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ORIGINAL PAPER

# What is 'Global' About Global Justice?

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**Abstract**
Global justice has become an important part of recent political philosophy across traditions. But most of it inevitably is local thought projected onto the world stage, the globe as seen from somewhere. But how can there be a genuinely global philosophy? What do different traditions of political thought have in common, and how can we think of them as contributing to the same agenda in a shared space of ideas, rather than different traditions taking note of each other in comparative spirit? This paper explores these questions, enlisting sociological world society theory for intellectual assistance.

**Keywords** Justice · Global justice · World society theory · Human web · Imperialism · Colonialism

## 1 Introduction

Global political thought could be several things. It could be thought concerned with a country's foreign policy, as seen from their point of view.[1] It could be thought from one domestic tradition projected onto the global stage. Or it could be articulation of ideas about the global in one cultural context that is nonetheless not a projection of domestic thought. While all these understandings capture sensible views of what it is for political thought to be global, one could in principle engage with them without studying anybody not teaching at one's own university. Alternatively, global thought could be a comparative enterprise: we are thinking globally not only, and not primarily, by conceptualizing the global one way or another from where we

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stand but by engaging with other thought. We would do that in turn specifically by way of engaging with how that other thought has conceptualized the global, but perhaps also by taking a broad interest in how political issues have been framed philosophically in other parts of the world.

Political thought could also be global in the sense of there being a genuinely shared intellectual context. Something like that we would need for there to be global political philosophy, globally conceived, for there to be more to global thought than local traditions conceptualizing the global that may or may not be mindful of each other. Something like that we need especially for there to be a recognizably global understanding of public reason. Something like that would also help us say that political thought across cultures is concerned with recognizably related problems, or even to classify bits of "political" thought across cultures as being about similar things. After all, the term "political" is distinctively culturally embedded by tracing certain patterns of human interaction to what was going on in political entities that by global standards of the time were rather peculiar: Greek *poleis* (Ming 2012).

There are in turn different ways of approaching the question of whether there is a shared global intellectual context. One is ahistorical and would say we have shared human concerns and a variety of philosophical traditions that articulate them—and that with all the problems around us that have global dimensions, now is the time for philosophers to construct such a global sphere of ideas. Another is a more historically and sociologically minded approach that inquires to what extent we already have a version of such a global sphere. Our task would be to understand that sphere, and the ways in which it is global, and build on that assessment for further constructive efforts to develop a self-consciously global political philosophy. I prefer this second approach because it grounds our philosophizing in the world as it already is.

For the most part, the social sciences accept the state system's political self-understanding. Instead of an integrated global society, our world frequently is reduced to one where over 200 entities claim sovereignty. Comparative research captures international dependencies, but research in the grip of the traditional picture sees states as distinct entities whose commonalities arise through interaction of independent entities, rather than as making up a single entity. But over time, in every sub-field supra-national dimensions have become prominent. Sociologists began to use terms such as "world society," "world polity," "world system" or "global culture." Peter Heintz first spoke of the world society. Niklas Luhmann too used that term, locating the core of the phenomenon in global communication systems. Charles Tilly saw the core in conflict, emphasizing how states made wars while wars made states. Roland Robertson regarded supra-national interdependence as cultural matters, a view also emphasized by John Meyer. More and more dimensions of social life and organizational forms have come to be seen as resulting from global diffusion (Krücken and Drori 2010; Robertson 1992; Tilly 1975, 1993; Heintz 1982a, b; Luhmann 1982).

The account of how ideas function in the world I enlist in ongoing research is a research program proposed by Stanford sociologist John Meyer and others: *world society analysis.* According to that stance, ideas are causally efficacious, by way of contrast, say, with materialist approaches in the Marxist tradition that hold only material circumstances drive change. World society analysis understands efficacy of ideas in a global context, by way of contrast, for instance, with

international relations realists who believe it is mostly interests backed by power (e.g., military, industrial apparatus or generally a strong economy) that generate explanations in the international domain. World society analysis has illuminating and significant implications for political philosophy. Most importantly for present purposes, it allows us to verify the existence and delineate the shape of a global sphere of ideas and thereby defend the possibility of a genuinely global political philosophy.

But once we understand the *global* in global political philosophy in such a unified way (rather than in terms of unilateral projections or comparatively), new disputes arise. World society analysis explains change in terms of dissemination of ideas. But global power structures have shaped who was adopting whose ideas. In recent centuries, Western colonialism and imperialism played that kind of role. One reaction to the West's outsized role is to argue that, in some sense, the world society that has arisen in this way lacks legitimacy. ("These are not originally our ideas; we are still colonized.") Another is to downplay the significance of the West in the formation of the current world society. ("We too had, say, human rights, going back to Ancient times.") My concern is with the first type of reaction. If that kind of concern cannot be disarmed, the understanding of the global that world society analysis conveys is too fundamentally tarnished to serve as a starting point for global justice inquiries. But if they can be disarmed, then world society is a good starting point for genuinely global political philosophy, and thus a good way of thinking about the "global" in global justice inquiries.

In the introduction to their *Dictionary of Global Culture*, following a discussion of how the most common dating system is organized around the birth of a figure (Jesus) who for many belongs to somebody else's story, Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates say this:

> Whatever their intentions, Europeans and their descendants in North America, a civilization we now call 'the West,' began a process that brought the human species into a single political, economic, and cultural system whose details are, of course, the work of people from all around the globe (Appiah and Gates 1996: ix).

