Taking first the simple idea of plurality, before coming to the pluralisms that emphasize or celebrate it, I note that moral universalism is hardly opposed to plurality; indeed, moral universalism is pointless without a plurality over which to range—a plurality of diverse persons, nations, jurisdictions, or localities over which morality has, or purports to have, universal authority. Far from denying the existence of such pluralities, moral universalism presupposes it. Such mere literal pluralities are not what are at issue in the essays here, of course, but rather the forms of diversity that inevitably and invariably come with human plurality. While moral universalism presupposes a plurality of persons and circumstances over which to range—else it has little point—it is also challenged by the diversity among persons’ views and practices, institutions and cultures, governments and jurisdictions that arise from that plurality. The challenges that these pluralities pose to moral universalism are both normative and practical: they demand that we ask both which forms of pluralism a universalist morality should accommodate and which ones it can. And the latter, broadly practical question has conceptual and political aspects: which forms of pluralism are conceptually compatible with moral universalism, and which ones can be accommodated in a politically stable way, without capitulating to sheer political force? As this volume’s essays here demonstrate in a wide variety of ways, these normative, conceptual, and political questions deeply intertwine.
Moral Universalism

The severity and the form of the challenges posed to moral universalism by human plurality depend on the nature of universality claimed. As the outset of Barbara Herman’s essay in this volume reminds us, moral universality sometimes comes in a merely formal version, amounting simply to an affirmation of the centrality of rules or principles to morality. Such a formal universality is compatible with the rules being highly context sensitive and specific; it excludes only references to particulars in the strict sense: persons and places as referred to by proper names, times referred to by indexicals such as “now” or “next week.” In being compatible with almost any content, a commitment to this kind of formal neutrality has seemed to many, going back to Hegel’s critique of Kant’s ethics, to be empty. It is today opposed, not by political philosophers or legal theorists worried about the diversity of religious and other doctrines within modern societies, but by moral philosophers who reject it on largely metaphysical or epistemological grounds. These particularists hold that the basis of moral reasons, say, is not in any universal principles, but rather in the particulars of each case. For these particularists, the ultimate ground for helping Mrs. Smith who has fallen and is lying helpless in the roadway is not that one has a general duty to help people in need when one can do so without gravely endangering oneself, but, say, the fact that Mrs. Smith is now lying helplessly and vulnerably in the roadway. Interesting as the debate between particularists and their opponents now is, for present purposes, we may set it aside. At least for the sake of argument, all of the contributors here accept moral universalism in the sense in which it stands opposed to moral particularism. Each accepts that there are objective moral principles that are formally universal. The question that each raises is rather whether there is also an importantly universal content to morality. As Herman puts it, the question is whether there is “universality in the content of obligation as well” (p. 17, this volume).

To get universality into the content of obligation, or of morality more generally, one must specify the domain across which it is purportedly to range. On this dimension, the essays in this volume have a distinctive focus. Most commonly in moral theory, the question is whether moral principles hold universally across
all persons. While this layer of concern presumably does always lie in the background of any discussion of moral universalism in politics, it is not here in the forefront. The challenges here addressed do not stem directly from the diversity of individuals’ views, characteristics, or commitments—the sort of challenge that has absorbed much recent attention from liberal theorists of toleration and their critics, a challenge posed to liberal justifica-
tion by what Rawls calls “the fact of pluralism.” If people’s moral, religious, and evaluative beliefs and commitments did not differ in the ways that comprise the fact of pluralism, then perhaps the issues treated in this volume would not arise; nonetheless, this kind of pluralism is not directly under discussion here. Rather, the potentially problematic pluralities considered here are all plural claims to authority of one kind or another: the normatively tinged claims of multiple nations, legal systems, or religious and other associations to some form of deference and allegiance, at least on the part of their citizens or adherents. The issue here being one of accommodating pluralism to the objective, universal core of morality, a thoroughgoing moral relativism is not on the table. Our contributors generally assume that there are some objective moral truths and set themselves the task not of defending this objectivity against a relativist’s challenge, but of asking how best to assimilate political, legal, and religious and otherwise associational pluralism within an objectively universal morality. In the broadest terms, then, the question addressed here is whether deference or allegiance to plural authorities of any of these kinds can be reconciled with, or accommodated to, the invariant, objec-
tive core content of a substantively universal morality.

