The foundations of the international legal order

d' Aspremont, J.

Published in:
Finnish Yearbook of International Law

Citation for published version (APA):
The Foundations of the International Legal Order

Jean d’Aspremont

Introduction

This is an article about international law. It expresses the thoughts of an international legal scholar on the much-disputed question of the foundations of the international legal order. It attempts to refresh and modernize, without repeating, the classic hobbesian understanding of international law. In that sense, it strives to shed some lights on the pitfalls to which contemporary liberal and constitutionalist doctrines of international law may lead. Because the compound question of the foundations of the international legal order mirrors similar debates that took place in other social sciences, the arguments developed here occasionally allude to non-legal disciplines. References to such disciplines should by no means be construed as an endeavour to borrow authority from non-legal sciences, which international legal scholars — and particularly this author — rarely fathom completely. The insight that they provide can nonetheless help international legal scholars unravel some of the theoretical uncertainties that beset efforts to unravel the foundations of the international legal order.

The question of the foundations of the international legal order which is examined here should not be conflated with that of its validity. The latter has long tormented international legal scholarship too. Its indeterminacy and the alleged failure of international legal positivism to provide a satisfactory answer to it has produced new and critical streams of legal scholarship into “politicizing” international law.

* Associate Professor and Senior Research Fellow, Amsterdam Centre for International Law, University of Amsterdam. The author wishes to thank Prof. Jan Klabbers, Prof. Yasuaki Onuma, Prof. Nico Schrijver, Prof. Stefan Oeter, Prof. William Twining, Dr. Frank Haldemann and Mr. Otto Spijkers for sharing their thoughts with him on this topic. He also thanks Mr. Sahib Singh for his very useful assistance.
and demoting it to a mere discourse\(^1\). It is not the aim of this paper to revert to the ever-lasting debate about the validity of the international legal order as a whole. Indeed, the author of this paper does not believe that, as such, the question of the validity of a legal order has ever made sense at all. There is not such a thing as a valid or invalid legal order. While it is of the utmost importance to appraise whether a given rule has been adopted in conformity with the systemic and substantive principles of the legal order in which this rule yields its effect, the existence of a legal order itself does not need to be judged in a similar manner. The existence of a legal order is basically not a question of validity but a question of fact\(^2\) – this actually is why the attempts to purify international law through the recourse to a presupposed and hypothetical ‘grundnorm’ may have eventually ended up unwittingly and unnecessarily weakening legal positivism as a whole\(^3\). When looking at the foundations of the international legal order, this paper accordingly disregards the issue of the validity of the international legal order and simply zeroes in on the reasons why States make law in the first place.

The question that this paper tries to disentangle echoes a controversy that riddled philosophy a century ago and that stretched out over some decades. Indeed, as it is well-known, both Nietzsche and Heidegger have attempted to demote the status of philosophy as the queen of politics and sciences\(^4\) and, for that reason, have been portrayed as the forefathers of postmodernity. Although in a different way and to a different extent, they have both faulted the traditional anthropocentric tables of values which they saw as the bedrock of nihilism. Yet, Heidegger is probably the only one that has truly advocated an utterly sceptical rejection of values. Contrary to Nietzsche whose endeavor to destroy values through the ‘Will to Power’ ultimately aimed at the construction of a new morality based on better and renewed values, Heidegger never faltered in his struggle against values and nihilism, thereby challenging the values-validation inclination of mainstream philosophers\(^5\).

Probably because his later alleged support of Nazi theories retrospectively sullied his whole work, Heidegger’s thought partly fell into oblivion in the second half


of the twentieth century and his influence on other social sciences faded away. The international legal scholarship is no exception to that. While postmodern philosophy incrementally started to trickle into legal theory and, subsequently, international legal theory, international legal scholars have remained averse to the utter scepticism towards values that was conveyed by Heidegger. It is particularly noteworthy that several prominent German (and Austrian) international legal scholars who grew up at a time Heidegger was still in his prime — although diminished because of his earlier political positions — have offered an unconcealed value-oriented understanding of the international legal order. These scholars — classically inventoried as international constitutionalists — have advocated an understanding of the legal system that corresponds to a table of global values. Although the present author may be guilty for overgeneralizing the respective positions on the idea of global values, it can still be contended that supporters include Christian Tomuschat, Hermann Mosler, Jost Delbrück, and, to some extent, Bruno Simma. The need to buttress existing rules and mechanisms by underlying global values is not limited to the German constitutionalist school. Other constitutionalists — or scholars whose discourse is occasionally tinged with constitutionalism — like Erika de Wet, Anne Peters, Pierre-Marie Dupuy, Nico Schrijver, Georges Abi-Saab, Verra Gowland-Debbas, 

Jonathan Charney, Robert McCorquodale have also embraced such a value-oriented understanding of the international legal order.

International constitutionalists do not have the monopoly on the abovementioned representation of the international legal order; there are many others. For the sake of this paper, it suffices to mention another mainstream strand of international legal thinking which espouses such a value-oriented understanding of the international legal order, namely international liberalism. Indeed, (neo-)liberals like Louis Henkin, Thomas Franck, Fernando R. Tesón, or Anne-Marie Slaughter — to name only a few — analyze the legal order through the lens of global values as well. Many of all the aforementioned scholars have been drawing on the earlier works of Wilfred Jenks, Georg Schwarzenberger, Wolfgang Friedmann, or

---

René-Jean Dupuy,27 all of whom had long recognized the role of collective interest in international lawmaking but had linked it to the existence of global values. Their views have enjoyed a prominent position in Western scholarship and they have occasionally permeated the work of the Institut de droit international.28

Constitutionalism and liberalism doctrines have been barely contested on this point. Asian scholars, reflecting visions often expressed in international lawmaking in Asia,29 have ventured to defy this value-oriented conception of the international legal order. It is not concealed that the understanding of the international legal order offered by these scholars has been significantly instrumental to the representation that is defended here. In particular, the works of Yasuaki Onuma30 and Muthu Sor-

28 See for instance the Resolution of the Institut de droit international of 26 August 2005 on the Universal criminal jurisdiction with regard to crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes (Session of Krakow — August 2005) adopted pursuant to the work of Christian Tomuschat and which considers that ‘fundamental values of the international community are infringed by serious international crimes as defined by international law’ and which affirms that ‘universal jurisdiction is designed to protect and uphold these values, in particular human life, human dignity, and physical integrity, by allowing prosecution of international crimes’. See also Article 1 of the Resolution of the Institut de droit international of 27 August 2007 on the obligation erga omnes: ‘For the purposes of the present articles, an obligation erga omnes is … an obligation under general international law that a State owes in any given case to the international community, in view of its common values and its concern for compliance, so that a breach of that obligation enables all States to take action …’ Available at <www.idi-il.org>.
29 See for instance the Report of the Regional Meeting for Asia of the World Conference on Human Rights, Bangkok, 29 March — 2 April 1993, A/Conf.157/ASRM/8 and A/Conf.157/PC/59, 7 April 1993: ‘expressing concern that [international human rights mechanisms] relate mainly to one category of rights’; ‘recognize that while human rights are universal in nature, they must be considered in the context of a dynamic and evolving process of international norm-setting, bearing in mind the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious background’. See more generally the paper issued by the Chinese government Human Rights in China (1991), Beijing Review 34 (4-10 November 1991) at 9. See also the statement by Mr. Nirupam Sen, Permanent Representative on Justice and the Rule of Law: The United Nations Role at the Security Council on October 6, 2004, available at <www.un.int/india> — Statements — Security Council — 2004: ‘The UN should play a supportive and facilitating role, without seeking to impose an outside optic or values of any particular country or group of countries on the delicate process of establishing the rule of law’. In the same mould, see Statement by Mr. V.K. Mamdani, Permanent Representative on Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction at the Security Council on April 22, 2004, available at <www.un.int/india> — Statements — Security Council — 2004: ‘India will not accept externally prescribed norms or standards, what ever their source, on matters pertaining to domestic jurisdiction of its Parliament, including national legislation, regulations or arrangements which are not consistent with its Constitutional provisions and procedures or contrary to its national interests, or infringe on its sovereignty’.
30 He has taken aim at the West-centric modern civilization and criticized the “cultural imperialism” that plagues international human rights law and has elaborately spoken of human rights law in terms of “usefulness” highlighting that human rights have proven to be the most effective way to protect hu-
narakajah have been of paramount importance in this respect, although regrettably ignored in Western legal scholarship. A similar scepticism — although of a lesser intensity — towards the role of universal values in the international legal order is also observable in the work of some Eastern European legal scholars. As illustrated by Milan Sahovic and Rein Mullerson, a fair number of Eastern European scholars have been circumspect as to the role that universal values may play in the international legal order, offering an interest-based and pragmatic understanding of it. Mention must also be made of the comparable interest-oriented understanding that pervades the work of the Kenyan scholar Yash Ghai. But leaving these few strands


32 On the contribution of Asian scholars to this debate, see generally, Jean d’Aspremont, ‘International Law in Asia: the Limits to the Constitutionalist and Liberal Doctrines’, 13 Asian Yearbook of International Law (2008) 89-111.


