CHAPTER III

Limited Sovereignties¹

"...nous ne savons pas dans quel temps nous vivons. L'obscurité, l'opacité du présent à lui-même m'apparait completement fondamentale."

Paul Ricoeur²

In most European Union member states today very serious crises continue unacceptably.³ For the main consequences of the bursting of the housing bubble in the US in 2008 and the subsequent banking, financial, economic, political, and then social crises remain unresolved. And they are still accompanying the EU through yet another increasingly difficult year of growing human deprivation and environmental disregard, of decline in culture and nature.

Granted that EU leaders have arranged, although not without great difficulties, several solutions. Still, these solutions have been short-term. And the ongoing attempts to remedy sustainably the worsening situations in Cyprus, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, and especially in Greece have, after five years, yet fully to succeed.

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P. Ricoeur, "Interview," in Between Suspicion and Sympathy: Paul Ricoeur's Unstable Equilibrium, ed. A. Wiercinski (Toronto: Hermeneutics Press, 2003), p. 690, cited in J. Grondin, Paul Ricoeur (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2013), p. 64, note 1.

See for example the extensive empirical evidence in the materials and analyses in *Le Bilan du Monde – Economie & Environment, Edition 2013*, http://lemonde.fr.

One plausible explanation for at least part of these repeated and very deleterious political failures is the unwarranted reliance of many EU political leaders on a seriously flawed understanding of sovereignty.

To achieve consensus on resolving these ongoing contentious matters I argue in this essay that some EU political leaders' need to re-conceptualize a cardinal notion in both political philosophy and ethics.⁴ Such re-conceptions may perhaps be understood as part of the tasks of what "ethical innovation." ⁵

§1. A Basic Problem in the European Union

At least one quite basic problem appears to underlie the EU's repeated failures to solve its persisting crises. This problem is the repeated refusals on the part of many EU member states' leaders to surrender their almost absolute political sovereignties.⁶

This quasi- absolute political sovereignty is the idea that "one nation or group of nations must not interfere in the internal affairs of another nation." Limited political sovereignty

⁴ I develop these arguments in much greater detail in P. McCormick, *Restraint's Rewards: Limited Sovereignties, Ancient Values, and the Preamble for a European Constitution*, forthcoming 2014.

⁵ Cf. the discussion of "ethical innovation" and references in P. McCormick, *Eco-Ethics and An Ethics of Suffering: Ethical Innovation and the Suffering of the Destitute* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter 2008), pp. 21-41.

[&]quot;Almost absolute," because by accepting EU membership member states necessarily become parties to antecedent and subsequent EU treaties that already entail some small renouncements of political sovereignty. Thus, the EU's various instances have been authorized to sign certain agreements with non-EU states on behalf of all the EU member states. But this authorization has not in any way replaced the persisting sovereign powers of individual member states to sign other agreements with non-EU states in their own names regardless of the EU. Moreover, while certainly according in some matters the priority of EU law over national law, EU nation states nonetheless still reserve the priority of their own national law over most areas of state sovereignty, such as budgetary control and defense matters.

Cf. R. Dworkin, Justice for Hedgehogs (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2011), p. 333.

seems to be the basic cost that so far no EU member country is willing to pay for ending many of the continuing EU crises and their manifold evils.

The most serious result of these refusals is not the rise of an increasingly debilitating EU skepticism. Nor is it the dangerous resurgence of extreme right nationalistic parties. The most serious result is the extraordinary growth today of individual and social suffering in an affluent, resourceful, and still powerful Europe.

But this vast suffering is largely unnecessary. For rightly comprehending not just political sovereignty but just what sovereignty itself is shows its basic character to be not virtually absolute but essentially limited. Sovereignty of whatever sort is necessarily limited sovereignty.

I would like to suggest, on mainly philosophical but also on historical and empirical grounds, that standard current understandings of sovereignty in exclusively political terms only are quite damagingly flawed. Rather, the idea of political sovereignty needs to be understood as basically limited in such ways that sufficient conceptual space remains open for the play of those basic ethical values that underpin social and individual sovereignties as well.