Something like this—especially the part about "from all around the globe"—is the message of this paper. In a nutshell, what I submit is that (a) we have a global sphere of ideas that world society analysis explores and that we can and must use as the starting point for the development of a genuinely global political philosophy; (b) in recent centuries the West has played an outsized role in its creation; (c) but this outsized role does not undermine the legitimacy of the world society.

Section 2 introduces world society analysis (and thereby then offers a response to the question in the title of this paper). The remaining sections then strengthen that answer by offering three responses to the concern that the outsized role of Western ideas in the emergence of the current world society undermines its legitimacy, in increasing order of importance: that the West is not a monolithic entity (Sect. 3); that its period-specific dominance must itself be embedded into a larger historical understanding of a human web (4); and that ideas that are originally

alien and may have entered by force can become genuinely appropriated (5). Other topics too could be discussed in this framework, such as Enrique Dussel's philosophy of liberation and Charles Mill's diagnosis of white ignorance at the global level (Dussel 1985, 2011; Mills 2015a, b). I do so elsewhere. I am interested in these topics because in my forthcoming book *On Justice: History, Philosophy, Foundations* I argue that my proposal for global justice in *On Global Justice* can be plausibly embedded into a larger account of distributive justice discourse over millennia and across cultural contexts.[2] The grounds-of-justice approach is a plausible continuation of how that discourse has unfolded. To make that point I need a background view of what a global sphere of ideas could be, and how a global understanding of justice could be based in it.

## 2 Introducing World Society Analysis

As opposed to both state-focused theories of international relations and economically oriented world systems analysis, world society analysis adopts an ontology conducive to genuinely global inquiry. Meyer has proposed, theoretically and empirically, a general world society approach, which views the world as one social system with a unified cultural framework (world polity or society) that nonetheless is implemented in a myriad of frequently conflicting variations. People, organizations and states (but not *merely* states) are seen to act on normative and cognitive models that are global in character and aspiration.[3]

A polity or society is a system where values and norms are defined and implemented through collective mechanisms that confer authority. The system itself also determines who gets to confer what kind of authority, and how that occurs. A *world* polity, accordingly, is such a system with global dimensions. In a pluralist spirit this approach theorizes various kinds of actors (whose interplay confers authority), including nations, companies, intergovernmental organizations, non-governmental organizations and individuals. All of these have causal roles to play in explanations, and influence each other. The defining feature of the world polity—it is in this fashion that this approach offers a unifying approach to global affairs—is that it provides a set of norms and roles that the various actors adopt. Through the implementation and spread of such "scripts" world society becomes a global "imagined community" in Benedict Anderson's well-known sense.[4] World society analysts enlist

[2] Mathias Risse, *On Global Justice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012). This paper draws on several chapters from my *On Justice* manuscript, and the fact that it draws on such ongoing work might be evident from the somewhat uneven citation practice I have adopted here. (Views established elsewhere in the book would be less heavily referenced than the ones being established in the present text itself.) This book will appear with Cambridge University Press.

[3] For Meyer's work, see Krücken and Drori, *World Society: The Writings of John W. Meyer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). This is a collection of Meyer's major research articles, alongside an introduction by the editors and reflections by Meyer. See also Albert, *A Theory of World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), chapter 1.

[4] Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, Verso, 1983). An *imagined* community is a socially constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group. Since they do see themselves that way, an *imagined* community is not *imaginary*.

praiseworthiness in norms, values and roles to help explain why some get accepted and others do not. Ideas about legitimacy, justice, and rights enter prominently.

World culture generates pressures toward isomorphisms (structural similarities). For instance, the model of statehood was adopted globally as a result of the centuries-long process of decolonization that generated about 130 states after WWII alone. States at different levels of development adopted similar guidelines and institutions, independently of their respective usefulness for the problems that needed to be solved locally. Examples include constitutional forms, education systems, policies on women's emancipation and environment, and notions of development. States obtain institutional setup and authority from being embedded into a world polity offering as worthy of imitation or "enactment" certain behaviors, organizational designs or legal patterns. At the level of individuals, a sense of individuality as well as a notion of citizenship spread. World culture was elaborated and implemented by organizations ranging from scientific associations to feminist groups, from standard-setting bodies to environmental movements. States, individuals, but also non-state organizations adopted scripts designed to be followed anywhere. World society has become a common heritage.

World society analysis sees that very society to a large extent as a product of Western intellectual tendencies, prominently including Christian notions of personhood and political order. Western culture was pivotal to the spread of many successful scripts (whose success, at that stage, was sufficiently strong that, as we just noted, their spread did no longer depend on their immediate usefulness for solving local problems in regions to which they were spread through exercise of power). In one of their research anthologies, world society analysts state "the world polity is the direct descendent of Christendom" (Thomas et al. 1987: 75–76). Notions of individual value and autonomy, rationality in pursuit of secular progress, and the sovereign status of states have roots in Western history. As far as individuality is concerned, "one can find its roots in Athens or Jerusalem, or in Rome," Meyer says. He means the distinctive status of man "as the integrator of nature and spirit, soul and body, church and secular society, or the Cities of God and Man" (Thomas et al. 1987: 243). After its rise in the Roman Empire, the Christian church was transnationally oriented, unifying individuals and peoples and providing a common frame of reference. The church aimed to bring its gospel to everybody. Christianity offered a schematic ordering of the world that included a transcendental reality, an account of humanity in its relationship to God and as separate from the rest of creation, as well as an account of human nature that explained common failings at implementing the divine will. The church also provided guidance for action with authority devolved on a range of actors (popes and priests, kings and nobles).

