

ONE

Why a Global Civics?

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The broad manifestations of today's epic global interdependence are well known. Financial engineering in the United States can determine economic growth in every part of the world; carbon dioxide emissions from China can affect crop yields and livelihoods in the Maldives, Bangladesh, Vietnam, and beyond; an epidemic in Vietnam or Mexico can constrain public life in the United States; and volcanic ash from Iceland disrupts travel across Europe. The inherent difficulties of devising and implementing solutions to global problems through nation-states have also become apparent. Traditionally, two broad models have been used to deal with this predicament. The first relies on a wide range of creative ad hoc alliances and solutions. When standard global public health instruments proved insufficient, the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria was established. When the Internet became global, its management was turned over to ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers), which among other things enlists the input of individual Internet users in its governance, a significant departure from conventional intergovernmental multilateralism.

The second model is based on a more systematic reliance on rule of international law and also on what is known as the global public goods paradigm. Proponents of this concept point first and foremost to the existence of certain vital global public goods, climate being the most

obvious example. The global public goods paradigm also implies some commensurability, if not uniformity, in the way people respond to various global collective action challenges. Some tend to feel suffocated by this expectation of commensurability among various global governance tracks; others find it reassuring and liberating. Many in the periphery have been largely absent from this debate, except for expressions of indignation about the unfairness of the status quo interspersed with acts of obstructionism.

Both of these models are premised on the belief that global governance is essentially a technocratic puzzle for which smart institutional design will provide the necessary answers. Yet, what the world is negotiating is, in effect, a global social contract, not a technocratic fix. The key question that needs to be answered is what responsibilities we all have toward people who happen not to be our compatriots. The question is so simple that one is often struck by the strange absence of ready answers to this fundamental question. Generating meaningful responses to this question will entail starting to imagine—without panic or rush, and with all the care and thoughtfulness this conversation requires—a global civics.

In its conventional use, “civics” refers to the familiar constellation of rights and responsibilities emanating from a social contract and citizenship in a nation-state. But what about *global* civics? Would this be feasible—or even desirable?

There are several plausible objections to the concept of global civics. One can argue that allowing for even a modest level of responsibility toward all the world’s 6.9 billion people is so overwhelming that it is a nonstarter. Furthermore, it can be argued that any meaningful experience of pan-global consciousness and solidarity among human beings is nascent at best and therefore cannot form the basis for a formidable constellation of rights and responsibilities, and that the experience of being a global citizen is restricted to a few activists and international elites, like those who gather for the World Economic Forum in Davos. Finally, one can argue that civics assumes effective enforcement and a state, and since there is no world government, any talk of global civics is whimsical.

Notwithstanding such skepticism, I intend to demonstrate that it is, in fact, possible to imagine global civics. In attempting to do so, I first consider the unhelpful views that have impeded fruitful consideration of

the concept of global civics. Then I outline the rationale for global civics and offer two thought experiments to operationalize this new concept.

Surrogate Debates

It is not surprising that there is skepticism about the concept of global civics because surrogate discussions about global civics have left much to be desired. Thus the case for global civics needs to begin by defusing several of these minefields.

The first minefield is formed by the group believing in *world federation by stealth*. Proponents of this view see each international problem as a way to get closer to some federal world government. They seem to be intent on delivering the good life through global structures since they doubt the legitimacy of nation-states and do not appreciate their ability to command allegiance and deliver results. They also have seemingly blind faith in international schemes and overlook the legitimate misgivings of those in many nation-states about turning over their sovereignty to woefully inadequate international institutions. The major negative consequence of this group's agenda is to raise diffuse suspicions about international frameworks and to scare reasonable people who might otherwise be open-minded about pragmatic international cooperation.

The second minefield is created by those who advocate *radical cosmopolitanism*. This argument, which is advanced by a small but influential group, posits that it is somehow morally reprehensible to care less about people halfway around the world than about one's own family and community. These radical cosmopolitans argue that we should be ready to give up all wealth until the last person in the world is not worse off than the rest of us. Critics have rightfully described advocates of these views as being interested in a hypothetical humanity while possessing a good deal of disdain for the actual fallible and imperfect humans themselves. Such morally virtuous cosmopolitans also underestimate how modern capitalism has improved the living standards of billions. They do not seem to care that preaching rarely works. Like the stance of the first group, this group's excessive demands intimidate reasonable people, who then resist any conversation about global normative frameworks.

