

Diversifying Syllabi 2015 Text Summary and Teaching Tips

Article/Essay Title: “The Need for Cosmopolitan Justice” (Ch. 2 of *Justice without Borders*)

Author: Kok-Chor Tan

Readability: Easy/Moderate/Difficult

Thesis: Tan argues that a cosmopolitan conception of global distributed justice is better equipped to address issues of global poverty than humanitarian duties of aid. The argument, in short, is that humanitarian duties of aid combat the *symptoms* of global poverty while a cosmopolitan conception of global justice combats its *causes*.

Key Definitions:

1. **Cosmopolitanism:** “The cosmopolitan view in its most basic form, to recall, holds that the individual is the ultimate unit of moral worth, and entitled to equal consideration regardless of contingencies like nationality and citizenship” (p. 35).
2. **Ethics:** “mainly concerned with personal conduct and decisions at the interactional level” (p. 21).
3. **Justice:** “concerned primarily with institutional arrangements (and their underlying norms and principles)” (p. 21).
4. **Duties of Humanitarian Aid:** “limited-term commitments with a definable goal (e.g., to raise developing societies to a level necessary for sustaining function in well-ordered social institutions)” (p. 23).
5. **Duties of Global Justice:** “aim to regulate inequalities between societies and hence be ongoing without a cut-off point” (p. 23).
6. **Globalism:** “the process of increasing integration and interdependency of national economies, the increasing mobility of capital and labor across traditional boundaries, the creation of new global markets and products (i.e., financial markets), and the creation of international organs and regulations to facilitate and to govern these interactions (e.g., the WTO). In short, economic globalization refers to the existence, or at least the approximation, of a single encompassing global economy in which all individuals of the world are participants. (p. 29).
7. **Morality of States:** an alternative to cosmopolitanism; “On this view, states are regarded as moral agents in themselves and are the basic moral subjects for the purpose of global justice” (p. 35-36).
8. **Methodological Statism:** a metaphysically innocent version of the morality of states; According to this revised “morality of states” view, an individualist focus is unnecessary for the purpose of distributive justice. Once distributive equality is ensured between states, equality between individuals (globally and within states) will follow” (p. 36).

Brief Summary:

- pp. 20 – 23: Tan begins by setting up a debate: among those who agree that we have a duty to address the challenges of global poverty, some say that this duty is a humanitarian duty of assistance, while others say that it is a cosmopolitan duty of global justice. The aim of this chapter is to motivate the latter view.
- pp. 23 – 29 Some have objected that we don't need a duty of justice to solve global poverty, since a humanitarian duty of assistance will accomplish the same goal more easily. Tan responds to this objection by arguing that a humanitarian duty of assistance doesn't go far enough: it addresses the *symptoms* of global poverty without addressing its *causes*. In these pages, Tan provides a very clear and helpful review of the recent literature on global justice.
- pp. 29 – 35 Others have objected that you can't have global justice without global institutions. Tan points out that there are global economic institutions already in place, and that these institutions are in many ways to blame for the problems of global poverty. Since the purpose of justice is to regulate institutions, these institutions ought to be regulated by a conception of global justice. In these pages, Tan provides a quick but clear history of neo-liberalism and its relationship to globalism.
- pp. 35 – 39 To conclude the chapter, Tan argues that a cosmopolitan framework—one that takes individuals to be the ultimate unit of moral worth—is preferable to both a “morality of states” framework—which takes states to be the ultimate unit of moral worth—as well as to a “methodological statism”—which assumes that you best serve the interests of individuals by serving the interests of states. In short, Tan argues that many people will be left out of the latter approaches, but not by a cosmopolitan approach.

Possible Applications:

Introduction to Ethics
Social and Political Philosophy
Global Justice
Introduction to Philosophy

Complementary Texts/Resources:

Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality”

Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*

Amia Srinivasan's [book review of *Effective Altruism*](#) (Srinivasan advances a very similar critique to Tan's)

Kwame Anthony Appiah *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*

Iris Marion Young [“From Guilt to Solidarity”](#)

Barbara Hermann [“Morality and Everyday Life”](#)

Possible Class Activities:

1. Give the students an example of a recent humanitarian crisis. Have some groups brainstorm ways of satisfying a humanitarian duty of assistance. Have other groups brainstorm ways of satisfying a cosmopolitan duty of justice. Compare their answers.
2. Show a short documentary on the current refugee crisis. Discuss the pros/cons of humanitarian duties of assistance, and compare them to the pros/cons of cosmopolitan duties of global justice.
3. Give the students a short passage from an older article on global justice, and have them decide whether the author is advocating a humanitarian duty of assistance, a cosmopolitan duty of global justice, or something else entirely.
4. Compare the pitches to potential donors from different NGOs (development literature)
5. Come up with practical, applicable action steps to crises using the cosmopolitan view

What traditional texts might this text replace?

1. Pogge on Effective Altruism
2. Singer on the '[drowning child](#)' in *Famine, Affluence, and Morality*