



Transcending the Quagmire of Patriotism in Cosmopolitanism Discourses

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Abstract: Cosmopolitanism, an age-old thought, has garnered renewed interests among philosophers in contemporary times. However, these renewed interests landed into the quagmire of the never-ending debates on the kind of obligation owed to other individuals. There are philosophers such as Nussbaum who holds that a special obligation owed to others individuals in the form of patriotism is untenable with the ideal of cosmopolitanism. At the same time, philosophers such as Kant would allow patriotism as a tenet within cosmopolitanism itself. This paper argues that there is a way out to this debate. Following Appiah's partial cosmopolitanism, we can see cosmopolitanism as a practical approach to addressing global issues.

Keywords: Cosmopolitanism, obligation, patriotism, Appiah, Nussbaum

1. Introduction

Cosmopolitanism, in the minimal sense of the thought, assumes the world to be a single human community. There can be many senses to such an assumption. In the political sense, it is the assumption that the world is one political community (Chappell 2010, 17). In the moral sense, it is the assumption that the world ought to be a moral community. In the cultural sense, it is the assumption that the world is a single cultural community. Corresponding to the different senses of the thought a person can be a political cosmopolitan, a moral cosmopolitan, a cultural cosmopolitan or more (Brown and Held 2010). At the same time, cosmopolitanism can just be a trivial slogan. Anybody can assume that humanity is one single community or that humanity ought to be a single community and keep that ideal to oneself. The earliest known cosmopolitan, Diogenes the Cynic, was said to have developed his cosmopolitan conviction from a refusal towards local obligation, a sceptical response to customs and tradition and contempt for distinction between Greeks and non-Greeks (Nussbaum 2010, 27). Contemporary cosmopolitans emphasise the individual as the ultimate unit of moral concern and is entitled to equal respect and consideration irrespective of the state (citizenship) he/she belongs to (Brock 2015). As cosmopolitans, we owe obligation to all individuals.

The question yet remains, what is the extent and degree of obligation we owe to others? Should local affiliations not be considered even if we avow our responsibility to the world-wide community? This is the

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debate that mired cosmopolitan discourse. Within the cosmopolitans themselves, there are varying takes with regard to the affiliations between the local authorities and the global community. There are discrepancies among cosmopolitans regarding the relationship between patriotism and cosmopolitanism. To some cosmopolitans, patriotism and cosmopolitanism are fairly compatible while to some others it becomes utterly incompatible – accepting one is tantamount to ruling out the other. Cosmopolitanism discourse is drowning in this quagmire. This paper argues that Appiah’s proposal of partial cosmopolitanism offers a way out of this quagmire of patriotism debates, and shows the way forward for cosmopolitanism to address the issues of our times like moral relativism, cultural relativism and globalisation using the age-old thought.

2. Patriotism and National Boundaries

In ‘Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch’, Kant proposes a ‘league of nations’ quite cosmopolitan in outlook. This league of nations will not be related in such a way as different nations come together within a state as it would imply a relation between a subordinate and a supreme authority. Kant then goes on to propose a ‘federation of states’ in which individuals will be affiliating to their own states but under the compassing authority of the moral law (Kant 2006, 78). This understanding places Kant among the group of cosmopolitans who view that cosmopolitanism does not mean the actualisation of a single world state. In other words, these cosmopolitans are not against submitting one’s allegiances to a local authority such as to the state to which they belong yet at the same time they uphold the idea of being a world citizen.

The cosmopolitan outlook of Kant is fairly compatible with patriotism. For Kant the state is inevitable for a cosmopolitan ideal because the individual’s freedom is guaranteed by the state (Kleingeld 2010, 15). So, it is a moral duty of a rational individual to affiliate oneself to a state. Kleingeld goes on to explain that the type of state to which a rational individual should be affiliated to is the state with a republican constitution. It will be the type of republic in which the rational free individuals – compatriots – would make laws for governing themselves. Thus, for Kant an individual must be patriotic because patriotism led to the emergence of the republic. However, the patriotism of the Kantian kind is peculiar. Kantian patriotism most significantly refers to a special obligation that citizens have toward their own republic as a political institution. In this sense, patriotism becomes a duty for a rational individual towards one’s own political belonging. As such to affiliate oneself to the world-wide community prior to the local institution that one belongs to would become unacceptable to Kant. Patriotism becoming a duty for Kant is explained by his philosophy of cosmopolitan right (Kleingeld 2010, 15). For Kant, patriotic and cosmopolitan duties are



compatible, as Kleingeld puts it “For if the republic is itself required as part of the enterprise of bringing about a ‘cosmopolitan condition’ of right, then doing one’s duty as a citizen of one’s own republic is in line with one’s cosmopolitan duty.” (Kleingeld 2000, 313-314)

