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Cosmopolitanism from Below: Universalism as Contestation

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Cosmopolitanism is attractive as a normative orientation, but the historical record of actual cosmopolitanisms, like that of practical universalisms more generally, is not encouraging. When they have not been merely empty, cosmopolitanisms' ostensibly universal values have too been often co-opted by dominant powers, making them into ideologies of domination. My question here is not *whether* but *how* to embrace cosmopolitanism so as to avoid these perversions. The key, I argue, is to focus on the processes through which their ostensibly universal values are challenged and appropriated from below, in struggles against exclusion, domination and exploitation. This means understanding cosmopolitanism not as a plan, project or design, but as a process and practice of contestation. In order to be truly universalistic and inclusive, cosmopolitanism must be political and its politics must be contestatory.

KEYWORDS cosmopolitanism, universalism, contestation, radical democracy

Since the early 1990s there has been an enormous revival of interest in the ancient idea of cosmopolitanism. Across the humanities and social sciences, but especially in philosophy and political theory, the ancient call to be a "citizen of the world" has struck many theorists as the best response to a rapidly globalizing post-Cold War world. With states and national forms of belonging weakening, while other, often broader, structures, authorities and bonds proliferate, cosmopolitans reason that we increasingly need to think and even act on a global level. The many cosmopolitanisms floating around academic discourse in the last two decades thus can be seen as converging around the idea that, to the extent humanity is becoming closer and more interdependent than ever before, we are obliged to recognize our connection and responsibility to all our fellow humans in a way we were not required to in the past.

Debates in political theory and philosophy have tended to pit cosmopolitanism against its contraries – challengers like nationalism or localism. In my view this creates a dichotomy that is neither illuminating nor helpful. To be sure, practically speaking, a division of labour must be worked out so that people can be entrusted

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with what is closest to them and what they know best. But nearly all cosmopolitans recognize and allow for this. And in a world of massive and asymmetrical interdependence, in which our actions bring us into relation with millions of others all over the world every day, there is simply no denying our connection to and responsibility for distant strangers – especially those of us in the wealthier, freer parts of the world, who by and large benefit from a system of cooperation whose costs and burdens fall elsewhere, and who have a greater say in these arrangements. Under such conditions, to abjure cosmopolitan responsibilities on the grounds that our energies and resources are necessarily limited amounts to wilful blindness. If what is at issue is *whether* we have important moral and political responsibilities beyond our local or national communities, the answer therefore only can be yes.

My question here is not whether but *how* to be a cosmopolitan. This is where things become more difficult. For as attractive as cosmopolitanism may be as a normative commitment, a cursory glance at history shows that the record of cosmopolitanisms, and of practical universalisms more generally, is little short of disastrous.[1] Even the best-intentioned cosmopolitan projects tend to go astray, typically by serving as cover for projects that do not share their noble aims or motives. The world was treated to a particularly stark demonstration of this in the first decade of our new century, when the very values and causes that had been trumpeted by cosmopolitans – human rights and democracy – were put in the service of what seemed to many to be wanton imperial aggression. But historians were quick to point out that this was nothing new. From the *Pax Romana* to the *mission civilisatrice*, imperial domination has seldom lacked universalistic justification. Indeed, in relations between states, peoples and empires, sceptics insist that it is a rare crime which cannot be justified with reference to universal humanity.[2]

I will argue here that this record should not be taken as reason to abandon the aspiration to cosmopolitan and universal values. Rather, it should be seen as a spur to rethink them, where they come from and, above all, how they can be put into practice. I argue that the underlying problem with most cosmopolitan projects to date can best be found not in their content but in their form, and the remedy is to be sought on the same level. Instead of understanding cosmopolitanism as consisting of timeless, transcendent values or principles to be discovered philosophically and then, in a second step, implemented politically, I propose that we understand it first and foremost as a particular kind of and orientation for political action, one that proceeds from the bottom up rather than from the top down. This involves a basic revision of the cosmopolitanisms that have dominated discussions in political theory and philosophy in recent decades, indeed, ever since Kant. On both the theoretical and the political level, when it comes to values and principles as well as practices and institutions, this revision can be understood as bringing contestation into the heart of cosmopolitanism. My claim is not simply that cosmopolitanism can or should be conceived in terms of contestation; rather, in order not to violate its central

[1] I argue this in the first half of my book, *Radical Cosmopolitics: The Ethics and Politics of Democratic Universalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), for which the present paper serves as a kind of *précis*.

