WHAT IS ORIENTATION IN GLOBAL THINKING?

Starting from Kant's striking question, 'What is orientation in thinking?', this book argues that the main challenge facing global normative theorizing lies in its failure to acknowledge its conceptual inadequacies. We do not know how to reason globally; instead, we tend to apply our domestic political experiences to the global context. Katrin Flikschuh argues that we must develop a form of global reasoning that is sensitive to the variability of contexts: rather than trying to identify a uniquely shareable set of substantive principles, we need to appreciate and understand local reasons for action. Her original and incisive study shows how such reasoning can benefit from the open-ended nature of Kant's systematic but non-dogmatic philosophical thinking, and from reorientation from a domestic to a non-domestic frame of thought. It will appeal to all those interested in global moral issues, as well as Kant scholars.

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A Kantian Inquiry

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To the memory of
Winfried Johannes Flikschuh (1928–2012)

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Preface

This book is an inquiry into what it may mean to engage in global practical reasoning. This way of putting it implies that we do not currently reason globally, which may seem odd, given that the debate on global justice has dominated political philosophy and political theory over the last thirty years or so. That said, interest in the issue is now also waning – there is global justice fatigue. One hears it said that the literature is 'saturated', as though too many had partaken too quickly of too much of a good thing. And yet, despite the oft-proclaimed urgency about solving problems of global poverty and deprivation, and despite sustained intellectual engagement to this effect, little has changed in global political practice as a direct result of the debate. Hardly surprising, one might say – at least in retrospect: Who in their right minds ever thought philosophy changed anything at all? Still, effecting 'real' change was the animus of the global justice debate from very early on.

But there is not just a feeling of practical disappointment; there is also a sense of intellectual fatigue or surfeit: a sense that all that can be said about global justice has been said – perhaps more than just once, or twice; the debate has become repetitive. My contrary suspicion is that not enough has been said at the more properly philosophical level. The perhaps mistaken emphasis, from very early on, on effecting political change encouraged neglect of, and even often impatience with, necessary prior reflection on the adequacy of our available political theories to theorizing the unfamiliar, global domain. And yet, I still think it necessary, even after more than thirty years of substantive global normative theorizing, to ask whether we are in fact theoretically well equipped to do so. This book is not about global justice as a substantive moral and political problem. I here set aside discussions about global poverty, distributive justice, human rights, humanitarian intervention, resource politics and so on. Instead, I begin from a suspicion that much of our current theorizing conflates global reasoning with globalizing particular, domestically favoured moral

and political principles. More specifically, my sense is that much current global theorizing takes the global political context to be the domestic liberal one writ large. I ask what may account for our persistent failure theoretically to advance beyond familiar domestic concepts and principles and conclude, provisionally, that we may not know *how* to do so. I call this predicament one of 'conceptual loss': our familiar, domestically developed concepts and principles have lost their grip on a globalized world, and yet we have no alternative, genuinely global concepts available to us. We are thus confronted with the need for conceptual reorientation. Much of the rest of the book asks how it may be possible for us to reorient our normative thinking about moral and political agency in a global context.

This book does not offer a new theory of global justice; I am no longer persuaded that, generally speaking, practical reasoning should proceed by way of substantive theory. The book nonetheless does seek to identify certain elements within our current approach to global normative theorizing, of which I believe that we need expressly to disown them. It also seeks to specify certain other elements, of which I believe that we need to take them on board if we are to learn to reason more globally. Thus, we need expressly to disown our implicit, historically inherited presumptions about the moral superiority of our own liberal way of thought and life, and we need to learn seriously to engage, on equal terms, with the moral views and philosophical concerns of those whose thinking and ways of life differ from ours, often quite markedly so. I believe that unless we can learn to engage on equal terms with the foreign views of others, global thinking will simply continue to elude us. This is not an argument for relativism so much as an argument against parochialism, most importantly our own. To argue that we must engage with the views of others is obviously to assume their accessibility to us in principle: the fundamental difficulty for us lies not in understanding others' points of view, but in accepting that though often very different from ours, their points of view generally *are*, in fact, intelligible. This may seem a small point to make, but I have found it peculiarly difficult to articulate and to defend in the present, often insistently one-dimensional intellectual climate.

Three major intellectual influences have shaped the argument advanced in this book: the general form of Kant's philosophical thinking as exemplified in the striking title question of his 1785 essay, 'What Is Orientation in Thinking?'; the writings by Jonathan Lear on transcendental anthropology and on conceptual loss; and modern (i.e. post-independence) African philosophical thinking. This book engages all three in an attempt to work

out whether we can and how we might reorient our global normative thinking. I am aware that this combination of influences is unusual; one may doubt its cohesiveness. I cannot say much by way of reassurance here, as working out how these three elements may relate to each other in the context at hand is in essence the subject matter of the ensuing chapters. Still, it may help to say a little bit more about how this book came to have the shape it does.

