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## Cosmopolitanism

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# Cosmopolitanism

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I should begin by confessing that I had reservations about taking part in this event, in part, because I don't feel familiar enough with post-colonialism to be able to sound off about it, and in part, because I doubt whether the War on Terror is substantial enough to identify an Age. This is not the first time US policy-makers have pulled together a package of disparate policies and called them a War – notably on Poverty and then Drugs, and now Terror. This time, other states have joined in and tried to benefit from US policies, as many American states did in the case of Drugs. But, in any case, why should we let US fantasies define our times? As for rethinking, my view is that we should all do this most of the time. What overcame my doubts, in the end, was the feeling that anything Professor Ahluwalia is involved in must be worth supporting. So here I am. Rather than talk about post-colonialism in general, I decided I would talk about one topic that some post-colonial writers have recently taken up: cosmopolitanism. At the same time, I want to enter a plea to take intellectual history seriously.

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There is a huge recent literature on this topic with contributions from international relations, political science, sociology, philosophy and now from post-colonial studies. Today, I'll focus on one of these post-colonial contributions, a book, *Cosmopolitanism*, which reproduces an issue of the American journal *Public Culture* (12(3) 2000 – all page references to the journal version), edited by a group of four academics from the University of Chicago. We can call this group the Gang of Four or even, as I prefer, the Chicago Boys – in spite of the fact that only three members of this group were male – in memory of the Chicago-trained economists who advised Genera Pinochet on how to remove socialism from his country. We might also wonder, in passing, how it is that a private American university has come to be seen as a centre for post-colonial studies.

First, what are we talking about? Conventional accounts of cosmopolitanism invoke two reference points: the Stoics of Western classical antiquity and the essay, 'Perpetual Peace' by the Enlightenment philosopher, Immanuel Kant (1991). Of the Stoics, Diogenese the Cynic is commonly reported (e.g. Nussbaum, 1994)<sup>2</sup> as telling the Macedonian Emperor, Alexander: 'I am a citizen of the world' – an assertion that is clearly open to interpretation. An influential essay by Martha Nussbaum explains that Diogenese meant 'that he refused to be defined by his local origins and local group memberships'. Whether or not he actually thought in Nussbaum's terms, Diogenese does seem to reject a merely local affiliation (to any one Greek city or to a Greek identity), but he says this using the parochial (ie. Greek) idiom of citizenship. This reference to citizenship suggests the idea of a corresponding state to Western readers, so we find that cosmopolitanism is often seen as a political doctrine appealing to the idea of a world state or federation of states. Nussbaum takes up the first of these elements – the extra-localism – without either directly disputing or taking up the second – the political. The Stoics, she explains, believed that each of us belongs in two communities – the local community of our birth, and the community of human argument and aspiration. The latter community, she adds, is the source of our moral obligations.

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<sup>2</sup> All quotations are from the online edition. (See <<http://www.soci.niu.edu/~phildept/Kapitan/nussbaum1.html>> accessed 01/10/2010).

The Chicago Boys also stress the extra-local, while remaining suspicious of the particularisms that infect most claims to universalism (it is easy to show that Nussbaum's universalism rests on an American particularism). They note that extra-localisms have appeared in a variety of contexts - in the circulation of Sanskrit literature across much of pre-colonial Asia, the familiar idea that capital has no national loyalty, the capitalist/liberal impetus behind the capitulations imposed on non-Western states in the 19th Century (Fidler, 2000), and, more recently, the attempts of the WTO, IMF, World Bank, UNDP and other international institutions (most of them based in the West) to open the whole world to the market. To this list I might add the religious toleration shown by Muslim rulers of Andalusia and the Ottoman empire, the circulation of Latin literature throughout late medieval Europe, the 20<sup>th</sup> Century international human rights regime and the British rhetoric of indirect rule (which suggests that the duty of the colonial power is to open up territories to trade with the rest of humanity – an early kind of international neo-liberalism).