On a purer form of universalism than is represented here, the pattern of any possible reconciliation would be simple to derive. Any such deference or allegiance to plural purported authori-
ties would be licit if endorsed by the universal principles of mo-
rality and illicit otherwise. Consider a simplified Kantian picture: the universal content of morality—as Herman also reminds us—would be “pure” or a priori, and hence invariant across possible worlds and across types of rational being. While the principles of universal morality might imply that, in certain circumstances, this or that government, legal system, or religious association ought to be deferred to, the moral principle that generates this result
must be formulatable without reference to any such contingent social structure. Although Kant allowed that an understanding of anthropology and a schema of practical judgment might help us bring the universal principles of morality to bear on our contingent circumstances, still, these principles remain, at their core, invariant across nations, legal systems, and constellations of religious and other social associations.

On this simplified Kantian picture, there is clearly no such thing as moral authority. There is only reason, identically present in each person, and needing to be freed from its “self-imposed tutelage,” its deference to authorities. It is perhaps an indication of the influence of Hegel’s critique of Kant’s ethics that so many of the contributors to this volume both accept the possibility of morally significant authorities of one kind or another and see these residing in various aspects of the social forms within which we live. Or perhaps it is just that we have lost confidence in this simplified version of the Kantian solution and, having also denied the authority of pure reason, are not sure how, if at all, to locate morally significant authorities.

By “morally significant authorities,” I do not mean “moral authorities.” Possibly no one in this discussion believes that there is anyone or any social body with the authority to issue a binding moral judgment, that there is anyone who can authoritatively tell it like it is, morally speaking. The authorities here in question are not interpreted by this volume’s discussants as claiming moral authority as such. Instead, they are taken to claim political, legal, religious, or associational authority. The question is whether any of these ways in which authority is socially exercised has interesting implications for the content of morality. For the implications to be interesting, they presumably must not be deducible from some invariant and universal moral principle plus the facts. For instance, from the moral principle that one ought to obey the commands of one’s legitimate sovereign plus the fact that one’s legitimate sovereign has commanded one to pay a poll tax, one may deduce the conclusion that one ought to pay a poll tax. In such a pattern of derivation, the sovereign’s command is indeed authoritative, and does indeed have implications for what ought, morally, to be done; but this implication is not interesting, for here the sovereign’s command is like any other factual condition
that activates a moral principle. That being so, there is no reason to think of the sovereign’s command as shaping or modifying the content of morality, which remains invariantly universal: the variable element is simply one part of the circumstantial facts to which morality must be applied.

As a model for what a more interesting form of morally significant authority might be like, consistent with the acceptance, for the sake of argument, that there are universal principles of morality, we might look to Aquinas’s idea of a “determination (determinatio) of certain generalities” of natural law. In addressing how it is that the universal content of natural law bears on the civil laws of the world’s many nations, Aquinas crucially distinguished two ways in which this can occur. One is via the sort of deductive route I have alluded to both in characterizing the claims of a simplified Kantianism and, just now, in explaining why some ways that social authorities might end up having moral significance would be uninteresting. The second, however, is the determinative route. Sometimes, as Aquinas pictures things, the civil authorities in a given state are called on creatively to interpret a precept of the natural law by making it more specific. Even in the absence of a meta-principle declaring that such interpretations or determinations of the content of principles by legitimate civil authorities are to be taken as binding, they can—perhaps in some of the ways innovatively explored by contributors to this volume—come to have morally binding force in their localities. Although Aquinas’s suggestion, here, is hardly radical—and, indeed, some of our contributors go farther in carving out room for moral creativity—it does illustrate how a social body that purports to issue authoritative guidance may in fact end up exercising morally relevant authority that is actually interesting, in that it contributes normative content not deducible from the invariantly universal core of morality.

