Theorizing Cosmopolitanism: Origins, Transitions and Iterations

Ajay Mathew Jose

The concept of cosmopolitanism has acquired multiple definitions over time. The word is derived from the Greek words kosmos (order; world-order; world) and polites (citizen) and propounds a world view of 'global citizenship' or that of a 'global village'. The concept also refers to ways of knowing the world and the forms of belonging to it. The history of the term is traced back to early Stoic teachings which asserted common citizenship to all members of the world. This paved way later to early Christian understandings of the cosmopolitan as the citizen of God's Kingdom, sharing equal rights and as an equal before God. Immanuel Kant's elaboration the concept in *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (1795) established cosmopolitanism as a guiding principle imperative for world peace. Contemporary understandings of the concept tend to characterize it based on an inclusive and shared moral system, thereby blurring the boundaries created by characterizations like the nation-state. Some authors link the term to current phenomena like universal rights, globalization, market deregulation and international co-operation. Cosmopolitanism thus provides a framework in understanding the relationship of oneself with the world and with the other. Cosmopolitanism revolves around broad cultural and ethical transformations in terms of the relationship between Self and Other, individual and humanity, and the local and the universal.

This paper attempts to trace the transition of the idea of cosmopolitanism through its various trajectories and attempts to establish it as a theoretical framework in understanding the relationship of the individual and the

collective. This paper also tries to develop the idea of cosmopolitanism as a phenomenon; an acknowledgement of the difference between the Self and the Other contributing to the existence in the world.

Cosmopolitanism and its Origins

Ancient Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle did not endorse the idea of cosmopolitanism. In Greek thought, the citizenship to a particular city or polis was the defining identity of an individual. Basic rights were guaranteed only to the citizen and the citizen was in return, expected to show allegiance only to the state establishment. Any other rights bestowed by the state was the entitlement of people (even foreigners) who were residents of Athens.

The earliest exposition of the concept of a world citizen came through the declaration of Diogenes of Sinope, the founding father of the Cynic movement, who emphatically answered, "I am a citizen of the world" to the question of his identity. By asserting his world citizenship, Diogenes distances himself from the special privileges entitled to him as a citizen of Sinope. Diogenes' assertion is in agreement with the tenets of Cynicism which is to live in accordance with nature, thereby rejecting conventional ideas like the state or citizenship. Further exploration of the idea of cosmopolitanism came much later in the Third Century CE, with the Stoics. The Stoics, who were proponents of the Socratic thought, adopted a two pronged approach of living in the world; firstly, as a citizen of the polis and secondly as a member of the *kosmos*.

This dual engagement thus doesn't completely exonerate the traditional ties of the individual with the nation-state. On the other hand, the individual as a universal citizen (of *kosmos*) is seen as complimenting the relation to the polis. Stoic cosmopolitanism however permeated more into the political sphere bringing in ideas of building bonds outside of one's immediate identities. The ideals of Stoic cosmopolitanism were further expanded by the Greek philosopher, Hierocles who developed a model of concentric circles depicting the identity of a person. According to Hierocles, a person should be regarded as existing in concentric circles of identities; the first one around the self, next immediate family, then extended family, and gradually expanding to include local group, citizens, countrymen, humanity, making all human beings' fellow city dwellers.

Hierocles argued that although there was a strong affinity for an individual towards the innermost circle, there was an ethical need to reduce the distance between the outer circles to enhance the understanding of the individual about all of mankind.

With the spread of Christianity in the Middle Ages, the notion of cosmopolitanism associated with a spatially aligned power structure gets replaced by that of a divine parenthood. Cosmopolitanism which was hitherto attached to secular notions of power got realigned with religious ideals of faith and divinity. St. Paul in his epistle to the Galatians write,

> "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.
>
> For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.
>
> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man,
>
> there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.
>
> And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise."
>
> (Galatians 3.27-28)

The polis or the city was replaced by God's kingdom and accessibility to this polis was limited only to the followers of the path of Jesus Christ.

Enlightenment and Kant's notion of Cosmopolitanism

The 18th Century witnessed various socio-political revolutions across the world. With the French and American revolutions and the consequent Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789), the notion of the universal right of the individual was pushed to the forefront. Human rights as a natural right guaranteed to every citizen was beginning to be established as an inalienable right in the West. With the philosophical focus resting on human reason, this epoch was dubbed as the Enlightenment Period. A sense of equality, right and embracement of the

other prevailed which enabled a fertile ground for cosmopolitanism as a concept to develop beyond its political connotations.

Emmanuel Kant was instrumental in widening the scope of the concept of cosmopolitanism. In his work *Towards Perpetual Peace* (1795), Kant reiterates the Stoic dictum by highlighting the need for respecting the basic human rights of every individual, citizen or foreigner. Even before *Perpetual Peace,* Kant had formulated the idea of republicanism placed within the confines of the nation-state. This analysis was done first by placing personal law as paramount to the existence of the the individual by stating placing property rights within the realm of natural laws to which

'an obligation can be recognized *a priori* by reason without external legislation'. From there he moves to public law and his ideas of what the state ought to be. He laid down the characteristics of a republican constitution including the separation of powers of the legislative, the executive and the judiciary. It was then that Kant turned his focus to international laws, laws that transcended boundaries of race, nationality and identity. Kant reconstituted cosmopolitanism as an international order that is principally placed as a moral norm. Kant however was not in favor of the formation of a 'world state' that blatantly erases transnational boundaries. Rather, his conceptualization of the international law was based on a shared moral common ground that constituted what he called, 'a league of nations." Thus Kant is clear in his preference of 'federal union' over 'universal monarchy'.

