

International Society

What is the Best that We Can Do?

Michael Walzer

The Occasional Papers of the School of Social Science are versions of talks given at the School's weekly Thursday Seminar. At these seminars, Members present work-in-progress and then take questions. There is often lively conversation and debate, some of which will be included with the papers. We have chosen papers we thought would be of interest to a broad audience. Our aim is to capture some part of the cross-disciplinary conversations that are the mark of the School's programs. While members are drawn from specific disciplines of the social sciences— anthropology, economics, sociology and political science— as well as history, philosophy, literature and law, the School encourages new approaches that arise from exposure to different forms of interpretation. The papers in this series differ widely in their topics, methods, and disciplines. Yet they concur in a broadly humanistic attempt to understand how— and under what conditions— the concepts that order experience in different cultures and societies are produced, and how they change.

Michael Walzer is the UPS Foundation Professor at the Institute for Advanced Study. He joined the permanent faculty of the School of Social Science in 1980 after teaching at both Princeton and Harvard. He is the author of numerous, and frequently cited, books in the fields of political thought and political and moral philosophy. *International Society* is the text of the talk that he gave in the Faculty Lecture Series in February 2000. The Faculty Lecture Series is an important part of the Institute's program of community outreach: every year, one member of each of the four Institute faculties gives a public lecture to the larger community. Like the Thursday seminars, these lectures make time for questions and discussion. A reception follows in which Institute and community members meet for more individualized conversations. In presenting this Occasional Paper, we have maintained the more informal style of Professor Walzer's talk.

In one of his more recent books, *On Toleration*, Walzer asks what kinds of political arrangements enable people from different national, racial, religious or ethnic groups to live together in peace? To answer the question, he examined five "regimes of toleration" in concrete detail, but with an eye on how they could be made more perfect; he examines not only how they work, but how they should work. *International Society* makes use of this form of ideal examination, describing seven possible "regimes" for contemporary international society. His eyes are again directed toward a more perfect solution, asking: "What is the Best That We Can Do?"

Walzer's most recent project is a multi-volume work, edited with two collaborators, on *The Jewish Political Tradition*. Its first volume has just been published by Yale University Press. He is also an editor of *Dissent*, a contributing editor at the *New Republic*, and a member of the editorial boards of the journals *Philosophy and Public Affairs* and *Political Theory*.

International Society: What is the Best that We Can Do?

I finished a first draft of this essay in 1999, just before the NATO bombing campaign against Serbia began—a campaign that provides a striking example of the failure of international society. A double failure in that case: its political agencies were not able to respond in a timely fashion to the disaster of the former Yugoslavia, and then they were not able to find a more immediately effective form of military intervention. The problem both times wasn't one of organization but of political will, and I won't have much to say here about how to solve it. No doubt there are organizational structures that lend themselves to strong action in a crisis. But these structures can as easily produce reckless and cruel acts as wise ones, and so we need to limit their powers. And then, properly limited, they may not act at all. This dilemma is an old one; it arises as often in economic as in political and humanitarian crises; and my way of dealing with it—which, as readers will see, is to multiply structures and agents in the hope that somewhere, somehow, someone will do the right thing—will certainly seem inadequate. I concede immediately that I cannot produce an organizational chart showing how a decision to act rightly in international society would be deliberated, decided, and then resolutely carried out. There is no solution of that kind; we have to think instead of political arrangements as if they were strategies—for avoiding as well as for coping with crises. That's what I will try to do; doing it doesn't answer to the urgency of the daily news, but these days nothing could answer.

I

Imagine the possible political arrangements of international society as if they were laid out along a continuum marked off according to the degree of centralization. Obviously, there are alternative markings; the recognition and enforcement of human rights could also be measured along a continuum, as could democratization, equality (among countries or individuals), welfare provision, pluralism, and so on. But I think that focusing on centralization is the best way of opening a discussion of international politics and the quickest way to reach the key political and moral questions, above all the classical question: what is the best or the best possible regime? What constitutional goals should we set ourselves in an age of globalization?

