# RESPONSE TO CRITICS

BY

THOMAS HALE, DAVID HELD & KEVIN YOUNG

[THIS PAGE INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK]

# Response to Critics

Thomas Hale, David Held & Kevin Young

I t is worth clarifying the historical basis of *Gridlock* as well as the development of the causal conjectures behind it. World War II was calamitous not just for Europe, but for the world at large. The death and destruction was of a scale nearly impossible to comprehend, leaving Europe devastated and much of East Asia traumatized. World War II brought humanity to the edge of the abyss, but not for the first time in twentieth-century history.

## I

## The *Gridlock* Argument

The politicians who gathered from forty-five countries in San Francisco in 1945 were faced with the choice of either allowing the world to drift in the aftermath of the shock of the war, or to begin a process of rebuilding the foundations of the international community. Addressing the gathering of leaders, US President Harry Truman warned that the world was at a crossroads: "The continuation of international chaos, or the establishment of a world organization for the enforcement of peace."[1]

[1] Harry S. Truman, Address to the United Nations Conference in San Francisco, 25 April 1945.

At the heart of the post-war security arrangement was, of course, the newly formed United Nations and along with it the development of a new legal and institutional framework for the maintenance of peace and security. Article I of the UN Charter explicitly states that the purpose of the UN is to "maintain international peace and security and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to peace."[2] Moreover, Article I goes on to stress that peace would be sought and protected through principles of international law. It concludes with the position that the UN is to be "a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends."

The UN sought to replace unilateral military action with collective action that might still preserve central elements of state sovereignty.[3] Maintaining global peace and stability serves the obvious purpose of limiting violence, but it is also a quintessential prerequisite for accelerating "globalization" across many domains of human activity: trade, finance and communication being the most prominent among them. With peace comes the prospect of stable and rising prosperity.

The titanic struggles of World War I and World War II led to a growing acknowledgment that the nature and process of global governance would have to change if the most extreme forms of violence against humanity were to be outlawed, and the growing interconnectedness and interdependence of all nations recognized. Slowly, the subject, scope and very sources of international law were all called into question. The image of

---

[2] United Nations, Charter of the United Nations, 24 October 1945, 1 UNTS XVI.

[3] G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

international regulation projected by the UN Charter (and related documents) was one of "states still jealously sovereign" but now linked together in a "myriad of relations"; states would be under pressure to resolve disagreements by peaceful means and according to legal criteria; subject in principle to tight restrictions on the resort to force; and constrained to observe "certain standards" with regard to the treatment of all persons in their territory, including their own citizens.[4]

At the heart of this development lies claims made on behalf not just of individual states, but of an alternative organizing principle of world affairs: ultimately, a community of all states, with equal voting rights in the UN General Assembly, openly and collectively regulating international life while constrained to observe the UN Charter and a battery of human rights conventions.[5]

Yet, the promise of the UN was compromised almost from its inception by the Cold War, the ideological and geopolitical tensions that would shape the world for almost fifty years. These tensions stemmed from the political, economic and military rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States, each bolstered by their respective allies. However, this standoff facilitated, somewhat paradoxically, a deepening of interdependence among world powers. It is difficult to imagine a more immediate form of interdependence than Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD). Once the world reached a point at which a small group of decision-makers could release weapons that could,

---

[4] Antonio Cassese, "Violence, War and the Rule of Law in the International Community," in David Held, ed., *Political Theory Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), p. 256.
[5] David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995).

literally, obliterate the rest of the world, it created a new recognition of shared vulnerability. This awareness demanded greater coordination among world powers. Thus, the nuclear standoff of the Cold War drew world powers closer together as a way to mitigate the threat and ensure that military posturing did not escalate into all-out nuclear confrontation.[6]

Thus, despite all its complexities and risks, the post-World War II UN system, including weapons of mass destruction and the threat of MAD, facilitated in many respects a new form of "governed globalization" that contributed to relative peace and prosperity across the world over several decades. The importance of this should not be underestimated. The period was one of peace between the great powers, although there were, of course, many proxy wars fought out in the Global South. This relative stability created the conditions for what now can be regarded as an unprecedented period of prosperity that characterized the 1950s onwards. While the economic record of the post-war years varies by country and region, many experienced significant economic growth, and living standards rose rapidly across several parts of the world. By the late 1980s a variety of East Asian countries were beginning to grow at an unprecedented speed, and by the late 1990s countries such as China, India and Brazil had gained significant economic momentum, a process that continues to this day (although Brazil is faltering now).

