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Fred Dallmayr

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## CRITICAL DEBATE ARTICLE

# Cosmopolitanism: in search of cosmos

Fred Dallmayr\*

*Department of Philosophy and Political Science, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN, USA*

### Abstract

The essay seeks to disentangle the meaning or meanings of the catch word “cosmopolitanism”. To contribute to its clarification, the essay distinguishes between three main interpretations: empirical, normative, and practical or interactive. In the first reading, the term coincides basically with “globalization” where the latter refers to such economic and technical processes as the global extension of financial and communications networks. A different meaning is given to the term by normative thinkers like Kant, Rawls, and Habermas. In this reading, cosmopolitanism refers to a set of moral and/or legal norms or principles governing international politics, regardless of whether these principles are derived from “noumenal” consciousness, an “original position” or rational discourse. Noting the is/ought dilemma troubling normativism, the essay introduces the further meaning of practical interaction. Indebted to the teachings of pragmatism, hermeneutics, and virtue ethics, this reading mitigates the split between norm and conduct through practical engagement and education.

**Keywords:** *globalization; liquidity; banal cosmopolitanism; normativism; pragmatism; hermeneutics*

Who saves one person saves the entire world.  
*Babylonian Talmud*

The legacy of Western ‘modernity’ is ambivalent. On the one hand, it has bequeathed to us the inspiring ideas of global brotherhood and universal justice. On the other hand, in the aftermath of the Peace of Westphalia, it has launched the agenda of a compact, exclusivist nationalism or nation-state, an agenda often copied or supplemented by equally self-contained sub-nationalities. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the nationalist agenda was steadily on the upsurge, engendering first a series of inter-state wars and then the violent paroxysm of two World Wars. In the midst of these conflagrations, the broader civilizational vision

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\*Correspondence to: Fred Dallmayr, Department of Philosophy and Political Science, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN 46656, USA. Email: [Dallmayr.1@nd.edu](mailto:Dallmayr.1@nd.edu)

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was not extinguished, with its core often captured by the formula of ‘cosmopolitanism’. In the words of the poet Heinrich Heine, exclusive nationalism or chauvinism was a sign of backwardness, whereas brotherhood harbored a ‘greater future’. Excoriating in harsh terms the ‘shabby, coarse, unwashed’ character of the former, Heine celebrated by contrast ‘a sentiment which is the most splendid and sacred thing Germany has produced’, namely, ‘humanity, the universal brotherhood of man, the cosmopolitanism to which our great minds—Lessing, Herder, Schiller, Goethe, Jean Paul and all educated people in Germany—have always paid homage’.<sup>1</sup>

In recent times, Heine’s cosmopolitan vision has come to be challenged again by all kinds of exclusivist backwardness. As a counter-move to social or cultural interaction and interdependence, we witness in many parts of the world the return of virulent forms of ‘identity politics’, where identity is defined in national or ethnic or religious terms (and sometimes in all these terms simultaneously). Exclusivism is manifest in the erection of new walls or fences between peoples and, on a legal level, in the imposition of new restrictions on immigration and citizenship. In this context, there is no doubt a great need to reaffirm and re-enact Heine’s cosmopolitan agenda—and, fortunately, this need is widely felt and emphasized. As political philosopher Seyla Benhabib has stated, quite correctly: ‘Cosmopolitanism . . . has become one of the key words of our times’—something which is surely to be welcomed. Unhappily, the popularity of a term does not always help to clarify its meaning—which remains contested.<sup>2</sup>

In the following I shall take some steps in the direction of clarification by differentiating between some possible meanings of the term. In a first step, noting the close connection or affinity between the term and ‘globalization’, I turn attention to the global extension of markets and communications networks. Taken in this sense, cosmopolitanism refers to ongoing, empirically observable processes of border-crossing and hybridization—processes which are often accompanied by glaring ethical and psychological deficits. In a second step, I move from empirical description to the normative level, that is, to cosmopolitanism as a moral ‘vision’—whether this vision is formulated as the Kantian demand for global justice in a world confederation or the (linguistically nuanced) stress on the universal redemption of discursive validity claims. Construed in this sense, cosmopolitanism refers (in Benhabib’s words), to ‘the emergence of norms that ought to govern relations among individuals in a global civil society’. Noting the dilemma besetting Kantian and post-Kantian formulations—the antinomy between ‘is’ and ‘ought’, between vision and practice—I turn in a final step to cosmopolitanism seen as a practical experience and mode of ethical conduct. Viewed in this light, the term refers to the agenda of a global pedagogy fostering the cultivation of global civic ‘virtues’, such as the virtues of openness, generosity, service and care. The same pedagogy animates the search for a viable ‘cosmos’ reconciling the split between description and norm and also the gulf between global and local dimensions of public life.<sup>3</sup>

## GLOBALIZATION

Cosmopolitanism and globalization are closely connected and on some level overlapping; but they are not synonyms. Although capturing some features of the former, the second term appears limited to various empirical processes—which, to be sure, have gained great prominence in our time. In the view of David Held, one of the chief sponsors of ‘world order’ studies, globalization denotes ‘a set of processes which are reshaping the organization of human activity, stretching political, economic, social and communicative networks across regions and continents’. Among these processes, Held gives pride of place to economic and financial transactions carried out under liberal or neo-liberal auspices. ‘For the past two to three decades’, he states, ‘the agenda of economic liberalization and global market integration—the “Washington Consensus”, as it is sometime called—has been the mantra of many leading economic powers and financial institutions’.<sup>4</sup> Held’s view is corroborated by sociologist Ulrich Beck who is likewise concerned about definitional issues. ‘In public discourse’, Beck writes, ‘the fashionable term “globalization” is understood primarily in a one-dimensional sense as *economic* globalization, and is closely connected with what can be called “globalism”’, a term that captures ‘the idea of a global market, defends the virtues of neoliberal economic growth and the utility of allowing capital, commodities and labor to move freely across borders’. Even opponents of globalization, he adds, tend to agree with the primary identification of the term with economic transactions and their social and cultural ramifications.<sup>5</sup>

