

# **Inequality as an Obstacle to World Political Community and Global Social Justice**

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Paper to be Presented at the SGIR 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on International Relations, Sweden, September 9-11<sup>th</sup> 2010

Section 3: The Politics of World Community: Beyond the International in Theory and Practice

Panel 2: Rethinking Universalism: World Community in Contemporary Political Philosophy

Inequality is one of the starkest features of human society on a global scale. Cosmopolitanism, an influential strand of contemporary political philosophy and international political theory, claims that these inequalities give rise to obligations of justice and the duty to institute a more globally egalitarian order. For cosmopolitans, the existence of a worldwide moral community of rights-bearing persons necessitates global participation in a scheme of distributive justice, thus the creation of an egalitarian form of global political community. Anti-cosmopolitans have contended that cosmopolitans have misunderstood the nature of and the relationship between moral and political community. Nonetheless, this paper will argue that the normative implications of inequality have been misunderstood because the debate has focused primarily on whether inequalities give rise to obligations of justice. Thus effort has been focused on examining when different sorts of moral obligations are incurred within and beyond the nation-state, and the demands these generate on our political institutions.

The way this debate has been framed has deemphasised the question of if the international system is the type of social organisation that could *support* a scheme of cosmopolitan justice, or whether cosmopolitan claims rest on a kind of category error. As thinkers such as Kant and Hegel were aware, as moral principles must be institutionalised within a particular social and political order. The extent to which a set of values can be realised depends on the nature of that order and the feasible sort of political community that it might support. Thus the relationship between moral principles and political principles is not as straightforward as cosmopolitans suggest. The evaluation of political principles therefore depends crucially on an assessment of the conditions for the possibility of the realisation of a moral values within a given order. Turning to the question of global justice, it is necessary to ask whether the international order is an institutional arrangement of the kind that could possibly conform to cosmopolitan principles.

The paper argues that the answer to this question must be negative. Ironically, given that it is the fact of inequality that gives rise to the moral demand for global distributive justice, inequality represents a central obstacle to the possibility of justice within the international system. Inequality is a structural feature of the global order and as such may condition the kind of relationships that may exist between actors and thus the kind of political community they might participate in. Given the degree of global inequality that currently exists, it seems implausible that putative world citizens could feasibly become co-equals in the sort of institutional scheme the cosmopolitan project would require. To demonstrate why this is so, the paper will argue that a stable order characterised in terms of justice must afford a means for actors to compel one another to respect each others rights. A vastly unequal international system necessarily lacks these features. The politically and economically less powerful would be unable to hold fellow 'world citizens' to account. Conditions of reciprocity would be absent. Therefore the beneficiaries under a scheme of cosmopolitan justice would remain dependent on the goodwill of the powerful and privileged. Steps towards the creation of a singular global political community in order to realise cosmopolitan justice would undermine the cosmopolitan principle of equal concern and respect for all persons. Inequality therefore presents a barrier to the political realisation of the demands made on individuals within the world moral community. Given the problems with moving towards a singular global political community, attempts to advance egalitarian principles of political justice may only be possible within an international political order in which the independence of political communities is maintained. The paper concludes that the political representatives of the marginalised may structurally be in the best position to act as agents to advance a more egalitarian international order. The states within the global South potentially occupy a position in which they can both be held accountable to those that they represent as well as challenge egregious aspects of global inequality within the context of a pluralistic international order. International political theory must therefore take seriously the importance of inequality for setting moral limits in world politics and, in addition, acknowledge the normative significance of the attempts by economically developing states to renegotiate features of the international order.

### **Justice and Cosmopolitan Moral Community**

Cosmopolitanism can be understood as a perspective that regards human beings as first and foremost members of a singular world community, if at minimum only in a moral or ideal sense. The focus of this analysis will be more narrowly focused on cosmopolitanism as a political theory, on cosmopolitan theories of *justice*, rather than, say, the humanistic ethic and the cultivation of a sense of belonging to the community of humanity notably advocated by Nussbaum (1994). At its broadest, the term justice is used to refer to the obligations that moral

agents owe to one another<sup>1</sup>, but within contemporary political theory the term is seen as primarily corresponding to the domain of politics. Justice *qua* justice is therefore concerned with a certain class of obligations that arise in virtue of the fact that human beings create political institutions in order to fulfil their collective goals. This understanding of justice follows Rawls, for whom justice is to be understood as the ‘first virtue’ of political institutions (1999b: 3): the core normative criteria according to which they should be evaluated. Drawing on concepts from German political thought, theories of justice can be understood as being concerned with *Recht*, the actualisation of moral principles through law<sup>2</sup>. Justice is an evaluative and normative concept: if a certain institutional arrangement fails to treat persons justly, relevant individuals and/or institutional actors have a responsibility to bring those arrangements into line with the requirements of justice

Duties of justice might arise because individuals have essential moral rights<sup>3</sup>. If these rights would be best secured by a particular institutional arrangement, relevant individuals would be under an obligation to create and maintain such institutions. Duties of justice might also arise when individuals engage in regular social interactions that affect their autonomy, and when pre-existing institutional arrangements shape the outcome of such social interactions in normatively significant ways, such as by distributing the benefits and burdens of social cooperation amongst persons. A prevalent strand within contemporary political thought derives the content of the concept of justice from the claim that institutions must ensure that individuals are treated with equal concern and respect as autonomous moral persons. Social interactions and institutional arrangements that affect individual autonomy, especially those of a coercive character, thus need to be justified in a way that those affected by them could endorse. Justice is thus typically defined in terms of hypothetical consent, a set of arrangements that reasonable individuals would endorse.

Cosmopolitan theorists of justice contend that there is no *prima facie* reason why obligations of political justice that apply within the nation-state apply with equal force beyond it. This claim is characteristically grounded in a belief that that all persons share certain morally significant

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<sup>1</sup> This is a position in political philosophy that can be traced at least as far back as Book 1 of Plato’s Republic, in which Polemarchus suggests that justice is paying one’s debts to others. Its appearance early on in the Socratic dialogue, and the fact that Polemarchus attributes the view to the poet Simonides, indicates that this was considered by Plato to be a widespread and common sense opinion on the nature of justice, although in the dialogue Socrates finds it wanting.

<sup>2</sup> For a thoroughgoing attempt to explicate a cosmopolitan theory of *Recht* from within the German tradition of political thought and critical social theory, see Fine, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Therefore what counts as being ‘treated justly’ by an institution is dependent on (without necessarily being reducible to) the obligations owed to individuals based on their rights more generally (Moellendorf 2002: 31-33; cf: Beitz 1999: 153).

capacities such as reason and autonomy. Agents and institutions are obligated to respect these morally relevant characteristics and, because these capacities are universal, all persons share certain civil, political and economic rights irrespective of their membership of exclusive social or political communities (Caney 2005: 66). As moral obligations arise from these characteristics, moral bonds between persons do not stop at borders but stretch to encompass a singular world community. This means that, in principle, because obligations of political justice are derivative of moral obligations, there is no reason why global obligations of political justice could not arise.

