theorists such as Thomas Hobbes would argue that the society that offers the best guarantee against the worst consequences human beings visit upon themselves is the most good one can reasonably hope for in this life, though again the label “moral community” does not quite fit because the unifying agent need not be a morality as conventionally understood. In both of these examples – a liberal society as per Mill, or the social contract tradition as per Hobbes – there is no priority given to any recognizable system of morality, ethics, or religion. Indeed, the need for separation of church and state is the rule here, raising an important and enduring concern regarding the basis for a global ethics.

If religion or morality as conventionally understood provides, as it has on far too frequent occasion in the past, a basis for nontrivial disagreement, enmity, or war, then it is a dubious basis for a global ethics or a global moral community, as this basis would risk alienating any non-adherents to the religion or system of morality, especially those peoples who identify themselves centrally by their distinctive moral code. One way out of this dilemma would be to start with the likely most noncontroversial propositions, such as all people are of equal moral worth, or all people are equally the source of moral worth, or no people are of superior moral worth that they may determine the moral community for everyone else. While this course of action explicitly seeks to avoid controversial moral claims, it does so by remaining at such a high level of generality, of being so nonspecific that it risks not speaking to many of the world’s peoples, or risks that many people will not see themselves as members of this vague moral community which is supposed to unite them and be regarded by them as morally good.

Nonetheless, it may not be unreasonable to expect communities to uphold and adhere to the most widely agreed-upon notion of moral community available at any given time, such as reflected in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as a provisional best global moral community. This demarcation of a moral community has the advantage of being both partly actualized while remaining aspirational.

Related Topics
▶ Animal Rights
▶ Communities
▶ Cosmopolitanism
▶ Decent Society
▶ Global Ethic
▶ Human Rights
▶ Kant, Immanuel
▶ Law of Peoples
▶ Moral Cosmopolitanism
▶ Political Cosmopolitanism
▶ Rawls, John
▶ Toleration/Tolerance, Liberal Principle of
▶ Universal Declaration of Human Rights

References

Moral Cosmopolitanism

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Cosmopolitan political theorists of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, who write about the injustice of current international or global economic, environmental, political, legal, and/or social conditions, commonly base their arguments on one or another form of moral cosmopolitanism, or more precisely, on some conception(s) of morality belonging to that category. All cosmopolitan conceptions of morality hold that all human beings are morally important and must be properly taken into account in practical deliberations about any actions (especially lawmaking and policymaking) that may significantly affect anyone’s vital, fundamental, or otherwise important interests. Theorists who use the term “moral cosmopolitanism” may contrast it to “cosmopolitanism about institutions” (Beitz 1979/1999), or to “political,” “cultural,” and “economic” cosmopolitanism (Kleingeld and Brown 2006), or to “legal” and “social justice” cosmopolitanism (Pogge 2007). Other theorists may contrast “cosmopolitanism about justice” to “cosmopolitanism about culture” (Scheffler 2001), or may contrast “justice-based” and “political” cosmopolitanism to “cosmopolitanism about the good life” (Caney 2010). Seldom have moral philosophers of past centuries used the term “moral
cosmopolitanism” when distinguishing or classifying conceptions of morality or ethics. However, since the end of the twentieth century a number of authors characterizing moral cosmopolitanism have implied or asserted that many conceptions of morality or ethics not described by their authors as falling into that category nevertheless do fall into it: these conceptions include Immanuel Kant’s and John Stuart Mill’s moral philosophies as well as more recent Kantian, utilitarian, and contractualist conceptions.

All cosmopolitan conceptions of morality oppose views according to which some human beings lack moral status, as well as views according to which some human beings’ needs or interests do not count or do not have equal moral importance. Such views include racism and some forms of nationalism (e.g., Benito Mussolini’s fascism), as well as some forms of moral perfectionism (e.g., that of Friedrich Nietzsche). Arguably other forms of moral perfectionism and of nationalism are compatible with moral cosmopolitanism.

Cosmopolitan political theorists and scholars of cosmopolitanism have offered related yet diverse articulations of this perspective. The account offered by Thomas Pogge (1992) is widely quoted: for example, after Charles Beitz (1979/1999) applies the label “moral cosmopolitanism” to his own view that the basic structure of international relations is subject to a requirement of distributive justice in virtue of its resemblance to the basic structure of domestic society, he explains moral cosmopolitanism by saying that it is, in Pogge’s phrase, the notion that every human being has a global stature as the ultimate unit of moral concern. According to Beitz, moral cosmopolitanism applies to the whole world the maxim that choices about what policies we should prefer, or what institutions we should establish, should be based on an impartial consideration of the claims of each person who would be affected. Beitz further explains that his own moral cosmopolitanism is a view about the basis on which institutions and practices should be justified or criticized, and that it is a challenge to theories that regard the state or the national or other community as an enclave of special responsibilities that are distinct and justified separately from general or global responsibilities.

