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Global Citizenship

11/12/2017

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” (18).[[1]](#footnote-1) The values and ideas of a cosmopolitan creates personal responsibility to friends, family and more importantly, strangers.

Appiah clearly illustrates Beck’s dimensions of cosmopolitanism with two strands: our obligations to others, beyond those to whom we are related or those we share citizenship with, and the value in human life as well as the practices and beliefs that lend them significance (15).[[2]](#footnote-2) “Cosmopolitanism offers only reason and the love of humanity” (6).[[3]](#footnote-3) Cosmopolitanism is not a new idea, but one with centuries of history. In the eighteenth century, “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).[[4]](#footnote-4) More than 225 years after the French National Assembly, equality is still a major issue in modern politics. How should someone view another person? The question begins with what a cosmopolitan owes a stranger.

This question of the relationship between a cosmopolitan and a stranger has always been a point of discussion. 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).[[5]](#footnote-5) 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 (44).[[6]](#footnote-6)

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).[[7]](#footnote-7) When a stranger is peaceful and does not conflict with cosmopolitanism, peace and harmony can be achieved.

Being a cosmopolitan creates an obligation not only to yourself, but all humanity. 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).[[8]](#footnote-8) 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. 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.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. World peace quickly becomes a possibility.

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3. Martha Nussbaum, "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism," in *The Global Justice Reader*, Thom Brooks eds. (Blackwell Pub., 2008), 6 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
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5. Anthony Appiah, Cosmopolitanism: ethics in a world of strangers, (New York:, W.W. Norton & Co., 2006), 99 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
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8. Anthony Appiah, Cosmopolitanism: ethics in a world of strangers, (New York:, W.W. Norton & Co., 2006), 95 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)