Post-war multilateral institutions—not just the UN, but the Bretton Woods institutions as well—created conditions under which a multitude of actors could benefit from economic activity,

---

[6] It is worth noting that this sense of shared vulnerability can only be upheld if both parties believe the "good life" lies in this world; in other words, if they are both more or less secular. If this association is no longer valid, the idea of shared vulnerability on this earth breaks down.

forming corporations, investing abroad, developing global production chains and engaging with a plethora of other social and economic processes associated with globalization. These conditions, combined with the expansionary logic of capitalism and basic technological innovation, changed the nature of the world economy, radically increasing dependence on people and countries from every corner of the world.

This is not to say that international institutions were the only cause of the dynamic form of globalization experienced over the last few decades. However, economic globalization, and everything associated with it, was allowed to thrive and develop because it took place in a relatively open, relatively peaceful, relatively liberal institutionalized world order. By preventing World War III and another Great Depression, the multilateral order arguably did just as much for interdependence as microprocessors or email.[7] From the late 1940s to the beginning of the twenty-first century, a densely complex interdependent world order emerged.

However, global interdependence has now progressed to the point where it has altered our ability to engage in further global cooperation; that is to say, economic and political shifts in large part attributable to the *successes* of the post-war multilateral order are now among the factors grinding that system into gridlock or deadlock. Because of the remarkable success of global cooperation in the post-war order, human interconnectedness weighs much more heavily on politics than it did in 1945. The need for international cooperation has never been greater. Yet the

---

[7] John Mueller, "The Obsolescence of Major War," 21 *Security Dialogue* 3 (1990), pp. 321–8; John R. O'Neal and Bruce Russett. "The Classical Liberals Were Right: Democracy, Interdependence, and Conflict, 1950–1985," 41 *International Studies Quarterly* 2 (1997), pp. 267–94.

"supply" side of the equation—effective institutionalized multilateral cooperation—has stalled. In areas such as nuclear proliferation, the explosion of small arms sales, terrorism, failed states, global economic imbalances, financial market instability, global poverty and inequality, biodiversity losses, water deficits and climate change, multilateral and transnational cooperation is now increasingly ineffective or threadbare. We have argued that gridlock is not unique to a one issue domain, but appears to be becoming a general feature of global governance. Why?

It is possible to identify four reasons for this blockage, four pathways to gridlock: rising multipolarity, harder problems, institutional inertia and institutional fragmentation.[8] Each pathway can be thought of as a growing trend that embodies a specific mix of causal mechanisms.

*Growing multipolarity*

The absolute number of states has increased by 300 percent in the last seventy years. More importantly, the number of states that "matter" on a given issue—that is, the states without whose cooperation a global problem cannot be adequately addressed—has expanded by similar proportions. At Bretton Woods in 1945, the rules of the world economy could essentially be written by the United States with some consultation with the UK and other European allies. In the aftermath of the 2008–09 crisis, the G20 has become the principal forum for global economic management, not because the established powers desired to be more inclusive, but because they could not solve the problem on their own. However, a consequence of this progress is now that

[8] Thomas Hale, David Held and Kevin Young, *Gridlock: Why Global Cooperation Is Failing When We Need It Most* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).

many more countries, representing a diverse range of interests, must agree in order for global cooperation to occur.