In the aftermath of the economic and financial debacle of recent years, the vaunted benefits and accomplishments of neo-liberalism and the Washington Consensus have come under critical scrutiny, depriving them of their status as a global mantra. Held is instructive in this respect by exposing the glaring defects or shortcomings of neo-liberal globalization. The latter model, he states, bears a ‘heavy burden of responsibility’ for failing to address important areas of market failure: such as the ‘problem of externalities’ illustrated by environmental degradation; the ‘inadequate development of non-market social factors’ including the insufficient provision of such ‘public goods’ as education, health services and transportation; and the ‘underemployment or unemployment’ of available productive resources in the world. The sketched market failures reached their culmination in the world-wide financial crisis where ‘high levels of consumer spending in the West, fueled by easy access to credit’ created ultimately a ‘global liquidity overflow’ evident in massive ‘asset bubbles and excess leverage’. In Held’s sober assessment, the ‘key fault lines’ of the debacle can be traced to the totalized ideology of privatization and deregulation which gave rise to ‘a “light-touch” regulatory system that encouraged risk-taking and allowed money to be diverted into very specific areas: mortgage securitization and off-balance sheet activity’.<sup>6</sup>

The exposed shortcomings of neo-liberal globalization do not by themselves challenge or put a dent into the celebration of global liquidity and borderless transaction flows. As Karl Marx had noted long ago: under the impact of capital

‘everything solid melts into air’. The fact that present-day globalization is not tightly bound up with market transactions is demonstrated by the rapid expansion of communications facilities and global travel. Ulrich Beck speaks in this context of the ‘new metaphor of “liquidity”’, stating that today ‘neither boundaries nor relations mark the difference between one place and another’, in the sense that ‘boundaries are becoming blurred’ while ‘relations are entering into consistently shifting constellations’. Citing a recent sociological study tellingly titled *Global Culture Industry: The Mediation of Things*, Beck reaches the conclusion that ‘social structures are dissolving into “streams” of human beings, information, goods and specific signs or cultural symbols’. What emerges at this point is ‘a sociology beyond societies’ characterized by a ‘single-minded empirical and conceptual focus on “mobility”’, a category that supplants the traditional concepts of ‘structure’ and ‘community’. To corroborate this finding further, Beck also cites a study by Arun Appadurai which, on the basis of empirical research, argues that ‘the new units “flowing” around the world are “socioscapes” that increasingly set capital, the media, ideologies, technologies, and human beings in “motion” and establish new relations between them’.<sup>7</sup>

As it happens, Beck is not entirely entranced or taken in by the metaphors of liquidity and ceaseless mobility. To register his reservations, he introduces the term ‘banal cosmopolitanism’ which in many ways resembles what Stanley Fish at one point called ‘boutique multiculturalism’, that is, the delight in exotic foods and customs which characterizes the global consumer society. Under the impact of global consumerism, he writes, the familiar and local becomes the ‘playground of universal experiences’, the ‘locus of encounters and interminglings or, alternatively, of anonymous coexistence and the overlapping of possible worlds and global dangers’. What is ‘banal’ about this kind of cosmopolitanism, above all, is the lack of any commitment or genuine engagement among people, in favor of the indiscriminate search for novelty for the sake of vacuous self-indulgence. In the pursuit of banal aims, Beck adds, cosmopolitanism becomes itself a commodity because ‘the glitter of cultural difference sells well’. The market here is vast: ‘Images of an in-between world, of the black body, exotic beauty, exotic music, and so on, are globally cannibalized, staged and consumed as mass products for mass markets’. Through the erasure of all boundaries and distinctions, products and transaction flows are mingled and ‘hybridized’—without leaving an imprint or trace. For example, ‘someone who listens to “black music” and wears pictures or quotations of black people on their t-shirts does not have to identify with the culture from which the pictures or quotations are taken’; rather, ‘black culture, styles and creativity are sold here to a public that knows no borders’.<sup>8</sup>

Beck’s comments refer—albeit obliquely—also to the human costs of banal cosmopolitanism. For, flow charts and streams of liquidity are not merely empirical processes but implicate distinct character or personality traits that are fostered in the global arena. In the case of economic globalization (as discussed above), it is relatively easy to delineate the personality profile undergirding the agenda: it is the *homo economicus* familiar from modern liberal economic theory, the robust entrepreneur or corporate business leader committed to maximizing profits at

minimal costs. Globalization has simply projected this profile onto the global screen where profits and losses are no longer counted in millions but in billions and trillions. No doubt, the vastness of scale puts an enormous strain on the capacity of human management—a fact which accounts for the frequent psychological or psychopathological afflictions among global business leaders. The likelihood of such afflictions is greatly intensified in the case of individuals caught up in the flows of total liquidity. No longer tied to, and steadied by, the ‘Protestant ethic’ of economic success, such individuals are bound to drift aimlessly in the ever-shifting ‘socioscapes’ of global life, where closeness and distance vanish together and where no place and every place is ‘home’.

