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Diagnostics: Why So Scary?

World government has long been the great bogeyman of international

political theorizing. It spooked Immanuel Kant. At one point in his essay *Perpetual Peace* he speaks of it as a "soulless despotism" that would threaten to "choke the seeds of good."¹ It has similarly spooked generations of writers ever since. But what is it exactly about world government that people find so

scary?

Maybe what people fear is how it might come about. Suppose, for exam-

ple, that the only possible way world government could arise would be by some expansionist imperial power swallowing up all in its wake.² That would be pretty scary. Ditto if a bloody world revolution were the only way to get there.³

World government would be scary if those were the only ways to get there—which, of course, they are not. Neo-Hegelians point to other perfectly coherent pathways, via the dynamics of recognition.⁴ Neo-functionalists point to routes whereby the European Coal and Steel Community turned into the European Economic Community (EEC) and then into the European Union (EU). In this neo-functional scenario, states would just cede ever-increasing power over functionally demarcated areas to some effective state entity that is demonstrably capable of coordinating them more effectively, with those multiple overlapping functional jurisdictions eventually forming a consolidated world government.⁵ Neo-liberals trace ways in which occasional crises lead to an expansion of the range of people to whom power

holders are accountable.⁶ A similar logic might lead to an expansion of the range of matters over which central power holders have power and for which they are accountable.

Maybe, however, what spooks people about world government is not so much what it would take to get there as what it would be like to be there. In the *Star Wars* trope, world government could be like the Federation, noble and benign. Or it could be like the Empire, evil and avaricious. And there is no guaranteeing which it will be initially, much less eventually. That thought, too, might well give us pause.

It might, until we remember that we already have long experience honing institutional mechanisms to guard against abuses of power by central authorities. The Anti-Federalists—"Brutus," the "Federal Farmer," and company—expressed precisely the same fears about the strength of the central government proposed in the U.S. Constitution of 1789. Nobody would pretend that that charter got everything exactly right. But nobody could credibly deny that our long experience of such institutional architecture gives us a pretty good idea how to check and balance power within a large and increasingly strong central state. And the same institutional machinery that is effective in checking and balancing powers within national government can readily be replicated at other levels of government, whether supra-nationally or subnationally.⁷ So I cannot really see how this second worry with world government should unsettle us all that much either.

Those brusque dismissals will hardly end all those long and tedious arguments. At this point, however, I am not trying to put arguments to rest. My initial aim here is purely diagnostic. I am merely trying to figure out what it really is that frightens people about world government. And in diagnostic mode, I just cannot bring myself to believe that either of the things mentioned above is what really has them so spooked. Those are the things that people seize upon and dress up as reasons, to be sure, when challenged for reasons to rationalize their reactions. But I just cannot credit those ostensible reasons as the root causes of people's skittishness.⁸

Instead, I suspect people's visceral fear of world government derives almost wholly from a simple fear of the unknown. World government is unfamiliar. We've never had a literal world government. We've not seen anything remotely resembling one for fully a millennium or two.⁹ And we all know (from postcolonial critical race theory and such like) about the way in which "Othering" can stir up fear and hatred of people of unfamiliar races, religions, and so on. In institutional terms, world government is the ultimate Other.

Insofar as that is an accurate diagnosis of contemporary anxieties about world government, a remedy is readily to hand. The standard way to overcome fear of the unknown is to assimilate it to the familiar. The way to desensitize people is to expose them, in limited and controlled doses, to that which they are overly sensitive. Such is the strategic aim of this chapter. My method will be as my title suggests: to show that in certain essential respects, world government is already with us. We should not fear it because we are already after a fashion (admittedly preliminary in form) living perfectly comfortably with it.

Whether world government is or is not ultimately desirable is a separate issue, and one that genuinely needs to be debated separately. But it can only be sensibly done after we've dispelled knee-jerk bogeyman responses.

World Government: In the Beginning

The first step in my argument is simply to invite you to think what world government would most probably be like in the very beginning. The bogeyman image of it—as a big, elaborate, unified, institutionally dense, all-powerful entity—depicts world government as it might be at the end of the day. But surely it would not start out that way. World government would not spring fully formed from the brow of some global Rousseauian lawgiver or from some conclave of founders in Pristina, or whatever. Instead, world government would surely start small and grow.

