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Contemporary Cosmopolitanism: Some Current Issues

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1. Introduction

Contemporary cosmopolitans standardly believe that every person has global stature as the ultimate unit of moral concern and is therefore entitled to equal respect and consideration no matter what her citizenship status or other affiliations happen to be.¹ Appealing to the idea of moral equality, cosmopolitans encourage us not to let local obligations crowd out responsibilities to distant others. Cosmopolitans highlight the responsibilities we have to those whom we do not know, but whose lives should be of concern to us. But if this is what cosmopolitanism is, surely all ethically defensible views must be cosmopolitan in flavour? In order to locate the points of tension between cosmopolitans and those resistant to such approaches, we need to cover more ground.

In this article we survey some current debates among cosmopolitans and their critics. We begin in the next section, Section 2, by surveying some distinctions typically drawn among kinds of cosmopolitanisms, before canvassing some of the diverse varieties of cosmopolitan justice in Section 3. Section 4 explores positions on the content of cosmopolitan duties of justice, especially the issue of whether the duties should focus on eliminating equality or some other standard central to a decent life. Here we also

examine the prominent debate between cosmopolitans and defenders of statist accounts of global justice. We analyze the position of egalitarian statist who believe that state borders do mark off some relevant boundary which affects what we owe one another. We then explore some common concerns about cosmopolitanism -- such as whether cosmopolitan commitments are necessarily in tension with other affiliations people typically have (Section 5) and how we should deal with issues concerning a perceived lack of authority in the global domain (Section 6) – and whether these can be addressed. In Section 7, we look briefly at how the concern with feasibility has led some to take up the challenge of devising public policy that is cosmopolitan in outlook, before offering some concluding remarks on future directions in these debates.

2. Two common cosmopolitan distinctions

We begin by reviewing some of the key distinctions widely in use in the literature.

i. Identity and Responsibility Cosmopolitanism

Being a cosmopolitan is most often characterized in terms of being a citizen of the world. This idea of being a citizen of the world captures the two central aspects of cosmopolitanism, as it is frequently understood today, namely it involves a thesis about identity and one about responsibility. As a thesis about identity, being a cosmopolitan indicates that one is a person who is influenced by various cultures. Cosmopolitanism as a thesis about identity also maintains that belonging to a particular culture is not an essential ingredient for personal identity or living a flourishing life: one can select

elements from diverse cultures, or reject all in favor of non-cultural options that are perceived as yet more important to particular people in living a flourishing life, as Jeremy Waldron (1992) maintains. Cosmopolitanism as a thesis about responsibility generates much debate, as discussed below. Roughly, the idea is that as a cosmopolitan, one should appreciate that one is a member of a global community of human beings. As such, one has responsibilities to other members of the global community. As Martha Nussbaum elaborates, one owes allegiance "to the worldwide community of human beings" and this affiliation should constitute a primary allegiance (Nussbaum, 1996, p. 4). We discuss responsibility cosmopolitanism in more detail in several sections below.

ii. Moral and Institutional Cosmopolitanism

The core idea with moral cosmopolitanism is that every person has global stature as the ultimate unit of moral concern and is therefore entitled to equal consideration no matter what her citizenship or nationality status. Thomas Pogge has an influential and widely cited synopsis of the key ideas, as he sees them:

“Three elements are shared by all cosmopolitan positions. First, individualism: the ultimate units of concern are human beings, or persons – rather than, say, family lines, tribes, ethnic, cultural, or religious communities, nations, or states. The latter may be units of concern only indirectly, in virtue of their individual members or citizens. Second, universality: the status of ultimate unit of concern attaches to every living human being equally – not merely to some sub-set, such as men, aristocrats, Aryans, whites, or Muslims. Third, generality: this special

status has global force. Persons are ultimate units of concern for everyone – not only for their compatriots, fellow religionists, or such like” (Pogge, 1992, 48).

