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## *World Government, Security, and Global Justice*

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*Kai Nielsen defends the desirability of establishing a world government conceived of as a single court of final appeal for the adjudication of international disputes, with the authority to enforce its decisions through complete control over the legitimate means of violence. The cultural diversity of distinct political communities is extremely important because through our memberships in these groups we have the personal identities we do; hence, it is important for a world government to protect the integrity and limited power of self-determination of political communities.*

*To ensure this, the world government should be a constitutional democracy and take a federalist form. To be legitimate, a world government must also institute world justice. Such a conception should be identified using something like John Rawls's original position, Nielsen says. The conception of world justice Nielsen advocates requires the achievement of basic human rights and an equality of condition for everyone in the world, at least as far as this is compatible with individual autonomy, and the flourishing of human life to the greatest extent possible. To bring about a world government of the sort Nielsen calls for would be extremely difficult, however, so much so that he believes that we should not place it high on our political agendas.*

World government to many, if not most, will sound like a thoroughly Quixotic idea, crazily impractical if not actually dangerous. We live in a world of entrenched and often fiercely antagonistic nation-states, large and small. These states frequently are jingoistic, almost invariably possess a sense of being a particular people with determinate traditions, and are quite unwilling to cede authority in any very fundamental sense, if possible, to larger units.

Even within nation-states, there are broadly ethnic or class conflicts where one group has hegemony (although sometimes an unstable hegemony) rooted in sheer power over another. We have, that is, both interstate and intrastate conflict. There will be struggles (sometimes violent struggles) for a new nation-state or at least a new government where there is interstate conflict and where there is an uneasy balance of power in which the extant hegemony can be feasibly challenged or one group sees the balance of power tipping toward it and moves into the breach. All these situations make for oppression of one sort or another and for strife and conflict, and such situations are very pervasive in our world.

However, throughout the world the sense of being a people runs very deep. Although we live, or so it is said, in a world of *Gesellschaften*, there is a sense, if only an ersatz sense, of *Gemeinschaft*. This sense, in concept although seldom in name, is very pervasive and persistent. (Hitler, after all, made *Gemeinschaft* a dirty word.) Even highly educated, politically sophisticated, well-travelled people are not citizens of the world. They tend to have a firm sense of their being a particular people and sometimes, although increasingly less often, a half-conviction of their superiority. But even with the ethnocentricism gone, there remains a particularist identity. "We" comes trippingly to the tongue. We have a longing for *Gemeinschaft*.

But hegemonic nation-states, such as the United States and the USSR, hate each other and are set on a firmly conflicting course that only an elementary sense of prudence keeps from breaking into war. Similar things obtain for smaller states such as Syria and Israel, Mozambique and South Africa, South Korea and North Korea. With such conflicts there is little likelihood of a movement toward world government. If by some miracle it could be achieved, for a time it would be inherently unstable, thereby threatening repeatedly, given the different national and cultural identities, to break out into civil war. Given the realities of the situation, it is dangerous, foolish, and irresponsible to speak of the desirability of establishing a world government.

I want, running against the stream, in what is perhaps an utterly utopian way, to defend the very idea of a world government as a single final authority, a court of last appeal. I will articulate and defend a conception of world government, with constrained authority, and without the savagery of a Hobbesian sovereign, in a fraternal, worldwide, cantonal system of diverse peoples. But before I face the challenge that this is cloud cuckooland, I must face the quite different challenge that, even if world government were possible, it would be undesirable.

## THE DESIRABILITY OF WORLD GOVERNMENT

We live in a world of diverse peoples with different prized traditions and partially distinct conceptions of self; the world's peoples have different conceptions of how one is to live and of how the affairs of state are to be arranged. A respect for persons and a belief in *moral* equality (the belief that the life of everyone matters and matters equally) require (or at least seem to require) a respect for these different traditions even when they conflict with our own. This may even be extended, although it need not be, to embrace the relativistic claim that all these ways of living and believing have equal validity.

There is, with such a Herder-like way of viewing things, a stress on sustaining the values of cultural independence and sovereignty and a commitment to distinct political communities. Without them, life will be flattened to a dull gray in which people will lose their sense of being a distinct people, which is something, nonrational or not, to which people, even reflective, informed people, attach a considerable importance. Some claim we cannot find our personal identities in an identification with humanity—in the great ideals of the Enlightenment—but in being a particular people: a Swede, an American, a Frenchman, a Catholic, a Jew, an Irish working man, a Wasp professional, an athlete, a communist, a fascist, a liberal intellectual, a lawyer, an architect, and the like.<sup>1</sup> We find our identities in distinct communities that sometimes are real and less frequently are imagined or ascribed.

Many of us firmly believe that nation-states exist to protect the integrity of at least the larger of these communities, these cultural entities, that constitute distinct peoples. (A state protects our identities as Swedes but not necessarily as architects, although we also expect a civilized state to protect our rights.) To protect this cherished cultural identity, without which we will experience a very deep estrangement indeed, these nation-states claim, against other states, rights of territorial integrity and political legitimacy over distinct territories. It is a claim to have, and to have legitimately as well, the sole right to sovereign power over a territory and the persons in that territory.

Within its boundaries the state claims to have the sole right to the legitimate means of violence. All use of force not sanctioned by state authorities is deemed by them illegitimate. To have the sovereignty they claim, they must be able to enforce this. Recognizing this and recognizing the value of these prized ways of life, Michael Walzer claims, we must have respect “for communal integrity and for different patterns of culture and political development.”<sup>2</sup> What we have, and valuably have, is a community of *nations*. But we are not within a good country mile of getting a community of *humanity*. The relevant “we” is not humankind as a whole but a distinct community in which we come to find ourselves, in which we discover and sustain our identity. Morality, most centrally, is a morality of *Sittlichkeit*.