The church transmitted Roman notions of law-governed community to medieval Europe. Christianity cherished a spiritualized understanding of empire that kings and emperors appropriated, as did later sovereign princes. Connecting to Stoic ideas of *kosmos* and equality, Christianity added its understanding of each human as created in God's image, with personal ties to the divine. This model of order that provided both for a certain kind of rule and an ideal of personhood within governed space (citizenship) spread around the world. Through Christianity Roman scripts became stupendously more successful globally than they ever had been at Rome's

greatest expanse. The expansiveness of religious and philosophical theories is a distinctive feature of Western culture.

As the West stretched out economically and politically, it individualized, bureaucratized and marketized the world in ways not easily explained without making adoption of successful scripts central to change. Officials, organizations and theorists, originally mostly in the West, elaborated ideas such as sovereignty, rights or progress meant to be universally valid. Especially throughout the nineteenth century, transnational movements arose to defend such ideas, giving international life a culture that became pervasive after WWII. A world culture has emerged that generates enactable cultures and organizations that elaborate world society further. Intergovernmental organizations enshrine ideas spread through the expansion of the West, most prominently the UN Charter and Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Educational institutions have spread rapidly, cultivating individuals in ways suitable for participation in scripts championed by modern societies.[5]

One might of course question the overall accuracy of this account, in terms of how it traces the origins of the current world society. But I am not here questioning the significance world society gives Western ideas or their origins in Jerusalem, Athens or Rome. All this seems plausible, and it seems to be a plain reflection of the fact that power structures have a lot to do with how, and whose, ideas, practices and understandings of roles travel. But what we must investigate is whether this outsized importance of Western ideas in world society delegitimizes it by making world society an alienating place where non-Westerners have reason to feel not at home, to feel the social world around them is not for them and does not capture their values unless they accept an alien framework. The following sections offer three responses to these concerns, in increasing order of importance. Such responses are necessary for world society analysis to provide a plausible answer to the question raised in the title of this paper, what is "global" about global justice?

## 3 Non-monolithic West

Note first that European thought bore most intensely on other traditions when it was at its most diverse and divisive, and that all along European thought had been anything but monolithic. On the contrary, diversity and divisiveness had been part of it all along.

The Scientific and Industrial Revolutions created possibilities for projection of power and penetration previously unimaginable. "Colonialism" captures separation: a colony is a distant settlement populated by pioneers who normally maintain ties to the homeland. Though "imperialism" also connotes with organizational looseness, the term implicitly refers to a center unifying far-flung regions. Unity might be

[5] On education see Thomas, George M., John W. Meyer, Francisco O. Ramirez, and John Boli, *Institutional Structure: Constituting State, Society and the Individual*, 1st edition (Newbury Park, Calif.: SAGE Publications, Inc, 1987), chapters 7, 8, 10, 11. See also Krücken, Georg, and Gili Drori. *World Society: The Writings of John W. Meyer* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), chapters 9, 17.

generated by a shared set of economic or financial policies, or a worldview implemented across the empire. The shift from colonial to imperial period in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century reflected increased technological capacities that made empires possible. By the end of the nineteenth century, most of the world was under Europe's imperialistic sway, one way or another.

Also during that period European political thought evinced an unprecedented breadth. This was caused by the range of questions following upon the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions, as well as the fact that universities expanded and more people could, or felt they should, reflect on how to organize society. Liberalism, socialism, communism and later fascism disagreed on what to do with the awesome possibilities of the era of machines and scientific sophistication. "Social justice" became a topic in emerging Catholic social thought. Reactionary thinkers defended tradition against reformist or revolutionary innovation, including anything under the heading of social justice. Conservatives worried about what to preserve from bygone eras increasingly detached from the industrial age.

Mainstream European thought supported imperialism, but anti-imperialism was in the mix, if only because some voices from the eighteenth century continued to echo. Universalism stood against particularism; cosmopolitanism and nationalism were discussed, as were ways of adjudicating them. Next to the ever more important nation there was eventually race. Race got theorized in a century that witnessed the abolition of slavery in the transatlantic region, a contested process managed differently across countries, politically and intellectually. Republicans, democrats, monarchists and absolutists made their cases. Equality, including material equality, became a bigger topic than before. Consequentialist and deontological moralities faced off, say, in the opposition between utilitarianism and Kantian ethics. Christianity was dominant, but non-standard readings of the gospel and of Jesus circulated. Atheists no longer worried about burning at the stake. The working class mobilized, later also women. Parliaments increasingly mattered, though against conservative resistance that was at its zenith after the failed revolutions of 1848.[6]

But it is not merely that European thought *under imperialism* was highly diverse and divisive. Europe had torn itself apart with violence for centuries before that violence was projected outward. Meyer referred to Jerusalem, Athens and Rome, by way of accounting for the *unity* of Western thought as it presented itself to the world. It is sometimes said that the idea of Europe (which became "the West" with the addition of the USA) derives from Christian thinking, Greek thinking and Roman law. But with these starting points (Jerusalem, Athens, Rome), diversity and divisiveness have been built in all along. The briefest way of making that point is that Rome conquered both Athens and Jerusalem, but in their own way each took over Rome and lasted much beyond its empire, in turn also constantly fighting the other.