Considerable debate surrounds what the cosmopolitan commitment *requires*. Indeed, cosmopolitanism’s force is often best appreciated by considering what it rules out. For instance, it rules out positions that attach no moral value to some people, or weights the moral value some people have differentially according to their race, ethnicity, or nationality. Furthermore, assigning ultimate rather than derivative value to collective entities such as nations or states is prohibited. If such groups matter, they matter because of their importance to individual human persons rather than because they have some independent, ultimate (say, ontological) value.

A common misconception is that cosmopolitanism requires a world state or government. To avoid this mistake, a distinction is often drawn between moral and institutional cosmopolitanism (Beitz, 1994). Institutional cosmopolitans maintain that fairly deep institutional changes are needed to the global system in order to realize cosmopolitan commitments adequately and such transformations would yield a world state (e.g. Cabrera, 2004). Moral cosmopolitans need not endorse that view, in fact many are against radical institutional transformations (Nussbaum, 1996). Such theorists maintain that our cosmopolitan responsibilities (such as protecting everyone’s basic human rights or ensuring everyone’s capabilities are met to the required threshold) should be effectively discharged, however they often argue that several arrangements might do this well. There are various possibilities for global governance that would not amount to a world state.

3. Varieties of Cosmopolitan Justice

What does cosmopolitan justice require? Accounts of justice that can plausibly lay claim to being cosmopolitan can originate from a number of theoretical perspectives. There are, after all, many different conceptions of how to treat people equally especially with respect to issues of distributive justice, and this is often reflected in these different accounts. Cosmopolitan justice could be argued for along various lines, including: utilitarian (prominently, Singer 1972); rights-based accounts (Shue 1980; Jones, 1999; Pogge 2002; Caney 2005); along Kantian lines (O'Neill, 2000); Aristotelian or capabilities-based (Nussbaum, 2000 and 2006); contractarian (Beitz, 1979; Pogge, 1989; Moellendorf, 2002; Brock, 2009); and sometimes using more than one approach (Pogge, 1989 and 2002; and Beitz 1979 and 2009).

There are other sharp division in arguing for cosmopolitan justice that are widely used in the literature. One common divide exists between those who argue for “humanist” views, versus those who use instead “associativist” or “relational” approaches. Humanists, such as Simon Caney, believe that our duties of justice track our shared humanity. We have duties of justice towards all human beings in virtue of our humanity. Associativists or relational theorists, by contrast, believe duties of justice track co-membership in some association, such as political or economic association. Unless we are members of some important association, we have no duties towards persons. On such accounts, if we happen to come across persons existing on some distant planet, with whom we have no prior interactions, we could not have any duties of justice towards such

people (though there might be some more minimal humanitarian obligations that we have towards them). Associativists, such as Darrel Moellendorf, tend to emphasize that all persons are part of at least one relevant association namely a global economic association and this is especially salient in our current era of economic globalization.

Cosmopolitan approaches to justice are often contrasted with “statist” accounts. For statist, states are an important factor in determining our duties of justice and they frequently maintain that the kinds of duties we have to fellow members of our state are different from, and typically stronger than, the duties we have to non-members. Cosmopolitans tend to place individuals front and centre of their theorizing about justice, though there might well be derivative implications concerning duties for states that flow from their analyses (Moellendorf, 2009). Statists, however, give the fact of membership in a state a certain kind of primacy of standing which cosmopolitans do not. There is a prominent debate between John Rawls and his critics that nicely follows these tracks and will provide a good illustration of the differences between the two approaches. Furthermore, this debate has been enormously influential in current debates on cosmopolitan justice, so we discuss this very briefly next.

In Rawls’s theory of justice for the international realm, our membership in a “people” makes for a very different justice context for Rawls compared with the views he famously argues for in *A Theory of Justice* (1971). One of the core principles that Rawls believes should govern relations among peoples in the international domain is that we should respect each people as free and equal. Goods such as self-determination and political autonomy are therefore prominent in this account. In respecting equality among peoples (rather than individual persons) liberals will need to adopt a foreign policy that

tolerates much diversity, especially in allowing non-liberal peoples to be admitted as full and equal members of the international community of states in good standing. Rawls's account has disappointed many cosmopolitans who argue that in tolerating non-liberal peoples (and a situation whereby individuals may be disadvantaged by those non-liberal principles in those societies), Rawls does not adequately respect individual human persons.

