

September 2014

## Cosmopolitanism and Global Justice: A Review Essay of Cosmopolitan Regard by Richard Vernon

Tiana-Renée C. Silva

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/e-Research>

 Part of the [Growth and Development Commons](#), [Inequality and Stratification Commons](#), and the [International Economics Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Silva, Tiana-Renée C. (2014) "Cosmopolitanism and Global Justice: A Review Essay of Cosmopolitan Regard by Richard Vernon," *e-Research: A Journal of Undergraduate Work*: Vol. 2: No. 3, Article 7.  
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/e-Research/vol2/iss3/7>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Chapman University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in e-Research: A Journal of Undergraduate Work by an authorized administrator of Chapman University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [laughtin@chapman.edu](mailto:laughtin@chapman.edu).

**e-Research: A Journal of Undergraduate Work, Vol 2, No 3 (2011)**[HOME](#)[ABOUT](#)[USER HOME](#)[SEARCH](#)[CURRENT](#)[ARCHIVES](#)[Home](#) > [Vol 2, No 3 \(2011\)](#) > [Silva](#)**Cosmopolitanism and Global Justice: A Review Essay of *Cosmopolitan Regard* by Richard Vernon****Tiana-Renée C. Silva**

Keywords: cosmopolitanism, cosmopolitan regard, Richard Vernon, globalization, sovereignty, nationalism, citizen responsibilities, poverty, global village

**Introduction**

While geologists may not be able to find physical proof to suggest that the world is shrinking, social scientists are convinced that this is the case. The amount of information that is shared amongst the world's citizens has grown exponentially over the years, and evidence of an increasingly interconnected world can be seen in every facet of our everyday lives from the food we eat to what we watch on television. Thousands of miles that once divided us from one another are now eliminated by telephones, the Internet, and even the ability to make telephone calls over the Internet. In countries where people lack food security and safe drinking water, they are able to own a pre-paid cell phone and drink Coca-Cola. This is troubling for those who examine the world we live in today with all of its technological advancements and wonder why there are still over a billion people living below the poverty line. If the world is becoming one "global village" then why is there such a disparity between the Haves and the Have Nots? Some believe that it is the responsibility of those who have to improve the wellbeing of those who do not. In the book *Cosmopolitan Regard, Political Membership and Global Justice*, author Richard Vernon explains the importance of a cosmopolitan world and implications for the world's citizens in its implementation.

**Cosmopolitan Theory Explained**

Cosmopolitan theory suggests that we should shift our moral attention from the local to the global, adopting a wider realm of responsibility to ensure the wellbeing of all the world's citizens. In other words, it is the belief that what happens to everyone is of moral importance. "Cosmopolitan," an ancient term coined in the late classical period by Cynics and Stoics, was used to contrast local political membership with membership in the world strictly speaking, the *cosmos* as a whole.<sup>[1]</sup> By describing the world as a polis, or "city," philosophers at the time were referring to it as the then-standard term for the association of the greatest importance to human life. As a metaphor, "city" was a community of people connected to each other by strong ties of proximity, acquaintance, and definite legal relations. If we adopt an idea of association with proximity and acquaintance removed, we take a large step toward the idea of natural law, which requires the humane treatment of all humans and does not necessitate reference to citizenship at all. This is important to Vernon because he believes that this natural law is what the global community should be striving for. Excuses that reference distance or disinterest as a means for inaction are no longer valid in the world that we live in, because cosmopolitanism holds that the suffering of one person has implications for everyone else. To fully embrace cosmopolitanism, there is the requirement of states to impose additional demands, in the form of economic and political costs, upon their citizens. For example, to intervene in a situation where human rights are being violated requires a lot of funding and resources. To front the costs, the cost of living for the citizens of wealthy countries is very likely to increase. This is why it is necessary for states to provide compelling grounds for the sacrifices that their citizens will have to bear in order to achieve the goals of cosmopolitanism. If states cannot foster the moral attachment one has to one's own state to the world in its entirety, there will be little motivation for people to take on the demands of cosmopolitanism. Additionally, states must be more open to what they owe to outsiders. Vernon argues that "what we owe to other societies rests on the same basis as what we owe to our own."<sup>[2]</sup> In summation, the core thesis of Vernon's work is as

T. Silva

follows: By adopting a cosmopolitan view of citizenship and shifting moral attention from the local to the global, the world's citizens must accept more demanding political obligations and realize that our responsibilities as global citizens extend well past our borders. Using examples including humanitarian intervention, international criminal law, and international political economy, Vernon explains what cosmopolitanism entails for the world's citizens. The rest of this paper will tie in other works that discuss the topic of cosmopolitanism and the implications it has for human morality, individual responsibility, globalization, and sovereignty, in the attempt to explain why cosmopolitanism is important and necessary in the world today.

