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‘Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism’

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The term *cosmopolitanism* derives from a double Greek root: the first component is *kósmos* ("order"), applied by Pythagoras to the universe in order to stress the orderliness of creation. The second one is *polis*, the "city" or "city-state". Thus, in ancient Greece a *kosmopolítes* was a citizen of the world (*polítes*=citizen). The term came to indicate someone who considered the entire humankind as more meaningful than his or her own city, group, region or state.

The idea of a universal city and sense of belonging was first formulated by Stoic philosophers, at least since Zeno of Citium (c. 335-262) began to lecture about 300 BC. The Stoics, like the Cynics, saw man as a rational agent, with universal rights and citizenship in a common *Kosmopolis*. (Bracht Branham and Goulet-Caze 1996). Happiness derived from observing the law of the Universe and from the acceptance of personal and human destiny. The Stoic tradition lasted for about 500 years and the latest *stoa* flourished in Rome around the teachings of the former Greek slave Epictetus (55-135) of Hierapolis, of whom the emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (121-180) was a disciple (Hadot 1998).

In Rome, Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 B.C) deepened the Stoics' theory of justice by elevating the *jus naturale* (natural law) into a universal standard against which all particularistic civil laws should be adjudicated. This vision of universal law was accompanied by a cosmopolitan emphasis on a universal commonwealth of all creatures possessed of reason and speech. Reason and language were central to this definition. Since Cicero was extensively emulated as a model of rhetoric and Latin style (Wood 1988), his teaching became extremely influential in the Middle Ages and have hence been identified as the chain transmitting Stoic cosmopolitanism to the Church.

However, as is known, universalism already permeated Christianity since its very inception. Indeed nearly all religious and philosophical systems sharply demarcate humans from other living beings on the basis of the former's monopoly of speech and reason (*logos*). It is this common rationality which makes mankind predestined to share a common fate. Thus, the primary 'oppositional' use of cosmopolitanism was to define humankind *vis-à-vis* other living beings -- as well as against all forms of us-them dichotomies dividing

humanity.

St Augustine's (354-430) project of theocratic universalism (in his *City of God/De Civitate Dei*) reflected this vision. The medieval conception of natural law combined an apology for the Papacy's temporal power with the defense of an international jurisdiction of the Church. This was framed within a cosmopolitan theory of the human condition, which saw the Papacy as the ideal candidate for a 'world empire'.

Notions of the universality of rights run parallel to the Medieval Church-centered international order. When the Crusades (1095 to 1270 ca.) were still in full swing, 'cosmopolitan' appeals went from Gregory IX's (1227-1241) claim of the *imperium mundi* to the Canon Lawyers' matchlessly influential system of international jurisdiction (Muldoon 1998).

The climax was reached in 1302, when Boniface VIII (c. 1228-1303, Pope from 1294) promulgated the *bull* (edict) *Unam Sanctam* affirming the complete temporal and spiritual power of the Papacy. Therein, he avouched that "it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff". In this sentence, we already have in embryo the clash between an instrumental form of cosmopolitanism and the princes' sovereignty, from which national sovereignty would later emerge. Yet, as Hans Kohn (1956: 88) has observed, "this radicalization of the doctrine of the universalism and supremacy of the Church was voiced at the very moment when its influence on the affairs of this world began to wane".

But also the critics of the temporal power of the Popes wholly subscribed to and mutated the same longing for an universal political order. According to Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), humankind constitutes a single community (*humana universitas est quoddam totum*) whose aim is peaceful coexistence for all individuals. In *De Monarchia* (1310-13), Dante claimed that the 'world is our fatherland' over and above specific dissimilarities, including differences of religious creed. Coexistence is not only natural, but imperative, and only through coexistence can man attain this-worldly happiness.

Four centuries later and in an even more secular mood, Gian Battista Vico (1668-1744) also viewed "the history of mankind as a unity following its providential course, subject to the same universal laws" (Kohn 1956: 502; see also Berlin 1976: 42-52).

As is known, elements of cosmopolitanism richly permeated the writings of the major Enlightenment thinkers, who "viewed all races and all continents with the same human interest and concern" (Kohn 1955: 228). Montesquieu (1689-1755) wrote that "if I knew something useful to my fatherland which were prejudicial to Europe, or something which were useful to Europe and prejudicial to mankind, I would consider it a crime" (Kohn 1955: 228). If this crime goes with the idea of nationalism and Montesquieu's inner conviction with that of cosmopolitanism, then the two are incompatible.

