

2017

The Cosmopolitan War Machine

Lucas Waggoner
University of Washington, Tacoma, waggol@uw.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.tacoma.uw.edu/access>



Part of the [Metaphysics Commons](#), [Models and Methods Commons](#), and the [Political Theory Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Waggoner, Lucas (2017) "The Cosmopolitan War Machine," *Access*: Interdisciplinary Journal of Student Research and Scholarship*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.tacoma.uw.edu/access/vol1/iss1/7>

This Undergraduate Research Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Teaching and Learning Center at UW Tacoma Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Access*: Interdisciplinary Journal of Student Research and Scholarship by an authorized editor of UW Tacoma Digital Commons.

Abstract

The endless struggle between state sovereignty and individual rights is central to discussions of political conflict and human rights. In this essay, I will be utilizing, in addition to cosmopolitan philosophy, Deleuze and Guattari's metaphysical masterpiece: *Nomadology: The War Machine*. I lay out a proposal for a potential method through which subalterns and other oppressed groups might obtain more cohesive representation, and use this representation to better protect their rights against the violent oppression of the states. I use ideas of establishing and perpetuating norms through legal and political discourse as a key tool for the continuation of the cosmopolitan project, and as a power source for the war machine. For this, I consult authors such as Immanuel Kant, Seyla Benhabib, Amos Nascimento, and John Rawls. The war machine itself is the basis of my entire approach. It is a structure through which the cosmopolitan project can be actualized. This proposal is one that provides a potential route to obtaining perpetual peace.

Key Words: Cosmopolitanism, Subaltern, State Sovereignty, Human Rights, War machine

The Cosmopolitan War Machine

Now, more than ever, and at increasing levels, the cosmopolitan project is under an existential threat. Cosmopolitanism, by definition, aims to achieve peace through discourse and consensus on a global scale. However, there is an increasing interest in both totalitarian practices and regimes. The rise of nationalism and its coinciding supremacy of state sovereignty threaten the survival of human rights. The situation appears as an omen, signifying not just a repetition of the past, but of a likely corruption, or even destruction, of human rights as we know them. Due to the severity of this situation, it is imperative that the failures of cosmopolitanism be properly investigated and that the points containing the potentiality for change to be triangulated. If cosmopolitanism can be properly rehabilitated, or at least forcibly evolved, then we can preserve the possibility of curbing the rise of global existential threats. The current renewed interest in totalitarianism is in part due to our historical context. We no longer occupy a world experiencing the immediate ripples or aftershocks of World War II. The echoes of the Holocaust grow fainter with each survivor that passes on. As we move further and further away from that world, we become increasingly removed from the sense of necessity and immediacy for creating safeguards against totalitarianism. Moving forward, philosophy and political theory need to innovate more heavily, and this will most likely include, but not be limited to, the establishment of stronger, better enforced cosmopolitan norms. As it stands, communication and negotiation are touted as the tools to bring about change, balancing sovereignty with individual rights.¹

The single biggest obstacle to the actualization of true human rights is state sovereignty. The existence of state sovereignty is inherently problematic, but becomes an active, violent hindrance once people attempt to instantiate themselves through human rights claims.

¹ Seyla Benhabib et. al., *Another Cosmopolitanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 35.

International discourse is permeated with state interests. Both representation and the establishment of international norms will be vital to helping repair the current state of affairs. If we are ever to establish a truly cosmopolitan vision of human rights, the significance of individual rights must transcend the importance currently placed upon those of states. To accomplish this, we must establish human rights as a weapon truly exterior to state sovereignty, so that it can function as a weapon against states in the struggle for protecting human rights.²

