
COSMOPOLITANISM AND THE ETHICS OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**Cătălin-Constantin Diaconu, PhD Student, "Al. Ioan Cuza" University of Iași**

Abstract: Theoretical cosmopolitanism requires, besides an acceptance of the universal, the necessity to accept particularity. Thus, the ethical consequences of cosmopolitanism extend beyond immediate relationships - neighbour or compatriot – in an attempt to include the `others` who, as claimed, are co-inhabitants of the world. At the same time, discretionary or philanthropic responsibilities are those which are not imposed by society and are generally, mediated by non-profit organizations such as UNICEF, The Red Cross, `Salvați Copiii` or religious organizations dealing with the immediate material support of the underprivileged. The actions of such organizations all subscribe to a more or less utilitarian framework. The ethical principle applied can be defined under the following terms: if you are in the position to prevent an awful thing from happening, and you're the most appropriate person to act, if the damage brought upon yourself would be minimal or entirely absent, then the ethical tenets lean towards action. To support the cosmopolitan vision regarding the discretionary elements of RSC, I propose the exploration of two lines of argument: Peter Singer's argument pertaining to the necessity of applying the above-mentioned ethical principle to every circumstance and, on the other hand, Richard W. Miller's argument, which also observes the principles of utilitarian ethics, but where certain nuances allow us to support an ethics in keeping with methodological cosmopolitanism, such as the fact that social responsibility is common to all and, consequently, this type of social responsibility must not only be imposed upon corporations, which mainly use it in large PR events, but should be accepted as limited common responsibility. As a result of this, social entities will manage to more easily overcome the social barriers artificially imposed by status differences and, at the same time, will seek to develop policies of social difference prevention.

Keywords: cosmopolitanism, ethics, social responsibility, political science, CSR

Under historical terms, it can be claimed that cosmopolitanism precedes nationalism by a long shot. Its principles can be found as early as ancient philosophers and can be traced as far as Enlightenment philosophy where they were ultimately forged in the shape they are taken for granted today.

In ancient Greece, `cosmopolitan` meant `citizen of the world` and it implied the optimistic and responsible welcoming of differences. This open-mindedness emanates from citizenship and, consequently, from the fulfilment of each citizen's rights and responsibilities. The ancient world, as well as the Middle Ages, did not foster the development of this philosophical idea because of the very processes at work in the making of nation-states. It took as long as Enlightenment philosophy for this principle to be found appropriate and be reiterated due to the political context of the time.

Enlightenment philosophers defined the main arguments that underlie this idea as a result of moral requirements. Kant defined cosmopolitan ethics under the terms of understanding the fact that `a violation of rights in one part of the world is felt everywhere`¹ by virtue of the fact that all people are equal and this is premise is non-negotiable. Also, Hegel claims it is extremely important that `a human being counts as such because he is a

¹ Kant, I., *Spre pacea eternă* apud Held, D., *Democratia și ordinea globală*, ed. Univers, Bucuresti, 2008 pg.52

human being, not because he is a Jew, Catholic, Protestant'.² The anticipation of autonomy for each member of society constitutes a fundamental idea of Enlightenment philosophy.

The passage where Kant writes that 'Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another'³ is well-known. Common human values are, according to the German philosopher, reason and the moral law. This is an idea that ensured a normative standard that could be pitted against the institutions in the political establishment of the time and that can still be used today to critically assess the extent to which the potential to define the degree to which modern democracy has failed in approaching the issues of social responsibility. The power of reason is based on the potential understanding with the others, and the process of thought at work when something is being reasoned about is not a solipsistic dialogue, but is first and foremost and most frequently found in the anticipated communication with the others, with whom a consensus must be reached. This open way of thinking must also take the presence of others in consideration, must also think *for them* (my emphasis). Philosophy can play an important part at this time precisely because it knows how to examine the links between the political system that governs the world today and the philosophical traditions it emanated from. By bringing these complex networks of ethical principles that govern the juridical fundamentals of the state together, philosophy can eventually raise the question of the governing people's responsibility.