Rawls believes we have a duty "to assist burdened societies to become full members of the Society of Peoples and to be able to determine the path of their own future for themselves" (1999, p. 118) but this duty should not take the form of a Global Difference Principle as such a principle would not have a target or a cut-off point, and these are provided by his account which aims at all people's political autonomy. Cosmopolitans have expressed many criticisms of these views, especially the idea that we can aim for political autonomy in a heavily globalized world. For instance, they claim that Rawls ignores both the extent to which unfavorable conditions may result from factors external to the society and that there are all sorts of morally relevant connections between states, notably that they are situated in a global economic order that perpetuates the interests of wealthy developed states with little regard for the interests of poor, developing ones. Such facts mean that there is a context of global co-operation such that distribution according to a Global Difference Principle is appropriate (Beitz, 1979; Pogge, 1989; Moellendorf, 2002; Tan, 2004).

Thomas Pogge has done much to advance arguments which show our involvement in perpetuating poverty in developing countries (1994, 2001, 2002, 2008, *inter alia*). The so-called international borrowing privilege and the international resource privilege provide good examples of features of the international order that demonstrate

the relevant connections. Any group that exercises effective power in a state is recognized internationally as the legitimate government of that territory, and the international community is not concerned with how the group came to power or what it does with that power. Oppressive governments may borrow freely on behalf of the country (the international borrowing privilege) or dispose of its natural resources (the international resource privilege) and these actions are legally recognized internationally. These two privileges can have disastrous implications for the prosperity of poor countries (for instance) because these privileges provide incentives for coup attempts, they often influence what sorts of people are motivated to seek power, they facilitate oppressive governments being able to stay in office, and, should more democratic governments get to be in power, they are saddled with the debts incurred by their oppressive predecessors, thus draining the country of resources needed to firm up new democracies. Local governments have little incentive to attend to the needs of the poor, since their being able to continue in power depends more on the local elite, foreign governments, and corporations. Because foreigners benefit so greatly from the international resource privilege, they have an incentive to refrain from challenging the situation (or even to support oppressive governments). For these sorts of reasons, the current world order largely reflects the interests of wealthy and powerful states. Those in affluent developed countries have a responsibility to stop imposing this unjust global order and to make various institutional reforms, such as to international resource and borrowing privileges (2008).

In the space provided I cannot possibly do justice to all the complexities of Rawls's sophisticated account or that of his critics, but for some more detailed

exposition, critical discussion, and defense of the views, see Martin and Reidy (2007), Samuel Freeman (2006), David Reidy (2006), Moellendorf (2002), Tan (2004), and Brock (2009).

4. The content of our global distributive justice obligations:

Some current issues

While cosmopolitans agree that justice has wide scope, they disagree among themselves as to what the *content* of these global justice obligations are – just what are we obligated to do for all in showing the necessary equal respect and consideration?

There is considerable debate about the content of our global distributive justice obligations among cosmopolitans. Much discussion centers around a particular question: Should the focus of our obligations of global justice be on eliminating global poverty, especially ensuring people's basic human needs are met? Or, should we be concerned about eliminating inequalities more generally, even if people are above the poverty line? So, should we care about alleviating global poverty or inequality? In the language commonly used, should we care about sufficiency – whether people have enough for a decent life -- or equality? Sufficientarians in the global context typically focus on meeting needs, sustaining capabilities, protecting basic human rights, or securing self-determination, while egalitarians typically believe that there are more demanding duties than those advocated by sufficientarians.² Global egalitarians endorse various positions including a commitment to global equality of opportunity or distribution according to a global difference principle, equal positive freedom, or an equal share of the value of

global resources, though many new options are emerging as well including the commitment to relational equality.³

Global egalitarians often take as their point of departure a so-called luck egalitarian intuition. Consider how it is a matter of luck whether one is born into an affluent, developed country or a poor, developing nation. Yet where one happens to have been born tends to have such an important bearing on how one's life will go. The current distribution of global wealth and opportunities does not track persons' choices and efforts, but rather is greatly influenced and distorted by luck. What is thought to be objectionable here is that existing social and political institutions have converted contingent brute facts about people's lives into significant social disadvantages for some and advantages for others. Persons as moral equals can demand that any common order that they impose on one another start from a default assumption of equality and departures from this be justified to those who stand to be adversely affected. Many cosmopolitans are persuaded by the luck egalitarian view.

