

(GT 1 - Migração)

## Nussbaum's critique of traditional cosmopolitanism and its implications

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### Abstract

In this work, I analyze Martha Nussbaum's 2019 work, *The Cosmopolitan Tradition: A Noble but Flawed Ideal*, focusing on her Critique of Traditional Cosmopolitanism. Nussbaum's critical reassessment of the cosmopolitan tradition highlights its historical significance and inherent limitations, particularly in addressing the material and political realities that shape human lives. Her critique targets the idealism of traditional cosmopolitanism, which often neglects socio-economic conditions and national contexts. Nussbaum proposes a reformed cosmopolitanism that integrates national concerns with universal human dignity, offering a more practical framework for addressing global inequalities. I examine how Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach (CA) challenges traditional cosmopolitan ideals by emphasizing tangible needs and national obligations. The perspective for global ethics and political philosophy, notes how her approach could reshape contemporary discussions on justice and human rights. Additionally, we consider whether Nussbaum's focus on moral cosmopolitanism might overlook other emerging cosmopolitan initiatives, which could provide a broader view aligned with today's global challenges.

Keywords: Cosmopolitanism, Global Justice, Capabilities Approach, Social Welfare.

### Introduction

The cosmopolitan tradition, with its roots in Stoic philosophy, has long championed the idea of global citizenship and the moral obligations of individuals to all human beings, regardless of national or cultural boundaries. In her 2019 book *The Cosmopolitan Tradition: A Noble but Flawed Ideal*, Martha Nussbaum revisits this tradition, offering a critical reassessment that acknowledges both its strengths and its shortcomings.

While cosmopolitanism has been celebrated for its universalist aspirations, Nussbaum argues that it has often been detached from the practical realities of national interests and material conditions. We delve into Nussbaum's critique of the classical cosmopolitan tradition. Drawing on her analysis of figures like the Stoics and

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Anais do I Simpósio Internacional Práxis Itinerante e III Seminário Temático do Práxis Itinerante: Diversidades, Pluralidades e Perspectivas em Debate  
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Immanuel Kant, we examine her argument that traditional cosmopolitanism, while noble in its ideals, fails to adequately address the material and political realities that shape human life. Nussbaum contends that this oversight has rendered cosmopolitanism impractical and, at times, counterproductive, particularly in its disregard for national contexts and the tangible needs of individuals. Additionally, this paper will reference Nussbaum's earlier work, particularly her 1997 article "Kant and Stoic Cosmopolitanism," as well as key works by Immanuel Kant, drawing from the Akademie Ausgabe list. These sources will provide a deeper context for understanding the evolution of cosmopolitan thought and how Nussbaum's recent critiques and reforms build upon or challenge these foundational ideas.

### The Critique of Traditional Cosmopolitanism

Martha Nussbaum's *The Cosmopolitan Tradition* (2019) offers a profound critique of traditional cosmopolitanism, particularly as it has been shaped by Stoic philosophy and later thinkers like Immanuel Kant. While Nussbaum draws heavily on these historical perspectives, she also challenges the sufficiency and realism of their approaches. In this section, we explore her critique by examining the foundations of Stoic and Kantian cosmopolitanism, and by considering how Nussbaum's analysis both acknowledges their contributions and reveals their limitations.

Nussbaum's critique is grounded in her interpretation of Stoic cosmopolitanism, which traces its origins to the Cynic philosopher Diogenes, who famously declared himself a "citizen of the world" (*kosmopolitês*). The Stoics further developed this idea, asserting that all human beings are members of a single universal community governed by reason. They promoted the idea of a cosmopolitan community, where every individual, regardless of nationality or background, was part of a shared moral order. However, Nussbaum argues that this Stoic vision, while noble in its intent, is overly idealistic. It emphasizes self-sufficiency and the regulation of emotions to an extent that can be dismissive of the real impact of social and material conditions on human well-being. Immanuel Kant's cosmopolitanism, which Nussbaum also examines critically, is deeply rooted in his moral philosophy, particularly his concept of the categorical imperative. Kant, like the Stoics, emphasized universal moral principles that transcend national boundaries. He advocated for a world where individuals recognize the

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inherent dignity of all human beings, rooted in rationality and autonomy. While Kant's focus on reason and autonomy contributes significantly to the discourse on cosmopolitanism, Nussbaum points out that his approach, too, overlooks the complex realities of human existence, where material conditions and emotions play a crucial role in shaping ethical decisions.

Nussbaum's 1997 article "Kant and Stoic Cosmopolitanism" delves deeper into these philosophical traditions, comparing the cosmopolitan ideals of Kant and the Stoics. She highlights that while both emphasize universal moral principles and world citizenship, they diverge in their approach to ethical living. Kant's emphasis on reason and individual autonomy contrasts with the Stoics' focus on virtue and the regulation of emotions. This comparative analysis reveals the nuanced differences in how these traditions approach the concept of cosmopolitanism. However, Nussbaum's critique in her later work points out that both traditions fall short in accounting for the full spectrum of human experiences.

