

Sustainable Development, Liberty, and Global Social Justice¹

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Abstract. The paper aims to establish the normative connection between sustainability and global social justice. In order to do so it (a) claims that the concept of sustainability is itself a *normative* concept, because it refers to our substantive disagreements about ‘what should be sustained’ or ‘what matters for current and future generations’ – it has both an intra-generational and an inter-generational dimension, although the intra-generational dimension will be our only focus here (b) involves equally physical sustainability and the conditions of justice itself. A sustainable society which is unjust can hardly be worth sustaining. A just society that is physically unsustainable is self-defeating. Humanity now has the responsibility to make a deliberate transition to a just *and* sustainable global society. The effort to provide a connection between sustainability and global social justice should be based on *interdependence* (which has an economic and an ecological aspect, but cannot be reduced to its being only a fact) and the *physical limits* of the carrying-capacity of the life-support systems of the planet. Based on an interpretation of Kant’s republicanism and Philip Pettit’s modern republican thought we try to justify sustainability using the notion of *common liberty* that expands distributive duties across the globe (and generations). Here, Kant’s telling metaphor of the spherical shape of the earth is crucial. Humanity is, under this interpretation, a just *and* sustainable political community under construction. Climate change provides perhaps the best illustration of such a normative basis.

Key words: sustainable development, Our Common Future, Kant, republicanism, global justice.

The paper aims to establish the normative connection between sustainability and global social justice. In order to do so it (a) claims that the concept of sustainability is itself a *normative* concept, because it refers to our substantive disagreements about ‘what should be sustained’ or ‘what should matter for current and future generations’ – it has both an intra-generational and an inter-generational dimension, (b) involves equally physical sustainability and the conditions of justice itself. A sustainable society which is unjust can hardly be worth sustaining. A just society that is physically unsustainable is self-defeating. Humanity now has the responsibility to make a deliberate transition to a just *and* sustainable global society. I will first try to give a sketchy account of the concept of ‘sustainable development’ through common, but ultimately unsuccessful criticisms of it. Then, I will focus on the normative aspect of it by trying to show that what should be sustained is a notion of freedom as development defined along A. Sen’s line of thought. My argument will confine itself within the framework of global social justice, that is, intragenerational rather than intergenerational, although sustainability should be both global and intergenerational in scope. I will therefore try to focus on the *global* aspect and leave the justice between generations for another occasion. If I am right in my

¹] Many thanks to the participants of the “Global Justice: Norms and Limits” conference at Bucharest (2012), Nicos Avradinis for pressing the right questions on me, and Tamara Carauş for excellent written comments on a previous draft of this paper.

argument global social justice that refers to current generations comes prior to justice across generations, not in the time dimension, but because it *determines* to a great extent who is going to be born in the future. Last, my main focus would be to provide a novel normative justification of the positive obligations we have towards each other. Therefore, the normative foundation lies at a conception of republican cosmopolitanism rather than 'lifeboat ethics' or liberal internationalism. Or so I will argue.

I. THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

As it stands, sustainability itself has little, if no meaning, at all. When it is linked to development the meaning becomes something close to a contradiction. On the one hand, sustainability alone is invoked to preserve something like a status quo, a frozen condition, in environmental terms preservation of ancient forests or protection of an endangered species. On the other hand, development implies action of some kind, therefore change. The resolution of the alleged contradiction would mean that "sustainable development" would refer to sustaining a process, not simply a condition. Therefore, we need to be clear about the coexistence of both sustainability and development.

According to, by now, most famous point of reference of the term "sustainable development" the World Commission on Environment and Development or, as it is mostly known as The Brundtland Report, "sustainable development" is defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts: the concept of 'needs', in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs."² The definition as it stands refers to physical sustainability, development, the satisfaction of needs and the acknowledgement of certain limits imposed by either environment or our duties to present and future generations. From the outset this formulation proved to be extremely controversial and kicked off a long-standing discussion on its true meaning with criticisms coming from deep ecologists, economists and political theorists. I would like first to focus briefly on these criticisms, before I say something about the status of "sustainable development" as a concept. This is because almost all of them undermine

2]World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, 43. It has been pointed out that this definition has striking similarities with G. Pinchot's own definition, the founder of the Yale School of Forestry in his 1910, 80: "Natural resources should be managed in a manner that recognizes fully the right of the present generation to use what it needs and all it needs of the natural resources now available, but [also] recognizes equally our obligation so to use what we need that our descendants shall not be deprived of what they need." There is also another definition worth mentioning, which focuses on "improving *the quality of life* while living within the carrying capacity of supporting systems [*my italics*]" in World Conservation Union (IUCN), United Nations Development Program (UNEP), WWF 1991.

