**Cosmopolitanism: A Reflection of Globalization**

**Introduction: What is cosmopolitanism?**

Modern globalization, beginning with international industrial development in the 19th century, led to the exchange of ideas, values, goods, and people internationally. Today, it is not uncommon for us to experience the effects of globalization, through the consumption of food or products that come from across the world. These conveniences have allowed us to consider other cultures, practices, and traditions outside of our own as a factor of everyday life—something that most generations before us were not exposed to. With the rise of globalization and civil rights movements dedicated to breaking down ideological borders, the concept of cosmopolitanism has become increasingly attractive to some; that is, the idea that all human beings share a global citizenship, regardless of arbitrary national borders or other factors like race, ethnicity, sex, or orientation.

Cosmopolitanism in its earliest forms thrived in ancient Greek and Rome where “[it] has been a project of empires, of long-distance trades, and of cities” (Calhoun, 2002). While this sense of cosmopolitanism has evolved with time and increased globalization, modern cosmopolitanism may feel much more achievable to some, and incredibly out-of-reach to others. True, there is an overwhelming ideological presence based on division in nationality, ethnicity, and race. These barriers in today’s society make it seem that with time we become more divisive rather than finding our common ground. However, reflecting upon the strides each generation has made overcoming these issues, one could argue the very opposite, that humanity is more often drawn to come together. While some people have become attracted to the idea of cosmopolitanism in today’s world, to others this idea may seem far-fetched, undesirable, or entirely unachievable. Our increasingly globalized world simultaneously becomes increasingly complex, and it may seem to some that our differences mean that cosmopolitanism is entirely unattainable.

With increased globalization impacting our daily lives and perspectives, the concept of cosmopolitanism and how it could be enacted can get muddled and vary depending on differing viewpoints. In other words, cosmopolitanism would mean different things to different people, and any form of implementation would need to address this issue and find some sort of system that protects its citizens from these kinds of generalizations. The purpose of this paper is to explore the fundamental concept of cosmopolitanism and its merit in our modern, ever-increasingly globalized society. As we explore this issue, we will also consider examples of modern cosmopolitanism, and its desirability in today’s world. In doing this, we gain a better understanding of what this concept details, if it ever could be implemented, and perhaps even give us a sense of what a future might look like in a truly globalized world.

**Is Cosmopolitanism achievable?**

If today’s society continues to evolve to push for cosmopolitanism, it begins to face the challenges of implementing such a comprehensive body of political institutions and human rights protections. If cosmopolitanism was to be achieved, one of the priorities for implementation would have to be establishing global political institutions in order to address the problems of a globalized society. This would prove to be particularly difficult as it would go directly against those in power politically and economically. Because of this, any sort of global democracy would struggle to come into existence, and in the event that it could, it would be consistently at odds with these forces. Not only this, but today’s current political and economic model was designed for a globalized yet divided world, meaning these global institutions would struggle to effectively run against this system.

Some argue that cosmopolitanism cannot be born from a rational plan, but rather occur organically as global democracy begins to empower citizens. In this instance, it is unlikely that this will happen through comprehensive, sweeping change, but rather it will occur slowly, incrementally, and at pace with the changing perspectives and ideologies of those who enact it. Today’s cosmopolitanism, particularly in the west, may attempt to negate factors like culture and tradition—arguing that cosmopolitanism should blend every culture together. These types of “global citizens” often adopt traits of cultures without moving too far out of their comfort zone and create a homogeneous form of cosmopolitanism that feels progressive and explorative but lacks all of the growth that comes from truly experiencing things that are foreign to you. While this sense of “global citizen” tribe does offer a sense comfort and a wider range of foods, practices, and traditions to live within, it is not a sustainable kind of cosmopolitanism (Douthat, 2016). If cosmopolitanism is to succeed, we must rather acknowledge and appreciate our differences and not only use them to our benefit but appreciate their importance outside of the scope of our own lives. Additionally, to retain motivation among citizens, we must emphasis the concepts of locality, community, and tradition. Through doing so, we offer the sense of moral obligation to help those around you and the emotional benefit of building strong relationships.

Meaningful and significant relationships are already being formed across national and political borders. Cosmopolitans argue to extend the rights of citizenship to encompass the range of these built associations. Through these values, enacting a global citizenship will feel naturally progressive to citizens who feel connected with humanity. When it comes to these non-nationally based relationships, political scientist David Held argues that “people would come, thus, to enjoy multiple citizenships—political membership in the diverse political communities which significantly affected them. They would be citizens of their immediate political communities, and of the wider regional and global networks which impacted upon their lives.” This argument establishes that nationality does not have to be negated for cosmopolitanism to work, but rather the two can come together in compromise. This belief that citizens can belong to and feel obligated to multiple political and ideological groups gives hope that cosmopolitanism in this sense is much more achievable.

**What are some examples of cosmopolitanism today?**

While cosmopolitanism is mostly discussed conceptually, modern globalization has led to some forms of cosmopolitanism that currently exist. Today, cosmopolitanism can be found in the messy interconnectedness of our global society. Products from across the world can be found in most stores, and our economies are dependent on international trade. Businesses can easily outsource certain jobs and practices to other nations, and politicians from differing countries often team up to accomplish a variety of tasks. These forms of globalization shed light to an increasingly cosmopolitan society. Take for instance the European Union, a classic example of what cosmopolitanism could look like. They’re ability to find common ground and create a unified institution has led its citizens to pass back and forth through different countries without much hassle at all. In many ways, it also shows how it’s possible to keep nationality while creating universal citizens—no one would argue that Germany and Italy are the same. Although this kind of system is not global, it does offer one of the best examples of what cosmopolitanism could look like and provides insight into its benefits.