The third minefield is laid by the *doomsday advocates*, a diffuse group of people who tend to think that tomorrow will be worse than today or yesterday. Often their scenarios of impending doom, unless some form of global cooperation is achieved immediately, are meant to spur people to action. However, these doomsayers do not seem to realize that crying wolf one too many times is unproductive. Nor do they appreciate the impressive progress made by humanity through piecemeal and pragmatic international cooperation schemes.¹ And even more important, they seem oblivious to the fact that fear is not a very potent motivator for the most important constituency for global cooperation: youth.

The fourth and final minefield is formed by the *cynical realists*, who readily argue that life is not fair and that one should grow up and not chase elusive and impractical global frameworks. Many of these cynics live in the advanced industrial countries, and they view all attempts at international cooperation with utter suspicion and are deeply skeptical about all national contributions—in treasure or in sovereignty—to global solutions. However, they underestimate both the need for proactive cooperation among many players to solve tomorrow's problems and the opportunity costs of such cynicism for that cooperation. These cynics also exist in the developing world, where they view any attempt to reform multilateral institutions as a plot to consolidate the power of the privileged few. They pontificate on the inherent unfairness of the status quo without any hint of what they might be prepared to do if they were to be convinced that a fairer order was within reach. Each group of cynics blames the unreasonableness of the other as the justification for their own position.

The Need for a Compass

The minefields laid by these four groups have made the initiation of a thoughtful conversation about global civics a forbidding task. Yet it will be next to impossible for the people living on Earth to navigate in a world of fast-growing interdependence if we do not at least begin to think about a global social contract. There is no reason to assume that interdependence will not continue or even accelerate in the near future. Many perceive that their ability to exercise meaningful control over their

lives is eroding. This leads to anomie, anxiety, and a diffuse backlash. The choice is not between returning to the good old days of robust, non-porous borders and almighty nation-states versus being a helpless leaf at the mercy of winds from the far corners of the world. The choice is whether or not humanity will be able to hammer out a global social contract. A set of guiding principles—a moral compass—is needed to enable the people of the world to navigate the treacherous waters of unprecedented global interdependence.

One could think of it like driving a car. Each day millions of people drive at speeds above fifty miles an hour in a ton of metal extremely close to others who are doing the same thing. A slight move of the steering wheel in the wrong direction would wreak havoc, but we cruise carefree because we drive in an implicit fellowship with other drivers and have reasonable expectations about their behavior. Such fellowship with and expectations of other drivers, which serve to mitigate the theoretical risks of driving, can exist because people follow a long-established framework of laws, habits, and conventions about how to operate automobiles.

In an increasingly interdependent world, people need a corresponding global framework to put their minds at relative ease. Part of that reference framework must be based on global civics, a system of conscious responsibilities that we are ready to assume after due deliberation and corresponding rights that we are ready to claim. We all need to ask ourselves: to what responsibilities to other human beings are we personally ready to commit, and what would global civics look like? Two thought experiments can aid in figuring this out.

The Seven-Billionth Human Being

The first thought experiment for imagining the shape of global civics is to speculate about what one would say to welcome the seven-billionth human being, who will join the rest of us on this planet in 2012. A worthwhile exercise would be for each of us to take fifteen minutes out of our day to imagine what we would tell our fellow seven-billionth person about the human condition awaiting her or him. This conversation, however hypothetical, would help us take stock of the global situation that we have all helped produce. It would also set us on a path toward

discovering our most imminent responsibilities to each other and the next generation—the essence of global civics.

The first thing we could tell our newcomer is that she can expect to live more than seventy years and that this is twice as long as what people counted on a century ago. We would tell this newcomer that though the world is a very unequal place in terms of income and wealth, disparities in life expectancy are decreasing. We could report in good conscience that the world possesses some effective global public health instruments, and that we have eradicated smallpox and might see the end of polio and malaria in her lifetime. She could be told to expect to have more than eleven years of schooling, education being another area where gross but diminishing global disparities loom large. We could also report that the world that awaits her prizes gender equality more than in any other era, so she can anticipate a more enabling world than her mother or grandmother experienced.

