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Human Interconnectedness

Andrew Linklater

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What is This?

Human Interconnectedness[1]

Andrew Linklater

Abstract

Kenneth Waltz's structural realism abstracts the international political domain from other spheres of social interaction to explain recurrent patterns of competition and conflict across the millennia. There are similarities between the structural realist 'grand narrative' and the process-sociological approach developed by Norbert Elias. But the latter supported 'high-level synthesis' in the social sciences in order to understand how relations between material, ideational and emotional forces have contributed to the growth of human interconnectedness. The analysis contended that one of the purposes of the social sciences is to increase knowledge of how humans can gain control of the processes that bind them together in global networks of interdependence. Elias was opposed to partisan inquiry such as Kant's notion of a universal history with a cosmopolitan intent. But a shared emphasis on how humans have developed the capacity to cause distant harm reveals how future grand narratives can combine the analysis of the growth of interconnectedness with the ethical argument for greater transnational solidarity.

Keywords: *cosmopolitan legitimacy, Norbert Elias, global interdependence, grand narratives, harm in world politics, Kantian cosmopolitanism, process sociology, structural realism/neo-realism, transnational solidarity, world history*

Kenneth Waltz's structural realist perspective contains the most impressive defence of the 'recurrence theorem' – the notion that certain 'propelling' principles have ensured that the same geopolitical forces have repeated themselves over the millennia, invariably ruining human hopes and dashing moral aspirations.[2] A distinctive methodology is used to analyse the 'striking sameness' of international politics over many millennia – to understand the 'dismaying persistence' of specific trends. To explain recurrent phenomena, Waltz makes a powerful case for abstracting states systems from the wider totality of social and political existence while recognising that, in reality, everything is intricately connected with everything else.[3]

Support for the recurrence theorem can be found in perspectives that appeal to rather different methodological commitments. Process sociology as developed by Norbert Elias also contends that realist dynamics are as old as encounters between human groups, but the approach develops an alternative 'grand narrative' from the one constructed solely around the 'recurrence theorem'.[4] The main difference is evident in Elias's observation that it is always important to consider what any abstraction is abstracted from, and necessary to examine the interrelations between the material, ideational and emotional dimensions of human existence in order to comprehend the long-term patterns of development that have shaped the evolution of social systems.

As well as highlighting the compulsions of anarchy, Elias emphasised that the 'scaling up' of social and political association and the 'widening of the scope of emotional identification' have shaped long-term trajectories that have come to affect humanity as a whole. Whereas structural realism focuses on the properties of an anarchic system that has been abstracted from the larger totality of social and political life, process sociology promotes 'high-level synthesis' in the human sciences to explain the growth of interconnectedness over the millennia.[5]

Process sociologists recognise that the forms of social learning that are integral to the formation of larger monopolies of power and to lengthening chains of interdependence have long outpaced the growth of cosmopolitan attunement to the needs and interests of other persons. As a result, the substantive analysis of long-term patterns is linked with a 'cognitive interest' in promoting an understanding of how humans might live more amicably together in the coming phase of global integration. The structural realist emphasis on how knowledge can contribute to learning how to control relations within anarchic systems is transcended by the belief that the central stake in social analysis is much greater, namely how to regulate a web of social, economic and political relations that are in danger of spiralling out of control. Elias was not naively optimistic about the prospects for mastering the social world. But his comment that the modern era may form part of 'humanity's prehistory' allows for the possibility that some future grand narrative may trace the evolution of collective learning processes that will enable societies to co-exist without the forms of violent and non-violent harm that attended all earlier stages of interconnectedness.

The recent fate of grand narratives

Borrowing from process sociology, the following discussion contains some pre-liminary observations about an overlapping but alternative grand narrative to that found in neo-realism, one that incorporates the latter's strengths in a more synoptic discussion of how relations between human groups have shaped the overall trend towards higher levels of human interconnectedness. It is important to begin by recalling that recent times have witnessed the virtual collapse of grand metanarratives – the almost total demise of approaches that portray human history as an unbroken ascent from ignorance to reason, domination to freedom, and barbarism to civilisation. Such interpretations of the past have not been entirely friendless in recent years,[6] but the broad consensus in the social sciences is that those endeavours are now embarrassing and obsolete. On that argument, scholars should resist efforts to revive progressivist narratives that had disastrous consequences for non-European peoples in the age of empire.

Elias argued that the critique of the nineteenth-century grand narratives was essentially correct, but the gains came with the cost of throwing 'the baby out with the bathwater'. Those interpretations of the human past appeared in an era when detailed understanding of societies beyond Europe was limited and filtered through an ethnocentric lens that provided flattering collective self-images. But the aim of

understanding human history in its entirety, and the belief that the analysis of long-term processes that have affected humanity as a whole should stand at the centre of social inquiry, were not preposterous. In his view, a major challenge facing the social sciences was how to recover long-term perspectives without perpetuating myths about inevitable progress, teleology, and historical finality. Nineteenth-century metanarratives could be regarded as transitional steps towards more detached, post-European perspectives that analyse the trend towards 'the globalisation of human society'.[7] Recent approaches to world history that have that focus belong to a tradition that includes Karl Marx's pioneering discussion of the evolution of humanity from the earliest small-scale societies to the global web of economic and social relations that was emerging in the mid-nineteenth century. Anticipating those dimensions of process sociology that integrates elements from the biological and social sciences in a larger theoretical synthesis, Marx stressed the need to comprehend the distinctive features of the biological constitution of humans that made history and higher levels of interconnectedness possible. The analysis was geared towards understanding the rise of universal structures of moral and political consciousness with significant cosmopolitan potential – with the capacity to increase human control over largely unmastered social processes. Similar normative tendencies exist in process sociology, although they are less pronounced given the latter's greater commitment to detached social inquiry.

