

The Universal Republic

A Realistic Utopia?

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Can humanity achieve collective self-government in a highly interdependent world? Catastrophic climate change, biodiversity loss, pandemics, war and displacement, the dangers of nuclear weapons and new technologies, and persistent poverty and inequality are among the global challenges that expose the weaknesses of existing international institutions as well as the profound disparities of power and vulnerability that exist among the world's people. *The Universal Republic: A Realistic Utopia?* examines whether a democratic world state is a feasible and desirable solution to the problem of establishing effective and just governance on the planet we share. While this question has haunted thinkers and doers for centuries, this book opens up novel perspectives by putting the powerful methods and rich data of contemporary social science into the service of a systematic analysis of several key dimensions of the broader theme. The first part shows why a democratic world state—a universal republic—is possible: why it can be achieved, and how it can endure without generating a frightful global despotism. The second part of the book shows why the universal republic is desirable, by exploring how it can help bring under our collective control the persistent sources of coercion, harm, and other processes that affect us deeply across national borders. By combining insights from political philosophy and empirical political science, this work sheds new light on a crucial question of our time: how to bring about a more democratic world.

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Introduction

Abstract - Disagreements about whether a democratic world state is an ideal worth pursuing are partly rooted in disagreement over the interpretation and relative importance of values such as equality, autonomy, community, and tradition. But the disagreements are also driven by different understandings of the empirical realities of world politics. Perceptions of empirical circumstances and constraints determine which global institutions are deemed achievable and viable. But they also play a part in judgments on which ones are (more) desirable. Despite the importance of empirical evidence for assessing the idea of a world state, it has played only a marginal role in the debate. The introduction to the book defines what the universal republic is, introduces the questions covered in the book, and explains the approach chosen to answer those questions, positioning it in the context of major traditions of thinking about global politics.

Keywords - World state; global democracy; world republic; Immanuel Kant; Anarcharsis Cloots; political theory and political science; classical approach to International Relations; scientific approach to International Relations; theory and empirics; realistic utopia.

Can humanity achieve collective self-government in a highly interdependent world? Catastrophic climate change, biodiversity loss, the dangers of natural and bioengineered pandemics, war and displacement, the risks generated by thousands of nuclear warheads and by novel technologies, the persistence of poverty and inequality, and other global challenges remind us daily about the weaknesses of the international institutions expected to address common concerns and how unjustly power and vulnerability are distributed in the world today. This book examines whether a democratic world state is a possible and desirable solution to the problem of governing the planet that we all share.

The scale and urgency of the challenges that such a world state would be expected to meet in the twenty-first century should not make us forget that the questions examined here have divided political thinkers throughout history. Seven centuries ago, Dante Alighieri declared that the fulfilment of the mission of the human species—achieving ever deeper knowledge—required peace, and peace in turn required the establishment of world government under a wise and disinterested ruler who would decide ‘in those matters which are common to all men and of relevance to all’ (Dante Alighieri c1312/1996). His contemporary Marsilius of Padova argued that universal empire was legitimate in so far as its authority rested on the revocable consent of the people subject to its rule—including ‘the workmen or craftsmen or the rest of

the labourers' (Marsiglio of Padua c1339/1993, 6, 39-43). Writing around the same time, Pierre Dubois retorted that any attempt to establish a world government would bring war rather than peace.¹ Instead, he offered what may well be the oldest proposal for an international organization aimed at resolving disputes between European sovereigns before they escalate into war (Dubois c1306/1956, 78-79).

These early explorations set the tone for the debate in subsequent centuries. Key writers of the Enlightenment rejected the imperial discourses common in previous centuries and redefined the idea of a world state in ways that still profoundly shape current debates. Immanuel Kant maintained that the establishment of a 'world republic' (*Weltrepublik*) or 'state of peoples' (*Völkerstaat*) was demanded by reason. However, he eventually settled for what he called a 'negative surrogate', that is a voluntary association of free states that would not wield coercive powers itself. The reasons for this evolution in his thinking are debated among scholars, but arguably it was at least partly driven by concerns about the achievability of a world republic (states 'do not at all want this') as well as its viability (the danger of a 'soulless despotism' eventually lapsing into anarchy).² Another Prussian Enlightenment thinker, Anacharsis Cloots, was far less cautious. He stated that the only legitimate sovereignty was the sovereignty of humankind as a whole. Hence, a 'republic of the united individuals of the world', centred around a legislative assembly of popularly elected representatives from every part of the globe, was indispensable to bring the principles of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen of 1789 to full realization (Cloots 1792/1979, 1793/1979).³ Cloot's ideas emerged in a time when many shared the conviction of his political associate Thomas Paine that 'nothing of