By attaching fundamental political sovereignty to a distinct nation-state protecting a distinctive *Sittlichkeit*, we are most likely to secure our distinct identities and for ourselves, whoever we are, viewed now collectively as the "we" of humanity, a richness of life not establishable and sustainable if there were simply to be a single humanity with a single way of life. We do not want a world government to flatten all this out into a single cultural unit under a single sovereign power. Just as, the argument goes, we do not want a single language in the world, so we do not want to have a single culture. There is richness, vigor, and beauty in diversity, and it keeps open human options as well.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, as Michael Walzer argues, such a world government would give us not only cultural drabness but is dangerous as well. Peter Bauer's remarks about totalitarianism may be an exaggeration, but we still should not try to transcend distinct political communities with their distinct and not infrequently conflicting nation-states.<sup>4</sup> Walzer, who argues this, gives two arguments for believing it to be so.<sup>5</sup> First, he appeals to considerations of tolerably elementary prudence. The outcome of political processes in particular communal arenas, he reminds us, is not infrequently brutal. This is a well-known fact of political life. Given that, it is reasonable to expect that "outcomes in the global arena will often be brutal too."<sup>6</sup> But such brutality in a world government will be "far more effective and therefore a far more dangerous brutality, for there will be no place left for political refuge and no examples left of political alternatives."<sup>7</sup>

This first argument seems to me unpersuasive. I am not advocating just any world government; I am advocating a government that would be assented to by fairminded, informed and through and through rational moral agents if they were to set out the design of their lives together under conditions of undistorted discourse. I speak here of a world government that is democratic and federalist with something like a cantonal system that provides a place in a constitutional democracy for diverse peoples. That is to say, we would have the loose federalism of a cantonal system, which would protect the distinctive ways of life of different cultures. That federalist constitutional democracy would protect the traditions of its discrete components and the rights of individuals under a system that cedes ultimate sovereign authority to a democratically controlled world government that is committed to respecting the traditions of its discrete parts. Just as in some nation-states there are distinct parties and distinct conceptions of alternative socioeconomic orders—for example, laissez-faire capitalism, welfare-state capitalism, state socialism, libertarian socialism and the like—so there would be such alternatives with a world government. Moreover, just as in nation-states rebellion, revolution, and secession are possible, the same thing could obtain with the establishment of a world state. There is here, as well as in our present situation, a place for political refuge. There is no reason to believe that a world government must be authoritarian, let alone (*pace* Bauer) totalitarian.

Let us turn now to Walzer's second argument against the very possibility of a world government being a desirable state of affairs. A world government,

Walzer claims, would undermine the very possibility of a political life, something already threatened by great modern nation-states. "Politics," he tells us, "depends upon shared history, communal sentiment, accepted conventions."<sup>8</sup> But these things are hardly conceivable in a global state. "Communal life and liberty requires the existence of relatively self-enclosed arenas of political development."<sup>9</sup> But, or so Walzer has it, world government would break "into the enclosures" and "destroy the communities."<sup>10</sup> Individuals in such an eventuality would clearly lose something that they value and to which they have a right—"namely their participation in the 'development' that goes on and can only go on within the enclosure, where, as against foreigners, individuals have a right to a state of their own."<sup>11</sup>

Again Walzer's argument seems to me unpersuasive. Analogously to nation-states with distinct peoples, located in distinct provinces or cantons in a federal system, the loose federalism of a world government would also give, in important areas of their lives, autonomy to the different groups while (a) protecting them more adequately from war and (b) enhancing more mutually beneficial cooperation among them than could a nation-state system. Some modern nation-states today do respect autonomy and the local attachments of distinct peoples while still providing a single control of the legitimate means of violence. The world state can do exactly the same thing. Once Italy, Yugoslavia, and Germany were not states but many frequently warring principalities. Now these regions, although unified into their respective nation-states, still have (particularly in Yugoslavia, less so in Germany) distinct traditions cooperating without losing their distinctness in a unified state. Although Yugoslavia has its ethnic frictions, there still is the general acceptance of a single nation-state, and the various ethnically diverse sections of the country work together fruitfully in extensive mutually beneficial cooperation. We have, to put the matter more generally, nation-states with very divergent populations, and while there is not infrequently friction (for example, Belgium), they, that notwithstanding, continue to cooperate in mutually beneficial ways with a common army, currency, taxation powers, and the like. On the one hand, we have both relative self-enclosure and respect for distinct traditions and peoples, and, on the other hand, these distinct peoples, proud of their distinctiveness, can still regard themselves as brothers and sisters in a common state. Canada is perhaps a good example of this and Switzerland as well. People in Switzerland traditionally have considered themselves members of a particular canton, but they also see themselves as Swiss. People from Cape Breton or Saskatchewan have a definite sense of local identity, and yet they also firmly see themselves as Canadians and all this without any ambivalence or conflict.

As the universalistic values of the Enlightenment deepen, there is a natural extension of this. We can see ourselves as members of particular nations and also as citizens of a common world. We can have distinct local identities and attachments, as J. G. Herder stressed, without feelings of cultural superiority. A person can be proud of being a Dane without thinking the Danes are God's chosen people. Americans and New Zealanders will be to

the world state what British Columbians and Newfoundlanders are presently to being Canadian. Different peoples can protect their identities without a nation-state of their own charged with representing in some exclusive or dominating way that identity. They can protect their identities while living in and being committed to such a world state. Within that world state, there will be distinct areas with considerable autonomy that still cede, without losing that autonomy, ultimate sovereign power to a global state, thereby radically lessening the possibilities of war and enhancing possibilities for mutually advantageous cooperation.