Enlightenment principles were unmistakably corrupted by the French Revolution which eventually restricted the idea of the 'rights of man' to a limited number of individuals, those pertaining to the 'nation'. The movement away from cosmopolitanism was consummated in the revolutionary years once the national principle was glorified above everything else. Cosmopolitanism and nationalism shared the same intellectual foundations in the idea of natural rights, but once applied to real life their interests increasingly and inevitably diverged. For instance, Maximilien Robespierre (1758-94) interpreted cosmopolitan ideas about the universal rights of man quite selectively, emphasizing them only when they coincided with his view of the national interest (Rapport 1996). Finally, it was the invocation of war as an external pretext which forevermore replaced cosmopolitanism with chauvinistic (rather than liberal) nationalism. Talks about imaginary threats of foreign conspiracies had been used in the past, but war itself created the conditions for turning cosmopolitan principles on their head and transforming them into xenophobic axioms.

From then onwards, the war “ensured that the more narrowly defined national interests ... won over the universal application of the rights of man” (Rapport 1996: 333).

A similar route was followed by other European nationalist movements, for instance in Italy: “Through the French Revolution [Italian intellectuals] followed the road from a rational cosmopolitanism to a liberal nationalism: the *Risorgimento* fused the longing for human happiness and for the resurrection of ancient greatness into a modern nationalism” (Kohn 1956: 509). Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872) best exemplified this melding of universal, romantic, modernist and nationalist values. Yet, in less than half a century also in Italy what initially was an elitist liberal nationalism turned into a mass creed of radical intolerance.

Perhaps the country where the complex and peculiar relationship between cosmopolitanism and nationalism can better be observed is Germany. Liah Greenfeld’s interesting point is that nationalism was a late-comer in Germany and that German intellectuals, followers of the *Aufklärung* (German Enlightenment) where cosmopolitan and anti-nationalist (or at least eminently indifferent to nationalism). When, as a consequence of the Napoleonic invasion (1808), nationalism first arose in Germany, the shift was sudden, radical and abrupt (Greenfeld 1992: 310-14 and 354-58). It was a leap forward from universal *beau ideals* to an exasperated mood which already contained the seeds of its xenophobic development. Always in the wake of war, the intelligentsia and the *Bildungsbürgertum* (the 100,000 strong ‘educated class’ of university-trained commoners, often unemployed, and their families) suddenly moved from neo-classicism to romanticism (Greenfeld 1992: 296), and from the liberal cosmopolitanism of, say, Wilhelm von Humboldt (1765-1835) to the nationalist jacobinism of Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) -- the latter a fervent admirer of the French Revolution in his youth (See the classic critique in Friedrich Meinecke’s (1862-1954) 1970).

But the German philosopher who most expressed a longing for cosmopolitanism was no doubt Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). Since Kant’s insistence on a world government parallels his stress on individual self-determination, he has been controversially identified as one of the inspiring lights of nationalism -- at least in Elie Kedourie’s (1993) contentious book where Hegel’s role in this respect is stridently neglected. Kant pledged for the abolition of national jurisdictions and their replacement by an universally applicable law. His project of ‘perpetual peace’ was to be achieved under the auspices of an international government.

Thus, it may come as a surprise to find some deeply rooted prejudices behind the sincere cosmopolitan creed of many post-Enlightenment philosophers. For instance, Kant claimed that “the Negroes can become disciplined and cultured, but never civilized”, and that “the Whites are the only ones who will always strive towards perfection” (Kant 1923: 878).¹ The private correspondence of Marx and, particularly, Engels is punctuated by similar statements addressed to variously despised nations, groups and races (Connor 1984, Nimni 1993).² Indeed, in the century of expanding European colonial empires (of which the Americas’ independence movements were but a phase), assumptions of racial superiority were the norm, rather than the exception.³

¹ In Kant’s *Handschriftlicher Nachlaß*, Band 2, Anthropologie (2 Part), Band [vol.] 15 (Reflections), 1923, n° 1520, p. 878.

² See Walker Connor 1984 *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; and Nimni, Ephraim 1993 *Marxism and Nationalism: Theoretical Origins of the Political Crisis*. London: Pluto Pres

³ [On Neo-classicism and romanticism, see Anthony D. Smith. ‘Neo-classicist and romantic elements in the emergence of nationalist conceptions’, in Anthony D. Smith (ed.) *Nationalist Movements*. London :

The rise of *internationalism* as a distinctive concept should be ascribed to the emergence of working class as an historical actor (Ishay 1995). In the nineteenth century the latter was torn between national identification and internationalism. The first usage of the term ‘internationalist’ comes from the members of the First International (International Association of Workingmen, f. 1864 in London under the guidance of Karl Marx), while the idea of an “international solidarity among the proletarians of the world” dates back at least to Marx’s and Engel’s *Communist Manifesto* (1848), in which they asserted that "the working man has no fatherland" (Marx 1998, See also Connor 1984). As is known, socialist illusions crumbled in 1914, when working class organizations proved unable to prevent war and sided instead with their governments and their respective ‘nation-states’ -- thereupon ignominiously capitulating to the nationalist imperative.