*Harder problems*

As interdependence has deepened, the types and scope of problems around which countries must cooperate has evolved. Problems are both now more extensive, crossing more countries, and intensive, penetrating deep into the domestic policy space and daily life of many countries. Consider the example of trade. For most of the post-war era, trade negotiations focused on reducing tariff levels on manufactured products traded between industrialized countries. Now, however, negotiating a trade agreement requires also the discussion of a host of social, environmental and cultural subjects—GMOs, intellectual property, health and environmental standards, biodiversity, labour standards—about which countries often disagree sharply. In the area of environmental change a similar set of considerations applies.[9] To clean up industrial smog or address ozone depletion required fairly discrete actions from a small number of top polluters. By contrast, the threat of climate change and the efforts to mitigate it involve nearly all the countries of the globe. Yet, the divergence of voice and interest within both the developed and developing worlds, along with the sheer complexity of the incentives needed to achieve a low carbon economy, have made a global deal extremely difficult to achieve.

[9] Ibid., Chapter 3.

*Institutional inertia*

The post-war order succeeded in part because it incentivized the involvement of great powers in key institutions. From the UN Security Council to the Bretton Woods institutions to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, key pillars of the global order explicitly grant special privileges to the countries that were wealthy and powerful at the time of their creation. This hierarchy, it could be argued, was necessary to secure the participation of the most important countries in global governance. Today, the gain from this trade-off has shrunk while the costs have grown. The architects of the post-war order did not, in most cases, design institutions that would organically adjust to fluctuations in national power. And it is very hard to change them; for example, numerous efforts to alter or reform the position of the permanent members of the Security Council have floundered.

*Institutional fragmentation*

The institution-builders of the 1940s essentially began with a blank slate. But efforts to cooperate internationally today occur in a dense institutional ecosystem shaped by path dependency. The exponential rise in both multilateral and transnational organizations has created a more complex multi-level and multi-actor system of global governance. Yet within this dense web of institutions mandates can conflict, interventions are frequently uncoordinated, and all too typically scarce resources are subject to intense competition. For instance, there are many examples of aid failing to meet its targets in pressing humanitarian crises due to the fragmentation of efforts. There are also many cases in emerging global health crises where the international community

has failed to coordinate its action in sufficient time to prevent the loss of life accelerating.[10]

The challenges now faced by the multilateral order are substantially different from those faced by the 1945 victors in the post-war settlement. We posit that they are second-order cooperation problems arising from previous phases of success in global coordination, and that together they now block and inhibit problem-solving and reform at the global level, and create the risk of dangerous drift in the global order, punctuated by force and violence. The Brexit vote and recent election of Donald Trump as president of the United States add a profound sense of foreboding in this context. Both are votes for the pursuit of national interests, isolation and seclusion above all else, and votes against multilateralism, international institution-building and an international law anchored in human rights and responsibilities. They both reinforce the risk of dangerous drift in the international order and the risk that existential challenges like climate change will only get worse.

## II

### *Gridlock* and its Critics

*Gridlock* has received a number of responses and challenges since its publication. Some have received it as a welcome contribution and helpful guide to the current dilemmas facing global governance, while others remain more sceptical about

---

[10] See Garrett W. Brown and David Held, "Gridlock and Beyond in Global Health," in Thomas Hale and David Held, eds, *Beyond Gridlock* (Cambridge: Polity Press, forthcoming).

either the premises upon which the book is based or the conclusions that are reached in the sectors analysed. Where for some it is an all-encompassing theory, for others it is overly simplified. The collection of critiques offered in this Special Issue set out a series of thoughtful and well-developed responses to *Gridlock*. In many cases we accept and agree with the criticism laid out, while in some others we tend to maintain the arguments set out in *Gridlock* in contrast with the views offered in response. Whichever, we welcome the opportunity to respond to and expand on issues of contestation, ambiguity or uncertainty.

As everyone recognizes, the book examines the question of why global cooperation is breaking down amidst the increasingly pressing need for it. In a sentence, the causal core of the argument is this: the breakdown of global cooperation is often paradoxically the result of prior success in global cooperation. This is a very different kind of argument than others to date. For lack of a better term, this is a historical and institutionalist-centred explanation for why the world looks the way it does— one that engages with but ultimately significantly diverges from existing international relations theory, as well as many other popular (i.e. non-academic) accounts of what is wrong with the global governance today.