It is here where we can, *pace* Walzer, have our cake and eat it, too. A commitment to basic human rights—something universal that we have simply in virtue of being human—commits us to such a mixed view as does a belief in moral equality. The vital thing is that we can have both universalistic commitments and local attachments and the right to distinct ways of doing some important things as well. Certain regions of the world, for example, can and indeed should have rights to linguistic choice in public education, as in the region around Belzano, while in other regions, say around Perth, there will be no such right. At the same time, other rights, say sexual equality, are human rights and should be quite universal. We can have universalist humanitarian politics and with that a universal sense of sisterhood and brotherhood and still have a prized sense of being a particular kind of person with valued local attachments. A cosmopolitan vision of humanity need not be a philosopher's conceit, and it is not incompatible, as Isaiah Berlin shows, with a Herderian acknowledgment of the immense value of distinct and perhaps incommensurable ways of life.<sup>12</sup> Herder's stress and Marquis de Condorcet's need not be in conflict.

National sovereignty should not be seen as our most important entitlement, such that without this sovereignty, we lose our centers of gravity or what makes us a people. We do not need such national sovereignty to be a people, and we should see ourselves, to put the matter moralistically, as members of the human community first and as Italians, Americans, Greeks, Germans, or Canadians second. We should come to recognize that the socially necessary rights of security and subsistence, rights that no one can do without if he or she is even to approximate living a tolerable life, are universal. Moreover, because no one can do without these rights, they should be accorded to all people and should not be subverted by nationalist considerations. This moral stance follows from a respect for persons.

In the contemporary world—and this is becoming truer everyday—nations are not self-enclosed. As modernization runs apace, we are becoming increasingly more and more interdependent economically, culturally, and politically. The metaphor of a global village is a truistic exaggeration by now but, where recognized as such, hardly inaccurate for all of that. The nationalism that would see the only global community as a community of sovereign states and not of humanity is backward looking. Such nationalism fails to see a steadily growing cosmopolitanism emerging, albeit not without its setbacks, from the Enlightenment and growing with our economic inter-

dependence, increased education, and enlarged understanding. Indeed, with these beings, these children of the Enlightenment, there emerges an increasing sense of the right of self-determination for a people: the right to choose the political forms by which they wish to be ruled. But this need not continue to lead to the hegemony of the nation-state. People, as their sense of universalism develops (with a corresponding loss of ethnocentric chauvinism), and their recognition of the need for secure peace in a nonviolent world grows, can come to accept a world government voluntarily and in a democratic manner. I do not speak here of being forced to accept a world state. I rather argue for the desirability of its acceptance where it has the character suggested in this section.

### ADVOCATING WORLD GOVERNMENT

On the assumption that I have made at least plausible the belief that a world government of a certain determinate sort would be a good thing if we could get it, I now want to face the challenge that to advocate it is irresponsible, given the way the world is and reasonably can be expected to be. (Think, for example, of the deep hatreds between Arabs and Jews and between Irish Protestants and Irish Catholics.) Given national chauvinism, given national intransigence—consider just the USSR and the United States—there just is no possibility of moving in that direction. If our aim is to achieve a world with more justice and more humanity in it than there are in the world now, we, if we are serious, waste our time in directing our political and moral energies into trying to achieve world government rather than something more practical. Assuming, the argument goes, that nation-states are here to stay (at least for anything like the foreseeable future) the thing to do is, either, on the one hand, to aim for the expansion or the refinement of the welfare state—say to push our societies somewhat more in the direction of Sweden—or, on the other, to aim at social revolution and the transformation of our societies into democratic socialist societies. It is a dangerous dispersal of our political energies to put them into Quixotic efforts for world government.

I want to say both yes and no to that. Yes, in the sense that what I shall call nonideal theory should say yes to the foregoing and should not concern itself with the issue of the establishment of world government. Rather, nonideal theory should concern itself instead with social issues and social struggles, with the here and now, with how we can transform our existing societies more in the direction of decency, both in the sense of being better, more caring societies for those within their respective borders, and for being more caring and responsible to those beyond their borders. (In speaking of nonideal theory I am speaking of theory that is very much concerned with mechanisms, with how to get from here to there.)

The struggle here may concern small communities, and often it will be, in the first instance, about particular social issues (better hospital care, better education, greater equality between men and women, better and less expensive

day care facilities, and the like), although I hope a larger agenda would be firmly in the background as well. Let me say here what I have argued for elsewhere: The struggle, in addition to such particular issues, should also be concerned with whether we should pursue a feasible socialism and if so, how. These issues, which often are avoided in our societies, should be put on the agenda.

All this is part of nonideal theory as I conceive it. But there is also ideal theory, which does not ask how we get from here to there but asks what it is, ideally and generally, we would like to see achieved, forgetting, for the moment, about how we would achieve it. What, we ask—as if we were gods, all wise, all good, all powerful, and could just bring it about like that—is what kind of world we would like for human beings everywhere such that this world would provide people with security and meet their needs, would be just and humane, and would be a place where human flourishing could be maximized. One feature of such a world, I shall argue, is that it will have a world government.

Why should this world have a world government? Because a secure, just, and humane society would be a society ordered by the rule of law, and that would require, among other things, something like a sovereign authority with the procedures to settle conflicts between different ethnic groups and cultures in an equitable, authoritative way. These procedures would settle conflicts without resort to war or to fighting where might prevails. A world government would have only one supreme authority to settle such questions, not unlike many present-day supreme courts and/or diverse executive authorities have within their respective territories in the various nation-states. No world of independent nation-states could provide people with that security.

