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Cosmopolitanism and Global Ethics

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Abstract

Embracing all humanity as one's own is the core of the modern idea of cosmopolitanism, but the present time with rising tribalism, populism, racism, and narrow-minded nationalism is not propitious for cosmopolitanism. At a time like this, the cosmopolitan effort to see cultures and peoples as close to one another rather than absolutely different becomes all the more important. The comparative study of different cultures and literatures may promote a cosmopolitan stance, and from a comparative perspective, we may draw some ideas from the ancient Chinese philosopher Mencius for a theory of global ethics.

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Keywords

Diogenes, Immanuel Kang, Mencius, global ethics, comparative studies, mentality, dichotomies

A cosmopolitan is literally a citizen of the world, and the first person who called himself a cosmopolitan, according to Diogenes Laërtius, is Diogenes of Sinope, a contemporary of Plato's. When he was asked what countryman he was, he replied: "A Citizen of the world" (Laërtius, 1915: 241–42). Reading the many anecdotes recorded in Laërtius's *Life of Diogenes*, we may find this ancient Cynic philosopher a rather eccentric fellow. Exiled from his native Sinope and living meagerly like a beggar, Diogenes was fiercely independent, holding "freedom of speech" as "the most excellent thing among men" (Laërtius, 1915: 243). He insulted Plato and many others, and famously told Alexander the Great to get out of the way as he was basking in the Craneum gymnasium in Corinth, when Alexander came by and asked him what kind of favor he would like to have. "Cease to shade me from the sun," Diogenes replied (Laërtius, 1915: 230). Rude and haughty as he was, Diogenes apparently enjoyed a rather high reputation as a philosopher among his contemporaries, so much so that Alexander once said that "if he had not been Alexander, he should have liked to be Diogenes" (Laërtius, 1915: 228). He was said to be "very violent in expressing his haughty disdain of others" (Laërtius, 1915: 225), so apparently Diogenes may have been a difficult person to deal with, but he certainly held himself well with a strong sense of dignity.

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For Diogenes, declaring himself not attached to any country or place was a gesture of defiance, but the idea of a "world citizen," κόσμου πολίτης or cosmopolitan, as Martha Nussbaum notes, was further developed by the Stoic philosophers to become a "respectable and culturally fruitful" concept, a principle of cosmopolitanism that stipulates that we should embrace all human beings in the world without the usual barrier of difference, be it ethnic, linguistic, cultural, social, religious, or whatever other kind. "We should recognize humanity—and its fundamental ingredients, reason and moral capacity—wherever it occurs, and give that community of humanity our first allegiance" (Nussbaum, 1997: 58–59). Embracing all humanity as one's own is the core of the modern idea of cosmopolitanism. This is also what Kwame Anthony Appiah argues when he speaks of cosmopolitanism as the basic moral principle that "no local loyalty can ever justify forgetting that each human being has responsibilities to every other" (Appiah, 2006: xvi). The central idea of cosmopolitanism, Thomas Pogge also argues, "is that of *including all human beings as equals*" (Pogge, 1993: 312). A citizen of the world takes the whole world as home and all human beings as one's own community beyond any differences of race, gender, class, culture, language, religion, social status, or political systems. In other words, cosmopolitanism advocates a global ethics, a moral responsibility towards all human beings in the world beyond any differences that divide us, and a sense of the unity of human beings with a diversity of cultures, histories, and traditions.

