

The Moral Imperative of Loyalty

*What, really, is the moral significance of national boundaries?
In terms of sheer need, the billion people around the world who live on less than
a dollar a day are worse off than our poor.*

—Michael J. Sandel, *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?* (2009)

*Moral imagination . . . the power that compels us to grant the highest possible reality and
the largest conceivable claim to a thought, action, or person that is not our own,
and not close to us in any obvious way.*

—David Bromwich, *Moral Imagination* (2014)

In February 2011 President Barack Obama, faced with persistent high national unemployment, traveled to Silicon Valley to appeal to the leaders of several American companies to bring jobs back to the United States from their overseas operations. “Those jobs aren’t coming back,” Steve Jobs, founder and president of Apple, responded. In fact, he pointed out that the economic advantages of manufacturing and assembling parts for iMacs, iPads, iPods, and iPhones abroad were too powerful to resist and likely to continue. Like other high-tech companies, Apple went to China to take advantage of both cheaper labor and the flexibility of Chinese factories in adjusting work and production rules. What was once an obligation by American companies to embrace the label “Made in America” no longer applied. “Profits and efficiency have trumped generosity,” a former Labor Department chief economist told the *New York Times*, which reported on Obama’s visit.¹

Obama later began to speak of “economic patriotism,” a catch-all phrase encompassing his appeals to companies to keep jobs in the United States and refrain from moving operations offshore to escape US corporate taxes. But although Obama has tried to promote his brand of “patriotism” with proposals such as taxing corporate profits earned overseas, his advocacy of trade agreements with Asian and European trading partners has drawn fire from critics as economically disloyal. In the early phase of the 2016 election, leading candidates in both the Republican and Democratic parties have organized their campaigns around the charge that such trade deals cost US jobs because of imports and corporations transferring their production abroad.

The phrase “economic patriotism” is a by-product of another complex ethical and moral dilemma posed by globalization, in which the benefits and costs of economic growth have been unevenly distributed among and within

countries, whether they are rich or poor. This uneven distribution poses difficult questions. To whom does a citizen owe loyalty—to his or her neighbors who might have lost jobs because of global competition, or to those in poor countries who have gained because of offshoring of jobs and investments? The role of multinational corporations makes this dilemma all the more complex, because most world trade in the globalization era is within and between their subdivisions or suppliers. It becomes nearly impossible to say who is “us” and who is “them” when thinking about products such as planes, autos, or iPods, all of which contain parts from dozens if not hundreds of different places. As for US-based multinational corporations, to whom should they be “loyal”—their workers, their investors, their home countries, or their customers, whether in the United States or distant countries?

Much of the opposition to trade and investment deals comes from organized labor. But employee solidarity becomes confused when workers are also investors—in the sense that their retirement funds are often invested in the same multinational companies that are offshoring operations or dependent on imports. Such workers may also benefit directly when their companies shift operations to tax havens such as Luxembourg or the Cayman Islands, lowering their costs so they can keep more of their employees on the job. Are people first and foremost citizens of their communities, of their countries, of their employers, or of the world as a whole? And what of the demands that people should keep faith with others of their race, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, income class, or labor union, irrespective of the countries in which they live?

This chapter explores the profound moral questions about the nature of citizenship, empathy, and loyalty or solidarity.

Three Categories of Loyalty

In the economic sphere, even the well-intentioned can be confused over the issue of loyalty. A striking example can be found in Pope Benedict’s encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*. On the one hand, it calls on wealthy countries, as a matter of morality, to import more goods from poor countries. On the other hand, it laments the effects of imports by deploring the struggles of the working classes in rich countries whose jobs are displaced or whose wages are held down because of cheap imports from poor countries.²

Recent elections in the United States have partly turned on the same dilemmas over trade. Trade accords with Mexico and China and the establishment of a new World Trade Organization in the 1990s were also extremely divisive even as Congress approved such steps. Labor unions, environmental activists, and other antiglobalization groups opposed these deals, and more recently targeted the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade deal between the United States and 11 countries in Asia and the Western hemisphere, on the ground that US trading partners are stealing American jobs with their cheap labor and weak environmental and safety conditions. In part because of their

campaigns, companies such as Foxconn Technology Group, whose Chinese operations supply parts and products for Apple and other companies, were forced to upgrade working conditions in the wake of bad publicity brought on by strikes, protests, and suicides (and the installation of suicide prevention nets at company dormitories).

President Obama was able to exploit the emotional quotient in these practices during his 2012 reelection campaign, when he attacked former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney, the Republican presidential candidate and a former executive at Bain Capital, for Bain's stakes in companies that either moved their work overseas or helped other companies do so. Yet Obama's support of the TPP caused most Democrats in Congress to abandon him when he sought authorization to negotiate the pact in early 2015.