¹ His reasoning is worth quoting at length because it anticipated many later arguments: 'I doubt if there is a man of sound mind who thinks that in this day and age there can be a single temporal monarch for the whole world, who would rule all things and whom all would obey as their superior. If there were a tendency in this direction there would be wars, rebellions, and dissensions without end. There would be no one who could quell these disturbances because of the multitude of people and the distant areas involved, local differences, and the natural inclination of men toward strife' (Dubois c1306/1956, 121-122).

² The cited words are in Kant (1795/1996, 328, 336). Other important statements are in Kant (1775-76/2012, 229; 1784/2007, 114-5; 1793/1996, 309; 1797/1996, 487-88).

³ While Kant died in his Königsberg home at the age of 79, Cloots was guillotined on Paris' Place de la Concorde at the age of 38 for energetically promoting his ideas as a member of the National Convention, to which he was elected after the solemn conferral of French citizenship in 1792. In the speech that led to Cloots' arrest, Robespierre accused him of lacking patriotism by preferring the title of citizen of the world to the title of French citizen, and condemned 'his extravagant opinions [and] obstinacy in speaking of a universal republic' (Robespierre 1793/1979, 654).

reform in the political world ought to be held improbable. It is an age of Revolutions, in which everything may be looked for' (Paine 1791/1995, 198). Toussaint L'Ouverture combined his call for the destruction of slavery with an appeal to overcome 'the barriers that separate the nations, and unite the human species into a single brotherhood' (L'Ouverture 1797/2019, 28). Paine himself believed that, '[f]or what we can foresee, all Europe may form but one great republic' (Paine 1792/1995, 262). However, Kant was not the only cosmopolitan thinker of the age to be wary about a global state. Condorcet, for instance, offered public support to Cloots and the principles he proclaimed for the 'great society of the human race' (Mortier 1995, 298-9), but in a posthumously published manuscript the universal republic is curtly dismissed as a 'puerile illusion' (Condorcet 1793/1976, 287).

Intellectual and political interest in world government became particularly intense between the 1930s and the 1950s, gaining endorsements from campaigners and politicians as diverse as Rosika Schwimmer, Barbara Wootton, Albert Einstein, Jawaharlal Nehru, Winston Churchill, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and Martin Luther King, Jr. (Wootton 1943; Churchill 1947/2003; Einstein 1947, 1948/2007; King Jr 1964/2012; Bhagavan 2012; Billion 2021; Threlkeld 2022). Gathered for the Fifth Pan-African Congress of 1945, Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, W.E.B. Du Bois and other anticolonial leaders declared: 'We demand for Black Africa autonomy and independence, so far and no further than it is possible in this "One World" for groups and peoples to rule themselves subject to inevitable world unity and federation' (Fifth Pan-African Congress 1947, 5). Following several decades of neglect, scholars have started to devote serious attention to the topic since the early years of the current century, prompting some authors to celebrate a 'resurgence' of the idea of world government or at least renewed debate (Craig 2008; Cabrera 2010; cf. also Weiss 2009).

As during the Enlightenment, cosmopolitan theorists remain divided on whether a democratic world state is the best way to realize the principles they advocate. While some embrace the notion (e.g., Cabrera 2004; Höffe 2007; Marchetti 2008; Martí 2010), others reject it (e.g., Habermas 2006, 134; Appiah 2007, 163; Archibugi 2008, 110). This rejection is often rooted in concerns that are shared by thinkers across a broad spectrum of intellectual traditions, notably that '[t]he prospect of world government would be an invitation to prepare for world civil war' (Waltz 1979, 111-2) or 'a forbidding nightmare of tyranny' (Arendt 1970, 81). It is common for political philosophers to stress that the realization of the principles they advocate does not involve the establishment of a world state (e.g., Pogge 1992, 63; Held 1995, 230; Walzer 2000; O'Neill 2001, 181; Nussbaum 2006, 313; 2019, 137; Benhabib 2007, 448; Miller

2007, 26; Gould 2009, 25; Sen 2009, 408; Stevens 2009, 98; Pettit 2010, 156; 2022, 141; Pavel 2015, 139; Laborde and Ronzoni 2016, 286; Unger 2022, 3).