35 The most importance universal human values are those connected with the resolution of global problems. Diminishing the threat of world war, nuclear catastrophe and the use of force in international relations generally accrues with the interests of all peoples and individuals. Similarly, protection of the environment and maintaining ecological security are generally accepted human interests. Social injustice, economic underdevelopment, hunger and disease in the developing world are potentially explosive global problems, the resolution of which is also in the common interest of all nations’, Mullerson and Vereschchetin, ‘International Law in an Interdependent World’, supra note 34, at 292; see also Mullerson, ‘Right to Survival as Right to Life of Humanity’, supra note 34, at 50.


of the international legal scholarship aside, the liberal and constitutionalist visions of the foundations of the international legal order have remained mostly unchallenged.

Without denying the oversimplification inherent to any of the aforementioned categorizations of scholars, this paper is an attempt to question such Kantian or Grotian conceptions of the international legal order that are conveyed by the liberal and constitutionalist doctrines. It aims at laying out an understanding of the international legal order based on (individual and common) interests rather than global values. Indeed, drawing on the idea that the main tenets of the international legal order are determined by forces underlying international lawmakering, this paper offers an understanding of the international legal order which is stripped of reference to global values and exclusively rests on individual and common interests.

It is acknowledged that the differences between common interests and global values are not always obvious. They can overlap each other; for example, what may constitute a global value can simultaneously serve the interest of all. It should be made clear that this paper does not try to reconsider the role of global values under the guise of common interests. As far as this paper is concerned, common interests, as is explained below, can always be distinguished from global values, since the former are fundamentally relative, context-dependent and ever-evolving. On the contrary, the concept of global values rests on the idea that there is such a thing as an objective truth independent from its factual context of application. It is precisely because this paper assumes that the driving forces of international lawmakering are not immutable and are subject to constant and contingent changes, that it plays down the importance of global values and zeroes in on common interests.

By defending a representation of the international legal order based on interests, this paper will seek to revive a neo-Hobbesian vision of the legal order; one that has taken a backseat in contemporary international legal scholarship. By reviving a neo-Hobbesian approach to the foundations of international law, the paper simultaneously helps modernize international legal positivism in a manner that strips it of the ideological overtones that have classically kindled its critique. Because Hobbes has been perceived as the precursor of so many radically opposite understandings of the international society, it is important to stress that, for the sake of this paper, a

---


A Hobbesian understanding of the legal order should not be conflated with the widespread (neo-)realist interpretations of Hobbes and, to that extent, is disparate to the recent work of Jack Goldsmith and Eric Posner. The (neo-)realist school has always centred on the Hobbesian ‘state of nature’ as a breeding ground for the vying for power. Even though it does not deny the overarching importance of self-interests in contemporary lawmaking, this paper distances itself from such (neo-)realist theories. Rather, it seeks a focused conceptualization of Hobbes on the role played by common interests, which is a feature that realists such as Hans Morgenthau or neo-realists like Kenneth Waltz have adamantly disputed. It is argued here that Hobbes, although he might have been ‘guilty of gross and dangerous cru-dities’, recognized that common interests (and not only individual interests) were playing a role in international relations. In that sense, this paper provides a Hobbesian understanding of the international legal order which significantly borrows from the rationalist approach of the English School of international relations as is explained in the first part of this paper.

It is not contested that a growing number of rules serve the public good and, in that sense, they reinforce the public character of international law. Accordingly, the second part of this paper focuses on those rules that allegedly serve the public good in order to demonstrate that they are not resting on any sort of global values but are rather supported by (individual and common) interests. The extent to which our interest-oriented conceptualization of the international legal order contributes to the public character of international law is also examined in this part.

45 Kenneth Waltz is said to be a neo-realist in the sense that he is not endorsing the conservative and pessimistic analysis of men and favors a more top-down analysis of international relations based on the deficiencies of the international system (whereas Morgenthau, Kennan and Niebuhr construe the behaviour of States as a magnification of the flawed human nature). This said, Neo-Realists yet treat States as self-interested. For an overview of the different strands of realism, see Keith L. Shimko, ‘Realism, Neorealism and American Liberalism’, 54 The Review of Politics (1992) 281-301.
It must be acknowledged, however, that the Hobbesian approach offered by the English School of international relations is tinged with a Grotian vision of the world order. It is well-known, for instance, that Hedley Bull has been decisively influenced by Grotius. Although embracing most of the rationalist theory of international relations, this paper ultimately does away with the Grotian overtones of the English School’s reading of Hobbes in order to demonstrate the inapplicability of global values in the international legal order. In particular, it is argued here that interests are inherently subjectively contingent and cannot be subject to any objectivization. Interests remain ever changing and their perception is inescapably subject to the context and the position of each individual lawmaker, which in turn arguably condemns the interpreter to a complete relativism. The relativism inherent in the conceptualization of the international legal order offered in this paper is precisely what differentiates an approach based on ‘interests’ from one resting on ‘values’ as is explained in the third section.

The latter point means, in philosophical terms, that this paper does not seek to reproduce any ‘Nietzschean’ moral revolution — to which was alluded above — by replacing one system of values by another in all but name. Seen through this lens, the vision of the international legal order conveyed here is thus rather inspired by the relativism of Heidegger. It should be highlighted, however, that the ultimate aim here is by no means to support any ‘incorporation’ of the philosophy of Heidegger in the international legal doctrine. The former is far too complex and subtle to constitute a direct means of interpretation for a simple and rudimentary system like international law. Above all, international law, as a system, has a logic of its own and does not need to ‘borrow’ from other social sciences to ensure its internal coherence. It is precisely by drawing on the logic of that system that this paper seeks to play down the liberal and constitutionalist idea that the international legal order rests on global values and rather to put the emphasis on common interests.


I. Individual and Common Interests

Even liberals and constitutionalists agree that States first strive to promote their own interests. As States are both primary lawmakers and subjects of international law, they naturally act to maximize the interest of their constituency given their perception of the interests of other States and the distribution of State power. International cooperation first stems from a convergence of individual interest, as explained by De Visscher. This convergence entices States to cooperate and create multilateral frameworks for their actions.

One should not bemoan the fact that States primarily seek the satisfaction of their individual interests. Their own interest is not especially that of the State as an independent abstract entity. It may also come down to the interest of the constituent populus, whether it is for the sake of their welfare or the more cynical desire to gain their support. One could say that the foregoing is consistent with the essence of representation. It could even be argued that, generally speaking, the reinforcement of the liberal democratic structure of governance at the national level, on the heels of the Cold war, has enhanced the tendency for a government to strictly advocate the interest of its people at the international level, especially in international lawmaking.

The conception of the international legal order supported here does not however, rest exclusively on the individual interest of States. Contrary to what (neo-) realist theorists have contended, States are not inherently self-interested. They are sometimes prone to promote the interest of all and not only their pure self-interest.

