

## BOOK REVIEW

*The Cosmopolitan Tradition: A Noble but Flawed Ideal.* BY MARTHA C. NUSSBAUM.  
(Harvard University Press, 2019. Pp. 309. Price \$27.95. ISBN 9780674052499.)

Because it provides a useful framework for thinking about specific duties across national boundaries and global justice, cosmopolitanism has many adherents and considerable influence in the field of global ethics. Martha Nussbaum's latest contribution is commendable for its scholarly detail in tracing the historical lineage of the cosmopolitan tradition while identifying the origins of its shortcomings. Though Nussbaum provides a rich discussion of historical texts and philosophical issues that would appeal to the specialist, her writing is clear and accessible to general audiences, and the book would be appropriate for an upper-division undergraduate seminar.

Cosmopolitanism is the 'moral idea' that 'dignity is non-hierarchical' (p. 2); that human beings have equal and unconditional worth because, and this is the germ of the philosophical failing for Nussbaum, of our *capacity* for moral choice. Characteristics endowed either by nature or society, as well as those of non-human animals, are irrelevant from a moral point of view, as are external goods such as wealth, status, class, and the like. This noble idea, however, is flawed because it introduces the problem that we have yet to overcome—that 'the dignity of moral capacity is complete in itself' in that material goods are unimportant for human flourishing (p. 5). Consequently, cosmopolitanism introduces a bifurcation of duties—duties of respect and duties of material aid—but holds that only duties of respect matter. This flaw—that human dignity is immune from the vicissitudes of fortune—allows us to evade duties of material aid. The remainder of the book sets out to trace this flaw through a selected history of Western moral philosophy (Cicero, the Stoics, Grotius, and Smith) and argue that its persistence to this day can be overcome by important modifications to cosmopolitan theories based on Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach (CA).

Nussbaum lays blame for the bifurcation of justice at the foot of Cicero but does so through a critical account that aims to rehabilitate certain aspects of his view. It was Cicero, under the influence of Stoic philosophy's dismissive attitude towards external goods, who introduced the distinction between duties

of justice and duties of material aid and the asymmetrical idea that duties of justice are strict and universal, while those of material aid allow for some discretion on the part of the agent in terms of when and to whom such duties are binding—an asymmetry that is the origin of modern philosophy's distinction between perfect and imperfect duties. But it was also Cicero's recognition that some differential consideration can be given to family, kin, and nation when it comes to duties of material aid because of morally relevant features of 'gratitude, need and dependency, and thick association' (p. 33).

Nussbaum identifies two problems with the Stoic/Ciceronian view, which she further develops in Chapter 3. First, the Stoics' dismissal of external goods as accidental and unnecessary for moral goodness of the soul is inconsistent with their justification for the asymmetry of the two notions of duties. If the Stoic ideal is complete mastery of one's passions and freedom of the soul, then why should slavery or abuse be any more an affront to human dignity than poverty or low social class? Rather than follow the Stoic to this logical conclusion, however, Nussbaum advocates for the decidedly more Aristotelian view that both physical and mental abuse, as well as material impoverishment, are an affront to human dignity because a minimum standard of both material and emotional well-being are required for *eudaimonia*. The second problem Nussbaum identifies strikes at the heart of Stoic cosmopolitanism. The Stoics eschewed external goods also due to their belief that any attachment to externals would lead to attachment to personal relations, to unstable passions, and to moral partiality. Thus, Stoics deny that externals are necessary for flourishing also because one cannot have particular attachments *and* respect the value and dignity of all humans. For Nussbaum, this poses a deep problem for cosmopolitanism because external goods are necessary even for duties of justice given that internal capabilities constitutive of human dignity require nurturing and external support to develop. If the Stoics are right about the dangers of particular passions and attachments—even to family—then the external goods that Nussbaum thinks are necessary at the same time block our ability to have sufficient detachment to satisfy cosmopolitan ethical demands. To overcome this dilemma requires a reconceptualization of both cosmopolitanism and our emotional relationship between particular attachments and love of humanity, which Cicero has achieved, according to Nussbaum.

In what is an insightful, thorough, and penetrating chapter (Chapter 5), Nussbaum lays bare how these two contrasting strands of thought—the Ciceronian allowance for special duties to family and fellow citizens and the Stoic emphasis on detachment from our passions—are articulated by Adam Smith in complex yet ultimately unsatisfying ways. But more interestingly and importantly for Nussbaum, Smith is the first to argue in *The Wealth of Nations* that duties of justice entail duties of aid in a way that lays fertile ground for the CA. Duties of justice alone are insufficient for protecting the dignity of persons because differences in habit, education, and legal and economic arrangements

have an impact on these core capacities and ultimately distort the conditions of exchange. To be fully human requires that these capabilities be trained and developed, which suggests that duties of material aid are as important as duties of justice, a position that Nussbaum further develops in Chapter 7.

In the last two chapters, Nussbaum identifies and discusses five significant philosophical and ethical problems associated with cosmopolitanism and offers prescriptions for overcoming these deficiencies that transition cosmopolitanism to Nussbaum's preferred CA, some of which might be familiar to communitarian critics of cosmopolitanism. The first addresses limitations to cosmopolitan moral psychology, especially the Stoics' difficulty in motivating individuals to care about global justice given their skepticism of particular attachments. Secondly, cosmopolitanism's emphasis on a single, overarching normative view excludes from consideration any fidelity to religion or similar traditions within the public sphere. Thirdly, Nussbaum rejects the Stoic-cosmopolitan tradition's emphasis on international law both because of the absence of satisfactory enforcement mechanisms but also due to the Grotius's (Chapter 4) commitment to national sovereignty as a normative principle. Fourthly, the concentration of aid funneled through powerful and largely unaccountable international non-governmental organisations undermines national sovereignty and is ineffectual at best and harmful at worst. Finally, her improvement upon Grotius' views on asylum and migration has particular salience given the global challenges today and provides useful principles for adjudicating among competing concerns while justifying moral condemnation of current policies, especially guest-worker programs, liberal deportation policies, and selective asylum based on ethnicity or religion.

In making a compelling case that the cosmopolitan tradition is a noble but flawed ideal, Nussbaum engages the reader through her usual careful, scholarly analysis of important historical texts that would be beneficial to those interested in the history of philosophy and to those seeking a nuanced understanding of cosmopolitanism. Certainly, some might object that her analysis represents only one version of cosmopolitanism, a point she anticipates in her criticism that 'the term "cosmopolitanism" is now too vague to be useful' (p. 209), but part of her project is to isolate through historical analysis those salient aspects that provide the tradition with unity. Her argument might have been strengthened as well by acknowledging existing critiques of cosmopolitanism outside the CA, but for those who are interested in justifying a global ethic freed from the constraints of cosmopolitanism, Nussbaum's latest contribution will serve as a rich and valuable resource.

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