

From the Abolition of Politics to a Politics of Liberation: Globalizations from Below and the Cosmopolitanism of the Other: A Discussion

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Immanuel Kant is the *de rigueur* point of reference for any discussion on cosmopolitanism. Yet, his form of cosmopolitanism is what I would like to call ‘imperial cosmopolitanism.’ In our age of globalizations and exclusions, we are in need of a different form of cosmopolitanism, one that emerges from below, from the below of those who are the majority of the planet. This form of cosmopolitanism is what I call dialogical cosmopolitanism, and it is the cosmopolitanism of the other. The following is by no means to be read in session. I hope that these notes are the point of departure for a fruitful discussion.

The 1780s was one of Immanuel Kant’s most productive decades. After giving us the three critiques, which laid down the foundations for his critical philosophy, the critique of the critique, Kant proceeded to develop a philosophy of history, of the state, of law, of virtue, and above all of cosmopolitan right. It is not without justification that Kant is the *de rigueur* point of reference for any discussion on cosmopolitanism. Indeed, Kant is to many the titan of cosmopolitanism. In the following I want to suggest that while Kant may have been one of the founding father of modern cosmopolitanism, his form of cosmopolitanism is grounded in a series of assumptions and preconceptions that make it suspect, if not entirely unusable in our post-metaphysical and post-secular context. In fact, I content that what Kant offers us is a form of ‘imperial cosmopolitanism’ that is improved by what I will call naïve cosmopolitanism, but which does not yet overcome its imperial material foundations and hubristic epistemic orientation. I will argue that critical and situated cosmopolitanism opens the way for forms of dialogical cosmopolitanism that are able to criticize and overcome Kant’s imperialistic and naïve cosmopolitanism. This path from imperial to dialogic cosmopolitanism will be guided by brief discussions of Nussbaum, Appiah, Mignolo, and Butler.

The last of his books that Kant personally edited and saw into press was *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, which was published in 1798. This book was based on his lecture course on Anthropology, which he had been offering on a yearly basis since 1772. This course in turn had emerged from his Physical Geography lecture course he had been offering since 1756. Early in his teaching, Kant discussed the physical, natural, terrestrial character of the human being under a general discussion of the earth. We could thus say that he lectured at least for over forty years on Physical Geography and over 20 on anthropology. Kant lectures on these popular topics not just because he needed to make a living, as a lecturer without an official post, he earned his living by the number of students he was able to enroll. It is clear that from the outset Kant saw his “Physical Geography” as part of his civically minded pedagogy that aimed to

provide citizens of Prussia what he called “Weltkenntnis,” a term that has been translated by Kant scholar Holly Wilson as “cosmopolitan knowledge.” The “Physical Geography” lecture will finally appear in English within the next few years in the Cambridge Edition of Kant’s Works. The translation, expertly executed by Olaf Reinhardt, however, is based on a corrupt edition of the German manuscript. This is the Rink edition, which Kant authorized, but which Kant himself did not oversee or approve, for as we know by 1802, when the Rink edition appeared, Kant was no longer able to read and many speculate that he had lost his rational faculties. I should note parenthetically that I have organized with Stuart Elden two seminars on these lectures and we have edited a volume that should be appearing within a year¹.

Now, Kant’s Physical Geography lectures are perhaps one of the best ways in which to gauge Kant’s cosmopolitan presuppositions and goals. Like arctic ice, and some very ancient red woods on the West coast, this course registers Kant’s intellectual growth and his own education into cosmopolitanism. In them we can track what Kant was reading and how he was reading it. German scholar Werner Stark has spent decades reconstructing the sequence of these lectures and providing us an insight into what was added and dropped as Kant modified, expanded, updated his lectures. Much work has been done in Germany, by Stark and his colleagues, which remains barely known in the US. This aspect of Kant’s work remains *terra incognita*. Yet, I will argue that Kant provided us with a hermeneutical key that will allow us to make sense of what he sought to do in both his Physical Geography and Anthropology Lectures. This hermeneutical key is to be found in a footnote in the foreword to his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. The note, not accidentally, comes as a clarification to the following statement: “*Travel* belongs to the means of broadening the range of anthropology, even if it is only the reading of travel books. But if one wants to know what to look for abroad, in order to broaden the range of anthropology, first one must have acquired knowledge of human beings at home, through social intercourse with one’s townsmen or countrymen.”² This statement is fascinating because, in light of what we know about Kant’s reading habits, namely that he loved to read “travel books,” he is providing an *apologia ante re* for his own anthropology, which is not based on travel experience, but on the reading of secondary material, brought to Königsberg by sailors docking in the city’s ports. The remark is also peculiar because while Kant was known for his youthful participation in the *Königsbergische Tischgesellschaft*, Kant became a recluse. Kant was by no means a socialite. The fact that he also remained a bachelor and did not father children could be a background for this remark. Be that as it may, Kant appends the following note after those sentences, and I quote at length, because it is so pivotal:

A large city such as Königsberg on the river Pregel, *which is the center of a kingdom*, in which the provincial councils of the government are located, which has a university (for cultivation of the sciences) and which has also the right location for maritime commerce – a city which, by way of rivers, has the advantage of commerce both with the interior of the country and with neighboring and distant lands of different languages and customs, can well be taken as an appropriate place for broadening one’s knowledge of human beings as well as of the world, where this knowledge can be acquired without traveling³.