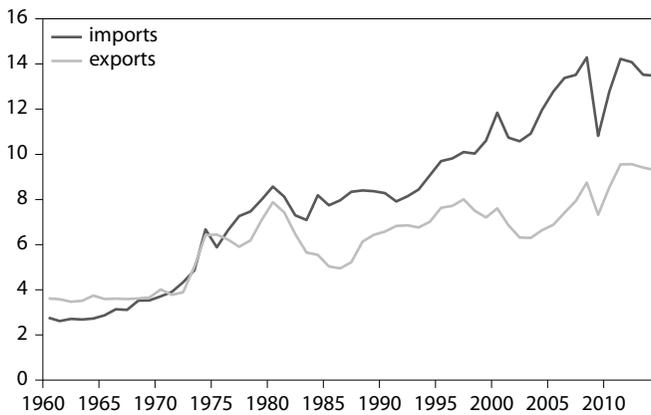
The fact is that lowering trade barriers has never been terribly popular in the United States, even during the heyday of trade deals going back to the Kennedy administration.³ Trade in the early decades after World War II was not a big factor in the US economy, however, which meant that it was not a central issue of concern for Americans. In recent years, total trade as a share of the US economy has approached a quarter of US GDP, elevating its importance in any discussion of the economy (see figure 9.1). In addition, global exports have risen to new heights since 1960, reaching 30 percent of global GDP (see figure 9.2).

In the face of considerable skepticism in the 1990s, President Bill Clinton managed to convince majorities in Congress that the balance of benefits derived from trade and other aspects of globalization was positive, and that Congress had no choice but to embrace globalization because global trade and investment were not going away. Obama made the same argument but with less success, in part because the confidence of many Americans in trade deals has been shaken. Surveys show that although Americans seem to appreciate the benefits of opening new markets for American goods and services abroad, and are happy to buy less expensive imported electronic gadgets, toys, shoes, and clothes, they also think that globalization—combined with advances in labor-saving technologies in the workplace—has contributed to wage stagnation and unemployment at home and enriched corporations and the wealthy at the expense of the middle class.

Basic economic theory holds that trade and financial flows maximize efficiency and productivity to the benefit of producers and consumers alike through the theory of comparative advantage. But changes in the trade and flow of goods, services, and investments, while eliminating inefficiencies and building new competitive sectors, also do so in line with what the economist Joseph Schumpeter called in 1942 “creative destruction.” If one country specializes in producing clothing and another in food, for example, and they concentrate in their areas of comparative advantage, each country is in theory better off than if they do not trade, but the less efficient clothing workers and farmers in each country may lose out. Offshoring jobs to other countries, in theory, also works to the advantage of workers in both countries, most econo-

Figure 9.1 Trade's share of the US economy is increasing

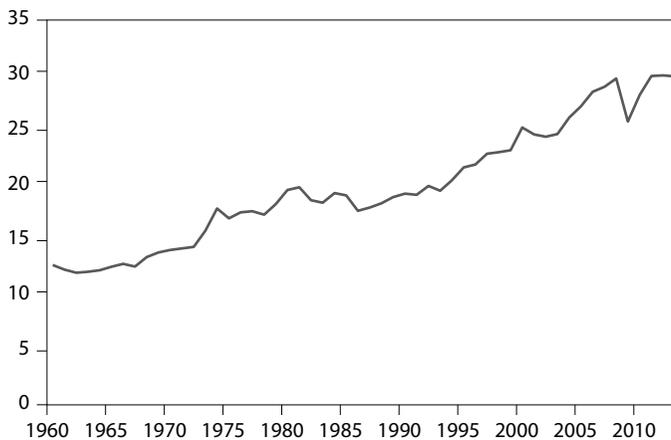
trade (exports and imports) as a percent of GDP



Sources: Trade data: US Census Bureau, Foreign Trade, Historical series; GDP data: US Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Figure 9.2 Global trade has reached new highs

global exports as percent of global GDP



Source: World Bank, *World Development Indicators Database*, December 19, 2014.

mists would agree, but that does not mean the adjustment is painless. “Trade can make everyone better off,” the economist Gregory Mankiw wrote in his classic economics textbook *Principles of Economics*. “But *will* trade make everyone better off? Probably not.”⁴

The *moral* issue comes down to evaluating gains and losses in terms of

one's own fellow citizens versus the less affluent citizens of the world. Martin Wolf of the *Financial Times* has written, for example, that it is "immoral for rich countries to deprive the poor of the world of so large an opportunity for betterment merely because they [the rich countries] are unable to handle sensibly and justly the distribution of the internal costs of a change certain to be highly beneficial overall."⁵ In a similar vein, Thomas Nagel, professor of moral philosophy and law at New York University, finds it is "indecent" for wealthy nations to subsidize their own farmers and in the process cripple the ability of poor countries to export food.⁶

Critics of free trade and investment assert that such agreements are immoral because they hurt the working middle class, especially unskilled labor, and enrich the investor class and those fortunate enough to have the skills to take advantage of the new economic rules. But even these critics seem to have a threshold when it comes to some trade agreements that benefit poor countries. For example, while Congress struggled over legislation granting President Obama authority to negotiate trade deals in 2015, it overwhelmingly approved renewal of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which eliminates or lowers trade barriers for dozens of sub-Saharan African countries. AGOA has become a bipartisan moral imperative, generating tens of billions of dollars worth of exports to the United States from some of the poorest countries in the world, enabling them to lure foreign investments and increase employment, arguably at the expense of American domestic producers.⁷

Ethan Kapstein, professor of sustainable development at the graduate business school INSEAD, usefully divides advocates who disagree over these tradeoffs into three categories:⁸

