

## A “Global” Global Justice Theory

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*Abstract.* Global justice is one of the hottest topics in political philosophy and growing in popularity over the last few decades. This chapter examines a major blind spot in leading theories in the field. It is so prevalent that neither its leading proponents nor defenders appear to take any notice. The blind spot is that while virtually all theories of “global” justice claim worldwide reach, few, if any, are global in any deep sense of globally engaged. The problems are partly an imperialistic application of values and principles from philosophers in the affluent world to all others without their input, engagement or consideration showing an arrogance and aloofness to be avoided. But at least as problematic is the failure to engage with global ways of thinking across traditions. This is because traditions can learn from each other bringing new resources to solve a tradition's philosophical problems. This new perspective - which I call “global philosophy” - is key to making global justice more global as well as more philosophically advanced

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### Introduction

The field of global justice has grown enormously over the last few decades (Brooks 2016, Brooks 2023a, 2023b).<sup>1</sup> While much of the history of political philosophy focuses on justice within a country's boundary, recent work has been increasingly centred on justice beyond borders. There has been great sophistication over time in our understanding of global justice, too. The chasm between nationalists and cosmopolitans has closed as each often develop more complex and compelling analyses of how we might share duties to all, but have more stringent duties to those with closer connections of some morally relevant kind. Scholarship in the field has come a long way since its earliest days and it remains more vibrant than ever (Brooks 2020a).

However, there remains a long-standing and deep-rooted problem with the global justice field. There is a strong prevalence for thinking about global justice and global problems more generally in a distinctly *non-global* way. Theorists reflect on the world through various philosophical and ideological lenses – whether they be conservative or cosmopolitan, liberal or libertarian, nationalist or realist, capitalist or Marxist, left or right, analytic or Continental – that are bound up within a single tradition. This is not to say that Western philosophical concepts and theories are irrelevant or unimportant for thinking about and solving global problems, for example. But it is to say we should recognise and take more seriously the issue that much of global justice thinking is insufficiently “global” in applying insights from one tradition without considering more substantively, if not incorporating, insights found in other philosophical traditions. Why should philosophers think their

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter substantially redevelops themes and ideas first presented in Brooks (2013a).

tradition's resources are sufficient and uniquely placed – whatever the approach taken – to address issues in places where other traditions prevail, especially where there is widespread ignorance of even their most basic tenants?

It is a central problem for global justice theorising that it seeks to apply insights from a single tradition to global challenges. We need to move closer towards a more “global” global justice theory from the perspective of a more global philosophy.

This chapter will explain how we typically work within variously diverse traditions that are bounded separately from others. The chapter next considers how bounded philosophical approaches are restricted means for addressing global problems. However rich their philosophical resources, they remain limited to their bounded, often culturally-specific tradition and unable to employ additional resources found in other traditions. In contrast, a global philosophy is then a more “unbound philosophy” better suited for a globalized world providing access to a wider range of philosophical resources (Brooks 2013). Our world is ever-changing and more interconnected than ever before. It is time for philosophy to catch up with these developments and this chapter will explain why and how.

## **Philosophy as bounded**

It is easy to view any philosophical tradition as sufficiently ideas-resource rich to address global problems, as they are usually highly diverse with various, contrasting and contradictory positions in these wide tents. Philosophical traditions are complex and multifaceted.

A good example is liberalism. This tradition is diverse and inclusive of a large range of some of Western philosophy's most canonical figures. These towering philosophers include a complexity of thought, such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, T. H. Green, John Stuart Mill, Brian Barry, John Rawls and beyond (Barry 2001; Hobbes 1996; Locke 1988; Mill 1989; Rawls 1971; Rawls 1996). Liberalism is a wide tent of diverse views. They represent advocates of popular democracy and their opponents. They are libertarians as well as communitarians. Some are contractarians or deontologists, while others are Hegelians and consequentialists. Whenever someone describes “liberalism” as one or the other, they capture only part of the tradition at most. The same is true for other traditions, not least conservatism.