Sophisticated studies of the growth of human interconnectedness are in their infancy, rather like the processes they examine. The former are undergoing a transition from the unsurprising condition in which the societies that spearheaded global integration constructed images of the past that celebrated their achievements. A more detached conception of human history had to await the challenges to the European sense of racial and cultural superiority and the collapse of the overseas empires. Only then could Western thought begin to recognise the scale of the contribution that different civilisations and inter-civilisational encounters have made to human development. It is probable that 'the human web' will become more intensive and extensive in the coming centuries unless, as is perfectly possible, catastrophic events throw the dominant tendencies of the last six thousand years into reverse.[8] But if no such rupture takes place, future generations armed with more synoptic conceptual frameworks may conclude that nineteenth- and twentieth-century studies of world history took the first faltering steps towards constructing accurate grand narratives that explain the forces that have made rising levels of global interconnectedness possible.

Efforts to account for the past few thousand years of history have proliferated in recent decades, most seeking to understand the trends that have shaped human development since then, forcing all societies into a single stream of world history and generating interrelated problems that raise the question of whether humans can acquire more universalistic structures of consciousness that prepare them for the challenges of the next phase of 'global integration'. Recent grand narratives stress the overall trend towards the 'scaling up' of social and political organisation that began with the revolutionary transition from nomadic hunting and gathering groups

to settled agricultural societies that occurred at the end of the last Ice Age.[9] Most focus on the rise of the first cities in the ancient Near East from around the ninth millennium BCE, on the appearance of the first city-states in that region about five millennia later, and on the rise of the first agrarian empires over the following two thousand years. Most argue that similar processes occurred, probably independently, in other regions including Egypt, the Mediterranean, the Indus valley, China's Yellow River region, Mesoamerica and the Andes.[10] Several accounts now exist of how the major regional civilisations that had earlier widened the spheres of social and political interaction within their respective domains have coalesced since the Columbian epoch. Reflecting the shift from modernist, Eurocentric world-views to more detached observation points, those approaches reject narratives that describe history as a progressive ascent from barbarism. As an example, Arnold Toynbee's *Mankind and Mother Earth*, which is still one of the best accounts of the coalescence of regional civilisations, is insistent that teleological or progressivist orientations corrupt understandings of the past.[11]

It is paradoxical that studies of human interconnectedness are largely unconnected, having appeared over recent years as mainly separate endeavours.[12] There is no detailed assessment of whether the methodologies that underpin those studies are compatible, and whether they result in partial interpretations that need to be combined in a higher synthesis. Future work in the area must address parallel endeavours in international relations that have evolved in separate ways, selectively borrowing from the large literature on world history. Further investigation is required to determine how far their methodological commitments and substantive findings are compatible with grand narratives in the social sciences.[13] There is a key role for theorists here. The theoretical analysis of different approaches can proceed with the intention of producing conjectures about the general course of human history that can then be tested against the findings of specialised historical inquiries. Over an extended period, the activity of moving back and forth between theoretical inquiry and historical analysis can be undertaken in the hope of securing breakthroughs to grand narratives that satisfy those sceptics who doubt that the sweeping overview of the past can escape over-simplification. Those fears raise large issues, which cannot be considered here, about how far synthesis lags dismally behind analysis in the social sciences, about the costs that attend the intellectual advances that are gained through 'overspecialisation', and about the political implications of approaches that prefer the 'retreat into the present' to the investigation of long-term social processes.[14]

One might expect future grand narratives to broadly support the anti-progressivism that is evident in Toynbee's writings as well as in neo-realism and process sociology. A shared contention is that, in some basic respects, world politics has not changed over the millennia. As noted earlier, Waltz argues that the international political realm displays certain recurrent patterns, and adds that there is no obvious escape from the security challenges that have often driven the great powers into rivalry and war. Elias maintained that the continuities between different periods of international history are as marked as the differences, and observed that there has been a broad trend towards the formation of larger territorial concentrations of power that may only expire when the long history of 'elimination contests' between 'survival units' culminates in a

worldwide state. Elias advanced a broadly realist account of the principal dynamics of anarchic systems (without, it seems, engaging with the specialist literature on international relations). His position was that it would be a very 'advanced civilisation' indeed that succeeded in inculcating high levels of individual and collective self-restraint without the enforcement mechanisms that a stable, global monopoly of power can supply.[15] A condition of generalised self-restraint that rivalled what is usually only achieved with the establishment of coercive institutions might forever elude the human race, but 'it was worth trying' to progress in that direction.[16]

The parallels between neo-realism and process sociology are relevant to the thesis that International Relations has failed as an academic discipline, a judgement that emphasises the low visibility and marginal influence of key texts in the field even in those areas of social-scientific investigation where the analysis of state power, geopolitics and war is central.[17] Developing the argument, Barry Buzan and Richard Little support closer links between international relations and the study of world history. Their position resonates with the claim that has been made by leading world historians such as William McNeill that future grand narratives should attach central importance to the impact of 'encounters between strangers' on the gradual evolution of human societies. It is possible to extend the thesis by analysing the advances that process sociologists have made in constructing high-level theoretical syntheses that recognise the influence of state-formation, imperial expansion, geopolitical rivalry and major war on the long-term trend towards the globalisation of human society.[18]