Indeed, cosmopolitans argue that our perspective for evaluating institutions and developing an account of justice should be global in scope. Epistemologically, the reasons given to justify a specific institutional arrangement cannot be the parochial standards of a particular community, they must be reasons which could command assent from all rational agents. Methodologically, cosmopolitan political theorists do not privilege a specific form of institutional arrangement, the nation-state. Co-nationality is, at best, only one normatively salient potential relationship between individuals. Persons may be participants in many other institutional associations or patterns of interaction to which the criteria of justice can be applied. Furthermore, it is insufficient for institutional arrangements such as the state to be justified solely from the perspective of the participants in those arrangements. A nation-state may fully satisfy the requirements of justice from the point of view of its members, but may egregiously fail to satisfy the requirements of justice on a global level. Global moral community trumps local political community: partiality to one's co-nationals is only legitimate once the demanding requirements of global justice have been discharged (Tan 2004). Institutions should therefore be evaluated from an appropriate and if necessary global perspective, as an institutional arrangement cannot be said to be just unless it respects the rights of all individuals concerned.

The scope of justification is thus universal for cosmopolitanism. All rational individuals are moral agents, all rational agents are worthy of respect. Furthermore, all subjects of moral respect are *equally* the subject of moral respect. There is no set of characteristics possessed by a class of individuals that entitles them to greater moral respect than others. This methodological commitment generates a strong presumption towards procedural and/or substantive equality. Political institutions and arrangements that systematically prioritise the interests of one group over another or allow an unjustifiable level of inequality between persons are deemed to fail to show equal respect for persons.

From this starting point, cosmopolitan theorists such as Beitz, Caney, Moellendorf, Pogge and Tan (Beitz 1999; Caney 2005; Moellendorf 2002, 2009; Pogge 1994, 2008; Tan 2004) have argued that obligations of justice do indeed exist amongst members of the global moral community.

Pointing to the extremes of global equality that exist within the world, and noting that interdependence between states makes it possible to speak of a basic structure or constitutional order that determines the distribution of these valuable social resources, they argue that cosmopolitan principles support a scheme of distributive justice that would necessitate a potentially radical redistribution of global wealth. It should be stressed again that these cosmopolitan theorists are focusing on the requirements of political justice, the legitimate arrangement of institutions that have globally distributive or autonomy-affecting implications. Therefore the distinction sometimes made between ‘moral’ and ‘institutional’ cosmopolitanism is somewhat misleading. It is true that cosmopolitan theorists are not necessarily committed to ‘institutional cosmopolitanism’, the advocacy of the creation of a single set of authoritative global institutions and/or the abolition of all forms of bounded political community. Nonetheless ‘moral’ cosmopolitans are engaged in a project to ascertain the moral legitimacy of institutional arrangements on a global scale<sup>4</sup>. This is something very different from, for example, the moral philosopher Peter Singer’s cosmopolitan account of the duties individuals owe to one another given the facts about extreme poverty and preventable malnutrition (1972). Singer is certainly cosmopolitan, in that he believes there is a singular global moral community, but his arguments do not concern justice *per se* but interpersonal duties that individuals owe one another, specifically what affluent persons owe directly to the very poor<sup>5</sup>. The concerns of cosmopolitan theorists are first and foremost institutional<sup>6</sup>.

Furthermore the theories of justice put forward by cosmopolitans are institutionally cosmopolitan in at least the minimal sense that they envisage a global order organised according to cosmopolitan principles. If nation-states continued to play a primary role in such an order, they would still do so as part of a globally extensive political order, the legitimacy of which would rest on the existence of a world moral community. Individuals, no matter their particular citizenship, would be co-participants within a global scheme promoting and ensuring social justice amongst members of this community. The more ambitious cosmopolitan theories of justice, such as Pogge’s global resource dividend (Pogge 2001, would require something more than this, as serious efforts supranational institution building would presumably be required to organise and coordinate the ongoing process of economic redistribution. Other cosmopolitans such as Caney and Held have called for the democratisation of significant international

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<sup>4</sup> The dichotomy between moral and institutional cosmopolitanism is confusing because the former is a criteria or standard for judgement and the latter a conclusion or settled set of judgements about political arrangements.

<sup>5</sup> Although as a utilitarian Singer would certainly claim that these obligations have consequences for the legitimacy institutional arrangements. The point however stands, as Singer’s central argument regards the interpersonal duties individuals owe one another.

<sup>6</sup> This is not a judgement about the plausibility of Singer’s thesis, but an attempt to define the scope of the present enquiry. Wealthy individuals may indeed have extensive personal duties to towards famished individuals, but this is outside the scope of this enquiry.

institutions and therefore for the creation of new cosmopolitan forms of citizenship. The moral demands of world moral community therefore demand the creation of new forms of world political community in order to address unconscionable global inequalities.

### **The Limits of Moral and Political Community: Anti-Cosmopolitan Objections**

The cosmopolitan account of the relationship between world moral community, obligations of justice and world political community has been subject to a number of well known criticisms. Communitarians, feminists and others find fault with the cosmopolitan account of moral community, arguing that moral values and obligations are more deeply embedded within particular bounded communities that it recognises<sup>7</sup>. These debates are well rehearsed, but it is worth noting that two very sophisticated accounts have been independently advanced recently by Rahul Rao and Toni Erskine, both of which attempt to mediate between the pull of cosmopolitan universalism and the embeddedness of individuals within communities and webs of interpersonal relationships<sup>8</sup>. These contributions to international political theory demonstrate that the choice between universality and embeddedness may well be a false one; and so this paper will leave aside the communitarian/feminist challenge.

A second set of objections has been raised by non-communitarian anti-cosmopolitans. The line of argument advanced by these liberal statist thinkers seems to acknowledge that moral obligations are in principle universal and that there might consequently be some form of minimal

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<sup>7</sup>'Communitarianism' is a very broad church. Two central contributions to developing this perspective were Macintyre's Thomist challenge to liberalism (1984; 1988) and Charles Taylor's liberal Hegelianism (1985). On the first generation of debates within the revived sub-discipline of international political theory see Brown 1992. For a broadly feminist exploration of international political theory that departs significantly from the assumptions made by cosmopolitanism see Hutchings (1999).

