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Résumé de l'article

Dans son livre de 2012, *On Global Justice,* Mathias Risse apporte à la littérature sur les théories de la justice mondiale une contribution inestimable. Dans cet article, je propose une critique de la quatrième et dernière partie du livre, intitulée « Global Justice and Institutions », qui traite de la position de l'État dans la perspective de l'internationalisme pluraliste défendu par l'auteur. Je me concentre ici sur la justification du système étatique et la discussion d'idéaux utopistes. Je conviens avec Risse que l'État demeure la structure politique incontournable que toute théorie sérieuse de la justice mondiale doit intégrer dans son cadre conceptuel. Cependant, là où je m'éloigne de l'approche de Risse, c'est que j'insiste davantage sur la contingence historique du système étatique, notamment la façon dont les prescriptions de la justice mondiale reflètent les contingences historiques découlant de la mondialisation. De ce point de vue, il faut donc comprendre l'internationalisme pluraliste comme un paradigme conceptuel qui, inscrit dans l'ordre mondial actuel, reflète sa propre contingence historique. Cette reconnaissance de la contingence historique du système étatique sert deux fins importantes. En premier lieu, elle constitue un rempart contre toute tendance à discréditer trop rapidement la pertinence philosophique et pratique de la théorie idéale. Deuxièmement, elle étaye la position selon laquelle nous pourrions encore avoir, au-delà de l'internationalisme pluraliste, le devoir moral de poursuivre l'objectif de la justice mondiale.

PLURALIST INTERNATIONALISM IN OUR TIME

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ABSTRACT

In his 2012 book *On Global Justice*, Mathias Risse makes an invaluable contribution to the literature on theories of global justice. In this paper, I offer a critique of the fourth and final part of the book, entitled "Global Justice and Institutions," which deals with the standing of the state within the pluralist internationalism defended by the author. My focus here is on the justification of the state system and the discussion on utopian ideals. I agree with Risse that the state remains the inescapable political structure that any serious theory of global justice must internalize within its conceptual framework. However, I differ from Risse's approach in that I place greater emphasis on the historical contingency of the state system, including how prescriptions of global justice reflect historical contingencies stemming from globalization. From this point of view, pluralist internationalism should then be understood as a conceptual paradigm that mirrors its own historical contingency as embedded in our current world order. This recognition of the historical contingency of the state system serves two important purposes. One, it is a bulwark against any tendency to discredit too quickly the philosophical and practical relevance of ideal theory. Two, it buttresses the stance that we might still have the moral duty to pursue the goal of global justice beyond pluralist internationalism.

RÉSUMÉ

Dans son livre de 2012, *On Global Justice*, Mathias Risse apporte à la littérature sur les théories de la justice mondiale une contribution inestimable. Dans cet article, je propose une critique de la quatrième et dernière partie du livre, intitulée « Global Justice and Institutions », qui traite de la position de l'État dans la perspective de l'internationalisme pluraliste défendu par l'auteur. Je me concentre ici sur la justification du système étatique et la discussion d'idéaux utopistes. Je conviens avec Risse que l'État demeure la structure politique incontournable que toute théorie sérieuse de la justice mondiale doit intégrer dans son cadre conceptuel. Cependant, là où je m'éloigne de l'approche de Risse, c'est que j'insiste davantage sur la contingence historique du système étatique, notamment la façon dont les prescriptions de la justice mondiale reflètent les contingences historiques découlant de la mondialisation. De ce point de vue, il faut donc comprendre l'internationalisme pluraliste comme un paradigme conceptuel qui, inscrit dans l'ordre mondial actuel, reflète sa propre contingence historique. Cette reconnaissance de la contingence historique du système étatique sert deux fins importantes. En premier lieu, elle constitue un rempart contre toute tendance à discréditer trop rapidement la pertinence philosophique et pratique de la théorie idéale. Deuxièmement, elle étaye la position selon laquelle nous pourrions encore avoir, au-delà de l'internationalisme pluraliste, le devoir moral de poursuivre l'objectif de la justice mondiale.