What brings these diverse figures into a common tradition is their acknowledgement of a shared identity. Hobbes and Rawls disagree about several significant issues, but one important factor that unites them as fellow members of a shared liberal tradition is their sense of a linked identity and common philosophical belonging to a mutual project. Rawls says that Hobbes' *Leviathan* is “surely the greatest work of political philosophy in English” and, importantly, Rawls understands his project as a further development of problems that Hobbes first raises (Rawls 2001, 1). Rawls and Hobbes share a conversation and common concern; they are connected through an identity about common concerns and the available horizon of possibilities for satisfactorily addressing them. We can locate a common thread linking these two figures together, such as the centrality of consent and the importance of individual rights. The idea of a philosophical tradition is found in this shared belonging and identity, whatever

these might be.<sup>2</sup> Liberalism is only one of many such examples we can find – in their own unique ways – in other traditions.

While they are often diverse and complex, our philosophical traditions are *bounded*. They operate within restrictions in viewing the world and philosophical problems from a particular perspective. Each tradition has its own set of resources with which it uses to understand our world – and it does so on its own. Typically, it will set itself in contrast and opposition to alternative perspectives. The object is to provide a more convincing understanding than others from its bounded perspective, limited to its own philosophical resources.

When our traditions come into contact with each other, it is like a Westphalian anarchic international sphere where each state is a self-contained whole bumping against others in pursuit of furthering its individual goals. Similarly, our traditions approach others as often antagonistic or hostile in the intellectual marketplace of ideas. Each tradition is like an island in a swirling sea of otherness. The issue is not whether traditions can or do interact with one another, but how they do so.

One illustration is the liberal tradition and its attempts to address the problem of political stability over time (Hobbes 1996, Rawls 1996). While these attempts may acknowledge non-liberal traditions, any such engagement is limited in most cases to those sharing important spheres of established contact breeding greater familiarity. In other words, traditional boundedness may become less rigid — or and less *bounded* and borders become more porous — as engagement becomes further embedded over time. Hegel's philosophy offers an alternative to liberalism, but it engages with canonical liberal philosophers and ideas (Brooks 2007, Hegel 1990). This engagement over time across traditions has led to later engagement in future (Rawls 1996, 285-88; Rawls 2000, 329-71).

The lack of engagement between traditions seems particularly true in Western-based traditions. The reason is not because they are more error-prone than others, but it is rather because non-Western-based philosophical traditions dwell in the shadow against the wider global backdrop of Western-based traditions' dominance. While Western-based traditions rarely engage with non-Western thought, the reverse is not the case. This is perhaps best explained by the fact that less dominant traditions must seek out their own spaces to develop and so forced to confront other philosophical traditions in a way that the dominant views need not given their position and, worse, too rarely value. One example is found in contemporary work in Indian philosophy (Raghuramaraju 2009).

Such examples are indicative only of how traditions containing great diversity should be understood as bounded, but not closed. A *closed* tradition is one which would deny *any* engagement with other traditions. While most philosophical discourses can be located within a single tradition, few omit any acknowledgement of others. An example of this might be fascism where only a single, self-contained ideological viewpoint is thought to consist in any merit, or perhaps other views the likes of which Rawls would describe as *not* reasonable

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<sup>2</sup> My discussion is not meant to be indicative and not exhaustive. Nor do I want to suggest that a tradition is a mere set of family resemblances. Whatever else a tradition may be, I claim that a tradition is related to a *recognition* of a shared belonging. I am unable to explore further issues concerning the possible roles for intended meanings and their reception which I bracket here because of space constraints. Nonetheless, I note my awareness of these and other important issues that may bear on my analysis (Bevir 2002, Brooks 2006).

comprehensive doctrines (Brooks 2015). The issue is not whether a tradition is open or closed, but rather whether a tradition might benefit from becoming unbound through engaging more substantially with alternative traditions. And, of course, they would benefit by having more resources to draw on to address philosophical problems.