<sup>8</sup>To summarise what are two highly complex works of international political thought, Erskine (2008) argues that whilst individual moral agency should be understood as being embedded in the interpersonal bonds of community, such communities are never monolithic or truly discrete. Rather, individuals participate in and are constituted as moral persons by multiple overlapping and intersecting communities. Therefore, individuals and communities never truly encounter one another as totally 'other' or alien. No matter how tenuous, grounds will nearly always exist for moral agents to engage with one another from some shared perspective. Rao (2010) seeks to analyse the emancipatory potential of cosmopolitanism and nationalism in the post-colonial world by examining the interrelationship between the themes of 'home' and 'the world' in post-colonial thought and subaltern political practice. He argues that the concepts of world community and of particularistic attachment are both ambivalent, risking entrapment of post-colonial peoples within 'coercive solidarism' and 'authoritarian pluralism' respectively, yet providing indispensable grounds for the moral claims of the marginalised. An emancipatory, subaltern cosmopolitanism must therefore remain grounded in the local and the parochial.

moral world community. Yet, they aver, certain forms of moral obligation, specifically duties of justice proper, only arise within bounded political communities. The position that extensive duties of distributive justice exist within, but not beyond, the nation state has been most notably defended by Thomas Nagel (2005). Nagel argues that a ‘justice relation’, a social relationship between individuals that incurs obligations of justice, only arises when actors are co-participants in a democratic political community subject to coercive authority. Justice therefore does not require the creation of any new form of global political community, but only arises within pre-existing national political communities<sup>9</sup>. This is a sophisticated challenge, but cosmopolitans such as Julius have been able to resist Nagel’s conclusions whilst acknowledging elements of the argument that duties of justice arise out of the social relationships between individuals (Julius 2006). Moellendorf, for example, argues that duties of justice do arise out of the particular associations that individuals enter into with one another, but the kind of associations that give rise to a ‘justice relation’ are broader than mutual submission to a coercive authority (2009: 31-2). Because duties of justice arise within a moral community that is wider than present political communities, there is an impetus to create the necessary national, regional and global institutions which would further the aims of justice. Statist anti-cosmopolitans have therefore so far failed to offer a decisive refutation of the cosmopolitan vision of a just global order. The debate continues cosmopolitans and their critics, with global inequality usually framed as the potential ground for claims of justice and the division of humanity into separate communities is the factor that potentially prevents justice from having global scope.

Nonetheless, although establishing that there exists a ‘justice relation’ at the global level has been the primary goal of cosmopolitan political theorists, this is insufficient. Cosmopolitans have focused their efforts on establishing that duties of justice are incurred globally, that the national community out not be the limit of the horizons of political morality. But equally important is the question of whether the character of the international system is type of social order that it could meaningfully *support* such moral claims: whether relations characterised in terms of cosmopolitan justice could come to exist within the international system. This is of central importance because otherwise the notion of cosmopolitan justice becomes very much the utopian ‘mirage’ that its critics allege (Kukathas 2006), a sublime yet ultimately ephemeral vision. The defenders of cosmopolitanism must be able to show that the notion of cosmopolitan justice is not, to quote Kant, ‘fantastic and overstrained’ (Kant quoted in Tan 2004: 35), that justice might come to govern the relations between persons on a world-scale. This is a question of the nature of the

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<sup>9</sup> Nagel presents a very strong version of anti-cosmopolitan statism. More moderately, David Miller (2000; 2007) puts forward a liberal nationalist position, according to which they may be duties of justice owed beyond the nation-state, but only in a weakened or attenuated form. The nation-state is a stronger form of moral community than humanity, thus compatriots owe each other special duties. On special duties owed to compatriots see Richard Miller (1998).

order that exists beyond the nation-state and whether that order really could become the sort of political community capable of conforming to the cosmopolitan standard of justice. Cosmopolitans must be able to demonstrate that the claim that political relations beyond the nation-state should be subordinate to justice does not rest on a misunderstanding of the nature of those relations.

### **The Question of Right Within and Beyond the State in Historical Political Thought**

This question of the conditions for the possible realisation of justice, and therefore the feasible limits of political community, has almost vanished in some areas of contemporary political theory, yet has historically been a central concern. Whether political developments might make it possible for a cosmopolitan order to come into being was of serious concern to Kant, who questioned whether it was possible that the world might not be fit for moral action. Kant believed that if human social relations were such that cosmopolitan principles could not govern them, this would make cosmopolitan goals quixotic. The dictates of the moral law Kant identified with the categorical imperative would still be valid, yet ultimately in vain. Thus in his *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View* (1784), Kant suggest that human history might be plausibly interpreted as leading towards a state in which a moral kingdom of ends might become reality. Thus Kant attempts to appeal to the notion of providence to demonstrate that if progress and a rational purpose can plausibly be posited in history, and that it is meaningful to speak of cosmopolitan right and thus work towards its realisation.

Although he believed, as do his contemporary cosmopolitan successors, that the existence of a world moral community demanded some minimal form of world political community, he was all too aware of the difficulties standing in the way of a cosmopolitan order<sup>10</sup>. His concerns about the uncertainties and instabilities of the ‘state of nature’, in which conflicting claims of right cannot be resolved without recourse to violence, led him to defend a statist order as a necessary stepping stone towards a truly cosmopolitan global federation (Kant 2007[1795]: 16-17). In this respect Kant’s position shares much with so-called ‘realists’ as Hobbes and Rousseau<sup>11</sup>, in that like them he wrestled with the question of whether concepts such as justice and injustice have any meaning beyond the nation state. Political principles are distinct from moral principles because

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<sup>10</sup> It may be that Wight’s categorisation of Kant as a ‘revolutionist’ in his discussion of the ‘three traditions’ that cemented this misleading picture of Kant’s international thought (Wight 1991: 45-7).

<sup>11</sup> The attribution of the moniker ‘realist’ to such thinkers is somewhat anachronistic in the same way that the term ‘conservative’ inaccurately describes thinkers prior to the French Revolution. ‘Realism’ might more plausibly be said to emerge in the C20th in the work of Weber, with the acknowledgement that many of its intellectual tributaries can be traced back much further. See Haslam 2002 for a account of the history and pre-history of realist thought.

the realisation of the latter within a political order is not a straightforward task and because in the absence of political order no effective moral order is possible. Thus, Kant's concern in his international thought was to identify the conditions under which an international order could come into being within which right could govern.

If we take the Kantian challenge seriously, then this raises serious problems for the notion that the nation-state can be evaluated in narrowly instrumental terms. For most cosmopolitans, the state is at best a trustee, charged with carrying out the requirements of global justice. Beitz for instance sees the state as a 'means to the end of social justice' (Beitz 1999: 104) and furthermore claims that cosmopolitans must ultimately regard the national community as 'suspect' (Beitz 1999: 216). But if the Kantian claim that it is only meaningful to speak about justice when it can be realised within a form of social order is valid, then the state should not just as a potential vehicle for the promotion of justice, but a framework, a form of political community, within which justice is more than a mere hypothetical goal but might come to govern the relations between persons (cf. Miller 2007: 40)<sup>12</sup>.

This comes close to the position articulated by Hegel, who emphasised the essential role of the modern state in providing a domain in which interpersonal right can be established. Hegel maintained that moral principles could only be realised under concrete circumstances, such as within modern civil society. He was nonetheless concerned with what he termed the 'problem of poverty', the ethico-political lacuna within the modern state created by the existence of an underclass outside of the embedded ethical life of civil society and the state (Hegel 1991: §240-244). For Hegel the condition of the poor was more than an ethical problem, it was a problem of whether the relations between the enfranchised and the disenfranchised were governed by ethics at all, or whether a rift might run through modern society.