These examples will suffice to make the basic point that there is nothing special about the extra-localism of Western cosmopolitanism and thus no reason to celebrate it for its extra-localism. This is the first and most important point of the Chicago Boys argument. In place of a singular cosmopolitanism, of the Western philosophical type, they invite readers to think in terms of diverse cosmopolitanisms. There are many cosmopolitanisms, just as, according to Dipesh Chakrabarty (2002), there are many modernities.

But what of the promise or hope of political universalism that Nussbaum finds in the Stoics and promotes among her readers today – a cosmopolitan 'Yes we Can'... treat all peoples as equal?

The first point to make in response is that it is precisely this universalism that many of his readers find appealing about Kant's cosmopolitanism. In contrast to the manifest Eurocentrism of most enlightenment intellectuals (see O'Brien, 1997), Kant includes all humanity in his vision of the future. Political cosmopolitanism's apparently universal inclusiveness helps many Western cosmopolitans to feel good about themselves (because it seems they are being nice to others), but this is no reason for post-colonialism to endorse it. Second, a benign universal state

or federation of states, of the kind that Kant has been read as suggesting, is not the only interpretation of the stoic universalism that Nussbaum invokes.

To substantiate this point will require a small deviation from my main line of argument. The key thing to say here is that, a few years later, in another essay Nussbaum (1997) inadvertently offers an alternative model of stoic cosmopolitanism as universal subjection to an imperial power. The way this works is that, in support of her reading of what Diogenese really meant, she cites the Roman senator, Seneca's 'De Otio' and Plutarch's observation in 'On the Fortunes of Alexander' that 'we should regard all human beings as our fellow citizens and neighbors'. Thus, what Diogenese intended, is that:

we should give our first allegiance to no mere form of government, no temporal power, but to the moral community made up by the humanity of all human beings (Plutarch, 1936: 397).

Let me just stick with her use of Plutarch, who was born a Greek, went on to acquire Roman citizenship and wrote a series of lives of famous figures. While Nussbaum reads Plutarch's speech as attributing cosmopolitanism to Alexander, Plutarch also offers another view, namely, that:

Alexander ... sowed all Asia with Grecian magistracies, and thus overcame its uncivilized and brutish manner of living. ... [Moreover] those who were vanquished by Alexander are happier than those who escaped his hand; for these had no one to put an end to the wretchedness of their existence, while the victor compelled those others to lead a happy life (Plutarch, 1936: 397).

And again, after noting that 'Alexander did not follow Aristotle's advice to treat the Greeks as if he were their leader, and other peoples as if he were their master', Plutarch tells us that Alexander:

believed that he came as a heaven-sent governor to all, ... those whom he could not persuade ..., he conquered by force of arms, and he brought together ... all men everywhere, ... He bade them all consider ... as foreigners only the wicked; ... the distinguishing mark of the Grecian should be seen in virtue, and that of the foreigner in iniquity (Plutarch, 1936: 399; c.f. Tarn, 1948: 420).

Greeks and non-Greeks alike were subjects of the one ruler. Plutarch's treatment of Alexander, with its suggestion of an imperial civilizing mission, was clearly designed to appeal to the sensitivities of a Roman audience. It presents Alexander, not as citizen of the world, but rather as a ruler who makes the rest of humanity equal in their subjection to his rule much as many Romans liked to imagine that Rome was doing. The parallels between Roman and contemporary American domination are too clear to need spelling out.

Now, back to the Chicago Boys. Among their other cosmopolitanisms, they cite 'a cosmopolitan humanism in the University of Salamanca and Francisco de Vitoria, thinkers for whom European expansion meant... confronting head-on the challenge of enlarging the definition of humanity as they understood it' (p.586) While it may be tempting to view renaissance humanism as an advance on Thomist philosophising, the humanists are the bad guys in this story. Vitoria was not a humanist but a Thomist theologian whose influential *relectione*, 'On the American Indians' (1995), undermined the conventional Aristotelian category of the natural slave by arguing that slavery is a social and legal status – i.e. a social construct – so that people become slaves as a result of social actions and legal decisions. They cannot be made slaves by nature. In contrast Spanish humanists, Juan Gines de Sepulveda prominent among them, used the argument that Americans were natural slaves to justify Spanish conquest in the Americas (see Pagden, 1982).

