

Abstract:

Beyond Cosmopolitanism: Towards a Non-ideal Account of Transnational Justice

Charles Beitz has characterized cosmopolitanism as the thesis that the moral and legal status of states must be reducible to the rights and duties of the individuals who constitute them. From the cosmopolitan moral point of view, socio-political institutions are mere instruments for the realization of justice, but they do not constitute “entities” with a moral standing of their own. Although cosmopolitans rarely argue for the reducibility thesis, they seem to take for granted that it derives from a liberal commitment to “ethical individualism.” But no such derivation is obvious, and in fact the substantive point of the cosmopolitan thesis is, as will be argued, quite misleading for two reasons. Firstly, ethical individualism is fully compatible with an analysis of social institutions and practices that regards states and peoples as bearers of genuinely collective responsibility towards other states and foreign citizens. It can indeed be argued that quite a few duties and obligations that individual persons owe to each other are grounded not in the moral personality of individual persons, but in their moral and legal status as citizens. Secondly, to the extent that requirements of inter- and transnational justice include duties to counter-act injustice committed by other agents than oneself, no practically reasonable account of transnational justice can dismiss the idea of genuinely collective moral responsibility—at least within the framework of liberal political philosophy.