Whether or not there exists any valid or legitimate form of morally significant authority, the pronouncements of popes, rabbis, and imams, the rulings of courts of law, and the statutes and edicts of national governments will inescapably shape what Herman here calls the “lived morality” of the world’s myriad localities. These interventions, each claiming a kind of authority, will shape the “basic practical skills,” the tacit perception of available options, and the “background conditions for everyday life” that people internalize
in becoming moral agents (Herman, pp. 23–24, this volume). Although we moderns are nervous about the very idea of moral authority, that does not mean that we can escape these many ways in which authorities of other kinds influence how morality is locally lived. The question pursued in this volume, in these terms, is whether such morally significant authority is ever valid or legitimate and, if so, under what conditions. Can universal morality cope with such pluralities of claims to other kinds of authority, and how, if at all, do the authoritative pronouncements of such diverse and plural authorities contribute to the content of moral requirements?

**Politics and Pluralisms**

The political issues raised by our contributors, as they grapple with this question about accommodating pluralisms of various kinds, fall into two broad categories. There are questions about whether political realism may successfully be resisted while carrying out such a reconciliation, and questions about how to recast liberalism if plural authorities are to be recognized. The authors of our three core chapters, Bernard Kingsbury, Barbara Herman, and William Galston, variously set these modes of engagement with politics. Kingsbury and Herman each seek to make room for pluralism of authority while resisting political realism. Galston, in his recasting of the ideal of liberal toleration, insists on the plurality of moral authorities.

Recurring to the understanding of invariantly universal morality that comes with the simplified Kantian picture described above, we can see why committed moralists as well as hard-bitten observers of politics might converge in thinking that when political currents generate variations that apparently depart from the core content of universal morality, these developments should be frankly viewed as the triumph of political power, political will, or political necessity over universal morality. Our contributors focus on two domains in which this tension between morality and political power are likely to be present: in international law, in which nations confront one another in ways that can seem only superficially moralized, and in moments of political revolution and upheaval, in which cataclysmic political change threatens long-accepted modes of lived morality and new “modes and orders”—the realist would say—are
imposed. Realist accounts of international law and domestic political struggle are both familiar and seemingly easy to grasp. Those who react against such political realism simply by insisting on the demands of universal morality tend to seem hopelessly utopian. Here, Kingsbury and Herman avoid that trap, each setting out to walk moral universalism across the knife-edge of according moral significance to those plural authorities whose de facto influence the realists stress while nonetheless resisting realism.

For Benedict Kingsbury, this effort is the crux of his answer to the question of how international law ought to be conceived. Although this is a question about law, it maps readily onto the issues about morality that are the common concern of the essays in this volume. In international law, the theoretical debate has long raged between cosmopolitan and realist poles. For the cosmopolitan about international law, international law’s core grounds and content, or both, are to be drawn from universal morality. Only such a basis in universal morality, it is argued, can distinguish international law from the brute use of force. For the realist about international law, by contrast, there is nothing more fundamental than the power relations among plural nation-states and, now, various other kinds of international actors, such as the multi-national corporation. Kingsbury holds that it is a mistake either to attempt to deduce the central norms of international law from universal morality or to reduce international law to being a modus vivendi among nation-states. The third possibility is to look to the idea of law for norms that have significance beyond being the residue of compromise. He finds such norms in international law’s complex commitment to publicness: to laws being an expression of a public and speaking in its name (pp. 174, 176, 181 this volume). In international law, this commitment is complex because multiple publics—not all of them national—are in play. Innovative and intersecting international law-generating bodies, such as the European Union and the World Trade Organization, also help generate, in effect, new publics to which this new law ought to answer. That public law ought to express the will of a public and to speak in its name is both a normative commitment specific to this type of law, as Kingsbury emphasizes, and one that plausibly has moral significance. Hence, on this kind of middle position, while the content of international law could not be read off of, or deduced from, the principles of
universal morality, still those principles can be seen as constrain-
ing the legitimate processes whereby international legal authority
is exercised.