Greek thinking gave rise to secular inquiry that through the ages was often at odds with religion, certainly with Christianity with its idea of the omnipotent,

[6] For diversity of European political thought, see also Black, Antony, "Towards a Global History of Political Thought," in *Western Political Thought in Dialogue with Asia* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009a), 25–42.

omnipresent and omniscient God who created humankind (or in any event Adam) in his image. Roman law succeeded in promoting unity, first in the Roman Republic, then in the empire. But its success in pacifying Romans also enabled them to extend power over a vast region stretching from the Atlantic to the Euphrates, from Scotland to the Sahara. After the expansion was over defense against Germanic tribes from the North and Parthians from the East became the empire's main business. Its disintegration in the West resulted from centuries of invasions by Germanic tribes, who eventually supplanted the empire with their various realms. Several more centuries of warfare against Vikings from the North, Muslims from the South and Asiatic tribes from the East ensued. There were only limited periods of peace before the Reformation plunged the continent into 150 years of some of the most gruesome warfare the world had witnessed. These religious wars were about the design of the political world that had arisen from the Roman empire in its Christian guise.

When Sun Yat-sen gave his famous lectures on the *Three Principles of the People* in 1924, formulating his definitive thoughts on nationalism, democracy and socialism, he insisted on differences between China and the West. Chinese intellectuals need not argue for liberty and equality first but can support democracy directly, Sun argues. In the West, liberty and equality did need to be established first because of the West's horrific history.[7] We need not engage in any comparative assessments to determine whether Sun might not take too critical a stance on the West by way of comparison with China, which had been notoriously beset by a stunning number of uprisings over the millennia. What matters for present purposes is merely that Sun is right to imply that the West does not confront the rest of the world with one internally unified worldview; instead, it confronts the world with the legacy and repertoire of a long history of political and religious conflict.

Reference to the diversity and divisiveness of Western thought—not only but especially during the time of imperialism—does not directly respond to the concern that world society is delegitimized by the outsized role Western ideas have played in its genesis. But it helps with a better understanding of the phenomenon: one should not think a monolithic project has confronted the rest of the world emanating from Europe. On the contrary, internal diversity and divisiveness have fueled much of its aggressive engagement with the rest of the world.[8]

[7] Yat-sen, Dr. Sun, *San Min Chu I: The Three Principles of the People*, edited by L.T. Chen, translated by Frank W. Price (Shanghai: The Commercial Press, 1928), 225, 234. This is lecture 3 in the democracy part. On p. 317 Sun points out that Westerners for good reasons have hostility to their governments.

[8] Distinguished French historian and statesman Francois Guizot, author of a well-received history of European civilization, first published in 1828, captures the diversity of European thought as follows: "It has been wholly otherwise with the civilization of modern Europe. Without entering into details, look upon it, gather together your recollections: it will immediately appear to you varied, confused, stormy; all forms, all principles of social organization coexist therein; powers spiritual and temporal; elements theocratic, monarchical, aristocratic, democratic; all orders, all social arrangements mingle and press upon one another; there are infinite degrees of liberty, wealth, and influence. These various forces are in a state of continual struggle among themselves, yet no one succeeds in stifling the others, and taking possession of society. In ancient times, at every great epoch, all societies seemed cast in the same mold: it is sometimes pure monarchy, sometimes theocracy or democracy, that prevails; but each, in its turn, prevails completely. Modern Europe presents us with examples of all systems, of all experiments of social organization; pure or mixed monarchies, theocracies, republics, more or less aristocratic, have thus

## 4 World Society and Human Web

Our second response is that today's world society is itself embedded into a human web that has been unfolding for much longer. The "rise of the West" did not encounter a hitherto disjointed world where multifarious cultures had evolved in isolation. Instead, that rise occurred within a larger and much older interconnected web that subsequently thickened into the world society.

Historians McNeill argue that, after the departure of *homo sapiens* from Africa, there was a very loose human web where ideas and practices travelled (McNeill and McNeill 2003). Some parts of that web thickened into metropolitan nodes. Over millennia, these webs and nodes intensified to such an extent that a world society emerged. Exchanges were unevenly developed, more intense at some locations than others, which continues to be true. World society is the especially thick and relatively unified stage this web has entered through developments that led to the age of colonialism and imperialism, as well as through developments during that age itself. Pointing out that Western ideas have shaped world society is consistent with seeing those ideas in close cultural connections with ideas and practices adopted from other cultures.

