

# Political Theory Without Borders

## *An Introduction*

Robert E. Goodin and James S. Fishkin

Political theorists of old had much to say about war and peace, and issues arising from them. Those matters apart, however, political theory's traditional focus was insistently internal – on relations among a people, and on relations between them and those ruling over them.

Those political theorists of universalist inclination have always insisted that the same principles should apply everywhere alike, of course. Virtually none of them, however, thought that literally one and the same set of institutions should rule over everyone everywhere alike.<sup>1</sup> Political theory's prescriptions were traditionally for the internal governance of principalities, taken one at a time.<sup>2</sup>

In political theory, as in political practice, proffered rules governing relations among and across principalities tended to be essentially Westphalian. They were designed to ensure that each self-contained community could get on with the business of perfecting its own institutions and practices in light of the theory's prescriptions, with minimal interference from abroad.<sup>3</sup> Of course there are always threats and opportunities arising from abroad – but that is the business of statesmen to manage well in the national interest. And of course there are always disasters and destitution abroad that tug at the heartstrings – but that is the business of charity and churches. Or so it had long been thought, within both political theory and political practice.

Yet the world has a way of intruding. And it did. First, with spillovers of a very literal sort – with industrial effluents threatening to poison the global biosphere upon which all life depends, including especially carbon emissions wrecking havoc with the global climate. Chapters in Part I by Kennan and Caney address those concerns, with Risse's reminding us of what it really means to treat the earth as the common property of all of humankind.

With the latest wave of globalization,<sup>4</sup> state borders also became increasingly porous – to the movement of people and products and financial capital. States have become sovereign over their domestic affairs largely in name only, in a great many respects. At the same time, and in consequence, the classical concerns of political theory – justice and equality, liberty and oppression – have reemerged powerfully at the global level. Global justice has grown into a veritable cottage industry, now displaying decreasing returns to scale.<sup>5</sup> But over and above the question of whether the same principles of distributive justice are properly applied at the global as at the national level, there are a great many other more specific matters of principle raised by those global flows of people, products and financial capital. Those issues are here explored in chapters in Part II by Dietsch and Rixen, Barry, Buchanan, Cole and Keohane, Offe, and Shachar and Hirschl.

As a result of all of that, there has been a growing reluctance to regard what happens elsewhere as of concern to people in that jurisdiction alone, as shown in the chapters in Part III. Through colonialism, earlier waves of globalization had left an awful legacy, as Lu's chapter reemphasizes; and suspending judgment for a time may have been an honorable stance in the backwash of it, as Geertz's chapter nicely recalls. But in the wake of increasing numbers (or anyway awareness) of atrocities and disasters – many connected to the phenomena described above – there has been a growing sense of global responsibility for global problems. This expanding humanitarian sensibility has led to increasing intervention abroad, by both humanitarians with guns and those without.<sup>6</sup> Those are the subjects of chapters by Evans and Rubenstein.

It would be wrong to claim that political theorists have fully theorized all these new developments. The critique contained in Marx's Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach remains valid: theorists mostly just interpret the world rather than change it. Still, political theorists have not been remiss in engaging with and responding critically and creatively to the new sociopolitical and intellectual landscape that is rapidly emerging as the old Westphalian borders are increasing drained of practical relevance – as we hope this set of chapters will show.

## Notes

- 1 Perhaps the last to argue for a world government unitary in form was Dante, in his fourteenth-century *De Monarchia*, a defence of the Holy Roman Empire. Later political cosmopolitans argued instead for a world government, federal in form, with rules of subsidiarity allowing for substantial local variation. See Robert E. Goodin, "World government is here!," *Varieties of Sovereignty and Citizenship*, ed. Sigal R. Ben-Porath and Rogers M. Smith (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), pp. 149–65.

- 2 As one commentator puts it: “*A Theory of Justice* was published at a time when *globalization* was not yet a word in our everyday lexicon and few people described themselves as cosmopolitans. Virtually all political philosophers at the time assumed that the individual society was the default unit of analysis”; Samuel Scheffler, “Cosmopolitanism, justice and institutions”, *Equality and Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 160–73 at p. 162.
- 3 That way of thinking is bracketed, roughly, by Hugh Grotius’ *Law of War and Peace* (1625) and John Rawls’s *Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).
- 4 Hardly the first, as pointed out by John Quiggin, “Globalization and economic sovereignty,” *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 9 (2001), 56–80.
- 5 The two-volume collection edited by Thomas Pogge and Darrel Mollendorf, *Global Justice: Seminal Essays* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2008) can be regarded as the capstone of this body of research.
- 6 Albeit in qualified ways akin to earlier waves of humanitarian sentiment associated with the rise of capitalism; see Thomas L. Haskell, “Capitalism and the origins of humanitarian sensibility,” *American Historical Review*, 90 (1985), 339–61, 547–66.