Nevertheless, the novelty consists in the very differences between the context in which humanity has evolved and the current context of globalization. Today, a new type of reference to the other is in place. A closed society, indebted to parochialism, cannot be imagined anymore. Only when I take the subway, for instance, can one virtually get in touch with more people in an hour than one could meet in a lifetime as a citizen of any country three hundred years ago. Anthony Appiah managed to capture this state of fact simply and eloquently when he said that 'we have reached a point where each of us can realistically imagine that it is possible to contact any of the seven billion fellow human beings and that he can send that person something that they deserve to have: a radio, an antibiotic, a good idea.'⁴ Redefining an ethics of social responsibility seems to be the new global necessity. Emile Durkheim emphasized that fact that 'societies must have the ego not to be the biggest or the most prosperous, but to become the most just, the best organized and, at the same time, to have a constitution that fully abides by moral principles'.⁵

Cosmopolitanism's commitment to morality is a real, fully acknowledged one. Topics such as responsibility, acceptance, openness to others, respect, hospitality define the need that social agents accomplish a political and cultural unit that comprises all human beings at a global level.

The main aspect when dealing with globalization is that globalization is not linear and constant. It is a disorderly process, paradoxical at times, and also full of the unexpected. On

² Held D., *Democratia și ordinea globală*, ed. Univers, Bucuresti, 2008 pg.35

³ Kant, I., "An answer to the Question: what is enlightenment?" in *Kant's political writings*, Cambridge University Press, p.54

⁴ Appiah, K.A. *Cosmopolitanism : ethics in a world of strangers*, ed WW Norton & Company New York, 2006, pg.158

⁵ Durkheim, E., apud Held, D., *Democratia și ordinea globală*, ed. Univers, Bucuresti, 2008 pg.128

the other hand, it is irreversible. This proves that globalization is not a process that might show signs of ending any time soon. Contrary to the opinion that the phenomenon in question is a *par excellence* trait of the twentieth century, most researchers claim that the process has merely been considerably accelerated starting with the 1980s. The novelty regarding the modern global system pertains to the expansion of social relations through a new series of spheres in the realm of human activity: technological, organizational, cultural activities. Thus interpreted, globalization implies at least two distinct phenomena:

a) *The understanding of globalization as the extension and the deepening of social relations and institutions in time and space, so that human activity is increasingly influenced by cultural acts or events taking place in any part of the world.*

b) *The decisions made by local groups or communities can have significant global impact.* Recent events occurring in the Arab world seem to strengthen this statement. A constant aspect of globalisations is, without a doubt, economic motivation. The fight for resources, the dynamics of capital markets and the need to open new market outlets, principles that mainly characterize the Western World and the capitalist economy had the destruction of local economies and implicitly, the generation of new forms of social inequity as side-effects.

‘We cannot deny’, says Habermas, ‘that globalization has divided world society in winners, beneficiaries and losers’⁶. The West, in its totality, serves as a scapegoat for the very real experience of its own defeat of the Arab world. It is again, Habermas, to note that ‘those who can become alienated one from the other through systematically perturbed communication cannot previously acknowledge each other as participating members of a community’.⁷ We can infer, from this, that the putting of peaceful living in jeopardy is in no way overcome as long as a model of sustainable development is not appropriated institutionally. The ethical responsibility of cosmopolitanism presupposes the deconstruction of falsely neutral and potentially hegemonic ideals. Faced with such situations, this encourages a global reaction that implies the surpassing of the current moral model of social responsibility, a model still anchored in the thought principles of the nineteenth century, to a new cosmopolitan paradigm that involves multilateral institutions as the new social actors.

This points to a series of ethical problems that might seem impossible to surpass at first sight, since people continue to develop communication abilities at an immediate, terrestrial, passive level. In the context of globalization we must be responsible for the citizens of the world. The question is: will we find out how?

The Ethics of Cosmopolitanism

We have so far established the global vocation of cosmopolitanism. The ethical acceptance of cosmopolitanism imposes the need to extend the real, concret, immediate reality, the passive reality, as I have called it above, to all beings of the world. What cosmopolitanism proposes is precisely that the ethical system applicable inside this reality be extended to all people.