In his latest work, *On Global Justice* (2012)[2], Mathias Risse makes an inestimable contribution to the scholarly literature dedicated to theories of global justice. Following several foundational works of this research area, such as *The Law of Peoples* (1999)[3] by John Rawls, *World Poverty and Human Rights* (2002)[4] by Thomas W. Pogge, and *Justice Beyond Borders: A Global Political Theory* (2005)[5] by Simon Caney, Risse's new book participates in a more recent wave of publications focused on the subject of global justice.[6]

What singles out Risse's philosophical contribution is his foundational theory of international obligations based on a pluralist and contextualist conception of the grounds of justice, which distinguishes his approach from the current cosmopolitan ones. Risse describes cosmopolitanism following the well-known definition proposed by Pogge,[7] which develops around three major positions. Firstly, cosmopolitanism is based on *individualism* according to which any single person represents the ultimate unit of moral concern. Secondly, cosmopolitanism is based on moral *universalism* that sees all human beings as individuals who must be equally considered as the ultimate unit of concern. Thirdly, cosmopolitanism is committed to the *generality* of this status and extends the scope of justice to a global scale. However, from Risse's perspective, the cosmopolitan approach is no longer pertinent to define and specify the principles of justice, the *distribuendum* (or *metric*) of justice, the multiple grounds and scope of a coherent theory of global justice. According to Risse, "while the term [cosmopolitanism] is suitable to describe a love of humanity or the evanescence or fluidity of culture, it has outlived its usefulness for matters of distributive justice. We have learned the basic cosmopolitan lesson: moral equality is an essential part of any credible theory of global justice" (Risse 2012, 10).

Risse's distinctive approach is located mid-way between a statist and a full-fledged globalist view of the extent of our moral obligations. These two terms are defined on the basis of a spectrum of positions we adopt according to the limits and/or the extent of the mutual obligations between moral agents we consider warranted. From a relationist point of view, statists believe that the configuration of the state delimits the set of reciprocal obligations that the members of a society are mutually subjected to as members of a specific political community. This community is determined by the set of institutions that constitutes its basic structure. On the other hand, globalists argue that the global order determines the fundamental relationship that ties together all individuals in their interactions. However, the pluralist view adopted by Risse will acknowledge that not all grounds of justice are relational. "Common humanity", for example, is a ground of justice that does not pertain to any relational considerations of the sort while other grounds of distributive justice must necessarily rest on the recognition of special ties and obligations between members of a polity. Moreover, Risse's approach recognizes the particular status of the state in the international context. I agree that the state remains, in many ways, the inescapable political structure that any serious theory of global justice must internalize within its conceptual framework, and will discuss this in more detail further down. In his book, Risse advocates a *pluralist internationalism* that we can summarize in his own eloquent words.

"Internationalism shares with statism a commitment to the normative peculiarity of the state. Internationalism also holds that nothing as egalitarian or demanding as Rawls's account of justice […] applies outside of states, though it does apply inside the state. At the same time, internationalism accommodates multiple grounds, some of which are relational and some not. […] Internationalism's inherent pluralism transcends the distinction between relationism and nonrelationism, formulating a view 'between' the two common views that principles of justice either apply only within states (as statists think) or else apply to all human beings (as globalists and nonrelationists think)" (Risse 2012, 10).

In this paper, I offer critical remarks concerning the last section of Risse's *On Global Justice*, entitled "Global Justice and Institutions". Chapters 15 to 18 all deal with the standing of the state within the pluralist internationalism defended by the author. Risse's pluralist conception of global justice conveys a partly statist approach to international relations that distances itself from the current cosmopolitan trend, precisely because pluralist internationalism recognizes the crucial standing of the state and, at same time, justifies extensive obligations of global justice on five distinct but overlapping grounds: 1) shared membership in states; 2) common humanity; 3) humanity's collective ownership of the earth; 4) membership in the global order; and 5) subjection to the global trading system. According to Risse, a global difference principle does not apply for all the reasons previously detailed in the book. I will put aside these questions, for fear of repetition, and will only focus on some of the salient features of this fourth and final part of the book, namely the justification of the state system and the discussion on utopian ideals.

The first general comment pertains to the structure of Part IV. Admittedly, it might be the case that the following critical comments are already biased by my mild realist assumptions according to which states remain the most important actors in international relations. In this regard, it is somewhat puzzling that the author would devote so much effort in chapters 15 and 16 to argue that, in the current state of affairs, world order and global justice cannot be thought beyond the state system. However, in the name of intellectual probity, we must acknowledge the issue at stake here since Risse worries about the relevance of pluralist internationalism, should one contest the fact the state system is *morally* justified. The argumentative strategy which the author relies on in Chapter 15 ("The Way We Live Now") is the following: in order to justify the descriptive and normative pertinence of pluralist internationalism, Risse believes that one must first reply to the critical objections brought against the global order, based on the state system, which is seen by many as the source of "moral flaws" wrongfully harming the global poor. In the following chapter, the author tries to demonstrate that there is no sound argument that the state system should not exist, in spite of the fact that there isn't "a justice-based rationale" that one could refer to in order to justify it. Risse comments as follows: "[t]here remains a nagging doubt about whether there ought to be states at all; nevertheless, morally and

not merely pragmatically speaking, we ought not abandon states now, nor ought we aspire to do so eventually" (Risse 2012, 284).