Perhaps, to shift for a moment back to nonideal theory again, such a world would be unstable. A people (a nation) who did not like the decision rendered by the supreme authority might very well revolt, and we, with a kind of civil war within the global state, would be faced with the same old thing all over again. But if we could postulate (as in ideal theory we could) that people would not revolt, we would, with full compliance, have with a world government a single mechanism to settle conflicts of interest peacefully and equitably.

However, it remains the case that we could have a world government that turned out to be as authoritarian and tyrannical as any government we find among nation-states. However, in the case of world government there would be no possibility of an external power breaking that tyranny, although of course there could be a civil war or a coup d'état. Thus, it is not just a world government that is desirable but a certain kind of world government—namely, a cantonal-type democratic federation where considerable autonomy devolves to distinct cultural entities within this global federation.

In adjudicating conflicts there would be the supreme authority of the world government. It is the place where the buck stops. Here it is not difficult to share Mikhail Bakunin's anarchist concerns. Nevertheless, the world government we are discussing would be a democratically elected



government with the usual democratic controls of a federal system. Thus, there would be democratic mechanisms for appointing a supreme court, and there would be a constitutional world democracy with a specified system of rights, some of which devolved to the cantons and some to the central government. This provides the protection of a constitutional democracy for a world government.

### SQUARING WITH OUR CONSIDERED JUDGMENTS

Federal systems such as Switzerland and Canada are hardly paradigms of just societies, however. What more do we need in order to secure a just world order? We need a coherent and feasible conception of global justice that would square with our considered judgments in wide reflective equilibrium—a conception that would square, that is, in a coherentist model of justification, with all we know or can reasonably believe and with those moral judgments to which on careful reflection we are most firmly committed in light of this knowledge or reasonable belief.<sup>13</sup> It, as well, must be a conception of global justice that we must be able to make a good start at showing could have a reasonable chance at a stable institutional exemplification in a feasibly possible world order. (That does not mean that it must be feasible tomorrow.)

Let us start characterizing it with the abstract conception of social justice first and move to a consideration of whether we can specify a possible institutional home for it. (Ideal and nonideal theory tend to meet in this last issue.) To get a start at this let us begin with a general considered judgment that, in modernizing contemporary societies, has a very firm acceptance at least in theory—namely, the belief in moral equality, the belief that the life of everyone matters and matters equally.<sup>14</sup> This indeed gets different readings and different phrasings, but it is accepted in some form across the political and moral spectrum in modern societies. Among current social philosophers, moral equality is accepted as much by Robert Nozick, F. A. Hayek, and Milton Friedman as it is by John Rawls, Michael Walzer, and Alasdair MacIntyre.

If we start with the considered judgment that the life of everyone matters and matters equally, then (if we are thinking clearly) we will want a world, as far as this is achievable, in which there is an equal protection of rights for everyone; an equal societal concern for the well-being of everyone; a concern with achieving, as far as it is reasonably possible, an equality of condition for everyone alike in a way that is compatible with individual autonomy and the possibility for human flourishing; and, finally, a concern for the fullest satisfaction of needs compatible with a fair treatment of people and with an equal respect and societal concern for their autonomy as interdependent individuals.<sup>15</sup>

This is, of course, a tall order, and it is not unreasonable to believe that the components of the package are incompatible to the extent that not all

these values can be satisfied together. In particular, equality of condition and autonomy might not both be achievable.<sup>16</sup> It was the burden of my *Equality and Liberty* to show that a commitment to the most extensive possible autonomy for everyone requires a commitment to achieving or as fully as possible approximating an equality of condition. Without some reasonable success here, differential power relations will develop among people that will undermine the autonomy of some and thus will conflict with a commitment to moral equality. Perhaps neither extensive human equality nor autonomy is achievable in the modern world, but without their achievement there can be nothing like moral equality, and without that there can be no global justice. If both approximate equality of condition and autonomy are really impossible, then moral equality is a chimera. Whether, given human differences, anything like an equal satisfaction of needs or equal well-being is possible, is through and through questionable, particularly where this stress on equal well-being at the highest possible level of well-being for each is linked to a commitment to the fullest human flourishing possible for individuals whose needs will in certain respects be different. In being committed to moral equality we will be committed to as full an approximation as possible and to the fullest satisfaction of needs possible for everyone, taking into consideration that the needs of people will not be identical. To be committed to the fullest satisfaction of needs possible also is to be committed to achieving, as far as possible, the fullest human flourishing possible for all human beings.

We would only get global justice if we got something approximating the satisfaction of these conditions or, at least, if we had a world in which there were no institutional blocks to the achievement of these conditions. A world government with a legitimate authority would be a government that was committed to securing the conditions that would enable the achievement of global justice.

### SO-CALLED INTRACTIBLE CASES

Nevertheless, questions generated by nonideal theory keep returning. People, when we look at them in their variety and across cultures, are rather different, their belief systems are different, and they have different perceived interests and some different genuine interests as well. A world government that tried to represent these different people in some equitable way could fail because there are just too many conflicts for an equitable adjudication of them. Consider, for example, a sparsely populated, tolerably well-off part of the world such as New Zealand and then a crowded impoverished part of the world such as Bangladesh. People from Bangladesh might wish to come to New Zealand, but New Zealanders, even when they had overcome social and ethnic prejudices, might still reasonably wish to preserve their world with its small population, uncrowded beaches, and mountain tracks. Thus, it is in the New Zealanders' interests to keep New Zealand as it is and not take on an extensive increase in population, and it is in the interests

of many Bangladeshians to emigrate to New Zealand. Here interests, plainly rational interests, clash. Global justice with its commitment to moral equality would be committed to favoring the more extensive satisfaction of interest and the more basic interests. Thus, considerations of global justice would lead to a further opening of immigration in New Zealand so that there can be both a more extensive well-being and a greater equality of life conditions in the world. But this may, as John Rawls would put it, strain the strands of commitment to the breaking point.<sup>17</sup> Of course, there will be conflicts of genuine interests, but what needs to be shown for this to be devastating to the case I wish to make here is that there are no principles and practices of global justice that, together with a good knowledge of the world, can give us definite guidance here as to what is to be done.