'Scaling up' social and political organisation

As already noted, many grand narratives start with the interrelated ecological and social transformations that began around twelve thousand years ago when the last Ice Age came to an end. They note that changes in material production (specifically the shift to settled agricultural societies) led to larger human settlements, to new structures of social (including gender) inequality, and to states and empires with an increased ability to project military and political power and wage war over greater distances; they focus on how longer chains of military, political, economic and cultural interdependence forged evolutionary pathways that continue to this day, and which seem likely to remain dominant. That said, there is no obviously correct starting-point for the study of world history; all points of departure are bound to be at least to some degree arbitrary.[19] For reasons of convenience, it is useful to begin with the contention that 'the general principle of cultural development' since Neolithic times has led to 'a *decrease* in the number of autonomous political units and an *increase* in their size'.[20] The importance of that point is evident from the fact that hunting and gathering societies had been the dominant modes of social organisation from the emergence of the first anatomically modern humans circa one hundred to one hundred and fifty thousand years ago until around the middle of the fourth century BCE when the first city-states appeared. The revolutionary nature of that transition is underlined by recalling the short time-span between the rise of those first political

systems and the construction of territorial states and empires that became entangled in the pathways described by Robert Carneiro. There is evidence that some hunting and gathering communities experimented with settled agricultural ways of life only to return to traditional social relations, not least because of perceptions that labour-time increased greatly without significant improvements in diet and health.[21] Many may have migrated to more remote areas to escape the entanglements of 'civilisation'. (Social groups that are still being discovered, most recently along the Peruvian–Brazilian border, may reflect that wider trend.) But in the fourth millennium BCE in the Near East, and then in the other regional civilisations, the initiative shifted to the process of state formation – 'primary' and 'secondary' (where societies felt they had to emulate the pacemakers in their region in the struggle to survive).

Time and again, larger territorial monopolies have emerged from 'elimination contests' between competing power units. Realism and process sociology largely agree about the main reasons for the historical importance of what Elias called the 'monopoly mechanism'.[22] In their judgement, states have often been motivated less by the desire to expand their military power and political influence to the absolute limit than by the modest ambition of controlling strategically significant areas, or preventing adversaries from wielding influence over them. The long-term result of the monopoly mechanism is that societies have become entangled in ever-widening theatres of war, binding more and more people by their 'hands and feet' in the strategic interconnections that are one of the main illustrations of the globalisation of human society.[23]

Such points about the impact of state-building, widening strategic relations and rising levels of human interconnectedness raise questions about the relative influence of economic and political forces on that trend. From a theoretical standpoint, it is important to heed the Marxists' warning against rigidly separating the two domains. They have argued that the sphere of production had little autonomy from the political domain in pre-modern social systems where states employed force for the purpose of 'primitive accumulation' and/or were centrally involved in promoting trade networks in order to acquire the material resources for extending and consolidating their power.[24] What is more, merchants would have been unable to conduct business across frontiers unless coercive institutions had succeeded in protecting trade routes from pirates and predators. Only with the emergence of industrial capitalism did the sphere of 'economics' acquire significant autonomy from the sphere of 'politics' and come to exercise a relatively independent influence on material interconnectedness and its moral and cultural counterparts.[25] From the earliest periods, closer material ties between social systems developed alongside and often stimulated the invention of cultural breakthroughs that made intergroup communication and understanding possible. Merchants were often key 'cross-cultural brokers', just as trade settlements were critical in fashioning a 'bare bones morality' that allowed humans to become bound together in still longer webs of interconnectedness.[26]

If Fernand Braudel is right about the early history of Islamic civilisation, there have been periods when economic ties ran along pathways that religious groups

had previously created, thereby enlarging the circles of mutual understanding and trust around which new trade networks could flourish.[27] Again, it is important to ask how far the economic sources of interconnectedness ultimately depended on the role of states and other actors in pacifying the routes along which ideas and commodities dispersed. In the ancient Near East, separate states seem to have pacified 'Mesopotamia' to the point where economic and cultural integration could freely develop. Political unification came later. In Michael Mann's felicitous phrase, closer economic and cultural ties in the 'interstices' that states were powerless to control led to profound transformations of consciousness.[28] Especially important was the quest for new social bearings during periods of unsettling and unpredictable change in which humans became more tightly bound together over longer distances. The first monotheistic religions have been described as examples of that search for new forms of world orientation during episodes of disconcerting large-scale change. Universal belief systems were not only crucial in providing a new social map for those entangled in increasing interconnectedness. In addition to making it easier for humans to become better attuned to one another over greater distances – and creating higher levels of awareness of the need for new principles of co-existence – world religions represented major advances in 'cultural memory' that made 'the formation of ([still] wider communities' possible.[29]

Changes in emotional identification

To summarise, any account of human interconnectedness must analyse changes in the organisation of coercive power and transformations of modes of production, noting how their respective causal influence has shifted over time (where indeed it makes sense to separate them). But the investigation of material structures and forces has to be coupled with an examination of the ideational movements and ideological changes that enabled humans from different communities to orientate themselves to the demands of growing interconnectedness, and to become more adept at interacting with strangers and outsiders. The concept of attunement is useful because it draws attention to the socio-psychological dimensions of those changes, and particularly to transformations of the emotional ties that simultaneously bind human beings together in longer networks while separating them from those who are the object of fear, hatred, envy or distrust.[30] That is to focus on what Elias described in the 1930s as the non-existent science of 'historical psychology' or 'historical social psychology'.[31] The point of emphasising that lacuna in the social sciences was to argue for the move to a higher plane of understanding which examined how changes in social and political structures were accompanied by the reconfiguration of personality systems – that is, by movements at the level of emotional identification with other persons, and specifically in the patterns of self-restraint (or 'conscience') that govern the capacity to cause violent and non-violent harm.