Historian John M. Hobson, for instance, has recently articulated discontent with the widespread perception in the West that it succeeded economically and politically without constructive input from elsewhere. Hobson defines Eurocentrism as conflation of "the progressive story of world history with the Rise and Triumph of the West," according to which "the West properly deserves to occupy the center stage of progressive world history, both past and present" (Hobson 2004: 2).[9] He documents the crucial role of Islamic, African and Chinese resources, technologies, institutions and ideas especially for the Industrial Revolution. The strides the West made were not autarkically generated and self-constituting. West and East have been consistently interlinked through globalization since about 500 CE. The East played a crucial role in enabling the West's rise through diffusion and appropriation. Hobson ends by quoting postcolonial theorist Edward Said, insisting historical understanding must not stress the clash of civilizations, but "the slow working together of cultures that overlap, borrow from each other and live together."[10]

Footnote 8 (continued)
thrived simultaneously, one beside the other; and, notwithstanding their diversity, they have all a certain resemblance, a certain family likeness, which it is impossible to mistake;" Guizot, Francois, *The History of Civilization in Europe*, edited by Larry Siedentop, translated by William Hazlitt (London New York: Penguin Classics, 1997) 29f.

[9] Hobson refers to the work of the McNeills, to make the point of interconnectedness that stretches back much longer than the Rise of the West.

[10] Said, Edward W. *Orientalism* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), xxii. This is quoted in Hobson, John M., *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilisation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 322. On these themes, see Goody, Jack, *The Theft of History (*New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Blaut, J.M., *The Colonizer's Model of the World* (The Guilford Press, 2012). Blaut considers it a "malady of the mind" to make Europe central to the spread of ideas and see others only as beneficiaries of diffusion.

Hobson's more recent work mentions Meyer's (2010) in passing, calling it "highly Euro-Centric."[11] He argues that international relations theory does not deliver value-free analysis and universalist theories of politics. It is more about defending and celebrating the idea of the West, even where this takes on imperialist guises, from scientific racism to subliminal Eurocentrism. Hobson seems to find it so obvious that Meyer's approach fits some such description that it merits little attention. But with its emphasis on explaining change through adoption of ideas, role models and scripts, world society analysis explains Western ideas as *themselves* descending from earlier adaptations. It lies in the methodological spirit of world society analysis to connect to the human web approach as I just did.

To be sure, Hobson's critique of widespread ignorance of how Western ideas have spread and of the importance of non-Western ideas is valid. But accepting the outsized role of Western ideas for the way world society has shaped up is consistent with recognizing a bigger picture that sees that outsized importance as one episode in a larger narrative (the human web).

## 5 Unobjectionable Appropriation of Initially Alien Ideas

The third and most important response is that the fact that Western ideas played an outsized role in the genesis of world society and have spread with violence does not mean their *success* simply results from violence or coercion. Often ideas that spread coercively were adopted by later generations, as voluntarily as new ideas could ever be adopted by people born into a society where certain views prevail. The violence of colonialism and imperialism does play a role in explaining global culture. But world society analysis also sees other factors at work in the spread of scripts. To the extent that it led to enduring changes, that spread can be explained largely through voluntary adoption of role models perceived as successful, such as statehood or individuality. What is crucial is that we are talking about processes unfolding over time. World society analysis readily captures that thought because of its emphasis on the adoption of role models in the spread of ideas. Odious origins do not preclude genuine and authentic acceptance later. For subsequent generations, ideas that spread coercively are part of their intellectual infrastructure. What matters is no longer how ideas entered but *only* if they generate allegiance.

I sketch several examples where ideas or practices that entered in ways involving violence and coercion became freely adopted over time. There is nothing embarrassing or humiliating about such acceptance any longer:

**Persia and Islam:** Zoroastrianism had been prevalent for centuries when Arabs conquered Sassanian Persia in the seventh century. But while the conquest was rapid, Islamization took longer. Conversion was voluntary, and took 2.5 centuries to complete. Anti-Islamic rebellions occurred until the nineth century. Arabs established trade routes and commercial centers. Merchants were more

[11] Hobson, John M., *The Eurocentric Conception of World Politics: Western International Theory, 1760–2010 (*Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 304.

highly regarded by Muslim rulers than under Zoroastrianism. Trade had to be conducted according to Islamic rules, giving merchants incentives to convert. Muslims did not pay poll taxes or undergo the humiliation that often accompanied payment. Converted slaves were freed. Subsequently, Persians played a major role in internationalizing Islamic society beyond Arab origins. As one commentator sums up: "Though many conversations were reluctant, or dictated by self-interest, yet the children of such converts grew up within Islam, trained from infancy to say Arabic instead of Avestan prayers; and each generation saw an increase in the number of Iranians who knew no other faith. Among the converts there were moreover some who became in their turn ardent proselytizers, either to obtain the comfortable support of greater numbers, or out of true missionary zeal; for not all who adopted Islam did so for worldly motives, or under coercion. A number were convinced that the success of Muslim arms proved the truth of Muslim doctrine; and yet others must have been persuaded by the preachings of religiously-minded Arabs."[12] With its great cities and ancient history, in due course Persia contributed to the advancement of Islam and to Muslim political thought "much as Rome did for Western political thought."[13]

**India and Western political thought**: Discussing Indian political thought, Parel offers a distinction between "political thought in India" and "Indian political thought."[14] Modern political thought *in India* has its beginnings only in the nineteenth century. Referring to influential nationalist poet Sri Aurobindo, he takes Indian thinkers of that century to task for reproducing Western ideas, covering a spectrum from Marx to Spencer. As opposed to that, there is *Indian* political thought. Parel gives prominence to Gandhi. Gandhi grasped originally Indian ideas (e.g., non-violence), often drawing from traditional sources like the Bhagavad Gita, and combined them with Western ideas (e.g., rights). This amounted to "using an Indian intellectual framework to reset Western ideas" (Parel 2009, 202). Parel urges a return to the "Indian intellectual framework" to "put an end to the intellectual colonization of the Indian mind" (Parel 2009, 206).[15] But instead of colonization we could talk

[12] Boyce, Mary, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London: Routledge, 2001), 148. Chapter 10 of Boyce's book covers the whole period, as do Foltz, Richard, *Iran in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), chapter 4; Katouzian, Homa, *The Persians: Ancient, Medieval and Modern Iran (*New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), chapter 3. In due course there would be a revival of Iranian national spirit and culture in an Islamic form, especially under the Buyid Dynasty beginning in the mid-tenth century; see Kraemer, Joel, *Humanism in the Renaissance of Islam* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishing, 1986).