Our argument is hinged on two concepts: self-reinforcing interdependence, and second-order cooperation problems. The process of international institution-building that has taken place since World War II has allowed human interdependence to grow deeper. However, this process has also given rise to new problems that must be managed, which we refer to as self-reinforcing interdependence. As the supply of global-level management is outstripped by demand for coordinated policy solutions, "second-order" cooperation problems have emerged that stymy global cooperation on a range of pressing issues.

These second-order cooperation problems are products of the historical development of the international system; specifically, we show that increasing multipolarity, the emergence of harder problems after simpler ones have been tackled, institutional inertia and institutional fragmentation all affect the ability to solve pressing global challenges, from climate change to global economic imbalances. Each of these second-order cooperation problems emerges as a result of a historical process, and thus cannot be understood through a theory of why and how human beings fail to cooperate or why and how states fail to cooperate.

Throughout, we intended to strike a balance between a simple set of propositions and an encompassing take on the nature of the contemporary world order and its problems. To date several critiques—in this Special Issue of *PPI* and elsewhere—have been proffered arguing that the propositions we have put forward are too simple or should be extended further for analytical benefit. Surprisingly to us, there hasn't been much resistance to the notion that one can attempt an analysis of the nature of the contemporary world order and its problems as such. Given the current in a lot of contemporary political theory that seeks to resist universalizing narratives, this is somewhat surprising. Yet, whilst we are encouraged by many reactions to our argument that are also trying to "think big," there are some important distinctions with respect to how we approach the subject matter and some of the critiques the book has received.

We emphasize these points about the historical nature of our analysis because we wish to clarify that *Gridlock* is not an argument about how global cooperation per se breaks down. It is an argument that seeks to explain how the once highly successful forms of global cooperation have recently been failing. The temporality of this objective is important because we are trying to explain the present, and not global governance per se.

The argument of *Gridlock* was also not attempting to explicate all the things that are wrong about the world, or even about global governance more generally. We suspect one significant way in which we perhaps oversimplified the argument was in drawing too fuzzy a distinction between "the breakdown of multilateral cooperation" and "the breakdown of the world." Since, in our view, many good things came from the previous successes of multilateral cooperation in the past, it was all too easy for us to make this kind of slippage. As several colleagues have pointed out to us, global cooperation is not necessarily a good thing in and of itself—it is the ends and consequences of that cooperation that matter. We fully agree with this stance.

In the four essays of this Special Issue we receive truly thought-provoking and interesting reflections on the *Gridlock* book, its strengths and shortcomings. Di Paola and Maffettone offer a deeply thoughtful discussion of the meaning and relevance of cosmopolitanism in a gridlocked world. We find much of this analysis compelling, even though it takes us beyond the scope of the book itself, which did not discuss cosmopolitanism in anything other than a passing way in the conclusion. Nonetheless, there are some general points here that are valuable to highlight.

In the first instance, Di Paola and Maffettone emphasise that gridlock makes it hard for any form of progressive thinking, and for cosmopolitanism in particular, to assume institutional progress is possible. In their words, the book provides "a series of dark flashes from the real world of contemporary international relations." As they note, cosmopolitan thinkers have all too often assumed that their programme of ideas for global governance reform were realisable, if not immediately, imminently nonetheless. Such thinkers have been faithful to the idea that the continued development of global governance institutions is both

desirable and possible. Di Paola and Maffettone argue that the "dark flashes" make this highly problematic.

They go on to emphasise how *Gridlock* forces cosmopolitans to remould their thinking in relation to trends in global politics. Future cosmopolitan prescriptions will have to be configured in relation to the descriptive facts of the world and the structural factors that explain them—not regardless of them. To ignore these facts and explanations is to build prescriptive castles in the sky that will have no anchors or bearing on the actualities of global politics. Di Paola and Maffettone hold that the domain of cosmopolitan thinking can only go forward if it is no longer in the form of ideal theory. We agree, with one qualification. The project of a political philosophy in a gridlocked world needs to be rooted in the "type of damages that humanity is in the process of inflicting upon itself." But if this is all it does, such a political philosophy will no longer be able to project a normative pathway—whether based on justice, democracy or sustainability—beyond the dangers we face. It is unclear why we have to choose between a political philosophy rooted in the here and now, and one that sees visions beyond. As Martin Luther King understood, it is hard to motivate change by just focusing on what people fear; hence, he had a dream. What we can and cannot live with, and what we can and cannot achieve, can only be worked out at the intersection of the facts of the world and what we have good reason to strive for. As navigators have long noted, one sails by the stars not to reach them, but to chart a path; yet, without the stars there is no path.