1. *Economic communitarians*. *Communitarian* is the widely accepted term assigned to those primarily interested in the distributive impact of globalization on their own country or community. The United States advocated free trade after World War II, and in later decades it promoted programs to help those adversely affected. To the extent that critics oppose such steps on the grounds that they contribute to inequality, wage stagnation, and unemployment at home, they are economic communitarians. Some critics argue further that by weakening the US and European economies, globalization has reduced tax revenues and thus curbed the ability of governments to sustain social safety nets and train people for jobs. Communitarians may also focus on concerns about social and economic justice in communities defined by gender, religious, or local identities.
2. *Economic cosmopolitans*. *Cosmopolitan* is a term embraced by a group of modern philosophers who focus on the well-being of persons and groups around the world as a whole, especially the most poor and disadvantaged. They would invoke the Rawlsian "difference principle" (holding that a system is unjust if it hurts the least advantaged) on a global scale, which is something that John Rawls himself never did. Some cosmopolitan-leaning philosophers find fault with Rawls on these grounds. Rawls

argued that his principle was not necessarily applicable beyond a country's borders because each society has the right to adhere to its own norms. Cosmopolitans in this camp say that, on the contrary, rich countries owe something to the poor in other countries, although they disagree about whether globalization gives advantages to the poor in poor countries. Cosmopolitans would favor elimination of farm subsidies in rich countries and barriers on textiles and clothing produced in poor countries. To cosmopolitans, globalization is unjust to the degree that it hinders the opportunities of the world's most vulnerable citizens.

3. *Liberal internationalists.* These supporters of a global trading system advance the argument that such a structure creates a liberal international order that provides benefits well beyond the question of whether the rich or poor are better or worse served. Instead, their goal is to reduce the economic gap between rich and poor countries, irrespective perhaps of what happens within such countries, thereby strengthening the prospects for peace and political stability. The goal of liberal internationalists does not run counter to the goal of either cosmopolitans or communitarians. Instead, their primary objective is to fulfill the vision of the founders of the Bretton Woods system of world trade and development, achieving economic justice as a binding benefit of what Kapstein called the "society of states." A main concern of liberal internationalists is achieving greater cooperation among nations in order to pursue economic cooperation as well as justice. The overriding purpose is to accommodate disputes peacefully, achieve economic interdependence, and make war less likely. In their view, until there is more open trade, the international order falls short of the goal of economic justice (see chapter 12).

Who Is a Communitarian? The "Mystic Chords of Memory"

Neither human existence nor individual liberty can be sustained for long outside the interdependent and overlapping communities to which all of us belong.

—Manifesto of the Communitarian Network (established in 1993)

In theory, ethical norms are or ought to be universal, implying no double standards—for example, one for your family or community and another for those outside that circle. In the pantheon of moral tenets, the demands of loyalty are especially complicated because of the long tradition of fixed moral principles engraved in stone as they were thought to have been in the Ten Commandments. The literary critic Lionel Trilling, writing as moral absolutes were coming under attack in the 1960s and 1970s, has observed that the tradition of moral ideas fixed for all humanity began to undergo a change toward relativism in the 16th century and that in the modern era intellectuals understand morality to be defined differently in different eras and cultures, including the rules of family, tribe, and community.⁹ Thus loyalty has become elevated as a

virtue in modern times, even among philosophers trying to reconcile morality with the wellsprings of culture and history.

The *Wall Street Journal* op-ed contributor Eric Felten has called loyalty a “vexing” virtue because it does not seem to derive from a moral principle beyond helping friends and hurting enemies. He asks if such an evolving set of principles can be called moral. “We can’t say that loyalty to principle always comes ahead of conflicting loyalties to people, nor the other way around,” Felten has written. “We can’t say that family always comes before country, nor the other way around. We can’t say that our obligations to friends trump all. . . . For many, this is the irredeemable downfall of loyalty: How can we say it is a virtue when it works just as effectively in the cause of vice?”¹⁰

What exactly is this loyalty we feel? Michael Sandel, arguing that loyalty is indeed a fundamental moral trait, says it can derive from historic memory and narrative, mythology and art, religious faith, regional ties, ideological fealty, and other factors often evoked in history, narrative, legend, poetry, and song. An eloquent evocation of loyalty was delivered by Abraham Lincoln in his first inaugural address. He appealed to his listeners to save the Union based on “the mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land.”¹¹

Most everyone, however, is aware of examples in which loyalty compromises the ethical or even sensible thing to do. Anyone who has seen crowds cheering or booing umpires or referees in baseball or football games, and almost always siding with the home team, recognizes the irrationality driven by loyalty. When he placed loyalty to the South over his sworn allegiance to the Union and his misgivings about a war to defend slavery, General Robert E. Lee was considered a hero by many, a traitor by others. In another example of loyalty, two famous sets of brothers took different approaches to the issue of family loyalty. In 1995 William Bulger, a prominent Democratic Party political figure, lawmaker, and educator in Massachusetts, had contact with his brother, James Joseph (Whitey) Bulger Jr.—the Boston mobster who was wanted for murder and was a fugitive from justice—without informing the police. For that, he made no apology. Family loyalty trumped duty to society, he acknowledged. But the brother of Ted Kaczynski, the notorious “Unabomber” responsible for multiple murders and injuries, turned his sibling in to authorities—on the condition that the death penalty not be imposed.¹²