[13] Black, Antony, *The West and Islam: Religion and Political Thought in World History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 115.

[14] Parel, Anthony. "From Political Thought in India to Indian Political Thought." In *Western Political Thought in Dialogue with Asia* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), 187–207.

[15] This overall view of Indian political thought is echoed by Dalton, Dennis, "Hindu Political Philosophy," in *Oxford Handbook of the History of Political Philosophy*, edited by George Klosko (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 803–20. Dalton points out that the apogee of political theory in Indian thought occurred during the 19th and 20th centuries in response to British authority. He too gives a prominent position to Gandhi. Bikuh Parekh concludes reflections on Hindu political thought with the

of appropriation of new thought transferred to India. Chilean writers can lay claim to Cicero's legacy as much as Italians can. Greek intellectuals have no more claim to counting Aristotle a predecessor than Nigerian academics. Academics at Chinese Communist party schools may worry about their government not taking the credo seriously enough. But they would not worry about Communism being an oddity in China given that Marx never thought the Qing agricultural society would morph into a Communist powerhouse. Indians are entitled to European thought without worrying about intellectual pollution.[16]

**African Americans and Christianity:** Those who came to the US enslaved brought an array of beliefs and practices. Some were Christians due to Portuguese missionary work before transatlantic trade became entrenched. The Kongo adopted Christianity as state religion in 1491, partly because Catholic rites resembled local rites. But part of the rationalization of slavery was that Africans were heathens. Initially, Christians could not be enslaved. Subsequently, "[r]eligion created race, and race thereafter shaped religion" (Harvey 2013: 17). Colonial assemblies in Virginia and Maryland decreed baptism did not mean

Footnote 15 (continued)

observation that the social conditions in Ancient India made political philosophy neither possible nor necessary, by way of contrast with Ancient Greece. He suggests it would be worthwhile reflecting why this was so; Parekh, Bhikhu, "Some Reflections on the Hindu Tradition of Political Thought," i*n Comparative Political Theory: An Introduction (*New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), edited by Fred Dallmayr, 107–16. For actual discussion of what they take to be ancient Indian political thought, see Black, Antony, *A World History of Ancient Political Thought: Its Significance and Consequences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009b), Part I; Ghoshal, Upendra Nath, *A History of Indian Political Ideas; the Ancient Period and the Period of Transition to the Middle Ages* (New York: Indian Branch Oxford University Press, 1959). For the view that it is a Western "pet notion" that there was no political thought in Ancient India, see Banerjee, Amritava, "Political Thinking in Ancient India: A Brief Outline," in *Indian Political Thought and Movements: New Interpretations and Emerging Issues* (Kolkata: KPBagchi & Co, 2007), edited by Harihar Bhattacharyya and Abhijit Ghosh, 14–29. One of the central ancient texts is Kautilya, *The Arthashastra* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000).

The issue seems to be if works like that are sufficiently philosophical to count as political philosophy, rather than (at least primarily) treatises in political science as understood then. For contemporary Indian political thought in historical perspective, see also Bhattacharyya, Harihar, and Abhijit Ghosh, eds., *Indian Political Thought and Movements: New Interpretations and Emerging Issues* (Kolkata: KPBagchi & Co, 2007).

[16] By way of contrast, Farah Godrej takes the following approach to Indian thought. On the one hand, she argues that "we could not even begin to address the question of an autonomously Indian discourse of religious pluralism without reference to the fascinating mélange of Vedic metaphysical pluralism combined with later Buddhist *and* Islamic political practice;" Godrej, Farah, *Cosmopolitan Political Thought: Method, Practice, Discipline* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) 106. But she also argues that many non-Western nations, India among them, "are thoroughly infiltrated by various (often hybridized) strands of Westcentric political theory (Godrej 2011: 130). She insists overcoming the Eurocentrism of current political discourse in favor of a genuinely global discourse "requires the introduction of competing frameworks that displace altogether the terms of the existing debate, rather than simply 'include' non-Western knowledge" (Godrej 2011: 99). Here I would submit that acceptance of Western thoughts by Indian thinkers should be treated similarly to earlier acceptance of Buddhist and Islamic practice. Within the resulting Indian discourse and world culture traditionally non-Western knowledge should indeed be re-articulated to the extent that it has gotten lost but nonetheless is of interest to current debates. But we should not think of what is *re-articulation in world culture* as *inclusion of non-Western knowledge into Western discourse.*