Charles Jones (1999) describes the cosmopolitan moral perspective as impartial, universal, individualist, and egalitarian, and as “closely akin to liberalism.” However, liberal political values are variously interpreted by theorists who regard themselves as moral cosmopolitans. On the one hand, there are “egalitarian liberals” (such as Beitz and Pogge) who endorse the essentials of John Rawls’s conception of a just liberal-democratic society as presented in A Theory of Justice (1971), but reject Rawls’s later modifications of it and also reject the conception of international justice he presents in The Law of Peoples (as they interpret it). On the other hand, there are “political liberals” who endorse not only Rawls’s conception of a just liberal-democratic society as he later modified it in Political Liberalism (1993) and Justice as Fairness (2001), but also the essentials of his conception of international justice understood as based (or centered or focused) on human rights. According to Pauline Kleingeld and Eric Brown (2006), although every cosmopolitan argues for community among all human beings regardless of social and political affiliation, some argue for global political institutions or for global economic markets open to all, while others hold only that living a good human life requires serving the universal community by helping human beings (for example, by promoting human rights and justice), and some cosmopolitans argue for multiculturality. Jeremy Waldron (1992) argues that the “hybrid lifestyle” of the true cosmopolitan is the only appropriate response to the modern world in which we live. Caney (2009) criticizes Waldron’s challenges to the ideas that some people need the preservation of their own culture and that cultural minorities should have language rights. Kwame Anthony Appiah (2006) notes that all cosmopolitans agree that no local loyalty can ever justify forgetting that each human being has responsibilities to every other, but emphasizes the importance of the fact that people can disagree about values not only due to giving the same values different weights, or failing to share a vocabulary of evaluation, but also due to giving the same vocabulary different interpretations. Such disagreements can arise among people in the same society, but they are more likely to arise among people from different societies whose evaluative vocabularies are embedded in different ways of life. Appiah points out that in order to apply the Golden Rule, whether the negative version (“What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others”) or the positive version (“What you wish done to yourself, do to others”), you need to know how your acts will seem to others; it is not enough to have your own true descriptions of your own acts. As he explains, there are many true act-descriptions, and the person to whom you did what you did may be glad you did it if she/he describes or perceives your act in one of these ways, but not if she/he describes or perceives your act in one of the other ways. Appiah suggests, in light of this as well as many other considerations, that the position worth defending might be called “a partial cosmopolitanism,” in both senses of “partial.”

Caney (2010) distinguishes “cosmopolitanism about the good life” from “justice-based cosmopolitanism” and “political cosmopolitanism.” He explains that the first
includes views denying that a person can have a good life only if he or she follows the established practices or traditions of his or her local community and culture, and asserting that in order to flourish persons can, may, or must appreciate, draw upon, and/or adopt other communities’ and cultures’ ideas, practices, values, and ideals. Acknowledging that Scheffler (2001) uses the term “cosmopolitanism about culture” to refer to a thesis about the nature and requirements of individuals’ well-being or identity or capacity for effective agency, Caney (2010) says he chooses to use instead the term “cosmopolitanism about the good life” for two reasons: (1) the thesis in question is about the good life, and (2) a cosmopolitan culture is an ambiguous idea that can mean either a culture that encompasses diverse values and ideals or a culture that supports cosmopolitan principles of justice and the institutions needed to realize them.

Pogge (2007) writes that the central cosmopolitan idea is that of including all human beings as equals, and that since this central idea can be understood and employed in diverse ways, it can generate a variety of cosmopolitan positions. Pogge classifies a “conception of ethics” as cosmopolitan if its assessments and prescriptions are based on taking equal account of the interests of all human beings. This category encompasses interpersonal and international forms of ethical cosmopolitanism, he says: the former is a conception of ethics specific to individual human beings and their conduct, while the latter is a conception of ethics specific to states and their conduct. Pogge classifies as a form of “legal cosmopolitanism” any cosmopolitan moral conception that demands that social institutions be designed so that they include all human beings as equals and that prescribes a unified legal organization of the whole human world. He regards a conception of justice as a form of “social justice cosmopolitanism” if and only if its assessments and prescriptions are based on taking equal account of the interests of all human beings, as are those of a cosmopolitan conception of ethics.