Studies of the first cities and states highlight the crucial issues by emphasising the difficulties they faced in binding people together on an unprecedented scale. Many collapsed because viable solutions eluded them.[32] Those that succeeded did

so by designing new frameworks of thought and action that harmonised responsibilities to kin members and loyalties to the state (as in the case of the ancient polis) or allocated traditional deities an appropriate place in a universal pantheon (as in the case of Sumerian civilisation). Whether scaled-up societies survived or fragmented and collapsed depended to a large degree on how far they extended 'the scope of emotional identification' to embrace at least the most powerful or potentially disruptive groups, to ensure recognition of their world-views, and to protect their material interests. 'Higher levels of conceptual synthesis' were also required to meet the challenges of rising levels of interconnectedness.[33] As is the case with all social systems, just as important was the ability to embody collective norms in personality systems so that compliance occurred as a matter of course – without agents pausing to consider alternative normative possibilities or calculating whether self-interest required social conformity or transgression. Without such inventiveness, the long-term trend towards larger territorial monopolies would not have taken pace. To rephrase the point, the monopoly mechanism has not been a sufficient condition for the survival of larger political units; it has often been followed by fragmentation as significant social actors judged that it was in their interests to defect, often by forging alliances with outsiders. During the early phases of state formation, failures in binding more and more people together in stable communities may have outnumbered successful experiments. But occasional success may have been sufficient to tip the balance towards the scaling-up of social organisation (and not least because of the process of secondary state formation mentioned earlier).

Problems of order and legitimation were especially acute not only within social systems but also in relations between them, raising questions about their ability to become attuned to the needs of strangers that have interested analysts of rising levels of human interconnectedness ever since Herodotus and Thucydides reflected on the political challenges that confronted the ancient Greek world. As Thucydides observed, international systems or societies have been no different from separate cities and states in having to devise workable solutions to the ways in which human groups are compelled to live together by forces they do not control. Neo-realists and process sociologists are in agreement with Thucydides' additional claim that global 'civilizing processes' in Elias's technical sense of the term usually lag behind local or national equivalents, and can quickly dissolve when societies are anxious about their security or survival.[34] As Elias maintained, from the earliest times societies have tolerated levels of violence against outsiders that were usually outlawed within the group, or at least in dealings with 'high-status' members.[35] Similar restraints, however fragile, are not entirely absent from relations between states. The English School has investigated global civilising processes that have the purpose of constraining the power to harm, whether by appealing to shared interests in maintaining international order or by invoking a vision of a universal moral community to check national egoism. Related modes of analysis have explored the problems that result from the 'upward pressure on the optimal scale of states', and from increases in the level of destructive power that is deemed necessary for survival; they have also recognised the importance of understanding how far those who have been thrust

together in international systems have developed levels of 'we feeling' that can underpin collective responses to shared problems and challenges.[36]

What human societies can hope to achieve in that sphere has long been debated. The standard realist argument, which is echoed in process sociology, emphasises the strength of the loyalties that bind individuals to the specific 'survival unit' that provides protection from internal and external threats. Advocates of the two approaches agree that power struggles and elimination contests will continue to block the path to widening the scope of emotional identification. Considering the latter theme, Elias noted that the idea of 'humanity' remains a 'blank' space on the 'emotional map' of the average person, notwithstanding growing awareness of global integration.[37] As he stressed, the rise of the universal human rights culture indicates that the scope of emotional identification may not be confined to the nation-state forever. But the recent fate of the global norm prohibiting torture illustrates the earlier point that legal and moral constraints on violence can weaken rapidly when security fears run high (and when regimes arouse public anxieties and demonise opponents as ill-equipped to handle issues of national security). That said, recent debates about the status of the torture norm have revealed that such conventions cannot be swept to one side in societies that pride themselves on their civilisation.[38] The question arises of where there are significant global trends that point towards a future phase of interconnectedness that may reduce the violence that has invariably accompanied the formation of larger monopolies of power and elimination struggles between them.

As is well known, social and political thinkers in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries approached that question by asking how far the growth of world commerce would lead to higher levels of emotional identification between humans *qua* humans. Liberal voices in such explorations were often too optimistic about future possibilities, and not least because of a failure to recognise how far asymmetries of power and wealth block sympathy for vulnerable groups. If the evolution of the modern state provides evidence of more general trends, high levels of 'functional interdependence' between upper and lower social strata (that is, the former's recognition that they need weaker groups and are vulnerable to the ways in which they can damage their interests) is an important precondition for major extensions of emotional identification.[39] In this context, it is worth noting that, from the late eighteenth century, liberal and neo-liberal analyses of rising levels of interconnectedness have argued that the attendant constraints and compulsions require diverse human groups to become attuned to one another over greater distances, and to acquire levels of foresight and restraint that can allow them to co-exist with the minimum of insecurity and violence. Over the last three decades, the ecological challenge has been the spur for innovative arguments for reshaping moral and political horizons so that social systems exercise greater influence over global processes that largely escape their control. For their part, economic upheaval and uncertainty in recent months have led to new calls for global institutional arrangements that can reduce the insecurities of unprecedented levels of interconnectedness that are evident in everyday life. Familiar questions are raised about how far humans can combine loyalties to family, nation, state and so forth with stronger emotional identification with an increased role for universal and regional international organisations.[40]