My plan is to present seven possible regimes or constitutions or political arrangements. I will do this discursively, without providing a list in advance, but I do want to list the criteria against which the seven arrangements have to be evaluated: these are their capacity to promote peace, distributive justice, cultural pluralism, and individual freedom. Within the scope of a single essay, I will have to deal briefly and summarily with some of the arrangements and some of the criteria. This is especially regrettable since the criteria turn out to be inconsistent with, or at least in tension with, one another. So my argument will be complicated, and could be, no doubt it should be, much more so.

II

It's probably best to begin with the two ends of the continuum, so that its dimensions are immediately visible. On one side, let's say the left side (though I will raise some doubts about that designation later on), there is a unified global state, something like Kant's "world republic," with a single undifferentiated set of citizens, identical with the set of adult human beings, all of them possessed of the same rights and obligations. This is the form that maximum centralization would take: each individual, every person in the world, would be connected directly to the center. A global empire, in which one nation ruled over all the others, would also operate from a single center, but insofar as its rulers differentiated between the dominant nation and all the others, their rule would necessarily be mediated, and this would represent a qualification on its centralized character. The centralization of the global state is unqualified. Following Hobbes's argument in *Leviathan*, I want to say that such a state could be a monarchy, oligarchy, or democracy; its unity is not affected by its political character. By contrast, unity is certainly affected by any racial, religious, or ethnic divisions, whether these are hierarchical in nature, as in the imperial case, establishing significant inequalities among the groups, or merely functional or regional. Division of any sort moves us rightwards on the continuum as I am imagining it.

At the far right is the regime or the absence-of-regime that political theorists call "international anarchy." This phrase describes what is in fact a highly organized world, but one that is radically de-centered. The organizations are individual sovereign states, and there is no effective law binding on all of them. There is no global authority or procedure for policy determination, and there is no encompassing legal jurisdiction for either sovereigns or citizens. More than this (since I mean to describe an extreme condition), there are no smaller groups of states that have accepted a common law and submitted to its enforcement by international agencies; there are no stable organizations of states working to generate common policies with regard, say, to environmental questions, arms control, labor standards, the movement of capital, or any other issue of general concern. Sovereign states negotiate with each other on the basis of their "national interests," reach agreements, and sign treaties, but the treaties are not enforceable by any third party. State leaders watch each other nervously, and respond to each other's policies, but in every other sense, the centers of political decision-making are independent; every state acts alone. I don't mean this as an account of our own situation; I am not describing the world as it is in 2000. But we are obviously closer to the right than to the left side of the continuum.

The strategy of this lecture will be to move in from the two sides. I will be moving toward the center, but from opposite directions, so as to make clear that I am not describing a developmental, purposive, or progressive history. The different regimes or arrangements are ideal types, not historical examples. And I don't assume in advance that the best regime lies at the center, only that it doesn't lie at the extremes. Even that assumption needs to be justified; it isn't obvious; so I had better turn immediately to the twin questions: What's wrong with radical centralization? What's wrong with anarchy? The second of these is the easiest, since it is closer to our own experience. Anarchy leads regularly to war, and war to conquest; conquest to empire; empire to oppression; oppression to rebellion and secession; and secession leads back to anarchy and war again. The viciousness of the circle is continually reinforced by inequalities of wealth and power among the involved states, and by the shifting character of these inequalities (which depend on trade patterns, technological development, military alliances, and so on). All this makes for insecurity and fear not only among the rulers of states but also among their ordinary inhabitants, and insecurity and fear

are, as Hobbes taught us, the chief cause of war.