Darrel Moellendorf (2002) argues for the cosmopolitan view that there exist duties of global justice based upon equal respect for persons regardless of their national membership or citizenship. He points out that the view that the claims of individual persons constitute the basis of international legal obligations, a view that blossomed after the Second World War with the issuing of a variety of statements affirming a commitment to international human rights, is sometimes called “cosmopolitanism,” and says that the UN Charter expresses at several points “the cosmopolitan perspective.” However, in his more recently published book (2009) Moellendorf avoids using the term “cosmopolitan” except when referring to the views of other theorists or to his own previously held views (at which point he merely mentions the title of his earlier book, Cosmopolitan Justice), and the term does not appear in the book’s title, nor its chapter headings, nor its index.

Gillian Brock (2009) writes that some members of the anti-globalization movement fear cosmopolitanism due to misconstruing it as merely a way to justify the spread of capitalism. She contends that widely diverse positions are rightly seen as cosmopolitan, for there are diverse reasons why one might regard oneself as a member of a global community of persons; these include various religious (e.g., Christian) commitments and disparate political (e.g., Marxist) views. Currently theorists are debating the question of what cosmopolitan justice entails, and they defend a full spectrum of views, including forms of egalitarianism antithetical to the “neo-liberal agenda”; therefore, Brock argues, one should not assume that anyone who espouses cosmopolitanism holds capitalist or neoliberal views about economic justice.

Some theorists classify as forms of cosmopolitanism moral philosophies that are consequentialist, such as that of John Stuart Mill (a form of rule-utilitarianism), that of Jeremy Bentham (a form of act-utilitarianism), and that of Peter Singer (arguably a form of act-utilitarianism), in addition to moral philosophies that are anti-consequentialist, such as that of Immanuel Kant as well as more recent Kantian and contractualist conceptions. Among these cosmopolitan theorists is Kok-Chor Tan (2004, 2010), whose discussion of consequentialist and “deontological” conceptions of morality I will briefly summarize here. (Note that the term “deontological,” although often applied to Kant’s anti-consequentialist moral philosophy, does not in fact apply to it, according to the eminent Kant scholar Allen Wood (1999). As Wood explains, if a deontological moral theory is one that precludes grounding a moral principle on substantive values or ends, then what Kant argues is that no deontological moral theory is possible since a categorical imperative can be binding on a rational will only if there is an objective end or end in itself.)

Tan (2004, 2010) characterizes utilitarianism as a consequentialist moral theory that judges an act or a rule as right or wrong depending on its consequences; as he explains, act-utilitarianism holds that the right act is that which brings about the greatest utility or good for people, understanding the good to be maximized as happiness (which some theorists construe as net balance of pleasure over pain) or interest-satisfaction or preference-satisfaction. Citing Rawls (1971), Tan (2004) says that deontological theories, although not entirely
dismissive of consequences, do not define the right solely in terms of the good. Tan (2004, 2010) explains that deontological theories judge acts as right or wrong by reference to agents’ rights and obligations, or by reference to “some defined set of actions or duties,” the conformity with which need not necessarily maximize utility or the good.

Tan (2004) takes the article, “Famine, Affluence and Morality,” by Singer (1972), as his point of departure for a critical discussion of utilitarianism. Singer argues on act-utilitarian grounds for humanitarian assistance in general and famine relief in particular, on the basis of the principle that if it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought morally to do it. Given the great disparity in wealth and well-being in the world’s population, Singer concludes that well-off citizens in affluent countries ought to assist the poor and needy of the world up to the point of marginal utility, that is, up to the point where the agent has been reduced to very near the material circumstances of the recipients of assistance. Recognizing that a citizen in an affluent country would probably regard such a moral requirement as too demanding, Singer then proposes a more modest version of the principle (despite regarding the more demanding version as correct); this modest version says that one ought to contribute to humanitarian relief only up to the point where one would have to sacrifice something “morally significant.” Singer notes that even this modest principle provides reason for the rich to give much more than they typically do.

