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978-0-521-69545-9 - The Cosmopolitan Imagination: The Renewal of Critical Social Theory

Gerard Delanty

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The Cosmopolitan Imagination

Gerard Delanty provides a comprehensive assessment of the idea of cosmopolitanism in social and political thought which links cosmopolitan theory with critical social theory. He argues that cosmopolitanism has a critical dimension which offers a solution to one of the weaknesses in the critical theory tradition: failure to respond to the challenges of globalization and intercultural communication. Critical cosmopolitanism, he proposes, is an approach that is not only relevant to social scientific analysis but is also normatively grounded in a critical attitude. Delanty's argument for a critical, sociologically oriented cosmopolitanism aims to avoid, on the one hand, purely normative conceptions of cosmopolitanism and, on the other, approaches that reduce cosmopolitanism to the empirical expression of diversity. He attempts also to take cosmopolitan theory beyond the largely Western context with which it has generally been associated, claiming that cosmopolitan analysis must now take into account non-Western expressions of cosmopolitanism.

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Preface and acknowledgements

My intention in this book is to set out an argument for the contemporary relevance of cosmopolitanism for social science. More specifically my aim is to demonstrate the empirical and normative significance of cosmopolitanism for critical social theory. I have termed my approach critical cosmopolitanism to emphasize a dimension of cosmopolitanism that is not normally discussed in the now extensive literature on cosmopolitanism, namely the capacity for self-problematization and new ways of seeing the world that result when diverse peoples experience common problems. Against culturally oriented approaches, I see such problems as not cultural but social and economic and have significant political implications, which require a new kind of imagination – a cosmopolitan as opposed to national or market based ones – to address. The argument of this book is that such an imagination is present in the ways in which societies today, as in the past, have responded to the experience of globality.

In many ways this book is an expanded and re-worked version of an article on the idea of critical cosmopolitanism I published in 2006 in a special issue of the *British Journal of Sociology* on cosmopolitan sociology, edited by Ulrich Beck and Natan Sznaider, ‘The Cosmopolitan Imagination: Critical Cosmopolitanism and Social Theory’, *British Journal of Sociology* 57 (1): 25–47. Chapter 2 is a much extended and re-worked version of that article.

In the chapters that follow I have attempted to relate cosmopolitanism to debates in a wide variety of cultural and political issues relating to the consequences of globalization for contemporary societies. Europe is the specific concern of Chapters 8 and 9 where I am seeking to locate European issues in the context of what I have been calling for some time ‘post-Westernization’. As is argued in Chapter 7 on modernity and global history, the true significance of cosmopolitanism is that it offers a critical approach to global issues and a way of looking at modernity beyond the limits of Eurocentrism.

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Chapter 6 is a revised version of a chapter ‘Dilemmas of secularism: Europe, religion and the problem of pluralism’ in *Migration, Belonging and Exclusion in Europe*, edited by G. Delanty, P. Jones and R. Wodak, Liverpool University Press, 2008. It is included here with permission for the perspective it offers on post-secular society.

My ideas on cosmopolitanism have benefited from discussion with Ulrich Beck, Paul Blokker, Baogang He, David Inglis, Chris Rumford, Monica Sassatelli, Bo Strath and Shijun Tong, and from presentations at numerous conferences over the past six years. I am grateful to Piet Strydom for suggestions on linking cosmopolitanism to critical social theory.

A visiting appointment at Deakin University, Melbourne, in 2006 offered an excellent environment to develop some of the ideas that lay behind this book and to write the first draft.