Nobody has portrayed the pathology of the ‘banal’ cosmopolitan better than the noted sociologist Zygmunt Bauman. In his book *Globalization: The Human Consequences*, Bauman has pinpointed the social effects of unlimited liquidity and mobility. In his portrayal, the ongoing ‘time/space compression’—or rather the erasure of space/time boundaries—encapsulates the gist of the present-day ‘transformation of the parameters of the human condition’. In the course of globalization, he notes, ‘mobility climbs to the rank of the uppermost among the coveted values’ and the freedom to move ‘fast becomes the main stratifying factor of our late-modern or postmodern times’. In our postmodern context, the globalized individual is in a way catapulted into a dimension beyond space and time where the difference between ‘now’ and ‘then’, ‘here’ and ‘there’, ‘close by’ and ‘far away’ drops off. In the words of Paul Virilio, the new transcendent or ‘cybernating’ world is ‘devoid of spatial dimensions, but inscribed in the singular temporality of an instantaneous diffusion. From here on, people cannot be separated by physical obstacles or by temporal distances’. Undaunted by this exhilarating globalism, Bauman injects some sober ethical considerations. The new mobility, he observes, implies in fact a ‘radical unconditionality’, a ‘disconnection of power from obligations’, and ultimately a ‘freedom from the duty to contribute to daily life and the perpetuation of the social community’. This freedom from obligation in turn carries with it a heavy psychological baggage: the exposure to unlimited risk and insecurity: ‘Being “far away” [from everything] means being in unprecedented trouble, and so it demands cleverness, cunning, slyness or courage’—a cleverness which overtaxes the psychic arsenal of most human beings.<sup>9</sup>

There is another, even more sobering consequence entailed by nomadic or banal cosmopolitanism, namely, a deep social division. Alongside the emerging ‘planetary dimensions of business, finance, trade and information flows’, Bauman comments, ‘a localizing and space-fixing process is set in motion’; these two interconnected processes ‘sharply differentiate the existential conditions of whole populations and of various segments of each one of the populations’. Thus, while some of us are becoming ‘fully and truly global’ (in the dimension of liquidity), others are confined to an impoverished and barely habitable ‘locality’ or ‘localism’. However, being local in a globalized world is ‘a sign of social deprivation and degradation’—and also a sign of anomie and psychic trauma. In Bauman’s words: ‘The discomforts of localized existence are compounded by the fact that, with public spaces removed beyond the

reaches of local life, localities are losing their meaning-generating and meaning-negotiating capacity and hence are increasingly dependent on sense-giving and interpreting actions which they do not control or influence'. This fact may have something to do with the rise of 'neo-tribal and fundamentalist tendencies' today which reflect the experience of people 'on the receiving end of globalization', in opposition to the widely acclaimed 'hybridization of top culture'. Putting the argument of his study in a nutshell, Bauman concludes: 'Rather than homogenizing the human condition, the technological annulment of temporal/spatial distances tends to polarize it'. While emancipating some people from territorial constraints and rendering social meanings extraterritorial, it has the effect of 'denuding' the territory, to which other people are confined, of its 'meaning and identity-endowing capacity'.<sup>10</sup>

### COSMOPOLITAN WORLD ORDER

As indicated before, globalization (as discussed so far) is an outgrowth of Western modernity—more specifically of a certain empiricist strand which does not exhaust its meaning. There is another, rationalist or normative strand which shifts the accent from description to universal principles and prescriptions. In many ways, this strand was inaugurated by Descartes's focus on the inner mind (*cogito*) and its rules of cognition, in contradistinction from external contexts (*res extensa*). With some modifications, the Cartesian initiative was continued by Immanuel Kant and his emphasis on the invariant-transcendental structures of mind functioning as the premises (or conditions of possibility) of both scientific knowledge and practical action. In the broader political arena, Kant also elaborated on the norms or structures suitable for the interrelation between states and peoples, an elaboration which famously led him to the formulation of the guiding principles of 'cosmopolitan law or right' (*Weltbürgerrecht*).

With this formulation, Kant made an important contribution to the development of modern morality and law. As he wrote in his famous treatise on 'Perpetual Peace', it is necessary to distinguish between three kinds of legal orders: domestic 'civil law or right' (*ius civitatis*); 'international law/right' between states (*ius gentium*); and 'cosmopolitan law/right' (*ius cosmopolitanicum*) 'insofar as individuals and states, coexisting in an external relationship of mutual influences, may be regarded as members of a universal community of peoples'. The latter cosmopolitan community was only possible, for Kant, if all member states are 'republican' (not democratic) in character and linked together in a loose confederation. The only and central article of the '*ius cosmopolitanicum*' was the principle of 'hospitality' which involves 'the right of a stranger not be treated with hostility when he arrives on someone else's territory'. Although he may be turned away, 'the stranger must not be treated with hostility, so long as he behaves in a peaceful manner'.<sup>11</sup>

Kant's perspective has been ably carried forward and enriched by a number of later writers and philosophers, always with an emphasis on normative principles

and legal rules. During the twentieth century, probably the most famous thinker to continue the Kantian trajectory was the American philosopher John Rawls. In his early work, especially in *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls endeavored to articulate general principles of a just society by invoking, as transcendental or quasi-transcendental condition of possibility, an ‘original position’ of reasoning where all empirical contingencies are blended out. At that point, the philosopher’s attention was mainly focused on domestic society and hence on the domain Kant had called ‘*ius civile*’. In due course, however—and probably as a result of the ongoing process of globalization—Rawls shifted his focus to the global, international or (more precisely) cosmopolitan arena. The result was his famous study *The Law of Peoples*, whose title refers not properly to traditional international law (*ius gentium*) but rather to ‘the political principles for regulating the mutual political relations between peoples’. Continuing, but modifying the strategy of his earlier book in a global direction, Rawls states: ‘The content of a reasonable Law of Peoples is ascertained by using the idea of the original position a second time with the parties now understood to be the representatives of peoples’. The application of this strategy yields a list of ‘principles of justice among free and democratic peoples’ which includes items like the following: ‘peoples are free and independent’; they are ‘equal and parties to the agreements that bind them’; they are ‘to observe a duty of non-intervention’; they are ‘to honor human rights’, and the like. While following in general the Kantian lead, *The Law of Peoples* departs from this legacy in a number of aspects which I cannot pursue here in detail, but of which two seem particularly relevant: the toning down of Kant’s more rigorous transcendentalism; and the emphasis on ‘free and democratic peoples’ (in lieu of ‘republican’ regimes).<sup>12</sup>