⁶ Borradori, G. *Filosofie intr-un timp al terorii, dialoguri cu Jurgen Habermas și Jaques Derrida*, trad Marie-Luise Semen & Ciprian Mihali, ed. Paralela 45, Pitesti, 2005 p.48

⁷ *ibidem*

This assumption cannot be taken as such without clearing up a few dilemmas: Can and is a nation-state, through its institutions, entitled to take social responsibility to foreigners? How about a state's citizens? And, if so, to which point can we take responsibility towards strangers, and in what way? Can we define at least a single ethical principle with universalization value which can govern the field of social responsibility?

The golden rule or the ethics of reciprocity is a moral precept found in most of the world's religions. It is contained in the following phrase: *'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you'*. Immanuel Kant phrased this maxim as a categorical imperative: *Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end.* This ethical system grounds morality at the center of each action. Its value does not depend on what it establishes, but on the actions taken by abiding by it. The moral law is not good because it lays down a good action, but an action is good only if it abides by the moral law. The only problem here is that this ethical principle with a claim at universalization cannot be applied in any context.

We can imagine a situation in which the on-call doctor receives an urgent case requiring surgery, which in most cases implies a blood transfusion. As we know, there are persons who deem blood transfusions inappropriate since they runs counter to certain embraced religious convictions. The doctor's ethical dilemma will require that he weigh between saving the patient's life or violating his religious freedom by making use of the Kantian categorical imperative.

Consequentialism, in exchange, accepts that all moral actions fully depend on their consequences. The situation described above could rather be analysed according to this ethical principle.

An analogy that befits this ethics of consequentialism to which I will direct my attention is that belonging to the Australian philosopher Peter Singer, *The Drowning Child*.⁸

'If on my way I pass by a shallow pond and notice a child that appears to be drowning, I must wade in and save the child's life at the risk of ruining my clothes or shoes.' Of course the worth of the child's life can in no way be questioned. The fact that the clothes or shoes will be ruined should not be an impediment to the action. From here, the philosopher goes further to almost exponentially increase the value of the clothes to be ruined. The need to act continues to remain obvious. We all agree to the argument put forth by Singer.

If we were to draw an ethical principle from this analogy, it would be defined by the following terms: *if you're in a position to prevent an awful thing from happening, and if you're the most appropriate person to act, and if the prejudice brought upon your own person would be minimal or completely absent, then ethical principles lean towards action.*⁹

This principle is often used in the campaigns of non-profit organizations such as UNICEF, The Red Cross, *Salvați Copiii* or religious organizations dedicated to the immediate financial assistance of the underprivileged. These campaigns have the purpose of shaping discretionary or philanthropic responsibility, a type of responsibility which is not imposed by society by any act of legislation and, in conclusion, are left to the discretion of each agent of

⁸ <http://www.utilitarianism.net/singer/by/199704--.htm>

⁹ Appiah, K. A., *Cosmopolitanism : ethics in a world of strangers*, ed. WW Norton&Company New York, 2006, pg. 115

society, be it a prominent personality, companies or corporations who wish to improve their public image or even anonymous philanthropists.

These campaigns are usually run through the media and make use of stories or images with a strong emotional impact. The images are beyond a doubt real: third-world children schooled in frequently inappropriate conditions, refugees fleeing the conflicts from the Arab world, social cases from Romania. The analogy is obvious, we have a duty to act to prevent awful things from happening. War refugees or children with no access to medicine or the fulfilment of basic needs are just as many situations that never cease to challenge us and in which we must act.

If we are to reason according to this ethical principle to its furthest consequences, we are forced to deny its possibility to universalize and, at the same time, we are naturally led to the question: in this case, how can we correctly define our responsibilities towards strangers?

In a nation-state, social responsibilities are governed by the state in a well-defined framework by the fundamental rights stipulated by the state's constitution. If the state fails or does not manage to cover all the situations which pertain to social responsibility, the premise we started from, it is each individual's moral responsibility to intervene.

It is natural to accept the fact that in emergency situations such as the one described in Singer's analogy we must act with urgency. These organizations I mentioned so far have the indisputable merit of mobilizing themselves and of mobilizing resources. But cosmopolitanism's commitment to strangers, a commitment which accepts that each human being counts equally, will not settle for this little. A person's needs are much more varied. Food and security are at the basis of the pyramid of needs.