I did not originally set out to write this particular book some six years ago. At that point I thought I was going to write a book that critically engages with the use of Kant's moral and political writings in the current global justice debate. My intention was to argue against the assimilation of Kant's political and philosophical concerns under our own and in favour of a textually informed appreciation of the philosophical distance between Kant and us, or Kant and contemporary liberalism. Too often Kant's philosophical authority is being invoked to defend normative positions whose relationship to Kant's own moral and political thinking is tenuous at best. The idea was to show that many of the substantive issues – poverty relief, human rights, democratic self-governance, humanitarian intervention – in relation to which Kant's name is frequently invoked cannot plausibly be ascribed to Kant: they were not his concerns. I began to realize, however, that what primarily bothered me about the current global justice debate was in fact something else. The rough and ready use of Kant by reference to whom to justify familiar liberal positions in relation to this or that substantive normative concern is not to my mind the best way in which to go about reasoning globally (or, for that matter, learning to understand Kant). However, I began to realize that what bothered me far more was the *general* philosophical parochialism of the global justice debate, its almost obsessively inwardly turned engagement with the extension of liberal domestic principles to the global realm. There seemed to me to be virtually no serious intellectual engagement with non-liberal positions at all – let alone engagement with non-Western positions. This feature about the debate increasingly struck me as worrisome – indeed, as objectionable – about a nominally *global* normative discourse.

Around the same time I began to think about going back to West Africa, more specifically to Ghana, where I had spent a fair amount of time between 1988 and 1996. I wanted this time to make some academic contact with members in the Philosophy Department at the University of Ghana. Very fortunately for me, Helen Lauer did respond to my

tentative inquiries and it is through her that I was given my first exposure to modern African philosophy. It is also with her that I co-organized two workshops in London and Accra that sought to engage global theorists and African philosophers with each other. This experience led to my abandoning my initial book project: I realized that, in addition to Kant, I wanted to engage with African philosophical thinking and its bearing on the issue of global justice. However, I was at a loss as to how to bring the two together.

In 2012–13, I spent a year as a research fellow with the *Justitia Amplificata* Project directed by Rainer Forst and Stefan Gosepath at the University of Frankfurt. I had intended to write a good part of the initially planned book there, but arrived with that plan torn up. The Bad Homburg–based Humanwissenschaftskolleg was set in lush parklands which my office overlooked. The park extended into a small forest out of which deer occasionally emerged in the early hours of the morning. They would watchfully graze the lawn whilst I observed them from my office. In-between I reread Jonathan Lear's *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*. I had read it before, but this time it affected me much more. Though at one level a study of the experience of cultural devastation and conceptual loss undergone by the Crow Indians at the turn of the last century, Lear also speaks of the possibility of conceptual loss as a 'permanent human possibility'. I spent much of the year in Bad Homburg looking out my office window, waiting for the deer and thinking about conceptual loss. By the end of the year, I had a first draft of the first chapter.

Over the following three years back in London the book progressed similarly haltingly. I had in the meantime successfully applied for a research network grant from the Leverhulme Trust, which enabled a group of African, UK and German colleagues to hold more regular events and conferences designed to foster a mutual exchange of views. Martin Ajei from the University of Ghana and Eghosa Osaghae from the University of Ibadan became colleagues and friends. I had also by then read David Velleman's *Foundations for Moral Relativism*, whose central Kantian contention that action guiding reasons must be reasons for those whose actions they guide I found very persuasive. I reread a lot of Karl Ameriks's work on Kant, especially on Kant's *manner* of philosophical thinking. Lear's work on transcendental anthropology, Velleman's broad Kantianism about contextual practical reasoning and Karl Ameriks's work on Kant's philosophical openness crucially inform my approach to Kant in this book.

It is Kant's manner of philosophical thinking rather than its substance that primarily interests me here. This should be evident from the two central Kant chapters (2 and 3), although these also bear the traces of the original book project, which was to differentiate Kant's thinking methodologically from current liberal normative reasoning. But in the new project this process of differentiation is meant to make possible a turn to modern African philosophical thinking: this is why Chapters 6 and 7, the most 'African' chapters, mirror Chapters 2 and 3 substantively. It is the openness or open-endedness of Kant's thinking on the one hand and our appreciation, as Kant's readers, of his historically very different context on the other that are meant gradually to open us up, in the course of the arguments developed in this book, to engagement with a new philosophical tradition, the African one, which, though contextually different from ours, is not therefore inaccessible to us.

