Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers

In the book *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, Kwame Anthony Appiah has categorically described the value of differing cultures and the methods which are primarily used to keep two varying cultures from staying poles apart. In the first chapter, the author talks about the facts and values, wherein values are simply desires or preferences. While values differ from culture to culture, there are a few values which are common to all nations, such as kindness, love and non-violence. The aforementioned qualities fall under the aspect of positivism, while facts and beliefs have a subjective quality. Values should, therefore, be seen as tools which are essential for a human's life. Values, thus, are a part of the shared values of discourse. The narrative value, thus, is partly human and partially embedded values. According to Appiah, it is possible owing to shared values and shared opinions (Appiah 30).

Persuasion is directly dependent on shared coordinates, which, in turn, will allow you to develop a better story by offering you to fathom the flaws of the current narration (Appiah 34). According to Appiah, our belief system stems from biological specifics, which embraces color systems and the perception of objects in the world, while the rest are dependent on culture, upbringing and learning. While there is only one reality, people make various attempts to understand it from all possible aspects, incorporating theory and practice (Appiah 31).

Likewise, owing to the wide array of mathematical formulas, we always try and apply experiments and beliefs to ensure that we reach the correct value. Appiah discusses moral disagreements that occur within and across different societies. Here, different kinds of conflicts exist in thick and thin. Morals and taboos vary as well, depending on the culture of the given people and the environment they live in, as Appiah (36) said.

While taboos presuppose that the individuals could be purified, moral violation, on the contrary, can provide the reason for an individual to be expelled from certain society. It is worth mentioning, though, that the feeling of disgust triggered by certain moral violations is biological, although it is based on culture. Metaphysical and religious matters are directly linked with issues of prohibition. Virtues and vices, which are acknowledged widely amongst human societies, have strong local values attached (Appiah 57).

Vices and virtues are openly textured. In the case of a disagreement, the cause is often looked upon as an epitome of judgment and discretion. Hence, vices and virtues are contestable, which means that they can be argued with ease. Likewise, our thoughts, actions and feelings are based on the basis of our evaluated language skills. Likewise, we should always try and take others' interests seriously and try to expand our knowledge base by putting ourselves in their shoes.

In case of moral issues, we might not share a language, but apply it in different ways; on the other hand, we might share a language and apply it in the same way, but digress in terms of the values and virtues. In the chapter *The Primacy of Practice*, Appiah clearly states that life in civilized worlds is directly dependent on one's attitude towards certain practices, such as indulging in charitable work and purchasing essential goods, with actually thinking as to why we did so. Such agreements are called incomplete theorized agreements (Appiah 71). Hence, we live together because of certain values, yet without actually realizing or agreeing upon why the values actually exist and for what purpose. We often think of reasons and justifications on the basis of our actions and this in turn brings about a change in terms of our customs and beliefs (Appiah 75-76).

One can change a society by changing its habits and practices. When we argue on the same values, we tend to transform them into contested terrain (Appiah 81). The shift in values and moral ideas is often helpful for people who have a tendency of resisting change because a different environment allows individuals to realize the actual worth and the secretive reason behind the change. In the sixth chapter, the author clearly states that the overall machinery of the mind remains the same, regardless of the customs, culture and habits. Each society has certain norms, such as kindness and sympathy; these virtues are common to all cultures across the globe. Experience and culture shapes the overall perspective of a normal person (Appiah 96). At the same time, there are a few things which are common to all normal individuals.

In the seventh chapter, entitled *Cosmopolitan Contamination*, the author has stated that, while world and cultures change with time, there are a few practices that are kept intact. A cosmopolitan culture allows people to adapt new ideas with an utmost ease. Since adaptation to one's culture is a continuous process, the attainment certain cultural traits is not always deemed right and proper. It is worth keeping in mind that people prefer local goods and their response to American products depends on their cultural backgrounds. We all dwell in cosmopolitan worlds, wherein cultures are subject to constant changes and transformations. A cosmopolitan culture is totalitarian in nature, and while most of people are unaware of the truth, they have a common belief, which clearly states that each human being has an obligation towards another. Hence, the central idea is that everybody matters and that it sharply limits the scope of a human being's tolerance level (Appiah 96-114).

It has been stated that cosmopolitism is related to pluralism and although there are a lot of values that are worth living by, one simply fails to abide all of them, as Appiah (114) said. While cosmopolitan individuals hope that different cultures would

have varying values, cosmopolitans are never certain whether the values would be worth following or not. The concept of multiculturalism, which cosmopolitans support, is also marked by fallibilism, which clearly states that knowledge is provisional and, thus, is subject to revision, which in turn, is completely dependent on the new evidence obtained by a individual. In the last chapter, the author explains that our morals are stronger than the application principles. It is, therefore, easier to figure out the values rather than trying to picture their justifications. In this scenario, you are inclined to choose one good over another good.

 In simple words, you would rather save a drowning child than worry about wetting your new suit. The ideals of morality are developed owing to the basic needs of life. Food, water, shelter, education and health are the basic ingredients which predetermine whether a particular moral is to be followed in a related scenario or not. Hence, we need to take certain obligations for the same. Such entitlements, according to Appiah, are nation-state specific and not one-world government specific. At the same time, we tend to share the burden of our responsibility, although we are never really sure of our share. According to the author, we need to be partial to those who are close to us. A true cosmopolitan is always trying to achieve the greater good by working diligently towards his/her goals without disrupting local commitments in the act, as Appiah (114-161) said.