It is true, as Di Paola and Maffettone suggest, that the unprecedentedly complex nature of today's global problems, and the shifting conditions of the world, make it possible for cosmopolitan principles to justify both a given governance regime, a human rights-inspired climate governance, and

exemptions from it, if such standards would create undue burdens on struggling developing countries. But it is not clear why this is an argument just about cosmopolitan political thinking; principles and the conditions of their application are questions for all positions in political philosophy. Finally, while it is true that *Gridlock* offers, essentially, a structural argument, it is important to note that it is not structuralist in the sense of excluding agency. The foundation of the post-war order was driven by principles and the application of them by leaders. Gridlock pathways try to explain why the application of these principles has led to difficulties as the post-war era unfolded. Factors such as multipolarity and fragmentation are about the changing patterns and conditions of agency, not about the absence of agency.

In her contribution "Beyond Gridlock: Reshaping Liberal Institutions for a Pluralist Global Order?" Macdonald seems to agree a great deal with several parts of our diagnosis with respect to particular pathways (such as "harder problems") but not others ("fragmentation"). In many places she calls for a reinterpretation of our conclusions, not the causal evidence that led us there. More specifically, she argues that some of what we regard as limitations within the current multilateral order can sometimes also be seen as strengths. Whilst the problem-solving capacity of international institutions might be weak, or their broad-based representativeness thin, these features can actually be good things. Under some circumstances, for instance, the limited representativeness of international institutions can accommodate a diversity of values, thus enabling collective action among like-minded groups. Similarly, while Macdonald agrees with us that transnational governance processes can deliver only a partial solution, that partial solution can provide "feasible albeit imperfect pathways through which institutional barriers to cooperation can be circumvented."

We agree that a lot could (and indeed does) still feasibly get done under the conditions laid out in *Gridlock*. However, there is a basic assumption in the book that governance capacity has to date required forms of centralized coordination, usually present in formal governance institutions. An important question is whether these conditions still need to be met in the future, given the incredibly diverse models of governance one can observe in operation at other scales of governance, and increasingly as forms of governance innovation transnationally. This seems to be an empirical question, and one that we have already put some thought into in a forthcoming book, *Beyond Gridlock*, by Thomas Hale and David Held.

In some ways Macdonald comes down even harder on the decentring of political authority than we did in *Gridlock*, as she sees it generating uncertainty and higher transaction costs, the costly duplication and diffusion of responsibility, and the weakening of the capacity for collective bargaining and deliberation around shared issues of concern. Yet, ultimately Macdonald contends that decentred political authority "need not generate problematic forms of gridlock" because differentiated governance arrangements "can productively accommodate the emergence of specialized bodies to regulate and govern specific issue areas, and support adaptiveness to varying needs and values across political contexts."

Macdonald puts the emphasis of her critique on the book's conclusions, contending specifically that it concentrates "too much on reviewing the factors that are likely to reinforce gridlock in the coming years." In this respect she asserts that "[a] politics beyond gridlock is unlikely to be one of reinvigorated multilateral grand bargains, but this need not be a prospect we lament. Rather, we can productively explore the potential for revitalizing liberal principles within more decentred institutional structures

and processes." It is difficult to disagree with such a proposition, since "productively exploring the potential" for something can hardly be resisted. Yet Macdonald goes further than this, pointing to recent scholarship that has established how governance can work in relatively non-hierarchical fragmented institutional systems. Whilst we engage with some of that scholarship—as she notes herself in her essay (regarding experimentalism and institutional adaptation)—we clearly did not do so sufficiently in terms of thinking about how a book on the breakdown of global governance should be concluded.