Should "the moral arbitrariness of birthplace" be a factor in determining the nature of our duties to one another? According to several contemporary egalitarians, membership in particular states can indeed be relevant to what we owe one another. We examine their views next.

A current debate rages between those who believe that full egalitarian justice applies within the state but not outside it, and those who believe the state does not and cannot make this kind of difference to one's commitment to egalitarian distributive justice. There are several forms of the argument. One kind emphasizes the fact that states are legally able to coerce whereas the lack of a global legal coercive authority rules

out the need for global equality (Blake, 2002; R. Miller, 1998). The idea here is that legal coercion must be justifiable to those who will find their autonomy restricted, if it is to be legitimate. This coercion would be justifiable if no arbitrary inequalities are permissible in the society, hence we get a strong commitment to traditional egalitarian conceptions of distributive justice. This form of argument has been criticized from several directions. One line of attack is to dispute the idea that coercion is necessary for a concern with egalitarian distributive justice. There may be other reasons to care about equality in the absence of coercion. Another way to criticize this argument is to emphasize that even if we agree that coercion triggers egalitarian duties of justice, coercion in the global sphere being rampant, the necessary ingredient for egalitarian duties of justice is present at the global level (Cohen and Sabel, 2006; Abizadeh, 2007).

A second version of the “equality among compatriots but not among non-compatriots” position argues that when we make laws within a state, we become “joint-authors” of the laws of our society (Nagel, 2005). As “joint-authors” citizens live under a shared coercive system, the legitimacy of which relies on their consent. In order to give their consent, members can demand that no arbitrary inequalities are permissible. So their shared involvement in authoring and sustaining a coercive system, triggers egalitarian duties among compatriots. But there is no relevant analog in the global context: there is no global law making process, and so no global legislation of which all persons are similarly joint-authors. This argument has been challenged in several ways, including questioning whether joint authorship of legislation is necessary for the requisite concern (Caney, 2008) and also arguing that even if it is, similar processes can be found in the global context (Cohen and Sabel, 2006). Furthermore, others contend that the

argument is somewhat perverse in that I owe justification for coercion only to joint-authors of a coercive scheme, whereas those who are not similarly placed are owed none. This thereby removes protection to some of the most vulnerable people: those affected by my coercion but uninvited to the joint-authorship process in virtue of their status as non-members (Julius, 2006; Abizadeh, 2007).

Another attempt to justify the difference proceeds from an awareness that social co-operation grounds special duties. A democratic society is one in which there is fair social co-operation and arrangements that people can reasonably endorse. Members of a state owe egalitarian duties of justice to one another because each member plays a part in upholding and sustaining the collective goods of the society, such as maintaining a stable system of property rights or doing their part to uphold the good of security. Reasonable endorsement requires that there be no arbitrary inequalities within a society. Since there is no scheme of global social co-operation of the same type or scale, there is no similar requirement at the global level (Freeman, 2006; Sangiovanni, 2007). Several cosmopolitans have challenged the view that there is no set of global institutions based on social co-operation (Beitz, 1979; Buchanan, 2000). Others contest the normative argument that egalitarian justice only arises when there is social co-operation and maintain rather that justice can require the very establishment of such institutions of social co-operation (Abizadeh, 2007; Caney, 2008). Sufficient interaction among agents may obligate agents to ensure that the interactions proceed on fair terms, which might require the establishment of institutional arrangements that can secure or protect such fair terms.

5. Reconciling cosmopolitanism with other commitments:

Can cosmopolitanism accommodate partiality?

