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COSMOPOLITANISM AND GLOBAL JUSTICE\*

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**ABSTRACT.** Philosophical attention to problems about global justice is flourishing in a way it has not in any time in memory. This paper considers some reasons for the rise of interest in the subject and reflects on some dilemmas about the meaning of the idea of the cosmopolitan in reasoning about social institutions, concentrating on the two principal dimensions of global justice, the economic and the political.

**KEY WORDS:** cosmopolitanism, democracy, global distributive justice, global political justice, morality of states, poverty

Philosophical attention to problems about global justice is flourishing in a way it has not at any time in memory. I do not need to say very much to explain why this is a good thing. We face an assortment of urgent practical problems that are not likely to be solved, if they can be solved at all, without concerted international action. Some of these involve controlling the pathologies of the states system – for example, aggressive war and oppressive government. Some are collective action problems – for example, global warming and depletion of fisheries. Some arise from the fact that the world contains such vast amounts of human suffering, much of it chronic and in varying degrees avoidable.

There is at the same time the emergence of a nascent global capacity to act. This capacity is fragmentary and heterogeneous. It expresses itself in the foreign policies of states, in an eclectic variety of intergovernmental organizations, in the institutions and regimes that organize global economic relations, and in humanitarian and human

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rights law and a series of largely improvised legal and political mechanisms of enforcement. Alongside and occasionally intertwined with all of this is an evolving transnational civil society comprised of a diverse assortment of non-governmental organizations. The urgency of the problems and the prospect that they might eventually be alleviated by political action explain why the rise of philosophical interest in global justice is to be welcomed.

With the exception of the morality of war, philosophical understanding of problems of global justice is still at an early stage. It behooves anyone who thinks and writes about these matters to appreciate that as our understanding develops, we may learn from revisiting ideas that once seemed clear and persuasive. As a step in this direction, I would like to reflect on some dilemmas about the meaning of the idea of the cosmopolitan as it applies to the two principal dimensions of global justice, the economic and the political. These remarks are supposed to be brief, aimed more to characterize disagreement than to advance an argument. Inevitably they will be both incomplete and telegraphic, and for that I apologize in advance.

#### GLOBAL JUSTICE IN POLITICAL THEORY

By way of background, let me begin with an observation about the increase of philosophical attention to problems of global justice in the last 30 or so years. In 1960, Martin Wight, a leading English student of international relations, wrote an essay with the provocative title, “Why Is There No International Theory?” He meant to deny that there is a tradition of international political theory comparable to the political theory of the state. Such international thought as there was, he wrote, was “largely repellent and intractable in form” and “marked, not only by paucity but also by intellectual and moral poverty.”<sup>1</sup> As a judgment about the history of international thought, this is too severe – the product of an oddly constricted view of the tradition. But it would have been a fair description of the treatment of international relations in what was then the contemporary literature of political philosophy. With the

<sup>1</sup> Martin Wight, “Why Is There No International Theory?” in Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight (eds.), *Diplomatic Investigations: Essays in the Theory of International Politics* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1966), p. 20. The essay was first published in *International Relations* 2 (1960).

exception of a very few works from the mid-1950s about natural and human rights, a few more about the morality of war, the appendix on international relations in Stanley Benn and Richard Peters' important textbook in political philosophy, and H.L.A. Hart's chapter on international law, political philosophers had given virtually no thought to any subject that could be brought under the heading of global justice since the 1930s.<sup>2</sup>

The program of this conference shows how dramatically things have changed. Today, global justice is a legitimate subject of philosophical inquiry. There is a lively and growing literature. People teach whole courses about it. Conferences are devoted to it. Thirty years is not a long time in political philosophy – barely an academic generation – and one has to say the extent of the intellectual transformation is remarkable.