Challenges to cosmopolitanism at the present time

A cosmopolitan position is a morally lofty position with a sense of duty and responsibility toward all others who are not of one's own group or community, for a cosmopolitan is precisely not bonded to any group or community. In that sense, a cosmopolitan is typically someone on the verge of communal or national identities, or someone appreciating the importance of being on the verge or borders, someone always standing in-between, with the awareness of different groups or communities and their different cultures and traditions. Here we may see why it is difficult to assume a cosmopolitan position because a cosmopolitan, like all human beings, is by necessity born into a social group or community with all the basic social elements and circumstances already in place, such as language, culture, ethnicity, political system, religious faith, and all the rest that define and identify a human being as a member of a society. And yet, a cosmopolitan transcends all these circumstances and conditions to become a member of the human species in general rather than of the subdivisions of a particular group. All human beings, in fact, are born parochial and limited, while cosmopolitanism is a vision and a way of life formed and articulated deliberately with conscious effort and hard work to transcend those inborn limitations. According to Immanuel Kant, however, it is nature itself that makes human beings extend "beyond the mechanical organization of their animal existence" and appreciate only happiness or perfection "which they attain free of instinct and by means of their own reason" (Kant, 2006: 5). In other words, self-interest, parochialism, nativism, and narrow-minded nationalism are all instinctual rather than natural, and they belong to what Kant calls the primitive condition of man's "animal existence." I shall come back to Kant's argument later, but the point is that the cosmopolitan vision is essentially and fundamentally human, a vision that can unfold only when reason and moral courage are brought into full play against the animal instinct that inhabits each and every human being.

The present, however, is not a propitious time for cosmopolitans. In fact, it has become increasingly difficult to sustain the cosmopolitan position vis-à-vis the ugly political reality of rising tribalism, populism, isolationism, racism, and narrow-minded nationalism, which turn our world into the kind of "animal existence" Kant referred to. The discontent with globalization and liberal politics, the crisis of immigration and massive number of displaced people as a result of prolonged regional wars and conflicts in the Middle East and elsewhere, caused largely by the intervention of the United States and its allies, and the blatant nationalist and racist rhetoric in social media and other forms of discourse, worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic and its terrible influence on world economy and people's lives—all these have brought out a new wave of right-wing political parties, and an increase of incidents of flagrant racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia in different parts of the world. Vis-à-vis the horrible forms of misery and horror existent everywhere in the real world, cosmopolitanism, with its universal humanistic appeal, seems unrealistic and is often challenged and criticized as elitist and idealist in this world that has become so divided and fragmented with so many groups of different interests, demands and ideologies. Given the brute reality of such violence, horror, and hatred among different groups of people, the deep schism and fragmentation of societies, can cosmopolitanism still be sustained as a viable position? Can we form a global ethics against the grain, so to speak, and promote it for the betterment of the future of humanity?

Kant on nature, violence, and the cosmopolitan right

Cosmopolitanism has a long history not only as a philosophical or intellectual idea on a metaphysical level but also as a concept with practical implications in ethical, legal, social, and political theories closely related to the reality of human life and the human condition. "Unlike some otherisms, cosmopolitanism involves not merely views about how things are, but primarily views about how things ought to be," as Thomas Pogge argues (1993: 312). Indeed, philosophical discussions of cosmopolitanism in social and political theories are often closely linked with historical reality, and we may be surprised to find that, as a great philosopher, Immanuel Kant's reflections on cosmopolitanism and related issues are still highly relevant to our world today. Kant did not speak of a universal history from an abstractly moral perspective, but from a "cosmopolitan perspective," which in the German original is with a "world-citizen's intent" (*weltbürgerlicher Absicht*). He did not talk about cosmopolitanism from an idealistic notion of good human nature; in fact, he ridiculed the idyllic "Arcadian life of shepherds, in full harmony, contentment, and mutual love," which would not provide human beings with incentives to be creative and dynamic, and would make them not very different in their idleness and innocence from the sheep they raised, and "would thus give their own lives hardly more worth than that of their domesticated animals" (Kant, 2006: 7). What Kant saw as the means by which nature "compels" human beings to come together and form a law-governed civil society is not an inherently good human nature, but rather its opposite, the "antagonism" of human beings, their "unsociable sociability," the contradictory human disposition that we have, on the one hand, an inclination to associate with one another, but on the other, a tendency to get into conflict and fight because of our self-interest and self-centered behavior.