its relation to global social justice, which will be the main argument of the paper. Our reference to a 1987 document does not mean that there were no further developments. Two successors of that document are considered to be the *Agenda 21* of the Rio Declaration, and the recently drafted declaration called *The Earth Charter*.³ Yet, in more than one way, they do not move the discussion much forward and the basic concepts of the Brundtland Report [the Report] remain untouched, in need of clarification, therefore I will concentrate on this, referring to four main criticisms of the concept.

a) The concept of sustainability itself, even if useful, remains empty, because it is descriptively vague. Many people agree that, on its own, sustainability is descriptively vague, because it does not describe a particular institution, or a specific pattern of activity (mere conservation of plants or animals, let us say), or a specific environmental asset which is supposed to be sustained. Furthermore, it seems we cannot agree on whether there are any measurable criteria that are being met in a development program. So, to voice a common critical question: regarding sustainability, does anything go? (Lélé 1991). That would make the concept itself inefficient in many respects, and a plausible solution would be just to avoid it altogether. Yet, if what is supposed to be sustained is rather a process, the *way* this process can be sustained has perhaps to remain open to scientific evidence and social structures. Therefore, the interesting questions here are where to ground such a process, and what is the nature and scope of duties that follow from this.

b) If the Report tries to combine sustainability and the right to development it becomes anthropocentrically biased or even worse, it might be the smokescreen put up by the rich and affluent North to the poor South (The Ecologist 1993). Such a criticism comes mainly from what is termed in the literature deep ecology theorists or biocentric views, but it can come from other directions as well.⁴ In this sense it is argued that, despite good intentions, *Our Common Future's* reference to "sustainable development" promotes economic growth in favor of human welfare, therefore it can be said it becomes unapologetically *speciesist*. Nevertheless, this seems unfair for the document, as one of its proposals is a shift towards less energy-intensive activities (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, 51). Such a proposal though cannot suddenly transform it into the opposite, because if interpreted as a purely 'green' concept it can become absolutist or merely ideological, as it could involve preservation of nature in all its forms.⁵ The combination of both sustainability

3] *The Earth Charter* was created by the Earth Charter Commission, which was convened as a follow-up to the 1992 Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in order to produce a global consensus for a sustainable future. Although it includes many references to the earth community as including all forms of life, refers to ecological integrity and sustainable development in a rather loose way. In that sense it does not manage to clarify things further; see www.EarthCharter.org

4] Regarding deep ecology see for example Naess 1989.

5] See, for example, one of W. Beckerman's fierce criticisms of the concept interpreted as a 'green' concept in Beckerman 1994. The Brundtland report speaks occasionally about "reasonable standards of welfare for all living beings." There are passages that point towards a more biocentric ethic, such as: "the case for the conservation of nature should not rest only with development goals. It is part of our moral obligation

and development saves the notion of these extreme criticisms. Sustainability is environment friendly and it can be curtailed by development, which has to be sharply distinguished from economic growth that follows the same energy-intensive production activities and remains to a great extent unjust to the world's poor. The report stipulates these necessary conditions, and refers to the quality of growth (Langhelle 1999).

c) Sustainable development is “morally repugnant and logically redundant.” Wilfred Beckerman argues, for example, that the concept of *sustainable development* is flawed because it mixes technical characteristics of a particular development path with a moral injunction to pursue it (Beckerman 1994, 194). The concept is, according to him, purely technical and whether one *ought* to pursue what can be sustained over a period of time should be another matter. But why assume that the technical is separable from the non-technical, which refers to our duties?

d) The Report falsely focuses on the concept of needs' satisfaction. This particular criticism is addressed to the link between the concept of needs and the concept of 'sustainable development' on two accounts. First, the concept of needs is subjective and therefore to a certain extent useless, because it does not offer clues as to what has to be preserved for current and future generations. Needs are culturally and socially defined and differ at different points in time (Beckerman 1994, 194). Second, needs satisfaction, especially at a global level can be hugely unsustainable given the fact of population inflation especially in the developing world. But what do we mean by the concept of needs, and why do we have to remain with a narrow and quantitative conception of it? *Our Common Future's* reference to needs might demand clarification, and certainly allows for a more expansive interpretation.

Given all this controversy, even scientists tend now to admit themselves that sustainability *cannot* be defined objectively, that is, in a value-neutral way as to become automatically applicable and more concrete in content. On the contrary, any effort to define the concept of sustainability or sustainable development involves value judgments to a great extent, in contradistinction to many efforts by scientists to find an easy, and measurable criterion of identification (Lélé and Norgaard 1996). The fact that it involves value-judgments means that what is at issue here is a normative problem. This is what we will argue for in the next section with the hope to advance our understanding of the implication of global intragenerational and intergenerational social justice's considerations on the concept of sustainable development.⁶

to other living beings and future generations' (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, 57). *The Earth Charter* refers loosely to “ecological integrity” and a “community of life” without mentioning any kind of duties towards other living beings.