Similar concerns led Marx in a very different direction. In early works such as *On the Law on Thefts of Wood* (1842), Marx takes from Hegel the notion that the poor are outside the ethical order established by bourgeois society.<sup>13</sup> Yet Marx was ultimately unconvinced by Hegel's attempts to, in Benhabib's words, 'heal the wounds of the ethical' (Benhabib 1986: 109) and instead came to the conclusion that civil society and the modern state, far from instantiating conditions of right, merely express the domination of a particular class. The goal of seeking

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<sup>12</sup> The force of Miller's argument can still be appreciated even if we do not follow Miller's argument that duties of social justice as such (as opposed to duties of humanitarian justice) only arise within the nation-state.

<sup>13</sup> Although it relevant to note that at this point Marx, like Hegel, still sees the state as a potential defender and guarantor of individual rights and of human freedom, it is the laws of property that are at fault. It was the radicalisation of this critique of bourgeois civil society that led him to reject the more optimistic account of the state.

justice for those excluded and oppressed from the bourgeois social order was therefore seen as *meaningless* by Marx, justice is not something that can conceivably come into being within capitalist society. The capitalist state is not a 'community' of any kind, but rather the machinery of oppression. Instead, Marx looks towards the proletariat to take on the historical role of overthrowing and abolishing capitalist society, allowing for the realisation of truly human goals. As Rengger argues, Marxism should be understood as a political theory of ultimate ends rather than a theory of right (Rengger 2008: 191). It is not concerned with the duties owed between persons as it is radically sceptical about the possibility for modern capitalist society to support any such thing. 'Justice' cannot govern relations between bourgeois and proletariat, and thus Marxism calls for the total transformation of capitalist society.

### **The Possibility of Liberalism Beyond the Nation-State**

These examples suffice to demonstrate that throughout the history of political thought, major thinkers have struggled not only with the question of who owes what to whom, but with the question of whether it is meaningful to speak of political right and obligation *at all* outside of specific social and political arrangements. Nor did these thinkers limit their focus to the problem of the existence of a plurality of different bounded communities. Even the nation-state, the dominant form of political organisation in the modern world, could not be straightforwardly assumed to be a form of political community capable of supporting right and justice, especially given the fact of economic and political inequalities within modern societies.

Cosmopolitan theorists must, as Kant attempted to do, show that the international system might be feasibly transformed so as to support the realisation of the principles they advocate, without appealing to pre-modern notions of providence. But in what respects might the international order be unsuitable as a set of arrangements capable of supporting cosmopolitan justice? A self-evident feature is that it lacks a dedicated, central agent capable of upholding conditions of interpersonal right and fulfilling the requirements of cosmopolitan justice. Chwaszcza thus accuses cosmopolitan political theory of inappropriately transposing liberal political theory into the international domain, surreptitiously assuming the existence of a constitutional state, 'an institutional organization of agencies and offices that are invested with all the relevant competence and responsibility to facilitate justice, peace, welfare, and social and political life' (Chwaszcza 2008: 122). Chwaszcza thus claims that because liberal theory presumes an addressee, cosmopolitan justice makes little sense in the absence of a global central authority. As Miller suggests, there exists 'a large normative gap between identifying a state of affairs as intolerable and identifying agents, individual or collective, who have responsibility to remedy it' (Miller 2007: 232). Cosmopolitanism, according to Chwaszcza, fails because it mischaracterises the kind of

agents that exist in the international sphere and thus the structure of right that can feasibly exist beyond the nation state. She thus argues we should address international political theory to those institutional agents that do exist, states in the plural (Chwaszcza 2008: 130-5). But as defenders of such a society of states perspective have acknowledged (Bull 1977), an international ethic based on a morality of states is likely to be less ambitious than cosmopolitan justice.

On this point cosmopolitans agree, acknowledging that the state system may not be capable of accommodating cosmopolitan justice (Caney 2005; Linklater 1998). Indeed, many cosmopolitans have expressed scepticism towards the state, seeing it as intrinsically partial and prone to self interest. Chwaszcza's criticism that anarchy is a barrier to the application of liberal principles of justice beyond the nation state therefore seems potentially fatal to cosmopolitanism. Yet Chwaszcza overemphasises the role of the state in liberal political thought and therefore cosmopolitanism. It is true that liberals such as Rawls regard justice as the 'first virtue' of political institutions and regard dedicated agent and a constitutional order as necessary to uphold individual rights. But absent such conditions, the obligation falls on ordinary persons to modify institutions that fall short of this standard or create them if none exist. *Passé* Chwaszcza, liberalism not only regards the state as an addressee of claims of justice, but grants a central role to the 'conscientious individual', a subject capable of being moved to action by moral principle<sup>14</sup>. Consequently it is reasonable to interpret cosmopolitanism as claiming that conscientious individuals the world over have a duty to support steps towards the realisation of cosmopolitan justice. It is not surprising therefore that when attempting to establish ground for what Moellendorf calls 'cosmopolitan hope' (Moellendorf 2002: 176), some political theorists have looked towards global civil society as the agents capable of carrying out the 'cosmopolitan project for unifying humanity' (Gowan 2001: 92; see Smith and Brassett 2008: 71). Similarly scholars of international relations sympathetic to cosmopolitanism have seen transnational activists as playing a central role as normative entrepreneurs in reshaping international politics (Keck and Sikkink 1998).

How might civil society actors create conditions for cosmopolitan right on a global level? The first possibility is that they may correct for the structural inability for states to act in accordance with moral principles. Cosmopolitan thinkers hold that the state is too partial and too prone to self-interest (Held 2004: 178). They see a role for non-state actors in holding states and international actors to account and drawing attention to questions of inequality and injustice (Morivaridi 2008: 32). Global civil society therefore acts as a conscience and a corrective to the one-sidedness of *raison d'état*, forcing states to modify their behaviour to bring it into line with

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<sup>14</sup> This claim is expressed in the popular quote attributed to Margaret Mead: 'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has'.

justice and thus 'humanising' international relations and compelling states with the wherewithal to do so to act as trustees of cosmopolitan justice.

A second, more globalist position has been articulated by theorists such as Archibugi, according to whom mass media and information technology make membership of a cosmopolitan global community a social reality for many more individuals than was previously possible (Archibugi 2002: 25). Individuals can conceive themselves as co-participants in some kind of global society and possibly even engage in some form of global dialogue: providing a necessary underpinning for the emergence of global deliberative democracy. In the stronger version of this thesis, an activist global civil society acts as a 'vanguard', a demos-in-waiting for a 'cosmopolitanism to come'. Although embryonic at this stage, a strong form of global political community has the potential to emerge organically and interstitially. This position, which might be ascribed to some of the actors involved within the World Social Forum, sees the present international order as transitional, pregnant with the possibility of a new global order in which cosmopolitan right might be realised through the actions of a collective agent, a 'postmodern Prince' (Gill 2000) or the global 'multitude' (Negri and Hardt 2000). Pogge too appeals to the notion that only a few thousand activists could 'change the world forever' and eradicate severe poverty in just a few years (2005b: 80, 81).