The book does, in the end, have a certain thematic unity for me: the first chapter introduces the theme of conceptual loss in the context of the global justice debate. Chapters 2 and 3 turn to Kant: I consider Kant's qualified argument about a duty of state entrance on the one hand and his non-individualistic conception of innate right on the other hand. Both times I argue that Kant's thinking on these issues is erroneously appropriated by contemporary liberal theorists. Understanding the historical and philosophical *distances* between Kant's thinking and our own may offer us resources to reorient ourselves theoretically. Chapters 4 and 5 are to do with the possibility of conceptual reorientation. Chapter 4 argues that in the context of global normative reasoning, such reorientation must be predicated on the explicit repudiation of our tendency still to presume the moral superiority of our own point of view and way of life. Chapter 5 considers the legacies of that tendency as it grew out of Enlightenment preoccupation with a certain idea of moral progress; the chapter serves simultaneously as a transition into modern African philosophical thinking. Chapters 6 and 7 turn to African political thinking about non-individualistic personhood and about the disappointments with statehood. Thematically, they mirror the earlier Kant chapters, albeit in reverse order. Substantively, they argue that given African thinkers' contextually different experiences, we should not be surprised that their moral and political views and beliefs often differ from ours. But even if others' concerns are often very different from ours, mutual intellectual engagement remains possible. It can be hugely rewarding, moreover. Mutual intellectual engagement may not be a sufficient condition for a more adequate form of global reasoning but it surely is a necessary condition.

As with any book project, so the present one has incurred countless debts to colleagues, friends and family. A debt that goes back some way is to the Philosophy Department of the University of Essex, where I did my PhD, and to two of its then-members in particular: Onora O'Neill, who taught me everything I know about Kantian practical reasoning; and Mark Sacks, who, first drew my attention to the work of Jonathan Lear in the context of his own pursuits work on Kantian and Wittgensteinian transcendental arguments. I remain permanently grateful for having been exposed to the open-minded and tolerant philosophical atmosphere at Essex back then. My thanks to the *Justitia Amplificata* project at the University of Frankfurt and to Rainer Forst and Stefan Gosepath for offering me a year of funded work on the book when it was most needed. Their generosity, and that of the Bad Homburg Kolleg in general, was exemplary. I doubt whether, absent that crucial year, this book would ever have got off the ground. A heartfelt thanks to the Leverhulme Trust for its willingness to risk funding a highly unusual research network on theorizing global justice in modern African contexts. Finally, I thank the Government Department at the LSE, and the political theory group in particular, for providing such a collegial research and teaching environment. Thanks to my MSc students for their eagerness to explore African philosophical thinking in the context of a course on liberal justice, and to my research students for generously indulging me with regard to my 'Kantian relativism'. Turning from institutions to persons, I thank Martin Ajei, Bob Goodin, Simon Hope, Chandran Kukathas, Onora O'Neill and Eghosa Osaghae for advice, discussion and friendship, in some cases over many years by now. Particular thanks to Arthur Ripstein, for generously reading the entire manuscript and for offering unfailingly astute suggestions for improvement. Many thanks to my Cambridge University Press editor, Hilary Gaskin, for her advice, patience and forbearance, and to Robert Judkins for his equally patient help with the cover design. Thanks for stimulating discussion on aspects of the book to Lucy Allais, Rose-Mary Amanga-Etego, Sorin Baiasu, Simon Caney, James Conant, Thomas Christiano, Rowan Cruft, Karin de Boer, Marcus Duwall, Cécile Fabre, Pablo Gilabert, James Gledhill, Fergus Green, Kwame Gyekye, Paul Guyer, Otfried Höffe, Paulin Hountondji, Jakob Huber, Leigh Jenco, Paul Kelly, Pauline Kleingeld, Camillia Kong, Cécile Laborde, Helen Lauer, Jonathan Lear, Mathias Lutz-Bachmann, Catherine Lu, Joel Madore, Sem de Maagt, Ifeyani Menkiti, Thomas Mertens,

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Abbreviations for Works by Kant

CPR	Critique of Pure Reason
CprR	Critique of Practical Reason
DR	Doctrine of Right
GW	Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals
MM	Metaphysics of Morals
WE	What is Enlightenment
WOT	What Is Orientation in Thinking?

I have used the following translations:

Cambridge Edition of the Writings of Immanuel Kant, Practical Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996)

Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, transl. Norman Kemp Smith (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan 1990)

Translations from 'What Is Orientation in Thinking?' are my own. References to all works use the Prussian Academy pagination (volume followed by page number).