But would an international society, however anarchic, all of whose constituent states were republics be drawn into the same circle? Kant argued that republican citizens would be far less willing to accept the risks of war than kings were to impose those risks on their subjects—and so would be less threatening to their neighbors (*Perpetual Peace*, First Definitive Article). We certainly see evidence of that unwillingness in contemporary democracies, though it has not always been as strong as it is today. At the same time, it is qualified today by the willing use of the most advanced military technologies—which don't, indeed, put their users at risk though they impose very high costs on their targets. So it may be the case, as the Kosovo war suggests, that modern democracies won't live up to Kant's pacific expectations: they will fight, only not on the ground.

A rather different argument has been made by some contemporary political scientists: that, at least in modern times, democratic republics don't fight with one another. But if this is so (and here too the Kosovo war might be considered a counterexample), it is in part because they have had common enemies, and have established multilateral forms of cooperation and coordination, alliances for mutual security, that mitigate the anarchy of their relations. They have moved, so to speak, to the left along the continuum.

But I don't want to dismiss international anarchy without saying something about its advantages. Despite the hazards of inequality and war, sovereign statehood is a way of protecting distinct historical cultures, sometimes national, sometimes ethnic/religious in character. The passion with which stateless nations pursue statehood, the driven character of national liberation movements, reflect the somber realities of twentieth century international society, from which it is necessary to draw moral and political conclusions. Sovereign power is a means of self-protection, and it is very dangerous to be deprived of this means. So, the morally maximal form of decentralization would be a society in which every national or ethnic/religious group that needed protection actually possessed sovereign power. But for reasons we all know, which have to do with the necessary territorial extension of sovereignty, the mixing of populations on the ground, and the uneven distribution of natural resources above and below the ground, dividing up the world in this way would be (has been) a bloody business, and once the wars start, the divisions that result are unlikely to be either just or stable.

The problems at the other end of the continuum are of a different kind. Warfare as we know it would be impossible in a radically centralized global state, for none of the motives for going to war would any longer operate: ethnic and religious differences and divergent national interests, indeed, every kind of sectional interest, would simply cease to exist. Diversity would be radically privatized. In principle, at least, the global state would be constituted solely and entirely by autonomous individuals, free, within the limits of the criminal law, to choose their own life plans and their own associates.

In practice, however, this constituting principle is unlikely to prevail, and it is a mistake to construct ideal types that are entirely fictional; they have to fit an imaginable reality. It just isn't plausible that the citizens of a global state would be, except for the free choices they make, exactly like one another, all the collective and inherited differences that we now live with having disappeared in the course of the state's formation. Surely disagreements about or, at least, diverse understandings of, how we ought to live, would persist; and these would be embodied, as they are today, in ways of life, historical cultures and religions, commanding strong loyalties and seeking public expression. So let me re-describe the global state. Groups of many different sorts would continue to exist and shape the lives of their members in significant ways, but their existence would be largely ignored by the central authorities;

particularist interests would be overridden; the public expression (or, at least some public expressions) of cultural divergence would be repressed.

The reason for the repression is easily explained: the global state would be much like contemporary states, only on a vastly greater scale. If it were to sustain itself over time, it too would have to command the loyalty of its citizens and give expression to a political culture distinctly its own. It would have to look legitimate to everyone in the world. Given this necessity, I don't see how it could accommodate anything like the range of cultural and religious difference that we see around us today. Even a global state committed to toleration would be limited in its powers of accommodation by its prior commitment to what I will call "globalism," that is, centralized rule over the whole world. For some cultures and religions can only survive if they are permitted degrees of separation that are incompatible with globalism. And so the survival of these groups would be at risk; they would not be able under the rules of the global state to sustain and pass on their way of life. This is the meaning I would give to Kant's warning that a cosmopolitan constitution could lead to "terrifying despotism" (*Theory and Practice*, Part III)—the danger is less to individuals than to groups. A more genuine regime of toleration would have to make room for cultural and religious autonomy, but that would involve a move rightwards on the continuum.