---

52 Charney, ‘Universal International Law’, supra note 17, at 533.
53 In that sense, I agree with Goldsmith and Posner that “State interests are not always easy to determine, because the state subsumes many institutions and individuals that obviously do not share the identical preferences and outcomes. Nonetheless, a state — especially one with well-ordered political institutions — can make coherent decisions based upon identifiable preferences, or interest, and it is natural and common to explain state action on the international plane in terms of the primary goal or goals the state seeks to achieve”. Limits of International Law, supra note 39, at 3 and 6.
It is nonetheless true that, in many respects, States accept to promote a common interest because they feel that they will also benefit individually. Such an understanding of the common interest is probably what Niebuhr depicted as the ‘wise’ or ‘enlightened’ self-interest.59 It is also somewhat similar to Jeremy Bentham’s famous aggregative definition of the public interest.60 As it has been explained by Myres McDougal and Michael Reisman, ‘the most important “national” interests of a particular state may be its inclusive (“international”) interests with other states’.61 Friedmann noted that it is ‘possible to work for the strengthening of international law and authority from the standpoint of “enlightened national interest”, as being the best or even the only way of ensuring national survival’.62 This is what I have elsewhere termed, ‘mutualized interests’.63

Even though a common interest may sometimes boil down to a mutualized interest, there are hypotheses where States are truly and genuinely amenable to the interest of all, irrespective of the benefit that they can reap from the rule concerned. It can be argued that States sometimes seek to pursue the general well-being of human beings, wherever the beneficiaries may be located. In these hypotheses, the common interest underlying international lawmaker goes beyond the ‘Benthamian’ aggregate or mutualized common interest and embraces a quest for a general well-being of individuals. It is thus not only the interest of all States that is taken into account but also the interests of individuals whose condition will be affected by the measure concerned. This is exactly what has been supported by Yasuaki Onuma through the concept of ‘usefulness’. The protection of human beings or of the environment, as will be explained later, both constitute good examples of ‘useful’ rules.

60 See Jeremy Bentham, An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation (J.H. Burns and H.L.A. Hart, eds, Athline Press: London, 1970) at 12. ‘The community is a fictitious body, composed of the individual persons who are considered as constituting as it were its members. The interest of the community then is, what? — the sum of the interest of the several members who compose it’. Bentham’s conception of the public interest as a “sum-of-particular-interests” has usually been criticized for failing to distinguish private interests from the welfare of the community and leaving no room for the interest of society. For a rehabilitating understanding of Bentham, see J.A.W. Gunn, ‘Jeremy Bentham and the Public Interest’, 1 Canadian Journal of Political Science (1968) 398-413.
in that sense. It is important to stress that the common interest in these hypotheses cannot be conflated with a value in disguise. Indeed, the well-being of individuals, as will be explained, is subject to continuous reappraisal and is fundamentally relative, making it alien to objective determination. The common interest construed in terms of ‘usefulness’ remains void of any value-related overtones. The examples that will be provided in section II will help support that assertion.

It must be pointed out at this stage that an understanding of the legal order as based on interests rather than global values is not conceptually incompatible with the existence of an international society. Common interests may be those of the international society. This is in line with a functional conception of the international society as the one developed by thinkers of the rationalist English school of international relations like Hedley Bull. In such a society, rules can emerge because they are of mutual benefit and States cooperate because of the possibility of gains (for all and for themselves). The imprint of Hedley Bull’s thought on this paper does however not stretch any further, as Bull himself did not rule out the existence of ‘a consensus about common interest and global values that provides the foundations of its common rules and institutions’. As was made allusion to earlier, the minimal conception of international lawmaking advocated in this paper leaves little room for the Grotian understanding of the international society as a moral project.

Although the understanding of the international society found here is rather minimal, it is not incompatible with the conception that pervades the famous and influential work of Alexander Wendt, according to whom the existence of an ‘international society’ requires a degree of ‘cultural unity among its members’. An ‘international society’ thus presupposes some form of global identification, that is, a sense of being a group (‘we’). Provided that they share this ‘feeling’, States can seek the welfare of the group. But such a common identification is not necessarily the

---

65 Liberals have made a similar argument. See for instance, Henkin, Politics and Values, supra note 18, at 284.
66 Bull, The Anarchical Society, supra note 46 at 4-5.
68 Bull, The Anarchical Society, supra note 46, at 315-316.
70 Martin Wight, Western Values in International Relations’ in Herbert Butterfield and Martin Wight (eds.), Diplomatic Investigations (Allen and Unwin: London, 1966) at 33.
71 Wendt, Social Theory in International Politics, supra note 55, at 242, 337. See Bull who argues that an international society exists ‘when a group of States, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive of themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions’. The Anarchical Society, supra note 46, at 13.
reflection of any global value. Common identification simply means that the unit on the basis of which States assess their action (and its impact) is the group.\textsuperscript{72} If States accordingly feel that they belong to a group whose interests should also be promoted, they remain inspired by interests, not by global values. It can therefore be contended that the understanding of the international legal order that is carved in this paper is not incompatible with the concept of international society as devised by many international relations theorists.

The neo-Hobbesian view of the international legal order offered in this paper greatly relies on the role played by common interests in international lawmaking, a feature that differentiates the approach of this paper from a mere (neo-)realist account of rulemaking. The next section explains the role played by common interests in contemporary lawmaking with a view of demonstrating that international law can serve the public good without necessarily being the manifestation of any global value.

II. Common Interests in International Lawmaking and the Public Character of International Law

According to the prevailing European and positivist tradition against the backdrop of which the idea of international law was carved, international law boiled down to a set of rules established by public entities to regulate relations between public entities.\textsuperscript{73} In that sense, international law was undoubtedly public. This aspect of the public character of international law was rarely highlighted during the early stages of its development as scholars only resorted to the expression \textit{jus gentium} (law of nations).\textsuperscript{74} Back then, the explicit mention of the public character of international law was somewhat idle since international legal rules only applied to relations between States. It was however before the emergence of a body of rules applying to international relations between individuals — that is private international law\textsuperscript{75} — that the expression ‘public international law’ was created. In the wake of the Osnabrück and

\textsuperscript{72} Wendt, \textit{Social Theory in International Politics}, supra note 55, at 337.


\textsuperscript{74} Some authors like Suarez, Zouche or even Francisco de Vitoria, sporadically used the expression of \textit{jus inter gentes}.

\textsuperscript{75} Edvard Hambro, ‘Some Remarks on the Relations between Public International Law and Private International Law’, 39 \textit{Journal de droit international} (1962) 613-637.
Münster peace treaties, the public aspect of international law was already adverted through the expression *Droit public de l’Europe* (Public Law of Europe).\(^{76}\) When Bentham first coined the expression ‘international law’ in the preface of his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*,\(^{77}\) there was, however, no hint at its public character. The 1802 translation by Etienne Dumont\(^{78}\) for the very first time mentions the public character of international law with the help of the expression ‘Droit International’, which is a direct reference to the authors and subjects of international law. This aspect of the public character of international law is nowadays taken for granted and uncontested. In the Anglo-Saxon\(^{79}\) and German\(^{80}\) legal scholarship, the shorthand ‘international law’ is often preferred to ‘public international law’ although they do not dispute that international law is public. Only the French legal scholars continue to systematically resort to the expression ‘public international law’.\(^{81}\)


\(^{77}\) In a footnote, he stated: ‘The word *international* it must be acknowledged, is a new one; though, it is hoped, sufficiently analogous and intelligible. It is calculated to express in a more significant way, the branch of the law which goes commonly under the name of the *law of nations*: an appellation so uncharacteristic that, were it not for the force of custom, it would seem rather to refer to international jurisprudence. The chancellor D’Aguesseau has already made, I find, a similar remark: he says, that what is commonly called *droit des gens*, ought rather to be termed *droit entre les gens*. Bentham, *Principles of Morals and Legislation*, supra note 60, at 296.


\(^{81}\) See among others Joe Verhoeven, *Droit international public* (Larcier: Brussels, 2000); Alain Pellet & Patrick Dailler, *Droit international public* (LGDJ: Paris, 2002); Jean Combacau & Serge Sur, *Droit international public* (Montchretien: Paris 2004); Pierre-Marie Dupuy, *Droit international public*, (Dalloz: Paris,
The public character of international law not only rests on its being a set of rules between public entities. Nowadays, there is a growing consensus that the public character of international law can also be traced back to its promoting the public good.