It is beyond dispute that the building blocks of society depend on loyalty to one’s community, justifying the elevation of its importance over other ethical demands. But there are many ways in which tribal loyalties can blind members of that community to the goal of overarching welfare for all communities. In game theory, the “prisoner’s dilemma” sets up a situation in which it would be rational for two criminal gang prisoners held separately to confess to a crime, but the prisoners nonetheless remain silent out of loyalty, even though both will be worse off. In his classic study of an impoverished southern Italian town in the 1950s, the sociologist Edward Banfield found, based on interviews with its inhabitants, that there was no loyalty to the larger community

at all. Rather, the town was a tangled nest of rivalries and hatreds driven by the loyalty that families felt only to themselves. Banfield applied a revealing term to this phenomenon, “amoral familism,” because tribal and family loyalties blocked the chances of cooperation that would yield progress for all.¹³

Displays of one’s love of country are familiar in political culture, especially in times of war or conflict. The terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, on New York City and the Boston Marathon bombings on April 15, 2013, unleashed an outpouring of love among the citizens of those cities. Countries under attack—whether Britain during the Blitz in World War II, or Iran under siege today by global sanctions, or Israel faced with terrorist attacks and global condemnation of its policies, or Jordan when one of its soldiers is burned alive by the Islamic State—tend to rally around their leadership, sometimes to the exclusion of other moral considerations. Jonathan Haidt, professor of psychology at the University of Virginia and author of *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (2012), argues that these ties override basic economic axioms, such as the assumption that people behave rationally to maximize self-interest. “Despite what you might have learned in Economics 101, people aren’t always selfish,” he wrote. “In politics, they’re more often groupish. When people feel that a group they value—be it racial, religious, regional or ideological—is under attack, they rally to its defense, even at some cost to themselves. We evolved to be tribal, and politics is a competition among coalitions of tribes. . . . People who worship the same idol can trust one another, work as a team and prevail over less cohesive groups. So if you want to understand politics, and especially our divisive culture wars, you must follow the sacredness.”¹⁴

The rise of the nation-state in the 17th century and the loyalty that new nations commanded were a modern phenomenon. Indeed, nations are a modern phenomenon. A nation that has broken off from empires is defined by its common factors of language, culture, history, and obviously territory, all of which command loyalty. In his book tracing the history of the idea of world government, the author and diplomat Strobe Talbott argues that national identity has fallen into varying camps. One camp of “primordialists” consists of people who see their identity founded on ancient and natural origins. Japan is a good example of this category. Another is India. Talbott notes that Jawaharlal Nehru, in his book *The Discovery of India*, written while he was imprisoned by the British, sought to define such a unified ancient civilization out of a country of disparate factions that he would lead as its first prime minister when it became independent in the late 1940s. Another camp cited by Talbott, the “perennialists,” derives its national identity from ethnic and sectarian communities, some of them connected to particular myths (he cites Greeks, Turks, and the English). Finally, the “modernists” and “constructivists” tend to see nations as phenomena without deep roots but founded on practical necessity such as the desire for security. Many countries in the Middle East with arbitrary borders might fall into this category.¹⁵

But modern evolutionary biologists and others have found that cooperation and altruism among humans—and, by extension, loyalty—have evolved via

the natural selection theorized by Charles Darwin. Scientists studying the willingness of ants or other insects to sacrifice themselves for the greater good of their “societies” have suggested that this altruistic behavior applies to human conduct as well. Edward Wilson, a pioneer in the field of sociobiology, has explained how evolution rewarded the moral sentiments of loyalty to one’s own community because such behavior contributed to survival and more offspring.¹⁶ Richard Dawkins, the evolutionary biologist (and later famous as an avowed atheist), coined the term *selfish gene* to describe the factor in evolution that causes humans to behave selflessly toward those to whom they are genetically related. His use of the word “selfish” caused some misunderstanding. He did not mean selfishness, he claimed, but rather the genetic impulse to preserve one’s self or species in an evolutionary sense.¹⁷ Other experts such as Christopher Boehm, a biological anthropologist at the University of Southern California, and Steven Pinker, author of books on psychology and cognitive science, have also explored the importance of human evolution in creating altruism, empathy, and a sense of justice among communities.†

Yet altruism, empathy, and justice do not appear to have evolved beyond the loyalty that one owes to one’s community, according to some experts. Social scientists have labeled the negative impact from the conflict between loyalty to one’s own people and to strangers in other communities of the world as the “tragedy of the commons.” The “tragedy” lies in the danger arising from one community’s commonsense pursuit of its own self-interest harming the community at large. A well-known example is the overgrazing of a common pasture by rival groups that either spoils the pasture for both or causes a fight because rival camps are blind to the benefits of cooperation.

The psychology professor Joshua Greene notes that Charles Darwin was an early pioneer in trying to use social psychology to answer the question: Where does morality come from? “We now have an answer,” Greene claims. “Morality evolved as a solution to the problem of cooperation, as a way of averting the Tragedy of the Commons.” But he clarifies that, “Morality evolved to enable cooperation, but this conclusion comes with an important caveat. Biologically speaking, humans were designed for cooperation, *but only with some people*. Our moral brains evolved for cooperation *within groups*, and perhaps only within the context of personal relationships. Our moral brains did not evolve for cooperation *between groups* (at least not *all groups*.)” Universal cooperation, he concludes, is simply inconsistent with the principles that govern evolution by natural selection.¹⁸

† Not that altruism as a product of evolution is accepted by everyone. Free market libertarians have gone so far as to disdain the whole concept of altruism. “As to altruism—it has never been alive,” Ayn Rand wrote. “It is the poison of death in the blood of Western civilization, and men survived it only to the extent to which they neither believed nor practiced it. . . . If any civilization is to survive, it is the morality of altruism that men have to reject.” Ayn Rand, “Faith and Force: The Destroyers of the Modern World,” lectures at Yale University on February 17, 1960, Brooklyn College on April 4, 1960, and Columbia University on May 5, 1960.

