Justice, Community and Dialogue in International Relations

RICHARD SHAPCOTT

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Shapcott investigates the question of justice in a culturally diverse world, asking if it is possible to conceive of a universal or cosmopolitan community in which justice to difference is achieved. Justice to difference is possible, according to Shapcott, by recognising the particular manner in which different humans identify themselves. Such recognition is most successfully accomplished through acts of communication and, in particular, conversation. The account of understanding developed by H. G. Gadamer provides a valuable way forward in this field. The philosophical hermeneutic account of conversation allows for the development of a level of cosmopolitan solidarity that is both 'thin' and universal, and which helps to provide a more just resolution of the tension between the values of community and difference.

RICHARD SHAPCOTT is Lecturer in International Relations, Deakin University. His research interests lie in international relations theory, international ethics and the hermeneutic philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer.

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Various sections of this book have also appeared, in slightly different formats, in the following publications: 'Solidarism and After: Global Governance, International Society and the Normative "Turn" in International Relations', *Pacifica Review*, vol. 12, no. 2, June 2000; 'Beyond the Cosmopolitan/Communitarian Divide: Justice, Ethics and Community in International Relations', in J. S. Fritz and M. Lensu (eds.), *Value Pluralism, Normative Theory and International Relations*, London: Macmillan, 2000; 'Conversation and Coexistence: Gadamer and the Interpretation of International Society', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Spring 1994, vol. 23, no. 1.

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Introduction

> Insofar as hermeneutics is more than a theory of the human sciences, it also has the human situation in the world in its entirety in view. Thus it must be possible to include different cultures, religions, and so on, and their relations. What is at issue here is that when something other or different is understood, then we must also concede something, yield – in certain limits – to the truth of the other. That is the essence, the soul of my hermeneutics: to understand someone else is to see the justice, the truth, of their position. And this is what transforms us. And if we then have to become part of a new world civilisation, if this is our task then we shall need a philosophy which is similar to my hermeneutics: a philosophy which teaches us to see the justification for the other's point of view and which thus makes us doubt our own.[1]
>
> No one can say what will become of our civilization when it has really met different civilisations by means other than the shock of conquest and domination. But we have to admit that this encounter has not yet taken place at the level of an authentic dialogue. That is why we are in a kind of lull or interregnum in which we can no longer practice the dogmatism of a single truth and in which we are not yet capable of conquering the scepticism into which we have stepped.[2]

This book faces an impossible task and suggests an impossible solution. It investigates the question of justice in a culturally diverse world and asks: is it possible to conceive of a universal or cosmopolitan community in which justice to difference is achieved? In order to answer this question it is necessary to investigate what may count as a just relationship

[1] H. G. Gadamer, 'Interview: The 1920s, 1930s and the Present: National Socialism, German History and German Culture', pp. 135–53, in D. Misgeld and G. Nicholson, *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry and History* (Albany: SUNY, 1992), p. 152.
[2] P. Ricoeur, *History and Truth* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966), p. 283.

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to 'otherness' or 'difference'. These questions are part of an impossible task for several reasons: the term community itself implies a collectivity exhibiting a high degree of homogeneity of identity and consensus among its members and, therefore, a lack of 'difference' between them. A universal community, one that in principle includes all members of the species, must by virtue of being a community, exclude or deny important differences amongst its members. The idea of a universal community suggests that underlying apparent differences of identity there exists an essential unity. Such a statement itself denies the possibility of truly radical 'difference'. For this reason this book and its subject are guided by a tension between the desire for community and the recognition of difference.

The impossible solution to the task presented here originates in the work of H. G. Gadamer and the tradition of hermeneutics. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics arises from a tradition of thought which emphasises the possibility for understanding across both temporal and linguistic distances. The hermeneutic interest in understanding arises from the encounter between the familiar and the strange, usually in the form of historical texts. The primary argument presented here is that the account of understanding developed by Gadamer in *Truth and Method*[3] provides the basis for a conceptualisation of a cosmopolitanism more able to accommodate the tension between community and difference in a productive manner.

While the tension between community and difference is expressed differently according to the context both this problematic, and testimony to the impossibility of resolving it, can be witnessed throughout all of the positions discussed in this investigation. Be it as a tension between equality and identity, cosmopolitanism and communitarianism, abstract and concrete otherness, limitation and legislation, universalism and particularism or citizenship and humanity, this problem characterises all discussions of moral life in international relations (IR). Of course this dilemma goes well beyond the terms employed in this investigation and can rightly be understood to have characterised almost all western thought about politics and society. It is this same tension which informs the discourses of citizenship and statehood, rights and obligations, duties and freedoms. This book restricts itself, with some minor exceptions, to an examination and assessment of the resolutions offered by different theories of IR. It argues that while certain approaches

[3] H. G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd edn (trans. J. Weinsheimer and D. Marshall), (London: Sheed and Ward, 1989).

provide better resolutions than others none escapes the tension entirely, including the 'solution' suggested by philosophical hermeneutics. For this reason the development of an approach informed by philosophical hermeneutics should be understood as a contribution to the effort to better accommodate this tension rather than a claim to have finally resolved it.