The study of the **relationship** between **nationalism** and **cosmopolitanism** raises more questions than answers, because both concepts lend themselves to contradictory interpretations, lacking empirical -- indeed, universal -- clarity.

Are nationalism and cosmopolitanism deeply opposed and inconsistent? or, rather, are they mutually compatible? These questions are pointless if we employ the two terms too loosely. Unfortunately, they are often utilized as either eulogies or pejoratives, without specifying their contextual meanings. For instance, nationalists have often used the term ‘cosmopolitan’ as an invective, while ‘cosmopolitans’ have correspondingly abused and distorted the term nationalism. As personal ennoblement, cosmopolitanism implies an emphasis on sophistication, openness to other ideas and cultures, acquaintance with the ways of the world. As affront and offense, it implies lack of loyalty and aristocratic decadence. In a more neutral acceptance, a cosmopolitan is someone who regards the whole world as his/her native homeland. Ideally, a citizen of the world should be exempt from national prejudices. Yet, an emphasis on cosmopolitan can actually conceal its antithesis and be strategically used as coverture to hide one’s own sectional interests (Likewise, a stress on nationalism can occult a dearth of patriotic allegiance).

For this reason, cosmopolitanism has been seen as a rhetorical device used by existing elites to justify the *status quo*, by attempting to ‘universalize’ the hegemonic pretensions of the dominant culture, while denying legitimacy to minority ones. For instance, the French wars against Algeria and Vietnam were also justified on the ground that independence would have cut these countries off from the stream of universal progress as only accessible through French language and culture. No wonder then that nationalists have often seen cosmopolitan ideas with deep suspicion. Ernest Gellner (1994: 112) mentions that the nationalists were hostile “not merely to rival cultures, but also, and perhaps with special venom, to bloodless cosmopolitanism, probably in part because they perceived it an ally of political centralism”.

The multi-faceted character of nationalism as a modern Janus makes it a double-edged ideology adaptable to multiple, often contrasting, purposes. One of nationalism’s inherent dilemmas is the contrast between *traditionalist* and *modernist* trends in its midst. A parallel dilemma is nationalism’s split between *isolationists* and *cosmopolitans*, which makes it a potential ally of both. A major difference is that cosmopolitanism is a personally held attitude rather than a political movement with a precisely framed programme, while nationalism is usually both. This may make their relationship occasionally congruous, even compatible.

Indeed, Will Kymlicka (1999) argues that there is no meaningful opposition between ‘liberal’ nationalism and cosmopolitanism. Citing the examples of Catalonia, Quebec, and Flanders, Kymlicka observes that many contemporary nationalists have also been liberal reformers. Their fight for self-government includes a fight to reform society (on Catalan nationalism’s attempt to reform the state in a liberal direction, see Conversi, 1997). However, it is important to recall that this may hold true today, but in the past it has often not been the case -- and that even today nationalism is not always liberal, as Kymlicka recognizes.

Both nationalism and cosmopolitanism refer to **political power** (the universal Monarch -- or the Pope, vs. the local prince), as well as to shared **values** (universal values and customs, vs. specific or localized ones). But, since in between power and values stands the law, the two terms also refer to different concepts of **jurisdiction** (universal vs. national --or local-- jurisdictions).

Enlightenment thinkers not only espoused a deep appreciation for human diversity, but also, on occasions, seemed to conflate cosmopolitan and pro-nationalist attitudes. Thus, in 1778 Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot (1727-1791) “protested against the domination of one people by another and maintained that a man oppressed by an unjust law could not be regarded as free” (Kohn 1956: 228-9). Was this an implicit advocacy of the principle of self-determination? Was his refusal of *etatist* oppression an appeal to the oppressed to constitute their own state(s)? Most likely it was not, yet Turgot’s claims can be interpreted otherwise and seen as perfectly compatible with aspirations to national independence. Other Enlightenment philosophers, from Rousseau to Voltaire, from Montesquieu to Diderot and Condorcet, have all expressed statements that can eventually provide fuel for the nationalist fire. By the same token, it would be improper to infer that Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) was a nationalist, even though his intuitions “laid the ideological foundation of nationalist doctrine” (Barnard 1965: 62). Herder can well be seen as a universalist preaching the rights of all human groups to exist, reproduce their culture and manage their own affairs. Herder’s view is more a hymn to human creativity than to cold reason. Yet, it may be inaccurate to put him in the same box as Fichte, and to declare that he was any more of a nationalist than many of the *philosophes des lumieres*.

