

**POLITICAL IDEALS
AFTER THE ‘MODERNISM VERSUS POSTMODERNISM’
DIVIDE: LOCAL ATTACHMENT AND GLOBAL OBLIGATION**

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Abstract. *Political thought has consistently dealt with particularist and universalist allegiance and ideality. Several — isms, chief among them, patriotism, communitarianism, cosmopolitanism, internationalism have been produced from various treatments of particularism and universalism. In recent decades the preoccupation with the ‘modernism versus postmodernism’ divide has set the stage for re-considerations of diverse commitments that emanate from local and global allegiance. After briefly explaining particularist and universalist political ideality, this article raises the claim that epochal debates such as the ‘modernism versus postmodernism’ offer (even if in retrospect) a new discursive context for framing local attachment and global obligation. To substantiate this claim, the article employs the political issue of material aid and redistribution of wealth. It concludes with some indicative remarks concerning how ambivalences of the particular and the universal can be investigated through a theory of justice that takes into account modern and postmodern sensibilities.*

Keywords: *modernity, postmodernity, particularism, universalism, Eurocentrism, liberalism, communitarianism.*

Introduction

The last decades of the 20th century have philosophically been marked by a spirited debate concerning the self-understanding of the era and the direction that, amongst other things, political thought should take. The debate revolved around modernism and postmodernism, and was destined to influence the first decade of the new millennium even if, by now, the debate has ceased to be as virulent and vivid as it was three decades ago. The political thinking of our times still relies on many of the terms, tenets, new — isms, tendencies and polemics that the academic ‘warfare’ surrounding the ‘modernism versus postmodernism’ dispute has generated or entrenched.

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This article does not aim to chart all the developments in political theory that can be associated with this debate, much less to exhaust the stakes of that debate descriptively or to explore mediating, transmodern options. It aims rather to narrow its overview down to those aspects of the debate that help us have a better grasp of where we stand today concerning particularist and universalist political ideals in relation to local attachment and global obligation. To do so, the article (a) will first explain what is involved in particularist and universalist political ideals and why there is tension between them; and then (b) it will show how the 'modern versus postmodern' divide has set the stage for much of what passes now as relevant treatment of the ideals in question. This will prepare the ground (c) for a discussion of current theorizations of political ideality, shedding light on prospects for conceiving a different relation between particularity and universality. The issue of global aid and redistribution of wealth will serve as an example of a case of tension between local attachment and global obligation. The article proposes that reformulations of particularity and universality may provide political thought with new conceptual tools for balancing out globality and locality in a less oppositional relation of set and subset that may shed new light on issues related to local attachment and global obligation.

(a) *Particularist versus Universalist Ideals*

Particularist ideals reflect allegiance to specific and context-bound collectivities, and require the active commitment of their members. The members of a collectivity view their membership as belonging to a community (which can be local or virtual but, in any case, imaginary¹). Such a belonging forms constitutive aspects of the self whose multiple identities have been shaped precisely by membership in various particular collectivities. Particularist ideals reflecting such a sense of belonging or affect (and its binding and bonding effect) ultimately concern visions of how such collective identities or configurations should be preserved, enriched, and promoted² in a world of various particularist (and at times competing or conflicting) attachments that clamour for a person's response, engagement or attention. To give some examples, one may feel strongly as a feminist the desire to further the interests of women throughout the world and combat — to one's power — women's oppression thriving in contexts of patriarchal hegemony and social conditions of deprivation and misfortune. In her professional life she may also feel a committed member of her work community — a community which may extend well beyond the borders of her own geographical locality. As a citizen of a specific country-state she may be concerned with its legal-political good order and strive for its flourishing. And this can be associated with all the aspects that compose our multiple identities varying only (or at least principally) according to the voluntary or involuntary character of membership (for instance, membership in a professional

¹ See, for instance, B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, London: Verso, 2002.

² See, C. Taylor, 'Why Democracy Needs Patriotism'. In Cohen, J. and Nussbaum, M. (Eds). *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*. Boston: Beacon, 1996.

collectivity is surely more voluntary than, say, membership in a specific ethnic group).

Universalist political ideals, by contrast, have typically been framed with reference to the common human nature.³ Attributing a legitimate force to a universally manifested reason, many political philosophers⁴ promoted all encompassing visions of humanism, cosmopolitanism, developmentalism, internationalism and progressivism — visions that aspired to express the commonality of the rational human being in space and time and to ground in it their hope for a better life and world. In the case of universalist ideals, participation is neither optional nor conditional on affect or voluntary membership. It is assumed that membership is automatic, so to speak, only by virtue of one's being a human. By dint of this universality and absolute inclusion, people are thought entitled to all the rights, prerogatives and benefits that the exception-less application of the ideal may bring along. But, at the same time, this also means that, on the basis of universalist assumptions, all people are judged with the same rational yardstick and that more or less the same expectations are raised quite uniformly from all people. The 'common' of the 'common human nature' foundation of universalist ideality evokes a unity of reason despite various manifestations and a uniform character of human political thought and action.