Once again, however, I want to acknowledge the advantages that lie on the continuum's far left side, though in this case they are more hypothetical than actual, since we have much less experience of centralization than of anarchy. But we can generalize from the history of centralized states and suggest that global distributive justice might be better served by a strong government that was able to establish universal standards of labor and welfare and to shift resources from richer to poorer countries. Of course, the will to undertake egalitarian reforms might well be absent in the world republic—just as it is in most sovereign states today. But at least the capacity would exist; the European Community provides some modest but not insignificant examples of the redistributions that centralized power makes possible. At the same time, however, the strength of the single center would make it impossible for nations, ethnic groups, and religious communities (as we know them today) to win any significant independence from it, even if they sought independence not in order to maintain inequalities from which they benefit but only to preserve their cultural traditions. Once again, centralization carries with it the threat of tyranny.

III

Now let's move one step in from the left side of the continuum, which brings us to a global regime that has the form of a *pax Romana*. It is centralized through the hegemony of a single great power over all the lesser powers of international society. This hegemony sustains world peace, even if there are intermittent rebellions, and it does this while still permitting some degree of cultural independence—perhaps in a form like that of the Ottoman *millet* system, under which different religious groups were granted (partial) legal autonomy. The autonomy is not secure, since the center is always capable of canceling it; nor will it necessarily take the form most desired by a particular group. It isn't negotiated between equals but granted by the powerful to the weak. Nonetheless, arrangements of this sort represent the most stable regime of toleration known in world history. The rulers of the empire recognize the value (at least, the prudential value) of group autonomy, and this recognition has worked very effectively for group survival. But the rulers obviously don't recognize individual citizens as participants in the government of the empire, they don't protect individual rights, and they don't aim at an equitable distribution of resources among either groups or

individuals. Imperial hegemony is a form of political inequality that commonly makes for further inequalities in the economy and in social life generally.

I have to be careful in writing about imperial rule, since I am a citizen of the only state in the world today capable of aspiring to it. That's not my own aspiration for my country, nor do I really think that it's possible, but I won't pretend to believe that a *pax Americana*, however undesirable, is the worst thing that could happen to the world today (it may be the worst thing that could happen to America), and I have been an advocate of a more activist American political/military role in places like Rwanda and Kosovo. But a role of that sort is still far from imperial hegemony, which, though we might value it for the peace it brought (or just for an end to the massacres), is clearly not one of the preferred regimes. It would reduce some of the risks of a global state, but not in a stable way, since imperial power is often arbitrary and capricious. And even if empire protects communal autonomy (which it doesn't always do), it can be very dangerous to individuals, who are often trapped in oppressive communities.

Now let's move in from the right side of the continuum: one step from anarchy brings us, I think, to something like the current arrangement of international society (hence this is the least idealized of my ideal types). We see in the world today a series of global organizations of a political, economic, and judicial sort—the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, the World Court, and so on—that serve to modify state sovereignty. No state possesses the absolute sovereignty described by early modern political theorists like Bodin and Hobbes, which makes for anarchy in its strongest sense. On the other hand, the global organizations are weak; their decision mechanisms are uncertain and slow; their powers of enforcement are difficult to bring to bear and, at best, only partially effective. Warfare between or among states has been reduced, but overall violence has not been reduced. There are many weak, divided, and unstable states in the world today, and the global regime has not been successful in preventing civil wars, military interventions, savage repression of political enemies, massacres and “ethnic cleansing” aimed at minority populations. Nor has global inequality been reduced, even though the flow of capital across borders (labor mobility too, I think) is easier than it has ever been—and, according to theorists of the free market, this ought to have egalitarian effects. All in all, we cannot be happy with the current state of the world; indeed, the combination of (many) weak states with weak global organizations brings disadvantages from both directions: the protection of cultural difference is inadequate and so is the protection of individual rights and the promotion of equality.