Like nationalism, cosmopolitanism has to be seen in opposition to something else. Kymlicka (1999) rightly observes that “in the past, cosmopolitanism was a reaction against the privileging of the local city, class or religious sect. But in today’s world, cosmopolitanism is almost always defined in contrast to nationalism”. Cosmopolitanism can also be opposed to **localism**, but in a complementary, more neutral, rather than judgmental, sense. For instance, Hannerz (1990) has observed that cosmopolitans still depend on the locals in order to be able to conceive themselves as cosmopolitans -- and to be identified as such. Hence, cosmopolitanism can ally itself with, and be opposed to, both localism and nationalism. Conversely, nationalism can find valid allies in both cosmopolitanism and localism.

More noteworthy, the enthusiasm for cosmopolitanism followed the expansion of the Roman empire and Rome’s transformation from a city-state into an ever-conquering machine. Indeed, the very birth and spread of Stoicism was unimaginable without Alexander the Great’s (356-323 B.C.) parallel drive to rack up a ‘world empire’ -- quite a non-Greek endeavour (Kohn 1956: 12). This seems to lend credit to the nationalist critique of cosmopolitanism as a disguised tool for imperial aggrandizement and global oppression. The function of cosmopolitanism has indeed been that of providing imperial elites (from Alexander to the Roman Empire, from the Popes to the expanding colonial powers and to present-day neo-colonial imperialism) with an ideological armour ideally fitted to underpin their expansionist aims and various other grand designs. Hellenistic civilization, rather than the elective self-insulation of the Greek *politeia*, produced

the first stimulus for a wider Mediterranean cosmopolitan vision that also permeated Arabic and Islamic thought.

Moreover, Enlightenment cosmopolitanism was mostly the perception of a small portion of Parisian elites who, despite their sincere effort to view with the eyes of the entire world, were still deeply imbued with French aristocratic culture. Thus, Condorcet's stress on the need for an universal language often ended up with a reassertion of French as the ideal candidate for such a task (on Condorcet's idea of a universal language, see Kymlicka 1999). Its paradoxical corollary is well synthesized by an old Breton witticism: "if we really need a world language, well, be it, but let it be Breton!".

However, the outright rejection of cosmopolitanism also entails its own problems: the risk of total *relativism* and the denial of even the possibility of comprehension between mutually unintelligible communities. This attitude denies *au fond* the common humanity of mankind and it is precisely one of the attitudes which have been appropriated by illiberal nationalists -- who at the minimum deny the humanity of a specific target group, the enemy.

Since cosmopolitanism relates basically to human values, it is the doctrine of universal **human rights** which constitutes its vital core. In this value-centered conception, neither nationalism nor localism are to be considered the cosmopolitan's main antagonists. Rather, the adversary *par excellence* is **state sovereignty**. Cosmopolitanism relates to [those] norms, values and principles to be applicable throughout the entire *oikoumene* (inhabited earth). Hence, such norms necessarily infringe upon state sovereignty -- which is the nerve center of international relations. Basic principles such as 'non-intervention' are normally advocated by states wishing to be sheltered from all forms of criticism. Likewise, state sovereignty is seen as being inherently adverse to the ideas of both a world decision-making body (not necessarily a world government) and universal human rights. In this picture, nationalism plays a relatively minor role, since it is largely unthinkable outside the modern inter-state system.

The main antagonist of a values-centered and rights-oriented conception of cosmopolitanism is *moral relativism*, i.e., the view that when two sets of values clash, we should find an "equidistance" -- which assumes that all views should be taken equally into account. Extreme forms of moral relativism would bring us to the conclusion that victims and aggressors are to be treated equally and, even more extremely, that all crimes are to be judged according to particularistic criteria, hence that no crime is such for the entire humanity.

For the sake of precision, moral relativism should be distinguished from cultural relativism. Whereas *moral relativism* is the claim that there is no superior moral judgement and human beings should not adhere to the same values, *cultural relativism* is the claim that there is no superior culture and all cultures should be treated equally. Universal values -- normally a selection of them -- may be embraced, while at the same time propounding that each culture has the right to survive and none is intrinsically superior to any other. Moral relativism reflects instead a belief in the non-universality of human values, including human rights. In other words, cultural relativism does not inexorably result in moral relativism.