Tan objects to utilitarianism for the reason that it can permit, and even require, the sacrifice of the human rights of some people in order to bring about an increase of aggregate utility. In his view, this conflicts with any plausible theory of justice. Utilitarianism’s most serious flaw in the eyes of those who take human rights seriously is that it fails to recognize the distinction between persons and hence can in principle require the violation of the liberty of the few for the greater good shared by many, says Tan, citing Rawls (1971). Utilitarianism is unacceptable, Tan contends, unless it can endorse individual rights as constraining good-maximizing actions.

Tan acknowledges that utilitarians have tried to refine their theory in response to such criticisms. Some try to incorporate what Samuel Scheffler (1982, 1988) has called “agent-centered restrictions” that prohibit the performance of good-maximizing actions if these involve violations of individual rights, and accommodate what Scheffler has called “agent-centered prerogatives” that would allow individuals to act in ways that do not necessarily maximize overall good. Other utilitarians adopt an institutional approach, according to which utilitarian principles do not apply directly to personal interactions and conduct, but instead to institutional rules, requiring that these rules be such as to maximize overall good in the long run. Acknowledging the importance of agent-centered prerogatives, some contemporary utilitarians require institutional rules to allow or enable people to exercise these prerogatives.

According to Tan, such utilitarians can argue that people ought to establish and support global institutional schemes that can coordinate and apportion duties in a way that appropriately balances good-maximization and agent-centered prerogatives. Utilitarians can also secure appropriate agent-centered restrictions by incorporating a notion of human rights, Tan contends; they can argue that respecting the “side constraints” of individual rights provides the best “indirect” strategy for maximizing the good (Tan credits these terms to Nozick and Summer, respectively). Once utilitarianism becomes a theory of justice that includes such agent-centered restrictions and agent-centered prerogatives, utilitarians can accept a “rights-focused” theory of global justice despite the fact that, according to utilitarianism, rights are not foundational to moral reasoning but instead derivative. Theorists such as Jones (1999) who have rejected utilitarianism as a basis for global justice due to doubting that it can provide an adequate justification for human rights have rejected it too hastily, Tan thinks. He acknowledges that contemporary moral philosophers do not agree about this, nor about whether such attempts at institutionalizing utilitarianism are, in the end, consistent with the core of utilitarian reasoning; however, he says, he follows Rawls (1993) in seeking an “overlapping consensus” with respect to justice, and therefore avoids rejecting out of hand diverse ethical perspectives that could, despite their differences and disagreements, converge on a rights-based or rights-focused model of justice. For similar reasons one may point out the arguably extensive compatibility between Rawls’s human-rights-focused Law of Peoples (1999) and the moral positions taken by Singer (2002/2004) on political, policy-related, and institutional issues such as humanitarian intervention, democracy, world peace, and what is wrong with the imposed, unelected global dominance of any single powerful nation that declares itself to be the world’s policeman.

Singer (2006) says that he is a preference utilitarian and does not assert that the ultimate end is pleasure or happiness. On his view, what people morally ought to do is to try to increase the extent to which people’s preferences are satisfied and reduce the extent to which they are
thwarted. Furthermore, he contends, we should give equal consideration to all preferences, irrespective of whose preferences they are. Singer regards this principle of equal consideration as a fundamental principle, and points out that it is compatible with a great deal of economic inequality.

Pogge (1992) says that, like most variants of moral cosmopolitanism, his own variant is formulated in terms of human rights. He offers an explication of the concept of human rights in terms of needs, saying that human persons with a past or potential future ability to engage in moral conversation and practice have certain basic needs, that these needs give rise to weighty moral demands, and that the object of each of these basic human needs is the object of a human right. A criterion of justice must, Pogge contends, employ a thin conception of human flourishing that would express some respect for the autonomy of diverse cultures, favoring social institutions acceptable to persons from different (religious, social, ethnic, etc.) backgrounds representing a wide range of diverse, more specific conceptions of human flourishing; thus the criterion of justice can be compatible with diverse national institutional schemes and ways of life, and can gain broad international acceptance.

As stated above, Pogge classifies a “conception of ethics” as cosmopolitan if its assessments and prescriptions are based on taking equal account of the interests of all human beings. Note that whether Singer’s utilitarianism counts as a cosmopolitan conception of ethics, so understood, seems to depend on whether preferences, as Singer understands them, are conceptually distinct from interests, as Pogge understands them. Pogge classifies a conception of justice as a form of “social justice cosmopolitanism” if and only if its assessments and prescriptions are based on taking equal account of the interests of all human beings; therefore, whether Singer’s utilitarian positions on institutional, political, and policy-related issues express a cosmopolitan conception of social justice, so understood, also seems to depend on whether preferences are conceptually distinct from interests. In order to understand Pogge’s contention that every human being has a global stature as the ultimate unit of moral concern, one must examine how he construes the meanings and logical interrelations of the ideas of an interest, a preference, a need, and a human right.