Let's take another step in from this same side, toward greater centralization. I don't think that this brings us to, say, a United Nations with its own army and police force or a World Bank with a single currency. In terms of intellectual strategy, we would do better to reach arrangements of that kind from the other side. Consider instead the same “constitutional” arrangements that we currently have, reinforced now by a much stronger international civil society. Contemporary political theorists have argued that civil society can serve to strengthen the democratic state. Certainly, associations that engage, train, and empower ordinary men and women serve democracy more effectively than they serve other regimes, but they probably strengthen any state that encourages rather than suppresses associational life. Would they also strengthen the semi-governmental international organizations that now exist? I am inclined to think that they already do this in modest ways and could do so much more extensively.

Imagine, if you will, a wide range of civic associations—for mutual aid, human rights advocacy, the protection of minorities, the achievement of gender equality, the defense of

the environment, the advancement of labor—organized on a much larger scale than at present. All these groups would have centers distinct from the centers of particular states; all of them would operate across state borders; all of them would recruit activists and supporters without reference to nationality. And all of them would be engaged in activities that governments also ought to be engaged in—where governmental engagement is more effective when it is seconded (or even initiated) by citizen-volunteers. Once the volunteers were numerous enough, they would bring pressure to bear on particular states to cooperate with each other and with global agencies; and their own work would enhance the effectiveness of the cooperation.

But these associations of volunteers co-exist in international civil society with multinational corporations that command armies of well-paid professional and managerial employees and threaten to overwhelm all other global actors. The threat may be exaggerated—these corporations haven't yet entirely escaped the control of the nation-state—but it isn't imaginary. And I can describe only an imaginary set of balancing forces in an expanded civil society that doesn't yet exist: multinational labor unions, for example, and political parties operating across national frontiers. Of course, in a global state or a world empire, multinational corporations would be instantly domesticated, since there would be no place for their multiplication, no borders for them to cross. But that isn't an automatic solution to the problems they create; similar problems arise in domestic societies. We still need a politics, not an organizational chart, and international civil society provides the best available space (or the most easily imagined space) for the development of this politics.

Best available, but not necessarily sufficient for the task: it is a feature of the associations of civil society that they run after problems; they react to crises; their ability to anticipate, plan, and prevent lags far behind that of the state. Their activists are more likely to minister heroically to the victims of a plague than to enforce public health measures in advance. They arrive in the battle zone only in time to assist the wounded and shelter the refugees. They struggle to organize a strike after wages have already been cut. They protest environmental disasters that are already disastrous. Even when they predict coming troubles, they have too little power to act effectively; they are not responsible agents, and their warnings are often disregarded precisely because they are seen as irresponsible. As for the underlying, long-term problems of international society—insecurity and inequality above all—civil associations are at best mitigating factors: their activists can do many good things, but they can't make peace in a country torn by civil war or redistribute resources on a significant scale.

IV

I want now to take another step in from the left side of the continuum, but before doing that it would probably be useful to summarize the steps so far. Since this next one, and the one after that, will bring us to what seem to me the most attractive possibilities, I need to characterize, perhaps try to name, the less attractive ones canvassed so far. Note first that the right side of the continuum is a realm of pluralism and the left side a realm of unity. I am not happy with that description of right and left; there have always been pluralist tendencies on the left, and those are the tendencies that I identify with. Still, it is probably true that unity has been the dominant ambition of leftist parties and movements, so it doesn't make much sense, on this occasion anyway, to fiddle with the rightness and leftness of the continuum. Starting from the right, then, I have marked off three arrangements, moving in the direction of greater centralization but doing this, paradoxically, by adding to

the pluralism of agents. First, there is the anarchy of states, where there are no effective agents except the governments that act in the name of state sovereignty. Next, we add to these governments a plurality of international political and financial organizations, with a kind of authority that limits but doesn't abolish sovereignty. And after that, we add a plurality of international associations that operate across borders and serve to strengthen the constraints on state action. So we have international anarchy and then two degrees of global pluralism.

On the left, I have so far marked off only two arrangements, moving in the direction of greater division but maintaining the idea of a single center. The first is the global state, the least divided of imaginable regimes, whose members are individual men and women. The second is the global empire, whose members are the subject nations. The hegemony of the imperial nation divides it from the others, without abolishing the others.