6] Not everybody think that what escapes objective, scientific definition belongs to the ethical and normative dimension. There is the thought then that what remains in the relationship between self, society and environment is irreducibly subjective and belongs to psychology. This sort of behaviorism, typical of a certain American academic trend, is advocated by Caldwell (1998).

II. THE NORMATIVE QUESTION: SOCIAL JUSTICE

Given all of the above mentioned criticisms, presented briefly, we can at least agree that sustainability is a highly contested concept (Jacobs 1999, 25ff). Yet, one wonders whether our disagreements around the concept of sustainability – as we might temporarily pause the easy and ready made reference to development – are, indeed, disagreements about facts or involve semantic disputations. However, almost none of the above four criticisms refers exclusively to mere facts. Sustainability is an “essentially contested concept,” *interpretive* in its own nature, which means that it involves substantive arguments about political morality.⁷ Yet this is not a reason to dismiss it altogether as some critics suggest, but a reason for us to engage in a substantive public dialogue in order to approximate an answer to what seems to be the normative question regarding its content: If there is some X whose value should be sustained, then the question becomes “What should be sustained?” or what should be the content of this X? *Our Common Future* famously and clearly focuses on the satisfaction of needs as the content of development but other people, mainly economists, tend to focus on utility and preference satisfaction. These are substantive disagreements over the concept, which demand deep philosophical argument, because they are concerned with what in the end matters both for present and future generations.⁸ Brian Barry argues convincingly that the concept of sustainability is irreducibly normative so that disputes reflect differing values, something that, in the end, mirrors the fundamental connection between sustainable development and social justice (Barry 1999; Langhelle 1999). Therefore, what we should be doing is making an effort to define X within social justice itself, trying to justify the best possible conception of it. This is the normative question.

It is true that the concept of needs, without any further clarification – whether we are talking about all needs or just basic or vital ones - leads to certain problems. If needs are the goal of sustainable development itself, how should they be defined? Some people take basic needs as being fixed, objective and universal for human beings, others, mainly economists, take all of them as subjectively defined due to cultural, social and economic parameters. In the first case, such a basic needs approach defines a threshold that is both limiting and questionable, because it is doubtful whether there can be a universal, objective catalogue of these vital or basic needs, and whether such needs have really remained fixed in any plausible way.⁹ In the second case the distinction between needs and want, desire

7] Here I follow, to a great extent, Ronald Dworkin’s *interpretivist* approach in relation to legal concepts, which points beyond positivism’s conventional definitions of them. See Dworkin 1986.

8] Note here that what can be sustained is not of course equivalent to what *should* be sustained. On the other hand, what should be sustained, must *also be capable* of being sustained as well. I think this is a question of physical limits and involves the nature of our freedom.

9] For the basic needs approach see among others Stuart 2006. However, Rawls, himself, refers to the satisfaction of basic needs insofar as their being met is necessary for citizens to understand and exercise basic human rights and liberties; see Rawls 1993, 7, 166.

or preference satisfaction becomes blurred. This second approach tends to give X the content of utility maximization as maximization of preference satisfaction, whatever their content. Nevertheless, both cases imply and involve certain levels of economic growth. Yet, as one could easily tell, economic growth and utility maximization involve levels of consumption and welfare that could prove to be, to a large extent, unsustainable both for present and future generations, especially when needs, and preference satisfaction tend to consume vast amounts of our natural, and fungible resources, due to either our model of production or population inflation. The latter can be equally very important.

If the X that should be sustained is defined over individuals the (d) objection mentioned above puts also a lot of pressure on needs satisfaction when refers to population inflation, something that can indeed be empirically verified in developing countries, the Third world, India and China. If numbers tend to increase rapidly the prospect of facing a human population of 10 billion in 100 years time with the needs and preference satisfaction differentiated following the consumption rates of the American or European countries, the results on natural resources and the environment would be unthinkable. However, we do not have to wait until that point of time in the future to realize that, for example, the prospect of every Chinese driving her own car would entail an enormous waste of resources, but also very high rates of carbon dioxide emissions in the atmosphere. Even J.S. Mill acknowledged the need to control population numbers across time, acknowledging also the fact that man should not strive to domesticate, that is, exploit all nature, but preserve much of its 'wilderness' for reasons not having to do with any religious notion of its sacredness, but with human flourishing.¹⁰ Does this entail we restrict freedom or rethink what freedom means?