While the idea is uncontested that international rules may promote the public good, interpretations as to what constitutes the international public good vary. This is precisely where the conception of the international legal order supported here conflicts with the constitutionalist and liberal value-oriented theories. To illustrate the argument developed here, four categories of rules that arguably serve the public good are examined with a view to demonstrating that their adoption is not premised on global values but rests upon common interests. Mention will be made of rules that pertain to the preservation of peace (a), the efficiency of the international system (b), the protection of the environment (c), and the protection of human beings.
(d). Finally, a few remarks will be formulated on those rules that belong to the international public order (e).

In examining the driving forces underpinning lawmaking in each of these areas, it will be shown that the common interests upon which a certain number of these norms rests outstrip the classical ‘Benthamian’ aggregated interest as it encompasses a quest for the general well-being. In that sense, the argument will draw upon the insightful as well as pragmatic concept of ‘usefulness’ circulated by Yasuaki Onuma. This notion will prove especially decisive when one comes to explain international lawmaking in the area of human rights. Although the meaning of the concept of usefulness will reveal itself in the examples provided below it is important to stress at this stage that a rule will be ‘useful’ in the abovementioned sense when, in a way or another, it brings about an actual improvement of the factual condition of individuals. The contribution to the well-being of individuals by a rule is thus gauged here in very pragmatic terms. This is why lawmaking, when it is explained through a conception of the common interest based on the idea of usefulness, remains value-free and can be accommodated in the neo-Hobbesian vision of the international legal order defended in this article.

a) Rules pertaining to the preservation of peace

It is not much disputed that peace constitutes a public good and that rules related to the preservation of peace serve a common interest. Those rules, as R. P. Anand has explained, do not reflect merely any value but rest on a mutualization of interests as previously defined. The prohibition of the use of force is probably the embodiment of this type of rule. States may have consented to the said rule for self-serving reasons. Indeed, States, whatever their power and their clout, seem to believe that the scourge of war can, in a way or another, be detrimental to them and their own population. Small nations which were not backed by any major power must probably have construed the rule prohibiting the use of force primarily as a means to protect themselves against greater powers. In that sense, the rules pertaining to the use of force reflect the interests of the weaker States. Major powers — whose might

85 The foregoing does not mean that Yasuaki Onuma must himself be portrayed as a neo-Hobbesian. It is simply that his insightful notion of ‘usefulness’ of human rights law is exactly in line with the value-free account of the international legal order advocated here.
can deter other powers from threatening them — probably realized that their power could wane or be insufficient to prevent harmful actions again them. Likewise, they have most likely understood that violence on the international level that is geographically remote from them can also impinge on their prosperity and the wealth of their population.88 Those rules can also serve a common interest which goes beyond the abovementioned mutualized interests of States. These rules can be ‘useful’ in the sense described above. Indeed, there are some weighty reasons to believe that States also agreed to relinquish their right to resort to force to promote the welfare of all. The global consensus on the general prohibition of the use of force can thus be conceived without resort to any global value.89

Rules pertaining to peaceful dispute settlement mechanisms are intertwined with the prohibition to use force. The settlement of a dispute certainly serves the interest of the States involved in the dispute.90 As Anand explained, one of the strictly individual interests that it promotes relates to the confidence-building effect that a commitment to a binding dispute settlement mechanism conveys.91 But these rules also promote a common interest in that they bolster international peace. These rules are not adopted on the basis of any value (like an idea of corrective ‘justice’). They aim at preventing or toning down international disputes whose fallout could be harmful to all States. 92

The situation of mixed dispute settlement mechanisms whereby standing is granted to individuals may be different. Indeed, monitoring bodies like the European Court of Human Rights or the Human Rights Committee — to name only a few — are not primarily aiming at the maintenance of peace but rather at ensuring the respect for human rights. The same can be said as regards the international criminal law enforcement mechanisms which ensure compliance with international...

88 See for instance the reactions and speeches formulated on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the International Court of Justice, available at <www.icj-cij.org/60/index.htm>.

89 Such a view is, for instance, supported by Asian governments: see the statement by Mr. V.K. Mam- biar, Permanent Representative on Non-Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction at the Security Council on April 22, 2004, available at <www.un.int/india>: ‘We believe that meeting new proliferation challenges requires fresh approaches, pooling together the efforts and resources of the international community. In the 1992 Security Council Summit on Non-proliferation, in which India participated, we had called for a new international consensus on non-proliferation. We renew that call today, with the hope that our endeavors will spur common efforts for mutual benefit and in the interests of a safe and secure world’.


criminal law. These mechanisms thus seek to shore up the protection of human beings, which, as is explained below, corresponds to common interests.

Eventually, rules regarding disarmament call for a few remarks, for some could contend that they probably fall into the same category. This is well illustrated by the Treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone that reflects the desire of Southeast Asian States to maintain peace and stability in the region. To a certain extent, these rules can be seen as a means to bolster the peace as they restrict the means available to States to wage war at each other. But it could even be argued that disarmament treaties only serve self-interests of States and are alien to any common interest. When agreeing on a curtailment of their weaponry, States rather want a constraint to be imposed upon the other parties’ powers. In so doing, one could argue that they can be seen as trying to cut back the cost of their own weaponry. The purpose of insuring a safer world or enhancing peace by limiting weaponry is accordingly not necessarily their overriding concern. Be that as it may, these rules are not created following the belief of States concerned in any sort of global values. They originate in their (in this situation, individual) interests. It would be exaggerated to deem them directed at the well-being of all.

b) Rules pertaining to the efficiency of the entire system

The international legal order is replete with rules that ensure the stability, the efficiency, and the predictability of inter-State relations. So are the rules pertaining to the diplomatic or consular relations for instance. The same conclusion probably


applies to the rules providing immunity to heads of State and government. On the one hand, there is little doubt that these rules serve a common interest as explained by the International Court of Justice in the Diplomatic and Consular Staff case in that they help keep the international system working (for instance by ensuring the protection of high-ranking representatives). On the other hand, it can be argued that these types of rules merely stem from the individual interest of each State to ensure predictability and stability of international relations. In that sense, they originate in the aggregation of each States’ individual interest, for each State is interested in having its high-ranking representatives protected. It is argued here that, whether they serve individual or common interests, they are not based on global values.

The same conclusion must be drawn as regards to the rules of the law of treaties. The Vienna Conventions on the Law of Treaties contain rules that can also be seen as dedicated to a better functioning of the entire system. Considering ‘the ever-increasing importance of treaties as a source of international law and as a means of developing peaceful co-operation among nations, whatever their constitutional and social systems’, it could be contended that the 1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties for instance ‘promote[s] the purposes of the United Nations [as] set forth in the Charter, namely, the maintenance of international peace and security, the development of friendly relations and the achievement of co-operation among nations’. The codification of the law of treaties is also a means to reduce the legal uncertainty which previously crippled international conventional relations. In that sense, the Vienna Convention has clarified various aspects of the conventional rela-


99 Diplomatic and Consular Staff in Tehran (United States of America v. Iran), ICJ Reports (1980) 3, at 43 para. 92: [The violation by Iran of its obligation under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations due to the United States] cannot fail to undermine the edifice of law carefully constructed by mankind over a period of centuries, the maintenance of which is vital for the security and well-being of the complex international community of the present day, to which it is more essential than ever that the rules developed to ensure the ordered progress of relations between its members should be constantly and scrupulously respected.


101 Ibid.

102 Goldsmith and Posner, The Limits of International Law, supra note 39, at 95-98.
tionships ranging from elaboration to termination. For these reasons, it can be submitted that the adoption of a set of rules regulating treaties has rested on interests, not on global values.

The rules of State responsibility fall under the same category. Like the rules of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, rules pertaining to international responsibility — and, probably, all secondary rules of international law — have been adopted to satisfy the same sort of interests as they provide legal clarity as regards the consequences of a breach. The need of all States for legal clarity and legal security together with the interest in the efficient running of the whole legal system constitute the prime motivation for adopting these rules. For these reasons, it is contended here that these rules fall short of enshrining any global value.