For Nussbaum, national boundaries are arbitrary. There is nothing absolute about them that warrants necessary obligation. She asked “what is it about the national boundary that magically converts people toward whom we are both incurious and indifferent into people toward whom we have duties of mutual respect?” (Nussbaum 1996, 14). For Nussbaum national or state boundaries are nothing but imaginary lines a cosmopolitan must overcome for the actualisation of the global community. Nussbaum (1996, 5) holds that “nationality is a morally irrelevant characteristic” for a cosmopolitan. For her, “conceding that a morally arbitrary boundary such as the boundary of the nation has a deep and formative role in our deliberations, we seem to deprive ourselves of any principled way of persuading citizens that they should in fact join hands across boundaries of ethnicity and class and gender and race” (Nussbaum 1996, 27). Affiliating oneself to local principalities can hamper one’s duty to transcend the petty biases of the local in order to realise the true obligation one has of the larger humanity. A cosmopolitan commitment is to “give our first allegiance to what is morally good” much more than our belongingness to one particular nation or country (Nussbaum 1996, 5). We can go on giving our allegiance to a local denomination or boundaries and never arrive at the good (the morally good). The reality is that human beings are all the same inside or outside of such imaginary boundaries. Thus, local affiliations can come in the way of one’s moral commitment towards the good of other human beings. As such, we may not be able to convince other people of the cosmopolitan reality; that we are all morally responsible to one another.

According to Nussbaum, one’s foremost allegiance ought to be to the moral good of all human beings. Patriotism is an allegiance to an imagined national boundary first rather than to the good. Therefore, patriotism and cosmopolitanism turn out to be, as we can see, utterly incompatible as far as Nussbaum is concerned.

3. Overcoming the Quagmire of Patriotism

For Appiah, national boundaries, imaginary as they may be, are germane to the formation of a state, a region, a demarcation etc. and without such boundaries there can be no such thing as patriotic feelings, no such thing as affiliation to a local authority. He went as far as saying that only because we can owe such an allegiance to the local authority in the name of patriotism, it becomes possible to have an allegiance to the worldwide community at large (Appiah 2002, 26).



The idea that patriotism and cosmopolitanism are held incompatible by Nussbaum is because of the failure to understand the modern nation and state as distinct entities. To understand this, Appiah holds, one has to distinguish the notion between nation and state. Yet by upholding this distinction does not mean subscribing to the Herderian notion that nations never pre-exist states. If states pre-exist nations this means that a state is arbitrary and not the nation. Appiah distinguishes the notion of the nation and the state to show that the nation is morally arbitrary, not the state (Appiah 2002, 27). He goes with Benedict Anderson's understanding of the nation as imagined communities sharing the same ancestry and culture. As such, the membership of the nation is different from the membership of the state. Appiah says that human beings exist under definite political orders called state smaller than what is called humanity. And within this political order the questions of public right and wrong gets largely argued out and decided. This cannot be done within a nation. Membership of a state is coerced or can be coerced but membership of a nation cannot be, it can only be imagined. Due to this Appiah says membership of the state then, is not morally as arbitrary as membership of the nation. Thus, he says that the cosmopolitan critique of liberalism's focus on the state is overstated: because the cultural variability that cosmopolitanism celebrates has come to depend on the existence of the plurality of states, we need to take states seriously (Appiah 2006, 28). Appiah is of the view that membership to the state can come close to membership of a cosmopolis – literal membership and not figurative one. He argues that membership to the worldwide community should be like membership to the nation in which the responsibility one owes becomes not coerced but out of free decision. This is because nations and states matter differently for Appiah. Nations matter because they matter to the people. In the moral sense, nations matter in the same sense as football or opera matter – as desirable things. They are desires of autonomous agents which cannot be undermined even if the desire cannot always come into fruition. On the other hand, states matter morally intrinsically (Appiah 2006, 28). States matter because they are necessary whether people have a concern for them or not. They regulate our lives through forms of coercion that will always require moral justification (Appiah 2006, 28). The state can coerce one to oblige because it is an instrument of coercion. The cosmopolitan obligation must be as strong as the obligation to the state but in such a manner that it comes out freely from an individual. Appiah went on to say that what can be hateful if coerced can be celebrated when it flows from the free decisions of the individuals or groups (Appiah 2006, 22).