The ambiguities of interconnectedness

It is important at this juncture to introduce recent debates about the relevance of notions of cosmopolitan or global citizenship for 'making world culture'.[41] Critics argue that such ideas are oxymoronic; their advocates contend that they are essential for adapting to the current phase of global integration, and for ensuring that moral and political consciousness does not continue to lag behind the social processes that force more and more people more closely together.[42] A major issue is how far the species can make progress in reaching enforceable agreements on ending avoidable harm and suffering. No less important is whether different cultures can find common ground in a grand narrative that harnesses the more sophisticated self-understandings of the age to a cosmopolitan project that commands moral legitimacy as well as widespread respect on the grounds of practicality.

One approach with an ancient pedigree employs the idea of the ambiguities of interconnectedness in support of collective measures to promote a global civilising process with explicit cosmopolitan purposes.[43] Immanuel Kant's 'universal history with a cosmopolitan intent' noted that humans enjoy the enormous benefits of global commercial and intellectual exchange. They are more able to identify with distant peoples, and to assist them by drawing serious violations of human rights to the attention of a worldwide public. But as systematic cruelty to newly discovered peoples illustrated, and as Chinese and Japanese anxieties about the encroachment of the European powers revealed, modern societies had also become skilled in causing harm in the most remote places.[44]

Kant constructed an image of the complexities of long-term human development that has affinities with recent narratives that argue for radical extensions of the scope of emotional identification in the context of the globalisation of harm.[45] An interesting but often overlooked feature of contemporary world society is the growing number of politically aware groups in different social and cultural locations that have (not least because of climate change) a similar 'harm narrative' that provides some grounds for cautious optimism that levels of transnational solidarity will keep pace with, or at least not fall further behind, future advances in global integration. Of critical importance is public recognition of how human inventiveness with respect to the power to harm has led to enormous destructive power over the non-human world, continuing the elimination of non-human species that began with the first waves of state formation, but now adding threats to human security in the societies that are most vulnerable to the effects of environmental degradation, and raising questions about whether a tipping-point that will transform all life on the planet is imminent.[46]

Such views may only help to strengthen the pessimistic belief that history is little more than one system of domination after another rather than a gradual ascent to freedom, although in making that point Michel Foucault insisted that it is unnecessary to be either for or against the Enlightenment.[47] Certainly, there is no obvious reason to flinch from an account of progressive features of world politics over the last two centuries that include the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade, related struggles to end the cruelties of colonialism, and more recent efforts to embody egalitarian

commitments in the universal human rights culture and international criminal law. Opposing pointless suffering, transnational civil society actors work for 'moral progress' in world affairs.[48] The more and less troubled interpretations of modernity are often combined in writings on the growing public realisation of how mundane daily routines require individuals to take a moral stand on matters that, however indirectly, affect distant strangers and the future of humankind.[49] Awareness of the many ways in which individuals can harm and be harmed by each other in their everyday lives often underpins a sense of urgency about assuming the roles and responsibilities of world citizens in response to many different issue areas, but most obviously the ecological challenge. In short, a global 'harm narrative' is emerging alongside advances in human interconnectedness that may foster a deeper shared understanding of the civilising process that must be promoted if societies are to succeed in living together harmoniously.

Grand narratives and cosmopolitan prospects

As noted earlier, that emergent approach to the past shares some features with the Kantian vision of how grand narratives can inform cosmopolitan ethical dispositions. There is a link with the darker side of his image of the past which contended that it was hard to reflect on human history without 'distaste'. Demonstrations of 'wisdom' were evident 'here and there', but the web of history appeared to be woven from 'folly and childish vanity', combined at times with 'malice and destructiveness'.[50] The upshot was bemusement about what to make of a species that took great pride in its 'supposed superiority'.[51] But, rather like McNeill in more recent times, Kant believed that an appreciation of the long journey that the species had undergone could promote levels of solidarity that would reduce the lethality of intergroup encounters.[52] Grand narratives that considered the ambiguities of human interconnectedness could promote substantial detachment from the immediate concerns of one's nation and the short-term preoccupations of the era; they could create deep moral concerns about the burdens that the living will bequeath to future generations.[53]

Interpretations of Kant's unfashionable belief in universal ethical principles that are anchored in an immutable reason have tended to obscure his interest in how humans can solve the problem of harm in world politics. It is useful to recall his belief that individuals in the original state of nature had a moral duty to enter into a civil constitution with everyone they were in a position to injure.[54] History would have developed along a very different course had moral agents displayed the levels of foresight and self-restraint that are required by that principle. Unfurnished with those attributes, they had become trapped in an international state of nature that exposed societies to the disruptive influence of external events over which they had limited control. Escape could only occur by learning through painful experience the profound wisdom of the Stoic idea that humans owe one another the duty to refrain from inflicting unnecessary injury, and by then proceeding to establish a 'cosmopolitan condition of general political security' to protect all people from cruelty or excessive violence.