The “communitarian” school encompasses this set of philosophical views, upholding the moral justification of loyalty and altruism. Besides Sandel, this school of thought includes historians, academics, and social thinkers such as Robert Putnam (author of *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*), Michael Walzer, William Galston, and Amitai Etzioni (who helped found the Communitarian Network in the early 1990s). Putnam cites globalization as a particular challenge to communitarianism. Describing the fracturing of his hometown of Port Clinton, Ohio, he laments “the radically shriveled sense of ‘we,’” undone by technology, globalization, and the resulting loss of an “egalitarian ethos” in which society’s members once cared for one another as they did in the 1950s.¹⁹

The “we” of whom Putnam speaks are members of his own community or hometown, and his nostalgia for a cohesive local community is no doubt compelling. Recent history suggests, however, that breaking up nations into new, more manageable communitarian units is hardly an unmixed blessing. It can lead to a new “tragedy of commonsense morality,” as Greene might put it, undermining the moral imperatives owed to larger states or to the world community.

Perhaps the greatest proponent of world government of modern times, Woodrow Wilson, underpinned his belief with the conviction that “self-determination” for the myriad sectarian and ethnic groups in Europe and elsewhere could help avert future conflicts and contribute to global order. Indeed, he and his victorious allies from Britain and France pored over maps and tried to create new boundaries to permit such a thing to happen. “Self-determination is not a mere phrase,” Wilson told Congress in 1918. “It is an imperative principle of action which statesmen will henceforth ignore at their peril.”²⁰ But whereas Wilson believed that self-determination and the loyalty it would engender would lead to global stability, many others thought differently. Prophetically, Wilson’s own secretary of state, Robert Lansing, warned of the dangers of promoting self-determination. “The phrase is simply loaded with dynamite,” Lansing wrote in his diary. “It will raise hopes which can never be realized. It will, I fear, cost thousands of lives. In the end, it is bound to be discredited, to be called the dream of an idealist who failed to realize the danger until too late to check those who attempt to put the principle into force. What a calamity that the phrase was ever uttered! What misery it will cause! Think of the feelings of the author when he counts the dead who died because he uttered a phrase!”²¹

The concept of self-determination returned to the forefront after the collapse of communism and the Soviet empire and its satellites in the early 1990s, especially in the wake of the breakup of Yugoslavia and the eruption of the Balkan Wars. Supporting self-determination, the communitarian Michael Walzer wrote in 1992 of a “new tribalism” asserting itself in nation-states around the world as communities yearned to find meaning in their own identities, a trend he said should be encouraged or at least not necessarily opposed.²² That call for greater tolerance of separatist movements was later

widely criticized by liberals such as the literary scholar David Bromwich, who pointed out in 2014 how such movements had devolved into nasty religious and sectarian wars everywhere, particularly in Yugoslavia. Events in the two decades since the early 1990s have proven that criticism worth taking seriously because sectarian and ethnic rivalries erupted in scores of countries, especially in the Middle East but also in Europe, where restive or rebellious Scots, Basques, Catalonians, Corsicans, and most recently Russian-speaking eastern Ukrainians have pressed for their independence.²³

In its manifesto, the Communitarian Network declared itself skeptical of social engineering, the elevation of individual rights over the health of a community, and attempts to change the basic social structures of other societies. “Neither human existence nor individual liberty can be sustained for long outside the interdependent and overlapping communities to which all of us belong,” the manifesto states. “A communitarian perspective does not dictate particular policies; rather it mandates attention to what is often ignored in contemporary policy debates: the social side of human nature; the responsibilities that must be borne by citizens, individually and collectively, in a regime of rights; the fragile ecology of families and their supporting communities; and the ripple effects and long-term consequences of present decisions.”²⁴

Communitarians do not disavow social justice. Indeed, it is a defining element of their moral imperative. Their emphasis, however, is on seeking fulfilling and just social connections through groups rather than the nation-state. They embrace what sociologists and political scientists call the group theory of politics, which holds that the state in a pluralist society mediates among interest groups—for example, business corporations and labor unions—or engages in a cooperative arrangement with them. Beyond interest groups, however, loyalty is commanded by what the sociologist Herbert Gans has called micro societies—family, neighborhood, local schools, voluntary associations, and the workplace. “These micro societies are elements, though not the totality of what is now being called civil society,” William Galston wrote, citing Gans. “They require special kinds of bonds of intimacy, continuity, and stability. Their characteristic language is a language of commitment, responsibility, duty, virtue, memory, solidarity, and even love rather than the discourse, valuable in its own right, of choice, rights, personal freedom, and individualism.” Galston asserts that these bonds and connections are under assault by economic growth and change, “collectivized” social norms, and the legacy of condescension harbored by liberal elites toward the working class that peaked in the United States in the 1970s. While favoring the buildup of communities, however, Galston makes clear his opposition to barriers placed in the way of the free flow of goods, capital, and people.²⁵

Rawls is not associated with the term *communitarian* (the term came into greater vogue after his death in 2002). But a much-debated element of his 1971 work *Theory of Justice* is that his principle of requiring that a society’s actions not hurt the least well-off of its citizens applies mainly to one’s own

community or nation. Rawls maintains that each society is self-contained with understood norms, values, and traditions.²⁶ In *The Law of Peoples* (1999), he explains that—beyond a minimal obligation to combat famine, disease, slavery, and genocide in other countries—one society does not necessarily have an obligation or even a right to impose its moral principles on another. To insist that other nations follow one’s own morals would be impractical and even coercive, he suggests.