In the spirit of first giving the good news, we can in good faith report that this seven-billionth person will have capabilities that not only empower her but would have been the envy of emperors and tycoons from earlier centuries. In terms of information and knowledge, our newcomer will have unprecedented access through the likes of Google Scholar, JSTOR (Journal Storage), and Wikipedia. The breadth of information and knowledge available and the ease of her access to such information would have been unfathomable to the *Encyclopédistes* and academies of sciences of previous centuries.

At the same time, we should admit to her that there are critical risks. Although we know about the mind-numbing horrors of previous genocides and have resolutely sworn not to allow this ultimate crime to recur, the sad fact is that nobody would likely come to rescue our seven-billionth fellow human were she to face genocide. We would have to tell her that not only have the world's military powers abdicated their solemn responsibility to protect, but they have also not allowed the development of procedures and institutions for people to join a UN volunteer army to intervene in cases of imminent genocide.

We would also need to tell this newcomer that we have set into motion, first unknowingly and then with full awareness for the past twenty years, a chain of events related to climate change that may very soon become

irreversible and lead to catastrophic environmental consequences. We now know that hydrocarbons are priced too low and do not reflect the real cost that their consumption inflicts on the environment and future generations. In effect, future generations have been subsidizing our current welfare, and they will need to deal with a deferred and compounded bill. We would need to note that while we were able to devise a plan for collective global action to prevent depletion of the ozone layer, a similar framework to mitigate climate change has thus far eluded us.

Finally, we would need to tell her that for decades in the twentieth century, the world's superpowers gambled with human civilization by amassing thousands of nuclear warheads, and that on more than one occasion, humanity was remarkably close to a nuclear holocaust. Although, as of today, we have not realized the forty-year-old goal of total nuclear disarmament enshrined in the Non-Proliferation Treaty, we have reduced the active nuclear arsenal to a fraction of what it once was.

Working on a welcome message for our seven-billionth fellow human being provides us with an opportunity for introspection as well as a frank accounting of the implicit responsibilities we have to other human beings and future generations, which constitute the very essence of global civics. Doing unto others what we would have them do unto us remains the most resilient benchmark for decent conduct in human history. This hypothetical conversation with our newcomer could set us on a path to answering some of these cardinal questions and help us elucidate what global civics would entail.

A Global Veil of Ignorance

In considering the shape of global civics, a second, more elaborate thought experiment is the global veil of ignorance, inspired by John Rawls and his book *A Theory of Justice*.² Rawls proposes thinking about justice both on procedural grounds and in terms of a particular definition: "justice as fairness." According to this definition, the organizing principles for a society would be agreed upon, hypothetically, in an initial position of equality, and these principles would end up governing all further agreements and the kinds of social cooperation and government that could be established. This situation would put people behind a "veil of

ignorance,” which would keep them from knowing their position in society or their fortune in the distribution of assets and abilities. The point of all this is to ensure that the organizing principles agreed to behind the veil of ignorance could not be designed to favor any particular condition, and that these principles would be the result of fair deliberation and agreement. Although Rawls’s basic proposition is a familiar Kantian move, one can argue that all major philosophical and religious traditions have similar tenets. The maxim of treating others as we wish to be treated by them in commensurate situations is both a simple proposition and quite possibly one of the most radical ideas in history.³

So how would the world look behind a global veil of ignorance? For what key issues would we want to set rules behind this veil, and what would we leave to the actual business of life and politics after the veil is lifted? My hunch is that we would want to have rules for things that we are absolutely sure about and for vital risks that we would want to have meaningful guarantees against. Constituent features of a good life cannot be delivered through global structures. A good life has much more to do with camaraderie, friendship, family, and affection than global measures. Therefore, the global rules to be set behind the veil of ignorance would need to be minimal, not the result of a familiar temptation to engage in global social engineering and to deliver the good life through global governance. Furthermore, rules set behind the global veil of ignorance ought not to aim to replace politics. The majority of the issues we care about should and will remain the subject of national and local politics. A global veil of ignorance would simply help us identify those exceptional issues that we would want to regulate before engaging in the essential business of life and politics. And this, in turn, would provide invaluable insights into what needs to be encompassed by global civics.