Walter Mignole's article (721-748) on critical cosmopolitanism in the *Public Culture* collection invokes both Salamanca and Vitoria but uses a different description from the Chicago Boys. Mignole stresses 'a need to reconceive cosmopolitanism from the perspective of coloniality' (723). 'Coloniality', he tells us, following the Argentine philosopher of liberation, Enrique Dussel (1995), 'is the hidden face of modernity and its very condition of possibility' (722)

‘Critical cosmopolitanism’, he says, ‘emerges precisely as the need to discover other options beyond both benevolent recognition ... and humanitarian pleas for inclusion’ (724) – that is beyond the cosmopolitanisms advocated by recent Western liberals (e.g. Charles Taylor and Jurgen Habermas).

So, if we want to hang on to the idea of cosmopolitanism, we should get away from well-meaning Western talk of recognizing and generally being nice to non-western peoples. This is a promising start. Further, reconceiving cosmopolitanism from the perspective of coloniality means not getting hooked on conventional Western accounts that begin, like my talk today, with the Stoics. Mignole posits ‘a different beginning: the emergence of the Atlantic commercial circuit in the sixteenth century that linked the Spanish Crown with capitalist entrepreneurs from Genoa, with Christian missionaries, with Amerindian elites, and with African slaves’ (725). He uses this starting point to identify three historical moments in the development of Western cosmopolitanism, each corresponding to developments within Western imperialism: the beginning – the expulsion of the Moors from Spain, ‘the final victory of Christianity over Islam in 1492’ (726) – an odd description of a local, traumatic event – and Spanish and Portuguese colonialism in America, Africa and Asia, and associated Christian missions; the second stage, with English and French colonialism and their civilizing mission and the third stage, the second half of 20th Century, with ‘US and transnational (global) imperialism’ (725) and the modernizing mission. He goes on to sketch a fourth ‘neoliberal’ moment.

What I think we see here is that Mignole’s critical perspective draws on a residual Marxism that sees ideological changes, different forms of cosmopolitanism in this case, as reflecting material conditions, the appearance of new forms of imperialism. Moreover, the stages he identifies seem suspiciously close to conventional Western periodisations of Imperialism, that is, before and after US independence – this is the flip side of identifying coloniality as the other face of modernity. I think we should just junk the idea of modernity.



But, leaving these issues aside, let me go back to Mignole's first stage, early Spanish and Portuguese imperialism. Just like the Chicago Boys, he associates a cosmopolitanism with Salamanca and Vitoria, but what they describe as a humanism, Mignole sees as a Christian global design based on the idea of the natural rights of peoples that arises out of religious conflict within Europe and a realization that the Christian God was not universally acknowledged. 'The law of nature could now be declared universal precisely when a Christian God no longer could. Thus a "natural" based idea of cosmopolitanism and universal history came together in one stroke' (727) This seems to me no less misleading than the Chicago Boys' account. If anything, Vitoria argued against a global Christian design, maintaining that the Church and the Pope had no dominion over the non-Christian world,<sup>3</sup> so that there was no alternative but to fall back on a version of the Roman *jus gentium* when examining relations between Christian and non-Christian peoples. Vitoria's version of *jus gentium* justified conscientious missionary incursions into non-Western cultures,<sup>4</sup> but it was not predicated on any Christian idea of an *orbis universalis*.

Mignole suggests, with no reference to the argument of Vitoria's text, that the resort to *jus gentium* was a consequence of conflict within Christianity and the existence of competing religions: 'Once God became questionable, the pope and the emperor became questionable as well' (p.727). This seems to be another case of ideology allegedly reflecting material conditions.