In due course, the initiatives of Kant and Rawls came to infiltrate or affect the academic discipline of ‘international relations’ (IR), a field which has tended to be dominated solidly by a ‘realist’ outlook (inspired by Hans Morgenthau and others) averse to ethical considerations. The result—at least among some practitioners of the field—has been a willingness to moderate power-political concerns through attention to normative demands, especially the demand of global justice. Among the group of ‘normative’ practitioners, some pioneering steps were taken by Charles Beitz, Henry Shue, and Thomas Pogge. In a way, it was Beitz who first inaugurated the normative or Rawlsian ‘turn’ with his book *Political Theory and International Relations* (published in 1979). Taking issue with the dominant realist or power-political emphasis, Beitz in his study argued forcefully in favor of introducing the idea of global justice into the international field. As he pointed out, Rawls’s theory of ‘justice as fairness’—with some modifications—was eminently suitable for transforming the traditional conception of ‘inter-state law’ (*jus gentium*) into a properly ‘cosmopolitan’ system of cross-culturally binding ethical rules. This shift to morally binding rules limiting state behavior was soon picked up, and applied to concrete issues by other practitioners, for example by Henry Shue in his study on *Nuclear Deterrence and Moral Restraint* (1989), followed later by the co-edited work on *Preemption: Military Action and Moral Justification* (2007). Perhaps the most prominent proponent of a global or cosmopolitan order inspired by Rawlsian



teachings, however, is the philosopher and public ethicist Thomas Pogge, well known for such publications as *Realizing Rawls* (1989) and *World Poverty and Human Rights: Cosmopolitan Responsibilities and Reforms* (2002). In all his writings, Pogge has insisted on the urgency of applying Rawls's idea of the 'original position' and his central principles of 'equal liberty' and 'difference', with appropriate adjustments, to the global arena.<sup>13</sup>

To be sure, among post-Kantian thinkers Rawls is not alone in having fostered a normative approach to international politics. In many ways, his influence has been corroborated, and also subtly transformed, by a European perspective: the critical theory of Jürgen Habermas. While preserving the rationalist tenor of *A Theory of Justice*, Habermas proceeded to reformulate the pre-linguistic conception of the 'original position' in terms of a 'discourse' or communicative interaction in which all people affected by the outcome of deliberations would be entitled to participate. As conceived by critical theory, communicative discourse is meant to apply to a broad field, from epistemology to ethics and politics. In every case, discourse is assumed to lead from the assertion of certain claims through their contestation to the ultimate 'validation' or redemption of these claims. Partly under the influence of Rawls, Habermas also envisaged a possible extension of his model to the broader cosmopolitan arena (although his primary concern remained focused on regionalism and European unification). In comparison with the Rawlsian agenda of global justice, the global application of the discourse model exhibits two distinctive features: first, a shift from the 'original position' to an exchange of validity claims (congruent with the so-called 'linguistic turn'); and secondly, a relative deemphasis of the 'difference' principle construed as concern with the fate of disadvantaged people who, for one reason or another, lack the ability or opportunity to raise validity claims.<sup>14</sup>

Among the followers of the discourse model, no one has been more resolute in transplanting this model to the global level than Seyla Benhabib. In a string of writings culminating in her study *Another Cosmopolitanism* (2006), Benhabib has attempted to sketch the path leading from inter-state relations to 'cosmopolitan law' anchored in discursive principles. In the words of Robert Post, introducing her book: The question taken up by the author is 'how we can fashion political and legal institutions to govern ourselves, all together, on this earth'; more specifically, how we can 'conceptualize the emergence of cosmopolitan law as a dynamic process through which the [universal] principles of human rights are progressively incorporated into the positive law of democratic states'. In her text, Benhabib clearly distinguishes traditional international or inter-state law (*ius gentium*) from the ethical and normative character of the emerging cosmopolitan order. As she writes: 'Cosmopolitan norms of justice accrue to individuals as moral and legal persons in a worldwide civil society'; their peculiarity consists in the fact that 'they endow *individuals* rather than states and their agents with certain rights and claims'. Basically, normative cosmopolitanism signals an eventual transition from treaties concluded among states to a cosmopolitan order 'understood as international public law that binds and bends the will of sovereign nations'. In accentuating the normative quality of public law, Benhabib also is at pains to differentiate it from 'globalization'

conceived in purely economic terms and from the empirical operation of global ‘networks’ of media and communication systems.<sup>15</sup>