An important aspect of Nussbaum's critique is her assertion that traditional cosmopolitanism, as influenced by Stoicism, fails to adequately address the role of social and political institutions in promoting human well-being. While the Stoics and Kant envision a universal moral community, Nussbaum contends that their philosophies do not sufficiently consider the importance of material and social conditions. She argues that the Stoic ideal of the sage—unaffected by external circumstances such as poverty or misfortune—is unrealistic and overlooks the significant impact that these conditions have on an individual's capacity to live a flourishing life.

Moreover, Nussbaum challenges the practicality of implementing cosmopolitan ideals within the framework of nation-states. Although Stoic and Kantian cosmopolitanism promote a global moral community, Nussbaum emphasizes that the nation-state remains the most effective political unit for ensuring justice and protecting human rights. She argues that without the support of robust social and political institutions, the lofty ideals of cosmopolitanism cannot be fully realized. This critique is central to her argument that a more grounded and pragmatic approach is necessary for addressing the ethical and political challenges of our time.

One of Nussbaum's key criticisms is that traditional cosmopolitanism, as critiqued in

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*The Cosmopolitan Tradition*, does not consider all the spheres of cosmopolitanism, particularly the social and political dimensions. Nussbaum's focus on moral cosmopolitanism, while important, overlooks the need for a comprehensive approach that includes economic, cultural, and institutional factors. By not fully addressing these aspects, traditional cosmopolitanism, according to Nussbaum, remains an incomplete and insufficient framework for addressing the complex challenges of the modern world.

While Nussbaum recognizes the contributions of Stoic and Kantian cosmopolitanism to the discourse on global ethics, she argues that their approaches are limited by an overly idealistic view of human nature and society. Her critique calls for a more nuanced and realistic understanding of cosmopolitanism—one that incorporates the social, material, and institutional conditions necessary for promoting human dignity and flourishing on a global scale.

Nussbaum's critique extends to the legacy of Adam Smith, particularly his work in *The Wealth of Nations*, where he highlights the inefficiencies of monopolies, trade restrictions, and limitations on labor movement. Nussbaum acknowledges the moral significance of Smith's arguments, particularly his assertion that a society cannot be flourishing and happy if the majority of its members are poor and miserable. However, she argues that Smith's focus on efficiency must be complemented by a more comprehensive consideration of human capabilities, which she elaborates on in her "Capabilities Approach."

The problems Nussbaum identifies in traditional cosmopolitanism are not limited to theoretical concerns. She highlights several practical issues, including the limits of international human rights law, the moral difficulties of foreign aid, and the challenges of asylum and migration. Nussbaum argues that nations, despite their imperfections, should be respected as vehicles for human autonomy and accountability. She contends that the cosmopolitan tradition has often failed to make necessary distinctions, such as those between legal and undocumented migrants or between political asylum and economic migration, leading to a humanitarian crisis in many parts of the world.

## The Capabilities List

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Nussbaum introduces a list of ten central capabilities that she argues are essential for a life worthy of human dignity. This list is intended as a minimum guarantee of rights for any nation that aspires to be just:

1. Life: Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length.
2. Bodily Health: Being able to have good health, including reproductive health, adequate nourishment, and adequate shelter.
3. Bodily Integrity: Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence.
4. Senses, Imagination, and Thought: Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason, and to have these things supported by an adequate education.
5. Emotions: Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence.
6. Practical Reason: Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life.
7. Affiliation: Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other humans, to engage in various forms of social interaction.
8. Other Species: Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.
9. Play: Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.
10. Control over One's Environment: Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right to property and employment on equal terms with others.

## Closing Remarks

Martha Nussbaum's exploration of cosmopolitanism in *The Cosmopolitan Tradition* critiques the philosophical ideal of global citizenship by highlighting both its historical importance and its inherent shortcomings. While traditional cosmopolitanism, with its roots in Stoic and Kantian thought, aspires to a universal moral community, Nussbaum argues that this vision often falls short due to its detachment from material realities and the socio-political structures that shape human lives. Her critique reveals the limitations of an overly idealistic approach that overlooks

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the crucial role of material goods, social welfare, and medical aid in achieving human dignity. Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach (CA) presents a more pragmatic and effective framework by focusing on the tangible needs required for individuals to live dignified lives.

In summary, while the Stoic vision of a universal moral community remains an admirable ideal, Nussbaum's approach offers a more practical and actionable means of addressing global inequalities. Her focus on the capabilities essential for human flourishing provides a robust framework for promoting justice within the structures of nation-states, ensuring that individuals' dignity and purpose are supported by effective political and social institutions.

However, it is important to acknowledge that Nussbaum's critique and Capabilities Approach may not fully encompass all contemporary strands of cosmopolitan thought. Her analysis primarily engages with moral cosmopolitanism rooted in Stoic and Enlightenment traditions, potentially overlooking or sidelining other cosmopolitan initiatives that have emerged in recent decades. These contemporary approaches might offer additional insights and broader perspectives more aligned with current global realities. While Nussbaum's emphasis on material and social conditions represents a significant advancement in addressing global justice, a more inclusive consideration of diverse cosmopolitan perspectives could further enrich our understanding and application of global ethics in today's interconnected world.

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