[2] Carl Schmitt's slogan, "He who invokes humanity wants to cheat," is often invoked in such contexts, typically to discredit anti-humanitarian anti-universalism by associating it with a well-known Nazi. It is less often recalled that Schmitt took the slogan from the socialist, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon.

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values in ways that countless universalisms have done before, cosmopolitanism *must* be contestatory.

1. Cosmopolitanism as ideology and lure

Cosmopolitanism has an ancient pedigree and today, in the wake of its recent resurgence, it is used to refer to a great variety of things. This terminological imprecision – the fact that it has been put to numerous, sometimes incompatible, uses – is of course not unusual among the key words of academic and political discourse. In the case of cosmopolitanism, however, the difficulty is compounded by the fact that, at least if it is taken literally, the term is impossible, hyperbolic or paradoxical. We cannot in any literal or legal sense be "citizens of the world," let alone of the "cosmos," since neither is a political unit. Any use of the concept is necessarily figurative. This leads some to treat cosmopolitanism as a utopia or fantasy, whether to dismiss it or to shield it from scrutiny. In contrast, I want to suggest that, despite or perhaps even because of its semantic instability, cosmopolitanism has been a practical matter insofar as it has been connected to worldly projects that have had tangible consequences, for good and often for ill. Grasping cosmopolitanism's practical character is essential both to grasping its nature and to undoing its dangers. First, though, for the purposes of discussion, I will organize the main senses of cosmopolitanism under three headings, each expressing, if not any single precise or settled meaning, at least a cluster of related usages.

The first sense, which is the vaguest but also the closest to its ancient roots, is *cultural* or *ethical*. Here "citizen of the world" refers to an orientation or way of life. This was the sense Diogenes the Cynic – the anarchic early Socratic who famously rejected custom in favour of nature and reason – presumably had in mind when he invented the term by answering, when asked his city: "I am a citizen of the cosmos." This ethical sense has always been primary – as, for instance, in Diderot's affirmation of the stoic maxim: "I prefer my family to myself, my country to my family, the human race to my country."[3] It takes on a Christian cast in the European Middle Ages through Erasmus, a more rationalistic one in the Enlightenment, but translates into other contexts as well.[4] Rabindranath Tagore, who explicitly preferred universal over parochial identities and commitments, is a particular favourite of present-day cosmopolitans, but examples can be found everywhere the universal is opposed to the local. This cultural cosmopolitanism resounds today in calls to transcend the limits of local memberships from Martha Nussbaum, Jeremy Waldron or Anthony Appiah.[5] As with Diogenes, however, while their negation of the merely local is clear, their positive content is often less so.

[3] D. Diderot and J. le Rond d'Alembert, "Cosmopolitain ou cosmopolite," *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, vol. 9 (Wikisource, 1765).

[4] For a reflection on the possibility and difficulty of a truly cosmopolitan approach to cosmopolitanism, see R. Rao, "The Elusiveness of 'Non-Western Cosmopolitanism,'" in *Politics and Cosmopolitanism in a Global Age*, ed. S. Gupta and S. Padmanabhan (New Delhi: Routledge, 2014), 193–215.

[5] M. Nussbaum, *For Love of Country?*, ed. J. Cohen (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1996); J. Waldron, "Minority Cultures and the Cosmopolitan Alternative," in *The Rights of Minority Cultures*, ed. W. Kymlicka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); K. A. Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: Norton, 2006).