This is a remarkable passage for its innocence, its confessional character, and its own evident lack of self-reflexivity. Kant’s cosmopolitanism presupposes as both epistemic and material

condition of possibility the imperial location of its subject of knowledge. Kant is the beneficiary of the metropolitan location of Königsberg, a capital of a *Reich*, an Empire, a Kingdom, which is also the mercantile center of the north Atlantic maritime market that is controlled by England, but that Germany and Prussia benefit from directly. The cosmopolitan philosopher, pedagogue of the citizenry, announces without so saying that his project of cosmopolitan education is product of the imperial locus of its production. This is what I call Kant's imperial cosmopolitanism. More of this type of cosmopolitanism is exemplified in the numerous lecture manuscripts of his *Physische Geographie* lectures. I want to underscore here that Kant links, naively and unconsciously but effectively, his pedagogical project to the imperial locus of the alleged cosmopolitan philosopher.

Nussbaum, without endorsing her own standpoint as a citizen of an empire, follows in Kant's pedagogical steps⁴. In an essay published in the fall of 1994 in the *Boston Review*, Martha Nussbaum succinctly and eloquently elaborated and defended a form of civic cosmopolitanism, which she juxtaposed to parochial and jingoistic patriotism. The aim of the essay, however, was not just to defend cosmopolitanism and reject patriotism, but also to endorse cosmopolitanism as the focus of civic education. For Nussbaum, who has philosophized extensively on pedagogy, the relevance of the debate is determined by how it would impact the way we would educate citizens. Thus, for Nussbaum, cosmopolitanism is not an abstract, philosophical stance, but rather a very practical and result-oriented attitude. If we educate citizens to see themselves primary as citizens of a world community, as opposed to members of narrow, special, chosen and exceptional communities, then these citizens would be less likely to engage in the rituals of blood that are so indispensable to patriotism, and would instead be more responsive and engaged with the cultures and welfare of communities across the globe. In this essay, therefore, Nussbaum elaborates four arguments for why a cosmopolitan oriented and guided civic education is a greater benefit to the US, and others as well, than patriotically oriented civic education. First, because "through cosmopolitan education, we learn more about ourselves." Second, we are better prepared to solve problems that "require international cooperation." Third, "we recognize moral obligations to the rest of the world that are real and that otherwise would go unrecognized." Fourth, we learn to "make consistent and coherent" arguments that we are prepared to defend intelligibly.⁵ One can quickly unfurl a myriad of arguments against Nussbaum's defense of cosmopolitanism, which can easily be confused with a rootless form of universalism and abstract humanism, as several of the commentators to her original essay already have. Yet, it is difficult not to be sympathetic with the pedagogical aims of her defense of cosmopolitanism. While it is true that we are socialized and nurtured in local ethical communities, we are faced with global problems that command that we look to the world, even as we are indisputably rooted in specific ethical traditions. What I want to underscore and take from Nussbaum's four arguments in defense of a cosmopolitan focused civic education is her fourth reason. Being educated to think as a member of global community raises the epistemic bar on what kinds of distinctions and arguments we are capable of making. What Nussbaum is pointing out, I think, is that cosmopolitanism is not just an emotive or affective stance towards the claims of others, but that it is also a theoretical and conceptual stance that commands us to assess the cogency of our claims from the standpoint of sometimes abstract others, but sometimes very concrete others who happen to be on different continents. Cosmopolitanism is also an epistemic stance.