The next step in from the left brings with it the end of subjection: the new arrangement is a federation of nation-states, a United States of the World. The strength of the center, of the federal government, will depend on the rights freely ceded to it by the member states and on the direct or indirect character of its jurisdiction over individual citizens. Defenders of what Americans call "states' rights" will argue for a mediated jurisdiction. Obviously, the greater the mediation the more this arrangement moves rightward on the continuum; if the mediation disappears entirely, we are back at the left end, in the global state. To make sense of this federal regime, we need to imagine a surrender of sovereignty by the particular states and then a constitutionally guaranteed functional division of power, such that the states are left with significant responsibilities and the means to fulfill them—a version, then, of the American system (different, no doubt, in many of its features), projected internationally. A greatly strengthened United Nations, incorporating the World Bank and the World Court, might approximate this model, so long as it had the power to coerce member states that refused to abide by its resolutions and verdicts. If the UN retained its current structure, with the Security Council as it is now constituted, the global federation would be an oligarchy or perhaps, since the General Assembly represents a kind of democracy, a mixed regime. It isn't easy to imagine any other sort of federation given the current inequalities of wealth and power among states.

These inequalities are probably harder to deal with than any political differences among the states. Even if all the states were republics, as Kant hoped they would be, the federation would still be wholly or partly oligarchic, so long as the existing distribution of resources was unchanged. And oligarchy here represents division; it drastically qualifies the powers of the center. By contrast, the political character of the member states would tend to become more and more similar; here the move would be toward unity or, at least, uniformity. For all the states would be incorporated into the same constitutional structure, bound, for example, by the same codes of social and political rights. And they would be far less able than they are today to ignore those rights; citizens who think themselves oppressed would quickly appeal to the federal courts and presumably find quick redress. Even if the member states were not democracies to start with, they would become uniformly democratic over time.

As a democrat I ought to find this outcome more attractive than I do; the problem is that it's more likely to be reached and sustained by pressure from the center than by democratic activism at (to shift my metaphor) the grass roots. My own preference for democracy doesn't extend to a belief that this preference should be uniformly enforced on every political community. Democracy has to be reached through a political process that, in its nature, can also produce different results. Whenever these results threaten life and liberty, some kind of intervention is necessary, but they don't always do that, and when they don't the different

political formations that emerge must be given room to develop (and change). But could a global federation make its peace with political pluralism?

It is far more likely to make its peace with material inequality. A federal regime would probably redistribute resources, but only within limits set by its oligarches (once again, the European Community provides examples). The greater the power acquired by the central government, obviously, the more redistribution there is likely to be. But this kind of power would be dangerous to all the member states, not only to the wealthiest among them. It isn't clear how to strike the balance; presumably that would be one of the central issues in the internal politics of the federation (but there wouldn't be any other politics since, by definition, nothing lies outside the federation).

Constitutional guarantees would serve to protect national and ethnic/religious groups. This seems to be Kant's assumption: "In such a league, every nation, even the smallest, can expect to have security and rights..." (*Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent*, Seventh Thesis). In fact, however, only those groups that achieved sovereignty before the federation was formed would have a sure place within it. (This might be an argument for the maximal development of international anarchy before any attempt is made to form a federation—except that no one can determine the timing of federalist opportunities.) So there would have to be some procedure for recognizing and securing the rights of new groups, as well as a code of rights for individuals without regard to their memberships. Conceivably, the federal regime would turn out to be a guardian of both eccentric groups and individuals—as in the United States, for example, where embattled minorities and idiosyncratic citizens commonly appeal to the central government when they are mistreated by local authorities. When such an appeal doesn't work, however, Americans have options that would not be available to the citizens of a global union: they can carry their appeal to the UN or the World Court, or they can move to another country. There is still something to be said for division and pluralism.