Disagreements about whether a democratic world state is an ideal worth pursuing are partly rooted in disagreement over the interpretation and importance of values such as equality, freedom, community, identity, and tradition. But the disagreements are also driven by different understandings of the *empirical* realities of world politics. Perceptions of empirical circumstances and constraints determine which global institutions are deemed achievable and viable. But they also play a part in judgments on which ones are (more) desirable. Take for instance the contemporary republican school of political theory inaugurated by Philip Pettit (1997) and Quentin Skinner (1998). Despite adopting the ideal of nondomination (understood as robust freedom from arbitrary interference) as their common starting point, republican thinkers disagree on which institutions are best suited to promote that ideal, with some supporting protections for state sovereignty, some favouring a global republic, and others preferring an intermediate arrangement or something else altogether. Miriam Ronzoni (2017) suggests that this wide divergence is due to each author prioritizing only one or two of the three desiderata that ideally should guide republican institutional design: (1) bringing informal power under rule-governed control, (2) avoiding excessive concentration of power, and (3) promoting an active and vigilant citizenry. Ronzoni argues that republican global institutional design requires a careful exercise of balancing that gives full attention to all three desiderata. I would emphasise that the extent to which different institutions further those goals cannot be ascertained purely through philosophical analysis: rather, it requires systematic engagement with empirical research. The same can be said about debates on institutional design within other traditions in international political theory.

Despite the importance of systematic empirical evidence for assessing the idea of a world state, such evidence plays only a marginal role in most contributions to the debate. Some leading political theorists dismissed the idea of a world state simply by referring to what Kant had written two centuries earlier (Held 1995, 230; Rawls 1999, 36). When some prominent social scientists touched upon the question of global democracy, they did so impressionistically, without adopting the systematic approach they have applied to other topics (Dahl 1999a, b, 2001; Keohane 2003, 2006, 2015). To be sure, there are exceptions to this generalization, such as the important work of Michael Zürn (2000, 2016, 2018) and Robert Goodin (2010, 2012, 2016, 2022). Also relevant are studies that empirically demonstrate and systematically explain the democratization of aspects of global politics, even when they do not address world state formation as such (e.g., Payne and Samhat 2004; Scholte 2011; Tallberg et al. 2013; Stevenson and Dryzek 2014; Grigorescu 2015; Schimmelfennig et al. 2020; Agné 2022). Overall, however, empirical research on these questions remains scarce, especially

considering the wealth of data on democracy, statehood, and other relevant phenomena that has become available since the time of Kant and Cloots.

This book builds a bridge between normative and empirical analyses by identifying the factual assumptions that underlie prominent positions on democratic global governance and by evaluating those assumptions against relevant empirical evidence. In this endeavour, I align with the terminological preferences of the early proponents of global democratic statehood and focus the analysis on the *universal republic*, sometimes abbreviated to UR for conciseness (Cloots 1792/1979; L'Aurora 1796/1956; Hugo 1848/1875; Garibaldi c1871/1934; Woodhull 1872/2010). For the purposes of this investigation, 'universal republic' denotes a political entity with the following features. First, it is a *state*. To be a state, a political organization must have the authority to create collectively binding rules on an important (but not necessarily comprehensive) range of issues, to enforce compliance with those rules using means of coercion when necessary, and to access the resources it needs through some form of taxation. A state does not need to have a monopoly of legislation, coercion, and taxation over its territory—these powers can be shared across multiple levels of governance. However, it needs to have sufficient authority and resources to be able to protect individuals and groups from the power wielded by other individuals and groups. States perform legislative, executive and judicial functions, although how these functions are distributed among different organs can vary greatly. The second feature of the universal republic is that it is a *democratic* state. For operational purposes, I consider democratic a state that meets the conditions stated by Robert Dahl (1998, 85-86): it has robust institutional protections for the right of citizens to form and join organizations, to exercise freedom of expression and to access alternative sources of information, and all adult citizens must be able to control the acts of key state officials by choosing between competing candidates and holding them accountable through free, fair and frequent elections.⁴ These are minimal conditions, and the implications of 'thicker' forms of democracy will be considered later in this book. I also assume, with Cloots and others, that the citizens of a universal republic would have a direct relationship with its institutions, as opposed to an indirect one that is fully mediated through the national layer of government. The third