Kwame Anthony Appiah, who was one of the respondents to Nussbaum's essay, published in 2006 a book entitled *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*⁶. Appiah, who has written on questions of identity, multiculturalism, race, imperialism and nationalism extensively, frames this book in terms of what is the proper rubric to use in order to confront the challenges of the modern world: globalization, multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism. He settles on the last, although he notes that its meaning is contested and it can be argued that cosmopolitanism is both an ideal and a particular stance. Appiah, however, proceeds to profile two distinct "strands" within cosmopolitanism. One strand underscores the idea that we have "obligations" to others. The other strand affirms that we must "take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance."⁷ Human difference, for this second strand, is an intrinsic good and must be preserved, celebrated and most importantly, learned from. As with Nussbaum, for Appiah cosmopolitanism has eminently pedagogical benefits, and like her, he also thinks that cosmopolitanism entails a moral orientation. This moral orientation imposes on all certain duties and responsibilities. Much of what follows in his book is about profiling these duties and responsibilities, and the contexts in which they become most evident and what elements and forms of thinking and knowing obscure these obligations towards strangers. There is, however, an argument in Appiah's book that is implicit in his distinction between two strands within cosmopolitanism but that only becomes explicit much later in the book. In the chapter entitled "The Counter-Cosmopolitans," in which Appiah discusses the neo-fundamentalist, Christian, Muslim, etc, reaction to the cosmopolitan challenge, he writes: "If cosmopolitanism is, in a slogan, universality plus difference, there is the possibility of another kind of enemy, one who rejects universality all together. 'Not everybody matters' would be their slogan."⁸ Indeed, whether you are a religious, market economy, or American supremacy *überalles* fundamentalist, and thus you think that there are a lot of others who do not matter and that their interests, knowledge claims, local histories, threatened traditions and endangered forms of life are unimportant or worth our respect and concern, you're still within the space of reasons. Appiah is clear about this: "Once you start offering reasons for ignoring the interests of others, however, reasoning itself will usually draw you into a kind of universality."⁹ This is an extremely important insight, one that Appiah arrives through a *via negativa*, i.e. when those who want to take a stance against cosmopolitanism draw up their reasons, they are unwittingly in the grip of universal reason. Yet, I would argue, not only the counter-cosmopolitan but also the avowed cosmopolitan is in the grip of some sort of "universality." Both are in the space of reasons. Consequently, I can make the claim that cosmopolitanism is an ethical orientation that puts reason on call, on guard. Universality, consequently, must be rearticulated, defended, expanded, and made concrete. Cosmopolitanism must therefore entail a self-critique of one's prejudices, as well as a confession and disclosure as to one's own epistemic standpoint.

The reason of the cosmopolitan must be a cosmopolitan reason and as yet to be specified universality. For this reason, one can speak of a naïve, or ideological cosmopolitanism, the kind that makes communitarians and conservatives bristle with contempt but that also makes those critical of cultural imperialism impatient and highly critical of dehistoricized enunciations of universal reason. This type of cosmopolitanism, which refuses to submit its own universality claims to critique, to enter the space of reasons in a symmetrical and egalitarian way with others who are at the table of cosmopolitanism, can turn into a form of epistemic arrogance that like a fig leaf barely conceals contemptuous disregard and brutal self-interest. Unfortunately, the

history of the modern world furnishes plenty examples of such forms of naïve, and in most cases, imperial cosmopolitanism. Neither Nussbaum nor Appiah are naïve cosmopolitans. Nor can one accuse them of offering fodder for the canons of neoliberal globalism and Western neo-imperialism. Their work on cosmopolitanism, absolutely indispensable, must be extended and supplemented.

The opposite of naïve, and imperial, cosmopolitanism, it may be argued, would be a critical cosmopolitanism. Walter Mignolo has in fact defended and articulated such a form of cosmopolitanism. He has done so weaving in a magisterial way a critical history of Western colonialism with incisive insights into key philosophical figures in a decolonized philosophical canon. In a brilliant essay “The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism”¹⁰ he illustrates *in actu* the virtues of a critical cosmopolitanism by distinguishing among three different global-imperial designs and what were their corresponding cosmopolitan projects. According to Mignolo to the global designs of the Spanish and Portuguese empires, from the 16th through the 17th century, corresponded the cosmopolitanism of the Christian mission, i.e. cosmopolitanism as evangelization and Christianization of the pagan and heathens. To the French and English imperial designs during the 18th and 19th centuries corresponded the cosmopolitan mission of civilizing, i.e., cosmopolitanism as civilizing the barbarians. To the US, translational, global and neocolonial imperial designs during the 20th century, corresponded the cosmopolitan mission of modernizing, i.e. cosmopolitanism as modernization, or globalization, of the premodern and traditional. One does not need to subscribe to this particular chronology or the corresponding organizing principles (missionizing, civilizing, modernizing) in order to recognize the validity of the critique of the ways in which certain embodiments of cosmopolitanism have, explicitly or implicitly, condoned, justified and legitimated colonialism, imperialism, and neocolonialism. Mignolo’s task, in this essay as well as in most of his work, is not just deconstructive and critical; it is also positive and constructive. The point of this critical cosmopolitanism is to open it up to other voices and others who challenge the reason of imperial and global designs that have resulted in so much inequality and human suffering. The task of critical cosmopolitanism, then, is to rescue, retrieve, and make audible and visible the voices of those local histories that have been rendered subaltern and silent by the imperial ethos that heeds the call of “Let’s Roll” in the incredible infantile but telling wording by G.W. Bush¹¹. As Mignolo put it “Critical and dialogic cosmopolitanism as a regulative principle demands yielding generously (“convivially” said Vitoria; “friendly” said Kant) toward diversity as a universal and cosmopolitan project in which everyone participates instead of “being participated.”¹² Critical cosmopolitanism, therefore, is oriented to a form of universality that Mignolo calls diversality, a combination of diversity and universality. To paraphrase what was written above, the reason and universality of critical cosmopolitanism is a cosmopolitan diversality and rationality, or more precisely diversal rationality. In Mignolo’s words: “diversality should be the relentless practice of critical and dialogical cosmopolitanism rather than the blueprint of a future and ideal society projected from a single point of view (that of abstract universality)...”¹³