Citing a hypothetical example, Rawls notes that some countries may choose policies that have the effect of keeping them poor, and such choices should be respected by outsiders. “I believe that the causes of the wealth of a people and the forms it takes lie in their political culture and in the religious, philosophical, and moral traditions that support the basic structure of their political and social institutions, as well as in the industriousness and cooperative talents of its members,” he wrote. A nation’s economic policies derive from factors particular to that country, such as an abundance or an absence of natural resources or choices made by its peoples democratically. The problem is practical as well as moral, he explains, adding that although there remains a “duty of assistance” to poor countries by rich countries, “merely dispensing funds will not suffice” in some circumstances because of their inability to use such assistance effectively.²⁷

Correct or not, Rawls did not cite any particular examples of countries that have made these choices. But many in the West would argue that developing countries that hewed to socialism and maintained tight government regulation or ownership of business and natural resources stymied the growth of their economies for years. Often, these policies were adopted because these countries wanted to break from the rule of the economic and political elites inherited from colonial years. Throughout the Cold War, Western countries urged and even pressured poor countries to turn away from socialism, arguing that it was for their own good and for the good of their poor, but these arguments frequently fell on deaf ears. India, for example, was a mostly socialist economy after its independence in 1947. Its founders argued that socialism helped to ensure democracy and ease sectarian and ethnic divisions that could have worsened with the emergence of a wealthy class of economic overlords manipulating the political system and producing instability. Some Westerners were resigned to that choice. “If I have any opinion about this country at all, it is that it has been a moderate economic failure, but a distinct political success,” Daniel Patrick Moynihan, ambassador to India in the 1970s, wrote to President Richard Nixon in 1973. Moynihan suggested that India willingly accepted slow growth as the price for political cohesiveness: “There is a sense in which India, not wholly unwitting, has taken vows of poverty.”²⁸ Despite India’s appalling poverty, Rawls might well have understood that tradeoff.

Thomas Nagel has noted that Rawls’s view in some ways descends from that of Thomas Hobbes, the 17th-century political philosopher, who, Nagel explains, maintained that justice cannot be achieved except within a sovereign state. If Rawls is correct, Nagel says, the goal of justice must be achieved

through “a world of internally just states” that do not impose their views on one another. But if Hobbes is right that justice can be guaranteed only by a strong sovereign, “the idea of *global* justice without a *world government* is a chimera.”²⁹ Chimera or not, a yearning for world consciousness has become a major factor in the debate over globalization in recent decades.

Who Is a Cosmopolitan? “I Am a Citizen of the World”

In his account of the death of Socrates, Plutarch argued that the charge that Socrates was a traitor and threat to his community was buttressed by the philosopher proclaiming himself not an Athenian or a Greek but “a citizen of the world.” The phrase has also been attributed to the Greek philosopher Diogenes of Sinope.³⁰

Other examples dating from antiquity note the higher calling of loyalty to those beyond one’s own border. In his book on global government, for example, Strobe Talbott applies the cosmopolitan principle to the spread of Christianity, as promoted by the apostle Paul, and later embodied in the Nicene Creed of the Roman emperor Constantine. “When I learned to recite this basic part of the Christian liturgy in Sunday school in the 1950s, I remember thinking that it sounded like the pledge of allegiance that began each day in the elementary school I attended during the week,” Talbott wrote.³¹

In the 13th century, Dante Alighieri was an early supporter of the idea of a global government, but in his vision such a government was to be established on the principles of the Roman Empire, which supposedly imposed its peace, *Pax Romana*, on warring European nations.³² Still another cosmopolitan in the pantheon is Immanuel Kant, who “considered himself first and foremost not a Prussian but a citizen of the world,” according to one biographer.³³ Kant’s essay “An Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose” prophesied an end to monarchy and imperialism, and, Talbott argues, “anticipates some of the major, if still unfulfilled, features of the United Nations system” of international law, nonintervention and nonaggression, self-determination, human rights, and democracy.³⁴

But the originators of cosmopolitanism spoke little or not at all of the *economic* sphere, where the issues of justice raised by Rawls’s “difference principle” take on a particular salience. Whereas Rawls argued, not unpersuasively, against the dangers of applying his principle to other societies, cosmopolitans contend that the citizens of rich countries have multiple obligations to pursue policies that help (or at least do no harm to) the poor in other countries, especially in those poor countries dominated by rich elites.