(b) *The Modern versus Postmodern Framework*

The 'modern versus postmodern debate' and the corresponding divide that emerged in the second half of the 20th century reflected and simultaneously re-negotiated the foundations of particularist and universalist ideality. Typically, for some political thinkers, Nietzschean perspectivalism prepared the ground for what has now come to be affirmed as the diversity and fragmentation that makes a particularist attachment more defensible than universalist commitment. In this context, the major *Ur*-opponent has been Hegel whose emphasis on the system and on wholeness was taken as reflecting tendencies to universalization and an ideality of a non-differentiated unity. Equidistant from Hegel and Nietzsche, Habermas has, as is well-known, taken issue with a blanket critique of universalism and rationality and argued that modernity engulfed an incomplete Enlightenment project full of counterfactual possibilities.⁵ Far from being passé, reason as a legitimating force of human thought and action has, for Habermas, had a universalist scope promising the critique of modern failures by means of reason itself — a reason evident in the force of the better argument that unmasks distortions of communication, performs *Ideologiekritik* and secures that dialogue will take an all-inclusive character. In this sense, the Habermasian line of thought secured that even after the modernism versus postmodernism debates, what Viorella

³ See, M. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2000.

⁴ For a discussion of some of them, see S. Toulmin, *Cosmopolis*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992.

⁵ J. Habermas, 'Modernity versus Postmodernity' *New German Critique* 22 (1981): 3-14, p. 4.

Manolache describes as the 'intimate bond between *modernity* and *rationality*' will continue to be set against 'the project of the *postmodern thinking* which aims a certain interruption, a separation from the political modern'.⁶

In contrast to Habermas, as J.-F. Lyotard famously described it,⁷ postmodern incredulity toward meta-narratives questioned the legitimating role of universal reason, exposed its secret complicities and displayed the bankruptcy of related Shibboleths of modernity such truth, justice, emancipation, and disinterestedness. Though the partisanship of reason (rather than its context-transcendence) had not been a philosophical assumption exclusive to postmodern thought,⁸ it appeared that the latter could utilize it more effectively in order to deal a serious blow on modern adherents to the idea of a rationality unaffected by space and time or non-biased by one's particular perspective or particularist attachment. The extent to which the 'modern vs postmodern' debate (and divide) revolved around legitimacy, reason, and particular narratives versus universalist narratives has been well-documented,⁹ and Richard Rorty's¹⁰ discussion of the best-known protagonists, namely, Habermas and Lyotard, and of their contention remains not only historically interesting but also highly informative and illuminating about the current reverberation of those concerns. Therefore, after this rough sketch, there is no need to delve more into the main stakes; rather, it is more important directly to explore the new conceptual and philosophical landscape that the debate created for political particularist and universalist ideality.

From Enlightenment onwards, modern thought sought to acknowledge attachment to particular communities and the significance this had for respecting a citizen's rights, promoting religious tolerance and gradually allowing the emancipation of women and other oppressed groups. Group membership was thought constitutive of one's identity and fulfilled existence, ranging from participation in newly formed nation-states to entitlement of rights on grounds of one's belonging to a specific group such as women. Various discursive differences aside, modernity converged in philosophies supporting particularist attachment as an enabling and often even inescapable immersion in a culture or social configuration that raised legitimate demands of allegiance on its members and of respect on the part of outsiders. In terms of social imaginary this often meant that membership in particular groups was so strongly felt that the limits of the community seemed to be the limits of one's world; in such cases, one's existence was thought as fully accounted for through one's belonging in a community: perhaps no other saying is more telling than that of Joseph de Maistre who claimed that he had seen many Frenchmen but never a Man.¹¹

⁶ V. Manolache, 'The Philosophical and Political Profile of *Homo Posthistoricus*'. *Romanian Review of Political Sciences and International Relations* IX, 2 (2012): 59-71, p. 65.

⁷ L. Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984.

⁸ See, for instance, Peter Dews's analyses in P. Dews, *The Limits of Disenchantment*. London: Verso, 1995.

⁹ See for instance, C. Norris, *The Truth about Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 14-24, and *Truth and Ethics of Criticism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp.11-15, 25-27, 49, 54, 107-8.

¹⁰ R. Rorty, 'Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity'. *Praxis International* 4, 1 (1984): 32-44.

¹¹ M. Hechter, 'Towards a theory of ethnic change'. *Politics & Society* 2, 1(1971): 21-45.

