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Introduction to the Guest Edited Special Issue on World Government

One can approach the idea of world government[1] from (at least) two angles. There is, first, the *theoretical* angle: Is this a good idea? A feasible idea? Should we pursue it? What shape should it take? These - and many more - are the questions to answer. At the same time, there is, second, the contextual, empirical angle: the angle of the world around us, as it were. What do people think about world government? Do they think about it all? Do they want one? Are they against one? And so on. Arguably, these two angles also interact: many theoretical ideas are responses (reactions) to what is happening in the world (just think of 1968 and its progressive movements); others predate and, perhaps, premeditate significant changes in the world (think of the setting up of the European Union and the radical thinking behind it); and, of course, many, perhaps most cases combine these two (both noted examples mentioned can also be looked at this way). Where does the idea of world government belong?

It is hard to tell. Theorizing about world government has a long and pedigreed history. Formulations of some version of the idea already appear in Chinese, Indian as well as ancient Greek thought and later supporters include Dante and Erasmus (while others, such as Bentham and Kant, offered qualified support only).[2] Today the idea appears to enjoy a small renaissance (as it did, briefly, after the Second World War for, perhaps, obvious reasons). This is not surprising. The world is encountering several global existential challenges, among them climate change, global injustice, and the threat of (nuclear) war. Some, such as Luis Cabrera (2004) or Torbjörn Tännsjö (2008), think that there is only one adequate answer to these challenges: to create a world state that governs the entire globe.

Does the 'world' agree? For a long a time after the last great war it looked like it did: for many decades after 1945, the world has seen the continuous development of multilateral, international, supranational institutions, the crowing achievement of which, arguably, was the

[1] In this introduction, I use the terms 'world government' and 'world state' interchangeably. I am aware that this is not a theoretically warranted position since a state is different from a government. However, in this short introduction this, I believe, doesn't make a difference. (Similarly, but I take it less contentiously, I use the terms 'world' and 'global' also interchangeably.)

[2] See Lu (2016), section I for a good account of the historical background of world government.

setting up of the European Union. Of course, all these developments fell well short of anything like a world government, but one could see – especially if one wanted to – a perhaps inevitable path to this ultimate end-state.[3] However, as must be evident by now to everyone, these developments have in the past years stopped or, at least, halted in their tracks: BREXIT (the decision of the United Kingdom to exit the European Union), the election of Donald Trump as president of the USA (with his America First agenda) that soon followed, the parallel rise of the so-called populist movements in Europe (and elsewhere), the creation of 'illiberal democracy' in Hungary and Poland, or the most recent election of Jair Bolsonaro as Brazil's next president are clear indications of this trend. At the same time, the challenges mentioned above remain and so do the other, more positive arguments for a world government. So what will it be? Will the world, as presently is, 'win' and force us to discard (or, at least, hibernate) the idea of world government? Or will the idea win in the face of adversity and change the world as we know it? What will it be?

This issue is not going to answer this question, I am afraid. However, it does what it can do to contribute to making it easier to find an answer. This is, moreover, a philosophical and politico-scientific contribution: the focus is on the theoretical angle, as defined above. The issue's primary aim is to see the pros and cons of the idea of world government. I have already mentioned names and grounds of support for the idea. But there is significant theoretical opposition. Many, such as more recently John Rawls (1999) or Martha Nussbaum (2006), think that creating a world state is not a good idea for a variety of reasons, both moral as well as non-moral (such as political or pragmatic). These reasons can be grouped into three categories. First, a world government is *infeasible* because it is unrealistic or even impossible to bring about, given that, for example, the world is now being dominated by territorial nation-states. Second, having a world government is *undesirable* because, say, it could lead to

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[3] For two good examples that provide also a theoretical context, see Wendt (2003) and Goodin (2012).

global tyranny and/or force uniformity upon humanity: it could lead to a cultural homogeneity that we don't want. Third, a world government is *unnecessary*. It would be an ineffective solution to the above problems and in any case, there are other – better – responses to these challenges, such as stronger nation states, supra-national organizations, stronger regional cooperation; so why should we opt for such a radical alternative as world government?

Who is right? Although no consensus will emerge from the contributions to this special issue, the papers in the volume do show the complexity of the idea and the different takes one can have on the above problems. Each article approaches or connects to the question of world government in some way, mostly in a positive way, at least in the sense of not ruling it out as a possible option for ordering our global system of government. In other respects, however, the articles differ significantly in their approach to the problematic. Still, the above three-fold characterization of the possible problems with world government provide a helpful framework. All contributions reflect, in one way or another, on one or more of the three dimensions: feasibility, desirability and necessity.

Several of the contributions are interested in the *justification* of world government. These discussions centre mostly on the desirability dimension mentioned above. Thus, Frank Abumere and Sam Director both look at the question of the legitimacy of a world government but their approaches and conclusions differ. ABUMERE first points out that what he calls the threefold argument against world government (the three groups of problems I mention above) is importantly predicated on the assumption that in world politics the larger a geographical and political entity is, the greater the chance of it becoming unstable, ungovernable and, ultimately, illegitimate. After having shown that this assumption is unwarranted, he goes on to argue, in a more positive vein, that the legitimacy or illegitimacy of a world government and the extent to which it is legitimate or illegitimate depends on the kind of social contract that produces it and the extent to which it fulfils or fails to fulfil the conditions of the social

contract. He then ends his discussion with interesting demands on what he calls the African conditions understood as a microcosm of the world.

