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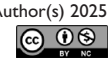
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On Democratic Mindedness in Global Normative Theorising

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Abstract

In this contribution I argue that the appeal to the 'democratic underlabourer thesis' in the context of international political theorising is premature at best. While theorists who are democratically minded often assume their democratic commitments to equate to an unconditional egalitarian commitment, I argue that as a political, governance-related concept, democratic equality is in fact conditional. More specifically, it is conditional upon all parties endorsing a further set of related beliefs and convictions regarding moral and political relations between persons as well as relevant governmental institutions. As such, democratic mindedness reflects commitment to a set of doctrinal beliefs that are too restrictive in the international political context, where general commitment to democracy cannot be assumed. In lieu of democratic mindedness I sketch a possible conception of 'open-mindedness' as a more adequate dispositional approach in the context of current international political theorising.

Keywords

Democratic theory, doctrinal beliefs, egalitarianism, mindedness, open mindedness

Introduction

What might it mean to theorise democratically in the global political context? This is not intended as a question about the *application* of extant democratic theories to the global context. Instead, I take my question to be about a theorist's intellectual attitude when theorising within and about the global context. In relation to the theme of this Special Issue – 'democratic under-labouring' – the question about intellectual attitude arises quite naturally, which is not to say that the question isn't nonetheless easily overlooked.

First, a word on 'democratic under-labouring' in general. The idea was originally advanced by Adam Swift and Stuart White in their endeavour to identify the tasks of

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applied normative political theorising in relation to the factual findings of political science in the context of domestic politics. (Swift and White, 2008) According to Swift and White, the contributions of normative theory within the domestic policy context are modest but crucial: on the one hand, normative theorists can engage in the analysis and clarification of key terms and concepts; on the other hand, they can alert their fact-finding colleagues to the normative implications of diagnosing or proposing this or that policy or set of political arrangements. The analogy with John Locke's famous *philosophical* under-labourer is evident: the latter 'clears the ground a little, removing some of the rubbish that lies in the way to knowledge'. (Locke, 1997) On the assumption that Locke was not being ironic when he identified 'the incomparable Mr Newton' as a 'master builder' in the knowledge business, and on the further assumption that Swift and White, too, are not being ironic when they similarly accept political science as leading the production of political knowledge, both Locke's philosopher and Swift and White's political theorist take the pronouncements of the relevant sciences as authoritative and cut their respective metaphysical and normative cloths accordingly. This is one way in which under-labourers ought to be 'modest': they assist master builders in the production of knowledge. But according to Swift and White, there is a further way in which the *democratic* under-labourer ought to be modest: he or she ought to see herself as a member of the democratic polity more generally and hence as one who, despite special expertise, cannot claim special status vis-à-vis any other polity member. There are thus two distinct forms of modesty at stake for the political theorist as democratic under-labourer: epistemic modesty in relation to political science and moral-cum-political modesty in relation to co-members of the democratic polity.

Whatever one thinks of Swift and White's conception of the proper relation between applied normative theorising and political science – and I, for one, am not convinced – the idea of the political theorist as 'democratic under-labouring' has gained wider currency and has in the process become delinked from questions about the relation between normative theory and political science. As the epistemic dimension has receded, so the moral dimension has grown in prominence: 'democratic under-labouring' is now primarily conceived in normative-attitudinal terms. The thought is that, within the constraints of a democratic polity, the political theorist ought to theorise that context in a manner that reflects an appreciation of the fact that the theorist is but an equal participant in wider public debates and that, as such, the theorist's albeit theoretically more informed views count morally and politically for one and no more than one. This view implies that the democratic under-labourer will theorise the domestic context in a manner that reflects a fundamental commitment to democratic institutions and ethos – querying these is theoretically out of bounds. Now, again, I think this an intellectually dubious constraint to impose upon a political theorist – but again, I shall set my disagreement on this to one side. The crucial point from the present perspective is that insofar as democratic under-labouring is premised on the presence of a democratic institutional scheme, the question arises as to whether the international political theorist can and should engage in democratic under-labouring in a context that is marked by the absence of the relevant institutional scheme.

Whilst there is an obvious sense in which the international democratic theorist *cannot* be a 'democratic under-labourer', there is another sense in which one might think he or

she *can or should* be one. The international political theorist obviously cannot modestly propose this or that normatively informed policy under the presumption of an existing democratic institutional scheme. The international democratic theorist can, however, normatively advocate for the global establishment of such an institutional scheme. Of course, in so doing, the normative theorist arguably turns master builder more than under-labourer, as the theorist now seeks to decide upon the relevant institutional constraints more than labouring under them. In that sense, Locke's (and Swift and White's) epistemic constraint on under-labouring would be violated. However, advocates of democratic under-labouring might claim that moral modesty would be preserved. This, because it is in the nature of democratic theorising that one's views count for one and no more than one. From the moral perspective, then, democratic under-labouring remains attractive in the international sphere even despite the absence of a democratic institutional scheme.