Now let's take another step in from the right side and try to imagine, what may be impossible, a coherent form of division. I have in mind the familiar anarchy of states mitigated and controlled by a threefold set of nonstate agents: organizations like the UN, the associations of international civil society, and regional unions like the European Community. This is the third degree of global pluralism, and in its fully developed (ideal) version, it offers the largest number of opportunities for political action on behalf of peace, justice, cultural difference, and individual rights; and it poses, at the same time, the smallest risk of global tyranny. Of course, opportunities for action are no more than that; they bring no guarantees; and conflicts are sure to arise among men and women pursuing these different values. I imagine this last regime as providing a context for politics in its fullest sense (and conflict is included in that fullness) and for the widest engagement of ordinary citizens, with citizenship understood in the most highly differentiated way.

Consider again the troubling features of the first six regimes: in some of them it is the decentered world and the self-centered states inhabiting it (whether the states are strong or weak) that threaten our values; in others it is the tyrannical potential of the newly constituted center that poses the danger. So the problem is to overcome the radical decentralization of sovereign states without creating a single all-powerful central regime. And the solution that I want to defend, the third degree of global pluralism, goes roughly like this: create a set of alternative centers and an increasingly dense web of social ties that cross state boundaries. The solution is to build on the institutional structures that now exist, or are slowly coming into existence, and to strengthen all of them, even if they are competitive with one another.

 THE CONTINUUM

From the left side:

UNITY: Global state/Multinational empire/Federation

3rd degree\2nd degree\1st degree of global pluralism\Anarchy: DIVISION

From the right side:

So the third degree of global pluralism requires a United Nations with a military force of its own capable of humanitarian interventions and a strong version of peacekeeping— but still a force that can only be used with the approval of the Security Council or a very large majority of the General Assembly. Then it requires a World Bank and IMF strong enough to regulate the flow of capital and the forms of international investment and a World Trade Organization able to enforce labor and environmental standards— all these, however, independently governed, not tightly coordinated with the UN. It requires a World Court with power to make arrests on its own, but needing to seek UN support in the face of opposition from any of the (semi-sovereign) states of international society. Add to these organizations a very large number of civic associations operating internationally, including political parties that run candidates in different countries' elections and labor unions that begin to realize their longstanding goal of international solidarity, as well as single-issue movements aiming to influence simultaneously the UN and its agencies and the different states. The larger the membership of these associations and the wider their extension across state boundaries, the more they would knit together the politics of the global society. But they would never constitute a single center; they would always represent multiple sources of political energy; they would always be diversely focused.

Now add a new layer of governmental organization— the regional federation, of which the European Community is only one possible model. We can imagine both tighter and looser structures (but tighter is probably better for the control of global markets and multinational corporations), distributed across the globe, perhaps even with overlapping memberships: differently constituted federal unions in different parts of the world. This sort of thing would bring many of the advantages of a global federation but with greatly reduced risks of tyranny from the center. For it is a crucial feature of regionalism that there will be many centers.

V

To appreciate the beauty of pluralist arrangements of this kind, one must attach a greater value to political possibility, and the activism it breeds, than to the certainty of political success. To my mind, certainty is always a fantasy, but I don't want to deny that something is lost when one gives up the more unitary versions of globalism. What is lost is the hope of creating a more egalitarian world with a stroke of the pen— a single legislative act enforced from a single center. What is lost is the hope of achieving perpetual peace, that is, the end of conflict and violence, everywhere and forever. What is lost is the hope of a singular citizenship and a singular identity for all human individuals— so that they would be autonomous men and women, and nothing else.

I must hurry to deny what the argument so far may suggest to many readers: I don't mean to sacrifice all these hopes solely for the sake of what is today called "communitarianism"—that is, for the sake of cultural and religious difference. That last is an important value, and it is no doubt well-served by the third degree of pluralism (indeed, the different levels of government allow new opportunities for self-expression and autonomy to minority groups hitherto subordinated within the nation-state). But difference exists alongside peace, equality, and autonomy; it doesn't supercede them. My argument is that all these values are best pursued politically in circumstances where there are many avenues of pursuit, many agents in pursuit. The dream of a single agent—the enlightened despot, the civilizing imperium, the communist vanguard, the global state—is a delusion. We need many agents, many arenas of activity and decision. Political values have to be defended in many different places so that failure here can be a spur to action there, and success there a model for imitation or revision here.

