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# Introduction to the guest edited section world government

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## Introduction to the guest edited section: world government

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### ABSTRACT

In this introduction, I first present the general problematic of the special section. Our world faces several existential challenges (climate change, threat of (nuclear) war, and global injustice) and some would argue (with even more disagreeing) that the only adequate answer to these challenges is setting up a world government. I then introduce the contributions that comprise the scholarly body of the special section: Andrić on global democracy; Hahn on global political reconciliation; Pinheiro Walla on Kant and world government; Miklós & Tanyi on institutional consequentialism and world governance. Lastly, I briefly describe the practical context in which the idea of the special section has arisen and in which the present contributions have taken shape.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

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### KEYWORDS

World government; climate change; global injustice; war; global democracy; Kant; consequentialism; political reconciliation

Theorizing about world government has a long history. Formulations of some version of the idea already appear in Chinese, Indian as well as ancient Greek thought and later supporters include Dante and Erasmus (while others, such as Bentham and Kant, offered qualified support only).<sup>1</sup> Today the idea appears to enjoy a new renaissance. This is perhaps not surprising. The world is encountering several global existential challenges, among them climate change, global injustice, and the threat of (nuclear) war. Some, such as Luis Cabrera (2004) or Torbjörn Tännsjö (2008), think that there is only one adequate answer to these challenges: to create a world state that governs the entire globe. Others, such as John Rawls (1999) or Martha Nussbaum (2006), think that creating a world state is not a good idea for a variety of reasons, both moral as well as non-moral (such as political or pragmatic). These reasons can be grouped into three categories. First, a world government is unrealistic, or even impossible to bring about, given that the world is now being dominated by territorial nation-states. Second, having a world government is undesirable because, say, it could lead to global tyranny and/or force upon humanity: it could lead to a homogeneity that we don't want. Third, a world government would be ineffective. There are other solutions to the above challenges, such as stronger nation-states, supranational organizations, stronger regional cooperation; so why should we opt for such a radical alternative as world government?

Who is right? Although it won't provide a definite answer to this question (if such an answer might ever be forthcoming), the aim of this special section is to contribute to the ongoing debate with articles that discuss, clarify and, at least to some extent, take a stand on the matter of world government. Each article approaches or connects to the

question of world government in some way, mostly in a positive way, at least in the sense of not ruling it out as a possible option for ordering our global system of government. In other respects, however, the articles differ significantly in their approach to the problematic.

Even if one broadly accepts that world government is justifiable, there is the further question what *form* it should take. Are there different types of world government? What are they and which is suited best for our purposes? Should world government be a democracy or something else? What else? And what form of democracy? Vuko Andrić's contribution engages with this part of the literature by critiquing one highly influential way of arguing for global democracy on grounds of affected interests and defends another directly utilitarian argument. The former, we may say, conventional defence attempts to justify global democracy based on the claim that affected interests vindicate individual claims to democratic participation or representation. Andrić, however, argues that this defence cannot be justified on utilitarian grounds and is at odds with our ordinary views and practices regarding democracy. In contrast to this demos-based argument (as he calls it), Andrić favours an approach that is directly utilitarian, pointing out that a world government taking the form of global democracy would be the best solution to our global problems and hence would produce the best consequence overall.

My contribution to the section, co-written with András Miklós, also takes a broadly utilitarian line. However, as compared to Andrić, we approach the problematic from farther afar. Elsewhere we have responded to the challenge of the so-called demandingness objection to consequentialism (which claims that the demands of consequentialism are unacceptably excessive) by working out an institutional version of the theory (Miklos & Tanyi ms). This *institutional consequentialism* builds on an influential idea of an avowedly non-consequentialist thinker: John Rawls's theory of justice. Adapting his point about social justice to consequentialist morality, we hold that the following division of labour is justifiable: the consequentialist principle regulates the design of a basic institutional structure, whereas individuals have the duty to set up and maintain these institutions. Taking this theoretical framework as given (while also providing some details to put flesh on the bones, as it were), we ask which global framework would be best suited for institutional consequentialism. We frame our discussion by contrasting the *status quo* (including the state system and supranational institutions) with radical options such as a neo-medieval global order and the world state. We discuss several reasons in favour of pursuing gradual reforms of the *status quo* but we also mention the questions they leave open.

The other two contributions to the section leave behind utilitarianism (and, more broadly, consequentialism) as the theoretical framework of their argumentation. Henning Hahn draws a rare connection between global governance and the theory of *political reconciliation*. His underlying thesis is that the idea of reconciliation fits better with the non-ideal circumstances of global injustice. To work this idea out in more detail, he develops a three-tiered model of political reconciliation and introduces the related concept of restorative justice. After this, he looks at some of the most obvious forms of international and global injustice – historical injustice, economic exploitation, and political domination – and argues that a normative theory of political reconciliation provides better proposals for feasible global governance reforms than do theories of corrective, retributive, or distributive justice.

Finally, Alice Pinheiro Walla's contribution takes us into even more controversial waters in the history of philosophy. Her specific focus is on the way Kant scholarship has interpreted the German thinker on the matter of world government: has he endorsed the creation of a world state or merely a voluntary federation of states with no coercive power? Pinheiro Walla's approach to this vexed matter takes a distinctive form. She argues for what she calls *methodological realism*: the attempt to realize the requirements of Right (*Recht*) in a world governed by its own laws and mechanisms. That is, she argues that the best way to understand Kant's position on world government is as a principled combination of (political) realism and idealism: the latter pertains to the way we should, according to Kant, understand the global juridical condition; the former determines our understanding of the implementation of this rational ideal in world politics as it is today (or was back in Kant's day).

On the whole, my hope in putting together this special section has been to shed light on the complexity of and difficulties inherent in the idea of setting up and maintaining a world government. I believe the contributions briefly summarized above go some way in fulfilling this hope. The final judgment, however, is left for the reader of these articles to make, of course.

To end this introduction, I would like to say some words about the practical circumstances of the birth of this special section. The section has grown out of a two-day workshop held in 13–14 June 2017 in two different locations: the first day in Zurich (Switzerland), at the Collegium Helveticum (ETH/University of Zurich); the second day in Konstanz (Germany), in the Zukunftskolleg (University of Konstanz). Three of the four papers above (Hahn, Miklós and Tanyi, Pinheiro Walla) were presented in the workshop (other speakers were: Marco Cellini, Eva Erman, Raffaele Marchetti, Timothy Sinclair, Torbjörn Tännsjö, and Joachim Wündisch). The workshop was organized as a tenure-ending event in my role as an EURIAS Junior Research Fellow (COFUND Programme – Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions – FP7) in the Collegium Helveticum. My research project in the Collegium, *Consequentialism and Its Demands: The Role of Institutions* focused on the demandingness objection and introduced institutional consequentialism in response. It thus seemed just fitting to bring in the global dimension (given the evident consequentialist demands on the global level) and investigate possible institutional frameworks. As foretold above, this is just what my contribution to the present special section co-written with András Miklós attempts to accomplish.

## Note

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

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## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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