Consider this analogy. Nowadays, we tend to think of democracy primarily in terms of free and fair elections with universal adult suffrage. Following that definition, global democracy looks pretty hopeless: a single worldwide electorate is nowhere in sight. Notice, however, that that is essentially a nineteenth-century, Reform Act way of defining what democracy is all about. It marked the culmination of many other steps, large and small, that came historically much earlier. Notable among them were things like establishing the principle that the king's word was not itself law but rather that the king ruled under law (via the Magna Carta of 1215), and establishing the principle that the king was answerable to parliament (via the Bill of Rights of 1689). Judged in terms of those more preliminary harbingers, global democracy may well be nigh.

That is an argument about global democracy I develop elsewhere.¹⁰ My central thought is that if we are interested in global democracy and want to know how far along we are toward achieving it, we ought not to fixate on

what global democracy would look like "at the end of the day," fantasizing about some popularly apportioned, directly elected Second Chamber of the United Nations or some such. That scenario may well be the culmination of the project of democratizing the globe—at the end of the day. But remember, the Reform Act came at the end of the long process of democratization domestically; and, globally, we are only at the very early stages. Modeling like on like, we ought not to be looking for global analogs to the nineteenth-century Reform Acts. Instead, we ought to be looking for global analogs to the sort of democratic developments (rule of law, accountability) that came domestically several centuries before that.

Here, I will be making a similar argument about world government. That, too, is in its early days. Instead of fixating on what world government might look like in its fullest form at the end of the day, we ought to consider instead what it might look like at the very beginning and ask, "How far are we along that path?"

In my companion article, I modeled the steps toward global democracy on early English history. Here, I propose to model the slow growth of world government on early U.S. history:

- Maybe world government will eventually have, as the United States now does, a strong central administration. But, in the very beginning, world government will inevitably be as the United States was initially: a loose federation of relatively strong, relatively independent states.
- Maybe world government will eventually have, as the United States now has, a large standing army of its own. But in the very beginning, world government will inevitably rely (as the U.S. central government initially did) on member states to volunteer the services of troops of their own.
- Maybe world government will eventually have, as the United States now has, broad powers to raise taxes and transfer resources among those under its jurisdiction. But in the very beginning, world government will inevitably be vested with only weak, special-purpose powers to tax and transfer just as the early U.S. federal government (which initially had to rely largely on excise duties at ports of entry or points of production).

I take it that those three functions, between them, are *sine qua non* for a state worthy of the name.¹¹ They are what distinguish a genuine state (albeit

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one that is federal in form) from a mere alliance of essentially separate states.¹²

1. A state, to be a state, must have some authority over what it claims as its subordinate jurisdictions. It need not have complete authority: it need not be able to overrule subordinate jurisdictions on any and all topics. (No federal state would count as a state according to that definition.) But for a state genuinely to be a state, there need to be some matters on which it is authorized to overrule its subordinate jurisdictions, intervening to substitute its will for theirs.
2. A state, to be a state, must have some military capacity. It need not enjoy a complete monopoly on the legitimate use of force, perhaps; subunits may also have authority to exercise police and defense powers as well. But a state without any capacity to exercise force does not look like much of a state.¹³
3. A state, to be a state, must be able to raise and spend money. Again, it need not enjoy a monopoly over taxing and spending powers; subordinate jurisdictions might retain substantial powers in that respect as well.¹⁴ But a state without any capacity whatsoever to collect and disperse revenue would not be much of a state.

The burden of the subsequent sections of this chapter is to show that these defining features of statehood are found, in at least rudimentary form, at the global level today. In that sense, we already have the rudiments of world government. Indeed, we have about as much of a world government as the United States had a federal government on the eve of the nineteenth century.

In my companion article on global democracy, I go on to argue that there is a mechanism whereby democracy, once established after some rudimentary fashion, will basically only ever expand and almost never contract.¹⁵ I will make no parallel argument here in respect to world government. I do have views on the subject.¹⁶ But that issue is beside the point of the present chapter, so it is better for me to remain silent here on those matters to avoid muddying the waters.