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If the longest-standing and probably still most common meaning of cosmopolitanism has to do with culture and identification, a second, more demanding usage gives it an explicitly *moral* sense. Not only should we identify with all others, rather than just our kinsmen, neighbours or co-nationals, but this wider circle of identification carries with it certain duties or obligations. While the two elements can be found separately, moral cosmopolitanism generally has been thought to entail moral universalism in at least one of two quite different senses: first, that morality is the same everywhere and, second, that moral concern must be extended to all. This sort of moral universality – which, in the wake of Kant and Bentham, many are inclined to identify with morality as such – has lately been asserted from philosophical positions as different as Nussbaum's neo-Aristotelianism, Peter Singer's utilitarianism and Onora O'Neill's Kantianism.[6] What they have in common is the cosmopolitan conviction that local membership cannot be an excuse for neglecting our moral responsibility to all other members of the species (and possibly even beyond – be it to extra-terrestrial beings for Kant or non-human animals for Singer or Nussbaum). Cosmopolitanism has direct practical implications, even if at this stage they are conceived only as individual duties.

A third and still narrower version of cosmopolitanism, finally, observes that these duties are unlikely to have much practical purchase unless they are expressed in actions and buttressed by institutions, and so extended to a cosmopolitan *politics*. Here again the range of positions is again considerable, from modest pleas for international cooperation and respect for human rights to ambitious plans for world government. These different positions are in turn supported by a range of considerations as wide as the tradition of political philosophy, from preventing chaos to protecting human rights to securing universal justice. What binds this diverse array of programmes is a cosmopolitan aspiration to construct an appropriate "infrastructure of responsibility,"[7] a set of institutions or simply guidelines that can allow, encourage or even force us to meet our cosmopolitan duties. A number of political theorists have accordingly devoted themselves to developing arguments and even designs for cosmopolitan reforms, be it on a more piecemeal basis, like Thomas Pogge, or as part of a generalized framework of "cosmopolitan democracy," like David Held.[8] In such political forms, cosmopolitanism is both a vision of a future order and the politics of pursuing that vision and putting it into effect.

This schematic presentation of three basic varieties omits a range of social, cultural and literary cosmopolitanisms that have proliferated over the last two decades as commentators have sought to describe the contemporary condition. But it is sufficient to indicate that, at least within practical philosophy, one variety tends to feed into the next. To be sure, one can be a cultural cosmopolitan without conceding that one has any particularly strong duties to distant strangers,

[6] M. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (London: Belknap, 2006); O. O'Neill, *Bounds of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); P. Singer, *One World: The Ethics of Globalization* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002).

[7] S. Scheffler, "Conceptions of Cosmopolitanism," *Utilitas* 11.3 (1999): 255–76.

[8] T. Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights: Cosmopolitan Responsibilities and Reforms*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Polity, 2008); D. Held, *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995).

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let alone that one should be committed to arrangements which would tie one to those strangers more durably. But a chain of considerations leads from cultural to ethical to political cosmopolitanism. By the same token, these three forms of cosmopolitanism have enough in common that what holds for one tends to hold, *mutatis mutandis*, for the others. We see this clearly if we turn now to the tensions, problems or anxieties that have tended to grow up around them. For, if recent developments have given new substance to the old idea, they have not succeeded in quieting the doubts that have circulated around it from its beginnings.