What Mignolo is noting is that cosmopolitanism is caught in what has been called by Karl-Otto Apel a “performative contradiction,” that is to say, there is a way in which all cosmopolitan claims are defacto deferred and thus awaiting further specification by that in the name of which we are called to respect, celebrate, and heed: the claims of the others, the claims of strangers, as

Appiah calls them. Interestingly, Judith Butler has made this exact point in her response to Martha Nussbaum's essay "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism." Butler's response takes up the "performative contradiction" character of universality claims implied in cosmopolitan claims and argues for a universality that must be articulated by and through the challenges to "its existing formulation, and this challenge[s] emerge[s] from those who are not covered by it, who have not entitlement to occupy the place of the 'who,' but who nevertheless demand that the universal as such ought to be inclusive of them."¹⁴ This universality that is always deferred and caught in its own insufficiency is what Mignolo has called "diversality." Both Mignolo and Butler agree on something far more important than on signaling that all cosmopolitan enunciations of universality demand that the universal itself be held in suspension, as an asymptotic horizon, a counter-factual, without-which but also against which, we must engage in order to enable a proper response to the other. They agree more dramatically on the place of the other in this pedagogy of the universal, in the expansion and enlightenment of universality itself. Mignolo has argued that critical cosmopolitanism is sustained in its critical stance when it adopts what he calls the locus of enunciation of the subaltern¹⁵. Butler has argued that it is the "who" that is excluded from a given articulation of the universal that constitutes the "contingent limit of universalization." Both, in my view, are arguing that cosmopolitanism is made cosmopolitan by the diversity of the subaltern, the excluded other, the stranger, the marginalized. For this reason, one can speak of a cosmopolitanism from below, one that matches the socio-political effects of a globalization from below. Mignolo and Butler give voice to what can be called the cosmopolitanism of the subaltern, and it is one that has been educating those in the metropolises of the West and who claim to speak univocally and unequivocally for the universal as such. As I argue in my book *Global Fragments: Globalizations, Latin Americanism, and Critical Theory*¹⁶, Enrique Dussel, Cornel West, and Jürgen Habermas have been articulating this type of cosmopolitanism when they have sought to think from the standpoint of the voice of those hitherto silence, excluded, and niggerized.

ENDNOTES

¹ Stuart Elden and Eduardo Mendieta, eds., *Reading Kant's Physical Geography* (Albany: SUNY Press, forthcoming)

² Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. by Robert Louden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 4.

³ Ibid., 4. Italics added.

⁴ The following is an adaptation of a part of the introduction to my book *Global Fragments: Globalizations, Latinamericanisms, and Critical Theory* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2007).

⁵ Martha Nussbaum, *For Love of Country?* Edited by Joshua Cohen for *Boston Review* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 11-14. This book, which contains Nussbaum's original essay, also contains responses and critiques by 16 other major scholars (such as Elaine Scarry, Benjamin Barber, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Michael Walzer, Sissela Bok, Judith Butler, Emmanuel Wallerstein, and many others, and a response by Nussbaum to them. This is an outstanding little book.

⁶ New York: Norton, 2006.

⁷ Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, xv.

⁸ Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, 151.

⁹ Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism*, 152-3

¹⁰ Walter D. Mignolo, "The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism" *Public Culture*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Fall 2000): 721-748.

¹¹ See transcript of speech by W.G. Bush from November of 2001 in Atlanta, available at: <http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/11/08/rec.bush.transcript/> Bush, however, went on to use this outrageously mundane phrase in an extremely crucial time ad nauseam.

¹² Mignolo, "The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis," 744.

¹³ Mignolo, "The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis," 744.

¹⁴ Judith Butler, "Universality in Culture" in Martha Nussbaum, *For Love of Country?* 45-52, citation at 49. Butler develops more extensively her views on universality in the book co-authored with Žižek and Laclau, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London and New York: Verso, 2000).

¹⁵ See Celina María Bragagnolo, "Deprovincializing the West: How the Rest Globalizes the West" in Gary Backhaus and John Muringi, eds. *Interfacing Globalization and Colonialism* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2007), 138-152.

¹⁶ Eduardo Mendieta, *Global Fragments: Globalizations, Latinamericanisms, and Critical Theory* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2007).