The meaning of community

The identification of a tension between the values of community and difference raises the possibility of doubt as to the accuracy of the term 'community' to describe the goal being pursued here. However, because what is being attempted here is a reconceptualisation of community which captures this tension, the term community is employed in the loosest possible sense. Community here refers to the act of inclusion in the 'moral world'. It refers to the range of subjects who are included within moral calculations or within the range of moral considerateness. This definition is loose in the sense that it is not restricted to those united by common beliefs, religion, culture or political institutions. The advantage of formulating community in this way is that emphasis is placed on the moral realm *per se* rather than any particular understanding of morality. It is adopted here because it is the nature of community, morality and justice in the absence of commonly held norms or normative discourse that is the focus of this investigation. This definition both allows for and problematises the assumption that morality and justice can only be practised within a shared discourse. It allows for the fact that individuals and societies can and do understand themselves as having moral obligations and duties to those who do not necessarily belong to their 'group' and for the possibility of moral action where norms and values are either openly in dispute or not shared, this conception therefore does not restrict the scope of moral action to the like-minded community. Most importantly it suggests that the act of engaging in conversation is an act of community and solidarity that extends the range of moral inclusion. Understanding community in this fashion is central to the task of developing a cosmopolitan community that achieves justice to difference, because this community itself is instantiated in a conversation between diverse positions, agents and discourses. It is important to note that underlying the account presented here is the loosely Kantian understanding that morality consists fundamentally, but not exclusively, of treating other humans as equals, or ends in themselves. It is for this reason that the task of pursuing both moral community and

justice are intertwined in this book: inclusion can only be moral if it is just.

What this book does and does not do

Before proceeding with the argument it is necessary to clarify some key terms and concepts and to set out exactly what it is this argument seeks to do and not do. The argument in this book should be understood as an attempt to think philosophically about certain moral dimensions of international politics. It does not provide a defence of the normative project itself. Such a defence has been made, rather conclusively I think, by more capable authors. Andrew Linklater, Mervyn Frost, Charles Beitz, Stanley Hoffman are just a few of those who have demonstrated the centrality of moral and ethical concerns to international relations. Those who seek more elaborate discussion of this project need go no further than the works of these authors (cited in chapters 1 and 2).

This book engages in a largely philosophical discussion regarding the conception of a cosmopolitan community and the nature of good dialogue. It does not attempt a substantive defence of the principles of inclusion, universality and the value of 'difference'. The discussion which follows should be understood as one largely occurring within the cosmopolitan tradition. It does not seek to defend the ideals of universal equality nor cosmopolitan community as such. Rather it assumes, for the purposes of argument that these are 'goods' which have been successfully defended elsewhere. The argument does problematise these concepts and offer some alternative interpretations of them.

The language of the discussion is at times necessarily abstract. While the final chapter engages with some less abstract questions and begins to investigate the implications of the philosophical positions developed in the earlier chapters there is relatively little in the way of concrete policy advice, prescription or analysis of specific moral problems such as humanitarian intervention. This is not a result of an in-principle refusal to engage with this level, nor still less a belief that philosophical reflection should be unsullied by the 'real world'. Rather, it stems from a belief that before 'real' moral and ethical problems can be adequately addressed it is essential to be clear about the issues at stake as well as their possible solutions. This being the case, this book is an attempt to think through the meanings of justice, morality, community and dialogue and their relationship to each other. Incorporating the results of this reflection into any attempt to address the myriad concrete ethical and moral issues characterising the international realm can only take

place once the philosophical ground work has been undertaken. That said, as Gadamer and others emphasise, the meaning of the concepts explored here are incomplete as long as they remain exclusively in the abstract realm. Therefore this book should be seen as merely the first step along the way of developing a thin cosmopolitanism informed by philosophical hermeneutics.