Moreover, without restraining current understandings of political sovereignty as almost unlimited, reaching eventual consensus about EU general policies to resolve sustainably such an immensity of finally unnecessary individual and social suffering can hardly be realized.⁸

My suggestion for further critical discussion will be that sufficiently efficacious political action at the EU level for resolving sustainably many grave EU crises involves, among other things, two major tasks.

The first is restricting conceptually the standard notion of political sovereignty in the EU today. And the second major task

⁸ Cf. C. Reveillard, La Construction européenne, 2nd ed. (Paris: Ellipses, 2012), esp. pp. 171-180.

is enlarging conceptually the general notion of sovereignty itself so as to include not just a fresh understanding of suitably restrained political sovereignty but also of restrained social and individual sovereignties as well. Consider briefly a recent account.

§2. Sovereignty: A Contemporary Account

For some years now, the Canadian political scientist and historian of ideas, Robert Jackson, has been developing a nuanced and widely influential account of political sovereignty. With others, he has stressed that political sovereignty in its modern form derives mainly from the political settlements in Europe after the Peace of Westphalia ended the many catastrophes of the Thirty Years War. In this historical sense, then, political sovereignty, as most European leaders understand it currently, is "a specifically European innovation," Westphalian sovereignty.

But today sovereignty is no longer just a European concept. For like other basic concepts such as the technological conjecture, 12 the concept of sovereignty now is also globally recognized. 13 The European way of government, Jackson writes,

See R. Jackson, Sovereignty (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007) and the relevant chapters in Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches, ed. R. Jackson and G. Sorensen, 5th ed. (Oxford: OUP, 2013).

See P. H. Wilson, The Thirty Years War: Europe's Tragedy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP/Belnap, 2009), and D. Philpott, "Sovereignty," in The Oxford Handbook of the History of Political Philosophy, ed. G. Klosko (Oxford: OUP), pp. 561-572.

Jackson 2007, p. 144. See Jackson's summary historical sketch of the developments of the notion of sovereignty from the Tudor monarch Henry VIII's 1534 Act of Supremacy to the 2005 French and Dutch rejection of the European Constitution (pp. 2-5) which he then details on pp. 24-113.

On "the technological conjuncture" see P. McCormick, *Eco-Ethics and an Ethics of Suffering: Ethical Innovation and the Situation of the Destitute* (Heidelberg: Universitâtsverlag Winter, 2008), pp. 43-63.

J. Habermas, Between Facts and Norms, tr. W. Rehg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1966), p. 444. See also his interview in Le Monde, August 14, 2013.

"became a global system, and the only one known to history. The entire planet was enclosed by it." ¹⁴

Even brief reviews of modern European history from the perspective of the history of political ideas show the rather constant development of democracies from monarchies. ¹⁵ Although many stages have intervened between the early modern dominance of monarchical forms of government and contemporary forms of democracy, ¹⁶ the number of sovereign states has continued to multiply. Moreover, increasing sovereignty has brought with it increasing homogeneity among different populations. ¹⁷

Despite its continuing historical developments, however, the concept of political sovereignty has preserved many of its old characteristic features. That is, the now 28 EU member states included so far in the EU system of state sovereignty today continue to insist, like virtually all countries elsewhere, on their state authority as almost absolute.

For, while cooperating with the United Nations and other international organizations, EU member states recognize finally no higher governing authority than their own. ¹⁸ No world government exists to which the sovereign authority of European nation states is to be regularly subordinated.

¹⁴ Jackson 2007, p. 144.

See for example A. Ryan, On Politics: A History of Political Thought (London: Liveright, 2012), and R. Forst, "Civil Society," in A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy, ed. R. E. Goodin, P. Pettit, and T. W. Pogge, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 452-462.

¹⁶ Jackson 2007, pp. 144-150.

Thus, "populations have been shaped into peoples, knitted together by transportation and communications networks, political and military mobilization, public education and the like... [Some might add: by the technological conjuncture also.] Parliaments have been elected by an ever widening and now universal franchise. [And] Aristocratic and oligarchic political factions have become political parties" (*Ibid.*, pp. 148-149).