It is through the horror of wars and sufferings that human beings are forced to enter a social contract, a law-governed organization of society. Here, Kant was evidently following the idea Jean-Jacques Rousseau had proposed. For the same reason and by the same means, not only individuals enter the social agreement to form a nation-state, but different nation-states also form a "federation of states" governed by inter-state or international laws. "Nature has thus again used the quarrelsomeness of humankind, even that of the large societies and political bodies of this species, in order to invent, through their inevitable *antagonism*, a state of peace and security," says Kant (2006: 10). It is through the devastation of wars and the horror of human suffering that nature "impels humankind to take the step that reason could have told it to take without all these lamentable experiences: to abandon the lawless state of savagery and enter into a federation of peoples" (*ibid.*). History ought to teach humankind the necessity of civil society through war and devastation; but again, as Aldous Huxley put it in his essay "A Case of Voluntary Ignorance" with his typical wit and wisdom: "That men do not learn very much from the lessons of history is the most important of all the lessons that history has to teach" (Huxley, 1960: 308). That is true, unfortunately, but for that very reason, the importance of the lessons of history must be reemphasized, because human beings ignore those lessons only at their own peril.

When Kant anthropomorphizes nature and argues that “nature wills” human beings to behave in such and such a manner, what he means is that human beings are compelled and forced to do so “naturally,” that is, by necessity. “When I say that nature wills that this or that ought to happen,” says Kant, “I do not mean that she imposes a *duty* upon us to act thus (for this can only be done by practical reason acting free of compulsion), but rather that she *does* it herself, regardless of whether we will it so or not (*fata volentem ducunt, nolentem trahunt*)” (Kant, 2006: 90).[1] It is through human free will and their own action that nature finds a way to lead human beings—in other words, it becomes necessary for them—to achieve the ultimate purpose of establishing a civil society. Kant held a rather stern view of human nature and the human condition. “The state of nature (*status naturalis*) is not a state of peace among human beings who live next to one another but a state of war, that is, if not always an outbreak of hostilities, then at least the constant threat of such hostilities,” Kant argues: “Hence the state of peace must be *established*” (2006: 72–73). Cosmopolitanism is thus a vision and a way of life to be achieved through conscious effort. Kant argues that cosmopolitanism has to do with a basic “right” rather than “philanthropy,” that is, “the right of a stranger not to be treated in a hostile manner by another upon his arrival on the other’s territory.” He continues to add that “all human beings have a claim, to present oneself to society by virtue of the right of common possession of the surface of the earth” (Kant, 2006: 82). Here Kant almost echoes Diogenes the Cynic philosopher. Kant was, however, conscious of the horrible capability of man’s inhumanity to man, the heinous crimes committed by the Europeans in treating strangers and non-European others in the name of commerce and development. Kant’s condemnation of colonialism not only rang true in his time but also is remarkably relevant to our time as well:

> If one compares with this the *inhospitable* behavior of the civilized states in our part of the world, especially the commercial ones, the injustice that the latter show when *visiting* foreign lands and peoples (which to them is one and the same as *conquering* those lands and peoples) takes on terrifying proportions. America, the negro countries, the Spice Islands, the Cape, etc., were at the time of their discovery lands that they regarded as belonging to no one, for the native inhabitants counted as nothing to them. In East India (Hindustan) they brought in foreign troops under the pretext of merely intending to establish trading posts. But with these they introduced the oppression of the native inhabitants, the incitement of the different states involved to expansive wars, famine, unrest, faithlessness, and the whole litany of evils that weigh upon the human species (Kant, 2006: 82–83).

Kant saw European expansion as a process of globalization that connected the different parts of the world, albeit in unjust and violent ways, but injustice and violence also made cosmopolitanism necessary and significant as a matter of universal right of human beings. “The growing prevalence of a (narrower or wider) community among the peoples of the earth has now reached a point at which the violation of right of any *one* place on the earth is felt in *all* places,” says Kant. “For this reason the idea of cosmopolitan right is no fantastic or exaggerated conception of right. Rather, it is a necessary supplement to the unwritten code of constitutional and international right, for public human right in general, and hence for perpetual peace” (Kant, 2006: 84–85). When the world is closely connected and the potential danger for antagonism and conflict increases, there is also a greater need for cosmopolitanism. If that need was imperative for Kant’s time, it is definitely more imperative for our world today.