freedom. In any event, for the most part whites had no interest in converting blacks nor cared if they did. Most slaves were not interested in their enslavers' religion unless they already had it (normally as Catholics in Protestant lands). This changed mid-eighteenth century when evangelical revivals gave birth to African-American Christianity. The Great Awakening allowed religious communal life while assuring whites this was a civilizing mission. Initially this was a small minority, but eventually Christianity became the primary form of African-American religious expression, helped along by a second Great Awakening in the early 1800s. The Great Awakening pulled away from ritual and made Christianity personal, fostering a deep sense of spiritual conviction and redemption. Spiritual equality gave slaves a chance momentarily to enjoy a sense of freedom. But as W. E. B. Dubois emphasized in "Of the Faith of the Fathers," conversion also increased social control by whites, with Christianity appropriately twisted (Dubois 1994: chapter 10).[17] In his acclaimed 2015 *Between the World and Me,* Ta-Nehisi Coates discusses African Americans and Christianity. The book describes socialization into a climate of fear and exclusion in a country with racist violence woven into its cultural fabric. On Christianity Coates writes: "We spurned the holidays marketed by the people who wanted to be white. We would not stand for their anthems. We would not kneel for their God. (…) My understanding of the universe was physical, and its moral arc bent towards chaos and then concluded in a box" (Coates 2015: 28). Malcolm X believed the same, calling Christianity the white man's religion. "The Christian church," he writes, "became infected with racism when it entered white Europe. The Christian church returned to Africa under the banner of the Cross – conquering, killing, exploiting, pillaging, raping, bullying, beating – and teaching white supremacy. This is how the white man thrust himself into the position of leadership of the world – through the use of naked physical power." Blacks should be Muslims because only Islam can resist Christianity (X, Haley, and Handler 1966: 486, chapter 19).[18] But as Cornell West points out, "Christian emphasis on against-the-evidence hope for triumph over evil struck deep among many of [the slaves]." West connects to Nietzsche's point about the appeal of Christianity to the downtrodden (West 2000: 62–63). What Christian ideas did for blacks was the same Nietzsche claimed they did for the downtrodden at their inception.

**Japan and the Meiji reform:** Imperial rule was restored in Japan in 1868 under Emperor Meiji, bringing to an end the era known as *sakoku* (the foreign relations policy, lasting about 250 years, prescribing death for foreigners entering or Japanese leaving). Without massive changes Japan was at risk of colonial penetration. The ensuing reforms between 1868 and 1912 were responsible for the emergence of modern Japan. To win recognition Japan adopted a criminal and civil code

[17] For context, see Harvey 2013: 106–10. For comprehensive discussion see Raboteau, Albert J., *Slave Religion: The "Invisible Institution" in the Antebellum South*, updated edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[18] There were of course also many enslaved Muslims in the US; see Diouf, Sylviane A., *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* (New York: NYU Press, 2013), Anniversary edition.

modeled after France and Germany. Modernization required Western science and technology. Western culture, from intellectual trends to clothing and architecture, was promoted. Universal education, introduced in 1872, initially emphasized Western learning. Westernization was checked in the 1880s, when appreciation of traditional values was renewed (e.g., samurai loyalty, social harmony). The same tendency prevailed in art and literature, where Western styles were first imitated whereas later selective blending of Western and Japanese tastes was achieved (Jansen 2002, chapter 9–14; Westney 1987). To this day, Japan is shaped by this amalgam of traditional values and eclectic appropriation. The Japanese gave in to pressure to embark on reform, but made imported ideas their own.

**China and Nationalism:** Frantz Fanon advised decolonized regions in the 1950s and 1960s to eschew the state model, and any efforts to "catch up" within that model. "Two centuries ago," he wrote in *Wretched of the Earth*, **"**a former European colony decided to catch up with Europe. It succeeded so well that the United States of America became a monster, in which the taints, the sickness and the inhumanity of Europe have grown to appalling dimensions" (Fanon 2005: 313). But decades before, Sun Yat-sen, founder of the Republic of China, urged China to embrace nationalism. China should adopt the nation state model to put an end to its people being like "a sheet of loose sand" (Yat-sen 1928: 5 [part I, Lecture I]). They have reason to do that even though they encountered this and other Western ideas in violent and humiliating encounters with Europeans. The transition to the nation state model never fully succeeded in the Chinese mind, as demonstrated by mainland China's insistence on the One China stance (refusing Taiwanese independence). But surely Sun's response to the success of the nation-state model and its perceived inevitability was as legitimate a response as was Fanon's rejection.

The alien can become appropriated. In the millennia-long process that led to the creation of the current world culture ideas have always prevailed to the detriment of competing scripts that expired or got relegated. Non-Western cultures may have been compelled to adopt Western ideas in their reflection on the political. But that does not mean they could not genuinely appropriate those ideas for themselves.

But does it not add insult to injury to claim people whose convictions were supplanted with those of oppressors in fact *adopted* them? Indeed, Greek thinking, Roman law, Christian belief and their amalgamation by Germanic tribes contributed to world culture in ways that cultures that produced the Gilgamesh, Bhagavad Gita, Popol Vuh, Buddhism, Dao or various belief systems and traditions in Africa did not. But since that is what happened, it would be *orientalism* to characterize the outcome in terms of insult added to injury, a condescending distortion of people's capacities to make choices.[19]

[19] Of course within a world culture shaped by European starting points, non-European ideas can obtain prominence, as demonstrated by the global popularity of the Dalai Lama; Nosco, Peter, "Buddhism and the Globalization of Ethics," in *The Globalization of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), edited by William Sullivan and Will Kymlicka, 75–92. Nosco argues Buddhism's universalized principles and history of accommodation have more global potential than Abrahamic religions and situationalist Confucianism.