The evolving relations, however, between EU law and the law of EU member states remain vexed. Cf. S. Hix and B. Hyland, *The Political System of the European Union*, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan Palgrave, 2011), pp. 75-101.

Although existing written and unwritten European constitutions vary widely, nonetheless we can put this idea of the absolute sovereign authority of those EU member states making up the European state sovereignty system in constitutional terms.¹⁹

Thus, European states "continue to possess constitutional independence, which is the liberty to enact their own laws, to organize and control their own armed forces and police, to tax themselves, to create and manage their own currencies, to make their own domestic and foreign policies, to conduct diplomatic relations with foreign governments, to organize and join international organizations, and in short to govern themselves according to their own ideas, interests, and values." ²⁰

The EU state sovereignty system then is to be understood today and for the indefinite future as an almost absolute form of state sovereignty. This form can be understood relatively easily in both jurisdictional and constitutional terms. Nonetheless, the indispensable condition for such understanding is getting clearer about the different senses of the key expression here, "sovereignty."

§3. "Sovereignty": Several Precisions

Re-reading some modern European history shows that most dictionary definitions of "sovereignty" often obscure at least four quite important distinctions.²¹ The first is between sovereignty in general and political or state sovereignty in particular. The second is between absolute or unlimited sovereignty and relative or limited sovereignty. The third is between constitutional

Note however that critical discussion of so-called "constitutionalism" remains contentious. See for example the debate between J. Waldron (contra) and L. Alexander (pro) in Contemporary Debates in Political Philosophy, ed. T. Christiano and J. Christman (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 267-282 and 283-299 respectively.

²⁰ Jackson 2007, p. 149.

²¹ For example, those in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the *Oxford Dictionary* of *Law*, the *Oxford Dictionary* of *Philosophy*, and the *Stanford Encyclopedia* of *Philosophy*.

sovereignty and personal sovereignty.²² And the fourth, and perhaps most important, is between sovereignty and autonomy.

Besides recalling such distinctions, we also need to keep in mind the variety within different distinct kinds of sovereignties themselves whether political, social, or individual.

With regard to political sovereignties alone,²³ we may distinguish here at least three separate groups.

In general, we have among others international and national kinds of sovereignty, constitutional and parliamentary sovereignties, and popular sovereignties. Further, we may distinguish among social, cultural, and individual sovereignties. And we may perhaps even distinguish such philosophical varieties as normative and value sovereignties.²⁴ With the exception of the last group, however, the main although not always exclusive usages today of "sovereignty" are political.

More precisely then, in Europe's difficult legal, political, and social conjuncture today, reaching consensus on any eventual new European Union constitution will require all of the EU's member states to cede to the EU substantially more of their almost absolute state sovereignty and much of the relative autonomy of their social systems than they have already done.

But whether good enough reasons exist for anticipating the development of some more complex forms of limited political sovereignty by reason of the entrenchment of certain basic European ethical values in the preamble to an eventual new European constitution remains unclear.

²² Cf. J. Rawls, *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*, ed. S. Freeman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2007), p. 86.

Besides a general discussion of different kinds of sovereignty Jackson 2007 and Philpott 2011 also provide brief historical accounts.

Generally, regarding value see N. Dent, "Value," in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. T. Honderich, 2nd ed. (Oxford: OUP, 2005), p. 941, and regarding normativity see D. Parfit, *On What Matters* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), vol. 2, pp. 263-463. Cf. however H. Thome, "Value Change in Europe from the Perspective of Empirical Social Research," in *The Cultural Values of Europe*, ed. H. Joas and K. Wiegandt, tr. A. Skinner (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2008), pp. 277-319.

For the philosophical presuppositions, specifically those within political philosophy and philosophical ethics, of the actual EU state sovereignty system still remain to be satisfactorily addressed. But how are we to identify such presuppositions? Perhaps a first step is to isolate some assumptions.

§4. Assumptions

One way to identify many (if not all) of the effective presuppositions of the actual EU state sovereignty system that informs the thinking of most leaders of the EU member states today is to start by enumerating some of what most EU citizens assume with respect to proper government.