It is my impression that those who advocate democratic under-labouring in global normative theorising tend to do so on the sort of grounds just spelt out: there is a presumption that even in the absence of a democratic institutional scheme, democratic under-labouring is expressive of a fundamental commitment to treating all affected with equal concern and respect. In the rest of this paper, I shall argue against this presumption. As noted, I shall focus on democratic under-labouring as an intellectual attitude which the theorist brings to a relevant field of inquiry. I shall speak about such an attitude as a form of 'mindedness', that is, as reflective of a particular 'mindset'. I shall suggest, firstly, that those who endorse democratic mindedness tend to conflate it with a form of moral egalitarianism from which it is nonetheless distinct. I shall go on to argue, secondly, that once this distinction is appreciated, democratic mindedness amounts to a restricted form of normative theorising, one that is not ultimately divorceable from the particular institutional scheme it supports. Thirdly, I shall propose open-mindedness as an alternative to democratic mindedness and as a more adequate basis for a less restricted form of global theorising. I shall conclude with some remarks on why, despite its limited applicability in domestic democratic contexts, democratic under-labouring is inadvisable in the current global context.

Democratic mindedness versus egalitarian mindedness

By 'the global context', I simply mean the domain of politics beyond individual state borders, whether this involves inter-state relations or so-called cosmopolitan (world-state or global citizenry) relations. By 'intellectual attitude', I mean something like a theorist's subjective 'mindset'. I take a 'mindset' to be made up of a person's conscious beliefs but also, more importantly, their sub-conscious assumptions about human nature, good and bad, about how things work, about what makes sense and about what there is or isn't.[1]

Everyone, I assume, has a mindset in this broad sense of the term – a largely sub-consciously held mental outlook upon the world in general. Indeed, I take it that each person's mindset is unique to themselves, being made up of assumptions, beliefs, and general attitudes gained and accumulated over the course of each their particular life experiences. No one mindset is strictly identical to any other: mindsets are

subject-dependent. This does not mean that mindsets cannot be shared in the sense that groups of people typically have similar kinds of experiences and therefore hold relevantly similar kinds of beliefs about the world. Indeed, most of the contents of mind probably is culturally transmitted and comprised of what John Rawls has characterised as 'latently held beliefs' about morals, about the social order, and about the ways of the world in general. For people in general, their latently held beliefs form the bedrock of more consciously formulated beliefs, attitudes and opinions. According to Rawls, for example, US citizens' latently held beliefs about freedom and equality inform their consciously held beliefs about what a just social order should look like. (Rawls, 1973)

Mindsets thus conceived are evidently not the preserve of theorists. However, and whatever holds for non-theorists in this regard, a normative theorist should come up against their latently held beliefs over the course of their express inquiry about this or that aspect of the (social) world. They should come up against and be prepared to confront them precisely because these sub-consciously held commitments and beliefs will inevitably inform their express theorising about the (social) world. Insofar as the stock of latently held beliefs is typically culturally transmitted, and insofar as these culturally transmitted latent beliefs form the sub-conscious bedrock of consciously formulated further beliefs, a theorist's self-confrontation with their latently held beliefs may be especially important when theorising the global context. Since there is no guarantee that a given set of culturally transmitted beliefs is shared or sharable across different cultures, examining reflexively acknowledged sub-consciously held commitments should be among the chief objectives of theoretical inquiry in relation to global normative theorising. (Hountondji, 2002; Wiredu, 1996)

Democratic mindedness is widely seen, at least among Western global normative theorists, as the appropriate mind-set in terms of which to approach the (institutionally non-democratic) global context. This is because it is often assumed that a democratic mindset is characterised by a fundamental commitment to human equality, whether the measure of equality be in terms of each person's basic rights or interests, each their equal opportunity for political participation or, as shall be my focus here, each their equal claim to intellectual contribution or voice. I suspect, however, that even if democratic mindedness includes a commitment to a certain kind of equality, the granting of such equality is not unconditional but comes attached with implicitly held further commitments that are not always fully spelt out. Once spelt out, democratic equality may be more exclusionary than those who subscribe to a democratic mindset seem generally to take it to be.

What, then, is it to be *democratically* minded as opposed to being any other minded? Importantly, 'democracy' is a governance-related concept; it refers to a particular form of political organisation and governance, traditionally as this applies to a bounded polity. More specifically, democracy as a form of governance pertains to the idea of the rule by the many over the many (as opposed to the rule by one or by some over the many). (Aristotle, 1981) The core idea of democracy thus involves a conception of political equality; that is, it involves the view that no one person within the polity has any intrinsically better claim to rule over all others than any other person within that polity.[2] Analogously, for theorists who do take themselves to be democratically minded in the context of global theorising, this must minimally involve their treating their own views, beliefs and opinions as normative theorists as carrying no greater weight intrinsically

than the views, beliefs, and opinions of relevant others: in this case, other normative global theorists. This express commitment to the equality of voice of all participants in the global debate seems to me to be the chief attraction of the professed democratic mindset.