Assuming that we are all present at the founding moment behind the global veil of ignorance, our first question as “founders” would be whether we would want a world government, a world federation, or opt for the nation-state as the primary unit of allegiance and international cooperation. From Kant to the World Federalist Movement, many have argued for a world parliament. If we were behind the veil, what would probably strike us is how little support movements like the World Federalists have had over the years. Manufactured or otherwise, allegiance to

other people who speak our language and share a history and a territory with us seems to have survived the test of time. Therefore, as hypothetical founders behind the veil, we would likely opt to keep the nation-state, though I imagine we would also hope that nation-states would be more prone to cooperation than they are today. Even without the veil, global opinion surveys show that even in more unilateralist and sovereignist countries such as China, India, and the United States, more people support than oppose such multilateral notions as the UN's responsibility to protect and compliance with World Trade Organization (WTO) rulings, even against their own countries.⁴

The second vital question that founders can reasonably expect to confront is whether people would still want capitalism as the system of production and distribution. From the Luddites to the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, various anticapitalist traditions have maintained that capitalism destroys more than it creates and leads to gross inequalities, which in turn rob humans of their dignity. Yet in the last two centuries, there has been a level of material prosperity totally unprecedented in human history. It is true that there are dramatic inequalities in the world: the world's richest 2 percent owns more than half of global assets.⁵ This is unlikely to look very agreeable behind a global veil of ignorance. Yet we also know that the dramatic increase in income inequality between households is a result of the early industrialization process in the West and its immediate aftermath, from 1820 to 1950.⁶ Inequality between households, though very high, has held steady and not increased further since 1950, even though there is a common impression that income inequality has been increasing in the world in the last few decades.⁷ Increased communication and awareness of disparities may partially explain the difference between prevailing impressions and what various studies show. While income inequality has held steady for the last fifty years, we know that around the world, inequalities in years of schooling and disparities in life expectancy have both dramatically improved. The median human being today has far greater capabilities, as defined by Amartya Sen, available to him or her than did Genghis Khan or Napoleon.

Therefore, when founders review the evidence behind the global veil of ignorance, they are likely to be distressed by the size of income inequalities. However, they are even more likely to be impressed by the creative

energies unleashed by capitalist modernity and thus would opt to keep the capitalist system while continuing to think and negotiate the appropriate mechanisms to reduce the negative externalities of these inequalities. Founders would probably be dismayed by the hubris displayed at the commanding heights of capitalism, but they might decide that these excesses would be better addressed through activism and politics rather than through any timeless rule to be set behind the veil of ignorance.

So far, I have suggested that the founders behind the global veil of ignorance are likely to keep the fundamentals the same. This could be an important revelation for the development of global civics. People sometimes treat the status quo as an arbitrary state of affairs that they need to tolerate and endure. Yet, if this experiment points toward the truth, the current status quo would also likely have been reached through a process of meritocratic deliberation.

However, not all issues are like that. For instance, if I were a founder behind a global veil of ignorance, I would want to institute much more effective guarantees against major risks such as climate change. Most simulations show that business as usual with respect to the climate will soon mean reaching the point of no return, triggering a chain reaction of events with catastrophic impacts on human existence and civilization on Earth. Yet the qualities of the underlying dynamics make climate change an especially difficult challenge. For instance, there is a gap of about thirty years between carbon emissions and the full consequences of those emissions. This long duration between cause and effect weakens motivation for behavioral change. For example, the fact that significant percentages of adults continue to smoke, despite proven health consequences, demonstrates that humans find it difficult to give up immediate gratification to avoid costs deferred thirty years into the future. Furthermore, even if half of the world's population practices prudence and restraint, the lack of cooperation by the other half may still preclude humanity's survival.