Held advances a variant of this approach under which global civil society actors would play a key part in the deliberative process of fashioning new 'multi-layered' institutions (Held 2004: 112, 115-6). Thus global civil society would act as a transformative agent, helping to bring about structural change within the international system. The new specialised, functional agencies, operating under global democratic oversight, would then act as agents capable of discharging the duties of cosmopolitan justice. More technocratic viewpoints have been put forward which argue that current practices of global governance point towards possible cosmopolitan transformations of the international system. Ruggie highlights the erratic emergence of globally embedded liberalism as a result of civil society groups moving into 'governance gaps' and corporate actors taking on new responsibilities (Ruggie 2003: 118). Slaughter argues that transgovernmental networks are quietly transforming international relations by promoting a form of decentralised governance, knitting together the international system through 'regulation without coercion' (Slaughter 2004: 9). The international system becomes a single global space, capable of being administered in the global public interest by a range of transgovernmental, transnational and supranational actors. In the absence of a fully formed global political community, international administrators become trustees on behalf of the global moral community.

### **'Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism' the Problem of Inequality**

A commonality running through these approaches is their appeal to some kind of vanguard, whether in the form of transnational activists or decision-makers in international institutions, capable of transforming the international system so that it becomes a space in which cosmopolitan justice can be realised. However, this approach becomes problematic when we take seriously the extent of inequality within the international system. It seems troubling that given the egalitarian commitments of cosmopolitan international political theory, the existence of pervasive and enduring inequality should prove such a stumbling block. Inequality is usually understood as the ground for certain cosmopolitan claims of justice, as the fact that gives rise to the demand for an egalitarian principle of global redistribution. But inequality may also act as an impediment to realising cosmopolitan goals, as the power relations between actors shape the sort of political and moral relations that can exist between them. From this perspective, equality can be seen as a necessary prerequisite for certain relations such as co-citizenship within a scheme of cosmopolitan justice. Many cosmopolitans have grounded the claims regarding global justice on appeal to the existence of an inegalitarian 'global basic structure', the institutional structures and enduring patterns of social interaction that determine the fortunes of individuals and societies, reproducing a stratified global order (Buchanan 2000: 703; Pogge 2008: 150; Tan 2004: 25-6). Yet although the profound effects of such a deep structure of inequality are acknowledged, there has been little reflection on the way in it might limit the prospects for political community. The debate between cosmopolitans and anti-cosmopolitans has focused on the fact that the world is divided into distinct political communities, creating a bifurcated moral universe that distinguishes between duties to compatriots and those owed to persons in general. Yet this is not the only structural obstacle to a cosmopolitan political order, inequality itself seems to be an equally salient barrier standing in the way of establishing global conditions of cosmopolitan right.

For instance, even if some form of transnational civil society is emerging, it does not follow that all are equally able to participate in it. Archibugi expresses this concern, noting that it may make little sense to discuss an immanent global moral community when a third of the world has never even used a telephone (Archibugi 2002: 26). Bull's concern about the shallowness of cosmopolitan global culture remains salient given that the vast majority of humanity has little opportunity to participate in it (Bull 1977: 305)<sup>15</sup>. Thus the embrace of global civil society as a transformative agent overlooks how narrow and exclusive participation in this form of political activity actually is. Transnational advocacy networks are, by their nature, partial and issue specific. They are likely to be composed of and represent the views of a relatively narrow group of committed transnational activists, largely based in the economically developed world. Even

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<sup>15</sup> This is a different claim from notion that cosmopolitan values themselves cannot be universalised. The problem is whether the majority of the world's population remains excluded from any nascent global civil society.

cosmopolitans such as Held have themselves expressed a level of ambivalence regarding the possibility of greater involvement by NGOs in international fora, as it may result in economically developed societies being represented twice (Held 2004: 112). Hence there has been an increased tendency to 'question by what authority NGOs purport to speak for others and aspire to influence domestic and international polities' (Reitan 2007: 449). There is, furthermore, a rising awareness that transnationally oriented NGOs exist subject to quasi-market pressures, within a political economy in which competition for attention and influence can be fierce. Thus, although it would be wrong to be dismissive with regards to transnational activists, it is questionable whether they really can act as the vanguard of a global cosmopolitan community to come.

Similar criticisms might be made of the notion that a new cadre of global administrators could somehow act either as trustees promoting the global interest or as responsible executors of global civil society. Murphy notes that the huge social distance between the global elite and the globally marginalised means that it is extremely difficult for the former to develop an awareness of the values and concerns of the latter (Murphy 2005: 182-3). Again, although such actors may be receptive to egalitarian claims, questions arise as to whether their position makes them innately predisposed to paternalistic approaches to normative issues. International institutions are, at the present, relatively insulated from the pressures of the truly marginalised within the global order, but are out of necessity highly sensitive to the concerns of the dominant states within the international system, and to a lesser extent the dominant social actors within those states<sup>16</sup>. This is not an incidental feature, but part of the nature of international institutions in the present international system in which international institutions are the agents for state-based principals. This is problematic for cosmopolitanism because whilst few cosmopolitans entertain the idea of a world state, most see supranational institutions and multi-layered global governance as essential for any feasible scheme of global justice. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how the ambitious schemes of distributive justice cosmopolitans such as Pogge advocate could be realised without major efforts at supranational institution-building.

'Actually existing cosmopolitanism' within the present international order seems bound up with various forms of international inequality. In the absence of any alternatives, the agents best placed to advance a cosmopolitan transformation of the present international order would be

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<sup>16</sup> See Murphy (2005) on the extent to which global elites, however well meaning, are structurally insulated from the concerns of the globally marginalised. This is entirely consistent with the dominant approaches to explaining patterns of international institution and regime building, which argues that they are instruments for the resolution of problems of coordination and collective action that arise amongst states, and that the outcomes of international negotiations are determined by the preferences and the bargaining power of state-based actors (Drezner 2007). The preferences of states are, in turn, shaped by the preferences of major organised interests within their borders (Moravcsik 1997).

those states and actors who already possess a disproportionate share of power and influence within the international system. Indeed, a degree of power-inequality between liberal states and the rest of the world *must* exist if they are to take the lead in reordering the international system in line with cosmopolitan principles. The fact that the agents most able to project power and reshape the international order are the dominant states of the North is sometimes acknowledged by cosmopolitans as slightly unfortunate, but ultimately an incidental detail. Whereas some cosmopolitans such as Held do show an awareness of these problems, others have not regarded the particular identity of agents within the international system tasked with bringing about a cosmopolitan transformation as being of very great importance. In these cases, cosmopolitan theory addresses the demands of justice to whosoever is best placed to carry out the demands of global justice. Whatever agent is best placed to promote cosmopolitan justice has the right and the duty to do so. Thus, although he believes it to be empirically unlikely, Beitz argues that if imperial rule were to effectively promote social justice it would be morally justified (Beitz 1999: 99-102).

