THE PROBLEM OF HARM IN WORLD POLITICS

The need to control violent and non-violent harm has been central to human existence since societies first emerged. This book analyses the problem of harm in world politics which stems from the fact that societies require the power to harm in order to defend themselves from internal and external threats, but must also control the capacity to harm so that people cannot kill, injure, humiliate or exploit others as they please. Andrew Linklater analyses writings in moral and legal philosophy that define and classify forms of harm, and discusses the ways in which different theories of international relations suggest the power to harm can be controlled so that societies can co-exist with the minimum of violent and non-violent harm. Linklater argues for new connections between the English School study of international society and Norbert Elias's analysis of civilizing process in order to advance the study of harm in world politics.

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Theoretical investigations

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For Jane

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PREFACE

There is probably nothing more fundamental in social life than how people deal with the problem of harm in their relations with each other – how they protect themselves from the various forms of suffering to which they are susceptible by virtue of their mental and physical vulnerability, and how they deal with those who are prepared to kill, injure, exploit and in other ways harm them. There is no lack of literature that considers different aspects of harm in society and world politics. Invaluable resources can be found in many disciplines: criminology, psychology, jurisprudence, anthropology, sociology, political theory and International Relations. But there has been precious little work that draws their findings together with the aim of constructing a conceptual framework that unifies largely unrelated modes of analysis – and there is no body of literature that starts with the assumption that the study of harm can usefully promote higher-level synthesis in the social sciences.

As its subtitle indicates, this book is about theorizing harm, and not about providing a theory of harm. It is a ground-clearing exercise that aims to establish the foundations on which future work on the problem of harm in world politics can build. The longer-term ambition is to produce two other works that consider, first, the relationship between violence and civilization in the Western states-systems and, second, the problem of harm from the vantage-point of world history. No doubt, those volumes will require many revisions to the main arguments of this book. Adjustments will be made in due course. The prior task is to plot a preliminary course by drawing together themes from several literatures, including International Relations, in order to explain what is involved in studying harm in world politics.

The overall project is designed to extend Martin Wight's pioneering essays on the sociology of states-systems. A personal reminiscence is necessary here. Around 1974, when I was a graduate student at the LSE, I spent a week in the library tracking down references for what is now the widely-celebrated collection of Wight's essays, *Systems of States*. Then based in Canberra, Hedley Bull (who was behind this serendipitous employment) sent me only those pages where references were at the time missing or incomplete, but I saw enough to have some sense of the unique quality of those essays and the immense scholarship that underpinned them. The influence of Wight's sociology of states-systems runs

through much of the argument that follows. Few have sought to build upon them (the major exception is Adam Watson's *The Evolution of International Society*); curiously, they have not been at the heart of the recent revival of the English School perspective on international society; those who have been involved in building connections between International Relations and historical sociology have rarely mentioned them; they are virtually invisible in the sociological literature or in studies of world history. The great achievement of those essays was to put the comparative analysis of societies of states at the heart of the study of International Relations, and to outline the questions that the sociology of those distinctive forms of world political organization should investigate. This volume and the one that will follow it build on those papers through an inquiry into the study of the problem of harm.

To extend Wight's analysis, it is necessary to confront one of its main shortcomings which was the lack of any serious engagement with the classical sociological tradition, which is usually thought to include Comte, Marx, Durkheim and Weber and all those who have followed their lead by analysing long-term processes of change that have forged modern societies. The problem was that Wight's analysis of societies of states paid insufficient attention to broader patterns of social and political change that influenced developments within and between societies. Scholars who have explored connections between historical sociology and International Relations invariably draw attention to the significance of one or more of the authors mentioned in order to explain the links between changes in inter-state politics and the larger transformation of human society. But few have devoted any attention to the writings of the one last major representatives of that tradition, namely Norbert Elias's whose analysis of 'the civilizing process' rehabilitated the study of long-term social patterns. The omission is all the more significant because, from the late 1930s onwards, Elias devoted more attention than most sociologists at the time, and subsequently, to the impact of war and geopolitical competition on social development. Indeed, at the core of his thinking was the claim that 'internal' social developments cannot be understood without analysing relations between the societies involved. That standpoint now commands general assent as a result of the intellectual developments that have occurred in the attempt to comprehend the most recent phase of globalization. But such is the gravitational pull of disciplinary loyalties that sociologists rarely attempt to incorporate the arguments of major works in International Relations into frameworks of analysis that are designed to cast light on global processes. Nor, for that matter, do specialists in International Relations regularly venture beyond disciplinary boundaries to consider how the most sophisticated forms of sociology can contribute to their endeavours.