Kant’s argument—his idea that human “antagonism” and “unsociable sociability” necessarily lead to conflict and war that force human beings to recognize the necessity of a civil society, peace, and a world order governed by international law and cosmopolitan human rights—seems to have been informed by the treaties of Westphalia of 1648, which ended the Thirty Years' War in Europe and set up the model for conflict resolution by diplomatic negotiations rather than military intervention. With the hindsight of more than 200 years with regard to Kant's argument, however, we can see that the peace of Westphalia did not last long, and that the basis of the international laws set up in Westphalia was forgotten, violated, and completely ignored by the Western powers during the age of colonialism and imperialism in the nineteenth century. In the 20th century, the conflict among the Western powers for world domination intensified and eventually led to two even more devastating World Wars, which Kant could not have anticipated. Obviously, peace is fragile, and amnesia is the worst enemy of history. After the end of the Second World War, there has been a period of 70 years of peace by and large in most parts of the world despite the Cold War and numerous local conflicts and regional wars, but given the rise of nationalism, tribalism, isolationism, and racism in recent years, and particularly the danger of a new Cold War between the United States and China and the talk about a "Thucydides' trap," the world is now in danger of forgetting the horror of world wars and the many other evils in human history.

A plea for cosmopolitan comparativism

If cosmopolitanism is not just recognition of how things are, but more importantly, a vision of how things ought to be, then the humanities, that is, the study of human cultures, histories, and values, prove to be not a nonessential accessory to what is usually considered important in social life—science and technology, politics and religion, economy and commerce—but what the world needs most, namely, the promotion of human values and the cultivation of the human mind and human emotions toward the love of all human beings. In a time like the present, the humanities ought to be at the core of human life, rather than marginalized on the fringe of social life, and the very marginalization of the humanities in our time is in itself a sad sign of the times, an indictment as much as an indication of the problems and dangers of our world. Instead of feeling powerless and ineffectual, the humanists should, therefore, be courageous and fully justified to assert the significance and value of what they do in promoting the cosmopolitan vision as crucial for safeguarding our world.

Of humanists, I would argue, comparatists and scholars who study different literatures and cultures tend to be cosmopolitan, or ought to be cosmopolitan, because they are, as I said earlier about the cosmopolitan position, on the verge of communal or national identities, always standing in-between, with the awareness and appreciation of different groups or communities and their different cultures and traditions. As cosmopolitan comparatists, we embrace the world as such in all its diversity and richness, and yet we must fight against the dichotomous views of cultures and traditions. We must find affinities where least obvious and discover common human values where others see only fundamental differences and incompatibilities. Not that cultural differences do not matter, but no difference should be taken to the extreme to become something unique of one culture to the exclusion of other cultures. The nativist idea that one's own language and culture are the best and superior to those of others constitutes the core of fascist ideology. There is a danger that nativism begets quarrels and even wars, and that is why, for comparative studies, it is more important to take a cosmopolitan position and see human cultures as deeply interconnected than to emphasize, and indeed overemphasize, cultural differences and cultural uniqueness.

There are, unfortunately, comparatists who are not cosmopolitan in their outlook but essentialist in the sense of making cultures into incompatible monads and incommensurable entities along national, racial, linguistic, or some other kind of fault lines. Thomas Kuhn's argument for incommensurable paradigms, for example, though intended to be about the radical change of paradigms in the history of science, became very influential in the humanities and social sciences and had some unintended but rather harmful consequences. Kuhn's concept offers, as Lindsay Waters argues, "justification for a resurgent tribalism" (Waters, 2001: 144), even fostering "a blinkered, absolutist, nonpluralist relativism" (Waters, 2001: 145). Indeed, the dichotomous ways of conceptualizing our world ultimately embody and lead to dangerous ideologies, but the emphasis on fundamental differences or dichotomies has its own lineage even in respectable scholarship. In the late 19th and the early 20th century, for example, the French sociologist, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, proposed the concept of *mentalités* of different peoples and societies, particularly the *prelogical* mentality of *primitive* peoples and the logical or scientific mentality of *modern* Europeans. Despite a good deal of criticism in modern scholarship, Lévy-Bruhl's dubious theoretical hypotheses remain highly influential in the study of ancient and non-European societies. "The idea of distinct mentalities has continued to be widely used," as Geoffrey Lloyd remarks, "primarily but not exclusively in France, in a variety of contexts, by historians, psychologists, philosophers, social anthropologists, classicists and sinologists" (1990: 2–3).

