

rightful relations in order to establish a world state. Because states enable domestic justice, Kant seems to be saying in this text, the principles of the right of nations cannot require states to demolish themselves and create a world state with a global monopoly on coercion.

To add to these interpretive puzzles regarding Kant's ideal arguments, there are some passages, in which Kant seems to say that a world state is in theory necessary, but in practice it is impossible and, consequently, in reality, all we can establish is a voluntary world federation. We find such "in theory necessary, but practically impossible" passages in all of the three aforementioned major works by Kant. For example, both in the "Doctrine of Right" and in "Perpetual Peace" Kant appears to be saying that the difficulty of maintaining rule over "vast regions" of the globe entails the likelihood of either dissolution of the global authority into anarchy and ultimate war or the deterioration of effectiveness and a "soulless despotism." In "Theory and Practice," we find similar pragmatic considerations against the establishment of the world state. After Kant has said that in theory the only way to end expansionist wars is to establish a "cosmopolitan constitution," he seems to argue that in practice pursuing the theoretically correct option may sometimes be too dangerous. So, instead, we must seek only to establish a voluntary federation of states. Finally, in "Perpetual Peace," Kant seems to be saying that pragmatic considerations can explain, but not justify, states' actual rejections of a global public authority. Here, Kant famously argues that states, due to their mistaken understanding of the right of nations, will in practice ("in hypothesi"), albeit wrongly, reject what is true in theory ("in thesi"). That is, states will oppose the establishment of a world state ("state of nations"). As a result, what is likely to happen is merely the establishment of its "negative" surrogate, namely a "league" of nations, which operates mostly to avoid the outbreak of wars.

To sum up, it is hard to establish conclusively exactly what Kant's conception of global justice is since his texts are not in any obvious way internally consistent. The three major philosophical writings of Kant's on the issue of global justice appear to present both ideal arguments or segments of ideal arguments, according to which it is wrong to stay in the international state of nature and we can be forced to leave it by becoming subjected to a global public authority, as well as ideal arguments, according to which membership in the global public authority must be voluntary. The question naturally arising is how can Kant or the Kantian position simultaneously argue that states, in principle, can be forced to accept a global public authority as this is necessary for justice and, at the same

time, argue that they should only pursue a voluntary association of states or a so-called world federation? Alternatively, if the arguments for and against the establishment of a global authority cannot be reconciled, which view should the considered or best Kantian position adopt? What is more, the analysis is complicated by the fact that many of the ideal arguments as found in the texts are not complete. For example, exactly why is it necessary to establish a global public authority, that is, exactly which problems, in principle, cannot states solve themselves through appropriately constructed foreign policies? Finally, in addition to the above ideal considerations, there is the puzzle added by the pragmatic considerations. In which sense should we see them as undermining the ideal arguments – in principle or only in practice? For some of the current takes on these puzzles – both philosophical and textual – see the entry ► [Kant, Immanuel: Contemporary Kantian Responses to](#) in this encyclopedia.

Related Topics

- [Charity](#)
- [Duties, Perfect and Imperfect](#)
- [Duties, Positive and Negative](#)
- [Kant, Immanuel: Contemporary Kantian Responses to](#)

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Kant, Immanuel: Contemporary Kantian Responses to

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For a relatively long time, most scholars turning to Kant for input on issues concerning global justice focused primarily on his earlier and shorter works, "On the common

saying: That may be correct in theory, but it is of no use in practice” (1793, hereafter “Theory and Practice”) and “Toward Perpetual Peace” (1795, hereafter “Perpetual Peace”). Over the last 20 years or so, however, increased attention has been paid also to Kant’s most mature and comprehensive statement of his legal and political philosophy, namely, his Doctrine of Right as we find it in *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1797, hereafter “Doctrine of Right”). The increased attention to Kant’s “Doctrine of Right,” in turn, led to both a revitalization of Kantian research on global justice and an increased emphasis on situating Kant’s approach to issues of global justice within his overall theory of justice. The increased attention to Kant’s conception of justice as found in the Doctrine of Right has also resulted in a specific challenge, well worth emphasizing, to the earlier scholarship. Much of the early interpretation assumed that Kant conceives of justice and the state as primarily responses to vice. In contrast, increasingly prominent in recent interpretations is the view that Kant does not see the need for justice and public authorities – whether domestic or global – as primarily arising from our “crooked timber.” Rather, there are ideal problems, whose solution is possible only through the establishment of a state or, in the global case, a global authority.