### **Cosmopolitanism in Today's World**

Present in the world today are problems that cannot be faced without concerted international action. Some of these involve controlling pathologies of the states system, such as aggressive or oppressive governments. Some problems, on the other hand, are collective problems such as global climate change and environmental degradation. According to Charles Beitz in an article written for the *Journal of Ethics*, in spite of these issues there is also the emergence of a nascent global capacity to act.<sup>[3]</sup> This capacity is expressed through the foreign policies of states, a variety of intergovernmental organizations, the institutions and regimes that organize global economic relations, and in human rights laws that are enforced in a largely improvised manner. In spite of these steps in the right direction, Beitz contends that with the exception of the morality of war, philosophical understanding of problems of global justice is still at an early stage.<sup>[4]</sup> As we make mistakes and learn to prevent them in the future, we realize that there is still so much to learn to become cosmopolitan and achieve global justice. What is important to realize is that the capacity exists: the resources, the technology, and the need are all present; what is most important, though, is the desire. Vernon sees a challenge to cosmopolitanism in the persistence of the *us vs. them* mentality. There is little desire to help those outside of our state because feelings of competitiveness and "otherness" exist when we think about foreign states. We are either too similar to states, which puts them in competition with us, or we consider ourselves too different from other states, which makes us feel like we cannot relate or sympathize with them. This is seen in the world today though the existence of exclusive treaties, such as NATO, and long-standing grudges between nations, such as that between Greece and Turkey.

There have been steps taken toward achieving global human rights with the hope that all people can live free from oppression, and the most noted of these efforts is the creation and ratification of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948, the first article states that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."<sup>[5]</sup> The declaration even mentions marriage, privacy, and vacation time from work. Needless to say, violations of these rights have been taking place in every country all over the world even after the declaration was ratified. This is because even though universal human rights have been chosen by a group of people and approved by a prestigious international organization, this does not mean that they can be enforced. There is no way to force a state to grant its citizens all of the rights listed in the declaration, because states have sovereignty. A state is sovereign within its borders and cannot be coerced into doing something it does not wish to do. In addition, there is no such thing as a global police force. Who will be responsible for providing the funding, resources, and manpower necessary to operate a global police force? This problem is voiced by Vernon. The UDHR is an example of cosmopolitanism in the world today, but like most other attempts at cosmopolitanism thus far, it lacks the strength and ability to affect change. If cosmopolitanism is to prevail, there is a lot of change that needs to take place and the following sections of this paper will describe such changes and their challenges.

### **Cosmopolitanism and State Sovereignty**

Despite the shortcomings of efforts made thus far to achieve a cosmopolitan world community, this is not to say that future attempts will not prove fruitful. If a cosmopolitan worldview is to be adopted by all of the world's citizens, then we must look at the implications it has for the existing status quo. At present, all states have sovereignty and this grants them the right to rule within their borders. To achieve the goals of cosmopolitanism, state sovereignty will have to be redefined to allow for outside intervention or some say, dissolved altogether. In his article written for the journal *Ethics*, Thomas Pogge argues that sovereignty is heavily concentrated at a single level the state. This is demonstrated by the fact that states and only states that receive separate colors on a political map of the world. For nearly every human being and every piece of territory on earth, there is exactly one

government that reigns and holds responsibility for that person and territory.<sup>[6]</sup> To achieve a cosmopolitan world, this concentration of sovereignty at one level is no longer defensible. Pogge suggests that people should be citizens and govern themselves through varying levels of government that would range in size from one's neighborhood to the world at large.<sup>[7]</sup> To support this idea, he gives three reasons why this vertical dispersal of sovereignty is conducive with a cosmopolitan world: peace/security, reducing oppression, and global economic justice. According to Pogge, peace and security would benefit from decentralized sovereignty because it would allow for the collection and disposal of all weapons of mass destruction, which is currently impossible to do because states would not permit it. He also contends that states currently hold too much power over "their" citizens, which leads to abuses such as torture and oppression. If there were multiple layers of sovereignty, the different political units would be able to check and balance one another. Finally, to improve the economic situation of the poorest states, a global levy on resources could be established to ensure equal per capita endowment and even encourage conservation. Pogge's point of view is echoed by many supporters of cosmopolitanism, because in order to achieve many of the goals of a cosmopolitan world, the sovereignty of states must be thought of as elastic instead of rigid. To facilitate global cooperation and make sure that the new cosmopolitan world runs smoothly, states must be willing to give up their sovereignty. Alluded to but never mentioned outright so far is the implication that other states or established global policing bodies will be able to encroach on the sovereignty of other states if need be (for example, in the case of a leader committing genocide in his state). In a cosmopolitan world where the primary unit of moral concern is the individual, states have permeable borders where sovereignty does not apply in the event that atrocities are committed within. At present, states are sidelined as spectators to atrocities because interference would be a violation of state sovereignty. In a cosmopolitan world, the state is not the primary and most powerful actor, and state sovereignty takes the backseat to human wellbeing.

### Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism

With so much emphasis placed on the state and its role as the most important actor in the world community, we see in the world today strong nationalistic bonds. In the *Journal of Ethics*, Robert Audi writes about the difference between nationalism and cosmopolitanism, stating that nationalists tend to give priority to specifically national concerns and cosmopolitans to specifically human concerns.<sup>[8]</sup> Fostered by the state to give their people a feeling of pride, allegiance, and belonging within its borders, cosmopolitan theorists see nationalism as harmful in certain aspects. Extreme forms of nationalism have the mantra of "my country right or wrong." Roughly, this view is that where national interest calls for an action, citizens have an overriding obligation to act accordingly. With this in mind, Audi states that given a view on what is in the national interest, wherever there is a conflict between it and the interest of one or more other countries or peoples in relation to any of the variables in question, for example economic prosperity, national interests are considered overriding.<sup>[9]</sup> The result of this kind of nationalism is that even when a policy will cause much suffering for one nation and advance one's own only slightly, extreme nationalism requires that preference be given to one's own. This can lead to a person going against what is morally right because they are dedicated to follow what is dictated by their state. For moderate nationalism, one's country has high priority over others but not absolute priority. A moderate nationalist could hold, for example, that if the numbers of people affected by a decision favor one or more other states, then in any issue not involving vital interests the interests of one's own state are overridden. According to Audi, it is common for this kind of restraint to be due in part to recognition of moral standards.<sup>[10]</sup>

While nationalism does create positive feelings toward one's state, a byproduct is often feelings of animosity toward outsiders. Like mentioned previously, there is an *us vs. them* mentality. Cosmopolitanism is often seen as conflicting with nationalism because the former is inclusive that is, it views all world citizens as equal and apart of one community while the latter is exclusive and will place special importance on its own citizens, deeming everyone else as "outsiders." Vernon draws attention to the fact that not only do we prefer our compatriots to and tend to treat them better than outsiders, but we tend to treat outsiders worse and are often less respectful of their freedom.<sup>[11]</sup> This becomes an issue when trying to assert the importance of world citizenship. When globalization is taken into consideration, one sees that the expanding activities that accompany globalization are prime territory for the conflict between nationalism and cosmopolitanism.<sup>[12]</sup> As long as people feel their only

T. Silva

responsibility and moral obligation is to their own state, they will not be able to adopt the cosmopolitan ideal of solidarity amongst all the world's citizens and will continue to discard the needs of others.

### **Cosmopolitanism and Globalization**

One consequence of globalization is the emergence of overlapping networks of power and interaction across the world. As a result, political power is no longer concentrated within national governments; effective power is shared, contested, and bartered by diverse agencies which are both public and private and cross national, regional, and international domains. Now we see the significance of "global politics," which holds that political actions in one part of the world can rapidly acquire worldwide effects. This means that developments at the global level, whether economic, social, or environmental, can instantaneously have local consequences. These characteristics of globalization are important to take into account when looking at cosmopolitanism because globalization is what makes cosmopolitan ideals almost necessary in the world we live in today. We are "unavoidably side by side," as Kant eloquently stated more than two hundred years ago. And although globalization is shrinking the size of the world by connecting all people through technology such as the Internet, it has also created three regulatory and political gaps which weaken political institutions, national and international. As described by David Held, these three gaps consist of:

A jurisdictional gap the discrepancy between national uses of policy-making and a regionalized and globalized world, giving rise to the problem of externalities such as the degradation of global commons, who is responsible for them, and how to hold these people accountable;

An incentive gap the challenge posted by the fact that, in the absence of a supranational entity to regulate the supply of global public goods, many states seek a free ride and/or fail to find durable collective solutions to transnational problems; and

A participation gap the failure of the existing international system to give adequate voice to many leading global actors, state and non-state.