Given the high stakes and the difficult nature of the climate change problem, if I were a founder behind the global veil of ignorance, I would want a clear rule to be established. That rule would need to be based on the recognition of the equal rights of all human beings to emit carbon dioxide and other equivalents. This would require determining the maximum safe level for carbon dioxide and its equivalents, and dividing

that level equally among 6.9 billion humans.⁸ Those who want to emit more than their equal and safe share could do so only after establishing a sustainable, verifiable, and measurable sequestering scheme, or after receiving emission credits from others. Advanced societies could acquire emission credits through the provision of clean production, mitigation, and adoption technologies to others, but the basic rule could not be negotiated.⁹ Given the dramatic adjustments that would entail for global economies, founders might choose to institutionalize a meaningful grace period where carbon intensity would be the benchmark instead of per capita emissions.

Humanity dared fate and gambled with its very existence through nuclear arms production for decades during the twentieth century. The contingency of a nuclear holocaust is likely to trigger a reaction among the founders behind the global veil of ignorance. The nuclear arsenals have been reduced in the last two decades, but the noble and rational goal of total nuclear disarmament that was central to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty has still not been realized. Founders are likely to insist on the swift realization of that goal.

A similar risk that those behind the global veil of ignorance are likely to seek guarantees against is genocide. Humans have frequently been subject to this ultimate crime, and the solemn responsibility to protect has equally frequently been abdicated for parochial reasons. This is unlikely to look acceptable behind a veil of ignorance. Thus founders might chose to strengthen the International Criminal Court (ICC), insisting that parties refusing to join the ICC lose some of their sovereign privileges, such as their seat at the UN General Assembly. Furthermore, the founders might seek to address the chronic understaffing of the UN military. This problem is a consequence of the nation-state being the primary unit of allegiance, for in accepting that, we also accept that citizens cannot be compelled to risk life and limb if there is no national interest. Yet national conscription is not the only option for fulfilling the responsibility to protect and to prevent genocide. People have often taken up arms in other countries for their beliefs. The International Brigades that fought in the Spanish Civil War are the most celebrated example, but the practice is older. Therefore the founders might direct the UN to implement a mechanism to accept volunteers for its army, ensure balanced representation

from all global regions so that no particular group dominates the UN army during any given conflict, and train these soldiers to be disciplined during their mission, as there are too many examples of presumed rescuers harassing the very people they are meant to rescue. One can even imagine a setup where not just the UN Security Council but also the UN secretary general or a college of all former secretaries general could endorse a given mission, so that action would not be held hostage to veto by the five permanent members. Whatever risks might be associated with this iconoclastic system would pale in comparison to the opportunity cost of inaction when powerful military nations refuse to get involved in the face of imminent genocide.

One final fundamental issue that is likely to arise behind the global veil of ignorance is economic redistribution. Would the founders behind the global veil of ignorance feel compelled to set rules regarding redistribution, or would they leave this to the actual business of life and politics once the veil is lifted? I suspect that though the founders would likely find comfort in the decreases in some global disparities in recent decades, they would still feel uneasy about the overall size of the existing disparities. When reviewing the current tool kit for mitigating disparities, they would probably not be overly impressed by the track record of traditional overseas development assistance, though *sui generis* programs, such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria, would likely command greater approval and acclaim. Founders also would likely be impressed by the effects of allowing people from poorer countries to reside and work temporarily in advanced economies. Remittances often act as greater multipliers than official development aid and uplift recipient communities more effectively. The issue of remittances and export of services through temporary migration comes under the WTO agenda, and the founders could assign this issue greater attention than it currently receives. However, given the mixed record of much global trade, development, and aid assistance, the founders behind the global veil of ignorance would probably institutionalize a review of disparities and various tools rather than be convinced of the timeless superiority of any one rule or tool.¹⁰

The point of these two thought experiments, of course, is not the brilliance or ineptitude of any particular set of results or answers but rather the process. My goal here is to show that there are some issues worth

grappling with and that this is an inquiry worth pursuing. The similarities in what the two experiments reveal are telling: both experiments point to very analogous successes as well as to similar issues in need of imminent response.

Does Fairness Matter?

