

# Response to Cabrera: Beginning with More Cosmopolitan States

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Luis Cabrera is at the forefront of a new wave of thinkers arguing for greater global integration and a form of world government. As Cabrera notes, this is an idea with pedigree going back at least one hundred years. As with earlier advocates, it is hard to fault the logic of the argument: persistent risk of war, including nuclear war, environmental crises, and profound global inequality in terms of rights and quality of life all seem to resist solution in a sovereign state order that continues to allow each state a high degree of flexibility and autonomy. Such persistent problems can only benefit and may likely only be solved when all states can coordinate their responses, and this in turn is unlikely in a world of sovereign states. Thus the solution lies in global government and global levels of coordination necessarily requiring centralisation and surrendering of national sovereignty to transnational authority.

Cabrera's argument rests on two further arguments, first that global government is necessary for instrumental reasons, to solve persistent problems the solutions to which are beyond the capabilities of states, and a moral argument that justice and rights can only be met within the confines of a global state.

The first point is hard to argue with but also hard to contest or confirm: the possibilities of cooperation under anarchy are the stuff of international relations, and the findings there suggest that cooperation is neither impossible nor easy to achieve. So it remains possible in theory at least that states may be able to solve their problems should the costs of not cooperating become too high. Generally though, the argument is in favour of increased cooperation and integration at least in terms of addressing the urgent problems such as climate change and species loss.

The second point is also contestable. It rests on the assumption that moral universalism requires institutional integration and that the persistence of separate states is a moral affront to the species insofar as it generates or perpetuates profound inequalities in terms of poverty and realisation of rights. More specifically, it argues that it is moral necessity to ensure that all humans have their rights guaranteed. Again, this is hard to dispute on moral grounds. How could we defend, on moral grounds, a world in which some people suffer from underfulfillment of rights, especially basic rights?

As Cabrera notes, world government needs to be democratic and rights-protecting, not just centralised control, otherwise it will perhaps only meet the instrumental challenge but not the moral one. If it were not democratic, then it is likely to be a dominating state in the terms used by neo-republican theorists to describe a state in which some people are subject to arbitrary rule, i.e., rules which they have not assented to nor participated in the making of, in which some people are masters and others not.

As Cabrera is aware, the first part of his argument is vulnerable to the challenge that it is simply unrealistic, or that the preconditions for such levels of integration are not currently in existence nor are they likely to be. Thus the argument for world government today is vulnerable to the is-ought problem, that ought implies can.

In response, Cabrera suggests the model of the EU. While the EU suggests one possible level of integration, it is not without its problems, and it certainly is an insufficiently democratic body. It is plausible that part of the contemporary disillusionment with the EU has as much to do with its democratic deficit and overbureaucratized structure, which means that it is seen as not representative and only marginally legitimate in the eyes of those subject to its rules.

Global levels of integration, even if nestled in rights-based legislation, such as that of the EU, will also likely suffer from all the problems of centralised governments including increased bureaucracy and entrenched interests. There is no guarantee that a world government would be any better than, more just and effective, than individual states, given that it would have to hold together an entire planet's worth of cultures, values, and interests, not all of which are democratic.

The heyday of arguments for world government were also a time of big government, of a belief in the state as an agent that could engineer solutions to social problems through increasing rationalisation. This was also a high tide of commitment to social democratic principles, and Cabrera's proposal sits firmly in that tradition. The states where such visions have been most successful, the Nordic states, are underwritten by common cultural and social values concerning the common good of a specific community, such prerequisites are absent from the global level.

So given that global government and integration is not without its perils, my argument is that before such transformation can happen at the global level, more significant reform is needed at the state level, otherwise global government contains a risk of global domination. For what place is there for people to democratically reject global integration in Cabrera's model? Would a Brexit state be punished, or not have a right to democratically secede from the union? One vision of global government suggests distinctions between political communities would cease to be, and therefore the Brexit scenario would not exist. On the other hand, for that world to exist, communities would have had to democratically agree to disband or be merged into a larger polity. This, in turn, suggests that all states need to at least nominally or minimally democratic before a democratically constituted world government could come into being.

To argue for a world state now is to argue for a political institution that outstrips the consensus of the members who make it up. The danger of Cabrera's state, were it enacted now, is that it would

be an elite-led phenomenon and not a popularly inclusive one. It could not be democratic in inception, even if it had democratic institutions.

So the emergence of the world Cabrera envisions rests on significant change already having taken place in the self-identity of the constituent parts, not just the elites but the populations at large agreeing to merge with others in new forms of polity. Such a change already rests upon the willingness to subscribe to cosmopolitan values and vision.

Therefore, the argument I prefer is one in which attention is paid to how states become more cosmopolitan and democratic in their policies and practices in relation to each other. It is only when states have already committed to not harming each other's citizens and recognizing that they have obligations to do so that they will begin to change. Such a transformation will likely only occur in some form of dialectical move between state level influences and international pressures.

Thus, for those concerned with the serious issues that Cabrera thinks requires world government, the alternative is to pursue and encourage states to be cosmopolitan states, to be good international citizens, to acknowledge institutionally their responsibilities to outsiders. In my preferred view, this requires the development of cosmopolitan constitutional clauses in domestic states whereby they limit their capacity to harm outsiders and acknowledge a duty to consider their interests and allow contestation of their policies.