Wilkinson raises a very different kind of critique in his essay "Gridlock? Maybe." His thoughtful commentary raises seven "issues" that, whilst insufficient in his estimation to negate the *Gridlock* argument, are "sufficiently bothersome to warrant further reflection and debate." We might group these seven points into two lines of critique. First, is the argument correct? Second, if it is correct, what does it mean?

To our mind, the first set of criticisms usefully highlights caveats and nuances that qualify the gridlock argument but do not overturn it. Such qualifications are of course crucial, given that our aim was to articulate a general and parsimonious set of key dynamics in contemporary global governance. We are all too aware that the story is a "little messier," as Wilkinson gently puts it, but believe the gridlock argument still makes a clarifying analytic contribution.

The second set of criticisms, concerning how to interpret and understand the gridlock we identify in global governance, cuts more sharply against our claims. Like the contribution by Macdonald, Wilkinson is right to focus attention on the productive possibilities that gridlock may engender, and we welcome the opportunity his critique gives us to pursue the

"further reflection and debate" to which this line of argument leads.

First, however, we respond to the arguments against the gridlock hypothesis. Wilkinson begins by challenging the idea that "it is all quite bad now," echoing other critiques by arguing that our contrast of past cooperation and current gridlock is overly stylized. Relatedly, Wilkinson notes that many aspects of international institutions function effectively "behind the headlines," which is certainly true and noted but not emphasized in *Gridlock*. That said, while we agree that elements of our argument may be an oversimplification, we think overall the main argument remains a tenable and useful one if we conceptualize gridlock as a kind of ratio between the functional need for cooperation, which has grown with globalization and interdependence, and the ability of international institutions to supply that need. While "supply" has always been a difficulty, the need has grown enormously in the post-war period, we argue, and has done so in ways that actually undermine the supply function. Certainly this highly structural argument abstracts away from the historical processes "though which an institution's evolution may pass," as Wilkinson puts it, but that generality is precisely the value of the argument, we maintain. We sought to describe the evolution of a system of global governance, and of course that system has constituent parts which themselves evolve internally. Our analytical emphasis was on the system itself, because it is at that "emergent" level that second-order cooperation problems can be observed.

In addition to raising questions about the accuracy of our diagnosis, Wilkinson also questions some aspects of our causal explanation, highlighting important dynamics he feels *Gridlock* has missed. For example, he argues that *Gridlock* treats international organizations as overly passive actors, ignoring the way in which

secretariats may use their own agency to resist, or even promote, gridlock. He also wonders if, in focusing on "second-order" cooperation problems, our analysis is inattentive to "first-order" problems, such as a shift to the political right in the domestic politics of certain countries. These factors are certainly relevant. Again, however, we do not consider them contradictory to or incompatible with our core argument.

Second, Wilkinson questions the implications we draw from our gridlock analysis. What does it mean for world politics if international cooperation has entered a historically determined period of stasis, as we claim? Wilkinson correctly notes that there is no reason to necessarily think of gridlock as part of a process of punctuated equilibria in which cooperation swells, overwhelms itself, declines and then, perhaps, grows again. "Rather," he notes, "it could simply be an evolutionary trajectory that is non-linear and which contains within it moments of innovation, stasis, change and development." This is an important point because it shapes how we think about potential solutions to gridlock. Here Wilkinson encourages us to think about gridlock as a potentially "catalytic moment" for larger restructurings of world politics. It is not just a dampener on public good provision, but also a potential source of new strategies and transitions. Maybe. Such ideas are raised in the final chapter, but we agree with Wilkinson that these are the "least satisfying" elements of the book. Our subsequent work—the forthcoming *Beyond Gridlock*—has sought to address them more directly.

Even more so than Wilkinson's essay, Gupta's contribution, entitled "Gridlock, or a Period of Reflection for Triple Loop Learning," argues forthrightly that our book presents an incorrect diagnosis—that we are not in a gridlocked situation but something rather different. Gupta calls this the emergence of "triple loop learning in global institutionalism." According to

Gupta this entails a feedback process regarding the diversity of viewpoints on the limits of the earth and the need to share it equitably, and the recognition that weaker parties are becoming stronger and more vocal. Curiously, however, such "triple loop learning" is presented as both a condition of global governance (e.g. "we are facing the birth pangs of triple loop learning in global institutionalism") and also as something we need to do ("This calls for triple loop learning").