The more critical cosmopolitan scholars have recognized this problem, Archibugi admitting the dangers of a 'a new hegemony founded on the predominance of the United States, for whom institutions such as NATO, the IMF and WTO provide effective instruments' (Archibugi 2002: 32). Zolo, a trenchant critic of cosmopolitanism, claims that attempts to create a cosmopolitan order would thus inevitably consolidate and institutionalise a global oligarchy perpetuating the inequalities of the status quo (Zolo 1997: 2). This argument is rather hyperbolic, but the strong affinity between cosmopolitanism and empire has frequently been noted, from Stoicism in the Roman world to the cosmopolitan liberalism that accompanied European colonialism<sup>17</sup>. As Wight argued, any imperial actor is likely to promote a universalist ideology in order to legitimise the imposition of uniformity as a prelude to dissolution of the state system (Wight 1991: 47-8). Cosmopolitan ideals run the risk of being put in service of imperial ends and being used to legitimate, not the creation of a world political community, but the subordination of some political communities by others.

Without surrendering to nihilism or relativism, it should be acknowledged that ideas can never remain 'innocent' when they enter into politics within a highly unequal international order. Even laudable ideas may be subject to 'appropriation and distortion' within an unreformed international system. In a deeply unequal world dominated by powerful states and other interests, moral ideals may easily be used to lend legitimacy to the pursuit of narrowly self-interested aims. It is worrying therefore that cosmopolitans have hitherto shown little interest in either how

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<sup>17</sup> The list could be of course be extended to include Soviet communist expansionism, the Jacobin ideology promoted by thinkers such as Anarcharsis Cloots during the French Revolution, or the role of orthodox Christianity in Byzantine imperial policy.

power relations impact on normative considerations nor in how cosmopolitan ideas interact with a power-political context. It is striking that cosmopolitans almost universally employ a notion of 'generic globalisation', according to which globalisation is an even and uniform process of increasing interaction capacity and erosion of social distance (Held *et al* 1999: 16-17; Scholte 2005: 59-60). Globalisation is thus presented as a quasi-natural process, presumably driven by improved communications technology. For Gowan such cosmopolitan accounts lose sight of the 'underlying reality' on which the process of globalisation is predicated – the military and financial supremacy of the US (Gowan 2001: 81). Gowan's arguments are somewhat reductionist, but it is notable that Held can advocate building on the 'cosmopolitan steps of the 20th century and deepen[ing] the institutional hold of this agenda' (Held 2009: 546) without reflecting on the geopolitical processes that gave rise to many of these achievements. The pacific liberal order amongst the advanced core of states within the 'North' was forged in the heat of international rivalry, and remains deeply exclusive. Although issues of structure and agency are always difficult to disentangle, the role of power-political decisions made by dominant states in shaping the processes of internationalisation and global economic integration cannot be ignored.

A proponent of cosmopolitanism might argue that these criticisms are somewhat unfair. Cosmopolitanism is a prescriptive theory, they might claim, that holds all actors to an evaluative standard based on a conception of justice. Departures from this standard, even by actors ostensibly acting on behalf of some cosmopolitan principles, can be condemned without contradiction by cosmopolitan political theory (cf. Caney 2005: 52). The weaknesses of civil society, the proscribed nature of international organization and the improbability that the dominant actors who benefit from many aspects of global injustice could act as the agents promoting a new cosmopolitan order can all be acknowledged. But, it might be claimed, none of this tells against the plausibility of cosmopolitanism as a theory of global justice.

However, this seems like too much of a retreat from the goals of political theory. As Brown notes (Brown 2007: 10), cosmopolitan theories of justice are advanced as political theories, not contributions to applied ethics of the kind advanced by Singer (1972). If steps towards an order in which cosmopolitan goals could be realised would most likely lead to the negation of cosmopolitan principles, cosmopolitanism is weakened as an approach to international political theory. Without a feasible account of the agents or processes that could bring about the transformation that the theory calls for, grounds for 'cosmopolitan hope' (Moellendorf 2002: 176) will be undermined. Cosmopolitan theorists have unduly ignored the power relations that would be involved in any feasible cosmopolitical project and, as Fine has argued, have been too unwilling to face the problems confronting 'actually existing cosmopolitanism' (Fine 2007:140).

## **Equality, Reciprocity and Political Community**

Nevertheless, there may be a more essential point at stake regarding the relationship between cosmopolitan justice and inequality beyond the nation state. The issue is not just an instrumental question of which actors are practically capable or likely to be able to promote cosmopolitan goals or bring about change such that cosmopolitan goals might be realised. The deeper issue concerns the relationship that agents stand in relation to one another within a putative political community. Justice can be understood as a set of moral obligations, either on institutions or on individuals to change institutional arrangements. From a different but not incompatible perspective we can analyse justice as a specific kind of relationship that exists between actors who are 'materially entangled' (Julius 2006: 190) with one another through participation in shared social interactions or institutions. Nagel's concept of a 'justice relation' is useful here, for although he uses the phrase to refer to a situation in which duties of justice arise (Nagel 2005: 114), it points us towards an examination of the social relationships constitutive of justice. Conventional accounts claim that a relationship based on justice is one which would hypothetically be endorsed by all affected persons. However, to this requirement might add a further stipulation: that some reciprocity and/or a rough equality of power exist between agents such that actors can compel one another to respect each others rights. This is an analytic, not empirical requirement for justice to properly characterise a relationship and for justice to be meaningfully instituted within a social order.

To see why this is so, it is useful to draw on the insights of neo-republican political theory. Drawing on a tradition of thinkers including as Cicero and Machiavelli, neo-republican theorists have argued that freedom should be understood not just as the absence of restraint but being free from domination. A person may be unfree even if not interfered with if the exercise of their rights remains dependent on the good will of others (Skinner 1998: 70), a condition termed by the Romans as being obnoxious (Skinner 1998: 42). What matters is not the probability 'but the mere possibility' of being deprived of one's rights (Laborde & Maynor 2008: 7). Under such circumstances individuals are unfree in that they live at the will of another under conditions of dependence and vulnerability (Pettit 1997: 32).

A compelling case can be made that the considerations that apply to individual freedom apply to relations of justice between persons. The neo-republican account of freedom is based on a persuasive interpretation of the Enlightenment concept of personhood that likewise animates cosmopolitanism. According to Pettit, to be acknowledged as a moral agent a person must be able to command the respect of their peers rather than be granted consideration out of 'grace or pity' (Pettit 1997: 32). This is because to be treated as a moral agent 'is to be treated as a voice

that cannot be dismissed without independent reason: to be taken as someone worth listening to' (Pettit 1997: 91). Justice is the requirement that institutions adequately respect the rights of individuals, giving them their due by treating them with equal concern and respecting their moral personhood. Following Pettit, it can be claimed that for a social relationship based on justice to exist, individuals must be able to command that respect. This necessitates a certain level of reciprocity and equality of power amongst actors, as if respect is granted through good will alone the rights of weaker actors will be intrinsically precarious. For relations to be characterised by justice, all concerned individuals must be able to demand to be listened to and must be able to compel others to respect their rights.