But there will be failures as well as successes, and I need to mention and at least briefly worry about three possible failures—so as to stress that all the arrangements, including the one I prefer, have their dangers and disadvantages. The first is the possible failure of peace-keeping, which is also, today, a failure to protect cultural or religious minorities. Wars between and among states will be rare in a densely webbed international society. But the very success of the politics of difference makes for internal conflicts that tend toward and sometimes reach "ethnic cleansing" and even genocidal civil war. The claim of all the strongly centered regimes is that this sort of thing will be stopped, but the price of doing this, and of maintaining the capacity to do it, is very high. The danger of all the decentered and multi centered regimes is that no-one will stop the awfulness. The third degree of pluralism maximizes the number of agents who might stop it or at least mitigate its effects: individual states acting unilaterally (like the Vietnamese when they shut down the killing fields of Cambodia), alliances and unions of states (like NATO in the Kosovo war), global organizations (like the UN), and the volunteers of international civil society (like Doctors Without Borders). But there is no assigned agent, no singular responsibility; everything waits for political debate and decision—and may wait too long.

The second possible failure is in the promotion of equality. Here too the third degree of pluralism provides many opportunities for egalitarian reform, and there will surely be many experiments in different societies or at different levels of government (like the Israeli kibbutz or the Scandinavian welfare state or the European Community's redistributive efforts or the proposed "Tobin tax" on international financial transactions). But the forces that oppose equality will never have to face the massed power of the globally dispossessed, for there won't be a global arena where this power can be massed. What there will be, or could be, is very different: many organizations that seek to mobilize the dispossessed and express their aspirations, sometimes cooperating, sometimes competing, with one another.

The third possible failure is in the defense of individual liberty. Once again, the pluralism of states, cultures, and religions—even if full sovereignty no longer exists anywhere—means that individuals in different settings will be differently entitled and protected. We can (and should) defend some minimal understanding of human rights and seek its universal enforcement, but enforcement in the third degree of pluralism would necessarily involve many different agents, hence many arguments and many decisions, and the results are bound to be uneven.

Can it possibly be the case that a regime open to such failures is the most just regime? I only want to argue that it is the political arrangement that most facilitates the everyday pursuit of justice under conditions least dangerous to the overall cause of justice. All the

other regimes are worse, including the one on the far left of the continuum for which the highest hopes have been held out. For it is a mistake to imagine Reason in power in a global state— as great a mistake (and a mistake of the same kind) as to imagine the future world order as a millennial kingdom where God is the king. The rulers required by regimes of this kind don't exist or, at least, don't manifest themselves politically. By contrast, the move toward pluralism suits people like us, all-too-real and no more than intermittently reasonable, for whom politics is a "natural" activity.

Finally, I must insist that the move toward pluralism really is a move. We are not there yet; we have "many miles to go before we rest." The kinds of governmental agencies that are needed in an age of globalization haven't yet been developed; the level of participation in international civil society is much too low; regional federations are still in their beginning stages. Reforms in these institutional areas, however, are rarely sought for their own sake. No one is sufficiently interested. We will strengthen global pluralism only by using it, by seizing the opportunities it offers. There won't be an advance at any institutional level except in the context of a campaign or, better, a series of campaigns for greater security and greater equality for groups and individuals across the globe.

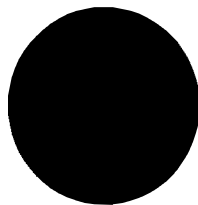
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School of Social Science, Institute for Advanced Study
Olden Lane, Princeton, NJ 08540