Why the change? Certainly one factor is the broader revival of interest in normative political philosophy since the 1960s. More important is a pervasive shift in understanding of the empirical content of global political life. Brian Barry wrote in 1965 that “in relations between states the problem of establishing a peaceful order overshadows all others.” He continued (interestingly, in retrospect):

No doubt it is possible for substantive general principles to be put forward and widely accepted, e.g., that rich nations have some kind of obligation to help poor nations develop their economies. But any attempt to develop a detailed casuistry of political principles in the absence of a working international order seems a doubtfully rewarding enterprise.<sup>3</sup>

Barry was ahead of his time in recognizing the subject of international distributive justice, but when he described the problem of establishing peaceful order as eclipsing all else he precisely recapitulated the prevailing view.

Today, political philosophy has absorbed a richer and more variegated conception of the content and structure of world politics. This is partly a reflection of changes in the academic study of international relations, where economic interdependence, transnational politics, and the political economy of international regimes have attracted

<sup>2</sup> Stanley Benn and Richard Peters, *Social Principles and the Democratic State* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1959), published in the United States as *The Principles of Political Thought* (New York: Free Press, 1965); H.L.A. Hart, *The Concept of Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), Chapter 10. In fact, Hart's book was published a year after Wight's essay first appeared.

<sup>3</sup> Brian Barry, *Political Argument: A Reissue with a New Introduction* (New York and London: Wheatsheaf Harvester, 1990), p. lxxiv (1st ed. 1965). These passages occur in the 1965 Introduction, near the end.

attention since the 1970s.<sup>4</sup> It also reflects the impact of changes in world politics itself – in particular, the assortment of economic and social phenomena conventionally known as “globalization.”<sup>5</sup> These phenomena have become more prominent since the end of the Cold War, which had the dual effect of encouraging a sense of political possibility and removing the principal remaining barrier to a truly cosmopolitan global market. One could not take these developments seriously without being forced to reconsider the sharp distinction between the domestic and the international realms implicit in the perception of international relations as primarily a zone of war and peace.

All of this is familiar enough. Let me add two related cautions. First, one should not think of globalization as a development peculiar to the late-20th century.<sup>6</sup> However it is measured – whether by the volume of trade, capital flows and labor migration, by the integration of goods and capital markets, or by the sensitivity of domestic life to economic transactions elsewhere – *economic* globalization dates at least from the mid-19th century. Indeed, in some respects it advanced further then than it has in recent years.<sup>7</sup> If part of the motivation of interest in issues of global justice is the thought that the extension

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<sup>4</sup> The pivotal works are Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, Jr. (eds.), *Transnational Relations and World Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972); Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977). Also, see the last chapter (on normative issues) in Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

<sup>5</sup> These phenomena resist easy summary. An inventory would include dramatic growth in international trade and investment, increased integration of goods and capital markets, the articulation of transnational regimes for trade, finance and development, the proliferation of non-governmental organizations and a series of changes in the organization of cultural life that have diminished the social significance of the boundaries of at least the advanced industrial states.

<sup>6</sup> This is, among other things, a self-criticism, since one of the central themes of Charles Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations*, rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) (1st ed. 1979) was that the growth of economic interdependence after World War II had transformed international relations in such a way that it had become appropriate, for the first time, to worry about international distributive justice. This exaggerated the novelty of the postwar changes.

<sup>7</sup> For example, in the openness of labor markets and in the share of international capital flows destined for developing economies [Kevin H. O’Rourke and Jeffrey G. Williamson, *Globalization and History: The Evolution of a Nineteenth-Century Atlantic Economy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999)]. O’Rourke and Williamson demonstrate that high levels of integration of commodity, capital, and labor markets were achieved by the late-19th century and that these forms of globalization produced very significant domestic economic and political consequences.

of the division of labor across national boundaries gives rise to a new class of ethical concerns, then one must recognize that these concerns have been with us much longer than we sometimes believe.

It is also a mistake to think of recent philosophical attention to global justice as something new. It is new, considered in relation to Anglo-American political philosophy in the decades after World War II, but it is not new if one takes a longer view. I said earlier that Wight's judgment of the tradition of international thought was too severe. I am not sure which writers he had in mind – perhaps the line of international jurists following Grotius. But he must not have considered the works of philosophers from David Hume and Adam Smith to John Stuart Mill and Henry Sidgwick who took up such topics of global interest as the ownership of resources, foreign trade, labor migration, and more broadly, the acceptable uses of imperial power.<sup>8</sup> Contemporary interest in global justice is not so much a new direction in political philosophy as a reframing and expansion of a subject with a neglected history. We can hope that a by-product of the revival of interest in the subject will be a philosophically-informed understanding of this history.