Thus it seems that Beitz's suggestion that an empire could hypothetically promote social justice is deeply misleading and reveals a flaw in cosmopolitan reasoning. Even if the hypothetical empire did act in a way that *happened* to be consistent with the demands of justice, i.e. in a way that might be hypothetically defended, this would not mean that a relationship based on justice existed between rulers and the ruled. A hypothetical empire might happen to grant the ruled their due in terms of socially produced benefits and burdens, but with no effective means of ensuring that their voices could command the attention of their rulers, the former would still not command respect as moral agents. The rulers would always have the option of withdrawing or changing the terms of any agreement between them. The fundamental problem is that the agents are in structurally different positions to one another, and it is this structural inequality that precludes the possibility of a relationship based on justice. Without a robust set of impartial political institutions to act as a counterweight to differences in material power, the acknowledgement of the status of the inferior party's moral equality is contingent rather than guaranteed, as is required by a right. Thus it is meaningless to talk of justice outside of conditions of reciprocity, where agents can check the power of one another.

To illustrate that this is an analytic question about the nature of relationships characterised by justice and not just an instrumental concern with how justice is best realised, it is worth examining an example put forward by Barry to critique the idea of justice as either mutual advantage or reciprocity. The notion of justice as mutual advantage<sup>18</sup>, as put forward by theorists such as Gauthier (1986), claims that an arrangement is just if and only if it benefits all actors concerned more than the *status quo ante*. As a *reductio ad absurdum*, Barry asks us to consider the example of contact between European settlers and American Indians, in which the settlers

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<sup>18</sup> Barry regards justice as reciprocity as being linked to a notion of justice as mutual advantage (Barry 1995: 49-50) and finds no additional persuasive arguments in favour of justice as reciprocity, so holds that demonstrating the inadequacy of justice as mutual advantage undermines the case for justice as reciprocity.

dispossessed the Indians from their lands through force and fraud<sup>19</sup>. He notes that given the power imbalance it was mutually advantageous for both the settlers and American Indians for the latter to acquiesce to grossly unequal treaties rather than be driven off their land (Barry 1995: 41). Barry claims that this scenario arouses our incredulity because it demonstrates that justice as mutual advantage ‘fails egregiously to do one thing that we normally expect a conception of justice to do, and that is provide some moral basis for the claims of the relatively powerless’ (Barry 1995: 46).

But it is possible to acknowledge that the native Americans had a claim to treatment as equal moral agents whilst remaining sceptical about whether meaningful relations based on justice could have existed between them and the settlers. Even treaties that conformed with the requirements of justice would have left the native Americans in a precarious situation. They would have remained dependent on the continued good will of the settlers given that the treaties could have been reneged upon at any point. Accounts of justice as mutual advantage or reciprocity are clearly flawed because they fail to correctly identify the ground of justice. But this does not mean that some form of mutual advantage or threat reciprocity are not *necessary prerequisites* for stable conditions of justice in the absence of an overarching legal order. It would of course have been possible for settlers to refrain from inflicting specific harms on the native Americans, to refrain from inter-personal wrongs, but it is difficult to see how a stable relationship based on justice could have been established between them given the radical power imbalance between the two societies. The only plausible means of firmly securing the rights of the Native Americans in law and thus securing justice would presumably have been to subsume both parties under a single political framework<sup>20</sup>.

Although we may acknowledge that the duties owed by the settlers in the example are genuine obligations, because these duties are not institutionalised within a social relationship they are rendered effectively supererogatory. Once we make even the smallest departures away from pure ideal theory, the inadequacies of such an arrangement from the point of view of justice and equal respect to persons become clear. As Pettit argues, cosmopolitan approaches to global justice would require saintly behaviour rulers of richer representative states for the ‘robust satisfaction’ of the ideal they advance (Pettit 2009b: 22). Cosmopolitan justice would be unstable because it

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<sup>19</sup> The anachronistic term is intentionally employed here. Political philosophy has since Hobbes been strongly influenced by the imaginary ‘state of nature’ populated by pre-political peoples based on a caricature of the condition of native American societies.

<sup>20</sup> Yet given the inequality between the parties this could only have meant the expansion of settler legal authority over the Native American communities. This point is not an idle speculation, attempts by Europeans to stamp out injustices led on numerous occasions to the expansion of imperial authority, as in the attempts to eradicate the slave trade along the Niger or in James Brooke’s attempts to eradicate piracy and headhunting in Sarawak.

would not be resilient against the failure of actors to conform to it, indeed outside of perfect compliance new and equally serious normative problems would arise. The supposed beneficiaries of cosmopolitan justice within the global political community would remain dependent on the good will of powerful actors. Not only are the dominant actors in international relations mostly certainly not saints, but in the absence of saintly behaviour, steps towards a more institutionally cosmopolitan set of arrangements might undermine cosmopolitan justice.

A fruitful contrast can be made with conditions within the democratic nation-state, although there are dangers in drawing too strong a dichotomy. The possibilities for achieving justice within contemporary states should not be overstated, and it is worth bearing in mind the critique by Marxists and other radicals such as Pareto that the state is in fact a vehicle for oppression by dominant social groups within society<sup>21</sup>. Yet this is too reductive a picture: although there are great inequalities in contemporary democracies, it is not impossible for individuals to command a level of moral respect even from powerful actors. Subordinate actors have historically been able to group together to challenge the terms on which the state relates to citizens and citizens relate to one another. Once won these achievements have been, if not permanent, then at least reasonably enduring, allowing for reasonably stable conditions of something approximating justice. Even those who are nearly powerless, as in the extremely disabled or the very young, can be accorded legal rights and protections which go some way to ensuring that they are accorded due respect as moral beings. Attempts to create a just constitutional order within the state have a level of robustness, as in a democracy if political institutions fall short of embodying justice, citizens can act to rectify its inadequacies. Nagel is therefore almost correct: reciprocal submission to a common power within a political community is central to the concept of justice. Only it is not the ground of claims of justice, but rather the most familiar and best established, although perhaps not the only, condition under which meaningful relations of justice become a possibility. Under such circumstances individuals are compelled to respect each others rights through an imperfectly impartial system of legal arbitration and through somewhat democratic political proceedings. A public sphere exists in which something approximating dialogue can take place between approximate equals. Crucially, when such arrangements fall short of the ideals we hold them to they are not normally dangerously self-undermining, but rather a second best under non-ideal conditions.

Such conditions do not exist on a global scale between individuals within the present international order. At the global level, individuals do not face each other as equal citizens within

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<sup>21</sup> Of course if the arguments of Marxists and realists against conceiving the nation state as a political community that can act as a moral community are legitimate, then presumably the problems at the global level are insurmountable. Any talk of political justice whatsoever would then be misguided.

a shared public sphere. Chandler illustrates the way in which the notion of cosmopolitan citizenship is potentially disempowering and anti-democratic because it implies that 'the global citizen can only be represented through global or trans-national civil society' (Chandler 2003: 335). The reciprocal relationship, in which the citizen is both a rights holder and a duty holder, is absent and 'freed from any such framework, the 'rights' of the cosmopolitan citizen become dependent on the advocacy of an external agency ' (Chandler 2003: 340). Questions of justice come to be depoliticised, symbolically turning individuals into pure victims of circumstance, reduced to the status of bare suffering (Zizeck 2004)<sup>22</sup>. The power imbalance between rights holders and duty bearers leaves the former dependent on the goodwill of the latter. The foundation for a relationship based on justice in which the marginalised could compel other members of a global political community to listen to their claims is lacking.