This appeal to visible corporeality as demarcation of political membership at odds with abstract claims to universality was as strong a trend in modernity as its rival ideal of a cosmopolitan right. As Manolache writes, ‘in the context in which the corpus remains an ambivalent being, bearing both obedience to the sovereign power as well as individual freedom, the new centrality of the body would coincide to a privileged position (Descartes, Newton, Leibniz and Spinoza) or to the central metaphor of political community (Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau)’.¹² Yet, paradoxically, what is left of modernism is equally a powerful legacy of universalist ideality that is felt as much in post-Kantian, continental political persuasions (from Habermas down to Alain Badiou’s discussion of Pauline universality¹³) as in political liberalism (owing to John Rawls a notion of universalizable public reason¹⁴) or in cosmopolitan egalitarian liberalism.¹⁵ But, after crucial debates and despite the resilience of various divides along those lines, a postmodern problematization of the ‘common’ of community and of the uni — of universalism that unmasks secret complicities of developmentalism,¹⁶ Eurocentric internationalism and humanism¹⁷ in colonial operations and in other forms of discrimination, violence, exploitation etc blocks any pretenses of ‘innocence’ that leave modern categories or — isms unaffected. Nevertheless, postmodernism is fraught with its own ambivalences, paradoxes and contradictions. Hence, ‘the major categorical oppositions, on which modernism was based: right/left; public/private; absolutism/democracy’,¹⁸ continue to frame much of political thought even when, in some cases of political philosophy, they set the pace of efforts to overcoming bipolar reasoning and mediating between binary oppositions such as the particularism versus universalism that preoccupies us here. All in all, it is important that the aftermath of the modern-postmodern contention creates new sites for exploring the particular and the universal in awareness of ruptures, discontinuities, complicities, old failures and new challenges.

(c) *Material Aid and Redistribution of Wealth*

To illustrate how all this may work as a background to dealing with topics framed by the particularist versus universalist ideality, let us now use as our focal point the specific political issue of material aid and redistribution. This topic will help us theorize some politically enabling as well as disabling new givens that should mobilize a more critical concern on the part of theorists exploring such issues and working within the framework of various disciplines — chief among

¹² V. Manolache, ‘Philosophical — Political Reflexions And (Pre)Texts of Biopolitics’. *Romanian Review of Political Sciences and International Relations* X, 1 (2013): 69-78, p. 73.

¹³ A. Badiou, *Saint-Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*. Trans. R. Brassier. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.

¹⁴ J. Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.

¹⁵ C. R. Beitz, (1999). ‘Social and Cosmopolitan Liberalism’. *International Affairs*, 75, 3 (1999): 515-529.

See, also, T. Pogge, ‘Cosmopolitanism and Sovereignty’. *Ethics* 103, 1 (1992): 48-75.

¹⁶ E. Dussel, ‘Eurocentrism and Modernity’. *Boundary 2*, 20, 3 (1993): 65-76.

¹⁷ P. Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* Abingdon: Routledge, 2004.

¹⁸ Manolache, ‘Philosophical — Political Reflexions And (Pre)Texts of Biopolitics’, p. 74.

them political philosophy, political science, international relations and European Studies.

Some liberal theories of justice exclude material aid and redistribution of wealth from their province. They do so for various reasons, some of which reflect the 'particularist versus universalist ideality' contention. For instance, many such theories involve the assumption that there is only domestic justice rather than global;¹⁹ the particular meaning that this assumption takes depends on implicit theorizations and commitments to universalist obligation and particularist attachment. It is often argued that, apart from the measures of international right securing sovereignty and non-interference, justice operates properly only within the confines of the state. For instance, the Rawlsian political liberalism²⁰ that sees justice to citizens as a domestic affair (a theory that Beitz rightly combats) can be described as particularist liberalism in this respect. We may take issue with the conclusion that helping compatriots has moral priority over helping remote others and expose this idea as tacitly ethnocentric and ethically questionable. Still, despite the fact that current accounts of cosmopolitanism, e.g. the egalitarian one, do not assume this priority, they also require reformulation if they are to frame redistribution in a more sensitive and just way. Reflecting lessons learned from the 'modern versus postmodern' we may re-approach the rigid distinction and neat categorization of the particular and the universal in order to show how they can make common cause in becoming mutual correctives and directives on grounds authorized by a richer sense of justice.

Let me first summarize the current treatments of the redistribution problem within such a context. As C. H. Wellman²¹ explains, egalitarian universalists 'deny that there is anything special about being fellow citizens and thus urge us to recognize that we are obligated to do much more to help the poor in other countries'. Libertarians reach the similar conclusion 'that our fellow citizens enjoy no special standing'; but they go much further, and into dangerous paths, when they relativize the particularist commitment to such an extent as to argue 'that the welfare state is unjustified'. According to Wellman, 'much more popular than either of these two views' is the position that privileges particularist attachment against any claims to universalist obligation. On this view, 'we have only minimal samaritan responsibilities to foreigners but have much more robust obligations to assist compatriots'.²² This particularist position is a morally suspect overgeneralization that reflects the worst sides of both modernism and postmodernism. It reflects the modern sense of particularism as demarcating a narrow moral (rather than ethical) discourse of duties and obligations at the expense of a broader notion of ethical responsibility. And it retains the sweeping postmodern negativity toward universality that narrows ethical discourse to a localized sense of ethical responsibility ignoring the value of moral and legal notions of international right at constant risk of being

¹⁹ T. Nagel, 'The problem of global justice', *Philosophy & public affairs* 33.2 (2005): 113-147.