Remember the purpose of this chapter. It aims purely to desensitize. Its strategy is to dispel fear of the bogeyman of world government by showing that world government in some rudimentary form is already with us. There is no reason to take fright at the familiar; and I will show that familiar features

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Cosmopolitanism, Federal in Form

Writers conjuring up the bogeyman of a unitary world government ruling over the whole world are of course being disingenuously inattentive.¹⁷ That proposal is simply not the one on the table.¹⁸ It is not now, nor has it been at any time in living memory. Arguably, the last time a really serious case was made for a unitary world government was in Dante's *De Monarchia*, a fourteenth-century defense of the Holy Roman Empire.¹⁹ From the 1648 Peace of Westphalia onward, a world federation of nation-states rather than a unitary world government has politically been the only remotely serious proposal.²⁰

Certainly mere world federalism, rather than anything grander, was what was on the agenda the last time anything remotely like world government attracted serious political attention—at the end of World War II. World federalism is what the United World Federalists' 47,000 members were lobbying for. That is what was being demanded in a 1945 open letter to the *New York Times* from twenty eminent Americans, including Albert Einstein, Supreme Court Justice Owen Roberts, and senators J. William Fulbright and Claude Pepper.²¹ That is what was urged in resolutions passed by legislatures of twenty U.S. states.²²

So too has cosmopolitanism, federal in form, been the long-standing focus of discussions within political philosophy. In his essay *Perpetual Peace*, Kant famously wrote in favor of federal rather than unitary political arrangements at the global level.²³ William Penn described his own proposal as a "European league of confederacy."²⁴ It was a "Federation of Europe" that Abbé Saint-Pierre wrote in favor of (and Rousseau against).²⁵ Similarly, what Henry Sidgwick hoped for—as "not beyond the limits of sober conjecture as to the probable future of political development"—was "a federation of West-European States at least, with a common government sufficiently strong to prevent fighting among these states."²⁶

So too with today's political philosophers. Michael Walzer's prescriptions for global governance stop well short of unitary world government.²⁷ Daniele Archibugi, David Held, and Raffaele Marchetti all advocate arrangements that are (in their very different ways) at root federal in form.²⁸ James Bohman's cosmopolitanism is institutionally so thin as to demand

only (if only!) that courts protect the human rights of people without regard to their citizenship.²⁹

Not only is the proposal that is presently on the table from cosmopolitans of virtually every stripe for "cosmopolitanism, federal in form." Furthermore, at least in the first instance, it would be a very weak federation, characterized by strong forms of subsidiarity.³⁰

Existing national governments would continue to exist, and they would function essentially the same as they do today. The only difference is that there would be erected over the top of them a light federal structure that assigns specific competences to the various levels of government. Or perhaps, more minimally still, it might merely assign a "fallback" allocation of responsibility, such that responsibility for certain things falls to the higher level of authority, if (but only if) the lower levels fail to discharge them.

How exactly to specify those latter powers varies from one theorist to the next. Naturally, there are heated disputes over all that. Do not let the heat of those discussions mislead us into misjudging the magnitude of the powers that world federalists of all stripes envisage being transferred to some central world authority, however. Almost everything that is currently done by existing nation-states would still be done by those nation-states, and in almost no cases would the federal government of the world have any authority to direct them to do otherwise.³¹

Nor is this merely some quirk of the proposals that happen to be on the table at the moment. Subsidiarity of some sort is built into the very nature of federalism itself. From Althusius forward, the animating idea underlying all forms of federalism has been one of allowing the lower levels of government to do what they can do well and for the higher levels of government to intervene only when the lower levels are demonstrably unable to discharge some crucial function.³² Hence, the bias toward localism is built into federalism as such. In adopting the motto of "cosmopolitanism, federal in form," cosmopolitans thereby concede a strong, continuing role for the nation-state—insofar as that institution is indeed still up to the job.

Minimal Central Authority

As William Riker observes, every government has multiple levels. Even the most unitary government invariably operates through local branch offices, and those often enjoy genuine discretionary power (albeit of a purely

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delegated sort).³³ The mere existence of many different levels of government is not what makes a political system "federal."³⁴

What distinguishes genuinely federal governments from unitary-but-decentralized ones is that in a federal system each unit of government (subordinate and superordinate) enjoys constitutionally entrenched sovereignty over at least one policy domain.³⁵ Were the subordinate units not sovereign over at least one domain, the state would be a unitary rather than a federal one. Were the notional "superordinate" not sovereign over at least one domain, the political system would be a mere alliance rather than a genuine federation with genuinely "subordinate" units.

Notice that even weak federations count as federations by that formalistic criterion. The U.S. Articles of Confederation purported only to create a confederation, which is ordinarily taken to be something short of a genuine federation. But notice that even under those articles, the central government most assuredly was sovereign over at least one policy domain (conspicuously, the war power).³⁶ Of course, the central government was not sovereign over many other domains, raising armies and revenue being ones of particular concern to those who gathered in Philadelphia in 1787 to beef up the powers of the central government. Still, notice that by this, the standardly accepted formal definition, the United States circa even 1781 would have counted as a federation.