There can be no doubt that conflicts like the one just discussed are very real, and it is understandable and not unreasonable to believe that it is just asking too much to expect New Zealanders, for example, to give up a prized way of life to equitably meet pressing population problems rooted in the needs of often desperate human beings. Yet fairness, rooted in moral equality, seems at least to require it. A prized way of life notwithstanding, if a people's lives are miserable and they can only be made nonmiserable by such population redistribution, then justice requires the population redistribution, where doing so would not make the general situation worse, particularly when the present inhabitants (in our case the New Zealanders) will not be made miserable by such a redistribution. Yet to insist on this would put a terrible strain on the strands of commitment. It is, without question, asking a lot of people.

The edge of this is taken off by the fact (indeed a convenient fact) that in actual life other measures can be taken such that there need not be this pressure to emigrate. Generally speaking, in statistically relevant numbers people will not want to emigrate to a faraway place with a radically different culture and language if the condition of life at home is not desperate. If the security and subsistence needs are firmly met and the condition of life improves with a development of the productive forces, people will not want to uproot themselves and move. Their identification with being a particular people is too strong for that.

With the development of the productive forces, with an intelligently and socially committed use of resources (world resources), and with a firm commitment to the conceptions of global justice I have outlined, Third World peoples for the most part can come to find a tolerable life without emigrating. The lives of many may not have the abundance of the New Zealanders' resources, to say nothing of the Swiss. But such a use of resources will allow them to flourish, and it will be a better answer to their needs, given their cultural commitments, than will emigration. Given some time and given a world government committed to policies designed to achieve moral equality, we will not have to make the hard choices discussed previously, choices that put a very considerable strain on what we can expect most people to do. But where we do, if we ever do, we still can see what justice requires.

Now one robin does not make a spring or one fine day. When we look at the diverse conflicts of interests among different peoples, we may come to the conclusion that often, indeed too often for the achievement of social justice, there can be no equitable resolution of conflicts of interest. But at least in the case discussed previously, the conflict appears to be intractable, and there plainly is justice on both sides. But to characterize the conflict as intractable is a superficial view. When we look at the conflict squarely, what justice would require, everything considered, is also evident. Justice here requires siding with (if you will) a utilitarianism of rights that requires the protection of the more extensive interests where the interests of everyone cannot be satisfied. Better a lesser harming of interests than a greater when it is unavoidable that some interests be harmed. However, it is also the case that there in fact need be no such conflict. The problem, if treated rationally and morally, would admit a morally accepted political and economic solution that would not require a redistribution of people. What is lacking, to achieve an equitable resolution, is political will and the resolute use of human intelligence. The lack of political will results from the entrenched interests of some and from the mystification of others—very many others—about what their interests are. (I believe the interests in question here are largely class interests on both sides, but I need not assume that here.)

I believe that this tough case is paradigmatic of a whole range of cases that involve issues of global justice and that they are rationally resolvable in a way similar to the way my paradigm case was. In nearly all non-desert-island moral conflicts, a thorough knowledge of the facts in the case plus a steadfast awareness and acceptance of a few moral truisms are sufficient to settle in a rational and morally acceptable manner what is to be done. It is a truism that people are different in certain respects, but it is also a truism that people are the same in certain respects. There are enough common needs and interests among people to give us a basis for some common policies and some commonly justifiable moral judgments (including judgments of global justice) on which a world government could act in accordance with the pervasive interests of its citizens. In such assessments, some of the differences among human beings can be accepted as tolerable differences, and others—where interests do clash—can be adjudicated, as we did in the foregoing example, by principles of global justice that, starting from widely shared considered moral convictions and a good knowledge of certain general facts, would be acceptable by reasonable people after careful deliberation in something like the original position.

### SOCIALLY BASIC RIGHTS

Although I would not defend a rights-based ethical theory, I think the general point made in the last section can be strengthened when put in terms of human rights and when some suggestions developed by Henry Shue and David Luban are utilized.<sup>18</sup> In speaking of human rights I am speaking of demands of all humanity on all humanity. Among these human

rights some are socially basic human rights and some are not. By a socially basic right I mean "a right whose satisfaction is necessary to the enjoyment of any other rights."<sup>19</sup> As Shue puts it, "Socially basic human rights are everyone's minimum reasonable demands upon the rest of humanity."<sup>20</sup> Some of these rights are what Shue calls *security rights*, such as the right not to be subject to killing, torture, assault, and the like. There are also *subsistence rights*, such as rights to healthy air, water, adequate food, clothing, and shelter where these can be had. There are, of course, other human rights such as our civil rights, but these socially basic rights are strategically central for they are the means for satisfying all other rights. A world government committed to global justice would be committed to the most extensive satisfaction of those rights for everyone. Moreover, these rights must first be secured before other rights are secured.

In conditions of moderate affluence and extensive security these rights can more or less be taken for granted, but ours is not yet even nearly that kind of world. A central aim of a good world government is to secure these socially basic human rights for everyone, and with the continued development of the productive forces it will become increasingly possible to do so. If we develop production relations that will optimally develop those productive forces and if we remain committed to global justice, it will become increasingly possible for a good world government to secure those socially basic rights for all and in an equitable manner (starting from the baseline that every person has an equal claim on them). With those rights secure, it will be possible to secure other human rights as well as many more of the interests of human beings than were previously secured. These latter interests can be increasingly met as the productive forces continue to develop.<sup>21</sup> Where we have conflicts of interests, the interests that answer to these socially basic interests will normally take pride of place. Socially basic interests will plainly override lesser interests, which could not count as human rights, and this provides the rationale for my judgment in the New Zealand example. But these socially necessary human rights will normally trump other rights as well because the former provides the causal foundation for the latter's very existence. With these, we would have a basis in rights for global justice, which for its achievement would require a world government.