Alternatively, if "sustainable development" cannot and should not be defined in terms of needs' satisfaction, it should be defined as a particular conception of freedom. Actually, this is how Amartya Sen defines it (1999).¹¹ In his view economic growth should be evaluated not according to actual GDP production, actual income or utility, but according to the criterion of whether it empowers our *human capabilities*. More fundamentally, development is realized when people are allowed certain powers to govern their own affairs. Sen includes here political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees and protective security (87ff).¹² Development as freedom is about strengthening all these freedoms. Development has not a quantitative flavor, because it does not involve monetary income or consumption, but a qualitative connotation, it does not take needs as a starting point, but our functioning capabilities, our freedom to flourish and develop, that is, also our freedom to change our patterns of consumption and thus our wants, preference and needs. It also involves equal distribution

10] See Mill's classical essay in environmental philosophy "Nature" in Mill 1985.

11] Sen focuses on development rather than sustainability.

12] One of the reasons for his criticizing the basic needs approach is that it gives an insufficient priority to freedom, because neediness refers to a passive state, and their satisfaction also implies paternalism.

of the right to development, making environmental problems derived partly from poverty issues.

Although Sen's categories are, on their face, largely silent regarding environment they can be easily redefined as including freedom from the consequences of environment's degradation.¹³ Development as freedom makes clear, in our view, that there is a connection between development as freedom and environment on several fronts: (i) poverty eradication, (ii) population stabilization, and (iii) natural resources and environment preservation.

In relation to (i) *Our Common Future* is also clear that poverty is the "major cause and effect of environmental problems" and that the eradication of poverty is a precondition for environmentally sound development (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, 44, 69). There is no agreement though around the status of this conclusion. Some argue that there might be a possibility it turns out that, under certain circumstances, social and economic inequality is conducive to environmental sustainability. It might be the case that poor people would not consume natural resources in an unsustainable way, thus, for that reason should be kept poor. Therefore, the question whether sustainable development and social justice are compatible is arguably an empirical and functional not a normative issue (Dobson 1998, 243). Sen manages here to redefine poverty along with development. Poverty is not about low income, although income plays its own role, but about deprivation of basic functioning capabilities. For example, unemployment is not just about poor income, which can be balanced by the welfare state through benefits, but deprivation of individual freedom and potential through loss of self-respect or what will be more crucial for our analysis here, through moving to a state of dependency that blocks capabilities. The abolishment of such a status of *dependency* grounds the normative and not empirical link between sustainable development and social justice.

In relation to (ii) we now know that population stabilization can become possible through exactly *voluntary*, not coercive choices made by individual women, who have received education and can apply for jobs outside home. This is the effect of human capabilities being empowered by an institutional structure that provides resources and opportunities. Of course, such an effect needs much time and obstacle removing to become reality, and problems might be very pressing and urgent, but goes further than the basic needs approach or preference satisfaction, because it provides the necessary presuppositions for, as Rawls says, needs and preference formation through free formation of one's conception of the good. Sustainable economic growth and equitable access to resources can lead to lower fertility rates (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, 96; Sen 1999, 204-26; Scherr 1997).

Finally, in relation to (iii) our response here tries also to give an answer to objection (a) mentioned above as to the vagueness of the term 'sustainable development'. If what

13] For the connection between Sen's conception of development and environment see McDonald 2006.

is supposed to be sustained is rather a process, that is, the process of development itself, the *way* this goal can be achieved has to remain open to scientific evidence and social structures. What has to be said here is that if the way the goal can be achieved remains open, this might have at least three consequences. First, it is only as a prerequisite of development that the injunction to conserve, for example, nature should be understood. The preservation of natural resources, animals, plants, etc., should be taken as attached to human development. Second, an activity with negative environmental effects cannot, in principle, be necessarily contradictory to sustainable development. Human development might sometimes demand the loss of a forest. Third, an activity, which is not itself sustainable could be nevertheless a part of a general process that is sustainable. Let us, for example, consider biodiversity. Loss of biodiversity can deprive people's functioning capability to experience and enjoy the variety of life and to profit from its study for economic, therapeutic and aesthetic reasons.

The normative link between sustainable development as freedom and social justice can thus be argued to be, at least weakly, *anthropocentric*. It is human development that is at issue here, not some archaic 'irreversible nature' or intrinsic natural value' as defended by deep ecology or biocentrism – both being non-anthropocentric approaches to sustainability. Defining what is the X that matters though does not give any reason to adopt sustainability, although it makes clear that if there is a reason to adopt it, it should be *our* reason, which demands it (Williams 1995, 240). There is a further argument missing here as to the interconnection between sustainability and social justice, especially regarding our duties and their scope. This refers to the (b) and (c) objections mentioned at section II above. I will focus on the question of scope first, which should give priority to the intragenerational time dimension and to the global reach of our rights and duties.