Accordingly, most EU citizens today live on the working assumptions that the state in which they are citizens has clearly defined borders. This is especially the case after the extremely consequential events and treaties in 1922 following the First World War.

This is also the case after the perhaps even more portentous events that followed both the Potsdam agreements close to the conclusion of the Second World War and the geopolitical adjustments upon both the reunification of Germany in 1991 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1993. After such unparalleled experiences following "the European Civil Wars," European state borders became sacred – they could no longer be modified.

A1. One might then informally call a first assumption of EU citizens today "The Unchangeable Borders Assumption." ²⁶

This is the illuminating phrase of the German essayist and poet, Hans-Magnus Enzensberger.

In current international law this assumption is called, somewhat obscurely but rather amusingly, "the *uti possidetis* principle" ("as you have, so may you hold"). This principle applies both to a colony's borders when it becomes a state as well as to a state's retaining any moveable public property "in its possession on the day hostilities ceased" (*Oxford Dictionary of Law*, 7th ed. [Oxford: OUP, 2009]).

Most EU citizens also assume that their highest political responsibilities and obligations are those deriving from their own national governments. These governments are the highest political authorities for the citizens of EU states. Citizens' rights and responsibilities do not derive either from a political party, or from the EU, or from the UN, or from any other political instance whether European or global.

A2. Accordingly, one might call this second assumption "The Highest Political Authority Assumption."

Still another assumption of the citizens of those EU states forming part of the regional European state sovereignty system is that the laws of their own country are those that directly apply to their activities and that the laws of other countries have no proper bearing on those activities.

If there are EU laws covering a certain domain, then most citizens assume that only those EU laws that are recognized by their own country's highest legal instances are in force. And those EU laws are in force not because of any EU higher legal authority, but only because their own particular state has, in its own right, carried over these laws into its own national sphere.

A3. Perhaps one might call this third assumption "The Highest Legal Authority Assumption."

A final assumption for now is the assumption on the part of most EU citizens that, just as their own EU sovereign state is composed of citizens, so other non-EU European sovereign states are also composed of citizens.²⁷

A4. Here then is a fourth major assumption of the European sovereign state system today, one we might call "The Citizenship Assumption."

Note that the idea that one's own state may also legally include persons who are not citizens, or who are merely transient, or who are citizens of more than one state, or who are also citizens of the EU (as the passports of member states of the EU show on their covers), etc. does not ordinarily come to mind for most EU citizens. Much illegal discrimination and physical violence, for example, against the Roma minorities in such EU countries as Hungary, Rumania, and Bulgaria provides some evidence for this distressing point.

§5. Presuppositions

Now at least these four working assumptions, taken either individually or as a group, may not unreasonably be taken as involving if not entailing certain political and ethical presuppositions of EU state sovereignty.

Thus, this system presupposes

(P1) that all actual European nation states are territorially sovereign. They are territorially sovereign in the sense that their borders can no longer be modified.

Further, the system presupposes

(P2) that legitimately elected European nation state governments enjoy quasi-absolute political sovereignty.

These governments enjoy such sovereignty in the sense that there are no higher political authorities to which its citizens are properly to be subjected.²⁸

Moreover, the system also presupposes similarly

(P3) that a European nation state's legal institutions are absolutely sovereign.

These institutions are absolutely sovereign in the sense that the code of laws they administer are subject to no other code of laws elsewhere.

And finally the EU system of state sovereignty presupposes

(P4) that a European nation state's citizenship is sovereign.

EU state citizenship is sovereign in the sense that it takes absolute priority with respect to rights and responsibilities over any other membership or citizenship in another state or states.

[&]quot;Perfect global justice," A. Sen remarks, "through an impeccably just set of institutions, even if such a thing could be identified [Sen is criticizing here what he calls Rawls's "transcendental institutionalism"], would certainly demand a global state..." (The Idea of Justice [London: Allen Lane, 2011], p. 25).

Now, even when charitably taken together instead of interrogated one by one, these presuppositions of the actual EU state sovereignty system raise serious issues that invite further reflection. For as a whole these presuppositions confront reflective persons with the basic issues of both the proper scope of political sovereignty in particular and, in general, the nature of sovereignty as such.

