

Cosmopolitanism and Distributing Responsibilities

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David Miller raises a number of interesting concerns with both weak and strong variants of cosmopolitanism. As an alternative, he defends a connection theory to address remedial responsibilities amongst states. This connection theory is problematic as it endorses a position where states that are causally and morally responsible for deprivation and suffering in other states may not be held remedially responsible for their actions. In addition, there is no international mechanism to ensure either that remedially responsible states offer assistance to particular states nor some level of accountability for causally and/or morally responsible states. I suggest that an intermediary theory of cosmopolitanism offers one way of overcoming these difficulties.

There is much about David Miller's criticisms of cosmopolitanism I would readily accept. In particular, following Thomas Pogge, I agree with Miller's criticisms of cosmopolitanism in its weak and strong forms. In this piece, I would like to take issue with what Miller defends – a connection theory to address remedial responsibilities. My contention is that this theory suffers from a number of difficulties that might be overcome if we adopt a cosmopolitan position: indeed, as Pogge has demonstrated, an intermediate cosmopolitanism can be modified to overcome Miller's various objections to cosmopolitanism in general.

Miller begins by taking issue with the idea that each person has equal moral worth, a view held by a weak version of cosmopolitanism. As an example, he asks us to imagine a child going missing with fears for her safety. In an abstract sense, the disappearance of any individual child is equally bad. However, Miller argues we have a greater responsibility to the child if it is ours or if we are 'connected' to it 'in some other way'. What he demonstrates is that equal moral worth may be commensurate with acknowledging special responsibilities between persons. Thus, the

disappearance of any child is equally bad, but we may have a greater responsibility to help one child over another if we share some special connection to this child in a way we do not share with other children.

Miller then tries to adapt this case from *individuals* threatened by deprivation and suffering to *states* (or *communities*) threatened by the same. His basic claim is that the duties one state has to another are not absolutely equal. For these reasons, weak cosmopolitanism is unhelpful because we can respect an abstract equality of responsibilities to persons *and* acknowledge that some have greater responsibilities to some persons over others. In addition, strong cosmopolitanism is also unhelpful because we can recognise disproportionate responsibilities to one another. Thus, there may well be stronger grounds for helping one distressed individual (person or state) than another.

The difficulty I see here is with Miller's approach. As we have seen, he argues that we may have greater responsibility to some persons over others if we are 'connected' to them in a particular way. Elsewhere, Miller elaborates at greater length how he conceives this in what he calls a 'connection theory' that brings together four underlying principles:

1. *Principle of causal responsibility*: the common-sense belief that when a cause has an effect as a consequence, the cause is responsible for the occurrence of an effect.
2. *Principle of moral responsibility*: an agent is morally responsible for a situation whenever he contributed intentionally and voluntarily to its coming into being.
3. *Principle of capacity*: an agent is held responsible whenever she has the best capacity to remedy a situation.
4. *Principle of community*: agents have special responsibilities to each other should any member be harmed or in need because of communal ties, such as 'shared activities and commitments, common identities, common histories, or other such sources' (Miller 2001: 455, 459, 460–62).

After examining each principle individually, Miller finds them capable of sufficiently dealing with some cases, but not all of them. I will not review all of his reasons for doing so. As each principle is unacceptable on its own, his solution is to argue for the construction of 'a multi-principle theory that combines the four principles ... identified in some fashion' into his 'connection theory' (Miller 2001: 464, 468–71).

Miller's premise is this: 'It is morally intolerable if (remediable) suffering and deprivation are allowed to continue ... where they exist we are morally bound to hold *somebody* (some person or collective agent) responsible for relieving them' (Miller 2001: 464). His solution is to examine various cases involving suffering and deprivation and apply his connection theory, without putting its constitutive principles into any particular order. In instances where more than one principle applies, we are advised to weigh the respective strengths of the relevant principles.

While I would agree (with Pogge as well) that the continuity of suffering and deprivation is morally intolerable, I disagree with how Miller states both the problem and his solution. He states the problem as:

Our world contains all too many instances of deprived or suffering people ... Nearly all of us believe that this is a situation that demands a remedy: *someone* should provide the resources to end the suffering and deprivation. (Miller 2001: 453, emphasis added)

Thus, there should be a remedy for all instances of suffering. Remedies should be available ideally, but may simply not exist in many instances. However, Miller speaks of remedies as something that *must* exist. This is problematic as the notion that someone must be responsible for a given situation – no matter their relationship to it – contradicts our intuitions about the role desert plays in determining responsibility.

A good example of this is what Miller recognises as a big problem with relying on the principles of causal and moral responsibility – taken separately or together – in cases where a causally or morally responsible agent is incapable of performing his remedial responsibilities. Miller suggests that the consequence of finding no agent morally responsible for a given situation is to find another way of discovering *anybody* responsible, *especially those capable of providing a remedy*. For Miller, the virtue of his connection theory is that it 'ensure[s] that there is always *some* agent who can be assigned responsibility for remedying [a suffering person or community's] condition' (Miller 2001: 471). The issue is determining whom to blame, although there must be someone at fault to satisfy the larger demands of remediation.