III. THE SCOPE OF 'SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT': GLOBAL SOCIAL JUSTICE

Starting from the conclusions we reached above as to the normative content of what should be sustained, we can provisionally assert that sustainable development is a necessary condition of justice both at an intragenerational and at an intergenerational level. If the X, that is, the right of development is not sustainable due to either consumption or population inflation there can be no justice intra or inter generationally (Barry 1999, 111; Langhelle 2000). Yet, we shall focus on intragenerational (synchronic) global justice rather than on intergenerational (diachronic) justice, because what we do *now* could determine, to a large extent the composition of future generations, or shape the tastes, values and the needs of future generations changing perhaps even the value we attach to any given environmental item (Holland 1999, 58). Focusing on global intragenerational justice is a necessary, although not sufficient condition for unfolding our duties to future generations. But again why care about intergenerational justice if one's own children face now extremely poor chances of reaching adulthood? There is then a certain moral and

political priority to intragenerational justice, which means there is a certain priority to global social justice in relation to justice between generations.¹⁴

Our aim now is to argue for the normative foundations of global social justice in relation to sustainable development. Within the broadly anthropocentric approach we have already endorsed above there is a common assumption spread throughout the literature that the sustainability component refers to human solidarity or fraternity across the globe (and across generations). The argument is the following: If the concept of sustainable development wants us to curtail our want satisfaction and put limits on the exercise of our economic liberty in order to meet the needs of present (and future) generations the justification for that is humanistic solidarity to fellow human beings present or forthcoming.¹⁵ However, this is an unhappy marriage forced to take place between economic liberty, on the one hand, and solidarity on the other. It assumes the preexistence of and juxtaposes self-interest on the one hand and fellow feelings on the other, under the hope that solidarity will manage to morally constrain economic liberty. Yet, if human solidarity was the right justification it would only entail an imperfect (moral) duty towards others, not a duty of justice. But our different interpretation of what is involved in the notion of freedom as development should alter the normative foundation of social justice as the goal of sustainable development and ground duties of justice rather than imperfect duties. There is, of course, in relation to our common humanity, the argument that what justifies sustainable development is the rights human beings have, which must be respected by us. I will not make an effort to argue for such rights here, but to derive the normative foundation of the conception of global social justice defended here, which applies equally to them.

This is where the issue of *interdependence* arises in an interesting way, especially in relation to environment, because it significantly marks the difference between two different normative approaches: liberal internationalism and republican cosmopolitanism, as I hope to show here. Rawls and some of his followers, who defend a broadly anti-cosmopolitan view, have argued with force and persistence that the scope of social (distributive) justice is restricted to participants in a system of social coordination with a basic institutional structure that could be a (just) system of social cooperation in which these persons participate. Nevertheless, they claim that a system of social coordination with a basic structure, which is also global in scope does not exist, therefore, the scope of social justice cannot be global, but only domestic. In that sense they significantly misconstrue the nature and scope of interdependence, because they only allow social justice to be applied where a basic structure *already exists*, as a historical fact. This is because only basic structure can trigger duties of social justice (Rawls 1999; Freeman 2006; Nagel

[14] This does not mean that they are not analytically separable, as there is a "prejudice to the near," which might be checked and controlled by our responsibilities to future generations. The literature on the rights of and duties to future generations is vast and expanding. See among others Partridge 1981; Gosseries 2008.

[15] See for example Langhelle (1999, 144) who mentions Gro Bundtland herself as advocate of such solidarity and also cites as an example Verburg and Wiegel 1997, 259.

2005). Abizadeh (2007) describes the shortcoming of Rawls's insistence on a moralized version of social cooperation in an illuminating way.¹⁶ Suppose, he says, that we take the fantastic Rawlsian assumption of closed, self-sufficient societies as being true, that is, there are two societies who have no flows of capital, people or goods across their borders. Nevertheless, the social activities of members of one society might have pervasive negative impact on the life opportunities of the other society, through "nonsocial" causal relations involved in polluting the atmosphere, because one society refuses to develop a scheme for coordinating action (339). Abizadeh's argument against Rawls's refusal to extend social justice to a global level unveils the fact that liberal internationalism is not enough to deal with the challenges faces sustainable development and environment as a public good. I will thus try to offer a different account.¹⁷

There is indeed an analogy between economic interdependence between countries and what has been termed by the Brundtland report as *ecological interdependence* seems striking (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, 5).¹⁸ However, I think climate change forms the paradigmatic case here of such a global interdependence (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 1996, 118). Ecological interdependence is not intentional and makes it impossible for a single country to maintain its environmental integrity alone. Nevertheless, what is of relevance here is not empirical interdependence, but normative interdependence. This is what we mean by that. It is true that globalization enlarges the way peoples of the earth come and live together, creating the sense that we all share the same prospects. Such a globalization, predominantly economic, argues that our unlimited economic liberty entails that we should abolish all boundaries and physical or non-physical restrictions exactly based on such empirical interdependence. But we cannot derive an "ought" from an "is" here. In fact, there are people that derive the opposite conclusion, that is, that the tighter economic interdependence, the greater is the need to strengthen our local self-determination and enforce our self-sufficient, closed societies.