I begin again with cultural-ethical cosmopolitanism. While the idea that we should try to transcend our parochial identities may seem unobjectionable, critics observe that the attempt to do so does not free us from having any position at all. Rather, it tends to correspond to a very particular location, typically one quite near the top. It might be said that one most easily sees the world as one from above, and especially from a great height. The claim to take a universal perspective is a privilege, more available to some than others, and cosmopolitans have always tended to see themselves as – and in fact by most measures to be – an elite of the educated or the wise, typically as a way of distinguishing themselves from their less-worldly compatriots. And if Diogenes expressed his independence from and superiority to mere convention by living in poverty, ever since cosmopolitanism has been associated more with the opposite. As the magazine and the cocktail that the term is now likeliest to evoke suggest, today cosmopolitanism tends to be identified with globalized metropolitan consumer capitalism as it is experienced by its beneficiaries – "the class-consciousness of frequent flyers," in Craig Calhoun's apt and oft-quoted formula.[9]

Moral cosmopolitanism may seem to be a correction for this tendency, since it gives even these elites the obligation to correct global injustices. But here too objections arise. On the one hand, critics argue that moral attention spread so wide must dwindle to practically nothing. Indefinitely broad concern can serve as an excuse for neglecting the proximate, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau acidly observed when he described cosmopolitans as those who "boast that they love everyone in order to have the right to love no one."[10] Perfectly general philanthropic sentiments not only tend to commit one to less than more focused ones, they also tend to be punctual and discretionary rather than ongoing and reciprocal. On the other hand, we might worry that well-meaning cosmopolitans will judge the world by their own standards, which will tend to become less appropriate the more they are removed from their original context. If we combine this concern with the observation that there is a natural affinity between privilege and taking one's own perspective as universal, we readily see how cosmopolitanism can become an ideology by means of which global elites identify their own interests, prejudices and preferences with the general good.

Such worries become that much greater, finally, when it comes to politics. It is when we consider the prospect of coercive action to realize cosmopolitan principles

[9] C. Calhoun, "Cosmopolitanism: The Class-Consciousness of Frequent Flyers," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101.4 (2003): 869–97.

[10] J.-J. Rousseau, "Geneva Manuscript," in *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, ed. and trans. V. Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 158.

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and commitments that we confront the limits and risks of cosmopolitanism most directly. Setting aside the question of how truly universal a particular cosmopolitan vision might be, who should be entrusted to bring it into being? Cosmopolitans since Kant have painted a reassuring picture of global institutions coming about gradually through peaceful confederation, but Rousseau's view offers an instructive counterpoint. Although he devoted considerable energy to editing the Abbé de Saint-Pierre's *Project for a Perpetual Peace in Europe* – the model for Kant's *Perpetual Peace* – in the end Rousseau concluded that the Abbé's project was hopeless, for, however noble in its intentions, "it could only have been carried out by violent means from which humanity must needs shrink."[11] That is, any serious attempt to realize cosmopolitan aims could proceed only by means of enormous violence, and could hope for success only if undertaken by an already dominant power. As in the case of humanitarian interventions, the power required to realize cosmopolitan goals is ordinarily in the hands of the powerful; as beneficiaries of the status quo, we might reasonably doubt their promise as agents of its radical reform.

We can sum up the logic underlying these concerns in the form of a set of dangers to which every cosmopolitanism or universalism is subject: the horns of a dilemma between which it permanently oscillates. On the one hand, any practical universalism risks being empty or ineffectual, of doing *too little* or *nothing*. Diogenes' cosmopolitanism transcended merely local identities and loyalties, critics point out, only by withdrawing from politics altogether – an anti-political tendency illustrated by the story of his request to Alexander the Great, who had come to offer a tribute to his wisdom, that the emperor get out of his sun.[12] On the other hand, cosmopolitanism risks doing *too much*, by smuggling in, even if unawares, its own particular values in the guise of the universal. This is to be expected simply because universals always have to be enunciated by someone, somewhere, at some particular time, rendering them to that extent particular. And since, as we have seen, cosmopolitanism tends to be the province of the privileged, its values and projects will tend to align with those of the dominant. From this perspective it is perhaps no accident that Diogenes and Alexander were contemporaries. Idealistic universalism and world-spanning imperialisms tend to go together, if only because it is easiest to imagine the world as one when a great power is in a position to make it so.[13]

Taken together, these considerations suggest that, if cosmopolitanism amounts to anything, it will be a false universalism, an ideology of the dominant that explains why their reason is universal reason and their domination is in the universal interest. As Timothy Brennan puts it, "If we wished to capture the essence of cosmopolitanism in a single formula, it would be this. It is a discourse of the universal that is inherently particular – a locality that's always surreptitiously imperial."[14] It is important

[11] J.-J. Rousseau, *A Lasting Peace through the Federation of Europe and The State of War*, trans. C. E. Vaughn (London: Constable, 1917), 111–12.