Cosmopolitanism is flawed because it fails to provide a compelling account of how such conditions could be realised at a global level. The processes and agents cosmopolitans have suggested that might potentially bring about the transformation of the international system into a global order are not feasible candidates for this task for both practical and analytical reasons. Anti-cosmopolitans have aimed at the wrong target: cosmopolitanism is in error not in that it makes demands that are too onerous or claims about justice that do not apply transnationally, but because in the present international order cosmopolitan justice would leave the powerless in a situation of obnoxious dependence on the good will of the powerful. Cosmopolitans have managed to defend their claim that compelling moral obligations arise in the face of striking global inequalities, but they have not considered that these structural inequalities may create a gulf between putative participants in any scheme of global justice. Critics have used a variety of phantasmagoric images to refer to cosmopolitan justice: referring to it as a 'mirage' or a 'chimera' (Kukuthas 2006; Nagel 2005), and it does indeed seem that that although cosmopolitanism does present a compelling image of global justice, it is one that cannot attain corporeal reality.

## **Conclusion**

Cosmopolitan theorists thus do not succeed in establishing that the world as it exists or might feasibly be transformed is suitable for cosmopolitan principles. Our moral horizons may have expanded beyond our ability to construct effective forms of political community outside of the nation-state. In the absence of a feasible global order which would uphold justice between

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<sup>22</sup> Chandler and Zizeck's own normative positions are however deeply unappealing. The former seems to be hostile to the application of any moral principle to international politics at all, leading some to accuse him of offering a form of international nihilism (Worth and Buckley 2009: 959); whilst Zizeck seems to advocate little more than an aesthetic of revolutionary violence.

persons, there is a danger that cosmopolitan moral arguments may be used to delegitimise the principle of national sovereignty and potentially exacerbate the problems arising from international inequality. Thus it is worth recalling Bull's claim that 'it has been by creating sovereign states in defiance of the colonial powers... that the poorer and weaker nations have been able to achieve some measure of international justice for themselves' (Bull 2002: 281). National sovereignty has been something of a shield through which weak societies have attempted to protect themselves from the extremes of international inequality. Indeed, in Polanyiesque fashion, without any ability to exercise 'world citizenship' and control transnational economic processes, individuals may well seek refuge in particularistic and (neo)traditional forms of community in an attempt to safeguard their rights and interests. Bounded political communities should not be uncritically endorsed, but in an international system characterised by massive structural inequality, genuine national self-determination remains a powerful utopian ideal.

So long as global arrangements remain structurally unable to support principles of cosmopolitan justice, it may be apposite to ask how far a plural international society composed of distinct nation-states could become a 'second order' political community<sup>23</sup> (Buzan 2004: xviii) and possibly support principles approximating those of justice. Cosmopolitans have been generally quite dismissive about such a possibility, arguing that principles of justice need to be re-encoded at a higher, global level of organisation. Yet in the contest of structural inequality it is difficult to see how a global political community could be constructed that did not undermine the basis for cosmopolitan justice. Furthermore, the reductive realist argument that inter-state politics is a necessarily amoral, anomic realm, which some cosmopolitans tacitly endorse, is a caricature that has been demonstrated to be intellectually and empirically flawed<sup>24</sup>. Chwaszcza's argument that international political theory should focus on the institutional agents that do exist within international relations, states in the plural, is a promising one. Despite its 'primitive' character, the society of states remains the most extensive and best developed normative framework within international relations, making what Beitz calls a two-level view, in which individuals are the ultimate units of concern but states the primary subject of international political theory, a

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<sup>23</sup> The concept of a 'second order society' is introduced in Buzan's attempt to clarify the core commitments of the English School or international society approach. A second order society is one whose primary components are distinct societies not distinct persons. The idea of an international society, as developed by the English School, presumes that a form of political order exists within international relations in which states accept as legitimate certain practices and fundamental institutions that restrict their freedom to act. Therefore, a weak form of international political community is hypothesized to exist.

<sup>24</sup> Endless examples could be given from constructivist scholars, the English School or the wider research programme into the role of norms in international politics, but see Kratochwil 1989, Katzenstein et al 1989, Albin 2001 for important examples of the ways in which norms shape international political outcomes.

plausible approach (Beitz 1999: 215). Focusing on 'vertical' normative contestation between states and transnational movements to the exclusion of 'horizontal' contestation between states therefore ignores an important normative dimension in international politics as well as potential forms of state-based moral agency (Mitzen 2005: 402). In an international system which is only incompletely globally integrated, 'insofar as the population of the world can express itself politically, it is only via the society of states' (Jackson 2000: 112). States at least have the potential to be able to represent and uphold the rights of their citizens in international society.

Thus, instead of focusing on the external advocacy of agents most often located in the North, a more promising enquiry into the conditions for the possibility of justice might focus on the agency of subordinate states within the international system. If relations based on justice can only arise when actors can compel one another to acknowledge them as a voice, the marginalised may be able to compel dominant actors to acknowledge them as moral agents by forming states and thus advance their interests in international society. States within the global South are in a unique structural position first that the obstacles standing in the way of their becoming genuine political communities are less severe than at the global level, domestic political representatives can potentially be held accountable by their citizens in a way that transnational agents cannot. Second they are members, if sometimes marginal members, of international society and thus participate in the most extensive and institutionally developed form of political community that exists beyond the nation-state. States of the global South are in the position to potentially renegotiate inequalities institutionalised within the present global order and ensure that new global structures do not simply re-encode pre-existing patterns of dominance.

Scholars of political philosophy and of international relations, when examining the potential for desirable normative change within the present international order, have focused on the emergence of 'global governance', the growth in transnational advocacy groups and the increase in the 'universal disinterested sympathy' (Kant 1991: 182) that can be discerned globally in response to disasters and human rights violations. Yet international political theory should also take seriously states of the less economically developed world as potential agents. As the argument presented here has shown, the structural position the agents tasked by an international political theory with bringing about the transformations it advocates makes a crucial difference. International political theories cannot simply appeal to 'whomever' to fulfil this role, the relationship between agents makes a pivotal difference in terms of the moral relations that can be realised within an international order. Structural features such as drastic inequality thus set limits on the sort of moral relationship that can be institutionally realised and thus the sort of political communities which might feasibly come into being. As a result the normative significance of challenges to the present international economic order by less economically developed states

should be acknowledged. Through self-organisation and active attempts to reshape the international order, such challenges suggest one route by which, in the long term, the international order could undergo a transformation to become the sort of social organisation within which a cosmopolitan global political community might hypothetically be established.

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