The rules pertaining to the efficiency of the system are thus based on interests and not global values. The extent to which they are ‘useful’ and serve a global well-being is, however, not so obvious. It is not even certain that this idea has supported lawmaking in these areas. These rules are mostly prodded by classical common interests. However, there is little doubt that an efficient and stable legal system capable of providing legal certainty, in a way or another, fosters the well-being of all. While this may thus not be the primary concern of the lawmakers, mention of these rules must still be made here given their potential usefulness.

c) Rules pertaining to the protection of the environment

It is commonplace to assert that rules pertaining to the protection of the environment serve a common interest. Such a belief is probably too all-embracing as there may be some environmental treaties that serve only individual interests of States. For instance, those rules dedicated to the prevention of the deterioration of a State’s environment by activities taking place outside the limits of its jurisdiction do not necessarily aim at the promotion of a common interest. Some of them are aimed at averting ‘transfrontier pollution’ as illustrated by the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution of 13 November 1979. Instruments of that kind are understood as protecting States themselves. Such situations where environmental lawmaking is driven by individual interests are rather limited. It is true that the most

cynical view could also support that lawmaking in the field of environmental law is also a way in which States satisfy their constituency in alleviating the fears that life on the planet be hindered. This does however not seem to suffice to explain law-making in this area.

It is anticipated that the idea that common interests lie behind environmental lawmaking will not prove very controversial. For the sake of this paper, it is more thought-provoking to note that the common interest that these treaties usually serve goes beyond the Benthamian common interest. It is contended here that they serve a common interest that embraces the well-being of all individuals. In that sense, it is argued that the rules pertaining to the protection of the environment are ‘useful’. Indeed, States are amenable to the survival of mankind. States deem it in their interest, and in that of their governments and their peoples, that mankind is preserved. This is why environmental lawmaking can be depicted, as is explained by M. Sornarajah, in terms of ‘advantages’.

To illustrate the idea that environmental law serves individual and common interests rather than global values as well as the well-being of all, one could think of the protection of endangered fauna and flora or the protection of cultural heritage in time of peace. It is hard to infer any global value from these sets of rules. Even the regulation of outer space, moon, Antarctic, seabed, ozone layer and

---

107 See the comments of Bernard H. Oxman on the occasion of the International Symposium of the Kiel Walther-Schücking-Institute of International Law, March 1996, reproduced in Delbrück and Heinz (eds), New Trends in International Lawmaking, supra note 6, at 112.
112 Agreement Governing the Activities of States on the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, 18 December 1979, into force 11 July 1984, 1363 United Nations Treaty Series 3, Article 4: ‘The exploration and use of the moon shall be the province of all mankind and shall be carried out for the benefit and in the interests of all countries, irrespective of their degree of economic or scientific development. Due regard shall be paid to the interests of present and future generations as well as to the need to promote higher standards of living and conditions of economic and social progress and development in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations’.
Kyoto protocol regimes\textsuperscript{116} are not value-oriented.\textsuperscript{117} They only protect those areas that States believe should be left free of any appropriation and exploitation. It is of course always difficult to capture all intentions underlying a given norm.\textsuperscript{118} However, it is fair to surmise that the reason why States want to keep these areas untouched revolves less around any sort of global values, than around the idea that preserving their ecosystems amounts to the protection of humanity, and the belief of greater scientific benefit in the future. The protection of these areas can also boil down to the impossibility of an equitable apportionment among them.

If one considers the Kyoto Protocol’s regime in particular,\textsuperscript{119} it could also be argued that States agree to curb their CO\textsubscript{2} emissions because they acknowledge climate change is a global threat. Even though some States would probably be more affected by it than others, all States recognize that curbing climate change serves the interest of all, including individual interests. In doing so, they are not driven by any sort of global value. They just follow what they perceive to be in the interest of all, including their own and that of their population.

The same is true for the seabed provisions of UNCLOS. States agreed that the resources of the seabed are ‘the common heritage of mankind’\textsuperscript{120} and that ‘the activities in the Area should be carried out for the benefit of mankind as a whole, irrespective of the geographical location of States, whether coastal or land-locked’.\textsuperscript{121} It has been reaffirmed ‘that the seabed and ocean floor and subsoil thereof, beyond the limits of national jurisdiction … are the common heritage of mankind’ and that ‘the importance of the Convention for the protection and preservation of the marine environment and of the growing concern for the global environment’ does in no way imply that global values have constituted the driving forces of these ground-

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{115} Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer, Vienna, 22 March 1985, in force 22 September 1988, 26\textit{International Legal Material} 1529.
\item \textsuperscript{116} See Arvid Pardo and Carl Q. Christol, ‘The Common Interest: Tension Between the Whole and the Parts’ in McDonald and Johnston (eds.), \textit{The Structure and Process of International Law}, supra note 106, 643-660, at 647.
\item \textsuperscript{117} Oxman, ‘The International Commons, The International Public Interests and New Modes of International Law Making’, in Delbrück and Heinz (eds), \textit{New Trends in International Lawmaking}, supra note 6, 30-33.
\item \textsuperscript{119} All documents are available at \textltt{<unfccc.int>}
\item \textsuperscript{120} Article 136 UNCLOS, supra note 111.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Article 140 UNCLOS, supra note 111.
\end{itemize}
breaking regulations.\textsuperscript{122} It is the perception that it was in the interest of all States as well as in the interest of individuals, and not at all for the sake of any global values, that States have promoted the international protection of the seabed.\textsuperscript{123}

d) Rules pertaining to the protection of human beings

The idea that international lawmaking rests on the promotion of global values has probably never been as present as in contemporary legal literature pertaining to international human rights law and international humanitarian and criminal law.\textsuperscript{124} As has already been explained, this paper argues that international lawmaking is based on individual and common interest and not on values.

It must first be acknowledged, however, that individual interests may play a significant role in international human rights lawmaking. Mention can be made of the neo-realist understanding of human rights lawmaking. For Goldsmith and Posner, human rights serve the individual interests of liberal (Western) States for they are instruments to impose ‘codes of conduct’ and coordinate ‘standards of civilization’. They can also foster the individual interest of non-liberal States as they allow to determine which behaviour will be rewarded or punished by Western liberal States.\textsuperscript{125} For non-liberal States, they can constitute a means to unambiguously signal that they are engaged in a phase of transition from authoritarianism to liberal democracy.\textsuperscript{126}

The role of individual interests in international lawmaking can also be explained by reference to the famous theory of Andrew Moravcsik. He construes human rights as the result of instrumental calculations about domestic policies. Drawing on the experience of postwar European democratization, Moravcsik argues that States are ready to relinquish a part of their sovereignty by adhering to a human rights regime in order to constrain the behaviour of subsequent domestic governments.\textsuperscript{127} Applying his theory beyond the European framework, he claims that

\textsuperscript{122} See the preamble of the Agreement relating to the implementation of Part XI of UNCLOS, supra note 111, available at: <www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/closindxAgree.htm>.


\textsuperscript{125} Goldsmith and Posner, \textit{The Limits of International Law}, supra note 49, 128-130.

\textsuperscript{126} \textit{Ibid.}, at 131.

\textsuperscript{127} Andrew Moravcsik, ‘The Origin of Human Rights Regimes: Democratic Delegation in Postwar Europe’, 54 International Organization (2000) 217-252, esp. 220; See also Terry Moe, ‘Political Institu-
newly established democracies use human rights regimes—in the broad sense—to ‘lock in’ credible domestic policies through international commitments. Moravcsik’s theory is certainly not ill-founded and may explain part of the enthusiasm of governments for legal regimes that restrict their freedom. It is argued here that Moravcsik’s theory is however insufficient to explain all the motives lurking behind human rights lawmaker.