Whereas the plurality that international law addresses is above
all that of nation-states and other “jurisgenerative” bodies, and
hence is arrayable, to a first approximation, on a world map, the
plurality with which Barbara Herman deals in the first instance is
one locality’s plurality of forms of lived morality as they change
over time. Herman notes that while lived morality needs to be sta-
ble over time in order to become properly internalized, thus equip-
ning individuals with adequate moral skills and moral perception,
lived morality is also locally lived, in forms of life that are subject to
change. Sometimes, indeed, change is urgently called for. Herman
does not address a Callicles or a Machiavelli who might purport
to reduce all of morality to a hardheadedly realist basis, but she
does focus on a type of case in which realism rears its head again,
even once universal morality is granted general sway, namely in
moments of political crisis in which years of systematic injustice
have come to a head. At those moments, it might be thought, one
should listen to the realist’s appeal to “political necessity,” even if
the aim is to rebuild the framework of a just society on the ruined
foundations of the old, unjust one. To test this question, Herman
takes the case of post-apartheid South Africa, where such an at-
titude was certainly to have been expected. She argues, however,
that there not only was available a pathway of renewal within uni-
versal morality, but that, with the institution of the Truth and Rec-
onciliation Commission (TRC), it was actually taken. As she de-
scribes it, this path involved a “moral improvisation” that shifted
the permissible routes of redress for the many decades of violence
and injustice suffered by the victims of apartheid. Nelson Mande-
la’s supererogatory forswearing of revenge set an example, making
possible a course in which the rights of redress of the many victims
were neutralized.

Although the target of Herman’s analysis is a change in moral-
ity over time, consistently with a framework of universal morality,
it is clear that, so long as the South African case is not unique, dif-
ferent local improvisations of this kind will result in a plurality of
divergent lived moralities. Another country that, like South Africa,
had long perpetrated systematic injustice against an oppressed
group, but that lacked a leader like Nelson Mandela, might not be able to improvise its way into a moral neutralization of rights of redress. What Herman is describing, then, is not just how the content of morality can evolve, consistently with a universal core, but also how, again consistently with a universal core and without any relativism, morality can come to have different content in different places. In these many places, lived morality claims a kind of authority over how life is to be lived. Herman sketches how to reconcile these claims of the moral practices of our many human localities with the universal morality underlying each of them.

While not denying the existence of this kind of local variation, William Galston reminds us that our localities each tend to be normatively complex. A political theorist such as Galston might find the idea of “lived morality” too much of an abstraction, insofar as it characterizes morality without reference to any of the preachers, politicians, pundits, or philosophers who claim the authority to articulate for us how we ought to live. A central tenet of the liberal pluralism Galston defends here is that, so long as individuals’ free alignment with any of these purported authorities is protected by robust rights of exit, political society ought to cede to its non-political competitors considerable sway in determining how their adherents’ lives are to be led. Galston’s approach is “empirical” at least in the sense that it starts from a close examination of how life is actually lived in modern societies. One observes, in effect, that the lived morality that people in most places internalize allows for a kind of render-unto-Caesar, render-unto-God compartmentalization that allows for multiple types of authority. Galston defends this multiplicity or pluralism of authorities as appropriate, both by undercutting arguments for “civic totalism”—the view that all authority ultimately rests with the state—and by suggesting that this kind of plural authority appropriately reflects the plurality of distinct, ultimate values that Isaiah Berlin so eruditely extolled. Galston recognizes and indeed affirms, however, that his liberal defense of allowing sway to multiple authorities does rest on a “minimal universalism” of moral commitment—one that elevates certain ultimate values over others and helps explain why this kind of liberal pluralism is appropriate for all liberal societies.

