

Review – World Statehood

Written by Bob Jessop

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

Review – World Statehood

<https://www.e-ir.info/2025/02/20/review-world-statehood/>

BOB JESSOP, FEB 20 2025

World Statehood: The Future of World Politics

By Heikki Patomäki

Springer Cham, 2023

This is a scholarly evaluation of trends toward the development of a world state that draws on the author's deep knowledge of planetary evolution, of leading academics and writers, and of theories and philosophers from different stages of evolution and from different world regions. It combines history, political philosophy, explanatory social science, and critical-reflexive futures studies. It also highlights the ethico-political dimensions of the tendential development of world statehood, world governance, and world community. Patomäki proposes a processual approach to world statehood, which is based on critical realism and pragmatism. It emphasizes the open-ended nature of planetary development, the importance of transformative agency, the role of self-reflexive collective learning about common planetary conditions, and the tendential evolution of a world state. Exploring these issues involves reflection on the direction of world history as a whole, how actors can defuse social conflicts, overcome lack, resolve contradictions, and so forth. This is seen in chapters that explore institution and community-building oriented to peaceful relations, international law, a global carbon tax, and a world parliament and how these serve to expand the sphere of human freedom on a planetary level.

The book is organised into three parts. Part One considers whether world history as a whole is directed towards planetary integration, focusing on the emergence of cosmopolitanism, the world economy, and the problem of resolving inter-state warfare. Chapter 3 explores how Big History develops a creation myth and origin story suitable to our globalised world marked by global risks such as (1) economic growth and ecological deterioration and (2) weapons of mass destruction. Chapter 4 focuses on the industrial revolution as part of the global history of humanity, harnessing new sources of energy, and expanding humanity and the world economy. Chapter 5 presents a processual account of cosmopolitan democracy. It discusses attempts to limit the destructiveness of wars and the contingent rise of the "golden age of capitalism" (1950–73) through collective learning across different fields of global political economy. A necessary condition for a global movement towards something better is the open-ended democratic development of a global, and pluralist, security community.

Part Two focuses on the 21st-century processes of world history in terms of how non-fixed pasts, changing contexts, and anticipations of the future interact. Chapter 6 considers how the Cold War through increased knowledge about how systems work, so that actors can transform the future. Chapter 7 examines gridlock in and the decline of global governance through a dialectic among three prevailing logics of identities in the 2010s and 2020s: (1) market globalism (neoliberalism), (2) nationalist-authoritarian populism, and (3) emerging identities that rest on higher levels of reflexivity. Chapter 8 re-examines Polanyi's "double movement" and argues that the next societal fightback must be a globally orchestrated response to market dominance and to protect society on a planetary scale. This requires the rise of global movements promoting more functional and legitimate common institutions that can ensure and facilitate planetary cooperation, overcome contradictions, and resolve social conflicts. Chapter 9 discusses a possible form of future transformative agency, namely, a world political party as an open ethical and political association oriented to a collective programme of societal re-organisation. This should nurture positive learning that makes the public knowledgeable about global and planetary affairs and receptive to higher-order purposes and a non-centric, critical, and pluralist cosmopolitanism. It would also promote various new institutional forms in which the

Review – World Statehood

Written by Bob Jessop

planetary public realm can be organised.

Part Three elaborates the processual and open-ended account of the formation of interconnected elements of world statehood by discussing the cases of a global greenhouse gas tax and world parliament. Chapter 10 advocates a much more comprehensive agenda that includes the consequences of uneven economic growth, contradictions of the world economy, ecological crises shaping the Earth system, new problems that have arisen because of expanding space, and other results of technological civilisation. Ethically and politically, this agenda should cultivate the rules of wise diplomacy and support functional cooperation and thereby create the conditions for gradual changes towards a world political community and state. Some new state-like institutions are therefore needed on a global and planetary scale. But hitherto this has occurred around a narrow agenda focussing on peace and war and weapons of mass destruction.

