

Cosmopolitans and Communitarians: An Ethical Battleground for a Globalised World

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ABSTRACT: *The unprecedented interconnectedness our contemporary society is witnessing gives rise to widely ranging, and often contentious viewpoints on globalisation. The political and social discourses surrounding this, therefore, require a framework such as Held and McGrew's (2007), to work from in order to address the question of how nation states fit into a globalised world that has perhaps outgrown hegemony. By examining the discussion around cosmopolitanism and communitarianism, political and social discourses attempt to connect how a globalised world is best understood, and how values may indeed be informed. This discussion addresses the notion that cosmopolitanism is too trendy or elitist, and that communitarianism lacks the celebration of diversity. Finally, it is argued that cosmopolitanism creates a space for global ideals to be expressed and rationally discussed, despite perhaps being privileged.*

KEYWORDS: *cosmopolitanism, communitarianism, universal standards, globalisation, populism, social discourse.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Within the debate on globalisation, the opposing normative perspectives of cosmopolitanism and communitarianism stand out in a quickly globalising world. Cosmopolitanism finds opposition due to its ideals of a global outlook and universal standards. Through rising right-wing populism across the globe, and particularly the rhetoric around 'threatening' immigration, communitarian ideals are creating a space in the political and social discourse. The discussion surrounding globalisation is contentious and complex, however, an approach to contemporary issues within this is possible. By applying Held and McGrew's (2007) model, the opposing views of cosmopolitanism in the globalisation debate will be framed.

Foremost, in order to briefly clarify the controversy surrounding globalisation, Held and McGrew's model must be examined. They clearly outline that 'controversies about globalization are shaped by two principal axes of disagreement' (2007: 5), namely intellectual and normative. As the authors point out, 'these two axes define a conceptual space for thinking about what distinguishes the plurality of voices in the debate' (5). Taking the vertical intellectual axis first, Held and McGrew describe it as intellectual hegemony, specifically in the social sciences, in terms of analysis of the concept of globalisation. On this axis, the globalists, or the promoters of positive globalisation, are at the top, and the sceptics, or societal forms of analysis, are at the bottom. The horizontal scale, which Held and McGrew define as the normative scale, includes cosmopolitans, or promoters of global citizens, to the left, and communitarians, or those who champion nation-state authority, to the right.

To explore these axes of Held and McGrew's model further, the aspects of both scales and their perspectives on globalisation should be inspected. On the intellectual or explanatory scale, globalists contend that globalisation, both positive and unique, 'remains far more socially and institutionally entrenched than its critics have recognised... [and] in this decade remains on almost all measures more intensive and extensive than a decade ago' (9). Conversely, sceptics claim that 'many accounts of globalization confuse cause and effect' (7), and within this critique find that globalizations' effects are overemphasized and that 'contemporary globalization is far from historically unprecedented' (7). On the normative scale, communitarians represent 'forms of ethical reasoning: ... an attachment to making the world a singular "good global community"', while oppositely, communitarians contest 'a world of coexisting "good national or local communities"' (5-6). Within these four, relatively broad aspects, Held and McGrew offer 'four distinct modes of analysis'.

Firstly, transformationalists take globalisation to be an 'existing condition and considered to be amenable to either political reform or transformation' (2007: 163). Secondly, critical globalists see globalisation as a 'new form of domination to be resisted along with any grand political projects for remaking the world according to cosmopolitan universal principles' (163). Thirdly, statist view the idea of globalisation with 'deep scepticism' and rather emphasise 'the continued centrality of state power to the improvement of the human condition', and, finally, globalists reject the privilege of globalization and 'the intermeshing of processes of globalization and localization is emphasised, but with a normative attachment to "rooted cosmopolitanism"'

(164). However, Held and McGrew do concede that Appiah argues that this last point, in regard to rooted cosmopolitanism, is a ‘blurring of ethical attachments between ethical cosmopolitanism and communitarianism (170). While not entirely conclusive or comprehensive, Held and McGrew are convinced that the model presents a ‘device for identifying, mapping and differentiating the intellectual and ethical contours of the great globalization controversy’ (6). Some of these contours include economic, social, military, and political activities, as well as intensifying technology growth (Held & McGrew, 2007: 2-3). This interconnectedness that our contemporary society is witnessing, unprecedented or not in its rapid speed and vastness, is in itself a contributor to the globalization controversy, and this model allows complexity and diversity to be applied to the analysis.