The U-Turn concept is directly linked with Appiah's work in relation with the transitional period wherein people learn to first enjoy, then suffer and finally enjoy, thereby taking a complete U-Turn. This is context to the universal principles of culture which is applicable and common to both authors' works.

When Appiah is compared with Gannon, it is very interesting to note that both themes have various similarities and whenever we talk about culture as a whole, we

would be surprised to note that culture has a major role to play whenever there is a talk about how culture can influence an individual's life in any way (Gannon 103). Gannon has categorically stated in his work that culture has a major influence on an individual's behavior. At the same time, there was always a concept that touched upon the U-Turn issue. In relation to Gannon's book, it has been clearly mentioned that an individual, when he tries to leave his home culture to become a part of the host culture, he/she always undergoes a U-Turn. In accordance with the U-Turn concept, he/she initially sees a good time and feels really elated.

This period of elation lasts a few months, after which, there is a sudden decline in the individuals' behavior. In fact, the individual tends to become negative in his/her approach. Thereafter, the individual has a tendency to steady his/her emotional quotient and keep pace with the lifestyles of the host culture. While the concept of U-Turn lasts for a period of 6 months as per the assessment of Gannon, the first 3 months are supposed to be good, after which, the remaining 2 months are spent in a turmoil. It is only when the individual, who has left home culture to get better work opportunities in the host culture, come around to accept the positive approaches of the new environment that (s)he actually gets back to his/her normal self. This happens in the sixth month (Gannon 103).

The influence of culture on an individual has also been depicted through the means of a classical example in Gannon's work, which, in abstract terminology, can also be attributed to the works of good faith (Gannon 104). There was an instance wherein a Chinese professional had been jailed for committing a crime in a foreign land. During the tenure the Chinese individual developed a chronic tumor in her abdominal region. The tumor was in reality, diagnosed as a serious heart disease by a local doctor and the doctor stated that it required an operation. The Chinese individual was

committed to her faith and she simply avoided the operation, choosing to suffer for a considerable period of time, perhaps a couple of years in prison, without undergoing any sort of operational treatment.

Over here, not only did the individual survive, she also defied the doctor's words and managed to live a healthy life solely on the basis of her cultural influence. She had the faith and belief that her ulcer would be cured through natural means and that it did not require any operational procedure. Culture has always been struggling with business ethics and standards. While the Chinese multinational companies have managed to survive the global struggle by adopting and accepting the international rules, Russian companies, which sized private companies, are struggling to fight corruption, disease, poor health facilities and a decrease in life expectancy. Henceforth, just as Appiah had clearly stated that culture has a major role to play in deciding the future of multinational firms, the fact still remains that unless and until multinational firms adopt the principalities of international players, individual nations cannot hope to break through the monetary barriers (Gannon 104).

To compare and contrast Appiah's work with that of Hall, we would certainly agree with the fact that each culture has certain qualities which are present in terms of a global perspective. Non-violence and kindness are two such qualities which each culture possesses and also executes to perfection, regardless of the fact that while some cultures may be willing to agree with their functionalities, whereas others may completely disagree. The subject of non-violence is also an interesting issue which also offers sufficient food for thoughts.

The topic of non-violence has more secrets and deception involved than an open debate has. Likewise, when Hall tries to portray the essence of culture in a loving relationship, there is a fairly clear view regarding the backgrounds and the values

attached, which in turn, differ from one place to another and from one community to the other. In simple words, whenever an individual is supposed to develop a relationship with an individual who belongs to a different culture, he/she would have to expand their existing horizons and think from the point of view of an international cultural domain. In order to develop a fulfilling relationship, the individual would be required to expand his/her skills set and allow his/her culture to act as a cushion in trying to adopt the other individual, irrespective of the other person's background. This concept of unity in diversity is only possible when an individual is ready to take a step forward and adopt the methodologies of the other culture. Likewise, in terms of relationships, it is very important to understand the true motive behind those relationships. While love is the deciding factor, at times, lust and selfish motives tend to spoil the relationship forever (Hall 361).

While discussing behavioral issues, it is interesting to note that Appiah has a lot in common with Hall and both texts are an interesting read for both the parties. Through the means of a classic example, Hall has categorically tried to explain the benefits of understanding the human behavior, or in better words, human psychology. Well, it so happened that during the course of a grand dinner, which was being hosted by a broker, his guests, who happened to be predominantly strict vegetarians, were treated with large servings of fresh vegetables along with chunks of fried fish. While the guests were indulging in feeding frenzy in order to please the host, one of the guests casually stated that the dinner was primarily meant to be purely vegetarian. It is peculiar that the event occurred when the dinner finally finished and all were left completely satisfied. To this, the broker, who also happened to be the host, categorically replied by stating that he would be more than glad to order a second round of dinner, which unlike the last time around, would primarily consist of purely vegetarian food items. Much to the displeasure

of the guests, the broker ordered the waiter to fetch a second round of meals, which primarily consisted of pure vegetarian food items. Hence, over here, the broker acted as a host, which his guests acted as individuals who had no choice but to accept the decisions of their host. At the cost of their personal discomfort, they had to agree with the words of their host. This was all to bridge the business differences which emerged from varied cultural backgrounds.

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