### SUMMING UP

I have set aside questions concerning the mechanism by which a unified global state with a world government would be achievable, although I have argued that it is not so fanciful as to be impossible in more propitious circumstances. I have also argued that in envisioning an acceptable global state we are looking at constitutional democracies on the model of a cantonal federation. This provides our model for what a good global state would look like—namely, a just and a humane cantonal federation writ large on a global scale with extensive cantonal autonomy for each canton. Surely nothing like that federation is even remotely in the offing. But it is neither

conceptually nor morally anomalous or untoward, and under certain conditions it could be put on a realistic political agenda.

However, I also argued that a global state is not something we should presently put high on our political agenda. Indeed, perhaps when a global state is practically achievable it will not be needed. A world of democratic socialist nation-states would stand in fraternal peaceful relations with each other and would surely mutually cooperate. Perhaps in such a world of socialist democracies a global state would not be needed.

We surely could not answer that one way or another with any confidence ahead of the social experiment. A world government and a world state, as any state and government, have instrumental value only. Such institutions are valuable only if they, more than any alternative human arrangements, answer more adequately and more equitably to human needs. The anarchists are surely right in thinking that it would be a good thing if we could get along without a state, any state at all, and perhaps some day in some sense of that ambiguous notion we can.<sup>22</sup> There is nothing very nice about any group of people, no matter how moral, just, and well informed, having a monopoly on the means of violence. Such a thing is desirable only if it could prevent still more violence. We have no reason to love the state *per se*, but it may well be something that we will continue to have to live with and, in some of its forms, welcome as the lesser evil.

My argument has been that in answering our need for security (in making a relatively stable peace possible), a world state of the sort I have characterized is our best bet. I have also argued that a global state, by its very firm commitment to human rights and to furthering the good of humanity as a whole, would be a more just and a more humane social order than any of its alternatives. Moreover, by giving us an international law with sanctions, it would provide conditions, better than any alternative social arrangements, for furthering mutual cooperation, cooperation that could be materially advantageous.

If it turned out that none of these things were likely to be so, then there would be no reason to wish for a world government. Without such advantages, the value of a more complete autonomy for discrete peoples would tip the scales against a world government. But that, or so I have argued, is not how things stand.

#### FURTHER DOUBTS ABOUT WORLD GOVERNMENT

Someone might argue that we do not need a global state to secure global justice and, in particular, to best secure socially basic human rights. There is something called international law, which obtains without a world state, and we could implement the rule of international law without a world state and without sanctions.<sup>23</sup> There indeed is law without the threat of effective sanctions, but it is also the case that there is likely to be little effective *rule* in the rule of law if there are no effective sanctions against noncompliance.

In a world of independent nation-states, there would be no such device to enforce compliance; in such a world there could be no international law with teeth and thus no rule of international law by which that law could enforce its verdicts. For security, if for nothing else, we need a world state with international law capable of enforcing its verdicts. Justice and a more humane order aside, a peace, secure from the alarms of war, most particularly nuclear war, makes a world state, as an institution capable of securing that, very desirable indeed. International law without teeth—our present state of affairs—cannot ensure that. Even if great warlike nation-states, such as the United States and the USSR, take it as a matter of elementary prudence to avoid a nuclear war (something it is reasonable to believe they would attempt), nevertheless, given their chauvinism, mutual dislike and distrust, and extensive nuclear stockpiles, the likelihood of an accidental nuclear war of (to put it minimally) devastating proportions is very real indeed and is a growing threat as these nations continue to build up their war machines. A world state would afford us significant protection from this situation, and that alone is worth the price of admission.

Some might counter that a world state would not really protect us more adequately from the ravages of war and the unthinkable consequences of nuclear destruction. With such conflicting, disparate elements as we have in the world, rebellions and revolutions would repeatedly break out. Consider, to see what is at issue, such entities as the USSR and the United States in the status of bloated, ungainly cantons.<sup>24</sup> They, to make a world state possible, have given up their claim to sovereignty, but they could, it is not unreasonable to argue, never be relied on to accept the dictates of international law when it worked against what they perceived to be important sectional interests.

Although I have set aside causal questions concerning how we could get these erstwhile states into a cantonal status, if somehow we could, then we would have set some additional impediments, moral and legal, to naked aggression and the pressing of their own perceived (and sometimes misperceived) interests in such a way that it would lead to global war. After all, we have an army, a world state executive, a world parliament, and a judicial system, all not creatures of any individual canton or clique of cantons, representing wider interests. Nevertheless, given the depth of cultural differences, the radically different economic position of different states, their dependency/domination relations, and the like, there are bound to be hatreds and struggles, attempts at secession, rebellions, revolutions, coup d'états, shifting hostile alliances, mean-spirited and destructive stratagems, and the like. Even with nuclear matters, there still could be trouble. Suppose a world government, with general consent, abolished nuclear arsenals; such a government hardly could abolish nuclear knowledge. Cantons that did not like the way things were going in the federation could, although it would not be easy, secretly develop weapons systems, and, particularly where several did this at once, something very similar to the same old nuclear standoff might occur again; some might even say, predictably would occur again, given the not inconsiderable economic disparities and the radically different

ideologies that obtain across the planet. No world state, it is natural to think, even in a loose federation, could adequately answer such disparate interests or adjudicate the conflicts among them.