Kant regarded the 'harm principle' as one element of a global ethic that could meet the challenges of growing interconnectedness. Of course, large issues arise about how far societies can agree on what counts as indefensible harm, but suffice to add that without some shared understandings, the major civilisations would not have developed similar laws of war that were designed to limit human suffering. Transnational solidarity is most easily anchored in the capacity to sympathise with the efforts that most humans make to live without suffering for as long as possible.[55] There is no obvious reason to look elsewhere to explain how very different cultures can agree on cosmopolitan harm conventions that prohibit genocide, torture and other assaults on human rights, as well as on practical measures to reduce human exploitation and harm to the environment.[56] That provides the basis for assessing how far institutions, policies and practices contribute to moral progress in an era of unprecedented global integration.[57]

Moral indifference and global interconnectedness

Formidable obstacles to advances in that direction have been noted: persistent 'insider–outsider dualisms' and the erosion of legal and moral restraints on force when societies fear for their survival. One might add the concerns raised by many social thinkers in the nineteenth century, namely the destruction of old forms of community and the emergence of atomised individuals 'shut up in the solitude' of their own hearts, 'ignorant of [their] ancestors, isolated from [their] contemporaries and disinterested in [their] descendants'.[58] Anxieties about the effects of urbanisation and industrialisation on human psychology led to serious doubts about the future of human solidarity. Related to that was the question of why those who display little concern for others in their own societies should be more troubled by the suffering of distant strangers. Adam Smith commented on the ease of sleeping soundly at night, knowing that millions face appalling conditions in China.[59] Kant's question of whether the oceans make a community of nations impossible also recognised that global interconnections could continue to thicken without equivalent ethical advances.[60]

By weakening customary attachments, processes of radical individuation may make it easier for moral agents to support cosmopolitan political initiatives.[61] But they can just as easily lead to widespread indifference to the plight of distant others. The question is what apart from material entanglements can bind strangers together in lengthening chains of interdependence. There is no satisfactory alternative to Kant's defence of the Stoic-influenced universal obligation to freely enter into a civil constitution with those one can harm, and be harmed by – and there is no clear alternative to the conviction (which transnational organisations often try to foster) that stronger cosmopolitan bonds ultimately depend on a desire to avoid collective or individual self-reproach for causing harm to others. An insightful commentary on the ethic of care captures the essential point by observing that those who are closest to us emotionally (family members, friends and so forth) are especially vulnerable to our actions, but distant strangers can be no less profoundly affected by what we do and

do not do.[62] That ethical engagement with the social consequences of interconnected-ness is essential to counterbalance tendencies to privilege the interests of the in-groups to which agents attach immense emotional meaning.

New principles of cosmopolitan legitimacy

Such sensibilities are central to 'transnational advocacy networks' that enjoy most success when they link concrete efforts to publicise what is generally regarded as senseless harm with a cogent explanation of the causally responsible agents or structures.[63] Those networks devise specific harm narratives to promote a global civilising process that responds to the ambiguities of interconnectedness. There is a link to be made with the earlier argument that human interdependence requires societies to become more attuned to each other's needs and interests. That theme has arisen in several different contexts that include discussions about how the nuclear revolution promoted foresight and restraint, about the need to think creatively from the standpoint of others to preserve the first universal society of states, and about the importance of curbing aggressive impulses under conditions of economic interdependence.[64] Of great importance is progress in agreeing on cosmopolitan principles of legitimacy that underpin contemporary international legal conventions that prohibit serious mental and bodily harm.[65]

The modern states system may be slowly turning the corner by devising cosmo-politan principles that address the harmful effects of human interconnectedness. Some comfort can be drawn from the observation that the modern society of states has already outlived the past 28 states systems in world history and all 23 universal empires.[66] It may survive long enough to allow cosmopolitan harm conventions to become more powerful influences on the future 'scaling-up' of social and political organisation. The larger point is that modern societies live in what may be an early stage of human interconnectedness, or in 'humanity's prehistory'.[67] There may be ample time for humans to learn how 'to muddle their way out of several blind alleys and to learn how to make their life together more pleasant, more meaningful and worthwhile'.[68] That is reason enough for wishing to place International Relations at the heart of a grand narrative that tries to understand the history of human ingenuity in multiplying the ways of causing harm, and to comprehend the slower evolution of measures to eradicate violent and non-violent harm from relations between social groups.

Notes

1   This article began life as the keynote lecture delivered at the Third Oceanic International Studies Association Conference, held at the University of Queensland in July 2008. The lecture on which the article is based will be published under the title, 'Grand Narratives in International Relations', in *Global Change, Peace and Security* this year.
2   Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1979), p. 10.
3   Waltz, *Theory*, pages 8 and 66.

4   Process sociology supports the recovery of the analysis of the growth of human interdependencies over many centuries and millennia – in opposition to 'the retreat of sociologists into the present'. Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), was hostile to efforts to explain long-term processes in terms of immutable forces such as the supposed logic of social systems. The point was that the compulsions of anarchy are evident in many different eras, but their influence on human development cannot be understood by calculating their effects on 'rational agents' that have exactly the same motives everywhere. The constraints of anarchy are always experienced through social lenses that are the result of diverse material, ideational and emotional influences. In his study of the European civilising process, Elias argued for 'process concepts' to understand the relations between state-building and internal pacification, marketisation and monetarisation, attitudes to the body, changing emotional responses to violence and cruelty, and altered conceptions of shame and embarrassment between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries.

5   See Norbert Elias, *An Essay on Time* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2007), pp. 142, 152ff, for a defence of high-level synthesis that checks the tendency towards increased specialisation in the human sciences. Elias made it clear that high-level synthesis depends on breakthroughs that come from specialised knowledge, while lamenting the extent to which synthesis lags behind analysis.