Yet a moment's reflection also suggests that this cannot be *all* democratic mindedness amounts to. Being democratically minded must involve more than a commitment to one's peers' moral and intellectual equality. If a basic commitment to moral and intellectual equality were all that was at stake, it would be more accurate to speak of an 'egalitarian mindset'. But an egalitarian mindset and a democratic mindset do not come to the same thing. In contrast to 'democracy', 'egalitarianism' signals a general *moral* disposition rather than a distinctly *political* one. The simplest way in which to set out the difference between an egalitarian and a democratic mindset is by way of considering the distinctive structure of democratic equality. Given that it is a governance concept, democratic equality is reciprocal and therefore mutually conditional. This structure is evident in modern social contract theory: I will consent to being governed by you and all others as well as myself only if you will in turn consent to being governed by myself and all others as well as yourself.[3] It follows that my treating you as a political equal depends, among other things, on your reciprocating by treating me as your political equal in turn. It further follows that anyone who does not agree to being governed by all thereby excludes themselves from the democratic contract. Hence no one who is not part of the democratic contract can be treated as a political equal by anyone who is part of the contract.

The conditional nature of democratic, political equality contrasts with the unconditional nature of moral equality. Mutual assurance is not part of the requirement of a moral commitment to equality. I can treat others as my moral equals even if they fail to treat me as their moral equal in turn. I can also commit to treating others as my moral equals even if we do not commit to treating each other as political equals. For example, a democrat can treat a monarchist as their moral equal, and vice versa, even though neither treats the other as their political equal, given the commitment of each to mutually exclusive forms of governance. The chief reason for the structural difference between political and moral equality is that, as a political concept, the former expresses a power relation. Insofar as, in the democratic set-up, power relations are *reciprocally* equal, then unless you reciprocate in my offer of equal treatment, the requisite democratic power relation is not achievable.

There is a further point of difference between moral and political equality, which concerns the ground of mutual recognition among democratically minded theorists. Morally, I can recognise another as my equal for no reason other than that I acknowledge them as a person or moral agent. Politically, by contrast, for us to agree to govern ourselves together we must have a shared interest in so doing. Our minds must converge on at least those conditions which make agreement on common governance possible. In Hobbes, this convergence is made possible by a shared desire for peace. In Rousseau, it is made possible by a shared interest in non-domination. In Rawls, it is provided by the idea of citizens' shared commitments to freedom and equality. What, analogously, may be the ground of reciprocally acknowledged intellectual equality among democratically minded *theorists*, such that they can be of partially one mind in the intellectual context?

Here, too, there is presumably some shared intellectual interest or goal that makes convergence of minds possible.

Among contemporary democratic theorists in the domestic context there is typically implicit convergence on certain basic features of democratic governance, including rule by law, the safeguarding of a basic human rights, political accountability, equality of opportunity in political participation, and so on. These are corollaries of the express commitment to political equality – they pertain to the distinctive structure of democratic governance. Of course, neither rule by law nor political accountability are in themselves *distinctly* democratic commitments, though equal opportunity for political participation may be. But these features can be given distinctly democratic institutional expression. Political accountability under democratic rule typically takes the form of regular elections; rule by law typically takes the form of parliamentarian law-making; equality of opportunity in political participation takes the form of multi-party politics. Democratic theorists in Western democratic polities converge on these and other basic features of democratic governance. The convergence needn't be explicitly thematised: it is simply taken for granted that these *are* the basic features of modern democratic rule.

It is my impression that, when they come to global theorising, democratically minded theorists tend to transfer some of these implicit allegiances from the domestic to the global context more or less unawares. In contrast to standard Western domestic contexts, the global context (including many non-Western domestic contexts) is generally characterised by an absence of democratic rule, including global governance at inter-state level. But many democratically minded domestic theorists retain their democratic commitments at the aspirational level: *ideally*, the global context and all of its constituents *would* be a democratic context recognisably similar in governance structure to the Western democratic domestic context.[4] In the global context, a democratically minded theorist will often bring to bear domestically incurred commitments to human rights, to electoral accountability and to multi-party political participation in their global normative theorising.[5]