#### THE MEANINGS OF COSMOPOLITANISM

An artifact of the growth of global political theory has been a reassertion of the idea of the cosmopolitan. This is hardly surprising, of course, since, whatever else it involves, a cosmopolitan perspective is, at least, a perspective that seeks to encompass the whole world. But cosmopolitanism is sometimes regarded, not only as a point of view, but also as a substantive moral and political doctrine that can be expected to yield distinctive prescriptions for policy. This can lead to misunderstanding.

When I first thought about global justice it seemed to me that most views could be classified under one of three general conceptions. These were political realism, the morality of states, and cosmopolitanism.<sup>9</sup> The first two were present in modern and contemporary

<sup>8</sup> Henry Sidgwick's *Elements of Politics*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1897), Chapters. 15–18, contains four substantial chapters devoted to moral issues in foreign policy, interestingly including free trade and immigration.

<sup>9</sup> These three conceptions are distinguished in Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations*, Introduction, Conclusion, and *passim*. For doubts and second thoughts about the basic distinction, see the Afterword in the 1999 reissue.

international thought, not so much as systematic philosophical positions than as families of extensionally-similar views; cosmopolitan views could be found as well but were less well represented. I interpreted political realism as a kind of skepticism, so if we confine ourselves to moral positions, in effect a dichotomous choice was posed: statism or cosmopolitanism. This simple distinction had expository value, but, if there was ever doubt, it is now clear that neither side of the dichotomy represents a single, coherent position.

In describing a “morality of states,” I had in mind the conception of the international realm found in the writings of 18th-century international jurists like Christian Wolff and E. de Vattel (the latter in a work whose title, literally translated, is *The Law of Peoples*). This is the idea of a “society of states” – perhaps the most familiar result of applying the domestic analogy to the international order. The idea has three related elements: the principal bearers of rights and duties are states rather than persons; they are obligated to follow a system of norms analogous to those that apply among individuals in the state of nature; and the value of equality is expressed in a principle requiring states to treat each other as equal moral persons.<sup>10</sup> There is no question that conceptions of this general form have been influential in the modern history of international thought. For that matter, some such conceptions are influential today.

But the normative elements of this idea need a defense, and when we ask how they might be defended we find that the conception of a morality of states fragments into a series of discrete and potentially incompatible positions. For example, there is one form of the view in which considerations of international order are taken to be fundamental. There is a second form in which the state’s character as a self-governing political community is basic. There is a third form in which political states, or anyway some of them, are seen as embodiments of social or national identity groups, in which participation is taken to be an important value for their members. There are other forms as well. All of these conceptions are interpretations of the morality of states, but because they motivate the identification of the basic units differently, they generate theories with different normative contents. Reflection about the doctrine of self-determination, for example, would make this clear.

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<sup>10</sup> See E. de Vattel, *Le droit des gens* [The Law of Nations], trans. Charles G. Fenwick (Washington: Carnegie Institution, 1916), Volume III, Introduction, Sections 2–6, and II, Chapters 1, 3, and 5.

My main interest, however, is the cosmopolitan side of the dichotomy. The adjective “cosmopolitan” can be applied to many kinds of things – for example, to schemes of world political order and conceptions of individual cultural identity. I will comment on a third idea, which I will call “moral cosmopolitanism.” Its crux is the thought, to borrow Thomas Pogge’s phrase, “that every human being has a global stature as the ultimate unit of moral concern.”<sup>11</sup> As this suggests, moral cosmopolitanism is a perspective on the justification of some range of practical choices. Pogge’s phrase captures two essential features of this perspective: it is individualistic and inclusive. But obviously more needs to be said. For example, it needs to be specified whether the subject-matter of moral cosmopolitanism is all of morality or only the morality of social institutions and practices. It also needs to be explained how the recognition of every human being as a “unit of moral concern” is supposed to bear on moral reasoning: it might be, for example, that each person’s interests or prospects are to be taken into account equally in deliberation about how to act or that each person should be treated as having equal standing as an addressee of justification. On each point, the second alternative seems to me to yield a more plausible interpretation of the view than the first, but I cannot argue it here.