It is surprising to discover how relatively rarely different philosophical traditions substantively engage with one another. One reason is that an established history of mutual engagement has a long track record of leading to important innovations for each participating tradition (Bosanquet 1923, Brooks 2021, Brudner 2009, Green 1986). There is much potential future promise for additional philosophical pay-offs from wider engagement with new and less familiar traditions as these examples indicate. This is not to overlook existing and important, fruitful attempts at bridging Western and non-Western philosophical traditions (Barnhart 2012, Carpenter and Ganeri 2010, Hutton 2006, Hutton 2008, Parekh 2006). However, it is to argue that such attempts are too rare and much more should be encouraged. Let us next turn to why.

### **Why Unbounded Philosophy?**

It is not the case that no one has tried to produce work that cross-cuts traditions where lessons are learned from one and applied to another. Most of this effort can typically be found in comparative philosophy (Scharfstein 1998). Undoubtedly, a neglected approach within academic philosophy and underexplored. For example, few university departments will cover comparative philosophy and the work can be underrepresented in the leading journals. And yet some fascinating research happens in this area – and overlooked, to their detriment, by the mainstream, as demonstrated by studies finding novel connections between Machiavelli's classic *The Prince* and Kautilya's illuminating *Arthashastra* (Brown 1953: 49-52).

One issue with some work in comparative philosophy, but certainly not all, is its focus on finding similarities *across* different traditions. This is invaluable work revealing new connections between areas that might seem alien, or even contrary, to each other. Much of my original personal interest in philosophy was through exploring comparative approaches (Brooks 2005). However, it retains the restrictedness of the orthodoxy, of bounded philosophy. We learn about relations, but do not – necessarily – transform our traditions through their adopting new resources.

A second issue is that much of comparative philosophy operates in the realm of histories of philosophies. This restricts the interest of the greater number working on more contemporary philosophical topics. There are costs in gaining an understanding of the history of ideas that are increased by exploring the history of how another tradition considers shared topics – and without clear pay-offs for contributing to contemporary philosophical progress.

A third issue is that comparative philosophy has, sadly, failed to convince the mainstream of the value in looking beyond one's tradition – not in search of rivals, but to find new sources of support. More philosophers need to become convinced of the value of unbounded philosophy to motivate and develop their interconnections. There needs to be a more compelling case made for the *philosophical* importance of bringing bridges between traditions (however otherwise intrinsically important these connections might be).

For example, consider the field of global justice. We should be surprised – perhaps obviously so – that the study of *global* justice to address *global* problems with international reach so often is developed through a parochial, bounded tradition operating in isolation, and perhaps in contrast, with others. It should be a deep concern that global justice theories are traditionally not global, but particular with most of the canonical work found in a broadly narrow frame (Brooks 2008a).

To illustrate this point, consider global challenges like the development of just war theories setting out the philosophical justification for armed conflict between different states – or the challenge of addressing the prevalence of severe poverty. Neither war nor severe poverty are phenomenon specific to the West or non-West. No single tradition has a monopoly of things to say, ideas to offer and resources to contribute in helping us understand them better.

Yet all too often, these *global* problems are considered only in a *non-global* way applying the views of one tradition to solve challenges facing all traditions. My primary objection is different from the view that the problem here is colonization by the West of the non-West in terms of how challenges are conceived and their attempted solutions, although this is a concern, too. On the contrary, my primary objection is not so much in the political power of some traditions versus others, but the ways in which *all* philosophical traditions – whether Western or non-Western – too often approach one another as bounded, inflexible monads unable to import new resources from others.

This objection is more philosophical than political. A failure to be open to the horizon of possibilities of incorporating concepts and other resources from other traditions limits the wherewithal available to understand and address some of the most pressing challenges of our time. For example, the climate emergency is not easier to address when choosing to restrict the available resources at hand to think and act in more effective ways (Brooks 2020). Our approach to *global* challenges should be *global* in their design – and requires our developing a *global philosophy*.