What kind of authority is Galston discussing? It is not political authority as such: that is what Galston seeks to limit to make way for
other authorities. Obviously it is not clerical or any other kind of associational authority. Political institutions, religious bodies, and other associations each share in the kind of authority that Galston has in view. It seems to be authority, or purported authority, over how we ought to live. This is, then, a kind of moral authority or purported moral authority. Compatibly with a modernist’s view that none of these institutions or associations can speak authoritatively—that is, infallibly or “unsecondguessably”—about the content of morality, one may recognize that each, in varying ways, claims authority—that is, obedience or allegiance—in articulating principles, ideals, and models of how one ought to live. Accordingly, while Galston’s concern is principally with politics—specifically, with reining in the tendency to civic totalism—in the background of his view is a quite general understanding of moral authority, namely that it does not rest entirely in any person, faculty, or body, but is irretrievably and appropriately dispersed across a plurality of those.

Details of Accommodation

Frank Michelman’s contribution to the present volume accepts Herman’s contention that the South African TRC involved some kind of moral improvisation but differs with her about how to analyze it in detail. The issues of relative detail that he raises have general importance for our understanding of how moral universalism might accommodate itself to plural authorities.

How much room there is for such accommodation crucially depends on whether the scope available for plural authorities to shape lived morality is limited to what counts as a determination or specification of universal principles. Universal principles may need determination because they are vague, because they are highly abstract, or because they explicitly require that people or societies adopt one sufficient means from a disjunctive list of alternatives. As Herman mentions, T. M. Scanlon “argues that where there is a region of activity that requires moral regulation, and there is more than one legitimate principle that can do the job, the fact that one of these principles is generally, even if not universally, accepted in a community can be sufficient for it to obligate all” (p. 40, this volume). Call this “Scanlon’s community-acceptance principle.” Herman argues that this principle is too
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conservative to cover the case of the TRC, however, because it involved a rejection or suppression of broadly accepted norms of redress in favor of a new approach. But what exactly did that rejection or suppression involve?

Michelman argues that the crucial moral change in the South African case was a shift, not in the moral rights of the victims of apartheid, as Herman suggests, but rather in the moral duties of the South African legislators who instituted the TRC. Michelman grants that the creation of the TRC made redress through the courts effectively unavailable to the victims. But did that shift their moral rights? He doubts this, for by removing an effective legal pathway for pursuing such a moral right of redress, the creation of the TRC made it practically unnecessary to modify these persons’ moral rights and odd to say that they had an obligation not to pursue them (p. 55, this volume). Conversely, as F. M. Kamm here reminds us—in addition to raising myriad important questions about the content of Herman’s moral analysis—the mere practical unavailability of a means of pursuing or defending a moral right does not mean that the moral right does not exist (p. 66, this volume). Michelman argues that, instead of a shift in the victims’ rights, what occurred in the creation of the TRC was a shift in which moves were morally permissible for South Africa’s legislators. He suggests that at an initial phase, shutting off the victims’ legal right of redress would have given the victims a valid moral complaint against the legislators, while at a later phase, “procedural-moral” reasons may have entered via the democratic process to have shifted things so that such a moral complaint would no longer be valid (p. 56, this volume). To consolidate this shift, he suggests—transposing Herman’s language into the key of deliberative democracy—that the democratic process must have come to favor one of two “competing casuistries”: the one favoring the TRC rather than the one favoring a more vengeful policy.

Michelman’s recasting of Herman’s example forces us to reconsider what it means for local divergences in lived morality to be compatible with the invariant, core content of universal morality. Different specifications or determinations of that core content will all be compatible with it; but it may seem that a moral change that has the effect of canceling the victims’ rights of redress cannot be a change simply from one determination of that core con-
tent to another. Either these rights were not truly grounded in universal morality in the first place, one might think, or else their cancellation is a violation of universal morality. Yet even if Scanlon’s community-acceptance principle cannot explain the moral change that interests Herman, it illustrates how it might have been the case that universal morality derivatively required local rights of redress before the TRC, compatibly with a moral change arising that sidelined them. Further, as Kamm’s essay suggests, meta-principles more abstract than Scanlon’s might explain how contingent shifts in the means available for effectively realizing morally necessary regulation can entail shifts in what is morally required or permissible. More specifically, Kamm argues that the case of the TRC as set out by Herman exemplifies a common meta-principle for transforming supererogatory acts into obligatory ones, namely, reducing the costs or sacrifices imposed by the act. As the rich exchange between Kamm and Herman brings out, the creation of a new moral obligation on a societal scale cannot hinge on balancing civic goods against individual rights. At most, a spirit of civic benevolence combined with the creative moral example of one or more heroic individuals can leverage individuals’ capacities to imagine their rights differently, and so to accept a different content of obligation.