Now, if acknowledgement of democratic equality is reciprocal and hence conditional, and if among the necessary conditions of reciprocal acknowledgement of democratic equality is (partial) convergence of minds on the purposes and nature of democratic government, it may not be possible for those who are not similarly minded to recognise one another as political equals. Analogously, in the intellectual context: it may not be possible for a democratically minded theorist to recognise as intellectual equals those whose core theoretical commitments diverge from the democratic mindset. Let us say that, in the context of global political theorising, the democratically minded theorist approvingly registers some colleagues' similar commitment to human rights or to multi-party electoral politics whilst disapprovingly noting other colleagues' disavowal of these commitments. Those who share a commitment to human rights or to multi-party electoral politics find themselves to be of one mind. By contrast, those who disagree will be of different minds. Dissenting, non-democratically minded theorists may find themselves in the state of nature intellectually: they may find their views ignored or dismissed by the democratically minded theorists. In short, once we consider the conditional nature of democratic equality, and once we spell out the implicit presuppositions concerning common democratic mindedness, the democratic theorist may not in fact be able to commit to their

non-democratically minded peers' intellectual equality. Of course, a democratic theorist's failure to acknowledge a non-democratic peer as intellectually equal is not peculiar to the democratic theorist. A monarchist or an oligarchist may similarly dismiss dissenting intellectual voices. What is distinctive to the democratic theorist is their possible inability to acknowledge dissenters as intellectual equals despite their express commitment to equality, where that equality turns out to be conditional, however, on a shared commitment to a particular institutional political scheme.

Democratic reasoning as a form of doctrinal reasoning

There are at least three possible responses to the above analysis. The first response denies that democratic equality is conditional in the way sketched. The second response acknowledges the difference between egalitarian and democratic equality as diagnosed and shifts from a democratic to an egalitarian mindset. The third response acknowledges the conditional nature of democratic equality but denies that this gives one reason to abandon democratic mindedness. I shall here set aside the first two responses: with regard to the first, the onus is on dissenters to show where the above analysis goes wrong; with regard to the second, my disagreement with the democratically minded theorist would largely dissolve were they to shift to an egalitarian rather than a democratic acknowledgement of peers' intellectual equality. My focus shall accordingly be on the third position.

The third position is more nuanced than I have just sketched it as being. The way I have sketched it makes it sound as if the unrepentant democratic theorist acknowledges his conditional endorsement of intellectual equality and therefore also acknowledges that he treats the view of dissenting peers as less than equal. Obviously, however, intellectual disagreement need not result in a failure to treat the interlocutor as one's intellectual equal. To the contrary, disagreement among intellectual peers is often seen as ensuring a healthy intellectual climate that in fact reflects equality in treatment amongst disputants who exchange, listen to and argue over one another's dissenting views. To fail to treat another as one's intellectual equal it is not sufficient that they disagree with one. In fact, mere disagreement may be neither sufficient nor necessary: as already noted, a more likely expression of unequal intellectual treatment is to have one's views discounted at face value, that is, without prior discussion and examination. (Cf.Fricker, 2007; Hountondji, 2002; Mbembe, 1990)

I think this is right: mere disagreement is not itself the source of unequal intellectual treatment. That said, the discovery of disagreement, or perhaps better divergence of views, is often a source of failure to engage. Otherwise put, disagreement is often seen as a reason for discounting the dissenting view unexamined. Again, however, the reasons for discounting dissenting views unexamined may be nuanced. One might discount a dissenting view unexamined on grounds of its perceived primafacie unreasonableness. One problem with this strategy is that relevant criteria of reasonableness are not themselves neutral: what a democratic theorist regards as 'reasonable' is likely itself to diverge from what a non-democrat regards as such. A dissenting position is not unreasonable merely in view of striking the democratically minded as unreasonable in the sense of its being a counterintuitive position from a democratic point of view. Consider dissenting

views regarding human rights morality and legislation: democratically minded theorists often treat a commitment to basic human rights as a prerequisite to normative political inquiry on reasonable terms. They might thus dismiss as self-evidently 'unreasonable' any position that expresses scepticism about human rights: such scepticism flies in the face of a democratic theorist's deep intuitions about human rights morality as an essential prerequisite to any normatively defensible political theory. (Buchanan, 2003; Christiano, 2008 ; Pogge, 2002) Similarly with multi-party politics: Western theorists often appear dismissive about proposals for one-party or no-party democratic participation not because they have closely examined these proposals but rather because they find it hard to envisage how anything but a multi-party contestatory arrangement could ensure equality of opportunity in political participation. In short, for many democratically minded theorists, non-democratic views and commitments are unreasonable not because they have closely examined these views and have found them to be wanting; rather, these views are unreasonable because they do not square with the views and commitments which a democratic theorist considers to be reasonable in the first place.