In Chapter 15, Risse argues that "no moral complaints arise against the system of states because the existence of borders is inconsistent with freedom, liberal justice, or democracy, or because statistics about the global order all by themselves reveal that it wrongfully harms the poor" (Risse 2012, 303). Previous arguments concerning freedom, liberal justice and democracy merit further discussions but I will leave them aside in order to put emphasis on the latter complaint concerning the causal responsibility of the global order in harming the poor. Here Risse reproduces in a more concise manner the fascinating debate in which he opposes Pogge in his article "How Does the Global Order Harm the Poor"[8]. The stimulating debate between Risse and Pogge will not be repeated here; it suffices to say for the purpose of the argument that much of it concerns the normative interpretation of empirical evidence for or against the claim that the global order aggravates the fate of the most disadvantaged. Risse's general claim on the issue is summarized in this passage: "Historically speaking, the global order seems to have brought tremendous advances. Moreover, advances in medicine and food production are largely due to countries that have shaped that order. As far as we can tell, the global order has benefited the poor. This is although the *absolute* (as opposed to *relative*) number of people in poverty is higher now than two hundred years ago" (Risse 2012, 296).

However, in the grand scheme of Part IV, it is not clear in what sense Risse's arguments against Pogge's thesis (according to whom it is not the percentage of comparison but the sheer number of people living in destitution that raises the moral concern) truly help us understand why the state system is justified. In other words, even if we could demonstrate without a doubt or statistical dispute concerning absolute and relative numbers (however important they may be) that the state system, such as we know it today, does cause harm to the global poor, this would not invalidate, in my view, the claim that the state system remains an inescapable feature of the world order and that any serious attempt to remedy inequality and poverty must internalize this salient feature of international affairs within its justification and ascription of duties of global justice. Consequently, a key question remains unsolved in the reader's mind: why does the author pursue this contentious line of argument when a more pragmatic, factual account of the salient features of the world order would suffice to justify the accuracy of pluralist internationalism based on the normative peculiarity of the state?

As a matter of fact, Risse doesn't convincingly address the moral complaint that the legacy of past colonialism still causes harm to the global poor either. In his view, "[i]ndeed, while it happened, colonialism disrupted lives, killing, mutilating, or enslaving many in the process. But one would need to show that there is *persisting* injustice rooted in colonialism to establish the claim that it is because of the colonial past that the global order wrongfully harms the poor" (Risse 2012, 299). Let's consider, for instance, the case of Haiti in the context of the difficult reconstruction following 2010's earthquake. An empirical case study of the

country's historical struggle to overcome its colonial past and to pay back its independence debt shows how this debt hindered past and present generations on the road to economic and political recovery, making it difficult today for the Haitian people, in fact, to even utilize international aid in useful, sustainable ways. This would suggest that in many respects the positions that read the legacy of colonialism as still harming the poor today are, at the very least, as plausible as Risse's doubts on the same subject. In any case, I merely want to suggest that even if the harms caused by our current world order were *lesser evils* than in the past, it would not invalidate either one of these claims: first, that the global order actually does cause harm (as Risse's description of the WTO's failings in chapter 18 precisely suggests), and secondly, that the state system remains nevertheless inescapable, therefore justifying the need to incorporate the state system as the unavoidable starting point of any plausible theory of global justice.

This brings us to chapter 16, entitled "Imagine There's No Countries. A Reply to John Lennon". This section opens on an epigraph taken from Lennon's cult song:

> *Imagine there's no countries*
> *It isn't hard to do*

Here, Risse tries to reconcile the state's moral relevance with its historical contingencies and deals with the problem of counterfactuals and utopian ideals. Again, for those endorsing Risse's reading of Hobbes, Kant and Rawls on the centrality of the state for any theory of justice, the chapter's exclusive focus on skepticism from below and skepticism from above in order to justify the relevance of pluralist internationalism appears puzzling. Skepticism from below describes the objections that criticize the moral necessity of the institution of a monopoly of force in order to determine the interactions between individuals, while skepticism from above does not contest the necessity to organize power, but rather the fact that the actual organization of power should necessarily take the shape of a multiple state system. If the skepticism from below reminds us of the objections advanced by anarchists, the skepticism from above, on the other hand, characterizes the claims voiced by advocates of cosmopolitan democracy or of the ideal of world government. In a nutshell, this is what Risse himself says on these forms of skepticism:

> "[…] a state system may be justified even though we are entitled to say neither that there ought to be a state system nor that there ought to be no such system. This would be the case if the following conditions applied: (1) The system of states has certain moral or prudential advantages, certain objections to it can be answered, and, to the best of our understanding, no alternative political system has moral or prudential advantages that outweigh those of a system of states. So we cannot conclude that there ought to be no state system. (2) Nonetheless, there remain nagging doubts about the acceptability of the state system, and we cannot conclude either that there ought to be a system of states. It is in the moderate sense of conditions (1) and (2) that the state system is justified. Neither type of skepticism can be either conclusively established or refuted" (Risse 2012, 309).

Thereby we also find a sweeping objection to any attempt to argue toward the conclusion that the state system morally ought to cease to exist, the objection that completes the discussion we began in chapter 15" (Risse 2012, 310 – the italics are mine).

Although one could perfectly agree with Risse's position on the necessity of acknowledging the crucial standing of the state in our current world order, in spite of the reservations previously expressed with regard to his argumentative strategy, it is the logical necessity that he establishes between the two fragments of this quotation that raises some questions. In order to better understand the author's remarks, we should focus on the lengthy discussion Risse offers on the topic of counterfactuals. In chapter 16, Risse explains why epistemic considerations concerning the practical and philosophical relevance of utopian ideals should warn us against the use of counterfactuals in our reasoning about global justice. He also argues, and has some good reasons to do so, that the utopian ideals conceived in the light of a distant future cannot be action-guiding, as much as one cannot justify prescriptions over human actions on the basis of counterfactuals that could have changed the world if the past had been different from how we know it. Risse argues that:

"The reason why we ought to refrain from certain judgments about the past is the same as why we should refrain from supporting certain utopian visions. Insofar as this is plausible for scenarios about the past, and to the extent that it is plausible that the reasoning in both cases is the same, this discussion about counterfactual history supports and supplements what I argued about utopian visions in section 5. […] We ought to refrain from judging the statement that 'the world would now be a better place if the state system had not developed' for the same reason why we ought to refrain from passing judgment on the statement that 'the world will be a better place, or look such and such, if the system of states is abandoned'" (Risse 2012, 321).

However, the question Risse's arguments inevitably raise is the following: should we endorse pluralist internationalism *forever until the end of time* merely because we cannot, at the present moment, *imagine* John Lennon's utopian aspiration? Indeed, this seems to be his conclusion. However, not only did this passage of chapter 16 deserve, in my view, a more elaborate discussion on the distinction between ideal and non ideal theory from an epistemological point of view, but it also begs the following question: the fact that we cannot imagine future changes does not immediately invalidate the epistemological relevance of ideal theory in the shaping of the future world. A backward looking perspective in the history of social changes and political transformations might tell us another story, a story according to which Kant's ideal of *Perpetual Peace* in the 18th century was not utterly irrelevant in the narrative and the shaping of the UN world order (despite all its failings) or a story according to which le *Projet de Paix* de l'Abbé de St-Pierre was not utterly irrelevant in the narrative and shaping of the European Union.

Another way of restating our main critical comment against Risse's defence of pluralist internationalism is the following: could it not be the case that we should merely accept the fact that states are historical contingencies? Although Risse seems ready to accept this, it is less clear how he understands the following implications. Indeed, the historical contingency of the state system would also imply that prescriptions of global justice also reflect historical contingencies (stemming from globalization) and therefore that pluralist internationalism should be understood as a conceptual paradigm mirroring its own historical contingency embedded in our current world order. But why would this necessarily lead to such a radical disqualification of the philosophical and practical relevance of ideal theory?