Human beings thrive best in smaller circles. So, the partial cosmopolitan should champion not just the state but also the county, the town, the business, the craft, the profession, and the family – all of these are community among communities, circles within circles of human existence under the same moral concern (Appiah 2006, 29). Appiah reduces the cosmopolitan ethos into 'live and let live'. An individual can be a



patriot and a cosmopolitan compatibly as long as one values one's life equally as one value the life of others, or strangers regardless of one's attachment to any state or local authority. Cosmopolitanism is one form of owing responsibility to others just as patriotism is a form of owing responsibility to others and they can overlap. They can overlap in such a manner that one can say I am an Indian and a citizen of the world.

4. As Patriotic as a Cosmopolitan

Just as Kant has a peculiar rendering of patriotism, Appiah too has a different nuance to the concept of patriotism. One stark difference between Kant and Appiah here would be, for Kant patriotism is one's duty towards the state while as for Appiah patriotism can be the moral obligation one owes to the nation or a loyalty towards any particular grouping which has been mentioned (Kleingeld 2016, 19). The epitome of a cosmopolitan patriot for Appiah is his father Joe Appiah who saw no inconsistencies in the loyalties between smaller circles of human existence and the overarching humanity – between a nation and the world (Appiah 2006, xvi). Joe Appiah was a Ghanaian patriot who considered himself to be a cosmopolitan and who told his progeny that they are citizens of the world (Appiah 2006, 21). He loved his Ghana nation as much as he loved the world at large. Patriotism, for Appiah, is the feeling that we belong with a group of people. Are compatriots special? Joe Appiah would definitely agree. But such patriotic feeling one harbours does not necessarily hinder the commitment that we have for strangers in the world. Appiah justified this by saying that “our loyalty to humankind – so vast, so abstract, a unity – does not deprive us of the capacity to care for people closer by; the notion of a global citizenship can have real and practical meaning” (Appiah 2006, 26). By caring for our near and dear ones we are already playing a part in the commitment we have for the larger community – we are acting as a citizen of the world, fulfilling the responsibility we owe to the larger human community.

Patriotism is more than just owing a responsibility and the prerogatives one has to a state or nation alone. It is a sentiment. This sentiment is to the feeling of pride, emotional elation that we have when the national anthem is played or when the national team is winning. It is also the feeling of pain, shame, remorse etc at the time of calamities or disasters etc. Such a feeling is unique to a human individual and it is a value. However, valuing one's attachments does not mean undermining other's attachment. As Appiah highlighted, “you cannot have any respect for human diversity and expect everyone to become a cosmopolitan” (Appiah 2006, xviii). A cosmopolitan compatriot loves her nation and she acknowledges the love strangers have for their respective nation and respects this love that strangers have for their own nations. Patriotism of a partial cosmopolitan must allow room for diversity. Cosmopolitanism ought to value the different human forms of social and cultural life (Appiah 2006, 26). The ethos of cosmopolitanism



is not the homogenisation of the global world. It is rather to think of a world in which each one is firmly attached to a culture of his or her own and where everyone celebrates the differences of other cultures. Partial cosmopolitanism emphasises a universal concern towards others or strangers - rather than patriotism being incompatible with cosmopolitanism, patriotism without any concern for the cosmopolitan ethos becomes unjustifiable (Appiah 2006, xiv). For if one respects one's life one must also respect the life of others, professing respect for one's life is morally connected with professing respect for similar life forms.

There are two strands intertwined in partial cosmopolitanism: "One is the idea that we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship. The other is that we take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance" (Appiah 2006, xiii). This approach is relevant in dealing with global issues such as border conflicts, refugees and migrants. Partial cosmopolitanism, at the core, offers a practical approach to everyday issues as compared to the kinds of cosmopolitanism that is stuck with theoretical patriotism debate. It challenges us to understand that the decisions we make, even those that seem to only help our local area such as protecting one's job, can actually be part of a bigger solution. We ought to look beyond immediate problems and recognize the full value of every human life, not just seeing someone who is suffering (Appiah 2006, 168).

5. Conclusion

Kant argued for obligation to the state while Nussbaum argued against it. We can see in Appiah the combination of the notion of responsibility to a nation and responsibility to a cosmopolis to come up with what he calls rooted cosmopolitanism. The world of a cosmopolitan patriot is a possible world where, as Appiah says, "people would accept the citizen's responsibility to nurture the culture and politics of their homes" (Appiah 2006, 22). This cosmopolitanism is different from the kind of cosmopolitanism that Kant and Nussbaum endorses, which is a rootless or impartial cosmopolitanism. Appiah's partial cosmopolitanism is a middle ground between impartial cosmopolitanism and extreme nationalism. It offers a way forward out of the quagmire patriotism debate, and provides a cosmopolitan approach that is practicable in dealing with global issues.



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