Cosmopolitanism – cultural, moral and political

Advanced Seminar

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Summer Term 2014
Class on Mondays from 16–18 in room M210 (Center for Ethics)

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Office hours: Tue 10–12 (M212)

Since ancient times, the idea that human beings are not only members of one particular city or state but also members of a global community has fascinated many thinkers. Recently, the concept of “cosmopolitanism” (“world citizenship”) has received increased attention in political and moral philosophy as well as in the social sciences. In this seminar we will read contemporary contributions from the thriving debate about cosmopolitanism and the non-cosmopolitan alternatives.

Three main dimensions of cosmopolitanism can be distinguished. First, cultural cosmopolitanism as a view about the role of culture in a multicultural global context. Second, cosmopolitanism as the moral view that all human beings are – as morally equals – part of a morally relevant global community that places moral demands on everyone’s actions. Third, political cosmopolitanism as a view about global justice which spells out consequences of moral cosmopolitanism for global institutional arrangements. The seminar will briefly touch cultural cosmopolitanism but focus on moral and political cosmopolitanism.

Questions to be discussed include: What is the role of culture in the globalised world? How much should we care about global inequality and what should we do about it? How does membership in associations like nations matter with regard to duties of distributive justice? Can special obligations be accommodated within a cosmopolitan framework? Which global institutional arrangements are desirable from a cosmopolitan perspective, and which reforms would hence be demanded? What should a “good citizen of the world” do?

We will read texts by: Kwame A. Appiah, Charles Beitz, Gillian Brock, Joseph Carens, Thomas Pogge, John Rawls, Samuel Scheffler, and Iris M. Young.

To prepare for the seminar, it is helpful to read the introduction by Gillian Brock in her edited volume “Cosmopolitanism versus non-cosmopolitanism. Critiques, defenses, reconceptualizations” (Oxford University Press 2013, pp. 1–35).

Some familiarity with moral theories and theories of justice will be helpful, but is no precondition for attending the class.

A reading list with the texts as PDF files will be available on the course website.

Skill objectives: To become familiar with the contemporary debate about cosmopolitanism and non-cosmopolitan alternatives in moral and political philosophy; to practice one’s abilities to critically engage with a complex topic, to contribute to a discussion and to write an academic paper.

The assessment will be based on a written assignment of about 15 pages.
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Seminar by Dr. Jan-Christoph Heilinger
Mon 4–6 pm (s.t.), M210


Easter Holidays


Pentecost Holidays