Although committed basically to a normative and quasi-Kantian vision—one should note—Benhabib is troubled by the division between ‘facts and norms’, and also by the tension and possible disjunction between universal principles and domestic practices of self-governance. Following some Kantian intuitions or suggestions, however, she places her trust in the progressive attenuation of the problem, mainly along the lines of what she calls a ‘dialogical universalism’.<sup>16</sup> A similar outlook can be found in the writings of David Held (whose work was previously invoked). As he observes in *Cosmopolitan Democracy* (1995), the end of the Cold War had ushered in the possibility of a ‘new world order’ based on the ‘spirit of cooperation and peace’, and hence the prospect of a ‘cosmopolitan international democracy’. Like Benhabib, Held ponders the tension between the emerging global order and the persistence of territorially limited legal orders anchored in the traditional (‘Westphalian’) model. In a time of regional and global interconnectedness, he notes, major questions arise ‘about the coherence, viability, and accountability of national decision-making entities’. With Benhabib again, he places his hope in the progressive attenuation of the tension—a process effected mainly (though not exclusively) through a restructuring of global institutions both inside and outside the framework of the United Nations. The hope for progressive attenuation is also expressed in Held’s emphasis on the need to connect global and local or domestic changes in a mutually complementary or ‘dialectical’ process. Precisely as a result of economic globalization, he observes, ‘new demands are unleashed for regional and local autonomy as groups find themselves buffeted by global forces and by inappropriate or ineffective [domestic] political regimes’.<sup>17</sup>

## **COSMOPOLITANISM AS ENGAGED PRACTICE**

As advocated by normative writers, the vision of global order and justice is surely captivating and important. Regardless of whether anchored in Kantian transcendental reason or a Habermasian discursive rationality, the vision injects a badly needed moral or prescriptive dimension into an international arena ravished by rampant power politics. Given the predictable effects of latter—domination, injustice, and violence—nothing appears more required in our world than a cosmopolitan order governed by rational and universal principles. Yet, even while appreciating the normative global design, one cannot quite discard a certain feeling of aloofness, of a troubling remoteness of theoretical construction from lived practice. Especially when—as in the case of David Held—one notices the steady proliferation of global principles and ‘metaprinciples’, one cannot avoid the impression of a certain ‘apriorism’, of an intellectual constructivism intent on starting the global building with the roof. This impression has to do, among other things, with the somewhat uneven or skewed treatment of the tension between norms and facts or else between global rules and local or regional contexts.

As this tension is treated by Rawlsian and discursive thinkers, primacy is almost invariably granted to global order or the ‘application’ of global norms, while local or regional conditions appear mainly as obstacles to be alleviated with the passage of time.

This unevenness comes to the fore especially in the relation between rational maxims of justice and the concreteness of cultural contexts. In the normativist construal, cultural contexts often tend to be treated as passive, even reluctant recipients of global rules rather than active contributors or resources. Thus, in his *Cosmopolitan Democracy*, Held makes room for cultural concerns—but on a very subsidiary level. ‘Distinctive national, ethnic, cultural and social identities’, he admits, ‘are part of the very basis of people’s sense of being-in-the-world; they provide deeply rooted comfort and distinctive social locations for communities seeking a place ‘at home’ on this earth’. But, he adds, these identities are ‘always only *one* possible option among others’; since they are ‘historically and geographically contingent’, they can readily be replaced by another identity (or perhaps by hybridity or no identity). On a cosmopolitan level, their significance in any case remains negligible. The unevenness also surfaces in his later *Cosmopolitanism* (2010). ‘While my account aims at being universal’, we read there, ‘it tries to address cultural and political specificity seriously’. As it appears, however, recognition of that specificity does not impinge on the ‘defining role’ of universal principles.<sup>18</sup>

In attenuated fashion, Held’s ambivalence can also be found in Benhabib’s writings. Like the former, she treats local and cultural contexts as arbitrary or contingent and in need of ‘moral justification’ through universal norms. As previously indicated, she follows Kant’s tradition, by stating: ‘I view cosmopolitanism as the emergence of norms that *ought* to govern relations among individuals in a global civil society’. Yet, as mentioned, she remains concerned about the antinomy between global norms and local customs. Hence, she asks: ‘How can one mediate moral universalism with ethical particularism?’ This question leads her to see cosmopolitanism mainly as ‘a project of mediations’, pointing in the direction of a ‘dialogical universalism’. This outlook also prompts her to embrace the need of a ‘dialogue with otherness’ and ultimately the practical-pragmatic agenda of (what she calls) ‘democratic iterations’. ‘Culture matters’, she states emphatically; ‘cultural evaluations are deeply bound up with interpretations of our needs, our visions of the good life, and our dreams for the future’. And ‘because these evaluations run so deep, as citizens of liberal democratic politics, we have to learn . . . to live with the otherness of others whose ways of being may be deeply threatening to our own’.<sup>19</sup>

This seems to me a correct and commendable observation. However, as one should note, the turn to practical ‘iterations’ has consequences: it involves a shift of intellectual horizons no longer strictly compatible with Kantian, Rawlsian or discursive parameters. In modern times, the acknowledgement of a certain primacy of practice (vis-à-vis theoretical principles) is associated mainly with the teachings of American pragmatism, hermeneutics and neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. One of the most distinctive features of John Dewey’s work was precisely his persistent remonstrance against the pretense of abstract theory-construction or what he called

‘intellectualism’. From Dewey’s angle, the task of philosophical thinking was not to impose ready-made maxims from on high (or ‘top-down’), but rather to be attentive to concrete (often perplexing) encounters and experiences as the nourishing soil of reflection. As he noted in one of his writings: ‘Thinking is not a case of spontaneous combustion; it does not occur just on the level of “general principles”’. What this means is that cognitive insight is not the possession of a detached ‘spectator’, but the result of a process of inquiry where ‘the self *becomes* a knower’ or ‘*becomes* a mind in virtue of a distinctive way of partaking in the course of events’. This approach has an important impact on the meaning of education or pedagogy which, for Dewey, involved not the transfer of finished doctrines from teacher to students, but rather an ongoing process of learning in which all parties are continuously transformed. Perhaps the most crucial implication of this outlook was in the field of politics where democracy was seen not as a finished system but as an ongoing ‘iterative’ practice: more specifically as ‘primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience’.<sup>20</sup>