Strikingly, and especially in view of the conditional nature of democratic equality, a democrat's rejection of unexamined views and commitments that run counter to democratic convictions may not be unreasonable. To the contrary, it may be a requirement of democratic mindedness that a democrat reject as unreasonable views that are incommensurate with basic democratic views and commitments. Consider, by way of analogy, Christian doctrinal belief: no one who does not endorse the belief in Jesus as the son of God can be a Christian. (Cf. Lear, 2009) Of course, a Christian may well concede that from outside the perspective of Christian-mindedness, the view is not necessarily false or unreasonable that Jesus is not the son of God, or that there is no God, or that God takes a very different form from that suggested by Christian doctrinal beliefs. But from within the Christian perspective, one cannot both be a Christian and deny that Jesus is the son of God. Similarly with the democratic theorist, who may concede that for non-democratic theorists commitment to individual political participation or representation is not necessary. Nonetheless, for a democratic theorist such commitment may seem to be a necessary feature of being democratically minded. From within the democratic perspective, those who reject the idea that each voice counts for one and no more than one are necessarily mistaken and their views must be discounted on those grounds.[6]

The democratically minded theorist may reject the analogy of doctrinal democratic beliefs with doctrinal Christian beliefs: he might say that whilst a doctrinal commitment is a matter of faith, a non-doctrinal commitment is a matter of demonstrable truth or at least of justified practical necessity – in this case, political practical necessity: democratic commitments are not articles of faith but are conclusions to sound reasoning about the best form of government. In contrast to doctrinal religious belief, the democratic theorist may say, democratic commitments are critically tried and tested both by theory and by practice. I do not think this response plausible. For one thing, doctrinal beliefs are not necessarily dogmatic – they are not endorsed for no reasons: a Christian can give one plenty of internal reasons in favour of Christianity. Nor need one assume that doctrinal beliefs and commitments cannot change. Doctrinal beliefs and commitments as I here understand them are simply the beliefs and commitments that one undertakes to uphold in subscribing to a particular religion or form of government or way of life, and these

beliefs and commitments can change consistently with maintaining the general outlook adopted. Besides, if democracy were a matter of truth or demonstrated practical necessity, commitment to it could not be conditional or voluntary. As argued above, however, it is a hallmark of (contractualist) democratic theory that commitment to democratic government is conditional and, indeed, voluntary: it is a matter of mutual agreement and it is only once you have made the commitment that you incur a set of internally necessary further commitments which you cannot disavow without in so doing disavowing your commitment to democracy. In this sense, that is, in the sense that the necessity of endorsing certain beliefs and commitments follows upon one's voluntarily accepting the democratic creed in the first place, democratic theory is doctrinal: you need not be a democrat but once you profess to be one you are required as a matter of consistency to endorse a set of related commitments.

The distinction between doctrinal and non-doctrinal reasoning tracks Kant's distinction in 'What is Enlightenment?' between private and public uses of reason. (Kant, 1970) Kant refers to the reasoning of the priest from the pulpit, the tax collector in state administration, or the army officer in the barracks as private uses of reason. For Kant, these are private uses of reason in the sense that they apply to a community of shared believers, or a community of citizens. These constitute a subset of reasoners who share a common purpose, whether this purpose be religious, political or of some other kind. Unrestricted, or public uses of reason, by contrast, address 'the learned public at large'. Their purpose is simply to engage in the task of reasoning itself – public reasoning is not tied to a particular purpose shared by only a subset of reasoners. I shall assume that, when he spoke of the public use of reason, Kant had in mind philosophical reasoning. Against the background of Kant's distinction between private and public uses of reason, the democratically minded theorist is a doctrinal thinker who addresses a subset of reasoners who share a common purpose. For Kant, democratic reasoning is distinct from philosophical reasoning in that the former, unlike the latter, is tied to a particular kind of purpose. In Kantian terms, democratic reasoning is restricted or private, hence doctrinal reasoning.

Open-mindedness in global context

But what would it mean to reason in a non-doctrinal or non-restricted way in the global context? As just noted, for Kant, unrestricted reasoning is philosophical reasoning – reasoning with no antecedently specified domain of inquiry or particular set of conclusions or recommendations. Thus conceived, philosophical reasoning may also be thought of as a form of disinterested reasoning. The self-conception among Western theorists of Western philosophy as disinterested or unrestricted has increasingly come under attack, not least in regard of Kant's own philosophical thinking.[7] Critics of the Western tradition do not share its self-conception as a form of unrestricted or disinterested reasoning. To the contrary, the Western philosophical tradition has increasingly come to be seen as one that claims universal validity yet often fails to live up to this claim. (Wiredu, 1996)

I do not here wish to engage in debates about the probity of the Western philosophical tradition as 'philosophy' strictly speaking. I simply note that, given that Western claims to universal validity have increasingly come under fire especially among non-Western theorists, a Kant-like appeal to philosophical as unrestricted reasoning in lieu of doctrinal

and restricted reasoning may be question-begging. It follows that appealing to a 'philosophical mindset' in the context of global theorising is premature: we do not as yet know what such a mindset would look like. Perhaps we can say, however, that whilst we do not as yet know what a properly philosophical mindset would look like in the global context, open-mindedness is a necessary requirement of any possible movement towards such a mind-set. By open-mindedness I mean receptivity in the broadest sense to unfamiliar views, perspectives and commitments. It seems to me that if we do acknowledge that not only Western democratic theorising in particular, but quite possibly the Western philosophical tradition in general constitutes, from a global perspective, a form of restricted reasoning, then we should seek to be open to the views of those whose positions may strike us as primafacie unreasonable from within the perspective of our own traditions of thought: their perceived unreasonableness may be a function of our doctrinal background assumptions. The question is, to what extent can one train oneself to become more open-minded?

