
Review

Transnational cosmopolitanism: Kant, Du Bois, and justice as a political craft

Inés Valdez,

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Inés Valdez's book is a gem, with game-changing contributions to cosmopolitanism in political theory and philosophy, international studies, and comparative political thought, not to mention in Kant and Du Bois Studies. A welcome *tour de force*, this book transfigures the premises and frameworks of Kant's and Kantian cosmopolitanism by bringing in DuBois's political craft as the much-needed reorienting normative framework of transnational justice. Not only is it rich and timely, but it also achieves a myriad of different and important tasks for contemporary political theory.

As the title of the book suggests, Kant and Du Bois represent two ends of the spectrum of cosmopolitan theory with which Valdez engages: on the one side, we have the popular Kantian or Kant-inspired cosmopolitanisms of liberal, critical, or democratic theory varieties, and on the other side, we have "colored cosmopolitanisms." The latter have been hitherto characterized as "vernacular cosmopolitanisms" and are considered to simply fill in the empirical details of white European normative frameworks, leaving the latter untouched. In a theoretical move building on the critique of what Charles W. Mills named the "white racial framing of political philosophy" (Mills, 2017, p. 194), Valdez flips the script of cosmopolitanism as we know it, and demonstrates that Du Bois's political craft offers a far richer and more truly inclusive or universal normative framework than what we currently have in all the Kantian varieties.

Kant was silent on the Haitian Revolution, which was contemporaneous with his major political works that are considered to be cornerstones of cosmopolitanism. In a way, the meaning and legacy of this silence in both Kant's and neo-Kantian political theory are developed in the first two chapters of Valdez's book. Chapter 1 reconstructs the social and political context of the writing of "Perpetual Peace," (1795) Kant's much celebrated essay that supposedly condemns colonialism once and for all (Kleingeld, 2014, pp. 43f.). Through careful textual and historical analyses, Valdez shows that Kant did *not* oppose actual colonialism, but



merely its detrimental effects on the intra-European project of peace and commerce. In Chapter 2, through a deep engagement with the recent work by leading Kant-inspired cosmopolitan theorists Lea Ypi, Katrin Flikschuh, Jürgen Habermas, James Bohman, and Seyla Benhabib, Valdez shows how various forms of Eurocentrism are inadvertently carried over from Kant's normative principles to our contemporary neo-Kantian theories of cosmopolitanism, even when we are critical of Kant in our re-purposing of his ideas. This rich chapter details the limits of Kant's anti-colonialism and his philosophy of history, showing us the specific forms of Eurocentrism that we reproduce when we take up Kantian normative frameworks of progress. It thus cashes out exactly how our (white European) epistemic ignorance plays out today and how we cannot afford to limit ourselves to Kantian/European frames, principles, and experiences if we are interested in justice on a transnational scale.

That contemporary discourse on cosmopolitan theory draws heavily from Kant is expected. But Valdez shows that the theoretical and political costs of relying on Kantian frameworks of cosmopolitanism are too high, as its various forms of Eurocentrism curtail our ability to consider transnational injustice. First, we end up with limited federative structures and definitions of political units that do not map onto the experiences of everyone on a global scale; second, we fail to consider the rich intellectual resources and political practices from outside the west; and third, our exclusive focus on the western genealogy of international institutions, such as the League of Nations and the European Union, causes us to overlook alternative instances of transnational organizations and actions, such as the second Pan-African Congress in Paris, which Du Bois hosted at the same time as the western powers were meeting in Versailles in 1919.