Skeptics still can insist that both thought experiments—and global civics in general—presuppose that fairness matters, whereas power, not fairness, matters both in life and in the world. These skeptics can find much in contemporary scholarship to support their perspective. These works frequently assert that all power is hard power and that being loved or respected is no substitute for being feared. The great-power game of nations always continues, they warn us, even when a higher goal or rhetoric is evoked. Superpowers are selfish, arbitrary, and dangerous nations, and they should not be embarrassed to be so or feel constrained by international legitimacy and laws.¹¹ They caution against assuming that the rise of the world’s emerging powers is doing anything to the status of the United States as the sole superpower. Naturally, it would be folly to think that global public opinion is in effect a “second superpower,” or even a crucial factor. Such concerns are like the Lilliputians binding an unsuspecting Gulliver. Anyone harboring such naive views needs to be told that good intentions are at best a distraction and a nuisance, and at worst a recipe for disaster, given their imprudence.¹² Cynics prefer to discount the achievements of transnational normative action, such as abolishing the slave trade or establishing the ICC.

Such cynical views are advanced not only from the hard power center of the international system but, in a fascinating twist, also from the various peripheries of the international system. The latter contingent argues that might makes right, which absolves those without formidable power of any responsibility for solving global problems or for even articulating their potential contributions if something other than the law of the jungle were to prevail. Thus the hubris of the powerful triggers irresponsibility among the not so powerful, which in turn is used by the cynics to argue the need for unadulterated power, given the rampant irresponsibility in the world at large.

I would argue fairness does matter today and will matter more in the future. The BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) and the Next 11 (Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, South Korea, Turkey, and Vietnam) groups of emerging nations are forecast to overtake the Group of Seven countries (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, United Kingdom, and United States). Though this change may not materialize for a very long time, and though such long-term projections are notoriously and predictably difficult, it is nevertheless evident that power disparities are less severe today and are likely to be even less so in the near future. At the same time, the current level of global interdependence and the very nature of the imminent global problems humanity faces have clear repercussions for the constellation of minimum alliances that are necessary to overcome these problems. Climate change is the most obvious case: unless all the major players *and their citizens* willingly and proactively cooperate, it is unlikely that human civilization as we currently know it will survive. It should be abundantly clear to all that a forceful Commodore Perry approach will not secure the proactive and willing cooperation of citizens around the world. Nor will hubris and cynicism encourage witnesses to speak out the next time they observe the plotting of an Abdul Qadeer Khan or an Osama bin Laden. Without a sense of fairness that appeals to many and a corresponding framework of global civics, humanity will not be able navigate the shoals generated by global interdependence and interconnectedness.

The world's architecture of power is not the only vector that is becoming more democratic. The rapid proliferation of transborder broadcasting has enabled us to become increasingly aware of each other's grief and bliss. We are not yet a global village, but we are significantly more aware of each other's predicaments than was the case a century or even a decade ago, and as a result, public opinion has come to matter even in the previously mandarin realm of foreign policy. It also so happens that public opinion around the world is more multilateralist than the views of policymakers. For instance, a recent survey by the organization World Public Opinion posed the choice between "Our nation should consistently follow international law; it is wrong to violate international law, just as it is wrong to violate laws within a country," and "If our government thinks it is not in our nation's interest, it should not feel obliged to

abide by international laws.” In the survey 57 percent of all the people from twenty-four countries chose compliance with international law and 35 percent chose national opting out.¹³ Participants from countries that are often assumed to be unilateralist, such as China, India, and the United States, were in line with the global trend. Seventy-four percent of respondents in China, 49 percent in India, and 69 percent in the United States favored compliance with international laws, whereas 18 percent, 42 percent, and 29 percent, respectively, wanted national opt-outs.

The same survey also showed that people systematically underestimate to what a large extent their own multilateralist preferences are shared by their compatriots, and how alone they believe they are in their support for international law. Forty-eight percent of respondents indicated that compared to the average citizen, they personally were more supportive of consistently abiding by international law; 28 percent said they were less supportive. This “optical illusion” can possibly be explained by the hegemonic discourse of the cynics and may itself present an opportunity for enhanced multilateralism. Cynical policymakers, on the other hand, have a good deal of disdain for these popular preferences for international norms and complain, for example, that “Americans do not want their power raw; it has to be sautéed in the best of causes.”¹⁴ A similar survey has shown that 55 percent of the people in twenty-four countries wanted their governments to be more ready to act cooperatively to achieve mutual gain, as opposed to the 39 percent who felt that their governments tend to be too willing to compromise and are often taken advantage of.¹⁵

As power disparities further decrease in the future, and as larger alliances that are more based on societal preferences become necessary, notions and perceptions of fairness will be central to forging the requisite alliances, making global civics not only a constituent feature of decency but a central part of enlightened self-interest.