6   Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Glasgow: Hamish Hamilton, 1992). For further discussion, see J. Bentley, 'World History and Grand Narratives', in B. Stuchtey and E. Fuchs (eds), *Writing World History: 1800–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

7   Stephen Mennell, 'The Globalization of Human Society as a Very Long-Term Social Process: Elias's Theory', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 7(2), 1990, pp. 359–71; Patrick Manning, *Navigating World History: Historians Create Global Past* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

8   John R. McNeill and William H. McNeill, *The Human Web: A Bird's-Eye View of World History* (London: Norton, 2003).

9   Andrew Sherratt, 'Reviving the Grand Narrative: Archaeology and Long Term Change', *Journal of European Archaeology*, 3(1), 1995, pp. 15ff.

10   Chris Scarre (ed.), *The Human Past: World Prehistory and the Development of Human Societies* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2005), ch. 5.

11   Arnold Toynbee, *Mankind and Mother Earth* (London: Paladin, 1978), p. 590.

12   At least four principal overviews of the human past exist at the present time: first, the study of world history that is now well established in the US, largely because of the influence of William McNeill, *A World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); second, the related sub-field of 'new global history', as developed by Bruce Mazlish, *The New Global History* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), where the focus is on the long-term trend towards globalisation; third, the 'Big History' movement initiated by David Christian, *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), which analyses the evolution of greater complexity in the physical, natural and social worlds from the origins of the universe to present levels of global integration; and, fourth, various macro-sociological approaches including, most influentially, Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, vol. 1: *A History of Power from the Beginning to AD 1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). Accounts of long-term trajectories in process sociology bridge the last two categories by seeking to integrate studies of biological and cultural evolution.

13   Again, at least four approaches exist: first, the analysis of the 'pendulum effect' (the rise and fall of international monopolies of power) from the Sumerian city-state system to the current era, as set out in Adam Watson, *The Evolution of International Society* (London: Routledge, 1992); second, the investigation of the shifting structures of human loyalty and their effects on political associations within the same time-span in Richard Mansbach and Yale Ferguson, *Polities: Authorities, Identities and Change* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996); third, the examination of the effects of different types of 'sector integration' on the growth of interconnectedness over the last 40 millennia in Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International Systems in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and, fourth, the focus on the interplay between modes of foreign relations and systems of production since nomadic times in Kees van der Pijl, *Nomads, Empires, States: Modes of Foreign Relations and Political Economy* (London: Pluto Press, 2007).

14   One of the main objections to grand narratives is that they are derivative and prone to stray from reliable sources of historical evidence. On that argument, world history is not necessarily without value, but it is essential to be vigilant in avoiding sweeping generalisations that are not supported by evidence, and to be alert to the danger of selecting data that validates pre-established conceptions of the course of human development (see John Goldthorpe, 'The Uses of History in Sociology:

Reflections on some Recent Tendencies', *British Journal of Sociology*, 42(2), 1991, pp. 211–30). The points are well made. Grand narratives are bound to be limited, making it essential to shuttle back and forth between the sweeping account and more specialist historical works in an unfinishable quest for accuracy. Alternative positions are not exactly inviting. Commenting on 'the retreat of sociologists into the present', Elias (*Civilizing Process*, postscript) argued that the focus on short-term horizons has fragmented knowledge, making longer-term historical tendencies harder to understand and control. On that basis, 'higher-level synthesis' provides a counterweight to the dominant forms of intellectual fragmentation and their often overlooked political consequence of impeding the development of grand narratives that are essential if humans are to control the processes that have forced them together in lengthening chains of interdependence.

15   Norbert Elias, *Involvement and Detachment* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2007), p. 141.

16   On continuity and change in world politics, Elias (*Time*, pp. 128–9) maintained that 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' involved (also Elias, *Involvement*, p. 175). There is a parallel between the argument about the stabilising role of nuclear weapons in Kenneth N. Waltz, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May be Better*, Adelphi Paper 171 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1981), and the process-sociological claim that nuclear deterrence in the bipolar world was the 'functional equivalent' of a monopoly of power that created the need for restraint and foresight that is rare in anarchic systems (see Godfried van Benthem van den Bergh, *The Nuclear Revolution and the End of the Cold War: Forced Restraint* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992).

17   Barry Buzan and Richard Little, 'Why International Relations has Failed as an Intellectual Project and What to Do About It', *Millennium*, 30(1), 2001, pp. 19–39.

18   Mennell, *Globalisation*.

19   William H. McNeill, *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), stresses the importance of the biological qualities that gave the species a unique capacity for forming longer chains of interdependence. Linguistic and symbolic inventiveness made such networks possible, and gave humans an evolutionary advantage over other species that has led to their dominance of the planet (see also Elias, *Involvement*).

20   Robert L. Carneiro, 'Political Expansion as an Expression of the Principle of Competitive Exclusion', in Ronald Cohen and Elman R. Service (eds), *Origins of the State: The Anthropology of Political Evolution* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Institutions, 1978), italics in original.

21   S. K. Sanderson, *Macrosociology: An Introduction to Human Societies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988).

22   Elias, *Civilizing Process*, p. 268ff.

23   The 'monopoly mechanism' also included the male monopolisation of the instruments of violence. Destructive masculinities gained the historical initiative as a result of the tensions between 'tributary states' and nomadic societies that shaped world history for around five millennia prior to the rise of modern capitalism. On those tensions, see L. S. Stavrianos, *Lifelines from Our Past: A New World History* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1990), p. 185, and McNeill, *World History*, pp. 84ff.