Although originating in a different intellectual milieu—that of Continental-European philosophy—hermeneutics likewise is marked by attentiveness to concretely situated experience and practice. This is particularly evident in the work of its chief representative, Hans-Georg Gadamer. Building on Heidegger’s notions of ‘being-in-the-world’ and its corollary of ‘understanding’, Gadamer developed his view of hermeneutics as an inquiry proceeding through dialogical engagement between self and other, reader and text, familiarity and unfamiliarity. As he writes in his magisterial *Truth and Method*, hermeneutical engagement requires a diligent openness to the world which, in the case of interhuman encounters, takes prominently the form of dialogue or of the interplay of ‘question and response’. What such a dialogue yields, or is meant to yield, is a mutual disclosure of ‘meaning’ which goes beyond mere psychic empathy and abstract rational consensus (in the direction of existential ‘truth’). In all his writings, Gadamer always stressed the close linkage between understanding and human practice where the latter is not simply deduced from theoretical premises but rather serves as the nurturing soil of understanding and ethical conduct. It is at this point that a fruitful interplay between hermeneutics and Aristotelian and neo-Aristotelian ‘virtue ethics’ comes into view, where ethics means basically the cultivation of personal and social dispositions transgressing the limits of selfishness or self-interest in the direction of mutual recognition and respect.<sup>21</sup>

What the discussed perspectives have in common is the emphasis on the primacy of practice over cognition and, more specifically, the primacy of ethical conduct over the knowledge of normative rules and legal principles. Knowledge of rules and principles can be easily obtained by reading textbooks or memorizing parental instructions. By contrast, ethical conduct in practice requires a steady process of habituation, that is, the cultivation of ethical dispositions conducive to the practice of individual and social virtues. It is the latter cultivation which alone holds out the hope of taming or curbing the temptations of power lust, greed, and injustice. As experience teaches—on both the personal and political levels—legal principles

and high moral rules can be easily avoided or circumvented in the absence of sound ethical dispositions; clever minds will always find loopholes, detours, and excuses. Moreover, general rules and principles do not interpret themselves and need always to be applied to complex circumstances—a need which provides endless escape routes to people not steeped in habituated ethical conduct. Transferring these considerations to the contemporary global situation, it becomes clear that cosmopolitanism cannot simply rely on the operation of legal principles and rational norms, but has to descend into the formation of conduct and character. As I see it, there is presently no shortage of international norms and conventions—but their impact on the actual conduct of public decision-makers is minimal.

This is not an argument against law, and especially against international legal rules and principles. But law is subsidiary to ethics; it is a fall-back position when ethical dispositions are lacking (and as a fall-back position it remains fragile and vulnerable to evasion). Turning back again to our theme: what is urgently needed in our time is a strengthening of the dispositions conducive to cosmopolitan co-existence and collaboration, chiefly the dispositions of generosity, hospitality, mutuality, and striving for justice. This strengthening involves a large-scale pedagogical effort aiming at the steady transformation of narrow (national, ethnic, or religious) self-interest into a willingness to care for the common interest or ‘common good’ of humankind. As a pedagogy, the effort should start as early as possible, at the elementary and secondary school levels and extending into college and adult education. An excellent mode of cosmopolitan pedagogy are exchange programs involving students, teachers, doctors, and members of other professions. Equally helpful are international nongovernmental organizations or institutions—like the ‘World Social Forum’ and the ‘World Public Forum—Dialogue of Civilizations’—which bring together people from many countries and from different walks of life. Even some inter-governmental institutions can play an important role; particularly prominent in this respect is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and its affiliates.

Given that, in all these instances, pedagogy involves cross-cultural learning processes, practical cosmopolitanism in large measure relies on communication, mutual interpretation, and dialogue, and thus takes a stand against every form of unilateral or hegemonic monologue. It is no accident that, in recent times, cosmopolitanism as practical conduct has been associated with the idea of a ‘dialogue of (or among) civilizations’.<sup>22</sup> The association is also captured in the notion ‘dialogical cosmopolitanism’—a phrase which is similar to, but not entirely synonymous with, Benhabib’s ‘dialogical universalism’. What is distinctive about dialogical or practice-centered cosmopolitanism is the refusal to grant blanket primacy to globalism or ‘universal’ order. In my view, granting such primacy seems to be based on the assumption that ‘bigger’ or larger is always ‘better’. But clearly, by itself, celebrating globalism means only to give preference to quantitative spatial extension—which says nothing about quality. As previously indicated, globalism often means nothing more than a mode of globetrotting or aimless tourism—devoid of any qualitative or ethical engagement. What one has to take seriously here is the

necessarily situated character of concrete human action and interaction—the fact that practice or conduct always occurs at a certain place, among a determinate and finite group of people. To this extent, the well-known motto ‘think globally, but act locally’ has its good sense—although the second half of the phrase is often forgotten. This also means that cosmopolitanism as practice cannot shun or sideline local contexts—because we basically learn about ethical conduct in concrete interaction with others. More generally, learning is a ‘bottom-up’ enterprise, and this holds true also and especially for cross-cultural or inter-civilizational learning. At its core, cosmopolitanism—to make any headway—requires learning and extending hospitality across borders, which is a difficult task and not sufficiently appreciated in celebrations of hybridity or total mobility.<sup>23</sup>

