

GLOBALIZATION AND THE ETHICAL GROUNDS OF COSMOPOLITANISM

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Abstract: Globalization is a far-reaching process in which economic, technological and social changes have dissolved the borders of space, becoming the messengers of a world without frontiers. All these should serve the interests of the general public and of progress. But do they? How could we find out, or what does this depend on? The issue is, in this case, a complex one. Many things certainly depend on the moral standards of all parties involved in the process. This paper presents several ethical reference points around which cosmopolitanism is built and that can provide a normative legitimacy given by the universal rights which constitute the condition of the coexistence of human beings, especially in a complex and multicultural society, as well as the gradual transformation of international law in a cosmopolitan order.

Keywords: cosmopolitanism, ethics, globalization

Human rights are, at the moment, an essential part of studies in various academic fields such as political philosophy, international relations, law and even anthropological and cultural studies. This turnaround is largely due to the effects of globalization and the intensification of social, political and economic relations.

The contemporary era is a period marked by the profound revision of values regarding the human civilization. The revision is caused by the superposition of several major trends that change reality and, subsequently, of those who take action. The world is experienced in an extremely dynamic manner. Never before in history have there been so many changes in such a short amount of time and for so many people. The internationalization of production and finance, globalization, culture and environmental issues are considered in as many conflict situations.

Globalization is understood as a process of liberalization, of chaotic, spontaneous, simultaneous and gradual integration of capital markets, goods or labour which until recently were conducted in a framework

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limited to one nation or one culture. Globalization is a chaotic process that cannot be predicted or controlled. It is a historical process that will result in the creation of a single world with interconnected regional, local and national segments. What happens in one place will be influenced by what happens in another place and, as a consequence, there will be effects in a third place in the world. The effects can be beneficial or not. Of course the actual form that globalisation – this interconnectedness – has taken, is exactly the opposite. It connects disjunctive histories, the developed, the developing and the underdeveloped, etc. In the discourse of contemporary globalization, though we speak about a space, a globe, and potentially a citizenship, a universal human morality, the reality is precisely the opposite. Not that the interdependencies don't constitute something new. But the reality of contemporary globalization - interconnectedness – must be seen as a structure of power - of global power -, and therefore of global inequalities, and conflict.

The “dynamic risk society rests on the assumption that – now and in the future – we must live in a world that has to make decisions concerning its future under the conditions of manufactured self-inflicted insecurity. Among other things, the world can no longer control the dangers produced by modernity. To be more precise, the belief that modern society can control the dangers that itself produces is collapsing; not because of its omissions and defeats but because of its triumphs. Climate changes, for instance, are a by-product of successful industrialization which systematically disregards its consequences on nature and humanity.”¹ The list of controversial issues is very long. How can they be solved? How can we manage to allow these transformations to take place peacefully? The demands of the modern world on ethical thought are unprecedented. Moreover, the ideas of rationality embodied in most contemporary moral philosophy cannot meet them.²

Under such circumstances, the contemporary society creates at least two challenges that address ethics directly. The first one is pragmatic: ethics should develop principles and standards to govern networking between business entities, individuals or nations. The second challenge is of theoretical nature. It is created by the requirement of having

¹ Ulrich Beck (2009). *World at Risk*. Cambridge/Malden, MA: Polity Press, p. 7.

² Bernard Williams (2006). *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. Routledge, p. 45.

society becoming constantly connected to the progress made in the medical, technical or economic areas of science.

Since globalization can be seen as a giant mechanism of social cooperation, many pressing problems have a global impact. The first step is to have ethics formulate several avenues of research designed to address the problem stated above.

It is an approach that shifts the emphasis to internal developmental processes within the social world rather than keeping it on seeing globalization as the primary mechanism.

A number of authors suggest that contemporary political philosophers tend to divide themselves into: communitarians (on the one hand) who believe that moral principles and obligations are grounded in specific groups and contexts, and cosmopolitans (on the other) who urge that we live in a world governed by overarching principles of rights and justice. In the latter sense – largely following Kant³ – cosmopolitanism refers to a philosophy that urges us all to be ‘citizens of the world’, thus, creating a worldwide community of humanity committed to common values.⁴

Behind *cultural, economic or political* cosmopolitanism, there is a moral ideal that aims at perceiving the *other* beyond cultural differences (that are essential or not), beyond political boundaries (that are permeable or not), beyond economic differences (that are insurmountable or not), by taking into account the fact that what all people have in common is that they are moral beings. When cosmopolitanism refers to "respect for differences", it primarily refers to the ability of people to come into contact with another person's universe that is fundamentally different from their own in a Levinasian way. This respectful attitude towards difference is not aesthetic. It is essentially moral.

The central thesis of cosmopolitan theories takes into account the need to consider all human beings as equal in terms of ethics. Here are a few well established categorizations regarding the manner in which theorists of cosmopolitanism relate to ethics.