The international economic system makes citizens of rich countries feel connected to the destitute abroad. “My relation of co-membership in the system of international trade with the Brazilian who grows my coffee or the Philippine worker who assembles my computer is weaker than my relation of co-membership in US society with the Californian who picks my lettuce or the New Yorker who irons my shirts,” observed Nagel. “But doesn’t the first pair

of relations as well as the second justify concern about the moral arbitrariness of the inequalities that arise through our joint participation in this system?”³⁵ Going further, some cosmopolitans direct their sympathies to particular ethnic, religious, racial, or gender groups deemed to suffer more than others. Such sympathizers are sometimes called “prioritarian” cosmopolitans. Among them is Martha Nussbaum, professor of law and ethics at the University of Chicago, who has argued that women deserve special consideration in a world that is tilted against them.³⁶

For all the logic of global justice and the pronouncements going back to antiquity, the postulating of any kind of universal moral precepts that ought to govern relations between rich and poor countries—indeed, between all countries—is a modern phenomenon. Most philosophical and political writings since ancient times have presumed that nations or their antecedents, such as the city-states of antiquity, are justified in pursuing their economic, political, and strategic interests, letting others fend for themselves. Accordingly, it is also presumed that the rulers of countries or nation-states should put the stability and welfare of their own state above universal moral values. As Niccolò Machiavelli wrote in *The Prince*, “It must be understood that a prince, and especially a new prince, cannot observe all those things which are considered good in men, being often obliged, in order to maintain the state, to act against faith, against charity, against humanity, and against religion.”³⁷

Self-interest, properly contained, was a building block of stability in the 1648 treaties known as the Peace of Westphalia that ended the Thirty Years’ War, fought among empires, nation-states, and religions. The new political order on the European continent established by the treaties was to be based on state sovereignty, self-determination, and noninterference. Yet it hardly challenged—indeed, it reinforced—the assumption that nation-states relentlessly pursue their self-interest in a perpetual state of competition and hostility.³⁸ Thomas Hobbes, in *Leviathan* (1651), viewed the state of nature among nations, as among men, to be inherently in conflict over basic pursuits of self-interest. He wrote, “In all times kings and persons of sovereign authority, because of their independency, are in continual jealousies, and in the state and posture of gladiators, having their weapons pointing, and their eyes fixed on one another, that is, their forts, garrisons, and guns upon the frontiers of their kingdoms, and continual spies upon their neighbours, which is a posture of war.”³⁹

In the era of diplomacy after World War II, in which US national interest in combatting communism was accompanied by a moral fervor, the heirs to the Hobbesian view were those “realists” who argued that self-interest, including the pursuit of compacts with distasteful regimes, had to take precedence over moral issues such as universal human rights. According to Stanley Hoffman of Harvard, among the most prominent contemporary heirs of this “realist” approach to foreign policy in the postwar era were Hans Morgenthau, George F. Kennan, and former secretary of state Henry Kissinger, who, with President Richard Nixon, overcame decades of moral opposition to Chinese communism to open relations with Communist China.⁴⁰ The higher purpose of the China

opening was to counter Soviet hegemony and negotiate an end to the Vietnam War, in the process seeking a new equilibrium of national interests to secure world stability. Kennan is renowned for proposing a policy of containment directed at the Soviet Union, but the policy was based on self-interest, not on morals. “Morality as the foundation of civic virtue, and accordingly as a condition precedent to successful democracy—yes,” he wrote in the 1960s. “Morality in governmental method, as a matter of conscience and preference on the part of our people—yes. But morality as a general criterion for the determination of the behavior of different states—no. Here other criteria, sadder, more limited, more practical, must be allowed to prevail.”⁴¹

In recent decades, however, realists have had to share influence with a more idealistic approach to international relations, emphasizing human rights, economic justice, and protections of health and the environment. This more idealistic approach has also called for cooperation and enforcement of agreed-on rules through international organizations such as the United Nations, International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and World Trade Organization (WTO). The emergence of morality-based foreign policy has come and gone in the decades since the end of the Cold War, in part because of the fading communist threat. Human rights, democracy, peacekeeping, protection of the environment, limits on greenhouse gases, and efforts to stop the proliferation of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons are all features of the US post-Cold War objectives, heading in the direction of cosmopolitanism. The supposed universal yearning for democracy and liberty, for example, has been a centerpiece of US dealings—not always honored as much as proclaimed—with authoritarian countries in the Arab world. As for alleviating poverty, the Cold War itself was filled with declarations by the United States that it wished to help the economically disadvantaged masses of the developing world, and yet it was manifestly in the self-interest of the United States to compete with the Soviet Union for allies and client states among poor countries. Helping them with foreign assistance would lift their peoples from poverty and—in theory—stabilize their political environments, but the self-serving parallel objective was to earn credit, loyalty, and security alliances with the West.