If we tried to form a world state, even the federation I spoke of, it would be inherently unstable and would either break up or lead in time, in trying to hold these disparate and hostile elements together, to a repressive dictatorship. There are not enough common bonds to make such a federation possible. We would end up with an authoritarian regime.

Here I first want to bite the bullet and accept for a moment the near-worst-case scenario by assuming that the world federation would be unstable and generate in time a repressive authoritarian government that would be prone to domination, to civil wars, and to a situation in which some of the cantons in the struggle for power within that system would develop nuclear weapons systems again. Even if this dreadful scenario were the more likely one and indeed became the one that transpired, we would still be better off than we are now; even with such an oppressive world government, the threat of nuclear devastation would still not be as great as it is at present.

It is also the case that there is something relevant here that those of us who live in North America are particularly prone to forget or even to never have adequately noticed or taken to heart. I refer to the fact that we have plenty of oppressive governments about now. Sometimes they are only internally oppressive, sometimes they are principally externally oppressive (for example, the United States), and sometimes they are both. Moreover, since the end of World War II, we have constantly had wars, sometimes civil and sometimes between states, and, war or not, we have had widespread massive exploitation, starvation, and impoverishment. We live in a world where some have an overabundance while others at best just barely survive. Thus, even if the world government were oppressive, it is not clear that it would be a worse state of affairs than we have now. If we read Hans Magnus Enzensberger and Noam Chomsky and not just F. A. Hayek and Peter Bauer we will get a vivid sense of that.

In fact, I think as bad as it would be, even an authoritarian and oppressive world state, unless (as is highly unlikely) on a world scale it became like the Nazis, would still be the lesser evil to the evil of the world order we have now. (Remember that ten thousand people starve to death each day mostly unnecessarily, that we now have a frightening nuclear insecurity, and that there is a considerable number of hostile, oppressive, and authoritarian states that from time to time engage in wars.) For our purposes, it is perhaps most important to note that the nuclear threat would be less, even with such a bad world state, than what we face now. It would be much harder with a world government, even an oppressive world government, to recapitulate the present war machines that obtain in nation-states. Even as aggressive oversized cantons, they would not be quite as dangerous as they presently are in the world system of nation-states, and it would take time, and there would be resistance, to their transformation back into nation-states again.



That aside, once the very idea of a world federation had come firmly into being in the minds of the great masses of people and had had a brief, even though unstable, institutionalization, of which the authoritarian world government was a perversion, there would be an effort to recapture a world state in its federated form. People would be motivated, as they are now, to struggle to regain democracy. When this happens, there is, as happened in Greece, Argentina, Spain, Portugal, Brazil, and Uruguay, and is happening in Chile, an attempt, which eventually is successful, to reconstitute a democratic order. In most of these cases, the society that succeeded the oppressive regime became more democratic than the society that preceded it.

If we start with the idea of a world federation, and with the underlying idea of a humanity that goes with it, and then move, under difficult political circumstances, to a world dictatorship in order to contain rebellious elements, we can expect that after a few years of that dictatorship there will be a struggle to regain the federation and, in time, a move on the part of the conflicting elements to find some mutual accommodation with each other as they engage in a common struggle against the oppressive regime. It is also reasonable to hope that these cantons would choose to avoid a replay of the situation that gave rise to a new dominating power and instead would find it in their respective interests to make mutual accommodations.

This, of course, as with all political encounters among different cultures and classes contending for a place in the sun, is fraught with difficulties but no more so than is our present situation, and, unlike our present situation, there would be a greater chance for world peace, more of a hope for global justice, more of a protection of human rights, and more of an extension of the bonds of sisterhood and brotherhood, where everyone, in commitment at least, comes under the net and with equal status. This is much easier for someone—or at least an educated someone—in the Third World than in the First to appreciate and take to heart.

I also think this near-worst-case scenario is not nearly as likely as some far more benign scenarios. I only accepted it provisionally for the sake of argument. World conquest, particularly given the nuclear situation, by any one power is rather unlikely, and the only kind of world government that would stand much chance of being accepted (if any would at all) by these different powers would be one that had something like the democratic and federalist structure of the world government I have described. But that structure surely could not come into being until an extension of the idea of democracy to all humankind went much further, as a popular ideology, than it has yet gone and until the various nationalisms, at least in idea, had been considerably weakened.

With the emergence of states from imperialist and racist domination, nationalism has grown, but so, too, paradoxically, has internationalism. The idea of democracy, once introduced, is very catching indeed. It goes readily with an increase in de facto interdependence, the extension of communications and knowledge, the continued development of the productive forces, and

relentless modernization. There is no steady development here; there are blips and downturns, such as we are now experiencing in some parts of the world, but if we look at longer time spans, it is evident that all of these forces are developing, carrying forth what one might call the logic of the Enlightenment.

With these Enlightenment ideas of democracy and the fellowship of humankind, with a firm sense of prudence about mutual nuclear destruction (and the like), and with the continued development of the forces of production, we have before us the conditions that, with luck, could generate the impulse necessary to make world government a live option.