DIRECTOR in some sense picks up where Abumere has left off. His primary interest is to see how a particular justificatory attempt would pan out with respect to world government: he calls it global public reason. This idea, originally constructed by the late John Rawls for the case of domestic justice and legitimacy, is a kind of contract theory. Accordingly, Director argues that the success of this justificatory attempt depends on the sort of consent employed. This can be two: hypothetical and actual. However, Director shows, neither construal works. If we opt for hypothetical consent, we won't achieve justification because theories of hypothetical consent simply do not fit the complexity and diversity of the global scale. And while switching to actual consent might help us overcome this theoretical difficulty, it does so only at the price of introducing another problem: actual consent can only give us a highly unstable world government thereby leading to a failure of feasibility.

Olufemi TAIWO's article also focuses on a Rawls-inspired problematic. Taiwo's immediate interest, though, is not in the justification of world government; this only enters the picture indirectly. Still, the connection is clear and strong. Taiwo's focus is on what he calls the two-tiered theoretical treatment of global politics (inspired by Rawls): "on which domestic political systems and the principles governing their internal dynamics constitute one tier, and on which the relationships between states and governing multinational institutions constitute a second." The Rawlsian justification for this system has to do with his notion of the basic structure of justice. Rawls's theory of (global) justice is relational: certain relations must exist among people in order for (distributive) justice to apply to them. The basic structure is his candidate for these relations but, according to Rawls, such a basic structure doesn't exist on the global level; what is more, the boundaries of basic structures in the world coincide with the boundaries of territorial nation states. It is this latter claim that Taiwo is strongly

criticising in favour of the (in his article unargued) position that there is only one global basic structure.

By invoking the problem of stability at the end of his article, Director has shifted focus to another aspect of the problematic of world government: feasibility. In their contributions, Stephen Clark and Torbjörn Tännsjö take the matter further in rather different ways. TÄNNSJÖ revisits the argument provided in his 2008 book (referenced above) in a critical manner. He has no doubts about the need for a world state in the face of the existential challenges humanity faces. However, he now disagrees with one aspect of his earlier position: we can call this the transition problem. Simply put, in the face of accelerating climate change, we – humanity – has no time to gradually advance toward a world government, which, in Tännsjö's view, should take the form of global democracy. The transition to a world government has to be rapid and efficient: it has to take the form of global despotism, which would/could then take a democratic shape. Tännsjö defends this idea in some detail working out practical aspects of the proposal.

CLARK, in contrast, is not in favour of a world government (he discusses and endorses some of the problems that come under the desirability heading above). This isn't to say that he is against some form of global system such as one that is organized more along decentralized regional lines (resembling somewhat the position called neo-medievalism nowadays). His main interest lies instead in the question of what would keep together (unify) such a global structure: he calls such a unifying force a 'world religion' (but it is clear from his discussion that this need not involve no supernatural element but instead an endorsement of some form of what we may call moral equality). He is moderately optimistic that such a shared value system could be created in the future building on existing similarities among humans, a realization that humanity is just one lineage among very many and a shared sense of the larger world (the universe) around us. But his moderate optimism does not at all rule

out doubt that we won't move to such a cosmopolitan state due to persisting divisions among us.

The remaining two articles return to the topic of justification but in very different ways. In her contribution, Eva ERMAN approaches the question of justification from the point of global democracy (an ideal she shares with Tännsjö): does global democracy require (hence: justify) a global state? Erman's take on the question is nuanced and insightful at the same time. She adopts what she calls a function-sensitive approach to global democracy, according to which a particular democratic function determines the regulative principles that should govern it, thereby disaggregating the notion of 'world state' into different functional components. She then proposes and defends five such principles and argues that they require supranational legislative entities (world parliament) and perhaps supranational judicial entities (supranational courts), but not necessarily supranational executive entities (world government).

Finally, Joachim WÜNDISCH looks at a more 'applied' side of the problematic. His focus is on the future institutional consequences of climate change as seen from a moral philosophical point of view. In particular, based on ethical premises, Wündisch convincingly argues that a climate fund will have to be set up in the future to compensate for territorial loss due to climate change. The ethical steps in the argument, very roughly, are that the territorial loss suffered by those who lose their land due to climate change should be considered a harm to these people. This harm, being a rights violation, requires in-kind compensation and a fund should be set up, with sufficient resources and authority, to provide this compensation. Wündisch makes it clear, though, that the setting up the fund does not require endorsing a world government but can be carried out using the tools of world governance.

On the whole, my hope in putting together this special issue has been to shed light on the complexity of and difficulties inherent in the idea of setting up and maintaining a world

government. I believe the contributions briefly summarized above go some way in fulfilling this hope. Final judgment, however, is left for the reader of these articles to make, of course.

To end this introduction, I would like to say some words about the practical circumstances of the birth of this special issue. The issue has grown out of a two-day workshop held in June 13-14, 2017 in two different locations: the first day in Zurich (Switzerland), at the Collegium Helveticum (ETH/University of Zurich); the second day in Konstanz (Germany), in the Zukunftskolleg (University of Konstanz). Three of the papers presented there were published in a special section of the *Journal of Global Ethics* (by Henning Hahn, by András Miklós and Attila Tanyi, and by Alice Pinheiro-Walla) along with a paper by Vuko Andrić; the present issue comprises most of the other papers presented (Erman, Tännsjö, Wündisch) along with some additional contributions (Abumere, Clark, Director, Taiwo). The workshop was organized as a tenure-ending event in my role as a EURIAS Junior Research Fellow (COFUND Programme – Marie Sklodowska Curie Actions – FP7) in the Collegium Helveticum.

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