Finally, if Mignole's critical cosmopolitanism gets its history wrong, basically because of its reliance on a residual Marxism, what is its alternative cosmopolitan vision? Diversality, a kind of:

'globalisation from below ... one that conceives diversity as a (cosmopolitan) universal project....Diversality can be imagined as a new medievalism, a pluricentric world built on

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<sup>3</sup> There is a clear precedent for the Christian *orbis universalis* that Mignole appears to find in Vitoria: in Innocent IV's two Bulls of 1245 addressed to the Emperor of the Tartars. These, together with the incredulous Tartar response can be found in Dawson (1955).

<sup>4</sup> Vitoria in fact doubts whether Christianity had been presented to the Americans under appropriate conditions: 'I hear of many scandals and cruel crimes and acts of impiety' (1995: 144)

the ruins of ancient non-Western cultures and civilizations with the debris of Western civilization' (745)

While they may question the Western image of a new medievalism, what the Chicago Boys have to offer is not very different:

Cosmopolitanism is not a circle created by a culture diffused from a center, but instead... centers are everywhere and circumferences nowhere. ...This ultimately suggests that we already are and have always been cosmopolitan, though we may not always have known it. ... Cosmopolitanism is infinite ways of being.... Given that the absolute universalisms of Western cosmopolitanism must forever subvert it from within and from the start, real strength may lie in division – at least in a division that holds division as a value – and true unanimity in a consensual dissensus (588).

On the same page, they acknowledge that in the political sphere 'our failure to realize what we have always been – that is, diverse – has had the most awful consequences' and point towards a 'sense of urgency behind this collection'. Yet, if we stick to the political sphere, it is not at all clear what the celebration of diversality or simply of diversity has to offer. If the problem is to find ways of living together in some kind of peace, then the celebration of diversity offers nothing more than multiculturalism on a world scale, but without the presumption that it happens within an overarching dominant culture.

Two critical points to finish: First, while they have little time for the conventional philosophical idea of cosmopolitanism, the Chicago Boys seem reluctant to confront it directly, leaving their readers either to find what they like in their text or else to read carefully between the lines – a strategy that Leo Strauss used to recommend. I have no idea of the reasons for this timidity – perhaps something in the internal politics of Chicago University or of the city itself; perhaps a sense that post-colonialism is losing ground in the American academy; and perhaps, even, a sense that it would be best at the moment not to pick a fight with American liberals. Whatever the reason, this apparent failure of nerve is disappointing.

Second, I've paid a lot of attention to the limitations of the Chicago Boys', and Mignole's treatment of the early phase of European colonial expansion – particularly European responses to the invasions of the Americas. Why does it matter? Part of my answer is the standard academic concern to get the facts right. But my broader concern is that we'll never understand the impact of the past if we insist on telling ourselves stories about it that make us feel comfortable.

And the earliest period of European colonial expansion is a particularly important one to get right. If post-colonial means anything, it has to be 'post' this experience as well. I say this not primarily for Dussel's reason – that modernity and colonality begin together – but because this is where the first colonial cosmopolitanism appears in a developmental view of humanity – the view that you find, in various forms, in the Scottish Enlightenment, Hegel, Marx, 19<sup>th</sup> Century sociology and contemporary theories of modernisation and development – a view that has its beginnings in the work of a 16<sup>th</sup> Century Jesuit priest José de Acosta, especially in his *De Procuranda Indorum salute* and *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*. It is in Acosta's history and not Christian humanism or Mignole's *orbis universalis* that Europeans first found a way to imagine that the people of the Old World and those of the New belonged to the same history. This is also where they started to imagine that non-European peoples could be ranked along a developmental continuum according to how far they were behind Europe itself. Unless we grasp the imperial beginnings of this bizarre idea, I doubt that we'll be able to deal with all of its destructive consequences.

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