By tracing back many of the dichotomous views to the ancient Greeks—after all, it is owing to the ancient Greeks that the Western languages and cultures have the concept and the word *barbaric* in contrast to themselves as civilized—Lloyd argues that we need to understand that "the Greek concepts in question were often, even generally, made to play a distinct and explicit polemical role. Once that is taken into account we can appreciate that the contrasts drawn for the purposes of polemic were often *over*-drawn" (Lloyd, 1990: 7–8). Lloyd discussed ancient Greece and ancient China and saw them as quite different, but also rather similar in various ways. The differences China exemplifies cannot be seen "as the product of some hypothesized, Chinese mentality," Lloyd argues. "Rather, some of the important differences between East and West relate more directly to differences in the prominence given to certain leading concepts and categories and to differences in the styles of interpersonal exchange, where, in turn, in each case, socio-political factors may be a crucial influence" (1990: 12). There are of course many differences between China and Greece, the East and the West, but differences are a matter of degree, not of kind, and differences exist within cultures as much as they do between cultures. To assume that an entire group of people or a whole society share a distinct mentality totally different from that of another group or society fails to account for individual differences within the same group, and cannot be helpful in cross-cultural comparative studies. To formulate a global perspective and a global ethics, we must understand that differences exist on all levels, personal, communal, and cultural, but they are not exclusive; and more importantly, affinities also exist on all levels across all differences.

The dichotomous way of looking at different peoples and their cultures, however, continues to pop up in scholarship, particularly, though not exclusively, in France. As Lloyd noted, under the influence of Lévy-Bruhl's idea of mentalities, some sinologists tend to see China as the opposite of Greece and, in extension, Europe or the West. In his book on the failure of the Christian mission in China in the late 17th and the 18th centuries, for example, Jacques Gernet talks about the impossibility for the Christian missionaries to teach the Chinese spiritual truths and logic because, he argues, logic and transcendental truths of the Christian religion were quite alien to the Chinese mentality. "Logic was inseparable from the religious dogma and the Chinese appeared to lack logic," says Gernet (1985: 3), and what seemed to be "Chinese inaptitude" was in fact "a sign not only of different intellectual traditions but also of different mental categories and modes of thought." The different mentalities underlie the failure in converting the Chinese, and the fundamental difference is ultimately on the philosophical level of language and thinking. Gernet makes the following remarks on the Chinese as the opposite of the Greek and the Indo-European:

> The only civilization to leave considerable evidence of elaborated philosophical thought which did not use a language of the Indo-European type was the Chinese civilization. Now, a model of a language more different from that of Greek, Latin or Sanskrit cannot be imagined. Of all the languages in the world, Chinese has the peculiar, distinctive feature of possessing no grammatical categories systematically differentiated by morphology: there appears to be nothing to distinguish a verb from an adjective, an adverb from a complement, a subject from an attribute. Furthermore, there was no word to denote existence in Chinese, nothing to convey the concept of being or essence, which in Greek is so conveniently expressed by the noun *ousia* or the neuter *to on*. Consequently, the notion of being, in the sense of an eternal and constant reality, above and beyond that which is phenomenal, was perhaps more difficult to conceive, for a Chinese. (Gernet, 1985: 241)

The failure of the Christian mission thus "confirms Benveniste's analysis: the structure of Indo-European languages seems to have helped the Greek world – and thereafter the Christian one – to conceive the idea of realities that are transcendental and immutable as opposed to realities which are perceived by the senses and which are transitory" (Gernet, 1985: 244). That is to say, the primitive Chinese had not the faintest inkling of the modern logical mentality of the Europeans, so the Christian missionaries, says Gernet at the end of his book, "found themselves in the presence of a different kind of humanity" (1985: 247) ("*ils se trouvaient en présence d'une autre humanité*", Gernet, 1982: 333). For a cosmopolitan humanist, these are seriously provocative words.