⁴ This definition concerns specifically the democratic character of *state institutions*. Hence, its adoption does not imply a position on what democracy is in general, whether it manifests itself in social processes and practices beyond formal institutions, and what forms democracy beyond the state could take. These questions are investigated in depth by Agné (2022, 33-93) and they will become especially relevant in Part II of this book, where polycentric forms of global democracy are considered.

feature of the universal republic is that it aims to be *globally inclusive*. Its democracy entails a global *demos* (List and Koenig-Archibugi 2010). This does not necessarily mean authority over the whole global population from the beginning—at least some UR advocates assumed it would emerge from a gradual enlargement process (Cloots 1792/1979; Woodhull 1872/2010). But I assume that two conditions must be met for a political entity to qualify as UR. First, it must be open to including on an equal basis all populations that express a wish for membership, as long as their representatives in UR institutions are chosen through free and fair elections. Second, the universal republic needs to control sufficient resources to be able to protect its citizens from coercion and harm initiated by outsiders.⁵ In practice, this requires that a ‘critical mass’ of states have transferred authority to the UR, including the authority to obtain resources through taxation. The fourth feature of the universal republic is that it is a *federal* state. Most decisions would be taken within lower jurisdictions, at national and subnational levels. As Goodin (2012) pointed out, virtually all proposals for world government take the form of a federal arrangement, where authority over some issues is *constitutionally* reserved for layers of government that encompass a more limited circle of citizens and are closer to them. Constitutional entrenchment means that authority cannot be claimed unilaterally by the higher level of government. However, I assume that the division of competences would emerge from a constitutional deliberative process rather than from theoretical postulates.

In sum, this book examines the viability, achievability, and comparative desirability of a universal republic in the light of relevant empirical facts. But how can the facts to which we have access help us answer questions about something that has never existed? John Rawls described the essence of the problem:

‘[T]he limits of the possible are not given by the actual, for we can to a greater or lesser extent change political and social institutions and much else. Hence we have to rely on conjecture and speculation, arguing as best we can that the social world we envision is feasible and might actually exist, if not now then at some future time under happier circumstances’ (Rawls 1999, 12).

If the realization of an ideal is feasible in this broad sense, then it is a ‘realistic utopia’ (Rawls 1999, 11-12). But how can we ensure that the ‘conjecture and speculation’ Rawls regarded as necessary are sufficiently disciplined and stringent? What follows are some reflections on the

⁵ Kant (2016, 69-70) appears to have hinted at this condition in this remark: ‘A world republic would in any case be one where no individual state would have enough forces to fight the great republic if necessary’.

overall strategy adopted throughout the book, leaving the details about the methods to later chapters. The strategy combines elements of ‘classical’ and ‘scientific’ approaches to the study of global politics. Hedley Bull defined the scientific approach as aspiring ‘to a theory of international relations whose propositions are based either upon logical or mathematical proof, or upon strict, empirical procedures of verification’ (Bull 1966, 362). By contrast, he saw the classical approach as being

‘characterized above all by explicit reliance upon the exercise of judgment and by the assumptions that if we confine ourselves to strict standards of verification and proof there is very little of significance that can be said about international relations, that general propositions about this subject must therefore derive from a scientifically imperfect process of perception or intuition, and that these general propositions cannot be accorded anything more than the tentative and inconclusive status appropriate to their doubtful origin’ (Bull 1966, 361).

Among the questions ‘of significance’ that classical authors have been willing to tackle is the possibility and desirability of world government. Bull himself discussed it in *The Anarchical Society* as one of the conceivable alternatives to the states system (Bull 1977, 244-5, 252-4). Hans Morgenthau and other classical Realist writers also engaged deeply with the problem of a world state (Schwarzenberger 1951; Schuman 1952; Morgenthau 1954, 469-85; Herz 1959; cf. Scheuerman 2011), as have other authors writing in a classical vein (e.g., Ewing 1947; Zimmern 1953; Claude 1956; Wight 1959/2022, 1991; Aron 1966, 1972; Falk 1975). By contrast, authors oriented towards the scientific approach have been more reluctant to engage with the topic. This may well be because they found it too speculative and unamenable to rigorous empirical hypothesis-testing. By tackling questions about fundamentally different forms of world order, this book follows in the footsteps of classically oriented scholars of International Relations.