[12] While criticisms of the anti-political character of cosmopolitanism tend to draw on Schmitt (see, for instance, C. Mouffe, *On the Political* (London: Routledge, 2006), ch. 5), similar arguments are found in Rousseau or Hegel (see R. Fine, "Kant's Theory of Cosmopolitanism and Hegel's Critique," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 29.6 (2003): 609–30).

[13] For a brief but incisive development of this theme, see A. Pagden, "Stoicism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Legacy of European Imperialism," *Constellations* 7.1 (2000): 3–22.

[14] T. Brennan, "Cosmopolitans and Celebrities," *Race & Class* 31.1 (1989): 4.

to see that this tendency is not contingent an unhappy accident, as if the wrong content had inadvertently filled the empty form of the universal or a malign parasite had somehow attached itself to a benevolent or neutral host. On the contrary, the corruption or perversion of the universal, its tendency to become not only a false universal but an ideology of domination, inheres in its very *form*, if only as a permanent tendency. For universalism can only remain truly universal by remaining impotent. It only stops being an empty dream when a power exists to make it effective, but then the recourse to this power inevitably particularizes it and puts it at the disposal of that very power.

The significance of this for those who seek to revive the idea of cosmopolitanism is that this cannot simply be a matter of eliminating the impurities which have distorted an otherwise noble idea. If cosmopolitanism had simply been hijacked by opportunistic forces, if it needed only to be pruned of the traces of its European origins and imperial legacies, then the task would be relatively simple. But since the problems with cosmopolitanism go to its very core as a practical idea and project, since they are situated at the level of form rather than content, in order to overcome them we must reimagine cosmopolitanism on a more fundamental level. In the next section I suggest that this diagnosis of what ails cosmopolitanism itself implies a remedy, likewise located on the level of form. If the sorts of practical universalisms exemplified by cosmopolitanism go predictably astray, then, according to this diagnosis, the *ways* in which they go astray can provide valuable clues to addressing these perversions. Specifically, if what predictably corrupts cosmopolitanism is its structural affinity with seeing and acting on the world from *above*, the remedy is to tie it to seeing and acting in the world from *below*. The solution, then, is to reimagine cosmopolitanism not on the model of a "project" or "design," but as a process and practice of contestation, a politics waged against the very forms of domination and false universals that seek to co-opt it.

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2. Cosmopolitanism from below

I take the image of cosmopolitanism as project and design from Walter Mignolo, who has developed an elegant account of how and why cosmopolitan visions have remained entangled in the very imperialisms they were conceived to oppose.[15] Mignolo narrates world history since 1492 as a series of "global designs" through which dominant Western powers sought at once to take and to make over the non-Western world. The Iberian conquest of the Americas, to begin with, was organized around the design of "Christianization," the French and British seizure of much of the rest of the globe around "civilization" and the American project of global hegemony around "modernization." The violence and injustice of these enterprises was opposed by Western critics, such as, respectively, Vitoria, Kant and Marx, who proposed cosmopolitan counter-projects. Yet in each case these critics were able to imagine only a more equitable and humane version of the underlying historical design; its basic assumptions, values and telos

[15] W. D. Mignolo, "The Many Faces of Cosmo-Polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism," *Public Culture* 12.3 (2000): 721–48.

(Christianity, civilization and modernity) remained for them beyond question. Thus, even as these critics sought to articulate a just, inclusive and truly universalistic alternative to ongoing imperial domination, in crucial ways they remained captive to its underlying matrix.

