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The Global Covenant: Human Conduct in a World of States. By Robert Jackson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 464p. \$29.25.

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Robert Jackson's recent book *The Global Covenant* is a work in the tradition of the international society school that extends the perspective of that school to today's world events and theoretical debates. Jackson's argument has several important components: that we live in a society of states that operates according to particular norms having significant ethical implications for the conduct of world politics; that this society of states can be distinguished from both the amoral perspective of the (neo)realists and the universalism of cosmopolitans; that this world must be examined primarily through the words and actions of statespeople, its primary articulators; that this world is distinguished by values of antipaternalism, normative pluralism, and the observance of sovereign rights of nonintervention and self-determination; and that recent crises (e.g., the Persian Gulf War, Bosnia, Kosovo, etc.) demonstrate more the continued durability of this world (which has existed roughly since Westphalia) than its decline or demise.

Taken together, the components of Jackson's thesis form a strong argument that draws on previous work, including primarily that of Hedley Bull, whose name is synonymous with the international society school, but also from Michael Oakeshott in theory and Terry Nardin in law. Jackson, however, employs the insights from these bodies of scholarship to develop his own thesis regarding the form, normative and ethical implications, and durability of the "global covenant." This thesis also draws on his own previous work on Africa. It is certainly a thesis that holds considerable power and therefore must be treated seriously. It is also a thesis that remains problematic, and Jackson's assessment of its critics is generally inadequate.

The global covenant, for Jackson, is both an empirical fact and something to be valued normatively. It is based on the concept of formal, *de jure* sovereignty in international law: that is, the notion that states respect each other's territorial integrity and political independence and thus refrain from any threat or use of force that violates another's sovereign boundaries. The global covenant, as such, also reduces "unnecessary political confrontation based on value conflict" (p. 182) over such issues as religion and ideology, and is therefore to be valued as contributing to international order and peace.

The concept of the global covenant is based, for Jackson, on understanding international politics as a human activity and a type of human relations. Focusing on the human and rejecting the idea that international relations are determined by mechanical forces distinguishes his conception (and the international society school in general) from many forms of realism, particularly neorealism. On the other hand, Jackson insists that his conceptualization of world politics differs significantly from other powerful

conceptualizations articulated by critical theorists and constructivists. While his critiques of these bodies of theory are not very satisfying (for example, he often charges poststructuralists of various kinds with making “category mistakes,” but does not sufficiently account for the partiality of his own categories), he spends more time in differentiating his conceptualization from critical cosmopolitans such as Richard Falk. Here, Jackson employs the concept of the global covenant to take issue with the activism of contemporary humanitarian interventionists (among whom Falk is not easily placed). Jackson raises critical issues for debates about intervention, the export of democracy, and what is commonly called humanitarian action today.

Jackson argues that there is no basis in the global covenant for these types of intervention. For example, despite the existence of what he and others call “failed states,” usually in Africa, that is, states that exist in name only but “cannot or will not safeguard minimal civil conditions for their populations” (p. 296), there is nothing that justifies intervention on the part of humanitarians or democracies to put things right. This is a powerful Kantian argument, one that many of those who disagree with Jackson on other grounds would strongly support. However, in making this argument, Jackson attempts to elide much of what actually goes on in world politics.

Jackson wants to focus on the “human,” rather than the mechanical, and explicitly states that his liberal view of the global covenant precludes cosmopolitan universalism with regard to the type of values that should be practiced within states. Thus, he distinguishes between *societas* and *universitas*. The former is a juridical conceptualization of the relations between states, whereas the latter, for Jackson, is “sociological” and cannot, therefore, be addressed within the confines of the global covenant. While it is fine from this point of view (as well as many others) to criticize value-based universalism, Jackson does not sufficiently acknowledge that in promoting the global covenant as both empirical fact and worthy of normative support, he, too, is engaging in a type of universalism that can easily be questioned. Moreover, he does not escape from either ideological or sociological preconceptions. His conceptualization, while powerful and in many ways useful, promotes one layer of sociological understanding—that long promoted by diplomats and more recently by many international relations theorists—over others. It also reveals a worldview based, despite his own partial criticism of it, on what we might call colonial and/or paternalistic understandings of power politics. For example, the Persian Gulf War, which he justifies in a manner more thoughtful than most, can also be criticized from an international society perspective on paternalistic grounds.

It is interesting, moreover, that Jackson strongly adheres to a notion of security that limits it to the idea of individual and state “safety.” While this is certainly an important aspect of security, adhering to it as the only definition that counts is a matter of contention, one easily challenged by both postcolonial and feminist theorists. How, for example, can we say that the threat of war looms larger for most people in sub-Saharan Africa than the threat of bodily harm from AIDS? Yet the latter is excluded from Jackson's limited conceptualization of security. In including the AIDS crisis or economic devastation in our understandings of security, one does not, as Jackson would have it, engage in “muddled thinking.” Rather, to include such issues is merely to acknowledge that, as Jackson argues later in support of his conceptualization of the global covenant, people conceptualize the world differently and hold differing values and virtues preeminent. Following from this, the conception of security most important to some people in the First World or to (male)

elites is surely not that which is critical for many others, including Third World women and/or those ravaged by AIDS, hunger, or environmental catastrophe. Jackson's antipaternalist stance, based on classical political philosophy, would do well to incorporate the critically important insights of contemporary feminist international relations scholarship in this regard, namely, that the global covenant is itself a gendered construction that benefits some and ignores or marginalizes others. Such a recognition is necessary for any fully realized notion of value pluralism in our world. Jackson makes an important argument with many thoughtful implications for world politics today. But his central thesis still provides us with only one view of international politics, which is and will continue to be contested, both theoretically and substantively.