Now, the reference to economic freedom and self-determination oscillates between two different conceptions of liberty. Broadly speaking, the former version of freedom is equated with negative freedom conceived as non-interference and the latter version with, broadly speaking, a version of positive freedom. Negative freedom is defined as the absence of actual interference by others, whereas positive freedom is defined by our capacity to act, our autonomy or self-determination. Interdependence on the first case is accidental, as if we bump onto each other through our actual interactions, interdependence on the second case is conceived as being already framed by a community that provides the necessary presuppositions of our self-determination (what basic structure actually does).

16] Abizadeh attacks the statist prejudice of liberal internationalism, arguing that a basic structure is not an existence condition of social justice, but one of its constitutive or instrumental conditions.

17] For a thorough critique of liberal internationalism especially in Thomas Nagel's version, see Koukouvelis 2011.

18] *The Earth Charter* also talks about "global interdependence" without, of course, clarifying what this means.

However, in both cases interdependence is *empirically* conceived as a mere happening. But interdependence is not empirical when it is transformed into, as Kant put it, “lawful dependence” or “independence” following the republican tradition in political thought, which currently has described such a freedom as non-domination. Briefly speaking, to experience domination it suffices that one has the *arbitrary* power to affect others’ plans and choices in a world of such interdependence, where we *cannot even choose those with whom we must cooperate*. We can have domination without actual interference, a form of tyranny that crosses state boundaries and make people dependent on the arbitrary choices of others through the influence of non-individuated effects. “Independence” or non-domination then can only be achieved within a framework of normatively, not empirically conceived, interdependence. As it is theorized by Kant it is not aimed to just permit those affected to give their voluntary, although ultimately, counterfactual, consent – something that would be in any way a Lockean rather than a Kantian thesis¹⁹ – but permits them to participate in an ongoing renegotiation of conflicts and cooperation securing “non-domination” across boundaries. And it is exactly because such a community is always under construction that it is *the capacity* to constitute it that mostly matters here.²⁰

What is the link between development as freedom and freedom as independence or non-domination? From the description of development as a set of functioning capabilities we offered above it seems that Sen’s aspiration is not about simple destitution, but exactly about the eradication of dependency. This is the centre of his approach, and in that sense, the link to freedom as non-domination should be obvious.²¹ As Pettit emphasizes, Sen’s ideal of freedom is that it gives the agent a sort of power over what happens in her life that is independent of both how her preference happens to go and of whether they happen to enjoy the favour of the rich and powerful (Pettit 2001, 16). Therefore, it is not solidarity the basis of normative justification of sustainable development, but common liberty, which extends at a global level. Insofar as the right to development is asserted it raises problems about the extent to which countries have a right to define development in their own ways, claiming their liberty as self-determination.

There is though a further argument backing the view of interdependence defended here. Actually, there would be no normative interdependence if there were no *limits*, either physical or non-physical posed by the whole. One such limit is the biosphere’s capacity to absorb the carbon dioxide emissions, which cause global warming, exactly the problem

19] That is why Kant is talking about a notional rather than an actual consent. Actual consent would entail participation rather than the status of membership in a cosmopolitan community.

20] A plausible version of the anti-cosmopolitan argument focuses on the *unfeasibility* or undesirability of a global basic structure, understanding it mainly in the sense of a global state form. Our insistence on the fundamental capacity to be an equal member of a global scheme of cooperation aims to sidestep such criticisms as irrelevant. Furthermore, unlike Nagel’s version of global justice, republican cosmopolitanism does not use the state’s use of coercion in order to justify distributive justice. For the coercion theory of distributive justice and its anti-cosmopolitan stand see also Blake 2002.

21] In fact Pettit himself argues for such a connection in Pettit 2001, 16-19.

of climate change. The existence and significance of such physical limits can be portrayed in our view in Kant's telling, but largely neglected metaphor of earth's spherical surface. The reference to the spherical shape of the earth is not just an empirical determination of its physical limits, although it cannot be denied that it is also this as well.²² It is essentially the basis of the normative interdependence we described above forming at the same time an intrinsic component of the distributive character of earth's original possession in common. If earth did not possess a spherical shape it could not be, distributively speaking, an object of possession in common. One has to contrast this view with John Locke's metaphor of "the whole world like America" (Locke 1980[1690], ch. 5). The thrust of the argument here is that what is being implied is that spherical shape conditions our common liberty by creating the duty to establish a global political community through establishing global institutions.