To be clear, our global challenges are *global* in different ways. First, they are global *geographically*. The problem of climate change does not impact only one place, one country or even one continent, but everywhere. This global scale and reach is important. Secondly, these challenges are global *philosophically*. These problems are not the exclusive subject-matter for any one philosophical tradition. The issue here is that much of the most influential work on global justice has operated almost entirely within a relatively *bounded* approach. Global justice is about global problems, but its formulation has lacked sufficient global *thought*. Global philosophy aims to fill this void.

It must be emphasised that my argument is *not* that our orthodox Western approaches to global justice should be jettisoned, but they – and any approach (Western or not) can be improved. Various approach remain of *vital* philosophical interest. The issue is not to cease working within any philosophical tradition, but rather than to develop the traditions we operate from to interrelate with others and progress as that tradition in learning from others. Global justice has been insufficiently global philosophically. Different traditions can and should meaningfully engage with each other to improve philosophical problem-solving. Once bridges are built long-term positive engagement can grow. But the problem is that these bridges are so difficult to forge. The challenge is to make a more convincing case for why

new philosophical horizons are worth exploring for greater philosophical benefit. I believe it is time our philosophy rose to this great challenge by ending its bounded approach to global problems: global justice deserves a more *global* philosophy.

### **Philosophy Unbounded: *Global* Global Justice**

Global philosophy is an *unbounded* approach. It is a method whereby we open our individual tradition to others beyond our immediate boundaries to pursue philosophical benefits. Global philosophy is unfettered by self-limitation to engagement with what is established and familiar; it is open to what is new. Global philosophy can be adopted by any and all particular traditions, no matter whether liberal, Hegelian, post-structuralist or others.

For example, the liberal or radical feminism engages in global philosophy by an openness to exploring new ideas from a wider range of philosophical traditions. Global philosophy is motivated by the potential for an improved ability to address philosophical problems through revised or new philosophical resources. So a liberal global philosophy might attempt to engage with traditions of both East and West to reveal new insights that might be redeployed within liberalism improving its success at constructing compelling arguments. A global philosophical approach is about improving the traditions we work within through engaging with traditions outside our framework. So global philosophy is not about abandoning our individual traditions, but working through them – connecting to others – so we can develop and improve our individual traditions.

Stated differently, global philosophy is *unbounded* in its not being bound entirely within any one philosophical tradition. Thus, global philosophy is about opening the horizons for the traditions we wish to improve and reinvigorate. Global philosophy – to be clear – is *not* unbounded in the sense of lacking any bounds: its aim is about improving our traditions and not merging all into a single World Philosophy.

I have highlighted throughout the notion of Western philosophical traditions – broadly defined – as a set of relatively *bounded* traditions. This distinction is made because the situation is generally different for non-Western philosophical traditions, such as found in Indian thought (see Ganeri 2011; Parekh 2006; Raghuramaraju 2011; Sivaraksa 1992). There is an increasing amount of work aiming to make Indian and other Asian philosophical traditions more accessible to a Western audience as well (see Bushan and Garfield 2011; Nhat Hanh 2008; Kontrul 1987).

In addition, there is deeply insightful and illuminating work undertaken within the Indian philosophical tradition that has developed with a deep awareness (and appreciation) of developments in Western philosophical traditions (see Radhakrishnan and Moore 1957, 575-637; Raghuramaraju 2006; Raghuramaraju 2009). The problem is not that non-Western philosophical traditions have nothing interesting to offer or lack philosophical sophistication. Nor is the problem for a lack of trying to communicate to a Western audience, especially as this work has become increasingly available. While so many Indian philosophers have engaged meaningfully with Western philosophical ideas, this has regrettably not been reciprocated.

There are several ways in which our taking more seriously an engagement with less familiar philosophical traditions may lead to illuminating avenues for future work in fields such as global justice. My illustrations will be confined to how Western traditions might engage further with Indian philosophical traditions. These examples are meant to be only indicative of the likely future benefits of building bridges between philosophical traditions: an exhaustive examination would require several volumes. Plus, the main hurdle is convincing philosophers working in Western traditions to see the value in greater engagement with non-Western traditions and not *vice versa*. Indian philosophy is selected because it is a non-Western tradition that I'm most familiar with. I do not claim or suggest that it has any exclusive bridges to Western thought over and above other non-Western traditions.