²⁰ J. Rawls, *Collected Papers*. Ed. S. Freeman. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999.

²¹ Wellman, C. H. (2000). 'Relational Facts in Liberal Political Theory: Is There Magic in the Pronoun "My"?' *Ethics* 110: 537-562.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 543-4.

trampled over by global *Realpolitik*. Although there are indeed many cases where special responsibility is owed to compatriots and such cases have to be more clearly spelled out and categorized in political theory,²³ this cannot and should not be elevated to a maxim of international action. In doing the latter, theory reflects a narrow Occidental sense of priorities, a partial interpretation of world history or politics and a mistaken normative frame of what counts as material aid.

Apparently, the debate over such issues has shifted towards whether liberals can promote the supposedly self-evident idea that redistribution of wealth must favor compatriots without succumbing to communitarian associativist arguments.²⁴ For communitarians, the duty to our compatriots has priority *per se* and functions not as motivational but rather as a purely moral reason for restricting redistribution to the community. Associativism claims that we have special duties to our particular community exclusively for relational reasons, i.e. because we are consociates and this, in itself, has moral significance without any further justification. Liberalism, and I am using Wellman's terminology here,²⁵ opts for reductionism, meaning that a relation should never be presented as an ultimate justification. It should be reduced to maxims that go beyond the relation itself and have a more universalist quality.

The liberalist reductionist position is usually coupled with universalism, whereas the communitarian associativist position is depicted as particularist. I believe that both positions suffer from ethnocentrism but, prior to discussing why, I shall explain why the associativist versus reductionist opposition presents us with a pseudo-dilemma. In rejecting associativism, liberalists overlook that a relation may indeed function as an argument that is *morally irreducible* without assuming that this move is not further *analyzable* as a concept. For instance, that I help someone because she is my compatriot, for some may operate as a sustained moral reason. But this does not imply a break with descriptive accounts about why one endorses this moral standpoint. What is significant is the fundamental role this plays in that person's morality; that role is irreducible to other moral justifications albeit easily explainable in other descriptive terms with normative implications.²⁶ Similarly, a liberal who maintains that compatriots should be favored in redistribution answers the question 'why help X' in a way that is similar to the associativist's response: 'because X is my compatriot'. What makes the difference between them is that the liberal will employ a different descriptive account in order to explain why the patriotic relation enjoys here this privileged moral status. The communitarian will argue that she helps compatriots because they are compatriots *and* that is morally significant because it is unethical to neglect the near and dear. The liberal will argue that she helps compatriots because they are compatriots *and* not helping them would result in fundamental

²³ For my own suggestions along such lines, see, for instance, M. Papastephanou, *Thinking Differently About Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Eccentricity and a Globalized World*. Boulder: Paradigm, 2012.

²⁴ Wellman, 'Relational Facts in Liberal Political Theory'.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ And if they had to analyze it they would say that this is how they grew up to believe, i.e. they would give a further cultural rather than moral explanation.

inequalities and inability to exercise rights within the political formation itself. The descriptive plane (i.e. a conceptual analysis of the underlying normativity) may vary but eventually both sides affirm the same position. As Wellman writes,²⁷ proponents of associativism and reductionism 'can agree that compatriots have special duties toward one another'²⁸ — duties that they do not have toward others. This will also be shown indirectly by the exposition of the ethnocentrism that is implicit in the example of redistributive responsibilities following presently. Ultimately, what this type of liberalism (one that is termed 'social' and contrasted to 'cosmopolitan' by Beitz)²⁹ wishes to avoid is only the legitimization of ethically undesirable conclusions through the moral significance of a relation. Still, even cosmopolitan liberalists who, according to Beitz, treat the problem of international justice as one of fairness to persons rather than collectivities concede at times the existence of special duties to compatriots on grounds of proximity.³⁰ Thus, by converging with their opponents on the same conclusion, many liberalists are equally susceptible to the charge that they hold an ethically undesirable and ethnocentric position.