Other sorts of individual interests may constitute an enticement to make law in the area of human rights at the international level. For instance, States may be induced to make, sign and ratify human rights conventions simply because of the image conveyed by these instruments. In an era where democracy and human rights are among the significant criteria of ‘good governance’, there is little doubt that refusing to adhere to the major human rights conventions makes a State run the risk of being tagged as pariah on the international level and of undermining the international legitimacy of its government. This is why it is plausible that some States, classically reluctant to be bound by that kind of rules, will finally consent to them in order not to be labelled in such a way. It could also be said that lawmaking in the area of human rights is sometimes driven by economic calculations as human rights brings about significant economic benefits. Likewise, as has been defended by Yash Ghai, it can be argued that human rights provide a workable framework for negotiating political and constitutional settlements of disputes as well as conflict prevention strategies. Abuse of individual rights can also shock the conscience of each States’ population which may feel uncomfortable with the view of blatant vio-

130 Brad Roth, Governmental Illegitimacy in International Law (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000); see Jean d’Aspremont, ‘Legitimacy of Governments in the Age of Democracy’, 38 NYU Journal of International Law & Politics (2006) 877-918; See also d’Aspremont, L’Etat non démocratique et le droit international, supra note 53.
lations of human rights. In the field of international human rights and criminal law, as was explained by Frédéric Mégret, the protection of each State’s soldiers and people, and the will to alleviate the concerns of public opinion, as well as the assurance not to be accused of some form of complicity, can explain why States set up rules and institutions to judge war criminals. It could eventually — and cynically — be argued that the decision-makers of each State may wish to soothe their own conscience and seek to appear as the guardian of some sort of international morality.

There is undoubtedly some element of truth in these various explanations of human rights lawmaking through individual interests — even liberals themselves have acknowledged that it may be in the interest of States to ensure the respect for human rights. These various individual interests of States as autonomous abstract entities do not suffice, however, to explain all the dimensions of contemporary lawmaking in the field of the protection of the rights of individuals. Indeed, besides the aforementioned individual interests, human rights lawmaking may also be prodded by classical common interests. For instance, the argument has been made that respect for human rights bolsters peace and security, in which each States is interested. But it is submitted here that the common interest that drives international lawmaking in the area of human rights is not limited to these individual, ‘mutualized’ and ‘Benthamian’ common interests. Human rights lawmaking also reflects a pragmatic quest for the general well-being of individuals. Human rights norms are thus ‘useful’ in the sense described above.

To understand how international lawmaking is directed at the well-being of all, it is necessary to recall that States are capable of seeking the satisfaction of the interests of individuals that are not especially ‘under their jurisdiction’, for States are capable of pursuing the general well-being of human beings, wherever the beneficiaries may be located. This quest for the general well-being of human beings is precisely what makes human rights law ‘useful’. The usefulness of human rights law, in this situation, must be understood in the light of the core mission of any national lawmaker. Lawmakers — whether entrusted with executive or legislative powers — have been appointed to foster the well-being of the people. It probably matters little how these lawmakers have been brought to power. Although democratic types of

133 This is also acknowledged by liberals like Henkin, Politics andValues, supra note 18, at 171.
135 Henkin, Politics and Values, supra note 18, 284.
domestic governance will almost automatically make lawmakers more amenable to the well-being of the electorate, it cannot be excluded that lawmakers having seized powers via non-democratic methods can also be receptive to the needs of the people they govern. It is true that ruthless tyrannies will more likely be focused on serving their own interests. But these countries hardly bind themselves by conventional human rights law or take part in the formation of customary international law. Leaving these governments aside, it can be said that most governments will generally seek to maximize the well-being of the people on the basis of the economic, financial, natural, political, cultural and social resources available to them. And there is no reason why they would act differently at the international level. On the contrary, that a government remains committed in international decision-making processes to the improvement of the conditions of the people under its power is not surprising.

If one accepts that most governments are concerned with the expansion of their people's well-being, it can hardly be disputed that improving the respect for basic rights of individuals enhances the well-being of the individuals concerned. In that sense, human rights constitute the very first means available to improve the condition of individuals. Human rights could even constitute the most effective legal mechanisms ever found so far to achieve that end. This is especially true with respect to civil, social, economic and cultural rights. This is not to say that political rights do not bolster the well-being of people. However, the latter only achieve that end indirectly. For they aim at ensuring the participation of individuals in the domestic decision-making process as well as a free and fair framework for the political struggle for power; they guarantee, to a certain extent, that individuals can defend their own interests — or that of the group(s) to which they belong. Taken together with the accounts of human rights lawmaking based on States' individual interests, the understanding of human rights law based on its 'usefulness' — that is as a set of rules directed at enhancing human well-being — plays down the usual value-oriented conception that dominates the liberal and constitutional scholarship.

It is true that one could be lured into a value-based justification of human rights lawmaking by the continual references in the political discourse to the 'human dignity' or to 'humanity' as the driving force for any advancement in the field of human rights. However, this value-loaded referencing is nothing more than a

---

139 This idea can also be found in J. Donnelly, Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice (Cornell University Press: Cornell, 2003) at 63-64.
141 See for instance the famous preamble of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: ‘Recognizing that these rights derive from the inherent dignity of the human person’, 19 December 1966, New York, in force 23 March 1976, 999 United Nations Treaty Series 171; see also the preamble of
catchword that expresses less a value than the objective of serving individuals’ well-being. More fundamentally, some scholars could be tempted to find support for their value-based account of lawmaker in the area of human rights and humanitarian law in a few pronouncements of the International Court of Justice — some of them echoing UN General Assembly resolutions. For instance, in the *Corfu Channel* case, the Court famously recognized the existence in international law of ‘certain general and well-recognized principles, namely: elementary considerations of humanity’. Likewise, in its advisory opinion on the *Reservations to the Genocide Convention*, the Court recognized that the convention endorsed in legal form ‘elementary principle of morality’. A similar statement was made in the *Nicaragua* case as regards the fundamental general principles of humanitarian law. The advocates of the idea that international lawmaker is driven by global values, especially when human rights are at stake, may be inclined to find further support in the declaration of the Court in the *South West Africa* cases according to which ‘humanitarian considerations may constitute the inspirational basis for rules of law’. More recently, in its decision on the *Application of the Genocide Convention*, the Court held that it had no power to rule on violations of obligations, other than those of the rules that prohibit Genocide, ‘which protect essential humanitarian values, and which may be owed *erga omnes*.

This paper argues that it would be misleading to infer from the aforementioned *dictums* of the World Court that it considered that rules pertaining to the pro-

---

142 See for instance GA Res. 96(I), 11 December 1946.

143 *Corfu Channel (UK v. Albania)*, ICJ Reports (1949) 4 at 22.

144 *Reservations to the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, Advisory Opinion*, ICJ Reports (1951) 15 at 23: ‘The Convention was manifestly adopted for a purely humanitarian and civilizing purpose. It is indeed difficult to imagine a convention that might have this dual character to a greater degree, since its object, on the one hand, is to safeguard the very existence of certain human groups and, on the other, to confirm and endorse the most elementary principle of morality. In such a convention, the contracting States do not have any interests of their own; they merely have, one and all, a common interest, the accomplishment of those high purposes which are the raison d’être of the convention. Consequently, in a convention of this type, one cannot speak of individual advantages or disadvantages to States, or of the maintenance of a perfect contractual balance between rights and duties.’


146 *South West Africa (Ethiopia and Liberia v. South Africa) (Second Phase)*, ICJ Reports (1966) 6 at 34.

tection of human beings were adopted to promote global values. It is submitted here that the Court only meant that these instruments were not serving individual States interests but a common interest. As stressed by the Court itself in its opinion on the Reservation to the Genocide Convention, the ‘States do not have any interests of their own; they merely have, one and all, a common interest’. Above all, it is far from certain that the Court aimed at taking a stand whatsoever on this theoretical and meta-judicial question. It is not even sure that the Court would have been interested in that. Even if the Court asserted that the aforementioned rules could mirror some kind of existing international moral principles, it did not claim that global values had been the driving force for adopting the rules concerned. Indeed, that the moral principles ‘constitute the inspirational basis for rules of law’ does not mean that States adopted these rules to promote any corresponding global values. Various normative orders can coexist without interfering with each other. Should there be global moral values of human dignity, corresponding international legal norms are not necessarily an offshoot of them. In other words, global moral principles do not automatically constitute what prods international lawmakers to act when they adopt corresponding legal principles. In adopting rules that enshrine ‘elementary considerations of humanity’, as was indicated by the Court, States simply believe that promoting humanity is in the interest of all States as well as in the interest of all individuals whose well-being States promote. In other words, the ‘elementary considerations of humanity’ pointed out by the Court are nothing more than the underpinning of the ‘usefulness’ of the rule concerned.