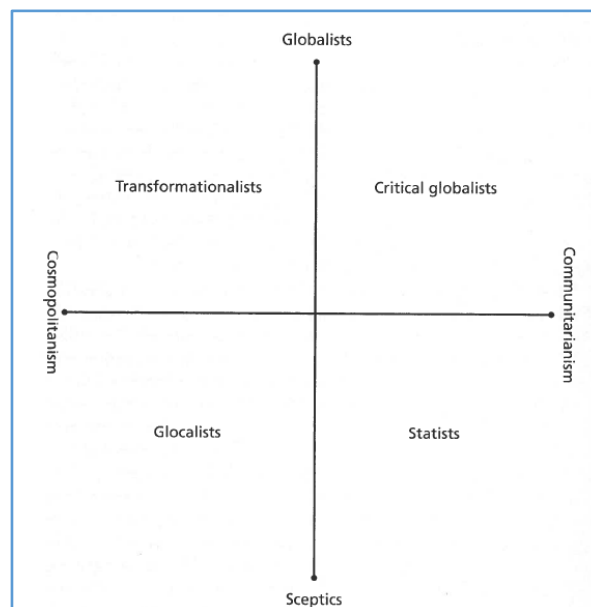


Figure 1. Held and McGrew's model

This intensification of global interconnectedness is what leads to disputes; suddenly, a very intricately connected world is no longer merely separated by borders and nations but is rather a world in which communication is instantaneous. Held and McGrew even state ‘in so far as local events may come to have profound global consequences and global events can have serious local consequences’ (3). While the positions described above in Held and McGrew’s model are intersecting and overlapping as well as differing, there are clear arguments, or ‘camps’ of essentially ethical belief. The authors argue this clearly: ‘Indeed the most contentious aspect of the study of contemporary globalization concerns the ethical and the political and whether that better world should be defined by cosmopolitan or communitarian principles, or both’ (2007: 173). These two opposing viewpoints on the normative scale of Held and McGrew’s model will be specifically explored.

Cosmopolitanism vs Communitarianism

When regarding the theory of cosmopolitanism, Kwame Anthony Appiah is often cited as leading the discussion for contemporary cosmopolitanism. In his work on cosmopolitanism, Appiah describes the theory as thus:

There are two strands that intertwine in the notion of cosmopolitanism. One is the idea that we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship. The other is that we take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance (2006: 23).

Simply, it can be said that cosmopolitanism encourages universal standards as world citizens. Ulrich Beck states a characteristic of cosmopolitanism is essentially ‘globalization from within’ (2006: 9) and goes on to discuss that, from a social perspective, realistic cosmopolitanism ‘presupposes a universalistic minimum involving a number of substantive norms which must be upheld’ (19). Global organizations like the United Nations and their policies such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and Responsibility to Protect (R2P) would be such examples. This is further exemplified when Appiah says, ‘the one thought that cosmopolitans share is that no local loyalty can ever justify forgetting that each human being has responsibilities to every other’ (2006: 24). R2P and the commitment organizations like the UN

have against genocide and ethnic cleansing are key here. Appiah further reiterates this in his article “Cosmopolitan Patriots” in that ‘we should, in short, as cosmopolitans, defend the right of others to live in democratic states, with rich possibilities of association within and across their borders; states of which they can be patriotic citizens’ (1997: 624). This seems quite straightforward and to any liberal, global citizen, perfectly obvious – why should anyone want the rights of others not to be upheld? While the above policies have their own controversies, they are, overall, considered universal. Other aspects that do fall under the articles of the UDHR, such as policies on refugees, however, are highly contentious. These contentions are primarily brought forward by communitarians.

As an opposing viewpoint to cosmopolitanism, communitarianism sees a commitment to the autonomy of the nation-state, prioritisation of the local community and obligations considerably more locally focused. Appiah (2006) states ‘for counter-cosmopolitans...universalism issues in uniformity’ (170) and ‘the real challenge to cosmopolitanism isn’t the belief that other people don’t matter at all; it’s the belief that they don’t matter very much’ (177). What is eerily reminiscent in these points is that the latter was expressed by leaders such as Hitler, Stalin, and Pol Pot. If ‘not everyone matters’, then it becomes much easier to blame and sow mistrust and hatred of others. This is not merely a sentiment from history, however. White supremacists and supposed Christian Republican supporters of the Trump administration in the United States are also expressing this, particularly in the recent US-Mexico border crisis.