This is not to imply that physical limits could, in any plausible sense, 'dominate' our freedom. We need to say something here about the question of the nature and role of limits. This is because what has indeed physical limits might be transformed into an unlimited exercise of human freedom through *human action*, which is self-conscious of their existence. However, this claim should not be interpreted as a claim about the irrelevance of scarcity of natural resources. There are arguments, which remain sceptical as to whether natural resources even matter for global justice, imposing limits. On the contrary, it is claimed that human ingenuity and knowledge, through technological innovation, can and will overcome scarcity, also believing in an indefinite substitutability of natural resources (Sagoff 1998). Such an argument is however unfounded, and unveils, in our view, a quasi-religious faith in technology. Physical limits will always exist, in some way or another. First, no economic system can grow beyond the limitations set by the regeneration and waste absorption capacity of the ecosystem. Second, despite the fact that natural limits cannot be fixed once and for all (the amount of ecological space available is contingent on the efficiency with which natural resources are exploited), one cannot infer from this that there are no such limits. In any case, people who have experienced diseases or displacement, because, e.g. of climate change, have already encountered physical limits.²³ But the spherical shape of the earth and common liberty might, on another reading, imply that physical limits might correspond to sustainable, therefore *unlimited* human development, provided we interpret development not as mere preference satisfaction or GDP growth. Without physical limits freedom is like spinning in a void.

What we have been trying to describe here is captured by *Our Common Future's* insistence that 'developing countries must operate in a world in which the resources gap between most developing countries and industrial nations is widening, in which the industrial world dominates in the rule-making of some key international bodies, and

22] Kant 1902[1797], VI, 262-63. For a notable exception regarding the use of the metaphor in relation to cosmopolitanism see Flikschuh 2000.

23] For a critique of Sagoff along these lines see Hayward 2009, 286-87.

in which the industrial world has already used much of planet's ecological capital. This inequality is the planet's main "environmental" problem, it is also its main "development" problem (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, 5-6). I take it that from exactly such an argument the relationship between sustainable development and social justice cannot be empirical and contingent, but normative. Let us finally try to be more specific about the duties implied under such a normative basis.

IV. DUTIES OF GLOBAL SOCIAL JUSTICE

The priority given here to intragenerational global social justice means that, along with the Brundtland report we also give priority to the world's poor. This kind of priority forms a moral-political constraint on possible alternative trajectories that freedom as (sustainable) development could, but should not take. One thing must be also clear from our argument thus far: the problem of global social justice in relation to sustainable development should not be understood as merely a problem about the minimum level of need satisfaction or the simple eradication of poverty, but fundamentally about (a) basic human capabilities that can secure basic non-domination across state boundaries, (b) the *upper limits of energy use*, and in the case of climate change, our duties regarding greenhouse gas emissions, which cause global warming. This is because mere need satisfaction of expanding population rates could prove highly unsustainable. Such duties that link sustainable development and global social justice would not be grounded on a version of liberal internationalism, which still favors state self-determination, and only a minimal duty of assistance to societies in dire straits.

Sustainability is about (physical) limits, but which point to our interdependence that conditions our common liberty on the one hand, yet unveil its own potential to go beyond these limits. One cannot even choose those with whom she must cooperate in order to achieve sustainable development. This is, I think, a case that refutes Nagel's claim that freedom of association demands that we can choose and pick those with whom we want to cooperate or, as he says, one cannot be obliged to get married and have children (Nagel 2005). Such a view should be compared with what has been termed as "lifeboat ethics," although it surely is less extreme. Take for example the following notorious passage:

[E]ach rich nation amounts to a lifeboat full of comparatively rich people. The poor of the world are in other, much more crowded lifeboats. Continuously, so to speak, the poor fall out of their lifeboats and swim for a while in the water outside, hoping to be admitted to a rich lifeboat, or in some other way to benefit from the 'goodies' on board. What should the passengers on a rich lifeboat do? This is the central problem of 'the ethics of the lifeboat. (Hardin 1977, 262)

Dilemmas, like the one Garrett Hardin describes here, we already face nowadays as in the case of the so called "environmental refugees," who due to climate change are forced to evacuate their homeland and immigrate. Hardin thinks that we should not admit more swimmers to the lifeboat, yet this position implies that there are many lifeboats around

the globe, whereas, in our conception there is only one lifeboat. The interdependence we described so far cannot allow us to consider “lifeboat ethics” as an option. Allowing such a possibility to take place is like carrying present injustices into the future, and hiding the fact that due to the spherical shape of the earth what is common is our liberty, which is at issue.²⁴