For individual citizens, there are examples of globalization almost everywhere we look. In a single day, a citizen may eat multiple different cuisines, hear multiple languages, and consume a variety of international products. Through this lens, each person may feel like a cosmopolitan. Even—if not especially—younger generations say they view themselves as global citizens. Many of these people are already experiencing a sense of multiple belongings: to different nations, regions, ethnicities, religions, global ties, and other communities (Nejatbakhsh, 2014). To younger generations, ties to their ideological communities may feel more significant than their ties to their nation or their hometown, and a sense of “tribe” is still one of the most fundamental senses of belonging. But even outside of our day-to-day, people often experience varying cultures on a regular basis. Today more than ever, frequent travelers can go globe-trotting using visa-friendly passports and international credit cards, making global exploration fairly painless. In this way, cosmopolitanism already exists in the lives of the privileged who can travel at will. While it is not accessible to all, this example offers insight that true cosmopolitanism might one day exist.

**Is cosmopolitanism desirable?**

Though cosmopolitanism itself is not inherently a undesirable ideology, like so many other issues today it has become radicalized and fallen prey to the new kind of misunderstanding that occurs with radicalized groups. Many political scientists have argued—especially in light of our new brand of politics taking place today—that the political spectrum is no longer a horizontal axis ranging from far right to far left, but rather a spectrum that covers cosmopolitan to nativist and globalist to nationalist (Kluth, 2018). The radicalization as a result of these upcoming ideologies not only impacts how cosmopolitanism could be enacted, but also how people—especially those on the opposite end of the spectrum—may view it. As the idea of cosmopolitanism is a fairly liberal ideology, it may come as no surprise that many view it as an elitist ideal. It is true that many who consider themselves “global citizens” often come from a place of privilege and may simply use cosmopolitanism as a tool to travel more or diversify their diet, but the idea itself is fairly anti-elitist, arguing instead that anyone can and should be a global citizen and that there should be no barriers to prevent anyone from world travel. However, those who are adamantly opposed to cosmopolitism may also defend their nationalism over experiencing other cultures. Often times the concept of cosmopolitanism may neglect senses of community and locality, leaving people feeling disregarded and undervalued. The term cosmopolitan may even seem to some as “rootless”, disregarding any sense of tradition or belonging (Kluth, 2018). This is one of the reasons that any implementation of a global institution must also emphasize the value of locality, community and tradition, as this shallow, washed up form of cosmopolitan would be wholly undesirable.

In a world where cosmopolitanism runs perfectly, there would still be significant drawbacks. For one, there is a very fine line these global institutions must walk to ensure that global citizens have universal rights, while also establishing the need for locality. There are also risks of these institutions gaining too much unilateral power, even with a form of global democracy. Even outside of these global political systems, citizens may feel negative impacts of being a global citizen if these issues of locality and community are not addressed. For instance, those who truly become global citizens and experience a variety of cultures, may not be able to connect with communities that have strong ties (Calhoun, 2017). In this sense, the life of a global citizen could easily lead to isolation. These two extremes looking at major international costs and smaller individual costs prove that even with a system in place, cosmopolitanism could still have costs. With this in mind, it becomes up to us to determine the kind of society we would like to live and grow in, and what our priorities should be as human beings.

**Conclusion**

This analysis of cosmopolitanism as a concept and as a policy illustrates it’s complexity, and how people can have varying perspectives regarding this ideology. While some may find it to be elitist or disregarding local communities and traditions, cosmopolitanism at its core is the belief that human beings should be global citizens and we should be able to appreciate our differences while still being able to share a global citizenship. Looking at today’s examples of cosmopolitanism, there is hope that one day universal citizenship could exist. Examples like the European Union and frequent travelers offer insight as to what a cosmopolitan society could look like. If we were ever to implement such an ideology, there would be a need to establish carefully balanced global institutions, and we would consistently need to emphasize the importance of locality and traditions. Even still, there would still be drawbacks to implementing a fully cosmopolitan society, both big and small. However, it is up to us to determine what priorities we want to hold close. Reflecting on these thoughts, we can see that cosmopolitanism could offer universal rights and freedoms and create a global citizenship that encompasses all human beings. While this could potentially have drawbacks, this ideology could potentially be achievable if not now, by future generations.

While cosmopolitanism is not inherently good or bad, there can be both benefits and drawbacks to having such an open global society. What we would gain in rights and freedoms, we would give up in security and potentially belonging. These problems may be fairly philosophical, but in the event that global institutions were to be created, they must be addressed. Our world is incredibly diverse and has so much to offer. With increased globalization, we are more connected now than ever before. While there are certain barriers preventing us from being a fully cosmopolitan society, I believe that it is achievable, and there is great merit to the benefits it would provide. However, the implementation would be difficult, and offer a great deal of challenges. Because of this, it is of the utmost importance that we continue to collaborate on a global scale, and continue the free exchange of ideas, values, and beliefs. In doing so, not only do we find more common ground, but we can begin to tackle some of the challenges our future world may face.

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