Methodological cosmopolitanism includes both *ethical cosmopolitanism* and *institutional (or legal) cosmopolitanism*. There

³ Kant: *Political Writings (Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought)* (1991). H. S. Reiss (ed.), H. B. Nisbet (trans.), 2nd edition. Cambridge University Press, p. 125.

⁴ Steven Vertovec & Robin Cohen (eds.) (2003). *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context, and Practice*. Oxford University Press, p. 67.

can be different levels of focus for both ethical and institutional cosmopolitanism. At one level, ethical cosmopolitanism is focused on what the moral standing of *individual* human beings is in regard to their obligations and rights. Much of the discourse on global citizenship is focused on these ethical issues. Arguments (such as those of Peter Singer) over the obligations of the rich towards the poor are of this exact same type.⁵ In the field of international law, cosmopolitanism displays a logic that extends the scope of the discipline and to some extent transcends its origins. International law is conventionally conceived as a form of law which recognises the individual nation-state as its unit of analysis and advances national self-determination and non-interference in the internal affairs of other states as its guiding principles. It imagines a world of sovereign freedom constricted by few international rules to constrain the behaviour of governments towards other states and towards their own citizens and subjects. Cosmopolitanism seeks to extend the reach of international law beyond issues of state sovereignty. It concerns itself with the rights and responsibilities of world citizens. One of the key problems it addresses is that some of the worst violators of human rights can be states or state-like formations.

Ethical cosmopolitanism requires that all human beings be regarded as equal in terms of ethics. At a closer look, this refers to the following four types of normative commitments: individualism, fairness, inclusiveness and generality⁶.

Normative individualism means that the ultimate units of moral concern are human beings and not states, nations, ethno-cultural groups or small groups such as family. *Normative individualism* is necessary in terms of social well-being and it contributes to human happiness, but it has a contingent character and it becomes useless if these groups deliberately violate fundamental human rights.

Impartiality refers to the fact that each person should be considered in relation to other persons without regard to gender, ethnicity, religious or political orientation. Also, this type of normative commitment must take into account the need for rational allocation of resources.

⁵ Peter Singer (1972). "Famine, Affluence and Morality." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 1, no.3, p. 243.

⁶ Thomas Pogge (2002). *World Poverty and Human Rights: Cosmopolitan Responsibilities and Reforms*. Cambridge/Malden, MA: Polity Press/Blackwell, p.169.

Inclusiveness refers to the fact that nobody can be excluded from moral assessments or political decisions made on the basis of moral criteria.

Generality provides the individual with “status and global force; it is an object of concern for everyone, not only for fellow members of the organizations to which it belongs.”⁷

Only two cosmopolitan principles seem to be of importance on account of their generality. David Held even uses the term “metaprinciples” because they provide a framework in which other principles are used. These are the autonomy and the impartial reasoning principles⁸. They, in turn, justify formulating principles such as the principle of equality or freedom of expression. Normative commitments listed above can only make sense by taking into account the principle of autonomy – a principle that is found in all pluralist ideology in which persons are defined as free and equal citizens in a manner understandable for all.

The belief that all human beings are entitled to the full spectrum of rights and the converse belief that violation of these rights must not be tolerated significantly weigh on the ethical shoulders of many societies. This is the ability of human beings to think rationally and then act in accordance to their own values. In this paradigm of thought, Kant defined emancipation as the maturation process that endows individuals with enough self-confidence to use their own reason and understanding. Such maturity is prerequisite for equal and free political participation in a community structured around democratic values. Thus, the theory of justice can function as a consensually applicable theory by establishing a federal union according to *a priori* principles, a necessity derived from the legal principles designed to maintain its social being, the principle of advertising⁹ the maxims of international law and the antinomy between politics and morality in traditional polities. A legal system that would be structured in the form of a constitution which has the potential to generate systematic inequalities (and not offer equal opportunities or political opportunities for

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ David Held (2005). “Principles of cosmopolitan order.” In Gillian Brock & Harry Brighouse, *The Political Philosophy of Cosmopolitanism*. Cambridge University Press, pp.10-27.

⁹ See Rodica Croitoru (2008). “Studiu introductiv” la Immanuel Kant, *Opere: Spre pacea eternă / “Introductory Study” to Immanuel Kant, Toward Perpetual Peace*, All Publishing House.

minorities within the society that it governs) will simply not pass the test of the four principles of moral equality and will not be accepted under cosmopolitanism.

In conclusion, we cannot think of a society without values. Values are human ideals, desires and needs both individual and shared within a family, group or nation of a society. Values affect decisions that are to be taken based on a rational system. According to Ludwig von Mises, no human activity is without purpose and there is no purpose without value judgments. No human action is amoral. There is no decision without ethical consequence. Cosmopolitanism theorists assume that these interdependent relationships are not some simple unilateral cause-effect relations, but rather an entire network of complicated feedbacks that cannot function without an ethical rational foundation that is, subsequently, unanimously accepted.

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