The particularist, unqualified priority to local obligations is ethnocentric, first and foremost, because it views redistribution and material aid mainly in terms of charity, placing the West in a morally and pragmatically superior position, that is, in the position of the one who can, and at times does, provide the most appropriate and effective assistance. Thus, rights and duties do not go beyond borders and aid becomes supererogatory. Of course, even some universalist (rather than particularist) versions of liberalism such as Nussbaum's acclaimed defense of the duty of material aid³¹ seem to depict it as an act of benevolence and charity rather than as a moral obligation deriving from justice. As I see it, the reason why the issue of justice has not arisen within some approaches or is not radical enough in others³² which also deal with material aid or redistribution is the neglect of the historical dimension in cross-cultural encounters and the related entanglement³³ of nations. This neglect of history in favor of spatiality has been attributed to postmodern theory

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 560.

²⁸ In fact, both positions contribute to the same since there is a special set of responsibilities that emanates from the entanglement of people within a territory in situations that raise questions of justice. But there are responsibilities that derive from the special relation that patriotism entails and other that come from the principle of humanity. All of them may operate in patriotism as well as cosmopolitanism. The difference lies in the focus.

²⁹ Beitz, 'Social and Cosmopolitan Liberalism', p. 515.

³⁰ For instance, Nussbaum writes that 'politics, like child care, will be poorly done if each thinks herself equally responsible for all, rather than giving the immediate surroundings special care' Cited by T. Erskine, "'Citizen of Nowhere" or "the Point Where Circles Intersect"? Impartialist and Embedded Cosmopolitanisms'. *Review of International Studies* 28 (2002): 457-478, p. 457.

³¹ M. Nussbaum, 'Symposium on Cosmopolitanism. Duties of Justice, Duties of Material Aid: Cicero's problematic legacy', *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, 8, 2 (2000): 176-206.

³² For instance, despite Beitz's (pp. 525-7) clear commitment to a redistributive sense of international justice for reasons of synchronic exploitation or intervention in non-western lifeworlds, his association of the welfare state with demands for global aid to counter the argument that state poverty usually has local sources misfires. It does so because of the connotations of charity or condescending care implied in the examples he uses (p. 526) and the total omission at least in that text of any reference to effects of diachronic entanglement as causes of poverty.

³³ P. Ricoeur's term; see, Ricoeur, P. 'Reflections on a New Ethos for Europe'. In: R. Kearney (ed.) *The Hermeneutics of Action* (London: Sage, 1996, pp. 9-10.

and chastised by some postcolonial thinkers such as Arif Dirlik.³⁴ Delving into the past has been blamed, and usually rightly so, for excessive memory and resentment against the other, ultimately leading to nationalism and fanaticism. The exaggerated fear of this causes, however, a narrow limitation of the study of cultural encounters to a synchronic dimension that loses sight of unresolved problems, historical injustices still informing political conflicts, and apologies that were never made. In this way, cultural encounter is viewed in a very superficial way, as an exchange of lifestyles and 'know-how' with little or no attention to power and injustices that block the cosmopolitan spirit.

For instance, oblivious to historical debts that colonialism and the cold war have created, some liberals³⁵ understand material aid or redistribution of wealth not as a legitimate claim of countries that suffered exploitation but rather as an act of benevolence on the part of the strong. At best, universalist liberalism accommodates in its conception of international justice duties to material global aid but, due to its neglecting or underrating the historical entanglement, it views this aid as deriving primarily from universal fairness to persons. Against this, the diachronic approach helps us realize that such duties stem also from fairness to societies and states that have long been exploited. Thereby, the excessive resources that the affluent West enjoys (compared to, say, malnutrition and poverty in some African localities) even in periods of recession, those that could be ceded to development aid and relief aid, are hardly deserved, and the West has no right to them.

For sure, contemporary generations are not accountable for the mistakes or crimes of past generations, even if those were performed in their name, but here the issue of justice emerges not out of direct liability but out of the *continuity* of the effects of past handlings. Contemporary generations still *profit* from past exploitations of others and much of current asymmetries in wealth and power can be explained as prolonged outcomes of historical injustices. Conversely, in the Third World, many conflicts, handicaps to development and what in the West is perceived as backwardness could be attributed, in good part, to old colonial strategies of stirring animosity, producing negative or confused self-images and sheer draining of resources of the colonized. Liberal political thought conveniently silences all this when it ponders on what is owed to foreigners. Wellman confesses: 'I suspect that I am less patriotist than most [...], but it still seems to me that egalitarians overestimate how much we owe to foreigners and libertarians underestimate how much we owe to compatriots'.³⁶ While we should agree that libertarians underestimate what is owed to fellow citizens, we must note Wellman's and other liberals' underestimation of how much is owed to foreigners. I interpret such underestimation as a sign of an ill-defined particularist attachment, often accompanied with lip service to global moral duty and unconscious commitment to a power — and history-insensitive universalism, overall divorced from justice.

³⁴ A. Dirlik, 'Is There History after Eurocentrism? Globalism, Postcolonialism, and the Disavowal of History', *Cultural Critique* 42, 2 (1999): 1-34.