The force of moral cosmopolitanism is clearest when we consider what it rules out: cosmopolitanism stands opposed to any view that limits the scope of justification to the members of particular types of groups, whether identified by shared political values, communal histories, or ethnic characteristics. It also stands opposed to any view that allows the justification of choices to terminate in considerations about the non-derivative interests of collective entities such as states or social groups.<sup>12</sup> If one takes the morality of states to posit that state boundaries are limits to the scope of justification, then cosmopolitanism is plainly incompatible with it.

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas W. Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), p. 169. Also see Charles Beitz, “Cosmopolitan Liberalism and the States System,” in Chris Brown (ed.), *Political Restructuring in Europe* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 124.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Scheffler, *Boundaries and Allegiances* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 112; Simon Caney, “Review Article: International Distributive Justice,” *Political Studies* 49 (2001), p. 977.

Trouble appears when we ask, not what moral cosmopolitanism rules out, but what it requires, for then the view seems to be far less determinate.<sup>13</sup> For example, moral cosmopolitanism is agnostic about the content of global political justice: it does not commit itself for or against the proposition that there should be a sovereign global authority. There is no automatic inference from cosmopolitanism about moral justification to cosmopolitanism about institutions. The question is how to account for this practical indeterminacy.

No doubt some of it is epistemic, reflecting the defectiveness of our knowledge about the empirical premises required to reach conclusions about how institutions should be arranged from the abstract requirement to include everyone within the scope of moral concern. But the more basic point is that cosmopolitanism is not a complete moral conception: it leaves open too many questions. An indication of this is that both utilitarianism and a globalized contractualism count as cosmopolitan theories. But this is only the beginning. There is no distinctively cosmopolitan position about how we should understand a person's good, how the prospects of different individuals should be aggregated, or how and whether aggregative judgments should be qualified by non-consequentialist constraints and permissions.

These areas of theoretical indeterminacy mean that a wide range of normative positions might count as cosmopolitan. In particular, positions that have practical consequences similar to those of the more progressive forms of the morality of states would count if they obey the foundational requirement to take every person as a unit of moral concern (I will give an example below).<sup>14</sup> I do not mean to endorse such views, only to observe that they can be constructed so as to satisfy the cosmopolitan requirement about justification. Whether we should be attracted to such a view is a substantive question in political ethics. The bare idea of the cosmopolitan is too protean to settle it.

Some people have distinguished between two forms of cosmopolitanism: Samuel Scheffler discriminates between the "extreme"

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<sup>13</sup> In this respect cosmopolitanism is like political equality, well described by Giovanni Sartori as a "protest ideal" which operates primarily as a basis for criticizing certain institutional arrangements rather than as a basis for choosing any particular one [Giovanni Sartori, *The Theory of Democracy Revisited* (Chatham: Chatham House, 1987), Part 2, pp. 337–338].

<sup>14</sup> See text accompanying note 23.



and the “moderate,” Simon Caney, between the “radical” and the “mild,” and David Miller, between the “strong” and the “weak.”<sup>15</sup> These distinctions are intended in part as antidotes for the excessive simplicity of the basic distinction between cosmopolitanism and statism, but I suspect they may still be too coarse-grained. The fundamental problem is that we find ourselves confronted with an array of apparent reasons for action,<sup>16</sup> some originating in considerations about local attachments and affiliations, some in differences of structure and purpose found at different levels of social organization, some in considerations about the legal and economic structure of the global political economy and that structure’s impact on human well-being, and some in facts about the well-being of individuals considered in abstraction from their spatial locations and group memberships. We need a better grasp of the content of these apparent reasons and of the processes by which reasons of these kinds might be integrated when it is necessary to make judgments about how to act. The result may be something like “moderate” or “extreme” cosmopolitanism, but more likely it will be some third conception, more richly described, that we have not yet clearly anticipated.