Beitz (1979/1999) says little about human rights; however, in his later book (2009) Beitz develops a “practical” conception of human rights, based on what he sees as an insight implicit in Rawls’s way of conceiving them. Human rights, according to Beitz, are the articulation in the public morality of world politics of the idea that each person is a subject of global concern. He describes the global human rights practice as consisting of (1) a set of norms for the regulation of states, which are expressed in the main international human rights instruments, and (2) a set of modes or strategies of action, for which violations of the norms may count as reasons. Beitz criticizes Rawls’s view of the practical functions of human rights as much narrower than what is found in present international practice.

Tan (2004) develops a “Rawlsian” global egalitarianism that requires distributive equality for the reason that the basic rights of the poor cannot be fully met as long as there are great inequalities between people. He points out that from this perspective, concern with equality derives from the more basic moral concern with ensuring that people are able to meet their basic needs. A different approach might, he suggests, take distributive justice to be a fundamental or direct concern, for example, by showing that the basic rights of individuals must include the right to equal consideration, and that this right to equal consideration entails among other things a direct concern with distributive equality between persons.

Both Moellendorf (2002, 2009) and Brock (2009) decline to formulate their conceptions of justice in terms of human rights. Brock offers two reasons for not doing so: (1) an account of needs is more fundamental than an account of human rights, and (2) the language of needs is much more widely used in a greater range of cultures than is the language of human rights. Brock contends that all of the human rights in the UDHR can be grounded in her account of basic needs together with a commitment to equality between persons. Moellendorf (2009) bases his conception of global justice on respect for inherent human dignity and equal respect for all persons, and contends that these moral values entail egalitarian duties of distributive justice both domestically, among compatriots, and globally, among non-compatriots. Moellendorf contrasts his own egalitarian conception of global justice with Pogge’s, describing the latter as a human rights based account that is “sufficiencitarian,” i.e., mainly concerned with remedying absolute deprivation. This description is disputable: see Jaggar (2010).

Caney (2005, 2010) formulates his own conception of justice in terms of rights (affirming Joseph Raz’s “interest theory” of rights), and asserts that all cosmopolitan conceptions of justice are fundamentally committed to the interests and rights of individuals and deny that membership in a nation or state is morally relevant to “a person’s entitlements” or to “the distribution of burdens and benefits.” (Note that since this denial is so strong, as Caney formulates it, arguably not all
cosmopolitans do or must agree with him on this point.)
Caney points out the variety of different kinds of arguments given for cosmopolitan conceptions of justice, noting that Onora O’Neill develops a Kantian argument, Robert Goodin and Martha Nussbaum take broadly consequentialist approaches, Henry Shue and Charles Jones argue that all persons should have a certain set of basic rights, and other theorists have employed a more or less Rawlsian contractarian method.

Tan’s claim that utilitarians can argue that people ought to establish and support global institutional schemes that can coordinate and apportion duties so as to balance good-maximization, agent-centered restrictions, and agent-centered prerogatives, amounts to a set of specifications for, or an incomplete formulation of, a utilitarian conception of justice applying to political, economic, or social institutions. Note here the distinction between a utilitarian conception of moral reasoning in general and a utilitarian conception of justice, which is a conception of moral reasoning about political, economic, or social institutions. This corresponds to the distinction between moral cosmopolitanism and political cosmopolitanism as I construe it for present purposes: I use “moral cosmopolitanism” as explained in the first paragraph of this chapter, and I use “political cosmopolitanism” to refer to a family of conceptions of justice, each based on some form of moral cosmopolitanism, that apply to political, legal, and/or economic institutions and specify morally required or (im) permissible uses of political or, more broadly, institutionalized power.

Caney (2010) construes the term “justice-based cosmopolitanism” as encompassing not only what Scheffler (2001) calls “cosmopolitanism about justice” (which Caney interprets as referring solely to cosmopolitan conceptions of distributive justice, and which Caney (2009) termed “juridical cosmopolitanism”) but also cosmopolitan approaches to civil and political justice. Thus justice-based cosmopolitanism holds, Caney says, that there are global principles of justice (civil, political, or economic) that apply to everyone in the world, ascribe entitlements to them all, and may also ascribe responsibilities to them. Caney (2010) uses the term “political cosmopolitanism” to refer to the view that there must be global political and legal institutions, whether a world state (which few cosmopolitans have favored) or a system that disperses power and authority among local, state-level, international, and global institutions. What Caney terms “political cosmopolitanism” is, he says, termed “institutional” cosmopolitanism by Beitz and “legal” cosmopolitanism by Pogge.