Chapter 11 explores the case for a global carbon tax as a rational global Keynesian solution to the gap in current climate governance based on a new, democratically organised yet flexibly inclusive global organisation that implements a carbon tax. It should mediate between domestic use of tax revenues (to give further incentives for states to join) and revenue sharing (to address the causes of climate change and mitigate its consequences on a global scale). A more market-disruptive approach may also galvanise action and open space for further development of global public policy.

Chapter 12 rethinks the idea of a world parliament based on the need to decide the nature of international or world law in the face of uncertainty and indeterminacy. Patomäki envisages a non-centralised, non-territorial, and non-exclusive system of complex multilevel and multi-spatial global governance involving manifold rules and principles. Although it would not be a sovereign legislative body, a world parliament can have real powers based on majority decision-making subject to review by a second chamber of experts who check whether the decision is within the scope of legal reasonability, given the existing legal materials. An autonomous world parliament needs independent sources of funding to facilitate its activities and implementation of its decisions. This kind of world parliament has the potential for becoming a focal point in world political activities of citizens, movements, and parties—indeed providing a context in which world parties could form.

Chapter 13 asks whether the important security and political economy reasons for establishing a world political community can provide it with a legitimate and sustainable base. This is unlikely without a civilising and story-telling process appropriate for a community of world citizens that has wide transformative effects. This must involve a widespread belief in normative legitimacy, anchored in universalising principles such as popular democracy and human rights. For example, a planetary issue such as global warming suggests a global “we”-ness. A better method of reasoning would develop more adequate principles for human cooperation and resolving conflicts.

The disparate parts and chapters share ten theoretical themes that can be discerned through a critical and empathetic reading of the whole book. The first is the increasing planetary integration of world society and the planetary nature of climate change. This necessitates the development of world statehood and a world political community. Second, this is linked to the use of world-historical hindsight and new conceptual tools that adopt long time scales, embrace collective learning and the creative re-interpretation of past and present events. Third, this connects in turn to a consistent emphasis on the transformative potential of human agency alongside material factors. The fourth theme is a new understanding of the development of world statehood and a world political community, which emphasizes the multiple processes involved in and the role of contradictions and conflicts in the complex and open-ended nature of economic and political development. Fifth is the critical realist observation of tendencies and counter-tendencies that produce contingent effects in a series of overlapping stages.

Sixth, nascent world statehood is understood in terms of the convergence of existing and emerging structures of global governance, of a global public sphere, and global constitutionalism. Seventh is the importance of individual and collective agency in realizing the development of world statehood. Eighth, the tendential direction of world history is based in collective human learning, making it possible to solve problems, absent ills, and overcome contradictions through collective actions and building better common institutions. Ninth, this links to the role of ethical and normative commitments to an emerging world statehood to complement rational calculation about the development of material

Review – World Statehood

Written by Bob Jessop

conditions that indicate its appropriateness. This ensures the normative legitimacy of a complex and pluralistic world community grounded in popular democracy and human rights and reflects the need for multi-spatial metagovernance in which world statehood would only be one component. Lastly, tenth, one should not prejudge the ethical-political telos for world history as this goal can only emerge through agents acting in history.

The book is long, draws on thirty-seven other works by Patomäki published between 1992 and 2022, and is not well-integrated. This leads to unnecessary repetition and lack of closure. Arguments develop through discussions of other approaches that are relevant to specific chapters but do not add coherence to the overall emphasis on the open-ended nature of planetary evolution and the role of collective self-reflexive learning. The book is nonetheless valuable for its strong critiques of Eurocentrism and of the misguided belief in inevitable laws and tendencies and, in this context, its strong emphasis on developing rational reflection and collective learning as a key to the contingent development of a world state. In this sense it is a valuable contribution to international relations.

About the author:

Bob Jessop is Emeritus Professor of Sociology at Lancaster University. He publishes in the fields of state theory, critical governance studies, critical political economy, critical realism, and cultural political economy.