In the standard characterization of a federation just cited, it is stipulated that the sovereignty of each level of government in at least one policy domain must be constitutionally entrenched. Here is the reason. We would not want to call a system "federal" if the superordinate unit could remove the subordinate unit's power whenever it so desired. The example ordinarily offered is that of U.S. cities: they are legally creatures of the states, and their charters could be revised or withdrawn by those state governments any time they choose. That example is probably not a very good one, for reasons I shall go on to discuss shortly. Still, the root intuition is a valid one. For a subordinate unit genuinely to have sovereignty over some policy domain, as is required for it to be part of a genuinely federal union, that power must be somehow politically entrenched. It must be the case that its removal cannot be effected just through ordinary political processes (simple majority vote in the legislature, for example). It must be removable instead only through some extraordinary political process (such as a supermajority to amend a constitution).

Clearly, what matters is that the powers in question be entrenched in the constitution, not that they be "written" into it. The United Kingdom has no

written constitution. But no one can doubt that there are some provisions (roughly speaking, those that Her Majesty's Stationery Office used to bind together as the first volume of *Statutes in Force*, which it entitled *The Constitution*) that are as entrenched as any provision of the U.S. Constitution. In some purely formal, legalistic sense, they may be only statutes enacted by one Parliament that could, in principle, be repealed by any subsequent Parliament. But politically, the facts of the matter are otherwise. Politically, much more would be required to change those provisions than is required merely to repeal any ordinary legislation.³⁷

Thus, constitution-like provisions can be politically entrenched without being formally inscribed, which is obviously so in jurisdictions with unwritten constitutions. But it even may be so in jurisdictions that do have written constitutions. Some of the political arrangements and delegations of powers that have emerged outside the formal text of the written constitution might, as a political fact of the matter, enjoy such status in practice as to be *de facto* constitutionally entrenched. As I foreshadowed above, I would actually be inclined to treat U.S. municipal governments as a case in point. True, they exist purely by virtue of a charter from the government of their state. True, that charter could legally be withdrawn at any time. Still, as one savvy commentator puts it, "In practice, when political costs are weighed, it is unlikely."³⁸ Indeed, it is so very unlikely that I would suggest that all the major U.S. cities should be considered to be virtually (if not literally) constitutionally entrenched.

The reason I am harping on about all this in the present context is, of course, that no constitution has yet been promulgated for the government of the globe. Were it the case that a federal government could only exist by virtue of a written constitution allocating it sovereignty over some sphere, then clearly no such world government could currently exist. But suppose a federal government can exist by virtue of allocations of *de facto* sovereignty, such that (purely as a political fact of the matter) it would be very, very hard to deny the various levels their respective powers. Then there could already be at least a rudimentary world government, federal in form, with the central authority's sovereignty over certain affairs being entrenched merely by the firmly settled views of the world community as to what it can and should (and nation-states cannot or should not) do.

In that sense, there arguably is already sufficient authority vested in the world community to underpin a world government, federal in form. There are certain policy domains over which lower-level units (the nation-states) do not enjoy sovereign authority. Peremptory norms of international law

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(*jus cogens*) identify various things that sovereign states simply are not legally permitted to do. Among them are waging aggressive wars, committing genocide or other crimes against humanity, and violating universal human rights (particularly those against slavery or torture). Nation-states are denied sovereignty over those matters. Nation-states are not legally empowered, in the exercise of their sovereignty, to commit those acts.³⁹

Not only is it the case that individual nation-states are denied sovereignty over those matters. Agents of the global community are legally empowered to intervene to prevent nation-states from behaving in those ways.⁴⁰ International organizations, organized groups of nation-states and perhaps even individual nation-states—acting on behalf of the international community—are legally permitted to engage in “humanitarian intervention” in such circumstances. Supranational actors, acting on behalf of the international community at large, are empowered to impose the will of the world community on any nation-state that itself wills otherwise.⁴¹ And one unit’s being legally empowered to override the decisions of another is, of course, tantamount to the former having (and the latter lacking) sovereignty over that matter.