For Mignolo, the solution to the intertwinement of cosmopolitan projects and global designs is to abandon the cosmopolitan aspiration to *universality* in favour of a search for *transversality.* The latter designates a commitment to dialogue between cultural alternatives, rather than an effort to seek the triumph of one over all others. By coming to see how an ostensibly universal value like "democracy" can signify different things in different contexts – for instance, how the Mayan-derived, community-based practices of the Zapatistas offer an alternative to the Mexican state – we can reimagine them as "connectors" of a critical, transversal cosmopolitics, rather than allowing them to be defined by hegemonic Western interpretations.[16] As attractive as this may be as an ethical orientation and critical project, however, I believe that it suffers from serious limitations as a *politics*. The local, the prior and the particular have no more of an automatic claim on our loyalties than the ostensibly universal. Values or principles of either kind can be mobilized for good or ill, for domination or emancipation, to rationalize injustice or to demand justice. And opposing the superimposition of the universal on the particular gives us no guidance when picking sides among contending universals or contending particulars.

Rather than abandon the aspiration to cosmopolitan universalism, I suggest that a surer course would be to address its complicity with domination. The key to this is the instability that makes cosmopolitan universalism vulnerable to such complicity in the first place. If ostensibly universal values are always at risk of being co-opted by global designs, they are equally available to those who resist the forms of domination for which they can become an ideology. In other words, the very ambivalence of universal values that makes them vulnerable to usurpation from above also allows them to be reappropriated from below. Their "truly" universal use would then be that which expands their scope of reference rather than restricts it, and this could only mean their use to challenge rather than to defend the status quo. To understand cosmopolitanism in this way is to identify it neither with ostensibly universal values themselves nor, above all, with efforts to implement them from above. Rather, it is to identify cosmopolitanism with the contestatory politics through which universal values are put to work from below, and to understand universality as coming about by and through such contestation. Rather than a politics of implementing or instituting cosmopolitan goals that have been theoretically arrived at in advance, such a contestatory cosmopolitanism would consist of a politics by which particular forms of exclusion, domination, exploitation and marginalization are challenged by those who suffer them.

From this viewpoint, universal values or principles become actual when they are taken up against a false universal by those whose oppression that false universal justifies. The universality of a value or principle thus advances through the negation of its negations, through particular struggles against the particular instances in which it

[16] Mignolo, "The Many Faces of Cosmo-Polis," 742–4.

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has been co-opted or betrayed. As Judith Butler put it in a response to Martha Nussbaum's argument for cosmopolitanism: the universal may not always be easy to find. Universal values are often encoded in ways that favour some and disadvantage, marginalize or exclude others. Since "standards of universality are historically articulated," Butler proposed, "exposing the parochial and exclusionary character of a given historical articulation of universality is part of the project of expanding and rendering substantive the notion of the universality itself."[17] Only through challenges from its outside does the universal come to be articulated as *more* universal. This means that we can never be in confident possession of universal values. Instead, we must see them as always potentially subject to contestation, but at the same time and for that very reason as always available for reappropriation, rearticulation and mobilization on the side of justice.

Seeing morality as universalized through unpredictable challenges from the outside of the moral-political universe as it is constituted at a given time has the effect of *politicizing* moral progress. This is, however, a politics of a particular kind, distinct from the understandings of politics that often underpin political philosophy and common sense alike. It is not the politics of rulers and ruled, protection and obedience, binding norms and coercive power, or the common good of the community. Rather, it is a politics of contestatory universalization understood precisely as the *disruption* of such norms and of the community itself. Its best formulation comes from Jacques Rancière – unexpectedly, perhaps, since Rancière himself has expressed little sympathy for cosmopolitanism or universalism.[18] What Rancière's celebrated theorization of democratic politics as contestation of the limits of the political community or domain by those whom it excludes – the share of those who have no part, in his formulation, or the right of those who have no rights, according to Hannah Arendt – has to offer cosmopolitanism is a vision of politics constructed essentially from the opening of the community to its outside. This cannot be imagined as happening all at once, as with utopian visions of an ideal cosmopolis, but only through a series of partial, local struggles. And it cannot be understood principally as the *ethical* task of those on the inside, as seen by Mignolo, but only as the *political* project of those on the outside, the excluded, marginalized or dominated, whose rights and interests are at stake.