On the other hand, advocates of the scientific approach had a point when they criticized their opponents for frequently leaving their assumptions implicit rather than stating them explicitly, and for remaining ambiguous about which variables and observations play a part in reaching a judgement and how they are combined (Kaplan 1966; Singer 1969). Even when they do not settle questions with appeal to authority, the reliance of classically oriented scholars on ‘intuition’ and ‘judgement’ makes it difficult to evaluate to what extent they transcended

preconceptions and biases—and what Singer (1969, 78) derided as ‘the old faith in the folklore and conventional wisdom of a particular time and place.’⁶

For these reasons, this book examines some of the questions that classically oriented scholars were and are willing to address with some of the methods privileged by scientifically oriented researchers. Such methods have several advantages. First, the collection of relevant data is more systematic, with inclusion criteria determined in advance of the analysis. This reduces the risk that findings are driven by particularly prominent but not necessarily representative cases, experiences, and informants. Second, the procedures involve transparency and auditability regarding assumptions, research design, and data. In short, it should be possible for others to replicate the results by applying the same research protocol to the same data. Third, systematic and transparent procedures help make knowledge more cumulative, by enabling other researchers to modify and improve the ingredients of the research and check whether and how any conclusions change. This is especially important for the question addressed in this book. I have no choice but making a substantial number of assumptions that some readers may find dubious or unpersuasive. Each step of the argument aims at presenting such assumptions as clearly as possible and put other researchers in a position to replace them with alternative assumptions if they wish. While I present some substantive conclusions on the questions at hand, this project has the equally important aim to offer a basis for future conversations that may end up overturning its original conclusions.

With its focus on the empirical dimensions of global political integration and democratization, this book closely relates to two strands of research in the recent literature. The first strand identifies and explains developments that can be seen as increasing the democratic quality of politics beyond the state.⁷ These studies may lead to the conclusion that global democracy is possible simply because it already exists—at least to some extent and in some contexts. The second strand finds elements of global statehood in the current international

⁶ Social scientists do not have a strong record in forecasting societal change. However, there is some evidence that social scientists who rely on data-based modelling as a basis for their forecasts tend to be somewhat more accurate compared to those who rely on intuitions or theoretical considerations (Grossmann and et al. 2023).

⁷ The literature is substantial and includes, for instance, Payne and Samhat (2004); Nanz and Steffek (2005); Scholte (2005, 2011); Bäckstrand (2006); Macdonald and Macdonald (2006, 2020); Steffek, Kissling, and Nanz (2007); Macdonald (2008); Macdonald and Macdonald (2010); Macdonald (2012); Jönsson and Tallberg (2010); Krisch (2010); Steffek (2010); Steffek and Hahn (2010); Tallberg and Uhlin (2012); Little and Macdonald (2013); Tallberg et al. (2013, 2014); Kuyper (2014); Stevenson and Dryzek (2014); Grigorescu (2015, 2023); Stevenson (2016); Koenig-Archibugi and Macdonald (2017); Kuyper and Squatrito (2017); Squatrito (2018); Martens, van der Linden, and Wörsdörfer (2019); Schimmelfennig et al. (2020); Agné (2022).

system.⁸ Again, these studies may suggest that a world state is possible simply because, in some way, it is here already. Both strands are very important and several of the findings generated by them play an important role in the assessment of achievability conducted here (see especially section 4.4.). However, this book is distinctive in its focus on the *combination* of global statehood and democracy, which is a defining feature of the universal republic. This is important because the elements of global democracy that already exist are largely disconnected from global statehood, and the existing elements of global statehood are mostly disconnected from global democracy. Consider for instance Goodin's argument that the 'defining features of statehood are found, in at least rudimentary form, at the global level today' (Goodin 2012, 153). Specifically, he points out that international organizations and perhaps even individual states are 'legally permitted' (Goodin 2012, 158) to intervene against governments that violate *jus cogens*—by committing aggression, genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, slavery and torture. This point does not settle the questions addressed in this book. First, today participation in enforcement action remains essentially a voluntary choice, which points at a qualitative difference between how law enforcement works in the contemporary international system and how it is supposed to work in a state. The universal republic would be expected to enforce its laws in a less haphazard way than what we have now. Second, what legal authority there is today is not usually wielded in line with democratic principles. As Hans Kelsen (among many others) pointed out when the United Nations were created, 'The veto right of the five permanent members of the Security Council places them above the law of the United Nations, establishes their legal hegemony over all the other Members, and thus stamps the Organization with the mark of an autocratic regime' (Kelsen 1946, 1121).