§6. Actualities

Nearly nine years ago, on October 29, 2004, the then 25 European Union (EU) heads of state signed a new formal draft treaty. The draft treaty incorporated for the first time a European Constitution.²⁹ This proposed constitution³⁰ was the fruit of an almost two year fractious constitutional convention of ca. 200 experts under the chairmanship of the former French president, Valéry Giscard-d'Estaing.³¹

Eight months later however, on May 29 and June 1, 2005, and after unusually acrimonious political campaigns, popular referenda in the EU member states of France and the Netherlands clearly rejected the proposed ratification of the signed constitutional treaty.

Central to these rejections were refusals on the part of many EU leading political figures to yield any part of what standardly is understood today as a state's political sovereignty. Debate continues today.

Yesterday, the debate seemed to turn finally not on the acceptability or not of the draft constitution's alleged overly-liberal

²⁹ *Traité établissant une constitution pour l'Europe* (Paris: La Documentation française, 2004).

[&]quot;Constitution. The rules and practices that determine the composition and functions of the organs of central and local government in a state and regulate the relationship between the individual and the state" (Oxford Dictionary of Law, 2009). For the EU's special problems with the constitutional consequences of eastward enlargements see W. Sadurski, Constitutionalism and the Enlargement of Europe (Oxford: OUP, 2012).

L'Europe de la construction à l'enlisement, ed. T. Ferenczi (Paris: Le Monde, 2012), esp. pp. 81-86, and pp. 98-102.

economic orientations and complexity. Rather, the debate turned, not surprisingly, on whether the constitution's preamble³² should or should not explicitly mention Europe's Christian backgrounds.

Two more basic issues, however, underlay the debate's traditional tensions in Europe between the sacred and the secular. The first issue was the exact nature of the limited sovereignty any acceptable EU constitution would require of its nation states. And the second was the identity of just those common basic European values³³ that were to inform ethically a properly articulated notion of limited sovereignty.³⁴

Today, early in 2014, the actual contexts of these issues are mainly not philosophical but geopolitical. And they are twofold.

In November 2012, the United States and China, Europe's most important global partners, had in one case re-elected their incumbent president for a second and final four year term and, in the other, appointed a new party leader for a ten year term. Where Europe now has to steer in order to restore its rapidly declining global status is quite unclear.³⁵

[&]quot;Preamble. A preliminary statement... introductory paragraph, section, or clause... in a statute, deed, or other formal document, setting forth its grounds and intention" (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 2007). The SOED also describes another, and strongly suggestive, sense of this key expression here, "preamble," as "a preceding fact or circumstance; esp. a presage, a prognostic."

On "European values" cf. www.europeanvaluesstudy.eu and the special issue of *Futuribles* (*Juillet-Août*, 2013). The linguistic bases of many of these values go back arguably to the emergence of the Indo-European languages of Europe between ca. 9800-7800 BCE (See E. Marris, "The Language Barrier," *Nature*, n° 453, pp. 446-448).

³⁴ Cf. the conception of a future Europe in J. Delors, "Les peuples doivent voir clair dans leur système de gouvernement," *Alternatives économiques* (*Hors Série*, N° 95, 1^{er} trimestre 2013), pp. 78-79, and the shifting conceptions in Germany's central views, for example, as reported in *Le Monde*, June 25, 2013.

Soros 2012, pp. 87-93. For a series of recent articles on the difficult future of Europe see Europe 2013, Alternatives économiques (Hors Série, N° 81, 3^e trimestre 2009).

