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Global Citizenship

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A Cosmopolitan View of Strangers

Ulrich Beck, a German sociologist and one of the most cited social scientists defines a cosmopolitan as “being a citizen of two worlds – ‘cosmos’ and ‘polis’.” He states there are five different ‘dimensions’ to this, three external and two internal to the human body. “Externally it means: including the otherness of nature, including the otherness of other civilizations and modernities, and including the otherness of the future.” Internally, he details the last two dimensions as “including the otherness of the object and overcoming the (state) mastery of (scientific, linear) rationalization” (15).[[1]](#footnote-1) The values and ideas of a cosmopolitan creates personal responsibility to friends, family and more importantly, strangers.

Definition varies slightly by historian. Appiah defines cosmopolitanism as “having two strands - we have obligations to others, beyond those to whom we are related or those we share citizenship with; we find value in human life, as well as the practices and beliefs that lend them significance” (15).[[2]](#footnote-2) With this, we can lay a framework of what a cosmopolitan’s view of the world consists of. Cosmopolitanism is not a new idea, but one with centuries of history. Janet Polasky, author of *Revolutions Without Borders,* writes “The first deputies elected to the new French National Assembly announced to widespread applause that in this revolutionary era all men would live as brothers” (232).[[3]](#footnote-3) More than 225 years after the French National Assembly, equality is still a major issue in modern politics. Family, friends and people you share cultural/national ties with will remain out of this discussion because there is a commonality that connects you with them on a personal level. What does a cosmopolitan owe a stranger?

A stranger is someone whom you are not familiar with. When one thinks globally, as cosmopolitans do, we must ignore the differences between people and find what is in common. We all are one species. We all share the same planet, revolving around the same star. We all have family, people we love. When a cosmopolitan looks at a stranger, they do not see what separates them, but what brings them together. Appiah eloquently explains the relationship between a cosmopolitan and a stranger: “When the stranger is no longer imaginary, but real and present, sharing a human social life, you may like or dislike him, you may agree or disagree; but, if it is what you both want, you can make sense of each other in the end” (99).[[4]](#footnote-4) Cosmopolitanism admits that people will not get along with everyone, but it is crucial to understand each other as human beings. Appiah continues to add that it is crucial to understand that when we enter a conversation, either with a neighbor or a stranger, we are okay with not coming to a final agreement.[[5]](#footnote-5)

A stranger can be anybody who practices any religion and lives in any nation. They could be a communist or a neo-Nazi. A cosmopolitan’s view of strangers is different than most people who do not practice cosmopolitanism. A cosmopolitan owes the attempt to understand a stranger. They owe empathy and time to create ties with anyone. But, when a stranger is in direct confliction with the core values of cosmopolitanism, or strands, actions need to be made to stop the conflict. Kant, a German philosopher during the 18th century, claimed “It is all right to refuse him this acceptance into the society if the refusal doesn’t have fatal consequences for him; but as long as he conducts himself peacefully and doesn’t push forward” (11).[[6]](#footnote-6) When a stranger is peaceful and does not conflict with cosmopolitanism, peace and harmony can be achieved.

Being obligated to others outside of your family and whom you share citizenship with and that all human life has value is the framework to a cosmopolitan. Being a cosmopolitan creates an obligation not only to yourself, but all humanity. Strangers are a people whom you do not know, but must attempt to understand as a human. Not all people are inherently good. People will conflict with the core values of cosmopolitanism. Appiah clearly details this phenomenon: “In what sense are kindness and sympathy universal? The answer in each case is not that *every* human being has these traits or capacities. Rather, they are present in every large enough group of our species; in particular, they are the statistical norm in every society” (95).[[7]](#footnote-7) Kindness and sympathy are important attributes to a cosmopolitan and they are crucial to the interactions with strangers. Not only is there a defined relationship between a cosmopolitan and a stranger, but this relationship can be the key to world peace. The acceptance of people as who they are is a crucial first step to live in harmony. If the world’s majority are cosmopolitans, we can begin to accept all people and no longer participate in war that break the core values of cosmopolitanism.

Quotes and Such

Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View (1784). Translation by Lewis White Beck. From Immanuel Kant, “On History,” The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1963.

1. The greatest problem for the human race, to the solution of which Nature drives man, is the achievement of a universal civic society which administers law among men. HIS FIFTH THESIS
2. Man is an animal which, if it lives among others of its kind, requires a master. For he certainly abuses his freedom with respect to other men, and although as, a reasonable being he wishes to have a law which limits the freedom of all, his selfish animal impulses tempt him, where possible, to exempt himself from them. SIXTH THESIS

Immanuel Kant, Idea for a Universal History, (The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1963), 3

The Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies

‘Cosmopolitanism’ means – as Immanuel Kant argued 200 years ago – being a citizen of two worlds – ‘cosmos’ and ‘polis’. There are five different dimensions to this, distinguishing between external and internal otherness. Externally it means: (a) including the otherness of nature; (b) including the otherness of other civilizations and modernities; and (c) including the otherness of the future; internally it means: (d) including the otherness of the object; and (e) overcoming the (state) mastery of (scientific, linear) rationalization. PAGE 18

So the cosmopolitan constellation evidently created in demands for legitimation, which are asserted both internally and externally, opens up discussions to include groups which have previously been excluded PAGE 20

Ulrich Beck, The Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies, (London, 2002), 18

Ulrich Beck, The Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies, (London, 2002), 20

Toward Perpetual Peace - Kant

It is all right to refuse him (2) this ·acceptance into the society· if the refusal doesn’t have fatal consequences for him; but as long as he conducts himself peacefully and doesn’t push forward PAGE 11

Kant, Immanuel, Perpetual peace; a philosophical essay, (London, S. Sonnenschein, 1795), 11

The Social Contract - Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Each man in giving himself to everyone gives himself to no-one; and the right over himself that the others get is matched by •the right that he gets over each of them. So he gains as much as he loses, and also gains extra force for the preservation of what he has. PAGE 7

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, The social contract, (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968), 7

Revolution without borders – Janet Polasky

The first deputies elected to the new French National Assembly announced to widespread applause that in this revolutionary era all men would live as brothers. Page 232

Cosmopolitanism – Appiah

In what sense are kindness and sympathy universal? The answer in each case is not that *every* human being has these traits or capacities. Rather, they are present in every large enough group of our species; in particular, they are the statistical norm in every society. PAGE 95

We enter every conversation – whether with neighbors or complete strangers – without a promise of final agreement. PAGE 44

When the stranger is no longer imaginary, but real and present, sharing a human social life, you may like or dislike him, you may agree or disagree; but, if it is what you both want, you can make sense of each other in the end.

Anthony Appiah, Cosmopolitanism: ethics in a world of strangers, (New York:, W.W. Norton & Co., 2006), 95

1. Ulrich Beck, The Cosmopolitan Society and its Enemies, (London, 2002), 18 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Anthony Appiah, Cosmopolitanism: ethics in a world of strangers, (New York:, W.W. Norton & Co., 2006), 15 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Janet Polasky, Revolution Without Borders, (Yale University Press, 2015), 232 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Anthony Appiah, Cosmopolitanism: ethics in a world of strangers, (New York:, W.W. Norton & Co., 2006), 99 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Anthony Appiah, Cosmopolitanism: ethics in a world of strangers, (New York:, W.W. Norton & Co., 2006), 44 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Kant, Immanuel, Perpetual peace; a philosophical essay, (London, S. Sonnenschein, 1795), 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Anthony Appiah, Cosmopolitanism: ethics in a world of strangers, (New York:, W.W. Norton & Co., 2006), 95 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)