Held contends that cosmopolitanism can help alleviate and even eliminate these gaps because a cosmopolitan world would be one in which global cooperation promotes the entire population to thrive. This would be accomplished through the creation of an effective and accountable administrative, legislative, and executive capacity at global and regional levels to complement those at national and local levels.<sup>[13]</sup> This body would be similar to the General Assembly of the United Nations but would be reformed to include the power of intervention and would have an emphasis on issues that are related to cosmopolitanism, such as health and disease, food supply, global climate change, and the debt burden of the developing world.<sup>[14]</sup> The establishment of a body such as this, as well as the opening-up and transparency of IGOs such as the World Bank and WTO and the creation of a cosmopolitan law enforcement and coercive capability in charge of peace-keeping and peace-making would create a world where the emergence of an interconnected global village would mean the betterment of humanity. Undoubtedly globalization and cosmopolitanism are related, but it is up to us to decide whether or not we will use cosmopolitanism to alleviate the problems introduced by globalization in the world today or continue to exacerbate them with inaction.

### **Significance of this Work**

To understand the significance of cosmopolitan theory, one must look no further than the world that lies right before their eyes. In the global village that we live in today, there is the necessity to turn our attention from the local to the global and think about everything we do as being on a global scale. Rights, laws, food security, the environment, weapons of mass destruction, security all of these things which have been previously associated with the state and viewed on an individual basis now must be applied to an all-encompassing global community. Literature on the widening gap between the rich and the poor and the polarization of the global North and South is extensive. It is obvious that unless we begin to care more about the welfare of the world's poorest citizens and

curb this and the other negative effects of globalization, the number of those living destitute lives will climb steeply.

When taking into account the ethics and human morality that are supposed to drive us to help others in need, cosmopolitanism corrects the current global status quo of "every man for himself." Competitiveness and the desire to accumulate as much wealth as possible have given us a world of selfish people who will work against one another if it means bettering their own personal situation. By adopting cosmopolitan ideals, we prove that we believe in the morals that we feel separate us from all other organisms on this planet. Feeling empathy for others, acting out of altruism, and realizing that the suffering of another human is painful for all are some of these characteristics. Recognizing the beauty of a common humanity and working together to better the lives of all of the world's people is possible through the acceptance of cosmopolitan ideals. While the theory is not perfect and is in some cases, more ideal than realistic, the underlying principles centered on human wellbeing are something worth implementing into our world.

#### Works Cited

Audi, Robert. "Nationalism, Patriotism, and Cosmopolitanism in an Age of Globalization." *Journal of Ethics* 13.4 (2009): 365-381. *Academic Search Premier*. EBSCO. Web. 16 May 2011.

Beitz, Charles. "Cosmopolitanism and Global Justice." *Journal of Ethics* 9.1/2 (2005): 11-27. *Academic Search Premier*. EBSCO. Web. 14 May 2011.

Held, David. "Cosmopolitanism: globalisation tamed?" *Review of International Studies* 29.4 (2003): 465-480. *Academic Search Premier*. EBSCO. Web. 16 May 2011.

Pogge, Thomas W. "Cosmopolitanism and sovereignty." *Ethics* 103.1 (1992): 48. *Academic Search Premier*. EBSCO. Web. 15 May 2011.

"The Universal Declaration of Human Rights." *The United Nations*. The United Nations, n.d. Web. 14 May 2011. <<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml>>.

Vernon, Richard. *Cosmopolitan Regard, Political Membership and Global Justice*. New York City: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

---

[1] Vernon, Richard. *Cosmopolitan Regard, Political Membership and Global Justice*. New York City: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

[2] Vernon

[3] Beitz, Charles. "Cosmopolitanism and Global Justice." *Journal of Ethics* 9.1/2 (2005): 11-27. *Academic Search Premier*. EBSCO. Web. 14 May 2011.

[4] Beitz

[5] "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights." *The United Nations*. The United Nations, n.d. Web. 14 May 2011. <<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml>>.

[6] Pogge, Thomas W. "Cosmopolitanism and sovereignty." *Ethics* 103.1 (1992): 48. *Academic Search Premier*. EBSCO. Web. 15 May 2011.

T. Silva

[7] Pogge

[8] Audi, Robert. "Nationalism, Patriotism, and Cosmopolitanism in an Age of Globalization." *Journal of Ethics* 13.4 (2009): 365-381. *Academic Search Premier*. EBSCO. Web. 16 May 2011.

[9] Audi

[10] Audi

[11] Vernon

[12] Audi

[13] Held, David. "Cosmopolitanism: globalisation tamed?" *Review of International Studies* 29.4 (2003): 465-480. *Academic Search Premier*. EBSCO. Web. 16 May 2011.

[14] Held