### CONCLUSION

I have defended the utopian possibility, in coherently stable circumstances, of a world government of a distinct democratic sort, and I also have defended the desirability of having such a government when we can get it in a reasonably tolerable way. I do not see anything like a movement toward it presently, although I do believe the unfoldment of the dialectic of the Enlightenment and the development of the forces of production, with congruent developments in the relations of production, will eventually make such a world, provided in the interim we do not blow ourselves up, a feasible nonutopian possibility. But I do not deny that there are staggering difficulties along the way, only some of which I have alluded to here. Surely, as a very central issue, there is the problem of whether, as long as capitalism survives, there is much chance of a world government of the sort I have characterized. I do not believe, although this claim is surely tendentious and needs arguing, world government has much chance as long as capitalism remains a major element in the world order. I think, however, that the same forces that push us toward a world government, even more evidently and more immediately, push us toward democratic socialism, which is an extension of the idea of democracy from the political to the economic realm. If we are well informed and morally reflective, we should want industrial democracy, workers' control of their workplace, and ownership by the public of the means of production, as well as political democracy, and we should want these things principally because they extend both human autonomy and human well-being.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, without industrial democracy, political democracy is not very likely to be effective. However, it is also the case that without political democracy, economic democracy will not flourish. All that notwithstanding, the crucial consideration for our argument is that the idea of democracy, like the related idea of moral equality, is an idea that once brought to people becomes irresistible. In the longer view of things, unless our social fabric is utterly destroyed, there is no turning back from democracy—a democracy that will continue to be extended.

### NOTES

1. Richard Rorty's "Solidarity and Objectivity," in J. Rajchman and C. West (editors), *Post-Analytic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp.

3-19; and Richard Rorty, "Postmodern Bourgeois Liberalism," *Journal of Philosophy* 80 (1983):583-589. Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), pp. 51-63, 86-101, 106-108, 339-342. Michael Walzer, "The Rights of Political Communities" in Charles R. Beitz et al. (editors), *International Ethics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 165-194. See in the same volume, David Luban, "Just War and Human Rights," pp. 195-216; Michael Walzer, "The Moral Standing of States: A Response to Four Critics," pp. 217-237; and David Luban, "The Romance of the Nation-State," pp. 238-243. See, as well, G. A. Cohen, "Reconsidering Historical Materialism" in J. R. Pennock and J. W. Chapman (editors), *Marxism* (New York: New York University Press, 1983), pp. 227-254; and Isaiah Berlin, *Against the Current* (New York: Viking Press, 1979), pp. 333-355.

2. Walzer, "The Moral Standing of States," p. 224.

3. Johann Gottfried Herder, among the classical writers, and Isaiah Berlin, among our contemporaries, have the best sense of that. See J. G. Herder, *Herders Werke* (Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1964). Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder* (London: Hogarth Press, 1976); Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969); and Isaiah Berlin, *Fathers and Children* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

4. P. T. Bauer, *Equality, The Third World and Economic Delusion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 19.

5. Walzer, "The Rights of Political Communities," pp. 165-194.

6. Walzer, "The Moral Standing of States," p. 236.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Berlin, *Vico and Herder*, pp. 145-216.

13. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 19-21, 48-51, 577-587. John Rawls, "The Independence of Moral Theory," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 47 (1974/5):7-10; Norman Daniels, "Wide Reflective Equilibrium and Theory Acceptance in Ethics," *The Journal of Philosophy* 76 (1979); "Moral Theory and Plasticity of Persons," *The Monist* 62 (July 1979); "Some Methods of Ethics and Linguistics," *Philosophical Studies* 37 (1980); "Reflective Equilibrium and Archimedean Points," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 10 (March 1980); and "Two Approaches to Theory Acceptance in Ethics" in David Copp and David Zimmerman (editors), *Morality, Reason and Truth* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1985); Jane English, "Ethics and Science," *Proceedings of the XVI Congress of Philosophy*; Kai Nielsen, "On Needing a Moral Theory: Rationality, Considered Judgements and the Grounding of Morality," *Metaphilosophy* 13 (April 1982); "Considered Judgements Again," *Human Studies* 5 (April-June 1982); *Equality and Liberty* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1985), Chapter 2; and "Searching for an Emancipatory Perspective: Wide Reflective Equilibrium and the Hermeneutical Circle" in Evan Simpson (editor), *Anti-Foundationalism and Practical Reasoning* (Edmonton, Alberta: Academia Press, 1987).

14. Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 106-127.

15. I have extensively argued for those views in my *Equality and Liberty: A Defense of Radical Egalitarianism* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1985); my "Capitalism, Socialism and Justice" in T. Regan and D. VanDeVeer (editors), *And*

*Justice for All* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982), pp. 264–286; and my “On Liberty and Equality: A Case for Radical Egalitarianism,” *The Windsor Yearbook of Access to Justice* 4 (1984):121–142.

16. Friedrich A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960). For a perceptive criticism of Hayek’s views, see Richard Norman, “Does Equality Destroy Liberty?” in Keith Graham (editor), *Contemporary Political Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 83–109.

17. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, pp. 145, 176, and 423.

18. Henry Shue, *Basic Rights: Subsistence, Affluence and U.S. Foreign Policy*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980), Chapter 1; and David Luban, “Just War and Human Rights,” pp. 195–216. In this general context, see Marshall Cohen, “Moral Skepticism and International Relations” and Charles R. Beitz, “Justice and International Relations” both in Beitz et al., *International Ethics*.

19. Luban, *ibid.*, p. 209.

20. Shue, “Foundations for a Balanced U.S. Policy on Human Rights: The Significance of Subsistence Rights,” Working Paper HRFP-1 (College Park, Md.: Center for Philosophy and Public Policy, 1977), p. 3.

21. G. A. Cohen, *Karl Marx’s Theory of History: A Defense* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978).

22. For a perceptive discussion of that complex issue, see Andrew Levine, *The Withering Away of the State* (London: Verso, 1987).

23. H.L.A. Hart, *The Concept of Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961). See his discussion of international law.

24. They are surely too large and, particularly the USSR, have too diversified populations to be cantons. In working toward a global federation of cantons, a rigid adherence to an old notion of nation-states as the basis for cantonal units would not be the optimal solution. It would be important to look for significant cultural units.

25. Andrew Levine, *Arguing for Socialism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984).