Related Topics
- Brock, Gillian
- Caney, Simon
- Cosmopolitan Justice
- Cosmopolitan Republicanism
- Law of Peoples
- Original Position
- Pogge, Thomas
- Political Cosmopolitanism
- Rawls, John
- Tan, Kok-Chor

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Moral Distance

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A compelling issue that has captivated philosophers for millennia is the question of the connection between justice and the distance of the moral agent, who enjoys the means to relieve suffering, from the victims of suffering, who are without means. The question of moral distance is crucial to the theme of global justice because those with the means to help the most miserable people on the planet dwell far from the places where the impoverished and disenfranchised huddle. If the needs of unfortunate others can lay claim to the consciences of those well off only in close proximity, then the hopes for a more just world are dashed from the outset.

The question of moral distance has taken on special global implications in the wake of World War II, as post-Holocaust philosophers attempt to understand how the civilized countries of the world stood by and observed, from their various safe distances, but for long years failed to intervene, as European Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, mental patients, and the many other victims were systematically annihilated by the German Third Reich. The philosophico-moral question is whether compassion for a suffering being is awakened in detached rational reflection upon the good and an objective evaluation of the significance of mutual support to the preservation of earthly life and species’ well-being, or whether the sufferer must overcome rational objectivity and geographical distance and find her way into the direct perceptual range of the moral agent in order to awaken the moral sensibility that will elicit a compassionate response to her suffering. Primo Levi writes: “To all of us there remains in the best of cases only the sporadic pity addressed to the single individual, the Mitmensch, the co-man: the human being standing before us, within the reach of our providentially myopic senses” (The Drowned and the Saved).

The postmodern thinker most famed for founding his rethinking of ethics in terms of moral distance is French Lithuanian Jewish thinker, Emmanuel Levinas, who posits “proximity” as the conditio sine qua non of concrete acts of goodness in the world. In the essay “The Ego and the Totality,” Levinas explains how moral possibility arises from out of a state of moral myopia, or “living being” (Levinas 1993: 25–46). Resonating the phenomenological experience of Western subjects, throwing themselves as autonomous, free subjects into their various life projects, living beings, explains Levinas, mistake themselves as totalities, worlds unto themselves. As islands, they believe themselves to enter and depart, at will, the web of human relations, much less the web of earthly life. The solipsistic self-understanding that results in moral myopia rests not on a deliberate rejection of moral responsibility, according to Levinas, but simply on a lack of thinking; a living being innocently fails to address what lies outside its world as lying outside its world. People must find themselves in direct proximity to suffering — “face to face” with the widow, the orphan, and the alien – if their solipsism is to be ruptured by the harsh reality of deprivation that exists beyond the self-enclosed world. Only in proximity does the face challenge the innocent freedom of self-enclosure, throwing the subject from active heroic freedom into passive undergoing, where no refuge exists, the inverse of a retreat, utter homelessness. A truly external thing, the sufferer awakens the ethical dimension of being in the subject, who suddenly discovers itself to be guilty and appreciates the violations that mere living-for-self effects.

Levinas frames ethics as a problem of distance; the moral challenge is a challenge of geography. The family of living things, the infinitely complex interrelatedness of the world’s myriad beings, is not a self-evident fact for subjects caught up in their individual worlds. The needy must storm the safe house, rupture the self-enclosure. She must be spatially in the agent’s face to deliver her demand for care. Levinas seems to trust that if the sufferer can arrive in proximity, my moral response can be assured. However, Fyodor Dostoevsky, another thinker of profound insight into the connection between distance and moral response, insists that proximity brings no guarantee of compassionate response to the needy. Dostoevsky argues that les misérables arouse little more than disgust when they are in proximity. In The Brothers Karamazov, he has Ivan Karamazov (his philosophical alter ego) explore the connection between moral response and distance. Ivan declares that he has never been able to understand the idea of neighborly love. While it is easy to love those farther away, outside the critical gaze that stimulates repugnance, Ivan does not believe the legend of the saint, John the