The logic of Elias's inquiry – nowhere does he state this explicitly – is that International Relations has no greater claim than Sociology to exist as a free-standing discipline. Readers of his work will find little indication that he read the principal writings in that field (although he knew E. H. Carr and very probably

read his work). Elias's study of the civilizing process therefore has some of the same problems as Wight's sociology of systems of states. It left open large questions about how the most sophisticated forms of analysis in the two disciplines could be combined in a higher synthesis. As far as I know, there is no evidence that Elias read any of Wight's publications – and there is no evidence that they ever met. Had they done so, they might have discovered that they shared an interest in civilizing processes. Elias's preoccupation was with how Europeans came to regard themselves as more civilized than their ancestors and more advanced than peoples in other regions. The analysis of that development noted in passing what International Relations scholars call 'the standard of civilization' – the formalization of the conditions that would have to be met before non-European societies could be considered for membership of the European society of states. Elias's comments on the Europeans' orientation towards other peoples therefore noted how the process of civilization had influenced their thinking about relations between societies. But in the main, he did not examine civilizing processes in different systems of states, and was inclined to think that there was little in the way of processes of civilization in international relations. The very idea of international society, which is at the centre of English School inquiry, embodies rather different conclusions, without assuming that civilized norms do much more than mitigate the effects of the competition for security and power – some of its more harmful consequences, it might be added. There lies the most obvious point of convergence between English School analysis and Eliasian or process sociology which defined the civilizing process as one in which different peoples are organized so that they can go about satisfying basic needs and promoting vital interests without harming each other over and over again. The details will follow, but perhaps enough has been said to indicate that the study of harm in world politics can integrate those schools of thought – seemingly very different standpoints but, at a fundamental level, united in attempting to understand how people control their capacity to cause violent and non-violent harm, and how their efforts both within their respective societies and in international systems have shaped the long-term development of human society.

I have been working on this book – and on the two volumes to come – for almost ten years. The project grows out of a book on political community which was completed while I was a member of the Department of International Relations at Keele University. I thank my former colleagues at Keele who offered advice and encouragement when I first began to think about this project, and I thank my current colleagues at Aberystwyth for their interest in, and support for, a project that has gone some way beyond the one-volume work that was envisaged back in 1999. Thanks to the University's generous support for the Department – evident in its magnificent sabbatical scheme – I enjoyed two years of research leave on completing a two-year period as Director of Research in the International Relations Department. During that sabbatical, I revised an earlier manuscript of this book, drafted the eleven chapters that currently make up

volume two, and laid the theoretical foundations for the last book in the trilogy. I have benefitted from discussions, both inside and outside the seminar room, with three excellent cohorts of Masters' students enrolled in my module, Harm in World Politics. Many in the exceptional PhD community at Aberystwyth have also contributed to the development of the project. Elaine Lowe has been exceptional in providing administrative support (not only during the period when I was preparing the 2008 RAE submission) but throughout the ten years I have been at Aberystwyth. I thank her for easing my burden with unfailing cheerfulness and efficiency.

Different parts of the argument have been tested before several audiences in Schools and Departments in the UK (the Universities of Aberdeen, Bath, Belfast, Birmingham, Cambridge, Keele, Kent, Leicester, the LSE, Newcastle, Oxford, St Andrews, Sussex and Warwick); in Australia (the Australian National University, Deakin University and the University of Queensland); in the United States (Columbia and the University of Southern California); and more recently at Ristumeikan University and the International Christian University in Japan, and at University College Dublin. I am grateful to more people than I can begin to mention here for suggesting directions, advising on reading material, and for engaging with the argument in highly supportive ways. Special thanks are owed to John Hobson at Sheffield University and Stephen Mennell at University College Dublin for incisive comments and advice on the penultimate draft. I am particularly grateful to Stephen for his friendship, generosity and support ever since he first received an unsolicited paper on Elias with a plea for advice on whether my interpretation of the latter's explanation of the civilizing process was broadly accurate. Stephen has not only deepened my understanding of Elias's writings; he has promoted discussions with the larger community of process sociologists (the 'figurational family') who have offered invaluable advice and encouragement over the last few years. My closest colleagues are aware of how my views about history, society and politics have been transformed by reading Elias's work, and they know that I believe that many specialist areas of International Relations could profit from engaging with his writings. I hope this book will encourage others in International Relations to consult Elias's various books and essays (now in the process of being published in eighteen volumes by University College Dublin Press), and that it will lead more process sociologists to turn to the literature in that field with a view to developing Elias's insights into society and politics.

Some parts of this book have been published – albeit in different form – in various journals and edited collections over the last few years. I thank the publishers for permission to draw on material that has appeared in the *European Journal of International Relations*, 16 (2) 2010, 155–78 ; *Global Society*, 20 (3) 2006, 329–43; *Global Change, Peace and Security*, 21 (1) 2009, 3–17; *International Affairs*, 78 (2) 2002, 319–38; *International Political Science Review*, 22 (3) 2001, 261–77; *International Politics*, 41 (1) 2004, 3–35 and 44 (1) 2007, 3–35; *International*

Relations, 21 (3) 2007, 355–59, 21 (1) 2007, 119–30 and 23 (3) 2009, 481–97; *Review of International Studies*, 31 (1) 2005, 141–54 and 33 (1) 2007, 135–50; and *Theory, Culture and Society*, 24 (4) 2007, 31–7.

I dedicate this book to my wife, Jane, in gratitude for her love and support during the years spent on this book, and in the hope that her tolerance and understanding will cover the period that will be devoted to the next two volumes.