Chapter 14
Cosmopolitanism and Ethics:
Ethical Dilemmas in the Implementation of the Cosmopolitan Ideal

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ABSTRACT

A unified and peaceful cosmopolitan humanity is a state of political organization, which is clearly worthwhile, and presents values of political stability, peace, co-existence, resolution of global problems and economic and cultural prosperity. The end of the Cold War raised expectations that the international community would take practical steps to try and reach a higher level of humanity's unity. The actual developments were very different, and the cosmopolitan ideal has been widely criticized by both politicians and intellectuals. This article's research question is why humanity remains divided despite its understanding of unity's benefits and the expectations of moving in that direction. The failed implementation of the cosmopolitan ideal is explained by its inherent characteristics. In this chapter I claim that Cosmopolitanism is a philosophical term and is primarily used in philosophical debate. It is not a political ideology, which constitutes one of the major obstacles in establishing the conditions of cosmopolitan world order. Therefore, the chapter states that to achieve the actual development of cosmopolitan conditions in the present world order, the supporters of Cosmopolitanism must redefine the concept of humanity's unity, and move it from the level of pure philosophical debate to the realm of political ideology. On the other hand, such a transformation, though seemingly vital for the cosmopolitan project, entails a variety of ethical problems for the nature and basic concepts of the cosmopolitan ideal. This work will describe and analyze the ethical dilemmas that arise from the attempt to implement the Cosmopolitan ideal in international relations.

INTRODUCTION

With the end of the Cold War in 1989, the idea of democratic government won broad support among the nations for the first time in history and was agreed to be the most desired form of government. Although humanity remained divided, there was an expectation that governments, international organizations and citizens of the world would try and solve numerous global problems and adopt the principles of global citizenship (Archibugi, Held, & Koehler, 1998, p. 2).

The actual developments were very different. Since the end of the Cold War, the neo-liberal approach with its rejection of governmental intervention and "political measures for curbing or directing market forces" developed and strengthened[1] and the world witnessed the revival of religious and nationalist approaches requiring the preservation of different communities' cultural identities and beliefs.[2] These developments prevent progress towards global citizenship or humanity's unity (Cosmopolitanism) and challenge its philosophical basis (Thompson, 1998, p. 179).

This research attempts to explain why, despite these expectations, world order is still characterized by cultural, ideological, religious and nationalist conflicts or, put even more simply, the research question is, why humanity remains divided.

This question becomes even more intriguing in light of the understanding that the ideal of a unified and peaceful cosmopolitan humanity is clearly worthwhile and presents values of political stability, peace, co-existence, resolution of global problems and economic and cultural prosperity. To support these claims about the utility, expediency and worthwhileness of Cosmopolitanism, several facts and assumptions are presented.

First of all, the normative foundations of human rights claims are universal and refer to all human societies. As Beetham states, "despite all differences of culture, social position and circumstance, all humans share certain common needs and capacities: the need for subsistence, security and respect; the capacity for reflective individual and collective choice and ingenuity in meeting their needs" (Beetham, 1998, pp. 59-60).

Moreover, nowadays, the fact that we all share the same ecological system, namely planet Earth, is undeniable and if any natural or manmade disaster - such as volcanic mega eruptions, influenza pandemics, global warming and environmental change - happen, every region, nation and person on the planet will suffer (Beetham, 1998, p. 60; Smil, 2008, pp. 13-49, 171-219). Therefore, at some point, and the faster the better, we, as humanity, will have to realize that it is not "us" and "them" anymore and that all human societies are interdependent (Beck, 2006, p. 7).

The other positive advantages of the Cosmopolitan ideal can be derived from the understanding that it causes political stability and promotes peaceful co-existence and the resolution of many global problems. Communications and the global movement of people and goods become easier, which in turn foster economic and cultural prosperity (Beck, 2006, pp. 74, 12). Any type of economic protectionism and mercantilism is less economically sufficient and is rejected by leading economists (Kleingeld & Brown, 2006).[3]

Despite these advantages, mankind is far from achieving a cosmopolitan organization of the world. My task here is to explain why this is so, to investigate the failure of the cosmopolitan idea and why it hasn't been implemented in International Relations.

COSMOPOLITANISM DEFINED

The term "Cosmopolitanism"[4] expresses the idea of global citizenship and represents a wide variety of social and political meanings, including cooperation between peoples and countries on the one hand and opposition to traditions and national culture on the other. Throughout history the term was used to describe varying approaches

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