**Excesses of Accommodation?**

As we have seen, each of the three core chapters argues that, in some important way, moral universalism can be accommodated to an important type of pluralism, while Michelman further probes how changes in what morality requires—and hence possible local divergences in moral requirement—might come about. While the remaining contributors raise specific themes and issues of their own, almost all of them, in one way or another, argue that the three core authors have been too accommodating of pluralism. In various ways, the remaining authors argue, variously, that moral universalism is robust enough not to need to accommodate pluralism, that pluralism’s claim to be accommodated is weak, and that the costs of accommodating it are too high.

What makes moral universalism robust against any need to accommodate pluralism might lie in the subtlety of its structure or
in the power of its demands. F. M. Kamm, who, as I have noted, emphasizes that there seem to be universal meta-principles governing the introduction and withdrawal of norms of lived morality, highlighted its potential conceptual subtlety. If so, she points out, universal morality may be more able to remain invariant in the face of variable contingent circumstances than at first appears. Put in slightly more political terms, her claim is that universal morality can remain a stable, conservative influence without hamstringing our ability to respond flexibly to changing circumstances. William Scheuerman, in his illuminating response to Kingsbury’s essay on international law, argues, in that domain, for the strength of universal morality’s demands. His argument is in the conditional. He maintains that Kingsbury’s attempt to steer a middle path between universalist cosmopolitanism and a realist capitulation to plural powers places him unstably on a knife-edge: if universal principles are robust enough to generate a requirement that international law be public in Kingsbury’s two senses, then they will also be robust enough to require more by way of international democracy and international distributive justice than Kingsbury admits.

Another basis for resisting the universalist’s accommodation of pluralism is to question why it is called for in the first place. This is the principal mode of Daniel Weinstock’s chapter, which analyzes the normative assumptions of liberal pluralisms such as Galston’s. Weinstock distinguishes what he calls “autonomy liberalism,” which holds that all should have the opportunity to live autonomously, from “toleration liberalism,” which argues for an unrestricted range of choice of modes of life. Galston’s liberalism, he suggests, is of the former kind. As Weinstock interprets it, it rests normatively on its commitment to Berlinean value pluralism: while being willing to elevate the value of autonomy, it denies that there is any general way of reducing the plurality of ultimate values to a single basis for choice. Weinstock points out, first, that value pluralism of this kind is a definite normative commitment, at odds with relativism on the one hand and value monism on the other. As such, a commitment to value pluralism is not compatible with neutrality about fundamental moral matters. While autonomy liberalism may not aim to be neutral in this way, it does tend to look to value pluralism to support the importance of ceding normative authority to the many religious and civic associations to which people in
a liberal society become attached. Weinstock’s principal aim is to undercut this purported argument from value pluralism to liberal pluralism. He argues that there is no necessary conceptual connection between the existence of plural ultimate values and the existence of plural social institutions having normative authority.

The final sort of response to universalist accommodation of plural authorities represented here is the claim that, even if there is some call for some such accommodation to be made, the moral costs of such accommodation are too high. In her powerfully argued response to Galston, Robin West urges that his liberal pluralism would give too much sway to the kinds of religious and familial authorities that long have oppressed and inflicted violence against women and vulnerable minorities. As she sees it, to accept the moral significance of these forces that claim authority within lived morality is to take a step backward to the kind of quietist liberalism that for centuries condoned such practices as “chastisement” (wife beating). On her reading of the history of U.S. liberalism, it was precisely deference to such plural authorities, and not a commitment to individual rights, that led to liberals shutting a blind eye to this kind of horror.