A common complaint against cosmopolitanism is that cosmopolitans cannot accommodate special attachments and commitments that fill most ordinary human beings' lives with value and meaning. It is commonly thought that cosmopolitans must reject attachments to those in local or particular communities in favor of an ideal of impartial justice that the individual must apply directly to all, no matter where they are situated on the globe. But this is not a position advocated by many cosmopolitans.⁴ Indeed, most contemporary cosmopolitans recognize that for many people, some of their most meaningful attachments in life derive from their allegiances to particular communities, be they national, ethnic, religious, or cultural. Their accounts often seek to define the legitimate scope for such partiality, by situating these attachments in a context which clarifies our obligations to one another. Cosmopolitan justice provides the basic framework or structure and thereby the constraints within which legitimate patriotism may operate (see, for instance, Tan, 2004 and 2005). Cosmopolitan principles should govern the global institutions, such that these treat people as equals in their entitlements (regardless of nationality and power, say). However, once the background global institutional structure is just, persons may defensibly favor the interests of their compatriots (or co-nationals, or members of other more particular groups), so long as such partiality does not conflict with their other obligations, for instance, to support global institutions. So cosmopolitan principles should govern the global institutions, but need not directly regulate what choices people may make within the rules of the

institutions. One of the strengths of Kok-Chor Tan's view (e.g. 2004) is that even though cosmopolitan justice provides the justification for the limits of partiality towards group members, the value of those attachments is not reduced to cosmopolitan considerations, which is arguably a flaw with other attempts (e.g., Nussbaum, 1996).

Cosmopolitanism is essentially committed to these two central ideas: first, the equal moral worth of all individuals, no matter what borders separate them from one another. Second, there are some obligations that are binding on all of us, no matter where we are situated. Acknowledging these two claims leaves plenty of room to endorse additional obligations, that derive from more particular commitments. So, we see that cosmopolitanism is indeed compatible with having many other particular commitments and attachments.

Furthermore, some argue that cosmopolitan duties and duties to co-members of states are not only compatible, but rather are often mutually reinforcing. We often need to attend to cosmopolitan duties in order to meet our obligations to compatriots, such as when we need to establish fair international institutions that enable citizens to meet needs. And in order to discharge cosmopolitan commitments and secure global justice goals, we often must advance local institutions that can realise the means for all to enjoy prospects for a decent life. There are many other noteworthy attempts to reconcile global and local duties. The arguments of Keller (2013), Schuppert (2013), and Ronzoni (2013) provide some further fresh ideas.

6. Is authority in the global domain problematic?

There are some who are skeptical of the cosmopolitan idea of obligations of justice that extend globally, at least given our current circumstances. Grounds for such skepticism include the fact that since there is no way to enforce obligations of justice at the global level, there can be no such obligations (Nagel, 2005). Another concern revolves around fears of what might ensue when there is a concentration of power (Kukathas, 2006). Underlying these concerns is an assumption that obligations concerning cosmopolitan justice require a world state, and since we have reason to fear the potential for world government to lead to oppressive consequences, we have reasons to fear cosmopolitanism. However, many reject the assumption that a world state is necessary or desirable and differentiate between global government and global governance. Though we may need some ways to co-ordinate management of our transnational affairs, this need not amount to world government. Supra-state organizations need not replace state level ones, such as currently exists with the European Union or the United Nations. In these cases, transnational institutions complement rather than replace states. Different models are available for thinking through a “post-sovereign” political world order, which incorporate scope for state-level institutions, as well as ones which are sub-state and supra-state level (Held, 1995; Held and McGrew, 2002; Held and Koenig-Archibugi, 2005; Pogge, 1992).