#### COSMOPOLITANISM AND WORLD POVERTY

All of this is unhappily abstract. Let me illustrate by considering how a recognition of the potential diversity of reasons for action might influence thinking about two dimensions of global justice: first the economic, then the political.

I begin with the question of responsibility for the relief of global poverty. Beginning in the 1970s, philosophical disagreement about

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<sup>15</sup> Scheffler, “Conceptions of Cosmopolitanism,” pp. 114–115; Caney, “Review Article: International Distributive Justice,” pp. 975–976; David Miller, “The Limits of Cosmopolitan Justice,” in David R. Mapel and Terry Nardin (eds.), *International Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 166. I drew attention to the possibility of conflict between cosmopolitan and nonderivative sectional values – I now think in a slightly Delphic way – in Charles Beitz, “Cosmopolitan Ideals and National Sentiment,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 80 (1983), pp. 591–600.

<sup>16</sup> “Apparent reasons for action” – reasons that suggest themselves to us in practical reasoning, before they have been subjected to a process of critical inspection [see Thomas Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 65].

this has revolved around two questions. The first, prompted by the publication of Peter Singer's influential paper about famine relief,<sup>17</sup> is about the demandingness of reasons of beneficence – that is, about the degree of sacrifice in the satisfaction of one's own interests one is required to undertake in order to improve the situations of destitute persons with whom one has no special relationship. The second is whether there are reasons other than those of beneficence to contribute to the relief of poverty in the world today, and if so, what forms of action one is committed to by these reasons.

The first question implicates deep issues in ethical theory that are still disputed.<sup>18</sup> But with respect to the second, I believe there has been movement. We can see this in the view of international distributive justice found in John Rawls's book, *The Law of Peoples*. His view contains a puzzle. Rawls holds that, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as international distributive justice. Individual states, which he takes to be the basic agents in the global normative order, are not obligated to achieve and maintain any definite global distribution of wealth. It is not only that there is no duty to bring about satisfaction of a global difference principle; there is no duty to bring about satisfaction of *any* global distributive requirement that lacks what Rawls calls a "target" and a "cut-off."<sup>19</sup>

Yet Rawls also holds the following three positions. First, he affirms that well-off societies have duties to assist other societies to escape the burdens that oppress them and he believes that under some circumstances these duties might require international transfers of wealth.<sup>20</sup> Second, in remarks about human rights, he argues that

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<sup>17</sup> Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1 (1972), pp. 229–243.

<sup>18</sup> Though at an increasingly sophisticated level; see, e.g., Liam Murphy, *Moral Demands in Nonideal Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). This book illustrates how the attempt to resolve problems that arise in the international context can produce contributions to moral and political theory of quite general interest.

<sup>19</sup> John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), Section 16. For an explanation of the significance of these features, see Leif Wenar, "The Legitimacy of Peoples," in Pablo De Greiff and Ciaran Cronin (eds.), *Global Justice and Transnational Politics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), pp. 65–67.

<sup>20</sup> However, he is skeptical that outside financial assistance can help a society to develop the capacity to satisfy its people's needs in the absence of internal change. He writes, for example, that "merely dispensing funds will not suffice to rectify basic political and social injustices (though money is often essential)" and that "throwing funds at [a burdened society] is usually undesirable" (Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, pp. 108–109, 110).

people have basic rights to subsistence and that a government that fails to honor its people's basic rights may make itself vulnerable to justified external interference. Third, he observes that the Law of Peoples as formulated is incomplete: it needs to be supplemented by principles to regulate organized international collaboration – for example, standards for fair trade – and to ensure “that in all reasonable liberal (and decent) societies people's basic needs will be met.”<sup>21</sup> Each position yields a reason why citizens in rich countries should support policies aimed at helping at least some poor societies to improve the living standards of their people. Rawls does not understand these as reasons of distributive justice, but he does not appear to regard them as reasons of beneficence either. The puzzle is to say what kinds of reasons they are.