Young children are often seen as paradigm examples of open-mindedness. Their minds are said to be as yet unformed – empty of contents, as it were. They are said to have a heightened capacity for absorbing and processing information – especially non-verbal forms of information that privileges sensory perception, observation and imitation. Young children are also of deemed to be highly impressionable – they lack discrimination and judgement in part *because* they have no previous experience to go by. As such, children are thought of as both uniquely open as well as especially vulnerable to the world: it is precisely *because* they have little by way of mental defences that they are ready to accept any input whatsoever. I do not know how much truth there is to this popular image of young children's minds as especially open but also, equally, especially vulnerable because non-discriminating and non-judgemental. Whether accurate or not, the idea of open-mindedness as essentially characterised by a non-prejudicial, pre-linguistic cognitive attitude towards the deliverances of the world serves as a starting point for thinking about cultivating open-mindedness relative to normative theorising in global context.[8]

In comparison with (the possibly misleading idea of) a young child's open-mindedness, an adult's mind is evidently not unformed or 'empty of content'. To the contrary, and as noted at the outset of this paper, an adult's mind-set constitutes the sum-total of conscious and sub- or unconscious beliefs that a person has acquired over the course of their lived experiences. An adult's open-mindedness is never going to be as non-prejudicial as that of a child. Nor, possibly for the same reasons, is the adult's mind going to be as vulnerable to the world as is that of the child. Firstly, unlike the child, the adult does have previous experiences to draw on; these will factor into the processing of new experiences to an extent which is only partly under a person's conscious control. Rather than forming the bedrock of experiences yet to come, an adult's new experiences are much more likely to be added to and categorised under similar, existing experiences. Secondly, the adult's experiences are typically discursively mediated to a much larger extent than they are in a young child: the adult is conceptually and linguistically competent in the way in which the young child is not; the adult will be more discriminating – more rationally evaluative – in relation to the experiences in question. This also suggests, thirdly, that an adult's new experiences will be less reliant on sensory perception and will in that

sense be less immediate than the process of experience by non-linguistic observation. For these and no doubt other reasons, a mature adult mind is less likely to be fully open-minded than is that of a child. Nor is this necessarily a bad thing – as mentioned, a child's relative lack of experience and cognitive (conceptual) competence render it not only more open but also more vulnerable to the world.

One thing which the adult mind has going for it is a significantly larger capacity for reflexivity. The child is open to the world which it draws in by way of its mind. However, the child is not reflexively aware of its drawing in the world in this way. This relatively lack of reflexive awareness is a function of the child's relative linguistic and conceptual incompetence. Unlike the adult, the child cannot represent the perceptual content of its mind to itself conceptually – or can do this to a lesser degree. The adult, by contrast, is reflexively aware of experiencing the world and can represent perceptual contents conceptually. Relatedly, the adult is reflexively aware of drawing on past experiences in the mental processing of new experiences: of classifying types of experience under general concepts and in so doing drawing both cognitive and evaluative similarities and differences between different kinds of experience. The adult is reflexively away of the stock of past, mentally processed experiences as providing the bedrock for the mental processing of new experiences. This means that the adult can become reflexively aware of the formation of a mind-set – the gradual privileging of a particular way of seeing the world, in part because this is cognitively efficient, in part because it is experientially stabilising.

When I said at the beginning of this paper that the normative theorist should come up against this bedrock of sub-conscious beliefs, commitments and attitudes I had in mind this reflexive awareness of the necessary formation of a mind-set as one that will tend by its very nature to settle into its course much like a river settles into its bed. This seems to me to be both inevitable and necessary for achieving cognitive and psychological stability: it is not in fact possible for us to retain a child's open-mindedness indefinitely. At the same time, as the mind settles into itself in this way, many potential alternative mindsets come to be ruled out as real possibilities for a person. This is not to say that these possibilities were never potentially available in the first place: if the content of mind – one's mind-set – is the stock of largely culturally acquired and now sub-consciously held beliefs and commitments, then it will be the case that one's acquisition of a particular mindset is contingent on cultural time and place: one could have learned to think differently about the world. (Lear, 2000 ; Velleman, 2013)