A frequently raised issue concerns how divided authority and sovereignty arrangements might work in practice. In fact, we have examples of divided and delegated authority that work reasonably well in practice. States in a federation (such as in the US),

local and regional authorities within a state, and the European Union, all involve divided authority and often function effectively on a day-to-day basis. Forms of global governance can be diffuse and overlapping, so long as they have clear sites of accountability. Indeed, whether we like it or not, we already have a system of global governance that is just like this, given all the international bodies that have authority over various domains that govern our lives (such as the United Nations, World Trade Organization, World Health Organization, or World Bank). Cosmopolitans might instead focus their arguments on how to reform this system to make it more responsive to the ideals of moral equality or other goals of global justice. As Thomas Nagel (2005) notes, we have transitioned to more just arrangements in the past by demanding that the existing concentration of power be exercised more justly, that is, by working on what is already there. It is likely that there will be a similar path to global justice. People might be motivated to demand more legitimacy of the institutions that dominate their lives if their sense of compassion and empathy for others is increased, as those who advocate for the position known as “Education for World Citizenship” maintain (e.g. Nussbaum, 1996).⁵

8. Future directions, the public policy turn, and some concluding remarks

Increasingly, philosophers have turned their attention to making recommendations for improvements in global policies, arrangements, and institutions often, in the process, advocating for important changes. I have already noted some of the proposals Thomas Pogge has made concerning reforms to international borrowing and resource privileges in Section 3. Christian Barry and Sanjay Reddy’s work (2008) also provides a noteworthy

attempt to outline detailed proposals for how Just Linkage arrangements can promote fair trade, creating desirable trading opportunities for those who offer improved employment conditions. And several others have detailed proposals concerning institutional reforms, for instance to promote global health (Pogge, 2011) or improved taxation and accounting arrangements (Brock, 2009; Moellendorf, 2009; Pogge, 2008).

In many ways the widespread and growing commitment to the importance of human rights in regulating our international affairs is something of a cosmopolitan achievement in the struggle for global justice. The fact that we have a document that clearly specifies the entitlements that all human beings have is quite remarkable, given the diversity of worldviews and perspectives represented among the world's people. Furthermore, we have an international legal order that has certain commitments to uphold these entitlements. All those states that are members of the United Nations have signed up to respect human rights in at least certain contexts. The cosmopolitan idea that each person has equal moral worth and deserves some fundamental protections and entitlements is not just a theoretical position but has made some significant inroads in international law and global policy making, though this is not to deny that we still have far to go before the cosmopolitan vision is adequately instantiated in the world.

In each of the preceding sections, I have highlighted current points of tension in debates and shown how one might navigate a range of issues and challenges that are presented for cosmopolitanism. However, by offering some ways cosmopolitans might resolve issues or respond to challenges, this should not mask the fact that *all* these matters are still the subject of lively debate. Indeed, none of the debates featured in this article are settled. Every aspect of cosmopolitanism treated here is still the subject of

critical engagement: from the ways in which one ought to define cosmopolitanism to what cosmopolitan commitment entails (see for instance, *The Monist* 94, no.4 and Brock, 2013).

In addressing the main issues identified as salient to various kinds of cosmopolitans and their critics, more work is needed on a range of central questions, including these: How does membership in global and national associations influence our duties to one another in the global context? To what extent are cosmopolitan and special duties reconcilable? What significance, if any, does the moral arbitrariness of birthplace have to accounts of global distributive justice? Do forms of coercion matter to the nature of our duties to one another and if they do, how and why does coercion matter? How, if at all, does equality matter at the global level? What kinds of reforms to our global and local institutions do cosmopolitan concerns require? Are these reforms feasible, even if normatively desirable? What account of feasibility ought we to embrace in discussing which cosmopolitan proposals could feasibly be implemented in our world? What might the cosmopolitan recommend as just policy in specific domains such as climate change, immigration, fair trade, health care, taxation, and the like? These kinds of questions emphasize that much work remains for all normative theorists concerned with justice in the global domain, be they of a cosmopolitan persuasion or otherwise.

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¹ For more on this convergence see Gillian Brock and Harry Brighouse (2005) and Brock (2011).

² Prominent sufficientarians include D. Miller (2007); R. Miller (2010); Nussbaum (2006); Rawls (1999).

³ Prominent global egalitarians include Caney (2005); Moellendorf (2009); and Tan (2004). For the idea of relational equality see Brock (2009, Chapter 12).

⁴ See, for instance, the essays in Brock and Brighthouse (2005).

⁵ See, for instance, the Council for Education in World Citizenship at:
<http://www.cewc.org>.