Take the issue of our diverse identities. Every society contains social spaces filled with diversity. The challenge lies in how to respond best to maintaining political stability over time in light of the reasonable pluralism that characterizes each society. This is understood as the problem of political stability (Rawls 1996, 3-4). One solution to this problem is the creation of an overlapping consensus through the use of public reasons (Rawls 1996, 131-72). The idea is that reasons acceptable to all provide satisfactory public support for policies that respect the reasonable diversity around us.

This solution has not gone unchallenged. Several important objections have been raised. One is that any overlapping consensus we construct might be too fragile to guarantee political stability because of our deep differences (see Wenar 1995). A second objection is that an overlapping consensus should be rejected as a contractarian, and thereby flawed, view about justice (see Nussbaum 2006). Instead, we require some further connection between persons to secure stability, such as bolstering an overlapping consensus by the guarantee of a social minimum consisting in capabilities (see Brooks 2015).

The Indian philosophical tradition offers several useful insights into how problems like this might be better addressed. The first insight is to challenge the model of so-called "moral monism" and the resistance to cultural pluralism found at the core of much Western political thought: we should develop greater understanding of an "intercultural" (and not merely multicultural) view about equality and fairness, a perspective indebted to Indian philosophical traditions (see Parekh 2006).

A further insight might be the view that political stability is best secured through guaranteeing a threshold of human capabilities (see Nussbaum 2000, Brooks 2015). Indeed, the capabilities approach is to some degree a major achievement of a more global philosophical approach to problem-solving with deep roots in multiple traditions, including Aristotelianism and classical Indian philosophy (see Sen 2009). This approach claims all persons should have their well-being guaranteed in terms of a capability to do or be (where debates continue about what should constitute our capabilities and how many we have). Political stability is thought best secured through the protection of human capabilities. But how we understand "capabilities" is a product in some measure of intercultural thought and interchange between traditions. Resources in Indian philosophical traditions can be mined to supplement or further develop Western philosophical traditions to improve their resourcefulness in providing new insights into how we should best address the challenge of diversity in modern society, a growing problem for both domestic and international politics as globalization becomes an ever greater presence in our collective lives.

A second philosophical issue concerns our moral duties. The standard view of most Western philosophers is that moral duties cannot conflict. But can there be possible conflicts? Immanuel Kant argues our moral duties do not conflict because they flow from a universal moral law (Kant 2011). Hegel famously rejects this argument as “an empty formalism” lacking in content (see 1990, 161-63; Brooks 2013b). Notwithstanding whichever side we might choose, the idea that our duties should not – and perhaps never – conflict has continued appeal for many, if not most, Western philosophers today. The potential problem is this view might be more dogmatic in its insistence upon non-contradiction among moral duties divorced from reality. It is not difficult to consider cases of potential moral conflict between what we might owe some versus what could be owed others.

The Indian philosophical tradition provides real use for us on this issue. The *Bhagavad Gita* is one of the most well-known Indian texts. The *Gita* contains a famous dialogue between the divine Krishna and the human warrior Arjuna (see Radhakrishnan 1948). The dialogue’s setting is the eve of a great battle pitting Arjuna and his army against his cousins. Arjuna is concerned: while his cause is no doubt just and victory appears certain, these results can only be obtained through much bloodshed and human suffering including the death of many, such as his own relatives. Arjuna has a moral duty to fight his righteous battle, but also a moral duty to support his family and avoid causing them harm. Arjuna becomes resigned to the view that perhaps it would better to permit his unjust cousins to govern if only to avoid confronting his clash of duties. Krishna advises Arjuna that his view is mistaken: he must engage in battle using, in Amartya Sen’s words, “duty-centred and consequence-independent reasoning” (Sen 2009, 209). (Note that this account reveals new horizons of “duty-centred” ethics and “consequence-independent reasoning” that is neither consequentialist nor deontological, or at least not in the traditional ways these views have been understood in Western traditions.)