Of course, telling nation-states’ governments what they cannot do is different from issuing orders directly to individual citizens of those nation-states. Some say that being able to do that is an important incident of fully fledged federalism, too; and perhaps it is.⁴² But just as when establishing democratic norms, the first thing to get established is that the sovereign rules under law (rather than the sovereign’s word being law); the first thing to get established in instituting some central federal authority is that there is a superordinate authority empowered to override (at least in certain circumstances) the decisions of the subordinate unity.

And of course there is, at the global level today, no standing entity organized that is capable of systematically exercising this authority. In the absence of that, the authority is institutionally free-floating. It can be, and is, taken up by any grouping that can credibly claim to be acting on behalf of the world community to enforce peremptory norms of international law. Ideally, perhaps the authorization of the U.N. Security Council should be secured. Ideally, perhaps, the United Nations should undertake the action itself. But failing that, a variety of institutional shells have been employed by different groupings engaged in humanitarian interventions under these peremptory principles of international law. There is authority without there yet being “An Authority.”

In that respect, perhaps particularly, it may seem a bit odd to say that a world government—even a rudimentary one—actually exists. The

institutional apparatus is missing. And surely institutions are the stuff of which governments are made.

But even if key elements of institutional architecture are missing, we do have something important, arguably even more important, in place. What we have is the fundamental principle required for a federal world government to exist, the principle that there is some authority at the supranational level that overrides the sovereign prerogatives of nation-states.⁴³ There are indeed some policy domains over which nation-states do not enjoy sovereignty and in which the global community (through whatever agency it happens upon, on a case-by-case basis) is not only morally but also legally authorized to impose its will instead of deferring to the will of the nation-state. By the "sovereign in at least one policy domain" standard, therefore, the global community (however organized) does indeed have the sort of authority minimally required to constitute a federal government.

Minimal Military Capacity

Some capacity to raise and deploy troops against enemies foreign and domestic is a defining feature of statehood. Nowadays, we think in terms of large standing armies, well-equipped and well-trained and under a unified command structure. But once again, those were later developments. At earlier stages of the formation of federal unions, military command structures were often much less unified, and titular heads had to cajole much more than they were able to command.⁴⁴ In this respect as well, the capacity of the international community today to raise and deploy troops compares well with that of the U.S. federal government in its early years.

At the end of the Revolutionary War, the U.S. army—which in any case consisted merely of the massed militias of the several colonies—was disbanded. Under the original Articles of Confederation, too, the U.S. government had to requisition troops from the state militias as needed. Furthermore, it could not do so lightly: "the number of land or sea forces to be raised" had to be agreed on by a supermajority of nine out of the thirteen states (Article IX).

The Constitution of 1789 changed that, formally empowering Congress "to raise and support Armies" and "to provide and maintain a Navy." But the state militias still formed a key part of the U.S. national military capacity. This is evident on the face of the text. The very same clause of the Constitution goes on to charge Congress: "to provide for calling forth the Militia

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to execute the Laws of the Union, suppress insurrections and repel invasions"; and "to provide for organizing, arming, and disciplining, the Militia, and for governing such Part of them as may be employed in the Service of the United States, reserving to the States respectively, the Appointment of the Officers, and the Authority of training the Militia according to the discipline prescribed by Congress" (Art. I, Sec. 8).⁴⁵

Both Anti-Federalists and even many Federalists, wary of standing armies, much preferred to rely on state militias instead.⁴⁶ It was agreed on all sides that militias were—in James Madison's language for the Second Amendment—"necessary to the security of a free state."

Even those wary of standing armies in general, however, eventually learned from hard experience the importance of at least a small, well-trained, well-equipped cadre of regular military troops. George Washington learned that lesson early. As Revolutionary War commander, he complained bitterly to the Continental Congress about the quality of the militias.⁴⁷ He was hardly more impressed with his experience as the only U.S. head of state to ride at the head of troops in battle, putting down the Whiskey Rebellion with a ragtag collection of state militias. In the War of 1812, the militias again proved unsatisfactory. The U.S. Military Academy at West Point was founded soon thereafter, and a small army of regular troops slowly began to emerge.⁴⁸

Still, the striking thing is how very small the federal government's standing regular army was for so long. By and large it was just deployed on the western frontier. On the eve of the Civil War, there were only 929 regulars assigned east of the Mississippi.⁴⁹ With the firing on Fort Sumner, it was to the states that President Lincoln first turned. He asked "governors of the loyal states for 75,000 militiamen to serve for three months, the maximum time permissible under existing laws"; they proffered 100,000.⁵⁰ Those troops from state militias were subsequently supplemented. To them were added "40 regiments of U.S. Volunteers (42,034 men) to serve three years or for the duration of the war," and the number of regulars grew over the course of the war as well.⁵¹ The size of the army declined again after the Civil War (although never to prewar levels), only to rise again with each World War (declining again after each, but never to prewar levels). When we contemplate the military capacity of any serious state today, it is of course those later developments—a large standing army with a unified command structure—that are at the forefront of our minds. My focus here is earlier than that, however: on the military arrangements of the U.S. fed-

eral government in the very beginning, at the point most akin to today's nascent world government.