³⁵ For criticisms of such liberal discourses, see A. Dobson, 'Thick Cosmopolitanism', *Political Studies*, 54 (2006): 165-184.

³⁶ Wellman, 'Relational Facts in Liberal Political Theory', p. 545.

If, as a more synchronic example, a country represents a 5% of the world's population but has a share of 25% in pollution, its wealth is gained at the expense of other peoples' health, production (as climatological changes destroy natural sources) and well-being. This creates a debt and a moral responsibility that cannot be ignored unless one adopts the kind of particularist or universalist perspective that is blind to a different sense of justice — a justice that after the 'modern versus postmodern' tensions seems now to be explorable in less Eurocentric terms.³⁷ But even when synchronic cosmopolitan liability is acknowledged and often passionately promoted, still there is much to be done regarding the distinction between assisting others as a supererogatory or a principled act of morality and assisting them out of implication in the harm that they suffered. In the case of a natural disaster such as a flood,³⁸ to think of it as a misfortune regarding which all attempts to assist those suffering from it belong to the supererogatory may constitute a Eurocentric affront to the suffering otherness deriving from an insensitive, uncritical and irresponsible self-understanding. For, to be in a position to handle a misfortune presupposes local sources the quality of which has been affected by a historical shaping that is only at first sight irrelevant to the actual situation.

Liberal universalism operates as a corrective of liberal particularism when it teaches that 'humans have distributive duties to other *qua* humans rather than merely *qua* compatriots'.³⁹ But, what it misses, and only a redefinition of the terms along with a theory of justice can supply, is the fact that, due to past or present failures, humans have special distributive duties to other humans also *qua* recipients of inflicted suffering that had occurred for the sake of furthering the strong's gains.

To explain, a liberal argument for granting priority to compatriots over others is that inequalities between compatriots undermine the effectiveness of major rights. By contrast, the argument goes, inequalities between a rich country and a poor country may 'influence their relative power in international law' but it may 'have a much less dramatic effect upon the welfare of the citizens of the poorer state'.⁴⁰ However, I believe that this reflects only the ethnocentric prejudices of liberalists who talk from the superior standpoint of the one who belongs to a wealthy and powerful nation and overlooks both subtle and manifest mechanisms of domination and control. As Bauman, Linklater,⁴¹ Pogge and Beitz amongst others have shown, globalization has exacerbated interdependence and deepened the gap between the advanced and the poor countries. The welfare of the citizens of poorer or less powerful states is drastically affected because differences in

³⁷ For my approach to Eurocentrism, see, M. Papastephanou, 'Eurocentrism Beyond the «Universalism vs Particularism» Dilemma: Habermas and Derrida's Joined Plea for a New Europe', *History of the Human Sciences* 24, 5 (2011): 142-166.

³⁸ For more elaboration on this example, see M. Papastephanou, *Educated Hope and Educated Fear: Utopia, Dystopia and the Plasticity of Humanity*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2009.

³⁹ Wellman, 'Relational Facts in Liberal Political Theory', p. 557.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 546.

⁴¹ See Z. Bauman, 'On Glocalization: Or Globalization for Some, Localization for Some Others'. *Thesis Eleven*, 54 (1998): 37-50. See also A. Linklater, 'The Evolving Spheres of International Justice'. *International Affairs* 75, 3 (1999): 473-482.

economic status often translate into differences in the capacity to regulate internal affairs in an independent and sovereign way. For example, some of the most technologically advanced equipment of military bases has been accused for environmental or health damages arousing public discontent in small countries hosting those bases. Yet, even in cases where scientific evidence is conclusive and damning, the governments of poor or small countries fail to take the necessary measures for reasons of dependence on, or fear of, the strong who consider their own geopolitical and strategic interests non-negotiable. Also, in moments of international crises and conflicts, history verifies Stanley Cubrick's famous dictum that, in wartime, big countries become gangsters and small countries become prostitutes rather than the liberalist unsuspecting assumption that comparisons of wealth are not as crucial to international relations as they are to internal affairs. Consider also Wellman's assumption that 'the liberal cannot allow excessive inequality among fellow citizens because these compatriots participate together in a political cooperative, and the rights of those cooperating can be rendered ineffective by a *relative* lack of funds'.⁴² This assumption misses the extent to which globalization has made the excessive inequality among nations costly for the rights of those that lack funding and the new divisions it has produced worldwide.⁴³

Is that supposed to mean that admitting that differences in wealth among countries affect drastically international relations constitutes in itself a sufficient reason for questioning the priority to local special obligations? My answer is negative because I distinguish between moral obligation and charity and consider the compelling force of the above admission conditional on the issue of justice. If there is no kind of political entanglement (past or present) between a rich and a poor country that could place the discussion on obligation in a different frame, then the whole problematic is a matter of samaritan conduct. In that case, the problem of liberalist distributive justice need not arise at all or, when it arises, it takes the form of imperfect duties,⁴⁴ depending on the variation. This case can be also theorized within the framework of a Levinassian conception of justice. If there is or has been such an entanglement, however, then the question might be one of moral obligation and the relevance of justice is unmistakable. Thus, one has first to place the maxim in context and check its appropriateness.