Kant thus is instrumental to the tradition of understanding cosmopolitanism as universalism, relying on a logic of categorical equivalence. For Kant, cosmopolitanism would start with recognizing the rights of all human beings and on this basis set limits on the ambitions of all states. It would extend to a notion of "universal cosmopolitan existence" as "a perfect civil union of mankind." (Calhoun, 2017)

New Cosmopolitanisms

With globalization and transnational migrations happening in the post World War II era, cosmopolitanism as a theory has undergone rapid metamorphosis. Kwame Anthony Appiah in his seminal work on cosmopolitanism titled *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006), outlines cosmopolitanism as "beginning with the simple idea that in the human community, as in national communities, we need to develop habits of coexistence: conversation in its older meaning, of living together, association." He identifies two ideas seminal to cosmopolitanism of the present; one is the obligation of an individual to the others and the other is the gravity in which an individual values not just human life but also the practices and beliefs that lend significance to others. Appiah stresses on the importance of solidarity in spite of social, economic and cultural disparities. For Appiah, cosmopolitanism is not merely peaceful co-habitation or multi-cultural diversity. It is also about emphasizing on the importance of living in spite of differences. According to Appiah, cosmopolitanism is the idea that people all over the world have obligations and responsibilities to others beyond their immediate identity markers. A cosmopolitan is recognizedas a a world citizen who recognizes the world as a community, believes in universal values and shows his or her universal concern. He also believes that people should learn from differences and disagreements and celebrate 'diversity' thereby weakening the national boundaries or borders. Appiah identifies this negotiation with differences as an important facet of New Cosmopolitanism. As Appiah says, "It is okay to agree to disagree; because no one person grew up the same or retains identical values."

The Self and the Other in Cosmopolitanism

Although cosmopolitanism as a concept has acquired different meanings in due course of time, the philosophical framework in which it locates itself is in the relation of the self with the other. According to Edmund Husserl, the relation between the Self and the Other is the basis of intersubjectivity, the psychological relationship among people. In phenomenology, the idea of the self is tied to the idea of the other. The identity of the self is understood in terms of the differences that a human being identifies with the other. As Husserl

says in *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology* (1931), "the Other is constituted as an alter ego, as an other self. As such, the Other person posed and was an epistemological problem—of being only a perception of the consciousness of the Self."

Emmanuel Levinas also focuses on the relationship between the self and the other. He portrays this through encounter with another person which evinces a particular feature: the other impacts the self unlike any worldly object or force. The self can constitute the other person cognitively, on the basis of vision, as an alter ego. The self can see likeness he/she shares with another human being. That was Edmund Husserl's basic phenomenological approach to constituting other people within a shared social universe. But Husserl's constitution lacks, Levinas argues, the core element of intersubjective life: "the other person addresses me, calls to me. He does not even have to utter words in order for me to feel the summons implicit in his approach." It is this encounter that Levinas describes and approaches from multiple perspectives.

Cosmopolitanism can borrow the two facets of the relation between the self and the other as proposed by Husserl and Levinas. The first is that of a shared social universe where co-habitation and a common ethical ground are established. The second is that of intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity argues that each thought community shares social experiences that are different from the social experiences of other thought communities, creating differing beliefs among people who subscribe to different thought communities. These experiences transcend our subjectivity, which explains why they can be shared by the entire thought community. Proponents of intersubjectivity support the view that individual beliefs are often the result of thought community beliefs, not just personal experiences or universal and objective human beliefs. Beliefs are recast in terms of standards, which are set by thought communities.

Cosmopolitanism as argued by Robert Fine has two facets: the cosmopolitan *outlook* and the cosmopolitan *condition.* Cosmopolitan *outlook* refers to the way of seeing the world, a form of consciousness. Cosmopolitan *condition* on the other hand refers to an existing social reality,

a state of the world, a set of properties belonging to our age. These two aspects of cosmopolitanism are in fact Fine says, expressions of a unitary phenomenon. On the one hand, the development of cosmopolitan

consciousness is itself part of social reality, a vital element of the cosmopolitan condition, and the cosmopolitan vision is itself an intellectual expression of the development of the cosmopolitan condition. "On the other hand, the idea of the cosmopolitan condition is itself a mediated, and indeed highly contested, characterization of the social reality in question. Cosmopolitan being and cosmopolitan consciousness are two sides of the same experience and are reunited through political action." (Fine, 2007)

References

Appiah, Kwame Anthony. Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers. , 2006. Print.

Benhabib, Seyla et al. Another Cosmopolitanism. Vol. 3. Oxford University Press Oxford, 2006.Print

Bhabha, Homi. "Looking Back, Moving Forward: Notes on Vernacular Cosmopolitanism". Preface. The Location of Culture. Routledge Classics ed. London: Routledge, 2004. Print

Delanty, Gerard. Routledge International Handbook of Cosmopolitanism Studies. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018.Print

Fine, Robert. Cosmopolitanism. Routledge, 2008.Print

Husserl, Edmund, and Dorion Cairns. Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology. The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1960. Print.

Kant, Immanuel. Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Essay, 1795. London: S. Sonnenschein, 1903. Print.

Kleingeld, Pauline and Brown, Eric, "Cosmopolitanism", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/cosmopolitanism/>.

Nussbaum, Martha C., 2002, "Kant and Stoic Cosmopolitanism," Journal of Political Philosophy, 5: 1–25.