24   See also Elias, *Civilizing Process*, pp. 218ff.

25   Justin Rosenberg, *The Empire of Civil Society: A Critique of the Realist Theory of International Relations* (London: Verso, 1994).

26   Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), and McNeill, *Keeping Together in Time*.

27   Fernand Braudel, *Civilization and Capitalism: Fifteenth to Eighteenth Century* (London: William Collins, 1982), pp. 555ff.

28   Mann, *Sources*.

29   Sherratt, 'Reviving the Grand Narrative', p. 15.

30   Elias, *Civilizing Process*, pp. 379ff and Thomas Scheff, *Bloody Revenge: Emotions, Nationalism and War* (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1994).

31   Elias, *Civilizing Process*, pp. 406ff.

32   See Elias, *Civilizing Process*, part 3, section 1, on how feudalisation prevented the centralisation of political power in early modern Europe and elsewhere.

33   Elias, *Time*, pp. 146ff.

34   The study of the civilising process was designed to explain how, particularly between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries, Europeans came to regard themselves as highly civilised. It most certainly did not endorse European self-images. Elias maintained that all societies have civilising

processes in the sense of arrangements that are designed to control the capacity to kill, injure and in other ways harm members of the in-group. See Norbert Elias, *The Germans* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1996), p. 31.

35   Elias, *The Germans*, pp. 154ff.
36   David Deudney, 'Regrounding Realism: Anarchy, Security and Changing Material Contexts', *Security Studies*, 10(1), 2000, pp. 1–45.
37   Norbert Elias, *The Symbol Theory* (London: Sage, 1991), p. 203.
38   Andrew Linklater, 'Torture and Civilization', *International Relations*, 24(4), 2007, pp. 119–30.
39   Stephen Mennell, *The American Civilizing Process* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).
40   Elias, *Civilizing Process*, p. 314, argued that the lengthening of the chains of interdependence within modern European states created the impetus for enlarging the regulative scope of centralised institutions. Exactly the same pressures exist in world politics today, but with the difference that emotional ties to nation-states continue to lag behind advances in interconnectedness, with possibly disastrous consequences as far as coping with climate change is concerned.
41   John Boli and G. Thomas (eds), *Constructing World Culture: International Non-Governmental Organisations since 1875* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).
42   Andrew Linklater, *Critical Theory and World Politics: Citizenship, Sovereignty and Humanity* (London: Routledge, 2007), introduction.
43   Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928) accounted for the long-term development of a Hellenic civilising process that had pacified territories and outlawed piracy as part of the wider project of restraining inter-city violence. However, the rise of urban monopolies of power that could project power well beyond their borders led to wars of unprecedented destructiveness. As a result of the influence of Kant and Marx, cosmopolitan variants on the idea of the ambiguities of human interconnectedness have proliferated since the Enlightenment.
44   Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysical Principles of Virtue* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), p. 126, and 'Perpetual Peace', in M. Forsyth, H. M. A. Keens-Soper and P. Savigear (eds), *The Theory of International Relations: Selected Texts from Gentili to Treitschke* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1970), pp. 215–16.
45   Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs and Steel: A Short History of Everybody for the Last 13,000 Years* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1997), and *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Survive* (London: Allen and Unwin, 2005).
46   A longer account of the emergence of a global harm narrative with cosmopolitan potentials would need to stress the impact of earlier concerns about the possible effects of nuclear war on human societies and the biosphere.
47   Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?' in P. Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986).
48   Ruth Macklin, 'Moral Progress', *Ethics*, 87(4), 1977, pp. 370–82, and Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
49   Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (London: Sage, 1992), and Hans Jonas, *Mortality and Morality: A Search for the Good after Auschwitz* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1996).
50   Immanuel Kant, 'Perpetual Peace'.
51   Immanuel Kant, 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose', in H. S. Reiss (ed.), *Kant: Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 42.
52   William H. McNeill, *Mythistory and other Essays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 16.
53   Kant, 'Universal History', p. 191.
54   Kant, 'Perpetual Peace', p. 206.
55   Linklater, *Critical Theory*, part three.
56   For further discussion, see my 'Citizenship, Humanity and Cosmopolitan Harm Conventions', *International Political Science Review*, 22(3), 2001, pp. 261–77.
57   Just as Kant stressed the importance of benevolence as well as avoiding harm, recent Kantians defend positive duties to ensure that the vulnerable have rights of representation in decision-making processes that affect them adversely (in addition to negative obligations to avoid causing injury).
58   Tocqueville, quoted in Bruce Mazlish, *The New Science: The Breakdown of Connections and the Birth of Sociology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).
59   Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1982), pp. 136–7.
60   Kant, *Metaphysical Principles*.

61   I am grateful to Johan Goudsblom for this point.
62   Grace Clement, *Care, Autonomy and Justice: Feminism and the Ethic of Care* (London: Westview Press, 1996).
63   Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1999).
64   Waltz, *Nuclear Weapons*; van den Bergh, *Nuclear Revolution*; and Hedley Bull and Adam Watson (eds), *The Expansion of International Society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).
65   Linklater, *Critical Theory*, introduction.
66   David Wilkinson, 'Civilizations, World Systems and Hegemonies', in R. A. Denemark, J. Friedman, B. K. Gills and G. Modelski (eds), *World System Theory: The Social Science of Long-Term Change* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 60.
67   Elias, *Involvement*, p. 128.
68   Elias, *Symbol Theory*, p. 146.