Despite the increased attention, Kant’s conception of justice as found in the Doctrine of Right is a relatively new area of research. The relative early stage of development that characterizes exegetical and philosophical investigations of Kant’s political and legal philosophy in particular has at least two implications. First, from a scholarly point of view, the present time is an exciting one to be thinking about global justice and to look to Kant for some guidance. Second, the available interpretations of Kant’s approach to global justice as well as the current proposals concerning the considered Kantian view on global justice are most diverse. What is more, the fact that Kant’s writings are neither easily accessible nor always in an obvious way internally consistent only adds fuel to this fire. For an outline of core pieces of text crucial to any comprehensive interpretation of Kant’s views on global justice, see the entry “Immanuel Kant.” After a brief summary of the puzzles that Kant’s own texts leave us with, the focus below will be on the various philosophical positions that have been proposed as compatible either with Kant’s texts or as capturing the best or considered Kantian position.

Since Kant’s texts on global justice are not in any obvious way internally consistent, it is hard to establish conclusively exactly what Kant’s conception of global justice is. The challenges Kant’s texts leave contemporary Kantians with are at least three. First, Kant appears to present both ideal arguments for the conclusion that

staying in the international state of nature is to “do wrong in the highest degree” and that we can be forced to leave it by becoming subjected to a global public authority, as well as ideal arguments that yield the conclusion that membership in the global public authority must be voluntary. The puzzle is that it appears contradictory to claim that membership is both enforceable and voluntary. Is there any textually coherent way out of this conundrum for contemporary Kantians or, if not, what is the best or considered Kantian position on the issue of the need for a global public authority? Second, Kant’s arguments appear somewhat incomplete in that it is not clear exactly why he considers the establishment of the global public authority an ideal necessity. Finally, because in several places Kant emphasizes the importance of nonideal reasons against establishing a global public authority, current Kantians are left with the challenge of figuring out the correct relationship between ideal and nonideal reasons for and against the establishment of the global public authority.

Before recent engagements with the “Doctrine of Right,” Kant interpreters and Kantians typically did not explicitly address the question of why we need the global public authority at all. It was quite common among Kantians to presuppose that according to Kant and the Kantian position, the need for a public authority was simply that it constitutes the more efficient means of ensuring peace. From this assumption, it follows that the above distinction between ideal and nonideal reasons is insignificant, since all reasons for or against the establishment of a public authority (domestic or global) are fundamentally prudential in nature. Moreover, now it becomes an empirical question whether or not we should aim for a world state with a monopoly on coercion or simply stay with a statist framework when pursuing global justice. The question reduces to figuring out which is more likely to bring about peace? And indeed, Kant’s own answer to this prudential question clearly seems to be that the statist framework is less likely to deteriorate into global despotism or anarchism – at least in the current state of affairs. Michael W. Doyle and John Rawls famously pursue this statist line of argument. According to Doyle, liberal states have proven themselves less likely to go war against one another, and for both Doyle and Rawls, at least according to standard interpretations, the aim is to identify which foreign policies liberal states should adopt in order to secure world peace.

If, however, empirical data determines which types of public authorities we should aim for, then these kinds of positions can be challenged on empirical grounds. For example, we can argue with Thomas Carson (1988) and

Sidney Axinn (1998) that in our nuclear times, a carefully construed world state with a monopoly on military power would be more likely to secure world peace than a series of states. Alternatively, we can, like Pauline Kleingeld (2004), pursue a less extensive world state solution in combination with a developmental thesis. The voluntary federation, on this line of interpretation, is a first step towards the realization of a world state – it is a means by which we can move from the statist to the world state condition with some coercive powers.

Regardless of how one treats Kant's references to pragmatic considerations, it appears central for the Kantian also to address Kant's ideal arguments regarding both the need for a global public authority and for not creating a world state, but merely a world republic. Starting with the latter, Georg Cavallar (1999), Pauline Kleingeld, Ingeborg Maus (2006), Helga Varden (2006), and Howard L. Williams (2006) utilize the arguments provided in Kant's conception of domestic right to fill in some of the explanatory gaps regarding Kant's ideal claim that states cannot be abolished in order to establish one, all-inclusive world state or any world state with a monopoly on coercion. Cavallar, Kleingeld, Maus, Varden, and Williams argue that because states enable rightful domestic relations, they cannot be required to dissolve their states when seeking to establish global justice. Maus and Williams argue that this entails that global justice must be pursued by voluntary, statist means. Cavallar and Kleingeld, in contrast, argue that this only entails that the establishment of a world republic (with limited coercive powers) must be pursued by voluntary means, whereas Varden argues that this argument alone simply entails that the global authority will (in all likelihood) be a project that involves both a global authority and domestic authorities.