This point is made by Ta-Nehisi Coates in *Between the World and Me*. Coates muses on a quip attributed to novelist Saul Bellow, who asks "who is the Tolstoy of the Zulus?" Coates reads Bellow as belittling people like him: only whites matter (Coates 2015; 43).[20] He reports on encountering an essay by black journalist Ralph Wiley where Wiley retorts "Tolstoy is the Tolstoy of the Zulus." Wiley adds: "unless you find a profit in fencing off universal properties of mankind into exclusive tribal ownership (Coates 2015, 56)."[21] "In fact," Coates elaborates, "Bellow was no closer to Tolstoy than I was to Nzinga. And if I were closer it would be because I chose to be, not because destiny is written in DNA" (Coates 2015: 43).[22] Indeed, people can choose to align with the achievements of others. There is nothing wrong with such choices even if first encounters were violent.[23]

## 6 Conclusion

The outsized significance of Western ideas does not make the world society as such illegitimate. Those who accepted them often did so as authentically as one ever could accept ideas that are prevalent where one is socialized. At the same time, within the world society we can inquire about how power and influence are exercised. Such inquiries are the indispensable counterpart to the position just

[20] One recorded source of this statement is *John Blades (19 June 1994),* "Bellow's Latest Chapter," *Chicago Tribune*. http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1994-06-19/features/9406190395_1_saul-bellow-janis-freedman-keith-botsford/2 Last accessed June 7, 2017. But in an op-ed in the *New York Times* on March 10, 1994 Bellow had already denied he made the comment, or ever said anything about Zulus. http://www.nytimes.com/books/00/04/23/specials/bellow-papuans.html Last accessed June 7, 2017. Authentic or not, the Zulu point has been discussed in the literature on multiculturalism, e.g., Taylor, Charles, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Jürgen Habermas, Stephen C. Rockefeller, Michael Walzer, and Susan Wolf, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1994), edited by Amy Gutmann, expanded paperback edition, 71–72. Taylor opposes the alleged arrogance of the statement supposedly uttered by Bellow. Not only might the Zulus have produced a Tolstoy yet to be discovered, but Zulu culture might evaluate merit differently. We would benefit from learning their evaluative system. For a different take, see Barry, Brian, *Culture and Equality: An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 266–67. On May 6, 2017, a review of Alain Mabanckou's book *Black Moses* in the *Economist* was entitled, "Africa's Samuel Beckett," referring to how the review says Mabanckou is commonly called. Perhaps some inspiration came from what Bellow allegedly said.

[21] For Wiley, see Wiley, Ralph, *Dark Witness* (New York: One World/Ballantine, 1996). 1st edition, 31f.

[22] Nzinga is a sixteenth century African queen famous for resisting Portuguese intrusion, whom Coates admired.

[23] (1) In this spirit, Coates should be more supportive of African-American Christians, see above. (2) In his introduction to African political thought Guy Martin points out that he does not discuss African Marxist regimes "because they do not derive from an original ideology," meaning an original African ideology; Martin, Guy, *African Political Thought* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 4. He also points out, by way of concluding his chapter on the penetration of Northern Africa by Islam, that Islam "is one of the fundamental aspects of African civilization" (Martin 2012: 39). He argues that, over the centuries, an Africanization of Islam took place, as opposed to an Arabization of Africa. This process of acceptance of Islam in Africa, parallel to its acceptance in Iran, is another example of the sort we discussed above. But one wonders then on what grounds adoption of Marxism is dismissed as merely an implementation of a foreign ideology "in an African context" (Martin 2012: 4).

formulated. To the extent that there are illegitimate phenomena of dominance in world culture, we must find them *in the present*, rather than in the story of how ideas spread, lest we belittle those who have appropriated values, norms and scripts once forced upon their forebears. But success of ideas blinds people to how they spread, and that blindness must be overcome, also to create open-mindedness about other ideas articulated or re-articulated in a shared global culture.

Still, both such a process of overcoming this kind of blindness and articulation of new ideas or re-articulation of ideas that have fallen by the wayside must happen within our current world society that, for better or worse, has emerged from our history. Consider again Sun Yat-Sen, who wrote his lectures roughly when intellectuals in all parts of the world oppressed by the West (and intellectuals from among the oppressed in the West) spoke up against the dark sides of Western culture. Sun pointed out (in Lecture 4 on nationalism) that "European superiority to China is not in political philosophy but altogether in the field of material civilization." And yet he could only say that by way of wrestling with European thought that had become the default through imperialism and thus has accompanied the creation of the modern world. We cannot pretend otherwise.

Political thought nowadays must deal with a world that has thus arisen, as did Sun Yat-sen. Accordingly, world society analysis helps us understand what is *global* about global justice inquiry. With this view in place, political thinkers around the globe can see themselves as engaged in the same conversation, rather than having a number of, respectively, local conversations that are *about* but not *with* thinkers in other cultural contexts. And they can do so without thereby buying into a framework (the world society) that is tarnished and thus delegitimized by the last several centuries of colonialism and imperialism.

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