With respect to the engagement with *Gridlock* itself, it is not always clear to us what the identified weaknesses with the gridlock argument are, other than their being not encompassing enough in the depth of analysis.

Regarding institutional inertia, Gupta seems to agree with our stance but argues that its problems should be extended by a recognition that "institutional inertia is also driven by the realization that many of us are talking at cross-purposes." Following from this she argues that ways of thinking about shrinking resources available in terms of ecospace represent promising intellectual tendencies. With respect to harder problems, Gupta contends that "modern wicked problems require temporal, scalar, interdisciplinary analysis, before level-appropriate specific solutions can be crafted." Such a stance is a position regarding what to do about harder problems from the point of analysis, and not a position about whether or not contemporary global governance is befuddled by harder problems.

Gupta does not contend with the condition of multipolarity itself but rather how it should be interpreted, especially given the fact that wealthy elites—she points to the global one percent—are still purportedly able to exercise effective control decisions in global governance. Without stating as much, Gupta thus reminds us that the "poles" of a multipolar world order are not necessarily

assemblages of state power but rather take other forms. This is an excellent point on its own terms, and we would only point out that the recent diversity of wealthy elites tend to emanate from states that are themselves emblematic of the state-based forms of multipolarity that we point to. We are also in general agreement with the notion that global constitutionalism, when supported by forms of local rule-making and participation, is both a desirable goal and an orienting principle that can guide how we operate politically today and in the future.

Ultimately Gupta offers multiple arguments for why current ways of thinking—about politics, about global governance, about sustainability and the organization of institutions—should be rethought. In many places she offers an alternative vision of social order as such. This is an ambitious and fundamentally radical stance and deserves an encompassing treatment the likes of which we cannot partake of here. However, it does allow us to highlight what we feel are some important differences in terms of the approach of our analysis and that which she offers. We suspect we are starting from different premises of where governance arrangements come from.

For Gupta the causal forces are based clearly in the realm of ideas—hence the "learning" that we are encountering and the need to rethink and reinterpret the world around us. Running through much of Gupta's critique seems to be a notion that thinking about the world's problems needs to go deeper into the structures of our thinking and ways of life than is frequently done. While we are not prone to disagree with this on principle, this in some way misses the point about the relevance of inherited structures in our environment (for *Gridlock* this meant an analysis of prevailing ideas and institutional arrangements). The successful transformation of the world into a better planet does not depend on visions alone but rather must contend with

the inherited structures of the past, which means contending with material circumstances and institutional configurations that are not of our own choosing. The world at large is always being rebuilt, to be sure, but it is never rebuilt from scratch. It is built from what is available to us. Because it is an institutionalist argument, *Gridlock* contends with the inherited structures of the past as a starting point to thinking about contemporary dilemmas in global governance. In trying to identify and explain challenges to global governance in this way our stance is thus grounded on a different model of how social change should be thought about.

Ultimately Gupta contends that "gridlock is the end of exclusive development and the beginning of a more inclusive development paradigm." This is a curious conclusion to reach on the basis of the analysis and evidence offered, since Gupta's stance is centred on the need to deeply rethink the way that human beings interface with the world around them. It is not clear that current trends are leading to such a radical *progressive* rethinking as one might hope. We leave this open for debate and would only reiterate our stance with respect to the potential catalytic effects of gridlock discussed above with respect to Wilkinson's critique, which we hold as a possibility but ultimately an empirical question. It seems worrying, however, that if anything the way that many people have recently reacted to problems with global governance is not with a paradigm-shifting eco-progressive turn. The last decade has seen a resurgence of right-nationalist sentiment and forms of xenophobia, reinforced by Donald Trump's success in the US presidential elections, which are all too familiar from our past. Far from engendering momentum towards a new global constitutionalism, these and other trends represent steps in the opposite direction. These are, of course, matters of contemporary and future social struggles, which are themselves open-ended and contingent by their very nature. Our stance is that we should conceptualize these

multidimensional issues from the perspective of where we are based and on where we have come from.