Some may still be inclined to conflate common interests with global values and argue that the common interest in the protection of human rights — and especially the well-being of individuals — amounts to a global value. It is argued here that construing the common interest that permeates treaties related to the protection of individuals through the lens of global values is fundamentally flawed. Even provisions like the prohibition of torture which are almost unanimously accepted do not reflect pre-existing global values. If there were such global universal values pertaining to human rights in lawmaking, how would one explain that there are so many reservations to the treaties where these rules are enshrines? As shrewdly explained by Jan Klabbers, we can in abstracto agree that torture is bad and should be prohib-
ited without necessarily agreeing in concreto on what justifies the prohibition. One should thus refrain from inferring a global value from any universal consensus emerging among international lawmakers. In particular, a consensus on the pursuit of the well-being of human beings cannot, as such, be considered a value. The well-being is intangible. It is a fundamentally contingent notion. In this sense, human rights only reflect an agreement on the quest for human well-being, not an agreement on any sort of global values, nor an agreement on what well-being really is. If conceived along these lines, human rights can thus be thought of in terms of ‘usefulness’. It is only then that it becomes possible to strip human rights lawmaking of all its value-trappings.

e) The international public order

The four categories of norms that have been examined here show that common interests suffice to explain international lawmaking directed at the promotion of the public good. Accordingly, a resort to global values to justify the public character of international law is both superfluous and inconsistent with the demonstrated practice. International law is of a ‘public’ character because some of these abovementioned rules serve the common interest, not because they reflect any global value. This paper argues that this conclusion is not different as far as the rules of the international public order (jus cogens) are concerned. Although many scholars think otherwise, the present author argues that jus cogens cannot be regarded as a manifestation of global values.

152 The mainstream legal scholarship does not draw a distinction between international public order and jus cogens. See contra Robert Kolb, Théorie du uis cogens international — Essai de relecture du concept (Presses Universitaires de France: Paris, 2001) at 77, 172-181. Kolb argues that jus cogens is only a manifestation of the international public order and cannot be conflated with it.
In any legal order, there are rules that cannot be subject to any derogation whatsoever. The international legal order is not different in that regard as it also contains such rules. The remarkable feature of the international legal order in this respect, however, is that the public order has been created among sovereign States \textit{in a conventional and contractual manner}. Based on the consent of States — as rightly echoed by article 53 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties — the international public order has not been supranationally imposed upon the subjects of the international legal order. Obviously, this contractual character of \textit{jus cogens} does not suffice to demonstrate the value-free foundation of \textit{jus cogens}. States may well have consented to a hierarchy of norms in the international legal order to endow a few rules with a superior hierarchical standing, because they were convinced that they reflect a global value. There is thus a more fundamental reason to rule out a value-based representation of \textit{jus cogens}.

It is argued here that \textit{jus cogens} has been forged not for what it could represent but for the practical effect that it could generate. In other words, it is the practical consequences of \textit{jus cogens} that have underpinned its creation, not any underlying global value. This pragmatic account of \textit{jus cogens} necessarily requires that the actual effect of \textit{jus cogens} in the international legal order be recalled. These consequences remain mostly restricted to the law of international treaties. Indeed, \textit{jus cogens} norms are, first and foremost, conceived as the rules from which conventional derogations are not permitted. In that sense, States have contractually created the concept of \textit{jus cogens} not because it was reflecting any global value, but because they deemed it useful to limit conventional derogations to some fundamental rules.

\footnotetext[154]{Stefan Kadelbach, ‘Jus Cogens, Obligations Erga Omnes and Other Rules: The Identification of Fundamental Norms’ in \textit{The Fundamental Rights of the International Legal Order}, supra note 150, 21-40, at 34.}
\footnotetext[156]{In that sense, see Mariano J. Aznar Gomez, ‘Une vision provisoire du droit international actuel’, in Emmanuelle Jouannot, Hélène Ruiz Fabi and Jean-Marc Sorel (eds.), \textit{Regards d’une generation sur le Droit International} (Pedone: Paris, 2008) 45-73, at 66-67.}
\footnotetext[157]{Article 53 of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, supra note 97.}
concept of *jus cogens* first serves the interest of the subjects of international law. It thus becomes possible to explain *jus cogens* without relying on global values.

*Jus cogens* does not only bring about a limitation to the exercise of treaty-making power. Mention must also be made of the (modest) consequences triggered by a violation of these norms. These consequences, however, fall short of any aggravated regime of State responsibility, and it is this absence — as well as the correlative abandonment of the concept of criminal responsibility of the State — which can above all be explained by the absence of any practical added value hereto. States did not deem it useful to create an aggravated regime of responsibility. This underpins the pragmatic conception of *jus cogens* advocated here. This notion has been designed for the sake of the practical effects that it generates, not for any global value that it could evidence. In the light of the usefulness of *jus cogens*, it would therefore be misleading to regard *jus cogens* as the expression of any underlying global value.

Based on the interests of States in the practical effects that it yields, *jus cogens* is not ‘useful’ in the same sense as human rights law is. In other words, it should not be inferred from the foregoing that *jus cogens* serves the well-being of all. It is only the rules that may be endowed with such a character that actually do. It is true that the determination of those rules remains beset by uncertainty. However, if one takes the former Article 19 of the Draft Articles on State Responsibility (1996) as an illustrative list, it can be contended that most of the rules traditionally seen as having a *jus cogens* character fall with the abovementioned categories of rules directed at the well-being of all. This means that the ‘usefulness’ of *jus cogens* aims indirectly, via a limitation of the exercise of treaty-making power, at strengthening rules that are themselves devoted to the general well-being.

---


III. Relativism, Scepticism and the Infinitude of a Global Conversation on the Public Good

The rejection of an international legal order based on global values and the reliance on (individual and common) interests as advocated in this paper does not lead to the replacement, under the banner of ‘interests’, of a value system by a value system in all but name. In philosophical terms, there is nothing of a ‘Nietzschean’ project in the vision of international law which is submitted in this paper. Indeed, it is argued here that the individual interests as well as the common interests that drive lawmaking and underlie the public international order are inherently contingent and are in no way capable of any objective determination. In other words, there are no a priori individual or common interests. What orientates international lawmaking is the way in which States perceive and construe their interests, the interests of their peers and the interests of the group.

Drawing on Hobbes’ concept of ‘self-preservation’, (neo-)realists have nonetheless argued that there are some structural individual interests (to realists, this comes down to survival, autonomy and well-being161) which must be deemed objective. As is explained above, this paper is at odds with realist interpretations of Hobbes because of their rejection of common interests. This author also disagrees with neo-realist thinking because of its objectivization of self-interests.

While this paper has mainly embraced the interpretation offered by the rationalist school for the role that it has ascribed to common interests in Hobbes’ model, it nonetheless rejects the leaning of the latter towards the objectivization of common interests. Indeed, the rationalist school, as illustrated by Bull, still reckons with the possibility of ‘a consensus about common interest and values that provides the foundations of its common rules and institutions’.162 For instance, it could be argued along these lines that the maintenance of order is structurally and objectively in the interest of all States.163 This conclusion is not shared by the author of the present study.

160 Bernard H. Oxman, ‘The International Commons, The International Public Interests and New Modes of International Law Making’, in Delbrück and Heinz (eds), New Trends in International Lawmaking, supra note 6, at 27.


162 Bull, The Anarchical Society, supra note 46, 315-316.

163 De Visscher, Theory and Reality of International Law, supra note 51, at 71, 100; See also Tomuschat, ‘General Course on Public International Law’, supra note 51, at 78. (He tends to make a difference
It is argued here that these allegedly structural interests — whether individual or common — can only drive lawmaking and underlie the international public order as long as they are perceived as such. The subjective perceptions of the parties are thus not irrelevant and must be taken into account. There are thus variations in the perception of interests. These differences can stem from objective contingencies. For instance, weaker States can construe a given rule as responding to their individual need as a weak subject whereas superpowers can understand the same rule as serving a common interest. But the differences of perception not only arise from objectively different situations. Should some States be in a very similar economic, political and geographical situation, they can also have a different view of their own needs and that of the interests of all. Whatever the reasons for these varying perceptions, it is thus assumed here that any attempt to capture individual and common interests in abstracto would always prove unsatisfactory. The direct consequence of such a contingent character of interests is an inevitable scepticism which is somewhat consistent with Hobbes’ scepticisms towards the self-referentiality of reason. According to him, no reason can be established without another reason, which inextricably leads to a complete relativism. This abiding relativism on the determination of interest also echoes what Hobbes expressed in De Cive when he stated that ‘the knowledge of good and evil belongs to each single man’ — an idea that may have been overlooked by the rationalist school.