In the second half of the book, Valdez transfigures Kantian discourses of cosmopolitanism by complementing them with what she terms "Du Bois's political craft," starting in chapter 3. Unlike other recent books which promise to "decolonize" cosmopolitanism, critical theory, or liberalism, Valdez's book provides actual theoretical and practical resources for "de-linking from Kantian-Habermasian norms" (Mignolo, 2011, pp. 205f.). Specifically, Valdez argues that Du Bois's transnational cosmopolitanism transfigures Kantian cosmopolitanism and its attendant ideal of hospitality in three ways:

First, it involves a transformation of consciousness that allows racialized subjects to re-envision themselves as part of a transnational collective and exit the dynamics of misrecognition of the domestic [national] sphere. Second, this transformation is enabled by the inauguration of a public relying on ties of solidarity and common sense of imperial temporality as bloody and radical regress, rather than progress. Third, these twin realizations, in turn, feed into new disruptive forms of politics, which upend sanctioned existing spaces of politics (p. 88).



In the remainder of the book, Valdez brings together her earlier critique of the overbearing presence of Kantianism in cosmopolitan discourses, and successfully de-centers Kantian normative frameworks by building on Du Bois's thought and praxis. Reminding us that Du Bois was not only a theorist and a writer but also a political activist and organizer, Valdez offers a reservoir of Du Bois's "political craft," an aesthetic as well as a political endeavor, represented in the book by three events that Du Bois spearheaded between 1919 and 1947. I understand them as snapshots of a radical transnational cosmopolitanism in the making. Valdez's unique timeline of Du Bois's works correlates them to the stages of imperialism and historical events, and this timeline alone is a masterpiece that will be very helpful for beginners to Du Bois's works. As a necessary complement to the theoretical accounts of western modernity, Valdez shows us that transnational cosmopolitanism requires radical revisions of our notions of progress, subjectivity, and publics in ways that deliver on cosmopolitanism's commitment to equality for all.

As a result, chapters 3 through 5 offer the most original scholarship we currently have on Du Bois's political thought and praxis. This scholarship does not solely focus on *The Souls of Black Folk*. Drawing on the notion of double consciousness in *Souls* as well as on a variety of works including *Darkwater*, *Black Reconstruction in America*, and also from his utopian novel *Dark Princess* in chapter 4, Valdez argues for a renewed understanding of the role of identity and solidarity in cosmopolitan thought and for a political consciousness that goes beyond the nation state. As opposed to the mainstream thinking of identification in concentric circles, going from group to nation to cosmopolitanism, Valdez demonstrates that following Du Bois on this question of identity shows that "in a transnational cosmopolitan framework, freedom and self-assertion flourish in sub-national realms—what Du Bois called 'a nation within the nation'—and transnational communities of racialized subjects" (p. 145).

In chapter 5, we find that Du Bois's transnational cosmopolitanism also exposes the international public sphere as colonial management, and hospitality as the conditional (one-sided) management policy, especially in his writings, reviews, and editorial work for *The Crisis* in 1920s. Du Bois's political craft of cosmopolitanism can be defined as a "theorization that is attentive to the particular way in which excluded groups set up relations of solidarity beyond the nation state and inaugurate public fora that serve to identify and challenge nodes of power responsible for injustice" (p. 174). Thus, a transnationally cosmopolitan counter-public would need to be anti-colonial, which Kantianism cannot offer normatively, as the earlier chapters have established. This chapter is pivotal in proposing this normative re-orientation to cosmopolitanism, and making it a truly transnational endeavour.

Among those who will immensely benefit from this book are scholars working with Kant or Kantianism in political philosophy and still struggling with how to



square Kant's ugly claims about nonwhite people and women with his cosmopolitanism; those groping among mere ideal political concepts like the "public sphere" and "hospitality," without carefully considering their histories and legacies for the oppressed; those who want to re-define what counts as the proper domestic/national or global "political" agent, framework, or action from a genuinely transnational perspective; and last but not the least, those who want to see how DuBois develops a radical *transnational* cosmopolitanism and its distinct normative tools throughout his career via a form of aesthetic and political craft. By the end of the book, you will see both how taking up narrow European frameworks uncritically for theorizing global justice is unhelpful or dangerous, and how the resources we find in DuBois's political craft can help us to re-think and re-orient some of these issues toward true global, i.e., transnational justice, the purported aim of all cosmopolitanisms.

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