What is particularly troublesome about this idea is that we are presented with a problem of states suffering sanctions for the deeds of others. For example, suppose the following:

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- Premise 1: Countries X and Y have more commonality with each other than either has with country Z.
- Premise 2: Only country X is causally and morally responsible for the suffering of the citizens of country Y.
- Premise 3: Only country Z has the ability to end the suffering of the citizens of country Y.
- Conclusion: Country Z has a greater remedial responsibility than country X to help country Y.

The fact that country X is causally and morally responsible for the suffering of county Y – in addition to best satisfying the principle of community – entails no *remedial* responsibility for the suffering in question. From the standpoint of remedial responsibility, states may perform acts that increase suffering at home or abroad without incurring sanction so long as the suffering they create is greater than their means of remedying it. Yet, those states that do not promote suffering may be penalised because other states act contrarily.

This appears grossly unfair. It may be due partly to Miller's desire to make a separation between an immediate and a final responsibility for remedying harm: therefore, a country responsible both causally and morally for the suffering elsewhere might be ultimately held to account for what it did. No state can then act with impunity in promoting suffering as a result. Remedial responsibility appears as only an instant, but temporary, burden on those capable of offering relief to the misfortunate. However, several questions immediately spring to mind: how much suffering is necessary to create a remedial responsibility to cure it? How are remedially responsible states to be compensated by states causally or morally responsible? What should be done if the latter remain unable to compensate those who acted on their behalf? Should states be compensated for their remedial responsibilities toward other states when the suffering is the result of a natural disaster? Miller does not yet appear to offer answers to these consequences of his position.

Finally, I would like to suggest that the variant of intermediate cosmopolitanism unveiled by Pogge may help rectify the shortcomings in Miller's arguments. Miller argues above that 'the best kind of world, for humans, is one in which many autonomous political communities co-

exist peacefully, without any attempt to create a uniform set of rights and duties such as cosmopolitans demand'. Pogge's intermediate cosmopolitanism recognises that our responsibilities to address the deprivation and suffering of others may only *increase* due to certain relationships we may have to these others. In other words, as Pogge himself states: 'though we owe foreigners less than compatriots, we [still] owe them something'. (Of course, if our responsibilities increase to some and not others, we may find ourselves unable to fully satisfy our more basic responsibilities to these others due to constraints in resources.)

It is worth noting that pure cosmopolitanism would share a common position with Miller in agreeing that country Z does have a remedial responsibility to country Y. That is, a pure cosmopolitanism would claim that there is a responsibility on those who can help to alleviate instances of suffering and deprivation, no matter their causal or moral responsibilities. An intermediate cosmopolitanism would recognise the right of those suffering to relief by able countries. However, the difference would be that this variant of cosmopolitanism would recognise a general responsibility to help, but not necessarily a remedial responsibility. For example, if suffering was caused in some significant way through the maintenance of global institutions rather than the activities of any particular country, then all countries have a responsibility to improve these institutions without any one country being signaled out for exclusive blame (see Pogge 1992: 53). Thus, an intermediate cosmopolitanism such as Pogge's may avoid the shortcomings of weak and strong cosmopolitanism explored by Miller, while demonstrating how cosmopolitanism might endorse a negative duty not to impose unjust social institutions upon others.

As it stands, Miller's alternative position may lead to a situation where states which *neglect* their duties to others can get away with it, whereas states with a greater capacity to help may find themselves forced to help. Moreover, there is no mechanism in place to ensure states respond appropriately to their responsibilities in the world as co-existing, but autonomous, political communities. I am not suggesting that the only way to address this problem is by a global government or anything of the kind, a view commensurate with Beitz's statement quoted by Miller. Nor do I have the space to elaborate a complete alternative theory. However, I will only point out that while I do share Miller's concerns about ethical doctrines that overlook their political implications, it seems that his alternative vision of remedial responsibility

between states fails to take stock of its own *political* implications. Some intermediary theory of cosmopolitanism may help us to fill this gap that 'anti-cosmopolitanism' fails to recognise. That is, a sense of belonging to an international community may be necessary if states taking responsibility for the suffering and deprivation elsewhere is to be made possible beyond mere voluntarism.

Miller does well to elucidate certain difficulties that confront cosmopolitanism. However, the connection theory he defends raises some difficulties. While this theory does help highlight the complexities surrounding the attribution of remedial responsibilities amongst states, I believe his discussion may raise more questions than it answers. I would suggest that an intermediary theory of cosmopolitanism, such as Pogge's theory, may help us to better take stock of the problematic political implications of Miller's theory of remedial responsibility.

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