These struggles are universal to the extent (which will never be total) that they participate in the general struggle for *equal freedom* which has animated emancipatory politics through modern times. Rather than understanding equal freedom in the liberal, Rawlsian terms of an equal share of private, individual liberty, I believe we understand it better as what Étienne Balibar calls "equaliberty" – the right of each individual to freedom as well as equality, in the social and political as well as the private sphere.[19] Balibar's radically democratic theorization of equaliberty is especially appropriate for cosmopolitics because it brings out both the unbounded, universalizing character of these politics and their indeterminacy. Equaliberty is the basic claim of modern political movements because it consists in the simultaneous

[17] J. Butler, "Universality in Culture," in Nussbaum, *For Love of Country?*, 45.
[18] J. Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. J. Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), ch. 6.
[19] É. Balibar, *Equaliberty: Political Essays*, trans. J. Ingram (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), pt. 1.

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rejection of subordination and domination, of privileges and tyranny, which has driven emancipatory politics since the so-called bourgeois revolutions.[20] Any legal stabilization of the kind to which Rawls tries to subject freedom and equality – by lexically subordinating equality claims to liberty claims – is merely provisional from Balibar's perspective, since the tendency of emancipatory politics always will be to overturn both inequality and unfreedom, within but also beyond the state.

Today, with national frontiers and national citizenship perhaps comprising the most visible single source of inequality and unfreedom, the possible sources of new equalibertarian claims are practically unlimited – and, by the same token, neither predictable nor resolvable by theoretical means. The contestatory approach therefore offers no solutions, only the prospect of ever-renewed struggles for freedom and equality along with contingent stabilizations based on circumstances, the balance of forces and the powers and judgements of those involved. These struggles are nonetheless cosmopolitan to the extent that they expand the scope of freedom and equality, rights and powers, beyond what is currently regarded as justified.

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3. Cosmopolitics in the context of contemporary contestations

It will by now be clear that such a contestatory account of cosmopolitanism does not provide the kind of answers political theorists and philosophers may be accustomed to seeking. Indeed, it proposes a fundamental revision of political theory and philosophy as they have tended to be practised over the last two generations. This is because the perspective of mainstream political theory, by and large, has tended to be "legislative."[21] That is, it seeks the best or most convincing "ideal" answer to moral, political or social questions and then, depending on subsequent, "non-ideal" considerations, makes policy proposals based on this answer. The underlying problem with this way of practising theory in the context of debates around cosmopolitanism is much the same as the problem that tends to afflict practical universalisms in general: it assumes a position outside and above the world for which it seeks to legislate, that is, the perspective of rulers or elites. From this vantage point it then reaches conclusions that are meant to form the basis for political, legal or administrative initiatives from above, typically in the form of state or international laws or institutional reforms. Even if the theory understands itself as just one of many contributions to a democratic public sphere, it nonetheless contributes to a conversation that is ultimately directed towards programming action from above. However egalitarian and democratic its content, then, it is hierarchical and authoritarian in its form.