The starting point of this investigation is thus the observation that supranational authority and democratic processes are both present in the contemporary system, but that they would need to be joined more closely as well as strengthened to give rise to something like the universal republic. To be sure, thoughtful contributors to the debate on world order have questioned whether strengthening global statehood is necessary for, or indeed even beneficial to, global democracy. This important question is addressed in Part II, especially chapter 7.

The book has two main parts, which are devoted respectively to the feasibility and the desirability of the universal republic. The two questions are tackled in this order because the

⁸ Studies positing the existence of global statehood are fewer and more heavily qualified than those finding instances of global democracy (Shaw 2000; Chimni 2004; Albert and Stichweh 2007; Goodin 2012).

alleged infeasibility of a democratic world state is often treated as a ‘normative argument-stopper’, a dialogical device that Southwood and Goodin (2021, 966) describe as follows: ‘If a proposed policy makes infeasible demands, then the merits or demerits of that policy are of no practical consequence. It is irrelevant how desirable or undesirable it would be to successfully realize the policy—it simply cannot be the case that we ought, practically speaking, to bring it about.’ As Southwood also put it, the function of feasibility assessments is to determine whether a particular course of action is ‘deliberation-worthy’, i.e. whether it should be included among ‘the set of options that are candidates for consideration within practical deliberation’ (Southwood 2022, 130). The feasibility of a democratic world state has been questioned by authors who reject it on principled grounds as well as authors who are sympathetic to the idea. Among the former is Anne-Marie Slaughter (2004, 8), who dismissed world government as ‘both infeasible and undesirable’.⁹ Among the latter is Hans Kelsen, who declared: ‘There can be no doubt that the ideal solution of the problem of world organization as the problem of world peace is the establishment of a World Federal State composed of all or as many nations as possible. The realization of this idea, however, is confronted with serious and, at least at present, insurmountable difficulties’ (Kelsen 1944a, 5).¹⁰ A third position does not declare a global democratic state to be infeasible, but more modestly points out that its proponents have not done enough to show it might be viable, given the ubiquitous problem of institutional design failing to attain its intended goals (Pavel 2015, 139).

The conception of feasibility adopted in Part I has two dimensions. The first dimension is *viability*, which can be defined as having a reasonable chance to persist over time and work in the intended way. This concept is similar to the notion of stability, which Gilabert and Lawford-Smith (2012, 820) define as ‘the extent to which its continued presence does not clash with general empirical truths about how people are or can be in their social life as they apply to the circumstances in which the scheme is instantiated.’ The second dimension of feasibility is *achievability*, which refers to the existence of transition paths from the status quo to the

⁹ For a similar stance see Unger (2022, 3) and Isensee (2003), who applies to the world state the remark about perpetual peace uttered by the Prussian army’s chief of staff: ‘just a dream and not even a beautiful one’ (Isensee 2003, 31).

¹⁰ Nevertheless, Kelsen went on to describe a path to global judicialization, after which ‘we can try to make a further step; we can hope to succeed in organizing a centralized executive power, a world police, and later perhaps a world administration under a world parliament’ (Kelsen 1944b, 389). Kelsen regarded ‘the organizational unity of a universal legal community, that is, the emergence of a world state’, as the logical outcome of his ‘pure theory of law’ (Kelsen 1967, 328; more fully in Kelsen 1920, 249-57). Hersch Lauterpacht (1950, 456-63) held a similar position on world federation.

intended end state. Chapter 2 discusses three issues. First, it elaborates on and makes more precise these understandings of viability and achievability, in general and in relation to the problem at hand. Then it presents an overview of various arguments that cast doubt on the feasibility of a world state—specifically a democratic world government—by invoking motivational, structural, or institutional constraints. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the challenge of gauging empirically the feasibility of such an unprecedented institution.