The moral problematique of international relations and the problem of community

Before this argument can proceed it is first necessary to outline the developments in normative theorising in international relations which have led to the posing of the questions with which this study is concerned. Recent years have seen a small but significant expansion of interest in what can broadly be called normative IR theory.[4] The literature involved in this expansion covers a wide variety of normative, theoretical and methodological approaches. Critical theory, constitutive theory, constructivism, international political economy and others have all contributed to a transformation of how international relations as a whole approaches normative issues. Not all of this literature has been exclusively concerned with debating moral issues and the meaning of justice but most of it has sought to include normative reflection of some sort or another in its ambit, whether it be on the normative orientation of theory itself, the role of norms in constituting and changing the international realm, or possibilities for international justice. Nonetheless there is still a relative dearth of genuine normative reflection within the discipline as a whole. With some notable exceptions IR as a discipline steers clear of directly posing the difficult questions normally associated with political theory and moral philosophy; such as 'What is the good life?', 'How shall we live?', 'What is a just society?' The current work is an attempt, amongst other things, to help redress this imbalance and to erode the divide between IR and other branches of the humanities.

Despite the relatively recent expansion of moral reflection evidenced in the publications of Linklater, Hutchings, Frost, Cochran, Beitz, Brown and Campbell, the presence of the questions which concern this volume can be identified in most of the central works of the discipline.

[4] As Molly Cochran has recently reminded us, all theory is normative theory. See M. Cochran, *Normative Theory in International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Indeed it is possible to follow Linklater's lead and argue that almost all theorising about international relations has at its heart the question of community.[5] According to Linklater, following Martin Wight, the three dominant traditions of Realism, Rationalism and Revolutionism (or Idealism) identify the determination of the boundaries of moral obligations in the absence of a universal state or universal moral community as one of the central problems of IR. The question of community is at the heart of international relations to the degree that most IR theory addresses or refers to either or both of the following questions: 'What are the possibilities for moral community beyond the state?', and 'What are the qualities and characteristics of any such community?' Indeed the dominant question addressed by most studies of international relations relates to the obstacles and possibilities for a transformation of international politics arising from a war-prone system of independent political communities, usually nation-states, into something less war-prone. For instance, the central question identified by Waltz in *Theory of International Politics*[6] is 'How is it possible to explain the reproduction of the anarchic system of states?' In other words what are the conditions that restrict the transformation of political community? Viewed in this light, the realist account of the international system stresses those forces which encourage particularity and the restriction of moral duties and obligations to the state-based community.

In contrast to realists, rationalists such as Hedley Bull suggest that not all moral ties stop at the state border. They argue that states have been able to commit themselves to international principles of order and coexistence which constitute a minimal international moral order. In this way, states admit to a limited and partial recognition of human community mediated through a society in which states, not individuals, are the members. Such a reading of the Rationalist school and of the meaning of international society is of course contested. But certain comments made by Hedley Bull suggesting that the society of states can only be judged according to how well it serves the human species, who are its ultimate moral referents, indicate the way in which the society of states mediates relations between the nascent community of humankind.[7] Linklater argues that the existence of such a community of states might provide the grounds upon which moral community may be developed even

[5] A. Linklater, 'The Problem of Community in International Relations', *Alternatives*, 15 (1990), 135–53.
[6] K. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading: Addison Wesley, 1979).
[7] H. Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (London: Macmillan, 1977).

further. In this reading the principles of coexistence evident in theories of international society are testament to the possibility of overcoming those processes identified by Realism as inhibiting the expansion of community.[8]

The achievement of a universal community is the primary defining aim for Revolutionists. The revolutionist and idealist traditions assert the primacy of the 'latent' universal community of humankind and argue that this community requires the transformation of the states-system into a cosmopolitan order. Cosmopolitanism refers to a form of moral and political community characterised by laws which are universal. The central proposition of cosmopolitanism as a moral and political doctrine is that humans can and should form a universal (that is global) moral community. Cosmopolitans argue that in addition to being members of our national and local communities we also belong to the human community. The task facing cosmopolitans, idealists and revolutionists is to transform the international realm and to bring it into line with moral law.

It is also true that culture, cultural difference and the obstacles to developing more inclusive communities presented by them have also been a concern for thinkers in each of these traditions. Most discourses of IR have cited the presence of radical cultural difference as one of the principal obstacles to the development of cosmopolitan tendencies in the states-system. For example, one of the standard arguments attributed to Realism is that the diversity of moral standards in different states contributes to the conflict accompanying the international anarchy and to the impossibility of moving beyond an international state of nature.[9] Realism suggests that genuinely morally motivated action remains impossible because the plurality of different standards rules out any possible agreement on what constitutes either the 'right' or the 'good' in the international realm. Furthermore, the Realists argue that any aspiration to cosmopolitanism, or any claim to be acting for the good of the species, is merely a mask, conscious or not, for the self-interest of particular states. In this account cosmopolitanism is seen both as a lie and one that is hostile to particular cultural differences. Traditionally, this account has led to the endorsement of a moral bifurcation, whereby

[8] See A. Linklater, *Beyond Realism and Marxism: Critical Theory and International Relations*, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 1990).

[9] See the discussions in E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years Crisis* (London: Macmillan, 1939) and H. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954).

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