I do not know how to answer this question, beyond observing that, in Rawls's terms, any explanation would most likely start from the special character of the public reason of the Society of Peoples. But if we step outside of Rawls's own terms of reference, surely the more natural way to express the point would be to say that the international realm has its own, distinctive form of distributive justice whose principles differ in content and foundation from those that apply within individual societies. Perhaps, as Miller puts it, principles of global justice are noncomparative whereas principles of social justice are comparative.<sup>22</sup> The substantive question is why one should believe that structural differences between the international and the domestic realms generate reasons for action that differ in this way.

<sup>21</sup> Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, p. 38; see also p. 37 and Sections 15–16. With respect to international cooperative organizations (such as might manage the trade regime), he writes, “should these cooperative organizations have unjustified distributive effects between peoples, these would have to be corrected, and taken into account by the duty of assistance” (Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, p. 43). He does not say how a baseline might be established to identify “unjustified distributive effects.”

<sup>22</sup> Miller, “The Limits of Cosmopolitan Justice,” p. 171. It would be reasonable to wonder how Miller's conception of non-comparative justice at the global level differs from beneficence. In introductory comments, he gives as an example of a “weak cosmopolitan” distributive obligation what might be interpreted as a duty of beneficence (p. 167). However, in the substance of the discussion, he refers to the non-comparative principle that establishes an obligation to contribute to the satisfaction of people's vital interests as a principle of justice. Elsewhere, he distinguishes explicitly between considerations of humanity and considerations of justice and holds that under certain circumstances there can be obligations of international justice (specifically, “in cases where people's basic rights were put at risk and it was not feasible for their own national state to protect them”) [David Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 108].

The answer does not appear to depend on whether one accepts or rejects moral cosmopolitanism. Or rather: the view that global and local distributive justice differ in the way I have described is not ruled out by the cosmopolitan requirement that the scope of justification must be global. Whether we should accept the view is more likely to depend on two kinds of judgment, one normative and the other broadly historical. The normative issue concerns the significance of the fact that domestic-level political orders are coercive in a way that the global order does not seem to be. A possible view, defended by Michael Blake and suggested in a different form by Ronald Dworkin, is that the institutions of domestic society face a higher burden of justification because they constitute a collectively-imposed coercive scheme. On such a view, it might be said, any acceptable justification at the domestic level would have to include a condition requiring distributive inequalities to be kept within some limit; the justification of the global order, on the other hand, because it is not coercive in the same way, need not include any similar condition.<sup>23</sup> The scope of justification is global but the standards of justification respond to variations in the characteristics of the institutions to be justified. (Plainly, there is more to be said on this point.)

The historical issue concerns the assignment of causal responsibility for chronic poverty. One position, taken by Rawls, is that the sources of poverty are largely to be found at the domestic level, so that any enduring improvement must come about through local changes that outsiders are not usually in a position to effect.<sup>24</sup> Another position, taken by Pogge, is that the global order perpetuates and may exacerbate existing global poverty.<sup>25</sup> He argues that because this order has been imposed by the governments of rich countries, they and their people have a duty, deriving from the duty not to harm, to reform the global order and perhaps to compensate for its damaging effects.

<sup>23</sup> I apologize for the crude formulation. See Michael Blake, "Distributive Justice, State Coercion, and Autonomy," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 30 (2001), pp. 257–296; Ronald Dworkin, *Law's Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 195–202.

<sup>24</sup> These domestic-level sources include "the political culture, the political virtues and civil society of the country, its members' probity and industriousness, their capacity for innovation, and much else. Crucial also is the country's population policy . . ." He adds: "But . . . the duty of assistance is in no way diminished" (Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, p. 108).

<sup>25</sup> Pogge describes a variety of mechanisms that bring about this result (Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights*, Chapter 6).