Chapter 3 presents an empirical assessment of the viability arguments reviewed in chapter 2. The method involves two steps: first, I use a machine-learning method called lasso to build statistical models of democratic survival that considers a range of geographical, economic, cultural and social variables to predict the longevity of democratic institutions in most countries of the world over a period of 120 years; second, I simulate the expected longevity of democracy in a hypothetical state that is assumed to have values of the current world on each of those variables. Such a hypothetical ‘world state’ is the universal republic. The starting point is a model including variables with good data coverage over time and space, which is then modified to take into account several other variables related to the arguments reviewed in chapter 2.

Chapter 4 considers achievability arguments and is methodologically more diverse. Arguments about structural constraints are again assessed through a statistical simulation based on the political experiences of countries, this time aimed at deriving a simulated counterfactual predicted level of democracy of a hypothetical world state given the cultural, economic and social conditions of the world as we know it. Arguments about motivational constraints are assessed through the evaluation of a mass of evidence, collected mainly through public opinion surveys but also through text analysis and coding of the institutional design and funding of international organizations.

The evidence presented in Part I provides reasons for regarding the universal republic as achievable and viable, and thus “deliberation-worthy”. Hence, Part II proceeds to assessing its desirability. The aim here is not to develop a novel set of principles that should guide global institutional design. I draw on the existing philosophical literature to formulate a set of normative postulates that can provide a coherent framework for assessing institutional arrangements in the light of relevant empirical information about the world. As such, the chapters in this part are an exercise in what Charles Beitz dubbed ‘normative political science’.¹¹ Chapter 5 develops an argument about what makes the universal republic a

¹¹ Beitz (1998, 831) explains: ‘Cosmopolitanism need not make any assumptions at all about the best political structure for international affairs; whether there should be an overarching, global political organization, and if so, how authority should be divided between the global

normatively attractive institutional ideal. The argument proceeds in three steps: first, it presents a set of normative postulates that can guide institutional assessments; second, it examines empirical facts about the world that require a global extension of democratic governance; third, it discusses how the institutions of the UR could fulfil that requirement.

The last two chapters of the book reflect the circumstance that the universal republic is not the only solution that has been proposed for combining global governance and democracy. Two other broad approaches have received a substantial amount of attention (Archibugi, Koenig-Archibugi, and Marchetti 2012). One is the ‘negative surrogate’ that Kant settled for: a voluntary association of states with domestic republican institutions. Here it will be called a confederation of democracies. Chapter 6 examines several arguments on why a confederation of democracies would be normatively superior to a UR or vice versa, discusses the empirical assumptions of such arguments, and assesses them based on empirical data. The other approach is polycentric democracy. This concept encompasses a more diverse set of institutional proposals, which share the vision of democratic practices being instituted in a large variety of transnational settings, both governmental and nongovernmental, without an overarching and unified institutional structure. Chapter 7 develops a conceptual and empirical argument on the advantages of a UR over polycentric democracy in translating popular preferences over global policies into collective decisions.

To conclude this introduction, it is advisable to say something also about what the book does not aim to do. In previous work, I considered the question whether global democracy is possible, reaching the conclusion that it is not impossible (Koenig-Archibugi 2011, 2012). As Zürn (2018, 233) rightly points out, rejecting impossibility claims does not tell us much about whether something is likely. Zürn (2016, 2018) himself discussed which cosmopolitan institutional model is more likely to be realized in the light of contemporary trends. This is a valuable exercise, but this book will not follow in its track by gauging the likelihood that a universal republic may come about in the foreseeable future, in absolute terms or relative to the two other institutional models considered here (the confederation of democracies and polycentric democracy). This might be seen as a weakness by some (e.g., Shapiro 2016, 111), but I would disagree. I think that the main contribution that social science can offer to the political practices of citizens, groups, and officials in relation to the universal republic is to help them decide whether the notion is ‘deliberation-worthy’ and, if it is, to help them decide

organization and its subordinate political elements, is properly understood as a problem for normative political science rather than for political philosophy itself’.

whether it is normatively attractive enough to deserve their support. They will then take care of the rest.¹²

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¹² As noted earlier, social scientists do not seem to have a strong record in forecasting societal change anyway (Grossmann and et al. 2023).

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