According to West’s critique of Galston, too hasty an embrace of moral pluralism can generate a failure adequately to protect vulnerable groups’ interest in equality and freedom. In a comparable fashion, Gopal Sreenivasan and Kenneth Baynes warn that Kingsbury’s pluralistic understanding of inter-public law gives inadequate weight to democracy, and therefore also to the principles of legitimacy that democracy supports. Kingsbury does not claim that his conception of public international law is democracy promoting, but he suggests that it is at least neutral with respect to democratic values. Sreenivasan demurs, arguing that international law on either Kingsbury’s model or the jus inter gentes model can function as a serious threat to democracy by constraining democratic publics’ capacity to legislate on behalf of their understandings of the common interests of citizens. On Sreenivasan’s reading, Kingsbury’s principle of publicness could counteract this threat to democracy only if it were interpreted robustly as protecting the permanent and fundamental common interests of all affected—but to strengthen the principle in this way would shift it significantly in the direction of moral universalism.
Is a pragmatic pluralism grounded in a normative principle of publicness or is publicity a sustainable middle ground between cosmopolitan universalism and realpolitik? Like Scheuerman and Sreenivasan, Kenneth Baynes argues that as soon as we identify rule-of-law principles, including the principle of publicness, as normative criteria of law’s legitimacy, we are set on a path toward moral universalism. The patterns of international law-formation that Kingsbury thematizes constitute a partial and incomplete “thickening” of rule-of-law principles in international society, representing a growing norm of mutual accountability between international actors and an increasing interpenetration of legal orders. Citing Habermas’s arguments for the internal connection between the rule of law and democracy, Baynes believes that these dynamics both encourage and demand “the development of democratic institutions at the global level” (p. 229, this volume). Kingsbury’s emphasis on the local and partial character of international “publics” is motivated, Baynes suggests, by a pragmatic concern to speak to what is possible in human affairs, to temper our normative aspirations with a sober assessment of empirical realities of power inequalities and deep moral disagreement.

In this respect, the debate between Baynes and Kingsbury, like the debates between Herman and Kamm, or Galston and Weinstock, return us to old questions in moral and political philosophy concerning the tension between what is practically realizable and what we imagine humans at their best to be capable of, between political necessity and the demands of morality, between the real and the ideal. Our authors agree, however, that the phenomena of moral pluralism cannot simply be explained away as expressions of human imperfection, as if they were flawed instantiations of universal moral principles. The fact of pluralism is not evidence for the impossibility of universalism. The practical realization of universal moral principles will not look the same in every time and place, and yet the claims of universal morality—equality, justice, the rule of law, perhaps toleration and democracy—do provide meaningful critical standards against which to measure actually existing practices. It seems inescapable that our guiding question in this introduction—whether a plurality of morally significant authorities can and should be accommodated by universal morality—must be answered in the affirmative, though that does not settle the question
of which authorities have a valid claim to recognition. Although this is a genuinely common issue across the contributions to this volume, it is of course possible that differences among the types of plurality that concern our different authors—plural international legal actors, plural moral localities, and plural voices within a given community that claim moral authority—will mean that different answers to these abstract questions will be appropriate for international law, for the comparative moral analysis of different times and places, and for domestic politics. Even if the answers thus vary, however, it is clear from the interlocking discussions here that the issues that arise about accommodating universal morality to plural authorities in these different domains all illuminate one another.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Jonathan Dancy, Ethics Without Principles (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).


6. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, I-IIae, Q. 95, a. 2.


8. The phrase is Machiavelli’s, as highlighted by Harvey C. Mansfield in Machiavelli’s New Modes and Orders: A Study of the Discourses on Livy, new ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

9. Political realism becomes more difficult to grasp insofar as it claims to be prescriptive.