Conclusion

Let us conclude by sketching in a skeletal way what the above entail concerning justice. They entail that a comprehensive account of deliberative justice is required, i.e. one that encompasses ethical, political and legal concerns without providing substantive principles prior to dialogue. Within this framework, dialogue on issues of justice should be opinion —, and will-formative, i.e., it could have a reforming effect on people thus going beyond negotiation and mere compromise.⁴⁵

⁴² Wellman, 'Relational Facts in Liberal Political Theory', p. 546.

⁴³ Bauman, 'On Glocalization: Or Globalization for Some, Localization for Some Others'.

⁴⁴ Linklater, 'The Evolving Spheres of International Justice', p. 480.

⁴⁵ J. Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992.

But, after the 'modern versus postmodern' philosophical exchanges, to subscribe to a deliberative notion of justice that critically focuses on moral expectation, harkens to the other and undoes unnecessary asymmetries presupposes awareness: of the post-metaphysical background that has to frame the utopianism of such discourse ethics; and of the criticisms by Laclau, Mouffe, and Butler among others to which such a post-metaphysical background must be responsive.⁴⁶

As mentioned above, a more detailed discussion of the presupposed notion of justice cannot take place here. However, there are two sets of arguments that may speak against the coupling of material aid and redistribution with justice to which a due response must be offered. One concerns arguments against the introduction of the temporal-historical dimension of ethico-political debt in the debate. The idea is that historical debt cannot burden new generations since younger generations are not responsible for the deeds of their ancestors. As I have already stated, this is true in general with the exception of cases of continuous profit. In such cases, there is a blatant contradiction between the demand to put the past to rest and the perpetuation of the effects of the wrongful act. Nevertheless, a major counter-argument to the recuperation of the historical dimension in questions of international justice would concern the criteriology and the judging agent of past or present debts. Who judges such issues and on what criteria? Another difficulty emanates from the possibility that one may find the role of the victim very appealing and convenient in order to put forward incessant claims of aid and do away with one's own responsibilities and duties to one's self. A variation of this is a case where one 'arrests time' and absolutizes the moment of his/her victimization thus silencing previous or later wrongs on his/her part. Most frequently, people alternate in the role of the victim and the wrongdoer but those who place themselves in the position of the permanent victim tend to forget that. Exploitation of the other's guilty feelings or the other's self-indulgence in such feelings is a real and serious danger of the coupling of collective political ideals with justice. Finally, how further back would this process of self-critique and undertaking of responsibility for harmful deeds go? And if people start raising claims of reparations will this not stir more animosity and resentment on both conflicting sides?⁴⁷

A possible solution to problems of that sort is to discern perspectives and associate them with a different kind of self-reflection each time. There is no question of a separation of 'good' and 'bad' peoples — a separation that would justify the position of one collectivity in the place of the permanent victim always to be assisted by the guilty party. As Lilian Alweiss writes, 'one is not morally superior to the other, rather the voices embody a history of inequality and injustice which cannot be ignored'.⁴⁸ Collective responsibility is meant to express only 'the realization that we share a common world that includes both those implicated

⁴⁶ On how criticisms by those philosophers affect and re-orient critical theory, see M. Cooke, *Re-Presenting the Good Society*. Cambridge: MA, MIT Press, 2006.

⁴⁷ I discuss such questions in far more detail in M. Papastephanou, *Thinking Differently About Cosmopolitanism*.

⁴⁸ L. Alweiss, 'Collective Guilt and Responsibility'. *European Journal of Political Theory* 2, 3 (2003): 307-318, p. 311.