It is acknowledged here that the relativism brought about by the vision of the international public order supported in this paper bears some resemblance to that of the critical legal school although it derives from a radically different premise. The deconstructivist approach of critical legal scholars leads them to challenge the legal objectiveness and to lay bare the conflict of values which lies at the heart of the legal discourse. But, contrary to constitutionalist or liberals, they do not uphold the su-
premacy of any sort of global values. In a way, the only ‘value’ which they could be
supporting is procedural: the openness of the legal discourse. In that sense the le-
gitimacy of a legal argument stems from a deliberation (or ‘conversation’ as they like
to call it) which is not without reminding us of the Habermasian understanding of
legitimacy. Even though the author of this paper does not espouse the critical legal
scholars’ rejection of any objective legal rationality,169 the relativism that flows from
the interest-based conceptualization of the international legal order that has been
defended here points to a similar ‘discussion’. Indeed, if interests cannot be subject
to any objectivization, their determination is bound to be the fluctuating upshot of a
continuous and abiding conversation. This is what corresponds to Hobbes’ appeal to
politics.170 Politics being the organization of the debate about what a good society is,
the determination of common interest is left to the world debate and the evolving
and fickle consensus among States.

It goes without saying that the immediate result of such relativism is a con-
tinuous exposure to challenges of those principles that have been deemed serving
the public good. Preventing such discussion or debate and cementing the concep-
tion of the public good at a given time is precisely the goal of all those who adopt,
like constitutionalist and liberals, a Grotian understanding of international law based
on global values. Indeed, under the guise of global values, they seek to crystallize the
consensus about what promotes the public good and to prevent any attempt to
question what has been at a given moment considered in the interest of all. In that
sense, the value-oriented approach of the liberals and the constitutionalists expresses
a fear.

The inextricable debate about the public good spawned by the interest-based
vision of the international legal order laid down in this paper should, however, not
be taken with such a dim view. One must not be apprehensive of the theoretical
possibility of a relentless challenge of the conception of the public good. Drawing
on the assumption that organs of States will always act rationally, it is contended
here that the continuous discussion (about what serves the common interest) that
follows the absence of global values does not necessarily bring about sweeping and
incessant upheavals of those principles that have been construed as directed at a
common interest. No such radical amendment of the principles directed at the pub-
lic good must be anticipated as long as the background of the aforementioned inex-
tricable debate meets certain conditions. In particular, the relativism and the infini-
tude of the quest for consensus encompassed in our vision do not carry any hazard
as long as the conditions for an open debate are assured. This, among other things,

169 See d’Aspremont, ‘Uniting Pragmatism and Theory in International Legal Scholarship’, supra note 51.
170 Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, supra note 163, at 80.
requires the representativeness of the lawmakers and the determination of those actors who should have their say in this conversation. These questions inevitably pertain to the more fundamental issue of the democratization of the international system. It is not at all evident that such a question is to be taken up by legal scholars, and certainly not here.

The continuous debate about the public good inherent to the conception of the international legal order defended here cannot be separated from the question of the role of international law, and, more basically, the role of international legal scholars. This author does not dispute that international law — provided that its universality is ensured — is endowed with a sweeping transformation capacity.171 The potential capacity of international law to transform domestic orders as well as the global order does, however, not mean that legal scholars should construe international law as a normative project and correlativey see themselves as entrusted with a ‘mission’ to construct a better international order.172 While international law can bring about significant changes in domestic societies, it is argued here that it does not necessitate international legal scholars to define these transformations. In other words, even if international legal scholars are without a doubt the sole experts of this extraordinary, transforming instrument, they should not be the ones determining the substance of the transformation.173 It is not only that they do not have the required expertise thereto nor the power. It is, above all, that they do not hold the necessary legitimacy. It is interesting to note here that those international legal scholars who construe the international legal order as based on global values almost systematically perceive international law as a normative project. This is why the representation of an international legal order based on common interests rather than values also points to a more modest and realistic perception of the role of scholars. It is submitted here that instead of endorsing the (Grotian) idea of international law as a normative project174 and striving to construct a ‘just’ order based on global values, international legal scholars should devote their efforts to help devise the instruments that make the abovementioned inextricable debate about the public good more transparent and open. Ensuring the transparency of the global debate about how to serve the public good by devising and streamlining the language of interna-

---

171 d’Aspremont, L’Etat non democratique en droit international, supra note 53.
172 On the classical controversies between Grotian Schools of International Law and the Vattelian Schools of International Law, see generally, R. Kolb (ed.), A. Truyol Y Serra: Doctrines sur le fondement du droit des gens (Pedone: Paris, 2007), 59-137.
174 Supra note 169.
tional law most likely corresponds to a far better use of international legal scholars’ recognized expertise.175

International legal scholars should certainly not bemoan the modesty inherent to the conception of the international legal order presented here. They should rather consider it a leap forward in the advancement of international law as a whole. Indeed, there is no doubt that any ‘progress’176 can more easily be achieved through a more modest interest-based conception of the international legal order than through a Kantian or Grotian discourse. Even if this author believes that the fears of a hegemonic use of international law are very often far-fetched177, the perception of a hegemonic project that inextricably lurks behind a value-oriented conception of the international legal order178 may severely undermine the universal acceptance of the latter. In that sense, it is not only that the international legal order actually rests on individual and common interests. It is also that, beyond the reality, the international legal order should be portrayed by international legal scholars as based on individual and common interests: stripping international law of any imperialistic and hegemonic overtones is the only manner in which legal scholars can foster its true universality. An interest-based conception of international law helps overcome the abiding perception that international law is a Western product without having to vainly wait for the emergence of any ‘common ethics’ or a ‘global culture’. 179

Conclusion

This paper has tried to offer an alternative understanding of the international legal order that differs from the mainstream constitutionalist or liberal theses with a view


177 For a different opinion see Emmanuelle Jouannet, ‘Universalism and Imperialism: The True-False Paradox of International Law’, 18 *European Journal of International Law* (2007) 379-407, esp. at 390-391 (who argues that we must not underestimate the perception that certain peoples, individuals and states have of these legal values and that there is a phenomenon of resistance that must be taken into consideration).


179 On this abiding perception and the emergence of a common culture or ethics as the only means to alleviate it, see Jouannet, ‘Universalism and Imperialism’, supra note 174, at 390.
of ‘deconstructing’ the value-oriented accounts of international lawmaking. In doing so, it has provided a conception of the international legal order based on individual and common interests. This has echoed a neo-Hobbesian conceptualization of the international legal order that has drawn on the arguments of the rationalist school of international relations rather than on the ones of the (neo-) realist thinking. With a view to mirroring debates similar to those that have permeated other social sciences, it has been explained that this ‘deconstructivist’ endeavor is less ‘Nietzschean’ than ‘Heideggerian’, as its purpose is not to destroy one system of values to replace it by a system of allegedly objective ‘interests’. Interests remain ever-changing and their perception is inescapably subject to the context and the position of each individual lawmaker. It has accordingly been argued that we must refrain from conceiving the international legal order in terms of global values or any equivalent makeshift objective standards. We must simply come to terms with the inter-subjective and fickle character of the forces that drive lawmaking and underlie the international legal order. Such an approach inevitably leads to relativism and an eternal debate about what the public good is and how it should be promoted. It has been explained why this permanent discussion about the public good should not be feared nor be moaned as long as the conditions for the transparency and representation of this conversation are ensured. While helping modernize international legal positivism in a manner that strips it of the ideological overtones that have classically underpinned its critique, this ever-ongoing discussion about what constitutes a common interest also offers a greater leverage to promote the universality of international law than any table of values open to suspicions of imperialism or hegemony.