These comments do not entail the dismissal of universalism or its collapse into the diversity of particular local customs. However, there is a sense in which ‘global’ and ‘local’ are related in ways different from that suggested by the image of a spatial hierarchy. One way to express this difference may be to say that the ‘cosmos’ (of cosmopolitanism) can be found in small and recessed circumstances as much and perhaps more readily than in spatial bigness. This is what may be suggested by the medieval notion of ‘*perichoresis*’ denoting the presence or indwelling of truth in everything or every facet of the world. In a slightly different idiom, the philosopher Spinoza captured the idea in the pithy statement that ‘the more we know individual beings the more we are able to know God’. Something along similar lines may also have been meant by Leibniz when he argued that the ‘monads’ (or elements of the universe) do not need windows because that universe is reflected and mirrored in all its diverse parts (in a cosmic kind of ‘relationism’).<sup>24</sup>

The idea of a cosmic indwelling or of a cosmos inhabiting even small places is not a monopoly of Western philosophy but can also be found in East Asian and South Asian traditions. Thus, the great Confucian thinker Mencius left us these memorable lines:

The Way (*tao*) lies in what is near, but people think it in what is far off; one’s task lies in what is simple, but people seek it in what is complicated. If everyone would treat their kin as kin and their elders as elders, the world would be at peace.

In a more religious or spiritual language, a kindred thought has been expressed by the Indian poet Kabir (of whom one does not know whether he was Hindu or Muslim or perhaps something else) in his famous admonition to believers: ‘No need to go outside (or abroad); your front yard is the holy Banares’.<sup>25</sup>

## NOTES

1. See Heinrich Heine, *Sämtliche Schriften*, ed. K. Briegleb, vol. 3 (Munich: dtv, 1997), 379, 710; Ulrich Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 1, 79. Regarding the History of Cosmopolitanism Compare Derek Hester, *World Citizenship and Government: Cosmopolitan Ideas in the History of Western Political Thought* (New York, NY: St Martin’s Press, 1996), and S. Thielking, *Weltbürgertum* (Munich: Fink, 2000).

2. Seyla Benhabib, *Another Cosmopolitanism*, ed. Robert Post (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 17. Benhabib proceeds to distinguish between several possible meanings. For an instructive discussion of different meanings see Stan van Hoof, *Cosmopolitanism: A Philosophy for Global Ethics* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2009), 4–9.
3. See Benhabib, *Another Cosmopolitanism*, 20. Van Hoof defines cosmopolitanism as a ‘virtue’ (see Van Hoof, *Cosmopolitanism*, 8).
4. David Held, *Cosmopolitanism: Ideals and Realities* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), ix–x. See also his *Cosmopolitanism: A Defense* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), and ‘Global Covenant: The Social Democratic Alternative to the Washington Consensus’ (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004).
5. Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision*, 9.
6. Held, *Cosmopolitanism: Ideals and Realities*, 5–7. Compare also Richard Falk, *Predatory Globalization: A Critique* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999); Saskia Sassen, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York, NY: New Press, 1998); Charles S. Morris, *Money, Greed, and Risk* (New York, NY: Times Business, 1999).
7. Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision*, 80. See also S. Lash and J. Urry, *Global Culture Industry: The Mediation of Things* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005); Arun Appadurai, ‘Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy’, *Public Culture* 2 (1990), 1–19.
8. Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision*, 10, 41. Compare also Stanley Fish, ‘Boutique Multiculturalism’, *Critical Inquiry* 23 (1997), 378–96.
9. Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 2, 13–4, 17. See also Paul Virilio, *The Lost Dimension* (New York, NY: Semiotext, 1991), 13. The similarities between the electronically created cyber-dimension “beyond” space and time and a certain Christian transcendentalism is noted by Margaret Wertheim who writes: “While early Christians promulgated heaven as a realm in which the human soul would be freed from all the frailties and failings of the flesh, so today’s champions of cyberspace hail it as a place where the self will be freed from the limitations of physical embodiment”. See Margaret Wertheim, ‘The Pearly Gates of Cyberspace’, in *Architecture of Fear*, ed. Nan Elin (New York, NY: Princeton Architecture Press, 1997), 296.
10. Bauman, *Globalization*, 2–3, 18.
11. See Immanuel Kant, ‘Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch’, in *Kant’s Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss and H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 98–9 (note), 105–6. As Kant adds: ‘The stranger cannot claim the *right of a guest* to be entertained [...] He may only claim a *right of subsistence*, for all men are entitled to present themselves in the society of others by virtue of their right to the communal possession of the earth’s surface’. As one should note, the German ‘*Recht*’, like the Latin ‘*ius*’, can mean both ‘law’ and ‘right’. By ‘republicanism’, Kant at that point (101) meant a regime ‘whereby the executive power is separated from the legislative power’, while democracy is seen as a totalizing regime which is ‘necessarily a despotism’.
12. John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 3 (note 1), 17, 36–7. Regarding the distinction from Kant’s ‘transcendental idealism’, Rawls states (86–7): ‘We are giving content to an idea of practical reason and three of its component parts: reasonableness, decency, and rationality. The criteria for these three normative ideas are not [transcendentally] deduced, but enumerated and characterized in each case’. Another distinctive feature is the interpretation of ‘law’ (*ius*) in terms of ‘human rights’ (48). Compare also, Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).
13. See Charles R. Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979); Beitz, ed., *International Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985); Henry Shue, ed., *Nuclear Deterrence and Moral Restraint* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and Shue and David Rodin, eds., *Preemption: Military*