Theories of international justice in the economic sphere focusing on trade, investment, and aid relationships are a phenomenon of recent decades. Samuel Scheffler, professor of philosophy and law at New York University, argued recently that the concept of “global justice” has emerged only in the last three decades. “New books and articles about global justice appear almost daily,” he wrote. “It has been the topic of numerous academic conferences and symposia, and outside of academia the idea has become a focal point for political activism across a broad front. There are global justice centers, global justice programs, global justice projects, and a global justice movement. An *Encyclopedia of Global Justice* was published in 2011. Yet the phrase hardly appeared in the philosophical literature at all prior to 1980, nor did it figure much in non-academic discourse.”⁴²

Rawls’s emphasis on justice as applicable to one’s own society has sparked

a counterargument that his theories are too limited. Peter Singer, professor of bioethics at the University Center for Human Values at Princeton, takes Rawls to task on the issue of immigration, which Rawls said was not an obligation for a rich country. This view, said Singer, effectively dispenses justice depending on which side of a national border one happens to live.[‡] Singer compares Rawls's view of justice as confined to one's own society as comparable to that of President George W. Bush, who in 2001 told German chancellor Gerhard Schröder that he would not sacrifice domestic economic growth to the cause of curbing climate change. Singer claims that the heedless emissions of carbon dioxide from the exhausts of gas-guzzling sports utility vehicles of the United States are no less an assault on global humanity than the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001.⁴³

Two other leading cosmopolitan theorists and advocates of international economic justice have also taken on Rawls: Charles Beitz, professor of politics at Princeton, and Thomas Pogge, professor of law and philosophy at Yale. More than three decades ago, Beitz's book *Political Theory and International Relations* (1979) broke ground on the issue by arguing for the relevance of economic justice on a global scale. In it, he claims that worldwide economic integration since Rawls has increased the urgency of combating global poverty, food and energy shortages, and exploitation of natural resources. Beitz also contends that Rawls took a blinkered approach, overlooking the importance of a changed global economy and the rise of supranational political authorities that can help set or enforce the rules. These organizations include the World Bank, the IMF, the WTO (and its forerunner the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, GATT), and many other organizations under the United Nations umbrella that Beitz maintains deepen rather than alleviate the world's economic injustices. Global economic interdependence, Beitz asserts, "widens the gap between rich and poor countries even though it produces absolute gains for almost all of them," and foreign investment by multinational corporations—which have created jobs for many in poor countries—"appears in some instances to exacerbate international inequality."⁴⁴ In his view, corporations that move profits and investments to escape taxation, seek friendly political environments, and pay low wages have subverted self-governance in poor societies, although he does not cite any examples. "International interdependence involves a complex and substantial pattern of social interaction, which produces benefits and burdens that would not exist if national economies were autarkic," says Beitz. "In view of these considerations, Rawls's passing concern for the law of nations seems to miss the point of international justice altogether."⁴⁵

Beitz acknowledges the validity of Rawls's point that "different cultures might have radically different conceptions of what morality is" and that the

‡ Singer is perhaps best known for his advocacy of animal rights and the view that it is unacceptable for people of means to allow poverty to exist in the world. He also calls on people to aim for "effective altruism," giving a third of their income to charities for the poor and focusing on where the money does the most good.

West cannot be confident of the correctness of its concepts. But despite an understandable concern about “intellectual imperialism,” minimal standards of justice are universally accepted as rational, he says.⁴⁶ A “broadly cosmopolitan” approach might reasonably be constrained by “one’s responsibilities to one’s own compatriots,” Beitz concedes, but that this is not persuasive because it is obvious that one’s own self-interest does not trump the morality of seeking equality in the society in which one lives.⁴⁷

Pogge, who studied under Rawls at Harvard, argues that his mentor’s view of justice as limited to one’s own society would be justified only “if modern states were indeed closed schemes.”⁴⁸ His argument is different from that of Singer. Whereas Singer calls on the wealthy to compromise their lifestyles and directly help the poor—the “duty-to-help” argument—Pogge argues that charity alone cannot substitute for changing an immoral system. Singer’s argument is that one would no more refuse to rescue a child because of concern over dirtying one’s new suit than one should refuse to give a portion of one’s income in order to save a starving child on the other side of the interdependent world. Pogge says, “I see a violation not in the mere fact that people don’t have enough to eat and that they are very vulnerable, but I see it in the fact that the economic institutional order of the world is associated with this very persistent poverty and that different institutional arrangements at the supranational level could stop and even reverse the slide towards ever-greater income disparities.”⁴⁹ It happens that many economists share one change Pogge advocates—ending curbs on the transfer of intellectual property in pharmaceuticals to poor countries. Instead of innovators reaping profits from their discoveries, Pogge says drug companies should receive government subsidies if they innovate.⁵⁰

Another student of these issues, Kwame Anthony Appiah, professor of philosophy at New York University, weighs the tradeoffs between cosmopolitanism and communitarianism in a different way. In *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006), he invokes the “splendidly philosophical” question raised by Adam Smith himself: Would a civilized European sacrifice his comfort to help victims of an earthquake in China? (According to Smith, this “man of humanity in Europe” would express his sorrow and misfortune for the Chinese, then reflect on the effects of commerce in Europe, and then return to his own affairs “with the same ease and tranquility as if no such accident had occurred.”⁵¹) Appiah points out that “cosmopolitan moral judgment requires us to feel about everyone in the world what we feel about our literal neighbors,” but this does not mean that distant sufferers have “the same grip on our sympathies as our nearest and dearest.” Indeed, he adds, “we’d better start with the recognition that they don’t.”⁵² Continuing in this vein, Appiah reflects, “Whatever my basic obligations are to the poor far away, they cannot be enough, I believe, to trump my concerns for my family, my friends, my country; nor can an argument that every life matters require me to be indifferent to the fact that one of those lives is mine.”⁵³

Reconciling the demands of communitarian and cosmopolitan principles becomes all the more difficult when the abstract is translated into the concrete realities of the global economy, the subject of the next chapter.

