

"Cosmopolitanism and Democratic Theory"

The general idea of cosmopolitanism.

In the 1720's Montesquieu, the French political theorist and writer, described himself a "citizen of the world". This broad citizenship did not, to his mind, contradict his allegiances to France. Rather, it described for him an ethic of what would come to be called cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism in the European Enlightenment was a way of living in the world in a way that was ethically attuned to a sense of a common humanity. To be a 'citizen of the world', a universal citizen, even citizen of the 'cosmos', has been a compelling way of imagining one's ethical life and political responsibilities in European modernity.

Montesquieu did not go very deeply into the political dimensions of cosmopolitanism, although he did briefly explore federalist theories. To him, and to most Enlightenment thinkers, at least until the German philosopher Immanuel Kant at the end of the century, cosmopolitanism was more an individual ethic. Cosmopolitans usually traveled frequently (Kant was an exception in this regard) and often studied other cultures.

Cosmopolitanism and democracy

Cosmopolitanism is not necessarily democratic. More often, cosmopolitanism is associated with liberalism. Cosmopolitans tend to endorse liberal principles of individual rights and of toleration for differences of culture and belief. Indeed, cosmopolitanism often takes a radically individualist form, in which it is believed that universal rights and justice is best achieved through the private reason of individuals. Essentially, this amounts to the belief that cosmopolitan values are best realized outside of politics, through private travel as well as scientific, intellectual, artistic and educational exchange. In modernity, this has often linked cosmopolitanism to free market capitalism. This linkage has been reinforced by urbanization, and the development of cities as centers of trade and finance, the home of those classes and elites who tend to travel and participate more in cosmopolitan cultures.

Some connections were forged between democracy and cosmopolitanism with the development of **internationalism** in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Internationalists held that in modernity class as well as some social and humanitarian interests required political movements and solidarity across national borders. In the nineteenth century the radical working class movements, socialist, communist and anarchist, were most often internationalist. They argued, as Marx most famously did, that workers' fundamental interests were in solidarity with workers in other countries, not with the bourgeoisie of their own national states. National states, especially the democratic ones, Marx argued, were, in fact, structurally linked to the interests of the dominant, bourgeois class and could not promote the interests of the workers. Only by organizing a worldwide movement, which broke down national barriers, could workers really promote their shared interest in emancipation. Internationalism in this sense

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declined in the twentieth century, in part through what many considered the betrayal of internationalist ideals by the Soviet Union, in part through the success of national revisionist political programs (the Labor Party in Britain, the Democratic Socialists in Germany), and in part through the reactions of working classes to world war. Currently, there is increasing interest among some labor unions in reviving forms of internationalism in the context of globalization.

Another form of internationalism from the 19th century also made some connection between to democratic politics for cosmopolitans. Suffragettes and anti-slavery movements also began to organize transnationally. These groups acted both in their national states, and pioneered form of international publicity and public opinion meant to put pressure on all states. In fact, there is some renewed interest in these movements as possible models of multi-layered citizenship in the context of globalization. In the twentieth century, peace movements developed, drawing on movements, which began in the later 19th century, to ban weapons considered to be cruel that were produced by industrialization.

Cosmopolitanism and globalization

In the context of globalization, interest in cosmopolitanism has revived, and democratic theorists are now paying attention to its political dimensions. The possibility of a universal law, rooted in universal principles (such as human rights) and in international organizations has been revived by democratic theorists such as David Held, whom you read before Spring break. The debate about the meaning of cosmopolitanism has gone beyond the debate about a universal law as well, returning to Montesquieu's ideal of a 'citizenship of the world'; cosmopolitanism as a way of being in the world, as an search for commonalities among nations and peoples.

An important aspect of the current debate is the compatibility of cosmopolitan ethics with national allegiances. Another regards individualism.

The debate about the compatibility of cosmopolitan ethics and the state, concerns the possibility of developing forms of citizenship that are multi-layered. That is, is it possible for citizenship to simultaneously involve allegiances to the nation-state at the same time as one adheres to universal, moral principles? In practice, the latter have come to inhere in a wide range of transnational organizations and practices that effectively limit national sovereignty. Democratic cosmopolitans grapple with the problem that even in the context of globalization, the state remains both powerful, and, moreover, an important source of democracy. Some argue that globalization is overstated, and that the state remains sufficiently strong to be the focus of democratic action and regulation.