One especially evocative illustration of the gradual, initially largely perceptual acquisition of a particular mind-set is Abraham Olivier's example of the young African child who spends the early years of her life strapped onto her mother's back from where she absorbs her surroundings, social interactions, patterns of daily life. (Olivier, 2014) The example is evocative in part because it draws attention to the non-linguistic acquisition of knowledge of the social world; given how much time young African children spent in this position, Olivier manages further to draw attention to the completeness of one's experiencing the world from that perspective: virtually everything the child learns about, it learns from that position – its social world is opened up to the child from that position. Again, the early years spent observing from that position will form the unconscious bedrock of subsequent, conceptually mediated experiences. Take the metaphysical view

– again widespread in many African cultures – of clan members as not only biologically but also as ontological related such that existence as an individual is metaphysically impossible absent existence as a group member. (Menkiti, 2006) And again, relatedly, if you think of persons as ontologically connected by lineage such that no individual person is self-sufficient, you may also think of the contestatory style of multi-party electoral politics based on expression of strictly individual preference as corrosive not only of community but indeed of personhood – you might think of a consensual form of politics as the search for common ground as a more appropriate form of political participation. (Ajei, 2016)

My chief point is that reflexive awareness of the cultural contingency of the sedimented bedrock of our culturally acquired mindset should alert us to the real possibility of the formation of our mindset as having taken a different trajectory: even if relatively settled mindsets are cognitively and psychologically necessary, this does not mean that different, if equally settled mindsets are not possible. Nor does difference in itself tell us anything at all about the superiority or inferiority of one such mindset over another: there is nothing inherently superior to thinking of individual persons as ontological distinct, for example, or thinking of persons as ontologically connected.

Reflexive awareness of the cultural contingency of one's acquired mindset can foster curiosity about different possible mindsets. (Velleman, 2013) This is the second aspect of a theorist's open-mindedness that I wish to thematise. Curiosity about the world is, again, a quality often ascribed to children for whom everything about the world is new and who are keen to find out how things work and how much control over the world they are able to exert. Curiosity is of course also generally regarded as the engine of discovery and invention, not least in the sciences. But curiosity – or 'wonder' – is also said to be the distinguishing feature of philosophical thinking: and by that is implied, among other things, the desire to understand. It is nonetheless also true that the professionalisation and institutionalisation of disciplines of inquiry exerts a strong pull towards conformity among their members: this for the methodological and sociological reasons first controversially outlined by Thomas Kuhn. The desire to understand on the one hand and the quest for intellectual respectability on the other hand are motivating factors in academia that do not necessarily pull in the same direction: the emergence of dominant methodological and thematic fashions in academic disciplines is well-known, even if not necessarily as widely acknowledged. Intellectual curiosity is therefore often difficult to maintain within the highly socialised context of academia. It is nonetheless an intellectual attitude that is valued at least in principle and one which a theorist ought arguably to strive to develop and maintain even against disciplines' socialising pressures. Certainly in the global context, if we can be confident of anything at all, it is the enormous cultural, moral, and political diversity of human life of which we nonetheless generally understand very little largely because of a failure to proper engagement, including the willingness to learn from those who may think very differently from us (or not).

Curiosity as the 'desire to understand' should be accompanied, thirdly, by a degree of humility, both of an ordinary and of a special kind. (Hazlett, 2012) Ordinary humility in the face of ways of life that are foreign to one is simply acknowledgement of the fact that one is oneself the ignorant party relative to those ways of life: one cannot know better than its practitioners themselves what those ways amount to – what significance certain

practises have and why, and how individual practises fit into a way of life as a whole. Special humility is the humility of normative theorists who have grown up in a philosophical tradition where the claim to know better relative to foreign ways of life has for long been a constitutive part of the tradition's self-conception. Say, for example, the theorist has been inducted into a way of thinking according to which human progress happens in linear fashion and over time and that the relevant conception of progress consists, say, in the idea of human beings ever greater control over the natural environment. If, under such a conception of human life and destiny, the home culture came to be seen as the vanguard of human progress, and if all diverging foreign cultures were ranked, in linear order, along this imaginary path of human progress, this theorist might struggle to adopt the primafacie natural attitude of humility. The theorist may have to make a special effort at humility, overcoming or guarding against a culturally ingrained tendency to see foreign ways of thinking as inferior in virtue of their foreignness. In this sense, special humility involves, once more, reflective awareness of the proclivities of one's acquired mindset – in this case the proclivity to discount to discount foreign views on account of their assumed inferiority.

Conclusion

The above discussion of open-mindedness is rudimentary and radically incomplete – my chief concern has been to *sketch* a feasible alternative to democratic mindedness more than inquire into it in detail. As I noted in the opening section of this paper, I am not persuaded that democratic mindedness – let alone democratic under-labouring – is always the appropriate mindset to take even in the context of domestic theorising. There are, after all, times when the political theorist ought to query the democratic set-up within which he or she labours. In the global context – a context marked not only by the absence of relevant institutions but marked also by the absence of a clear political consensus about the desirability of such institutions – the democratic mindset is likely to yield highly distorted results if it ends up claiming equality of voice whilst failing to deliver it.