In characterizing this as a historical issue, I do not mean that it lacks philosophical elements. One might wonder, for example, whether the causal mechanisms through which poverty is perpetuated in the existing global order count as “harming” in the sense necessary to generate a duty of redress. One might also wonder about the proper allocation of moral responsibility in cases where global-level and domestic-level causes interact to perpetuate deprivation. For now I leave these questions aside. The point is that the resolution of the historical dispute does not depend on whether one accepts or rejects moral cosmopolitanism. It depends on one’s understanding of the relationship between participation in the international economy, on the one hand, and domestic poverty and income inequality, on the other. These matters are complex and there is a good deal that philosophers could learn about them from economic historians and development economists.

On the other hand, the details of a cosmopolitan theory of global distributive justice will certainly depend on historical considerations. Here I can only give one illustration, combined with a plea for closer attention in the future. Until recently, discussions of global distributive justice were framed as if the most important practical consequence of taking justice seriously would be a requirement to advocate large increases in inter-country transfer payments. One may have imagined these on the model of foreign development assistance or as no-strings-attached grants to poor country governments.<sup>26</sup> Either way, it is now clear that this is a mistake: a confusion of a part for the whole. This should have been clear earlier as well, if only because a similar mistake can occur in the domestic context. Writing about institutions for distributive justice, Rawls himself noted that the aim was to design the social system so that, so far as possible, whatever distributions were produced by its normal operation would be acceptable. Direct income transfers were to be relied upon to guarantee a suitable social minimum, but this was a backstop for

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<sup>26</sup> I adopted the first model in Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations*. In my defense, I observed that aid and international economic reforms had to be considered as supplementary to a largely indigenous process of economic development (p. 173, note 82). For the second model, see Brian Barry, “International Society from a Cosmopolitan Perspective,” in David R. Mapel and Terry Nardin (eds.), *International Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 153–156.

circumstances in which markets failed.<sup>27</sup> Analogously, we might say that a theory of global distributive justice should concern itself primarily with the basic structure of international society – that is, the economic, political and legal institutions and practices that influence the global distribution of advantages. International transfers (for example, foreign aid programs) also influence this distribution, but by any measure they are less significant than other forces which are potentially open to political manipulation, such as private capital flows, the rules of the trade regime, and the system of international property rights. Principles of global distributive justice pertain to all of these.

### GLOBAL POLITICAL JUSTICE

The subject of political justice – that is, the justice of a society's provisions for making political decisions – is the oldest and arguably the most familiar element of the political theory of the state. In historical perspective the subject of distributive justice is a relative newcomer. So it might seem strange that in the recent growth of interest in global justice, this order has been reversed.

This may be because it is unclear how the subject of global political justice should be conceived. This is not such a problem at the domestic level: in any reasonably developed state, there is a structure of coercive institutions with a capacity to make political decisions and to enforce them by limiting people's liberty. This structure includes both an allocation of control over decision-making and some constraints on the use of state power to carry out political decisions. Principles of political justice regulate both aspects of the structure.

The problem is that there is no analogous structure at the global level: no sovereign executive power, no legislature, no effective police capacity. Moreover, there is a general, although hardly a unanimous, disposition to believe that a state-like structure encompassing all existing states is unachievable in the foreseeable future and would be

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<sup>27</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), Section 43. See also Richard Krouse and Michael MacPherson, "Capitalism, 'Property-Owning Democracy' and the Welfare State," in Amy Gutmann (ed.), *Democracy and the Welfare State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 78–105.

undesirable even if it could be achieved. So at first glance it is not clear that there is any subject for global political justice to be about. And even if one discerns a subject, it is not clear how to proceed, since models of political justice familiar from the domestic context do not straightforwardly apply.

But it would be a mistake to be misled by this. Global and regional processes of public decision-making (“regimes,” in the jargon of political science) are in some respects well developed already and under favorable circumstances can be expected to develop further. In parallel with these regimes, as my colleague Anne-Marie Slaughter has observed, we find transnational networks of state officials also performing global governance functions.<sup>28</sup> The decisions reached through these processes can have important consequences for those affected by them. Of many possible examples, consider the intellectual property agreement (TRIPS) of 1994 and rules of the world trade regime allowing the rich countries to maintain restrictive agricultural trade preferences which effectively deny access to their domestic markets to cheaper-cost providers in poor countries. In both cases, rules prejudicial to the prosperity of many poor societies were arrived at through rule-making processes in which effective control was distributed very unequally and which lacked mechanisms making them accountable to those affected. These examples involve rule-making processes, but there are equally severe problems of accountability in most international administrative and regulatory organizations. The problems are even more acute in transnational governance networks.