- Action and Moral Justification* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007); Thomas W. Pogge, *Realizing Rawls* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989); Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights: Cosmopolitan Responsibilities and Reforms* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002); Pogge, *John Rawls: His Life and Theory of Justice* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007). Following Pogge, the Rawlsian legacy has been pursued by numerous other scholars. See especially Gillian Brook, *Global Justice: A Cosmopolitan Account* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Darcel Moellendorf, *Cosmopolitan Justice* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002); Richard Vernon, *Cosmopolitan Regard: Political Membership and Global Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Patrick Hayden, *John Rawls: Towards a Just World Order* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2002). In Hayden's case, however, the Rawlsian legacy is curiously criss-crossed by borrowings from multiculturalism and radical empiricism; compare his *Multiplicity and Becoming: The Pluralist Empiricism of Gilles Deleuze* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1998).
14. Compare, for example, Jürgen Habermas, *Europe: The Faltering Project*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009); Habermas, *Time of Transitions*, ed. by Ciaran Cronin and Max Pensky (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006).
  15. See Benhabib, *Another Cosmopolitanism*, ed. and introd. by Robert Post (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1, 4, 16. In her comments on 'networks' and globalization, Benhabib sets herself in opposition to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000) and Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1999). The accent of 'individual' rights and liberties is even more pronounced in (so-called) 'liberal cosmopolitanism' as defended chiefly by Will Kymlicka; see his 'Liberal Nationalism and Cosmopolitan Justice', in Kymlicka, *Another Cosmopolitanism*, 128–44; and his, *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism, and Citizenship* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001).
  16. Benhabib, *Another Cosmopolitanism*, 18–20, 23–4. One should also recall in this context Habermas's famous text *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).
  17. David Held, 'Democracy and the New International Order', in *Cosmopolitan Democracy: An Agenda for a New World Order*, ed. Daniel Archbugi and Held (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), 96–7, 99–100, 108, 112. The deeper theoretical premises of his approach are spelled out in his *Cosmopolitanism: Ideas and Realities*, where he enumerates eight normative principles of global order (p. 69): '(1) equal worth and dignity; (2) active agency; (3) personal responsibility and accountability; (4) consent; (5) collective decision-making about public matters through voting procedures; (6) inclusiveness and subsidiarity; (7) avoidance of serious harm; and (8) sustainability'.
  18. Held, 'Democracy and the New International Order', 116; Held, *Cosmopolitanism*, 16. In the latter text, 'fundamental metaprinciples' bear in fact the 'justificatory burden' and serve as the 'organizing notions of ethical discourse'. As he adds, however, somewhat surprisingly (19): 'Contrary to popular criticism, cosmopolitanism is the triumph of difference and local affiliations'.
  19. Benhabib, *Another Cosmopolitanism*, 19–20, 60, 70–1. Compare also Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002) and Benhabib, 'The Rights of Others: Aliens, Residents and Citizens' (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
  20. See John Dewey, 'How We Think' and 'The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy', in *John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899–1924*, ed. Jo Ann Boydston, vol. 6 (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), 190–1, and vol. 10 (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980), 41–2; also 'My Pedagogic Creed', in *John Dewey: The Early Works, 1882–1898*, ed. Boydston, vol. 5 (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), 84–6; and 'Democracy and Education', in *John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899–1924*,



- ed. Boydston, vol. 9 (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980), 93. Compare also James Scott Johnston, *Inquiry and Education: John Dewey and the Quest for Democracy* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006), and my 'Democratic Action and Experience: Dewey's 'Holistic' Pragmatism', in *The Promise of Democracy: Political Agency and Transformation* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010), 43–65.
21. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1989), 295, 307–9, 329, 367–70; also his *Hermeneutics, Religion, and Ethics*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), and his essays 'Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy' and 'What is Practice [Praxis]? The Conditions of Social Reason', in *Reason in the Age of Science*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 69–87, 93–102. As articulated by Alasdair MacIntyre, neo-Aristotelianism involves an emphasis on ethical virtues shaped in 'practices', performed in particular settings, and recounted in 'narratives'. See MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008); Paul Blackledge and Kelvin Knight, eds., *Virtue and Politics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011). Compare also Elizabeth Anscombe, *Human Life, Action, and Ethics* (Charlottesville, VA: Imprint Academic, 2005); Elijah Millgram, *Ethics Done Right: Practical Reasoning as a Foundation of Moral Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and Stephen M. Gardiner, eds., *Virtue Ethics, Old and New* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).
  22. See in this respect my *Dialogue among Civilizations: Some Exemplary Voices* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), especially its opening chapter 'Dialogue among Civilizations: A Hermeneutical Perspective', 17–30; also Michális S. Michael and Fabio Petito, eds., *Civilizational Dialogue and World Order* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Majid Tehranian and David W. Chappel, eds., *Dialogue of Civilizations: A New Peace Agenda for a New Millennium* (New York, NY: Tauris, 2002).
  23. As indicated before, the need for 'hospitality' was initially emphasized by Kant in his 'Perpetual Peace'; more recently it was underscored by Jacques Derrida in his *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2001); the French original was titled *Cosmopolites de tous les pays, encore un effort!* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1997).
  24. Regarding 'perichoresis' see Raimon Panikkar, *The Rhythm of Being: The Gifford Lectures* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 42, 59, 174, 276; regarding Leibnizian 'monads' see Hans Heinz Holz, *Leibniz* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1958), 49–50. Regarding Spinoza see *The Book of God*, ed. with introduction by Dagobert D. Runes (New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 1958), 107–8. From a Buddhist perspective a similar thought has been expressed by the Dalai Lama in his book *The Universe in a Single Atom: How Science and Spirituality Can Save Our World* (New York, NY: Random House, 2005). Compare also my *Small Wonder: Global Power and Its Discontents* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).
  25. See *Songs of Kabir: From the Adi Granth*, ed. and trans. Nirmal Dass (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), 63; Muhammad Hedayetullah, *Kabir; The Apostle of Hindu-Muslim Unity* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977), 190–2. See also Mencius 4A11 as cited by Bryan W. Van Norden, 'Mencius', in Philip J. Ivanhoe and van Norden, eds., *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2005), 138.