[20] The classical struggle for freedom and equality, against domination and subordination, could be said to omit what could be called the fundamental claim of any cosmopolitics: the claim for *inclusion* against *exclusion*. We can observe that this dimension of (in)justice was in fact hotly contested in the course of the French Revolution, Balibar's principal historical source for the logic of equaliberty, whether regarding French women, other Europeans or the claims of French slaves in the Haiti, and similar claims have emerged in nearly all subsequent revolutionary moments.
[21] A major consideration of the defects of this model and attempts to work out an alternative can be found in J. Tully, *Public Philosophy in a New Key*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

In contrast, a radically democratic, contestatory approach to cosmopolitanism and political theory eschews such tasks. It does not tell us precisely what our duties are, how to solve the normative dilemmas that inevitably arise in political contexts or what institutional forms we should prefer. What it focuses on instead is providing a general moral-political orientation, a sense of the complexities, dilemmas and contradictions likely to arise in politics, while nevertheless providing a normative and political basis on which to choose sides, assess strategies and rough out compromises in particular situations. Such an account offers the essential lesson that, in most cases, cosmopolitanism must, however paradoxically, be *local*. This is because the agents of the cosmopolitan cause of universal freedom and equality, of democracy and human rights, will most often be particular groups in particular struggles for particular stakes. Such groups may advance universal causes in some respects and not in others; as would-be cosmopolitans we may feel called on to support them in some struggles but not in others. Their explicit aims may and often will be apparently *anti*-cosmopolitan to the extent that they seek to resist violence, oppression or dispossession at the hand of globalizing forces. Nonetheless, to the extent that their struggle implies and in fact directly expresses the equal right of people and peoples everywhere for freedom and equality, it is a universal cause. And insofar as we identify universalism with a general politics of equaliberty, as I have argued we should, they are the true agents of cosmopolitanism.

There is an obvious affinity between this contestatory cosmopolitanism and the "movement-of-movements" or "network-of-networks" for global justice that has grown up since the late 1990s. Indeed, studies of the alter-globalization movement and world social forums have increasingly come to interpret it as something like a global movement for global justice, however plural and diffuse its component struggles may be.[22] The most important aspect of this movement for my argument is its tendency to combine broad normative agreement (on such things as democracy, human rights, local autonomy, basic welfare, sustainable development and economic protection) with a flexible approach to particular struggles. For this movement, global justice is local. Especially as attention shifted away from headline-grabbing demonstrations against international summits, the struggles that comprise it have tended to emerge, as claims for justice do, against felt injustices and to be pragmatic, even opportunistic, when it comes to their addressees. They may take on national governments, but they may hope to achieve more by targeting international organizations, local or regional authorities, third-party governments, non-governmental organizations, regulatory agencies and even corporations. In so doing, they seek change wherever they can gain a foothold. Most importantly in view of the present argument, they give expression – necessarily imperfect – to the idea that local struggles have a universal dimension, and a cosmopolitan commitment to universal humanity can only be pursued one struggle at a time.

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[22] From a large literature, see G. Caruso, "Toward an Emancipatory Cosmopolitan Project: The World Social Forum and the Transformation of Conflicts," *Globalizations* 9.2 (2012): 211–24; D. Murray, "Democratic Insurrection: Constructing the Common in Global Resistance," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 39.2 (2010): 461–82; M. B. Steger and E. K. Wilson, "Anti-Globalization or Alter-Globalization? Mapping the Political Ideology of the Global Justice Movement," *International Studies Quarterly* 56.3 (2012): 439–54.

Does such an approach to global justice deserve the name "cosmopolitan"? And is it still relevant when the national movements for democracy associated with the Arab Spring and the place-based actions of the Occupy movement may suggest that activism has "gone local"? While the way of thinking about cosmopolitanism put forth here undoubtedly arises out of a recent historical conjuncture, it responds to tensions and contradictions within the theory and practice of universalism that are as old as emancipatory politics itself and, in some respects, even as old as political reflection. While it may have been more common for actors such as the alter-globalization movement and North-South solidarity movements to explicitly voice cosmopolitan moral and political commitments, there is no reason to believe that struggles for freedom and equality have lost their global dimension as activism has become more national or local. As I have argued, from a contestatory and radically democratic perspective, the universal must always be articulated locally. As the cosmopolitan internationalists of an earlier day might have put it: *même combat*.

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