Therefore, sustainable development, according to republican cosmopolitanism, is attached to our fundamental *duty* not to dominate others, which comes with the positive obligation to establish a new form of political community, that is, a cosmopolitan framework for sustainable development. This is because the scope of justice should be given by the range of persons engaged in a system of social interaction, which could become a scheme of social cooperation. Sustainable development shows that others depend on such a scheme, and their liberty is intrinsically involved (Maltais 2008).²⁵ By contrast, Nagel argues that global forms of political authority would be desirable, but not obligatory, including the provision of a global public good like that of environment (through perhaps climate change mitigation). Individuals or political communities cannot be “morally obliged to expand their moral vulnerabilities in this way” (Nagel 2005, 144).

By contrast, a cosmopolitan institutional framework becomes necessary for sustainable development. Securing basic non-domination differs from the strictly juridical model of self-determination here, because the idea of liberty conceived as non-domination decenters self-determination and requires that citizenship and its accompanying normative powers be exercised in a variety of overlapping states. If the situation is one of interdependence on several levels, then domination in such circumstances can take the following form: one is ruled by another, when one is able to prescribe the terms of cooperation at a global level where one’s inclusion is non-voluntary, therefore it doesn’t constitute a real inclusion on an equal basis. Basic non-domination could be expressed in terms of a ‘democratic minimum, which makes people able to form and change the terms of their common life globally speaking. People have a right to an institutional order, where those affected by a decision have an equal opportunity to contest it (Bohman 2007, 45-55, 92-97; Laborde 2010).

Now, the upper limits of energy use can trigger further positive obligations. This is especially so when we think of what might contribute to climate change. New needs and consumption standards, which are admittedly socially and culturally determined can be outside the bounds of the ecologically possible. Even if we manage to stabilize population numbers across time, our everyday preferences might turn out to be energy consuming beyond what can be absorbed by earth’s atmosphere. From such a conception there can

24] A recent example of “environmental refugees” are the inhabitants of the Kiribati complex of islands, who will be forced to evacuate their homeland due to the rapid rising of the sea levels; For the issues of global justice such a forced immigration raises see Risse 2009.

25] Maltais’s political conception of justice considers environment as a public good, thus, bases his normative justification of the non-voluntary duty to establish global institutions on the “collective goods justification of the state.”

be duties not only to refrain from domination on other people's choices, but a positive obligation to change production and consumption standards. This is of course something that goes to the heart of what is at stake with the republican justification of sustainable development, because it does not involve the equal sharing of economic benefits as liberalism might argue, but of the earth's capacity to sustain human action. Deciding for the upper limits of energy use then is a problem of distribution. There is a sense that the affluent are 'ecological debtors,' when deprive the planet's poor of their fair share of the earth's 'ecological space,' which is, according to the image of the spherical shape of the earth, limited, because refers to natural resources.²⁶ On the one hand, it is the developed countries that have such an obligation, on the other hand though, and if republicanism here has a cosmopolitan scope, it is also an obligation of the better off irrespective of which country they live to alter their patterns of consumption (Harris 2010).

What is the basis of such duties here? Common liberty, in the way we defined it, demands that it is not enough not to interfere with others, so long as one's own way of life already affects others by dominating their own preferences and make them adopt policies and ways of life that will threaten the life-supporting natural systems of the earth. One has to adopt a different pattern of consumption and production, that is, one has to *change oneself* in order to persuade the worst off to adopt a similar attitude.²⁷ The alternative would be, indeed, to prevent developing countries from aiming and attaining living standards that are equivalent to those of developed countries and to argue that developed countries have an exclusive right to their present standard of living (Langhelle 2000, 312).²⁸ The conception of common liberty presented here shows that there is more than one way we can or do affect other people's preference formation, yet there is only one way, normatively speaking, we do not exercise domination over them. Our common future is attached to our common liberty in a planet we all share.

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26] For the concept of *ecological debt* see Hayward 2009, 283.

27] Would this be an act of (new) domination through persuasion? I do not think so. It would only reveal, from another path, that people are not just external limits of one's freedom, but presuppositions of its exercise.

28] Langhelle talks here about the 'principle of universality', meaning that the consumption standards are to be such that we all reasonably can aspire towards them. However, one does not need a separate principle of universality as universality is a formal feature of the validity of moral judgments. The problem is whether that universality can be extended to our conceptions of the good, as Rawls would say. The answer, I think, is no. However, Kant again might offer a way out here through his account of the universality of aesthetic judgments. I do not have the space to pursue this issue here.

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