In our time, the same kind of argument is repetitively put forward by François Jullien, for whom China is a reverse image of Europe, particularly in his favorite opposition between China and Greece. "Indeed, if one wants to 'go beyond the Greek framework,' and if one searches for appropriate support and perspective," Jullien argues, "then I don't see any voyage possible other than 'China-bound,' as one used to say. This is, in effect, the only civilization that is recorded in substantial texts and whose linguistic and historical genealogy is radically non-European." Using Foucault's "*heterotopia*" as a conceptual frame and the Far East as representing "non-Europe," Jullien (2000a: 39) declares that "strictly speaking, *non-Europe* is China, and it cannot be anything else". China thus holds, as it were, a mirror up to the Europeans to look at what they are not. In Jullien's work, therefore, China never has its own presence and certainly never speaks in its own voice; it just stands for *alterity* as a conceptual tool for the Europeans to think of their own culture and tradition. China offers a detour for the Europeans to find themselves through the experience of "intercultural otherness (*l'altérité interculturelle*)," says Jullien (2000b: 9); it becomes a convenient symbol of difference, "a case study through which to contemplate Western thought from the outside."

It would be perfectly all right for Jullien to use China as the "outside" (*dehors*) for a European to embark on his journey to experience the alterity and find his own self inside, but the dichotomies created in such an exotic *Bildungsroman* are not the reality of the foreign other, only the imaginary reverse image of an equally imaginary image of the European self, while the generalizations and oppositions drawn in that imaginary journey are quite astonishing. Jullien claims, for example, that for the Greeks, the concept of truth was linked to the concept of being, but the Chinese "did not conceive of the existential sense of being (the verb *to be*, in that sense, does not even exist in classical Chinese)." Therefore, in China, says Jullien (2002: 810), there was "no concept of truth". If there was wisdom in ancient China, he admits, the idea of "way" in the West leads to truth or a transcendental origin, while in China, "the way recommended by wisdom leads to nothing. No truth—revealed or discovered—constitutes its destination" (2002: 820). Here, we may hear an echo of what Jacques Gernet once said about the Chinese language and the Chinese "mode of thinking." From Lévy-Bruhl to the present, then, we may detect a rough line of argument about the European and the non-European, or the East and the West, based on the highly problematic idea of mentality in French scholarship. Jonathan Spence once called this line of argument “the French exotic,” for setting up “mutually reinforcing images and perceptions” of an exotic China “seems to have been a particularly French genius” (Spence, 1998: 145). Such a predilection for a kind of Chinese exotic, however, is by no means just French, for it can be found in quite a few works by American and other Western scholars.

Considering that those who made such simplistic statements about the Chinese language and thinking often do not speak that language well or understand the Chinese tradition deeply, those statements are hardly worth serious responses, but their propagating of dichotomies and incompatibilities have consequences in the real world that may call for our serious reflection. The cosmopolitan vision demands our open-minded embrace of all human beings with all their diverse languages, cultures, and traditions for the sake of living together as a global community. This does not mean, of course, the flattening of all cultures and traditions in a general and banal sameness. Whatever individual or collective specificities that may have become blurred in that universal vision, however, do not justify the opposite direction of overemphasis on differences and dichotomies of cultures that turn our world into a darkling plain, where ignorant armies clash by night. Before it is too late, we must reach out to the world against the grain, so to speak, beyond the comfort zone of our own language and culture, and of our own communities. In that context, then, it is encouraging to see the rise of world literature in recent decades in many parts of the world, which represents a strong tendency towards seeing the world beyond narrowly defined national or regional boundaries and taking in the great works of different literary traditions as contributions to human culture as a whole. In the end, what we do as comparatists, as literary scholars and humanists, may appear to be impractically academic, but there is a sense of urgency and direct relevance in what we do to the social and political reality of the world we live in today.