We may learn several suggestive lessons from this account. The first is that any duty we have *to justice* trumps our other duties where these duties might conflict. Arjuna might have duties to his just cause and duties against causing harm to his relatives: our moral duties can conflict and where they do our duties to justice are primary. The second suggestive lesson is that our duties *require* commitments. The decision to perform duties might be consequence-independent, but the resolve to satisfy our duties must account for our personal responsibilities (Sen 2009, 213-14). Some moral decisions may be easier said than done: this is independent from questions about whether we might suffer from any weakness of will.

The claim that we should weigh up our different prospective moral duties in light of our full range of moral commitments informs important work in the Western philosophical tradition, too: Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* is an example (Hegel 1990). So my argument is not that Western traditions lack a similar perspective, but rather that they might benefit from a closer engagement with related ideas found in less familiar traditions.

The implications for global justice are clear. Much of the debates about any responsibilities affluent states or people have to those in severe poverty is often couched in terms of our duties (see Pogge 2002, Singer 1972). Philosophers choose sides between accounts focused on positive or negative duties and other considerations of the moral duties we might owe distant others. But are these the only or even best ways to address such a pressing international problem? Is our solution to one of our biggest international,



humanitarian challenges to work within a single, largely culturally-specific enterprise to determine universal moral duties binding on all meant to illuminate the way forward? Is it desirable, if possible, to defend approaches to global problems that fail to acknowledge the potential merits of approaches to thinking about moral duty found in non-Western societies? These questions are deliberately provocative, but I hope point towards the strong intuitive appeal of the need for global justice to be more *global* for it to have greater authority (and to be more compelling) as a theory about *justice*.

My brief illustrations have covered issues such as diversity and the problem of political stability as well as the problem of conflicting moral duties. These are longstanding problems in ethics and political philosophy with clear relevance for global justice. But perhaps a more clear issue as an issue of *global justice* concerns so-called “just war” theory. The standard, Western view of just war theory is that wars can be justified: a side can be right to wage war against others. Debates largely centre on which specific justifications are sufficient to confirm a war as “just.” These debates have developed substantially in recent years after pioneering work by Augustine and Thomas Aquinas where it had been argued that just wars required elements, such as a just cause, just conduct and waged by a just government (Augustine 1998, Aquinas 2002).

Current debates centre on Jeff McMahan’s powerful critique of orthodox just war theory where he rejects the moral equivalence of combatants (McMahan 2011). This orthodox view is that combatants on all sides have moral equivalence: in war, all are equal and the only persons who ought not be harmed are non-combatants (on all sides). McMahan argues that this view rests on an important mistake and, in fact, unjust combatants lack moral equivalence in war. So it is not the case that all combatants may be liable for attack during warfare. Instead, only unjust combatants can be held liable. And so debates have moved forward to work out the wider implications of this now increasingly dominant view: how to identify the “just” versus “unjust” combatants? Who are “combatants”? And so on.

If McMahan’s challenge to orthodox just war theory marked a revolution in this field, then Indian philosophy might reveal a second revolution. McMahan and others may disagree on several important issues, but all agree that wars can be justified even if what might figure in considerations about their justification remains hotly contested. Buddhism is a religion with roots in India and well-known for its general opposition to violence. The Dalai Lama, a Tibetan in exile in India, in his *Ethics for a New Millennium* argues that harm to other sentient beings is wrongful and beyond justification (1999). Justifying causing harm does nothing but add to the suffering already in existence today. If decreasing, if not ending, harm is a crucial good, then we should stop justifying hurting others and even in self-defence. Of course, this has strong connections to early Greek thought: in the *Crito*, Socrates also accepted the view it was better to suffer harm than cause it.<sup>3</sup>

The implication for just war theory is that “just war theory” is based on a mistake, namely, that war can be “just.” All wars involve the deaths of non-combatant civilians who are innocent. Such activity might be *excused* based on certain narrow justifications including the cause of the conflict and how any activity is conducted. The analogy is individual self-defence. No one is “just” in causing harm to others even if wrongly attacked by others. Any self-defence is not a just harm inflicted to others, but rather an *excused* harm: self-defence is