The democratic under-labourer may mount an important objection to the above considerations. The democratic under-labourer may claim that even if we do acknowledge political theory as a close cousin to philosophy, the discipline nonetheless remains crucially distinct precisely in being an equally close neighbour to political science. As noted at the outset of this paper, the democratic under-labourer as originally conceived by Swift and White will accept the political scientists as master builders within political studies as a discipline. Political science establishes 'what there is', politically; as under-labourer, the normative political theorist will consider what is normatively desirable within the constraints of the facts as established by the scientists. The international political theorist may claim that to the extent to which there is an observable process of international institution-building, it appears to reflect a consensus that these institutions must be democratic in nature; that they must respect things like the 'all affected' principle, as well as being based on equality of voice and attendant majority voting procedures. Given these facts of the matter, the international democratic under-labourer may take the view that any normative exploration of these institution-building processes should equally proceed within the constraints of democratic theorising. On this view, the normative

political theorist must be guided by the political facts of the matter, and if the latter indicate the institutionalisation of the international order along broadly democratic principles and practices, then the normative theorist should take these de facto democratic developments serious normatively.

Let me respond to this objection with an anecdote from Ghana. I was sitting some years ago with some colleagues from the University of Ghana, sipping beer and generally talking about nothing in particular. As happens so often on these occasions, a number of colleagues fell into Twi as they recounted a story that caused much amusement. I kept hearing the English phrase 'bend-down boutique'. In Ghana, the phrase refers to the enormous influx of second-hand clothing that is effectively being dumped by Western consumers on the West African markets. The piles of second-hand clothing are so plentiful that they are bulk-bought by traders who simply dump the parcels of clothing on the ground for shoppers to sift through themselves. The shoppers have to bend down when picking items of fashionable Western clothes from the piles dumped on the street. In the story that colleagues were narrating to each other, a government minister had been overheard referring to Ghanaian multi-party democracy as 'bent-down boutique', evidently meaning by this that this was another export 'from the West' which Ghanaians had little choice but to accept and wear as best they could.

I tell this story because it has stuck with me. It is a mistake to assume that just because there is a growing de facto consensus on multi-party democracy and on democratic institutions more generally that these institutional set-ups and the values schemes they reflect are always seen as intrinsically welcome or even as politically feasible by those who acquiesce in them. And it seems to me that where there is reason to suspect that those who acquiesce in political arrangements do so largely because they take themselves to have little say in the matter, then a normative political theorist ought to query the facts as they are rather than accept them as the relevant set of constraints within which to labour.[9]

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Notes

1. My approach to 'mindedness' is fundamentally informed by Jonathan Lear's work. Lear tends to broach the question of mindedness in the context of wider questions about living a human life; it is therefore difficult to cite any particular work of his on 'mindedness' as such. But see, Lear (1986, 1999, 2000).
2. Obviously, this doesn't as yet settle who qualifies as a person. Aristotle, for one, excluded women and slaves.
3. As Skinner (2007) has so brilliantly shown, Hobbes' contract theory ushered in modern democratic thinking even as Hobbes attempted to shore up authoritarian rule.
4. A classic text here is Pogge (1989). In extending the Rawlsian 'original position' from the domestic liberal to the global context, Pogge assumed a liberal-democratic mind-set, and did so largely unawares, which determined his express conception of what a just global order might look like. Pogge's approach was exemplary to many of the Rawls' inspired global justice theorists who followed Pogge methodologically. Interestingly, Rawls'inspired global theorists reacted very strongly against Rawls' own on culturally based rejection of a globalised liberalism in Rawls (2001) .

5. For some of the resulting theoretical tensions, see Wiredu (1996); see also, relatedly, Makau (2002).
6. For searching debates on the (de-)merits of contestatory, individually-focused democracy including the possibility of no-party democracy within modern African political philosophy, see Wiredu (2000) , Ajei (2016), Matolino (2016).
7. Much of this debate centres around Kant's views on race. For a most recent contribution to this by now voluminous debate, see Lu Adler (2023).
8. Jakob Huber has drawn my attention to the growing body of work on open-mindedness as an epistemic virtue, and I do think I have something like such a virtue in mind when I speak about open-mindedness in the context of global theorising. See for example, Baehr (2011), Arpaly (2011), Hazlett (2012). Helpful though this literature is especially in clarifying the concept, it also tends to isolate open-mindedness as a particular epistemic attitude or disposition which we ought to adopt on special occasions, as it were – when conducting research, for example. In the end, I probably have something slightly broader in mind – something closer to Lear's discussion of open-mindedness as an existential condition.
9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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