Vital Forums

The ideal venue for the conversation about global civics is the university campus. Global challenges, from climate change to nuclear proliferation, have a generational cleavage, and thus there is more at stake for

twenty-year-olds than sixty-year-olds. The previous generation built its networks and assets during a time when nation-states reigned unchallenged. Yet twenty-year-olds must contend with a much more interdependent future, where their well-being depends in part on people who live and work in other countries. Universities offer a unique setting where young people can grapple with new and thorny issues and pursue interconnections beyond what first meets the eye. Furthermore, as a global middle class emerges, university populations are becoming more representative of the myriad points of view on our planet.¹⁶

Liberal arts education aims to equip students with the information and analytical tools to better exercise command over their lives. In a recent commencement speech, Bill Gates expressed dissatisfaction with his education at Harvard, asking why during his time there he did not learn about the vast amount of misery in the world.¹⁷ We would not want future generations to tell us that their university experiences did not prepare them for life in an interdependent world. To be sure, students may well decide that they do not have any responsibilities toward those who are not their compatriots, but this ought to be their conscious, deliberate decision, not an implicit default option.

It also would be a gross mistake to pretend that arriving at a global social contract and a global civics is an easy pursuit with obvious answers. Some have tried to determine the maximum number of people with which one can have a trust-based relationship during a lifetime, and their estimates have coalesced around 150 and 200. Whatever that number is, it is bound to be significantly smaller than the actual number of people we are likely to interact with in our daily lives. If we are a little disoriented and feel thinly stretched, it is not because we are somehow lacking but rather because we are human. If we are a little overwhelmed by potentially being empathic with many more people, that is also perfectly understandable.

Nonetheless, given how interdependent our lives have become on this planet, we cannot avoid some sort of concerted effort to address both our responsibilities to each other on this Earth and our rights as members of the world community. Such responsibilities and rights would constitute the core issues of a global civics. If universities in the twenty-first century do not provide their students with the forums and tools to discuss and

figure out what their responsibilities are to their fellow human beings, and to develop the requisite normative compass for navigating the treacherous waters of global interdependence, then they would be failing in their mission. It may just be that we can never reach a timeless consensus on the exact extent and form of our responsibilities toward each other. Even so, the process of inquiry and debate is bound to be highly beneficial, enlightening, and empowering.

Notes

1. For an audit of existing global governance schemes, see Hakan Altinay, “The State of Global Governance: An Audit,” YaleGlobal (<http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/about/altinay.jsp>).
2. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, rev. ed. (Belknap Press, Harvard University, 1999).
3. There are, of course, other writings by Rawls and other Rawlsians on these issues. For our purposes, the intricacies of that debate are not all that relevant. Two caveats should suffice: I find Rawls’s methodology in *A Theory of Justice* much more interesting than that of his later work, *The Law of Peoples* (Harvard University Press, 2001). I also think that Rawls’s veil of ignorance is too thick, namely, that he does not allow us to possess vital knowledge necessary for thoughtful deliberation. He allows us to know only very general facts about our society, not its economic or social level, culture, or civilization. This seems to me to be too limited and not even necessary for the justice-as-fairness principle to work. Under the global veil of ignorance, we should be allowed to know history—for example, to be able to judge various alternatives.
4. An April 2007 survey by World Public Opinion at the University of Maryland shows that pluralities of Chinese, Indians, and Americans support compliance with adverse WTO rulings as well as the UN’s responsibility to authorize the use of military force to protect people from severe human rights violations, such as genocide, even against the will of the government committing such abuses. See “Publics around the World Say UN Has Responsibility to Protect against Genocide,” April 4, 2007 (www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/btjustice/human_rightsra/340.php?lb=bthr&pnt=340&nid=&id=); “World Public Favors Globalization and Trade but Wants to Protect Environment and Jobs,” April 27, 2007 (www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/btglobalizationtradera/349.php?nid=&id=&pnt=349&lb=btgl).