Trump and the border crisis clearly exemplify communitarian principles, in which families of asylum seekers are separated and detained. The fact that children are being taken from their families is a clear and resounding message for the global community that the nation comes first at any cost. This particular scenario echoes what Held and McGrew (2007) state: ‘In the political sphere, globalization elicits sharply divergent responses and fuels radically different projects, from the globophobia of the extreme right to the globophilia of neoliberals. Both the academic and the political controversies are interrelated, connecting how the contemporary world order is best understood and explained to the issue of what values and ethical principles should inform its future development’ (2007: 2). It is neither ethical nor admissible that vulnerable families should be separated, but as the threat of chronic immigration plays into the Trump administration’s pledges of ‘America First’, it suddenly becomes much easier to brand families as ‘illegal’. President Trump recently (2019) tweeted ‘It is becoming more and more obvious that the Radical Democrats are a Party of open borders and crime. They want nothing to do with the major Humanitarian Crisis on our Southern Border. #2020!’; subsequently, he then re-tweeted a reply by one of his supporters, in which she says ‘They [Democrats] are eaten alive by hate for our President & his voters! They care more about illegal immigrants than they do for American citizens! Look no further than CA re-directing money away from US citizens to illegal immigrants. Thank you for putting America 1st Mr. President’ (Twitter). This is just one of a multitude of examples from the particular US-Mexico border crisis where the rhetoric is largely nationalist.

Moreover, nationalist and populist views are becoming more mainstream, not just in the US, but in Europe and elsewhere in the world. As Held and McGrew (2007) argue, ‘globalization is synonymous with a process of time-space compression... in which the sources of even very local developments, from unemployment to ethnic conflict, may be traced to distant conditions or actions’ (3). In addition to the social perspective, Beck and Sznaider (2006) point out that, economically, ‘only those who fight for regulation at the global level have the remotest chance of success. Thus, much of the anti-globalization movement is in fact promoting an alternative globalization’ (15). Global organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) spread their influence and manage a global economy. In Gianpiero Petriglieri’s article “In Defense of Cosmopolitanism” (2016), he muses that ‘these are dark times for cosmopolitans. Discontent with globalization and resentment towards minorities, immigrants, and intellectuals have fuelled the rise of nationalism in Europe and the United States’, and ‘nationalism is a blunt tool for those hurt by the cultural and economic blows of globalization to strike back’ (Harvard Business Review). In regard to the previously mentioned case at the US-Mexico border, it is far easier to place the blame of current trends on an overarching aspect like globalisation if it is believed that outsiders are taking national resources.

While the animosity between local and cosmopolitan communities is nothing new in history, the many facets of these communities are more complicated than ever before due to the speed in which changes are occurring. Beck and Sznaider (2006) argue that, in fact, ‘without the stabilizing factors which nationalism affords in dealing with difference, cosmopolitanism is in danger of losing itself’ (20); thus, the nationalism-cosmopolitanism struggle actually philosophically depends on each other to exist. Without one another, there would be no ethical parameters in which to work or universal principles to debate. In regard to the seemingly universal ethical principles previously discussed, cosmopolitanism is often considered to be universalism. However, as David Hollinger (2001) notes ‘for cosmopolitans, the diversity of humankind is a fact; for universalists it is a problem’ (239), and Appiah states ‘for the cosmopolitan also celebrates the fact that there are different local human ways of being’ (1997: 621). In addition, Beck and Sznaider (2006) also say that ‘cosmopolitanism diverges from universalism in that it assumes that there is not just one language of

cosmopolitanism, but many languages, tongues, grammars' (14). Thus, universalism can be considered too simple in terms of dealing with multiple facets, whereas what Beck and Sznaider call 'realistic cosmopolitanism' is not about homogeneity, rather about creating a dialogue (19). This also indicates the aspects of 'old and new' cosmopolitans, in which the 'old' represents a more universal outlook, and the 'new' focusses on realism.