Here, the force of cosmopolitanism is to compel the question whether we have reason to hold international and transnational regimes and institutions responsible to standards of political justice similar to those that apply to the institutions of the state. Is there any sense in the thought that global institutions should be democratic? To some people it seems obvious that they should be, whereas to others, it is a kind of category mistake even to raise the question. The problem is simultaneously philosophical and institutional. The philosophical aspect is to distinguish the various kinds of reasons that explain why democratic forms are desirable at the domestic level and to judge whether and how these reasons are affected when the subject changes to governance beyond the state. The institutional aspect is to

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<sup>28</sup> Anne-Marie Slaughter, *A New World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

imagine what the range of realistically achievable alternative political arrangements is like at the global level, and to understand how they would likely operate in view of the incentives their procedures would establish. To illustrate: it seems to me that a plausible account of the justifying grounds of democratic institutions in liberal societies would have to take account of at least three kinds of considerations. These institutions should recognize the equal public status of citizens; they should afford procedural opportunities for individuals to protect their important interests against neglect or invasion by the state; and they should establish a political environment conducive to informed, effective deliberation by citizens about the political choices facing them.<sup>29</sup> Now it is not obvious that all of these considerations arise at the global level or, if they arise, that their consequences for the design of institutions are the same. If not, then the appropriate model of global political justice may not be the model of democracy in any familiar form.

With a few exceptions, philosophers have not engaged these problems seriously.<sup>30</sup> In my view they represent an urgent challenge for the future. Or perhaps I should say for the present: Reflection about reform of global governance is well advanced in other venues, both academic and political, almost never with the benefit of the moral clarity that might be contributed by an articulate philosophical conception of global political justice. That is too bad, not so much because moral clarity is a virtue (though it is), as because there is some chance, when ideas are in flux, that the intervention of political philosophers could make a difference for the better.

#### CONCLUSION

When the organizers invited me to present this paper, they suggested I discuss what they called “the state of the debate about global justice.” I soon realized this was ambiguous, because the idea of “global justice,” considered as the name of a subject of philosophical interest, has both a broader and a narrower sense. The phrase might be used as it is in the

<sup>29</sup> I borrow here from Charles Beitz, *Political Equality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), Chapter 5.

<sup>30</sup> The exceptions include David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995); James Bohman, “International Regimes and Democratic Governance,” *International Affairs* 75 (1999), pp. 499–514; Allen Buchanan and Robert O. Keohane, “Governing the Preventive Use of Force,” *Ethics & International Affairs* 18 (2004), pp. 1–22.



title of this conference, as an inclusive label for the normative problems that arise in political life beyond the state. Or it might be used more narrowly, to refer to the global requirements of *justice*, conceived as a special class of reasons for action that apply primarily to the institutional structure of political and economic life. I have tried to limit myself to the narrower of these two senses and have not been able to comment about many other problems whose claim on our attention is undeniable. These include the morality of war, the grounds of sovereignty and the meaning of international toleration, the theory of human rights, the permissibility of humanitarian intervention, emigration and immigration, self-determination, and much else.

Problems like those I have listed and those I have discussed are inherently difficult. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that the problems themselves are often not well defined and, leaving aside the morality of war, we lack well-established traditions of thought to guide reflection. This can be frustrating and sometimes discouraging. But from a more detached perspective, what matters is that philosophers engage with the subject at all. For the result is that practical issues that had been treated as uninteresting and peripheral can be appreciated for their genuine moral significance. Once appreciated, these issues do not go away. I do not believe there is any more urgent preoccupation for political philosophy today than to work out a better theoretical understanding of these matters of global justice. So the fact that they are now, unavoidably, before us should be encouraging: it is a sign of progress.

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