At the very beginning, the U.S. federal government had no army of its own. Under the original Articles of Confederation it had to rely completely—as the United Nations does today—on its military needs being met by member states assigning members of their armed forces to the central authority's command, for limited periods and for specific purposes. And, while the U.S. federal government soon acquired a small regular army and navy of its own—in a way the United Nations has not (yet)—the size of that force was relatively small, and the U.S. federal government continued to rely on member states assigning their militias to federal command for major operations for a very long time.

Much the same is true of U.N. peacekeeping missions today. "The United Nations has no standing army or police force. For every new United Nations Peacekeeping operation, the Secretariat must seek contributions of military, police and other personnel from member states who are under no obligation to provide them."⁵² Notwithstanding that fact, the United Nations has engaged in sixty-three peacekeeping operations since its inception in 1945. It is a particularly telling fact that "only the United States deploys more military personnel to the field than the United Nations."⁵³

Minimal Taxing Capacity

Finally, a state to be worthy of the name has to have some capacity to tax and spend, some capacity to raise revenue, spend it, and redistribute it. What revenue source can be assigned to the central authority that has not already been claimed by (or that can be wrested away from) the subunits? And what institution might have the capacity to levy such taxes at the global level? Again, early U.S. experience provides an interesting window on the prospects for world government in this respect as well.

Nowadays, mature nation-states typically rely on general taxes on income or on expenditures. They sometimes also collect various other much more special-purpose taxes, charges, fees, and duties. We tend to regard those as inefficient anachronisms, accidental carryovers from earlier times, which is precisely my point. In the beginning—when a new central government is just getting established—it relies almost exclusively on the special-purpose tax sources that we denigrate today.

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The most important of those sources to the U.S. central government in its early years were tariffs levied on imports at U.S. ports and excises (like the Whiskey Tax, occasioning the rebellion just mentioned) levied at the point of production. In the early days, it was simply "impracticable to raise any very considerable sums by direct taxation."⁵⁴ The fact that Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton's act for laying a duty on goods, wares, and merchandise imported into the United States was only the second law enacted by the new U.S. Congress is testimony to the importance of indirect revenue streams to the early U.S. republic.⁵⁵

From then until the eve of World War II, tariffs and excises remained the largest source of revenue for the U.S. national government. Total receipts from excise taxes were not surpassed by those from individual income taxes until 1943.⁵⁶

Economists bemoan the inefficiencies and economic distortions associated with tariffs and excises. They give good arguments why it is better for government to rely on broader-based taxes. But, in the very beginning, governments have almost invariably tended to rely on those sorts of special-purpose taxes instead—not least because they could be collected at a few specific points, like ports and points of production, that could be patrolled relatively easily.

My strategy in this chapter is one of modeling like on like. To get a good grip on how a world government would raise revenue in the very beginning, which is where we presently are, consider how the U.S. national government raised its revenue in the very beginning. In light of that comparison, we should not bemoan the fact that there is no immediate prospect for a global tax on personal income tax or on sales of goods and services. As with the early U.S. federal government, a nascent world government will doubtless have to rely initially on some special-purpose source of revenue.

What might that be? Let me begin by looking to the medium term. That is to say, I will begin by trying to envisage what sorts of taxes might plausibly get established to fund a modest-sized world government. I shall then return to discuss what precursors of the institutional structure might be necessary for what is already present in the world today.