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<sup>3</sup> See Plato (1997) and the *Crito* at 46b-50a and Plato (2022).

not a right (such as a right to free expression or to cast electoral ballots), but a defence against prosecution for crimes where the elements of a specific crime may be otherwise found. So I do not require any defence where no crime might have been committed, but I do otherwise. If I have not been attacked or threatened by another, then my actions may be unlikely to constitute self-defence. Likewise, if I am attacked and refuse or unable to fight back, then I have not engaged in self-defence. But if I have harmed another, then I may require a defence against any charge of assault or perhaps causing actual bodily harm. Self-defence is an excuse, a defence to prosecution to charges that might otherwise hold. Similarly, we might see engaging in war as an activity that is always wrong, but sometimes excused. And so war is an evil to be avoided wherever necessary, but sometimes necessary if never “just” (or morally good).

Note the way this is phrased. The insight from the Dalai Lama and its relevance for Western views about just war theory need not be the theory should be abandoned because we should endorse pacifism. Instead, a key idea is to identify the ever-present wrongness of war and reinterpret this in a way that might best bring out already present philosophical resources – for example, common understandings of self-defence from legal philosophy – to further develop our tradition. Nor is this the only way we might find uses for ideas imported from other traditions in our own traditions.

I conclude this section by considering a different issue: what is the goal of philosophical disputes? For many in the Western tradition, this may be little more than the aim for greater clarity into some important philosophical issue. Or perhaps others may be motivated by the goal of convincing others into agreement.

Broadly conceived, the Indian philosophical tradition has a fairly clear position on this issue: our goal is to seek *liberation* (see Radhakrishnan and Moore 1957, 46-47, 95-96; Swami 1935). Literally speaking, the truth will set you free (Rinpoche 1991). This idea of liberation is through a pursuit of knowledge carrying several connotations that are philosophical, religious and otherwise. Nonetheless, there is something genuinely liberating about the satisfaction we enjoy from improving our understanding about philosophical issues. Perhaps our pursuit of philosophical arguments is not merely for their own sake, but to learn more about ourselves. In these ways, this philosophical tradition may help inform how we engage in philosophical disputes.

## **Challenges for Unbound Philosophy**

There are several potential challenges for the future promise and popular appeal of global philosophy for global justice and other areas in philosophy. I will consider a range of potential challenges here in order to identify the possible obstacles – many of which are a commonplace in discussions I have participated in over the years – and show how global philosophy can overcome them.

The first possible challenge is the redundancy objection. This is the view that global philosophy might yield greater redundancy rather than illumination. The worry is that less familiar traditions might be too far removed for any meaningful engagement philosophical or otherwise. Instead, we should cash out these less familiar traditions in ways that are more readily recognizable to enable progress. The problem is that this may render less familiar

traditions largely redundant. Suppose we understood an unfamiliar philosophical tradition in light of its close proximity to another more familiar. So we attempt to grasp the work of the philosopher Shankara in terms of a related Hegelian-inspired philosophy. While this might help render Shankara's distinctive Advaita Vendantan philosophy more intelligible in some sense, the problem is we might remain better off examining Hegelian philosophy more closely instead. If all insights from Shankara are limited to the medium of Hegelian philosophy, then we don't have any clear pay-off from considering these insights. To grasp Shankara in this way is to reinvent our philosophical wheel.

The redundancy objection mistakes the goal of global philosophy. The goal is not to compare and contrast, but rather uncover new philosophical insights to further develop our own traditions. A deeper engagement with figures such as Shankara is surely highly rewarding on many levels, but this is also highly time intensive. The goal of a global philosophy-inspired approach is not necessarily to inspect and comprehend every possible school of thought. Instead, our goal is to further develop our own tradition through engagement with others. We need not come to any definitive views about alternative traditions. What matters is how their ideas may be put to good philosophical use within our tradition. Global philosophy is not about making philosophy more redundant, but rather shining greater light on wider philosophical diversity.