On the left¹, especially for European social democrats, the debate has also been about how to ensure the democratic regulation of capitalism. In the 20th century European

¹ Some conservatives also tend to worry about the decline of the nation-state but not from a cosmopolitan point of view. They tend to worry about the loss of sovereignty, especially in security. These are important arguments (and we discussed them somewhat

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states, and in the United States with the 'New Deal' after the Second World War, the state has been instrumental in regulating the economy to ensure democracy. The decline of the state with globalization seems to challenge the ability of the state to regulate the economy. As you have seen in your readings, cosmopolitan democratic theorists differ in how much the power of the state to effect democratic regulation of the economy has actually declined (Held taking one of the stronger positions on this), and on the possibility that cosmopolitan law and international organizations can effectively replace the state in this respect (here, Habermas is more skeptical than is Held). Several theorists that we will address in a couple of weeks take a somewhat different view from Held and Habermas. They believe that it is possible and necessary for contemporary democratic citizenship to be ambiguously perched between state-centered and cosmopolitan commitments. These theories, we will see, tend to weaken the universalism of the cosmopolitan commitments (i.e. they do not tend to seek unchanging, universal laws, but a looser ethos of cultural toleration and respect), and also argue for the more skeptical approaches to state power, but which do not reject the importance of the state.

The debate over individualism moves in a slightly different direction. Cosmopolitanism in modernity has tended to be associated with liberalism. Often, this has meant an association with the market and capitalism. To be a cosmopolitan is to draw a sharp distinction between politics and economics and between public and private. It is also to give priority to the economic and the private. This view of cosmopolitanism has been skeptical of the state and the nation as impediments to the realization of the good life. It has often been linked to a particular view of nature and the natural as the space in which the universal ends of human nature can be realized. Conservatives have tended to see this universal end realized in the global market, liberals in the application of reason, especially in science and the development of technology.

There is much current debate about whether cosmopolitanism must endorse such a foundation in nature. Can cosmopolitans reject a foundation in some naturalistic ideal of human nature (either as naturally self-interested or as scientifically rational)? Can cosmopolitans 'go with the flow' of globalizing technologies and social relations, so to speak? One way to understand this complex issue is in terms of the nature of political commitments and allegiances. Must political commitments and allegiances be 'forever', that is, naturalized as necessary and inevitable in some ways? This is certainly how most people in modern states have understood patriotism. From Socrates' claim that he owes his life to the Greek city, to 18th century American and French patriots allegiance to a particular political community has been considered natural and a part of human nature. In the context of globalization, some cosmopolitans argue that we need to jettison this naturalism, to see our political allegiances as contingent historical choices, negotiations

earlier in the term) but they are less relevant to the cosmopolitan democratic theories we are discussing in class. Nevertheless, comments about the conservative position are certainly welcome in the class discussion.

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of the particular historical circumstances in which we find ourselves. (Although we are not reading his work, this view is represented by the philosopher Richard Rorty.)

The latter position is reflected in John Keane's idea of global civil society as a loose configuration of social movements, transnational economic actors, non-governmental organizations, media organizations, etc.... The idea of a global civil society is important, and is being developed by a wide range of theorists. Some question whether it is sufficiently political to be considered as more than a supplement to democracy? That is, are the kinds of political activities in global civil society sufficiently political to constitute real democratic communities? We can address this question, and others, in the discussion of Keane's *Global Civil Society*.

Questions. I expect everyone in class to comment on these questions and participate in the on-line discussion of them. If you wish, you can write a paper during the next week on one of these as your contribution to the debate and it will count as one of your course papers.

1. Is it possible for citizenship to simultaneously involve allegiances to the nation-state at the same time as one adheres to universal, moral principles?
2. Does cosmopolitanism depend upon a particular theory of human nature? If so, does this 'foundationalism' limit its usefulness to democratic theory?
3. Can patriotism be construed as compatible with cosmopolitanism?