5. See James B. Davies and others, “The World Distribution of Household Wealth,” Discussion Paper, World Institute for Development Economics Research, United Nations University, 2008 (www.wider.unu.edu/stc/repec/pdfs/rp2008/dp2008-03.pdf). The same study estimates the global wealth Gini coefficient as 0.892. The Boston Consulting Group’s *Global Wealth 2010* report estimates that 0.1 percent of global households have 21 percent of global wealth, and 0.8 percent of global households own 38 percent of global assets. See Jorge Becerra and others, *Global Wealth 2010: Regaining Lost Ground: Resurgent Markets and New Opportunities* (Boston Consulting Group, June 2010). In terms of income, the top 10 percent is estimated to get half of global income. See Branko Milanovic, “Global Income Inequality: What It Is and Why It Matters,” Working Paper, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2006 (www.un.org/esa/desa/papers/2006/wp26_2006.pdf). In chapter 4 of this volume, Trevor Manuel and Edgar Pieterse rightfully ask whether there is any level of inequality that human society may find unacceptable.

6. See table 11.1, “World Inequality in Historical Perspective,” in Branko Milanovic, *Worlds Apart: Measuring International Global Inequality* (Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 142.

7. Income inequality between countries has continued to increase since 1950. Income inequality within individual countries has also increased in the case of several countries. Yet inequality between all the households in the world has not increased, and this is likely to be the key indicator that the founders behind the global veil of ignorance would follow most attentively.

8. While this formula of equal per capita emissions may initially seem far fetched, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and the Indian government have used it in the past. See <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/merkel-leads-climate-change>.

9. Although the issue of intergenerational and international burden sharing receives most of the attention, the issue of technological advance is even more important. Capping average temperature increase at 2 degrees Celsius would require decreasing global emissions from their current annual level of about forty gigatons of CO₂ equivalents down to twenty gigatons. This would need to happen at a time of continued population and economic growth, and cannot be achieved without multiple technological breakthroughs.

10. For a recent review of available policy options, see Jessica Cohen and William Easterly, *What Works in Development: Thinking Big and Thinking Small* (Brookings, 2009). For an interesting methodology for assessing options—albeit with disappointing results—see Bjorn Lomborg, *Global Crises, Global Solutions* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

11. Robert Kagan makes an unabashed defense of this argument in *Dangerous Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).

12. For examples of dismissive treatment of transnational movements, see two articles by Walter Russell Mead, “The Death of Global Warming,” *American Interest Online*, February 1, 2010 (<http://blogs.the-american-interest.com/wrm/2010/02/01/the-death-of-global-warming>), and “Blowing Hot and Cold,” *American Interest Online*, October 17, 2009 (<http://blogs.the-american-interest.com/wrm/2009/10/17/blowing-hot-and-cold>). However, not everyone is so dismissive of transnational movements. The National Intelligence Council has considered a scenario where nongovernmental organizations increase in number and strength due to the capacity of individuals and groups to affiliate with each other via the Internet, and consequently UN member states feel compelled to allocate to nongovernmental organizations twenty seats at the UN General Assembly with the same voting rights as nation-states. See National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2025* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 2008), p. 91.

13. World Public Opinion, “World Public Opinion on International Law and the World Court,” November 2009 (www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/nov09/WPO_IntlLaw_Nov09_quaire.pdf).

14. Leslie Gelb, *Power Rules* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), p. 72. In this book that purports to rescue American foreign policy, there is an astonishing and total neglect of the climate change issue.

15. World Public Opinion, “World Public Opinion on International Cooperation,” December 2009 (www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/dec09/WPO_Cooperation_Dec09_quaire.pdf).

16. A recent Brookings study forecasts the global middle class increasing from 1.8 billion in 2010 to 5 billion in 2030. See Homi Kharas and Geoffrey Gertz, “The New Global Middle Class : A Cross-Over from West to East,” March 2010 (www.brookings.edu/~/media/Files/rc/papers/2010/03_china_middle_class_kharas/03_china_middle_class_kharas.pdf).

17. Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, “Bill Gates—2007 Harvard Commencement,” June 6, 2007 (www.gatesfoundation.org/speeches-commentary/Pages/bill-gates-2007-harvard-commencement.aspx).