A second concern is the incoherence objection. This concerns the issue that our traditions possess some identifiable coherence that makes possible their recognition as a tradition. The problem is that a closer engagement with other traditions could undermine the existing coherence found in our traditions rendering them incoherent. We should then avoid unbounded philosophical pursuits and instead maintain the distinctiveness – and separateness – of our philosophical positions.

This objection rests on a mistake about the nature of philosophical traditions. Traditions are never static and constantly evolving in response to changing issues confronting traditions over time. One good example already highlighted previously concerns the historical development of liberalism from Hobbes through Mill to Rawls. Traditions change. The problem cannot be that we might revise our arguments in light of engagement with alternative traditions and so produce change within our philosophical tradition. On the contrary, our goal should be to improve the ability of our tradition to address philosophical issues. We should actively forage for new resources that better facilitate this goal. One promising approach is the idea of philosophy as unbounded and engaged with diverse traditions. Global philosophy need not render any tradition incoherent. However, it may help improve our ability to address philosophical issues. The benefits clearly outweigh the costs.

A final, third problem is the objection that global philosophy may be insufficiently global. What is so "global" about "global philosophy"? Global philosophy is an unbounded approach to how traditions might improve their ability to solve philosophical problems. Global philosophy is not a claim to there being one true Philosophy that best combines all others: global philosophy is not a World Philosophy. Nor is global philosophy about bringing together as many traditions as possible for their own sake. Instead, global philosophy is about our having an openness, a receptiveness for the need to pursue wider philosophical engagement in order to improve our potential philosophical argumentative power. Global philosophy is only global in terms of its pursuit for philosophical resources. Nonetheless, it

remains true that some philosophers, such as Hegel, have defended philosophical accounts about philosophical developments across the world in an attempt to bring them together in one unity. However, global philosophy need not be about speaking to all traditions – this might even be impossible because they are too plentiful – but rather speaking with diverse traditions. This not pursued for its own sake, but rather philosophical improvement through unbounded openness to new horizons.

These three main objections to global philosophy are not exhaustive. Nevertheless, they offer serious obstacles that must be overcome by global philosophy if it is to become a more dominant approach to future philosophical developments. Global philosophy can overcome these problems although it must be born in mind that “global philosophy” as an approach exists only in its infancy. I consider myself to be addressing a philosophical field that I firmly believe will rise to some future prominence in academic circles and not identifying any established field.

## **Conclusion**

Global philosophy is an approach to philosophical problem-solving that is likely to become more commonplace as our societies (and universities) further diversify. While many philosophers have already engaged meaningfully across different traditions, this engagement has been largely confined to established and more familiar links. More importantly, this work too often excludes meaningful engagement more widely with less familiar traditions, including Indian philosophy. There have been any number of substantial contributions already that arise from deep engagement, but these have been largely restricted to the relatively marginalized sub-field of comparative philosophy where analysis is often limited to historical comparisons without highlighting clearly enough the wider merits of bridging philosophical traditions for problem-solving.

This situation has contributed to a crisis of sorts for work in global justice. The main problem is not that this work is substandard or lacks for fascinating insights into our most pressing problems. No, the problem is that there isn’t much “global” about “global justice” philosophically-speaking. Global justice might be about justice for all, but the ideas that underpin these views of justice too often develop within bounded traditions.

Global philosophy accepts this challenge. It calls on each of us to engage across philosophical traditions and build bridges. The goal is not to develop one single view of Philosophy for all, but to improve the philosophical traditions we already accept. I have indicated briefly potential areas for how such engagement might be established and my discussion only indicative of the wider possibilities of global philosophy extend far beyond these fields and traditions.

If we want global justice to become more *global*, then we should warmly embrace a future with an unbounded, global philosophy. We have much to learn from other traditions to improve our understanding of philosophical issues. As our world grows ever smaller, so our philosophical engagement should develop ever more widely. Philosophy should become less bounded and tribal and more unbounded and engaged. The future, in short, is global

philosophy. And this should prove to be good news for work in global justice and for philosophy more generally in working out a more *global* theory of global justice.<sup>4</sup>

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