Purely in pragmatic political terms, the sort of tax that world government will have to rely on into the medium term will probably be one that has not yet been appropriated by existing nation-state governments.⁵⁷ Various possibilities include a tax on extraction of resources under international waters or in international lands of the Antarctic.⁵⁸ New technologies can open up new tax sources, such as licensing the international use of wavebands

for communication purposes. But everyone's favorite is the Tobin tax on international currency transactions.⁵⁹

In recent discussions of new sources of international finance (particularly but not exclusively with a view to funding development assistance), proposals that have particular appeal are ones that promise a "double dividend." That is to say, they "not only raise revenue but also help to internalize negative cross-border externalities." Among the tax proposals enjoying this advantage are

- environmental/energy-/transport-related taxes, like taxes on maritime transport, aviation, or a CO₂ tax/charge;
- taxes on currency or financial transactions, like the Tobin tax;
- health-related food taxes, like a tax on the sugar content of food;⁶⁰ and
- taxes on the trade of arms.⁶¹

In all these cases, significant benefits arise merely from collecting the tax, by providing disincentives to socially deleterious activities. Those benefits are wholly independent of how the revenues thus collected are actually spent.

Part of those "other benefits" that come simply from imposing those taxes accrue to the world as a whole. But at least with several of them, there is another part of those "other benefits" that accrues directly to the particular jurisdiction imposing the tax. A nation-state taxing the sale of unhealthy food to its residents reduces public health-care costs in that jurisdiction, for example. And so too with the much-discussed Tobin tax on international currency transactions: it is in the country's own interest to impose such a tax on transfers into and out of its national currency, purely in order to dampen economically harmful fluctuations in the value of its own currency, quite apart from the good effects of imposing that tax on the global economy overall.⁶²

Contrary to what it is ordinarily supposed, therefore, most of those sorts of taxes could actually be imposed, one country at a time, without necessarily requiring concerted global efforts—at least in the first instance. The question of what might induce the nation-states collecting such taxes within their jurisdictions to share any of those tax revenues with a world government remains. But here political dynamics of international negotiation might provide an answer. Suppose one nation-state unilaterally imposing those taxes helps it, while harming some non-nationals (airlines, shippers; foreign businesses operating in their currency; arms merchants). Insofar as that is the case, foreign countries inclined to protect their own nationals' interests

S. central government in S. ports and excises (like mentioned) levied at the "impracticable to raise the fact that Treasury Sec- on goods, wares, and mer- by the second law enacted tance of indirect revenue and excises remained the government. Total receipts on individual income taxes economic distortions associated with why it is better for on the very beginning, gov- on those sorts of special- could be collected at a few man, that could be patrolled like on like. To get a good in the very beginning, U.S. national government of that comparison, we ediate prospect for a global services. As with the early ment will doubtless have to revenue.

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would be inclined to protest those taxes and charges. But they would be much more prepared to tolerate those taxes and charges if the funds thus raised were going to some common project (financing world government and its globally agreed-on tasks) rather than just going into the coffers of the national treasury levying the tax.

So that is how I would envisage the taxing and spending powers of world government to go, in the medium term. But in the short term, there is the question of how we get from here to there. There is at present no institutional structure at the world level to discharge the functions being discussed. Or so it will be said. And that seems to be an important objection. Onora O'Neill insists that it is pointless to talk about universal human rights without answering the question of agency.⁶³ Thomas Nagel insists that it is pointless to talk about global justice unless there is some agency to which we could assign the duties to which it would give rise.⁶⁴

Clearly, the financial arrangements made for funding the national government in the U.S. Articles of Confederation were unsatisfactory. Leaving all revenue-raising powers with the lower-level governments and authorizing the higher-level government merely to levy assessments against those lower-level governments will work only if some mechanism will enforce its assessments. A great many countries of the world currently fail to pay their U.N. dues, in just the same way as several states failed under the Articles of Confederation to pay their full assessments to the U.S. national government. Notice, however, that while it is not a satisfactory arrangement in the long term, in the very first instance, newly emerging governments have historically tended to rely on others to collect their tax revenues for them. Such was the way with "tax farming" of old.⁶⁵ Such is the way with any state that relies on private debt collectors to enforce tax liabilities today. Thus, there is every reason to suppose that the private collection of public debts would be the model that a nascent world government would employ for revenue raising.

Furthermore, it is simply not true—not literally true anyway—that there is "no institutional structure at the international level." Let a single example suffice in reply. It is an example of private-law enforcement of, in effect, a tax. But it is an international system that is already in existence, one that could be used as a model for others or that could itself be expanded and used for broader purposes. This international system provides for registering patents and enforcing claims for payment of fees arising from other people's use of patented devices and information. A patent is, of course, a kind of property. And it gives rise, in turn, to a kind of private tax. It allows patent holders to impose a fee on anyone who wants to use the property that they