in the wrongdoing and those wronged’;⁴⁹ it does not speak for an essentialist segregation of people into good and bad. Hence, anti-essentialist postmodern sensibilities concerning the risks of essentialist universalism can be fully taken into account. As for the significance of the ‘voice’, it is manifest in the distinction between the perspective of the giver and that of the recipient of aid. The rehabilitation of the historical dimension I have defended is a topic of consideration suggested first and foremost for the one who is capable of providing material help in a certain circumstance to a suffering other. To decide whether her act is one of duty or supererogation, the subject needs to know the history of her entanglement with this concrete other and judge the effects of that entanglement. In Alweiss’ words, ‘there are instances in which the situatedness, or to use the Heideggerian term the “facticity”, of the voice counts’.⁵⁰ Hence, the historical dimension of justice should primarily be the ‘helper’s’ concern. As to how further back one may go in history, it is true that certain past crimes bear no obvious consequence to current affairs and, to theorize their difference from historical debts, I adapt Alweiss’ discussion of shame and guilt. Representatives of a particular socio-political or national group can only feel shame for a wrong that was committed in their name (or by those they identify as their ancestors), but has no current impact. It is unjustifiable to feel guilt in such a case. All that can be raised here is the issue of remembrance,⁵¹ doing justice to the need to acknowledge the harm caused and know what to avoid doing in future. The significance of this for a particularism reconciled with universalism is immense because it has a direct relation to the way members depict their communities; it thus wards off the nationalist idolization of one’s past. But when it comes to a treatment of redistributive matters that reconciles particularism and universalism, in which charity may not be applicable, wherever current profit derives from past wrongs or failures to act, guilt is the most appropriate feeling and the most relevant motivating force for solving the matter justly. Here deliberation and discursive justice is once again the key for deciding on such issues. Overall, if a commitment to justice — simultaneously patriotic and cosmopolitan — could be cultivated, then the motivation to use the challenge that history presents in an expedient manner would be checked or kept at bay.

The other set of counter-arguments would originate from realist⁵² and libertarian objections to the cultivation of such ideals. People are supposedly by nature predisposed to display a lack of the amount of altruism that is required if such ideals are to be approximated at all. But even if that were not the case, the argument goes, it would still be unfair on people to expect from them such a high degree of other-orientedness as to take willingly upon them the burden of diachronic and synchronic responsibility to the deprived. The anthropological aspect of this

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

⁵² For a critical account of such arguments, see C. Lu, ‘The One and Many Faces of Cosmopolitanism’, *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 8, 2 (2000): 244-267.

argument can be refuted by appeal to non-essentialist accounts of hominization; as I have elaborated on this point elsewhere in detail, here I shall leave it at that.⁵³ But the individualist aspect assuming that such ideals place too high a demand on people needs further elaboration here.

For some libertarians, the inculcation of particularist attachment raises the risk of the creation of subjectivities that are so immersed in their community that fail to promote their self-regarding goals. From Enlightenment until now, an absolutist treatment of the demands that collectivities have on people has imposed an 'either/or' logic: either one is self-regarding and exploitative of otherness (wherever such exploitation is possible) or one is so devoted to samaritan action that his/her own well-being is totally neglected. That absolutism was exemplified by the metaphor of the loving saint⁵⁴ and provided a philosophical moral alibi: if one cannot be a loving saint, one is almost justified, or naturally expected, to act in an interest-seeking way. This false drastic choice is no longer tenable in the era of piecemeal politics, of the abandonment of meta-narratives and of the commitment to approximations of regulative ideals. There is no need to aspire to model oneself after a loving saint, since it is quite clear that between the loving saint and the footloose élites that destroy the environment and encourage competitiveness there is a huge gap that offers ample space for modest but necessary ameliorative steps. Postmodern members of local communities being simultaneously global citizens are not asked to give up their personal desires or self-regarding plans in order to undertake remedial action for the sake of their community and the world. It does not take an ascetic self-denial to minimize the environmental destruction or alleviate the pain you cause or have caused for reasons of expedience and control. As A. Belsey writes, 'to give up something you are used to could be a psychological blow, but this does not mean that it is a sacrifice in the morally relevant sense, and it is only this sense that makes sense in the context of world poverty and the distribution of global resources. [...] To give up what you have no right to is no sacrifice'.⁵⁵

In discussing ideality and political community, Manolache explains that 'the *prime community*, fulfilled by becoming becomes the natural stronghold of the *zoon politikon* armed with the political conscience of justice, of obtaining happiness by virtue'. As part of a social duty, 'the happiness of the *zoon politikon* becomes total independence from the material constraint, which the individual is incapable of obtaining by himself — an ideal fully achieved only in the interior of the political community'.⁵⁶ I have argued that the limits of the political community or its possibly limitless character place particularism and universalism in a complex interplay of subset and set respectively. Ambivalences, failures and

⁵³ See, M. Papastephanou, 'Utopian Education and Anti-utopian Anthropology'. *International Education Studies* 6, 2 (2013): pp. 22-33.

⁵⁴ Y. Yonah, "'Ubi Patria - Ibi Bene': The Scope and Limits of Rousseau's Patriotic Education'. *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 18 (1999): 365-388, p. 382.

⁵⁵ A. Belsey, 'World Poverty, Justice and Equality'. In: *International Justice and the Third World*. R. Attfield and B. Wilkins (eds). London: Routledge, 1992, p. 45.

⁵⁶ Manolache, 'The Philosophical and Political Profile of *Homo Posthistoricus*', p. 67.

challenges, and postmodern problematizations of modern, normalizing politicizations of particularity and universality require and at the same time presuppose a more demanding sense of justice.

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