In the final chapter 18, we find a fascinating discussion on the role that international institutions such as the WTO could play regarding the need of a system of global accountability that falls short of global democracy. I will conclude this short critical commentary with these final remarks and questions. First, as previously mentioned, it appears somehow paradoxical that Risse would describe the current WTO failings without acknowledging that in this regard the global order does, in fact, cause harm to the global poor. Even if we could argue that these are lesser evils than in the past, there are justified moral complaints against the state system. Admittedly, Risse will acknowledge these moral complaints, but the discussion taking place in the final chapter seems to deflate the issues at stake in the Risse-Pogge debate mentioned in Chapter 15. Second, the reader might also continue to wonder why Risse doubts that complex mechanisms of accountability within an international institution such as the WTO can become genuinely democratic over time. Why shouldn't they be subjected to transformations that affect the global order, and the state system, such as we know them today? Those questions should invite the author to restate his argument, especially if he aims at convincing those who subscribe to the cosmopolitan democrats' claim according to which: "[…] the current absence of a global demos does not affect their argument. A global demos does not need to precede global democratic institutions. Instead, their creation may help with the formation of such a demos. More plausibly, gradual reform toward global democratic institutions would also gradually lead toward a global demos" (Risse 2012, 343).

In fact, following Risse's arguments, since the prediction of the path of future transformations of the world order remains a difficult task and cannot rely on scientific certainty, it seems every bit as problematic, from an epistemological point of view, to wander off in utopian terrain than it is to shut down any attempt to think beyond the contingent parameters of our historical situation. From this angle, one might be warranted to complain about a certain philosophical conservatism regarding the heuristic value of ideal theory. In many regards, this kind of philosophical conservatism commits the naturalistic fallacy deriving 'ought' from 'is'. After all, critics of a certain type of realism have pointed out that despite realists' aspirations to scientificity in the study of international relations, the failure to predict the end of the cold war or the scope of current globalization (because it was unimaginable in those days) should serve as a lesson of doctrinal humility.

In the context of Chapter 15, I have tried to demonstrate that Risse's controversial position with regard to the 'moral failures' of the state system does not contribute anything more than adding a layer of tangential controversies to the defence of pluralist internationalism. Regarding Chapter 16, the dismissal of utopian ideals goes, once again, a bit too far. The fact that the state system exists in the present world does not negate the epistemological legitimacy of prospective theories that try to escape the conceptual paradigm established by the state system. Since a key debate over the distinction between ideal and non-ideal theory is currently going on in the domain of political theory, the complete absence of reference to the numerous scholarly publications on the subject seems a relevant weakness of Risse's new book, particularly with regard to the point of view outlined in Chapter 16. It is not clear whether Risse criticizes utopian ideals from a non-ideal perspective in accordance with a certain implicit understanding of the importance of facts, feasibility considerations and empirical methodologies or rather because he rejects excessive forms of idealizations. Similarly, it is not fully clear if pluralist internationalism is not, itself, an ideal theory of global justice that excessively idealizes certain features of the state system obscuring the lucid analysis of the multiple wrongs that the global order causes in reality. In the end, the state borders may not be as politically, economically and morally hermetic as one may think.

To conclude, *On Global Justice* is, without any doubt, an extremely important work that, like any sophisticated contribution to a specific research field, raises a series of highly complex critical questions. In the context of this short critical review, my aim has been to open some of these questions, focusing on those that seemed central to the aims of the fourth section of the book. As far as I am concerned, I fully recognize the timely pertinence of Risse's conceptual framework and the importance to develop theories of global justice from the full understanding of the state system and under the light of a plurality of principles and grounds of justice. Nonetheless, pluralist internationalism still seems, from my point of view, a theory which mirrors the historical contingencies of our age that should not prevent us from thinking that we might still have the moral duty to go beyond the state system because, as Bob Dylan could have said to John Lennon, "*the times they are a-changin*".

NOTES

[1] I am indebted to Sara Villa and Peter Dietsch for their precious assistance in the English version of this text.

[2] M. Risse, *On Global Justice*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.

[3] J. Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999.

[4] T. Pogge, *Justice Beyond Borders: A Global Political Theory*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002 – second revised edition 2008.

[5] S. Caney, *Justice Beyond Borders: A Global Political Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

[6] These more recent works include: G. Brock, *Global Justice. A Cosmopolitan Account*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009; L. Valentini, *Justice in a Globalized World. A Normative* Framework, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011; P. Gilabert, *From Global Poverty to Global Equality. A Philosophical Exploration*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012; L. Ypi, *Global Justice & Avant-Garde Political Agency*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012; C. Nine, *Global Justice & Territory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012; D. Miller, *National Responsibility and Global Justice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012; N. Hassoun, *Globalization and Global Justice: Shrinking Distance, Expanding Obligations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

[7] T. Pogge, "Cosmopolitanism and Sovereignty" in *Politicial Restructuring in Europe: Ethical Perspectives*, ed. Chris Brown, 89-122, London: Routledge, 1994, p.89.

[8] Risse, M., "How Does the Global Order Harm the Poor", *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, vol.33, 2005, pp.349-376.