Richard W. Miller's analogy, on the other hand, manages to make us adopt a different, and, I believe, a more realistic point of view regarding each state citizen's social responsibilities.

A worker falls from the facade of building into the abyss. On the sidewalk at the bottom of the building there is another person, who can save the worker's life by cushioning his fall with his/her own body. We can assume that the person on the side-walk has some knowledge of orthopaedic medicine and thus has the capacity to decide how to act in full awareness of the few months in the hospital, a long convalescence period and, most likely, an incomplete recovery.¹⁰ This analogy proposed by Miller allows us to handle different distinctions in comparison with Peter Singer's analogy.

First, we can see that these two thought experiments can easily be reduced to a few common denominators: on the one hand, there is the situation in which it is imperative, from the ethical principle viewpoint, that one acts to save the child's life, at the risk of losing a considerable investment, since the clothes' worth is irrelevant compared to the worth of the life saved; on the other hand, there is the situation in which the person on the sidewalk can hesitate or even refuse the heroic act, despite the fact that the worth of the saved life throws a shadow on the hero's several months in the hospital. As we can see, in Richard Miller's analogy, moral intuition does not allow us to impose with the same laxity the imperative of action, although the situations are relatively similar from the perspective of consequentialist ethics.

¹⁰ Miller, R.W., *Cosmopolitan respect and Patriotic Concern*, *Philosophy and public Affairs*, 1998, pg. 209

Conclusion

Until now, we have seen in the two presented analogies, even in the situation in which an ethical principle that encourages action can be easily accepted by people by virtue of reason only (Singer's argument), this can become a burden in certain subjective circumstances (Miller's argument), especially if this action is discretionary or charitable.

The question posited in the introduction thus remains open: will we find out how to be responsible for the citizens of the world?

The ethics of cosmopolitanism, as we have seen at the beginning of the article, promotes the common responsibility of all members of a society starting from the premise of a common, shared citizenship. This premise is binding, in the sense that 'one' must become 'other' in the way in which Emanuel Levinas or Jacques Derrida defined a philosophy of hospitality and alterity, of course, each in the limits of their own philosophical systems.

Through this common responsibility, I understand the need to politically acknowledge social responsibility, with the result of the participation of all members of society and the diminution of the contribution of each. A diminution of this contribution will be easier to accept by the social agents.

At a practical level, in order to achieve this, the creation of new institutions might be necessary. Without a doubt, the first step would be the strengthening of the two that already exist. At a later point the need to redefine the principles of international law, stuck in the realities of the nineteenth century – a reality not so marred and influenced by the phenomenon of globalization - becomes apparent. These happened because a system of laws meant to govern the relations between states, on the one hand, and then between individuals, on the other, was created, leading to the emergence of a rift between the rights and duties implied by citizenship and the need to create, in international law, new forms of liberties and obligations.

This rift is fully exemplified by the outcome of the international court in Nuremberg or of its counterpart in Tokyo.

Thus, the ideals of Enlightenment philosophers of universal citizenship, as well as cosmopolitan ethics can ensure the source of inspiration for these institutions. Following the same logic, the European Convention stands out as an institution concerned with taking the first steps to collectively apply certain rights stipulated in the Universal Declaration.¹¹ Since nation-states no longer have the right to 'treat their own citizens as they find fitting'¹² the respect to the individual's anatomy that states owe to their citizens will create a new set of guiding principles that, if applied efficiently, can delineate or even restrict the principle of state sovereignty itself.

As Kant stated, this can be just a phase in the shaping of a universal community in which all members have the right to 'present themselves in the society of others by virtue of the fact that they share in their ownership of the earth'¹³ If such a society functioned, the violation of rights in a part of the world would be felt everywhere. This is the only way we can certainly flatter ourselves that 'we permanently strive to reach eternal peace', as Kant wrote.

¹¹ Held, D., Op cit pg. 127

¹² *Idem*, pg 128

¹³ Immanuel Kant, *Spre pacea eternă*, Trad Rodica Croitoru ed. All 2008, pg.25

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