A cosmopolitan vision for a global ethics

Theoretical and philosophical concepts tend to be universal in their meaning and applicability. One of the most important virtues in the teachings of Confucius is *ren* 仁, often translated into English as benevolence. In the Confucian *Analects*, Fan Chi, one of Confucius’ students, asked the teacher what does *ren* mean, and Confucius replies: “*Ren* means to love people” (Liu, 1986: 278). Another great Confucian thinker, Mencius, also says: “The one with *ren* loves people” (Jiao, 1987: 595). What is emphasized here is the general concept of a universal love of all human beings, a concept not so different from the universal cosmopolitan vision. Mencius, in particular, has a positive view of human nature as universally and inherently good, and famously used the metaphor of water flowing downward to argue his case. When another philosopher says that human nature does not necessarily develop in a particular direction just like water can run to the east or the west depending on the shape of the terrain, Mencius ingeniously took over the water metaphor and argued that human nature is inherently good just as water is by nature running always downward. “There is no man who is not good,” says Mencius, “just as there is no water that does not run downward” (Jiao, 1987: 736). This may not look like strictly logical reasoning, but he presents a more persuasive argument about good human nature when he puts it in the context of a hypothetical situation. This is Mencius’s famous hypothesis:

> Now upon seeing, all of a sudden, a child about to fall into a well, everyone would feel horrified and compassionate not because one would want to make friends with the child’s parents, not because one would want to make a reputation among neighbors and friends, nor because one hates to hear the child crying. From this we may conclude that he who does not have a heart of compassion is not human. (Jiao, 1987: 233)

We must agree that given the hypothetical situation, horror, and compassion tend to be the natural human reaction and moral behavior.

When arguing for the cosmopolitan tendency of ethical behavior, Appiah refers to Peter Singer's "famous analogy" in illustrating the moral principle by positing a very similar hypothetical situation. "If I am walking past a shallow pond and see a child drowning in it, I ought to wade in and pull the child out," Appiah reminds us by quoting Singer. "This will mean getting my clothes muddy, but this is insignificant, while the death of the child would presumably be a very bad thing" (Appiah, 2006: 158). In presenting "saving the drowning child" as a universal human reaction to an urgent situation, Singer's analogy sounds a lot like a reiteration of Mencius's hypothetical situation. The similarity here for making an ethical point is rather astonishing. Mencius lived more than 2000 years before Peter Singer, but their use of the same image makes a strong argument for the common and shared humanity despite linguistic, cultural, historical, political, and other kinds of differences. Mencius understood "nature" as something inborn, a given in life, just like the Greek idea of φύσις. When he says that human beings are "by nature good," he compares human nature to something happening in nature, that is, of necessity, like the flow of water. By the same token, any human being would save the drowning child without thinking or calculating the loss and gains but responding to the situation instinctively and naturally.

Such an optimistically positive view of a good human nature is quite different from the recognition of the self-centeredness of all human beings as Kant recognized, but it can be complementary to the more negative and stern view of human nature as inherently bad. Looking at the world with all the problems we see everywhere, we need both sober-minded recognition of the social and political reality of the world and the principled ethical position to encourage the good of all human beings. I will quote another pair of comparable articulations of the idea of a global ethics, the uncanny similarity of which is no less surprising despite their familiarity in both the East and the West. We read in the New Testament: "all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7.xii). This can be understood as a moral imperative, the effectiveness of which would depend on all to follow its injunction. The Confucian *Analects* articulates the same idea from an opposite perspective that foregrounds the self-interest of the person who listens in a negative formulation: "whatever you do not want others to do to you, do not do that to others" (Liu, 1986: 263). Put these two statements together and we have two sides of a complete formulation, that of a basic cosmopolitan principle, which is also the basic principle of a global ethics. We must realize that we need the cosmopolitan vision, the vision of taking all human beings as equals and as neighbors for whom we all share our care and our responsibilities, and we do not do anything to harm or injure others, as we do not want ourselves to be so harmed or injured. Given the social and political reality we are facing today, there is nothing more relevant and more important than this cosmopolitan vision or the principle of global ethics.

Note

1. The Latin quotation means: "The Fates lead the willing but drag the unwilling." From Seneca, *Epistles*, 107.11.

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