Also with regard to filling some of the explanatory gaps regarding Kant's claim that global justice ideally does require a global public authority, it is increasingly common to use the general structure of Kant's account of domestic right. A charitable reading of Georg Cavallar, Kevin E. Dodson (1993), Jürgen Habermas (1997), Otfried Höffe (2006), Pauline Kleingeld, Ingeborg Maus, Thomas Pogge (2009), and Helga Varden sees them as unified in holding that rightful solutions to conflicts in interstate relations and in relations between states and aliens require the institution of a global public authority. For example, due to a problem of indeterminacy with respect to any state's borders, rightful adjudication is achieved only by a global authority such as the International Court of Justice. The reason is that only a public global authority can at the same time represent both the interacting parties

(states or states and aliens) and yet no one in particular. In the same sense that a national public authority is required to rightfully legislate and settle disputes amongst its citizens, a global public authority is required to develop and apply general principles to settle disputes between states and at least some of the disputes between states and aliens.

As the result of arguing that Kant's considered view must stay consistent with this fundamental insight, Dodson and Höffe conclude that Kant's ideal reasons for not establishing a global authority with a monopoly on coercion should be rejected and instead our aim for the global authority should be what Höffe (with Nozick) calls a "minimal state." Habermas and Pogge, in contrast, conclude that the considered Kantian position defends an overlap between domestic, regional, and global spheres of sovereignty. Maus and Williams, yet again, use this as further support for their statist conceptions of global justice. They argue that global justice requires that just states, as is the case at the moment, always remain independent of one another, even though they ought to use global institutions like the Court of Justice to settle their disputes. Cavallar and Kleingeld use these ideal arguments for the necessity of the global authority to provide further support for their developmental conceptions of a world federation with some coercive powers. Finally, Varden takes a somewhat different route. She argues there is no inconsistency between Kant's ideal arguments for a global authority and those ideal arguments against the global authority's establishment of a monopoly on coercion in perpetuity. In her view, these two conclusions are not only consistent, but also jointly necessary given Kant's relational conception of right and the likely historical fact of states as preceding the establishment of a global authority.

In addition to the question whether or not Kant should be seen as embracing the establishment of a global public authority or as pursuing global justice according to statist principles, most Kantians are in concert in attempting to understand what Kant or the Kantian theory of justice has to say about issues of global poverty. One line of thought defended by the majority of Kantian interpretations, including prominent Kantians such as Pogge and Rawls, assumes that Kant's conception of domestic economic justice is of a right-libertarian sort. Therefore, they see it as ill equipped to address problems of global economic justice. Instead, like Rawls, they attempt to develop theoretical solutions along fundamentally statist lines or, like Pogge, along institutional cosmopolitan lines. That a libertarian reading of domestic economic justice should be attributed to Kant has been challenged recently by Kantians such as Sarah W. Holtman (2004), Arthur Ripstein (2009), and Helga

Varden (2006). They agree that Kant's conception of domestic economic justice requires public provision of poverty relief. Varden has also suggested ways in which Kant's understanding of economic justice on the domestic level can be used to develop a Kantian conception of global economic justice. Nevertheless, the work on this issue, as well as others, is nascent, and there is ample room for increased attention to how Kant's theory of justice can help. For example, there is little consideration of how Kant's theory of justice would treat issues concerning terrorism, punishment of international criminals, global environmental concerns, regulation of transnational companies operating in developing countries, and so on. And, as Thomas Nagel reminds us, philosophical research on issues of global justice, generally, is in a relatively early stage. Consequently, Kantians, too, are working hard to establish everything they need to address in order to arrive at sufficiently comprehensive conceptions of global justice.

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Killing and Letting Die

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The distinction between killing and letting die is an instance between doing or commissioning harm and allowing harm through the failure to act. Related to acts and omissions, the moral differentiation simply states that performing an act with the foreseeable negative consequence of death is morally worse than withholding aid in a situation where one *could* intervene to prevent the identical consequence from occurring. The distinction, as such, is anti-consequentialist, rejecting moral considerations of outcomes or ends in favor of focusing on processes or means. The doctrine of killing and letting die falls under the deontological – duty-based morality – and virtue ethic traditions. Circumstances of war, poverty, natural disaster, and the porous borders of environmental degradation push the question of the degree to which the distinction between killing and letting die is morally relevant in the arena of global justice.

Discourse on killing and letting die begins with the theory of, or belief in, the right to life. Often recognized through formal domestic and international laws, such as Article 3 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR), the right to life is necessary to satisfy or generate all other human rights. Prior to or independent of actual laws or formal recognition, the right to life is primarily taken to be *prima facie* a moral right. Though