States vs. Individuals

In the current global political domain, subalterns and other oppressed groups are rarely represented at all, and when they are, it is almost never at the same magnitude as that of states. The voices they are allowed politically are disproportionate, and discourse nearly always favors state interests and decisions. Jeremy Waldron had this in mind when he criticized Seyla Benhabib's reading of Kant's essay, "Perpetual Peace." Waldron wrote that "there is room for disagreement...about Kant's view of the inherent importance of state-sized political communities," but that "it becomes a problem...when Benhabib associates th[is] view...with the principle of hospitality that dominates his account of cosmopolitan right."³ Waldron continues this point, stating that he does not "think hospitality is about states or political communities at all," but that it "is about relations between people and peoples."⁴ This critique is important, as it showcases why Benhabib's vision could never necessarily come to fruition: it could not function. The shortcomings of her vision are shared by cosmopolitanism as a whole. Keeping communities subservient to the states within which they preside will always maintain a violent division, as all forms of membership and inclusion are illusory, half-hearted tokens of acceptance, rather than

² Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Nomadology: The War Machine*, trans. Brian Massumi (California: Semiotext(e), 1986), 1.

³ Benhabib, 89.

⁴ Ibid.

true representation.⁵ Robert Post, in his introduction to Benhabib's book, states that he is "convinced by Benhabib that cosmopolitanism can take us no further...because cosmopolitanism must inevitably collide with the boundaries required by democratic authority."⁶ This summarizes the basic contradictory nature of modern conceptions of cosmopolitanism. Each attempt to push the cosmopolitan project forward necessarily crosses lines over which states are unwilling to budge. Rather than trying to subvert rules laid out by state sovereigns, cosmopolitan tradition has communities and individuals following these rules before then approaching international organizations. The rules of the game are still entirely controlled by state sovereigns. This raises an immense dilemma: how can norms or values be established outside of state structures? For this we must first turn to American philosopher John Rawls.

Establishment of Norms

John Rawls allows for the formation of norms through what he refers to as "overlapping consensus."⁷ If two or more subaltern groups, whether they be religious, ethnic, or some combination, all hold a similar singular value, then it can be established as a legitimate norm. This is one potential model for instantiating subaltern values and needs in a system rife with warring states, each fighting over power. Now, as I am in no way suggesting any sort of utopian vision, there will obviously exist instances in which subalterns will be in conflict with one another over certain values. However, as long as enough major considerations are accounted for, such conflicts can be properly minimized. From this, we approach another potential issue: what if different groups view the same idea or norm differently?

⁵ Ibid., 34-35.

⁶ Ibid., 9.

⁷ John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples: With "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited,"* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 16.

Differential visions require accommodation for differential practices. Philosopher Amos Nascimento expresses this in his concept of “building of cosmopolitan communities,” where he explains that “cosmopolitan ideals are plural,” and that “their implementation obeys different and dynamic communicative processes in distinct contexts around the world.”⁸ Nascimento does, however, provide a caveat: this “process is a work in progress.”⁹ This in many ways echoes Benhabib in her concept of *democratic iterations*, which provides the idea that “we never simply produce a replica of the original usage” of a “term or concept,” but rather, that “every repetition is a form of variation.”¹⁰ Over time, cosmopolitan norms, like many other norms, shift and transform under the heated pressure of public discourse. Concepts are defined and refined through the repetition of this process.

The War Machine

Even if these non-state entities attain power within the international stage, and succeed in establishing moral, cosmopolitan norms, the problem of state sovereignty still remains. This is where traditional political discourse ceases to be an effective tool, and a more forceful approach is required. The recognition of these non-state actors in organizations like the UN is an adequate starting line from which to unite. At this point, a cosmopolitan Deleuzian *war machine* can be formed, allowing for an ideological war against states. A war machine exists, as previously specified, outside of the state, and operates with a freedom of motion, as it does so through the more easily navigable “smooth space,” as opposed to the stationary “striated space” from which a state operates.¹¹ Smooth spaces exist without the boundaries or borders which constrain states,

⁸ Amos Nascimento, *Building Cosmopolitan Communities: A Critical and Multidimensional Approach* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁰ Benhabib, 47.

¹¹ Deleuze, 18.

meaning the war machines, by their very design, surpass and evade state lines and state sovereignty, making them the ideal, and perhaps only, weapon against states.¹² Out of the conflict between states and the war machine, states can be more easily overwhelmed and consequently pressured into accepting the terms of the oppressed peoples within their borders, and within the borders of other states. Over time, as the number of groups represented within the war machine grows, states would become exponentially outnumbered, as the war machine could subsequently surround states and conquer state interests. The visual analogy Deleuze and Guattari provide is that of the game of “Go,” in which the pieces, unlike those in chess, aren’t restricted to a singular form of motion or action, and work together to surround the opponent, “shattering his territory from within.”¹³ While the exteriority of the war machine is necessary, so is this ability to attack from the interior. Through this approach, the war machine could potentially serve as a constraint upon the neo-colonial tendencies of international organizations such as the UN, since the subalterns themselves would be in a situation in which they could better, as Nietzsche might phrase it, instantiate their “will to power.”¹⁴

Unless oppressed and subjugated peoples are given a proper voice, Kant’s vision of *perpetual peace* remains virtually impossible. Being robbed of one’s voice creates tension and conflict. These conflicts lead to a loss of stability, and as a result, to a loss of security. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt expresses this idea, along with its natural consequences, in his 1944 speech, which is readily referred to as the “second bill of rights,”¹⁵ where he states that “unless there is security at home there cannot be lasting peace in the world.”¹⁶ Without relative peace,

¹² Ibid., 51 and 54.

¹³ Ibid., 4.

¹⁴ Dale Wilkerson, “Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900),” Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, last accessed May 29, 2017, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/nietzsch/#H6>.

¹⁵ “The Economic Bill of Rights,” US History, last accessed May 29, 2017, http://www.ushistory.org/documents/economic_bill_of_rights.htm.

¹⁶ Ibid.

interstate commerce cannot be initiated or perpetuated. For Kant, since commerce is necessary for the establishment of perpetual peace, protecting its viability should be a concern of the utmost importance. This requires allowing the voices of the oppressed to be heard, lest increases in internal turmoil twist into external struggles, creating bloodshed that could block commerce entirely. The war machine structure can help maintain peace within states by reducing the struggles between subalterns and the sovereign.

This cosmopolitan war machine also fulfills a form of Kant's "federation of nations."¹⁷ Kant writes that the foundation of peace through an international entity cannot be "a nation consisting of nations," as that would necessitate having a definitive leader.¹⁸ The war machine, however, has no leader whatsoever. It is a fully functioning arrangement of peoples. This can be more easily understood by referring back to the aforementioned "Go" analogy. While in chess all pieces are visually distinct, and the king serves as a definitive leader, "Go" pieces are visually identical, and all work in coordination, without any piece serving as leader.¹⁹

The war machine is the answer to bringing about the termination of the oppression of peoples worldwide. It provides ample defense against attacks performed by states, and protection from oppressive laws. The cosmopolitan war machine can unite groups which would otherwise be completely separated by region and divided by culture and form a weapon with which the people can finally wage war against the sovereignty of states.

¹⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983), 115.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Deleuze, 3.

Bibliography

- Benhabib, Seyla, et. al. *Another Cosmopolitanism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. *Nomadology: The War Machine*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Los Angeles: Semio Text(e), 1986.
- Kant, Immanuel. *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983.
- Nascimento, Amos. *Building Cosmopolitan Communities: A Critical and Multidimensional Approach*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Rawls, John. *The Law of Peoples: With "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited."* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999.
- US History. "The Economic Bill of Rights." Last accessed May 29, 2017.
http://www.ushistory.org/documents/economic_bill_of_rights.htm.
- Wilkerson, Dale. "Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)." Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Last Accessed May 29, 2017. <http://www.iep.utm.edu/nietzsch/#H6>.