For as detailed reports from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the International Monetary Fund have amply demonstrated, the European Union is still struggling with the financial, economic, political, and social consequences of the crises that began in the United States some five years previously.³⁶

Indeed, for the first time since 2009, Europe as a whole had fallen into recession. By April 2013 average unemployment in the then 27 member states³⁷ of the EU had reached more than 12.2% with more than 19 million people out of work.³⁸

Worrisomely, new EU elections were scheduled for May 2014. At the same time, widespread demonstrations of thousands of people broke out once again in Athens, Madrid, Rome, and Paris. Moreover, negotiations among the then 27 member states of the EU regarding the all-important budget for 2014-2020 were deadlocked for months.³⁹

Perhaps unexpectedly, however, the budget deadlock was not over the common economic good for Europe as a whole. Rather, the deadlock was essentially connected with inflated national egoisms, ⁴⁰ increasing populisms, and politically unacceptable limitations on state sovereignties. ⁴¹

For the continuing fallout on Europe and on the euro-skeptical backlash see *Le Monde*, April 24, 2013 and *Le Monde*, April 25, 2013.

On July 1, 2013, Croatia became the 28th member of the EU. On January 1, 2014, the EU member, Latvia, hopes to become the 18th member of the current 17 member Euro group within the EU. For details on the status of eight further countries actively concerned with further EU membership see "EU Enlargement: The Next Eight," BBC News: Europe, June 29, 2013. In alphabetical order the countries are: Albania, Bosnia-Hercegovina, Iceland, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey.

BBC World News, April 2, 2013; *Le Monde*, April 4, 2013; EuroStat May, 2013 (see http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics). The source for the April 2013 percentage of EU unemployment is Haver Analytics cited in the "Economic and Financial Indicators," *The Economist*, June 15, 2013.

³⁹ The EU Commission announced agreement on June 27, 2013 only.

⁴⁰ Le Monde, February 5, 2013.

⁴¹ Le Monde, November 22 and November 23, 2012.

Still, all deeply concerned stake-holders agreed at the time, and continue to agree today, that, without closer economic, financial, and budgetary union among the EU states, Europe itself will almost certainly continue its global decline.⁴²

Moreover, many political leaders of the EU member states themselves seem to realize that the key to such closer union will require something more substantive than, as perhaps too often in the past as in Lisbon in 2007,⁴³ just one more treaty revision.⁴⁴

What will be required of all EU member states is to renounce more of their substantive political sovereignty. And part of that requirement will involve enlarging the almost exclusively political understanding of sovereignty today. But just which of the various kinds of sovereignty that are now in question under the newly fashionable heading "limited sovereignty" still remains unclear.

Envoi

Can political sovereignty, under its present working understandings in the nation state of the European state sovereignty system, be properly understood as quasi-absolute? Or must it be understood as only relative? And if relative, then exactly in what senses "relative" and to what extent?

⁴² See for example the articles in the special issue of *Alternatives économiques* (*Hors–Série N°* 95, 1^{er} trimestre 2013), esp. pp. 12-29.

The EU heads of state comprising the European Council of the EU signed the draft Lisbon Treaty on December 13, 2007, and the Treaty became effective on December 1, 2009. The quite difficult negotiations tried to incorporate as much as possible of the previously rejected 2005 Treaty of the European Constitution without much success. Accordingly, agreement was reached on the understanding that the Lisbon Treaty was a "simplified treaty" that merely "amended without replacing" the major Maastricht Treaty signed in February 1992. Cf. Réveillard 2012, pp. 163-169 and Ferenczi 2012, p. 102.

⁴⁴ Cf. "Amsterdam, Nice, Lisbon...," The Economist, April 27, 2013, p. 37.

Are we to understand from the political scientists and the historians of ideas that political sovereignty is in some strong sense neither absolute nor relative but "limited"?

Moreover, if sovereignty itself is by its nature limited, is that alone good enough reason for maintaining that political sovereignty is not just limited but necessary.

Must any eventual and ratifiable new EU constitution entrench the most basic European values⁴⁵ so as finally to determine the meaning and significance of a freshly re-conceptualized notion of sovereignty?

Such a conception will need to include, I have been suggesting here, a newly restricted sense of political sovereignty in particular as limited state sovereignty.

The basic European values are not in fact strictly distinctive of European culture. Other world cultures in the past or in the present have certainly exhibited some such values, or some very much like them (cf. Galland and Lemel, *Valeurs et cultures en Europe* [Paris: La Découverte, 2007], esp. pp. 9-25).