Universalism, therefore, manages to ignore the unique aspects of humanity and beauty of diversity. Cosmopolitanism takes these differences into account and aspects like human rights that are seemingly undebatable are key. Beck and Sznaider also indicate that 'methodological cosmopolitanism implies becoming sensitive and open to the many universalisms' (2006: 13), even when seemingly conflicting. Additionally, they say that realistic cosmopolitanism 'must embrace the contradictions that, in order to uphold its basic principles – defending individual liberties and safeguarding difference – it may be necessary to violate them' (2006: 20). Therefore, even though there should be the universal principle of the recognition of freedom for all, the application is perhaps not conceivable for tyrants or warlords. This includes other divisions in society, for example, social strata. This is a dilemma cosmopolitanism must face.

However, as Beck and Sznaider(2006) also note, the principles that the majority agree on are not entirely due to the concepts of cosmopolitanism or universalism, as 'already prior to any cosmopolitan institution-formation, global norms are produced by outrage over circumstances that are felt to be intolerable' (12). These reactions can be applied at a local or global level and communication about these outrages or threats also contribute to cosmopolitanism, as 'people will "feel" that they are defending the foundations of their own identities' when defending human rights for others (Beck & Sznaider, 2006: 12). It is these attitudes that help build the identity of cosmopolitanism and make it popular, contributing to what they call 'unintended cosmopolitanism' (2006: 7).

In fact, some scholars claim that cosmopolitans are becoming a 'tribe' in themselves, though Pertriglieri (2016) notes that unfortunately 'cosmopolitans are being portrayed as a detached and indulgent elite' (Harvard Business Review). In his New York Times article, "The Myth of Cosmopolitanism", Ross Douthat (2016) argues that 'elite tribalism is actively encouraged by the technologies of globalization, the ease of travel and communication', and that 'like any tribal cohort they [self-proclaimed cosmopolitans] seek comfort and familiarity: From London to Paris to New York, each Western "global city" is increasingly interchangeable, so that wherever the citizen of the world travels he already feels at home' (New York Times). Nayar (2010) echoes this feeling when he says 'metropolises across the world have lost their traditional dominant populations and cultures and seen the mixing of cultures and traditions in a "hybridization" of place' (164). However, the question of how much actual mixing is truly taking place must be asked.

Thus, an interesting paradox arises in that while cosmopolitanism is meant to be defined by openness, tolerance, connection and multiculturalism, it actually creates an exclusive lifestyle. This is suggested in Marie Ostby's article (2018) when she posits another way to 'conceptualise cosmopolitan thinking is through the elitist, post national self-distancing of an exile or émigré figure' (263). This perspective of cosmopolitanism conjures up an image of international business expatriates or diplomats, striding forth with a new brand of colonization through Western multinationals and opportunities. This popular concept of cosmopolitanism creates a dichotomy between 'citizens of the world' and 'migrants' and how they are viewed and received within communities. This can be seen through the Trump's rhetoric of encouraging 'highly skilled workers': 'H1-B holders in the United States can rest assured that changes are soon coming which will bring both simplicity and certainty to your stay, including a potential path to citizenship. We want to encourage talented and highly skilled people to pursue career options in the U.S.' (Twitter). Essentially, some workers are sought, and others are not. Therefore, as Ostby notes, the limitations on actually living a cosmopolitan life, 'limits imposed by passports, visas, and work permits, but also by racial profiling, sex-and gender-based discrimination, and socioeconomic inequality' (2018: 263), are so numerous, that only the privileged and elite can truly live a cosmopolitan life by the popular standards. As Stuart Hall said in a 2006 video interview, 'interconnectedness has been made as a structure of power', which can be seen by the dominance of Western powers in much of the cosmopolitan lifestyle. As an aspect of global identity, cosmopolitanism is complex and multi-layered; it can be viewed as exclusive and to a certain extent, it is, yet it is also an identity that is generally becoming more common and more accepted for all types of transitory people.

II. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, within the globalisation debate, cosmopolitanism ideals are much contended as well as embraced. Held and McGrew's model provides a way in which to explore and frame the many facets of the cosmopolitan vision, though limitations are of course expected. While the world is more interconnected than perhaps ever before, narrow-minded rhetoric of right-wing populism and nationalists is seeing a particular re-emergence. Though cosmopolitanism is often criticised as being homogeneous, impractically too universalist, or elitist, the concept does provide a space in which global ideals such as human rights, environmental policies,

and tolerance can be expressed. Contemporary society needs such a place if the local and global are to ever truly work together in creating a better world.

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