The cosmopolitan idea is about pacifying mankind through the development of a strong sense of moral obligation to human beings everywhere. But adherence to such a program comports a clear understanding of moral priorities. Hence, the most crucial question is: what really are these universal human values? or, what are precisely those values which should be more strongly buttressed? Apparently there is no agreement on that, precisely because different political elites arrogate only those principles that best serve their aims. However, there are some basic human rights and values which transcend distinctions between different

value systems. Inarguably, the most universally execrable crime is *genocide* -- often accompanied by, or overlapping with, *ethnocide* and cultural genocide. But since genocide is perceived as the supreme iniquity against humanity, states perpetrating it have always been careful to save the appearance with all possible forms of denial -- often to the extent of publicly presenting the victims as aggressors.

Should these crimes warrant for international (cosmopolitan) intervention? The overwhelming common-sense reply is that they should. However, the cases of Rwanda, Bosnia, East Timor, Tibet and several other stateless peoples, have shown that not even the most basic universal principles can be easily upheld by the 'international community'. Likewise, a host of minor conflicts where small groups confronted themselves with devastatingly superior forces (such as Chechnya), have rather thrust international leaders to reassert the inviolability of existing state frontiers and the accompanying principle of non-intervention, rather than deepening and making effective universal principles of human rights and supra-national intervention.

As a *post-facto* measure, the institution of **international tribunals** can be seen as a first step towards enforcing basic universal values and norms, especially concerning crimes against humanity. However, the experience of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY, established in May 1993 by UN Resolution 827 in The Hague) in tracking down war criminals points to the difficulty of achieving any effective results if the principle of state sovereignty can always be used to shelter incriminated or indicted offenders.

That cosmopolitanism can be used as a resonance box for a particular nation's alleged virtues is a familiar historic incident. This double-edged ideology is best synthesized by 'Westernization's offspring, **'Orientalism'**, that is, "a style of thought based upon ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Orient" and (most of the time) "the Occident" (1978: 1). Such an European Western identity is promoted and internalized "as a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures" (1978: 7). The same concept can be applied to virtually all nationalist movements. The difference between *imperialist* orientalism and *nationalist* orientalism is simply that in the former case, the Orient is made up of colonial objects and subjects, whereas for the latter it is next-door neighbour(s). Thus, French nationalists perceive the Italians to be less European and more exotic and Mediterranean, while Italians perceive their neighbours, the Slovenes, to be the advancing edge of a purportedly undifferentiated Slavic tide, in turn Slovenes feel to be more fully-fledged Europeans than their Croatian neighbours, who in turn feel more Westernized and civilized than the Serbs, who in turn feel immensely superior to the Albanians, who in turn feel more European than the Turks. The trip Eastward from Greece, to Turkey, to Iran, to the Indian Sub-continent and further East is a trip towards ever-deepening Orientalisms -- specular images of the advancing tide of Westernization. Its habitual victims are not distant colonies and races, but next-door and 'next-of-kin' neighbours.

The trend is emphatically reiterated in all areas plagued by ethnic conflict, and stressed at paroxysmic levels in the most vicious war zones. Violent persuasions normally involve a denial of the enemy's membership to civilization, and hence 'humanity' -- as far as the West stands today for 'humanity' as a whole. This points to the fact that we still live in a hierarchically imagined and defined world, where the West is the centre of everything, and everything is measured by vicinity to that model. Such a hierarchic scale of values and norms is taken in by all nationalist movements, including liberal ones. Hence, contemporary Westernization (the cultural side of globalization) goes hand in hand with the planetary spread of nationalism, breeding new forms of intolerance, which represent in many respects the antithesis of the cosmopolitan ideal. The basic canon of this broadening circle of Orientalism is that '*we* are most Westernized than *them*' (hence, 'superior

to them'). Indeed, it often relies on slogans such as '*we* are the West', '*they* are the East' -- hence outcasts not pertaining to the same Civilizational side.

Conclusions

Cosmopolitan thinkers crave for a world organization in which universal values are protected and somehow enforced (Zolo 1997). Hence, the idea of a supra-national (that is, supra -state) organization is not only deeply related to the prevalence of universal moral principles, but the former's legitimacy is based on the latter's force and validity.

Although cosmopolitanism is normally conceived in opposition to nationalism, all modern nationalist movements tend to include both isolationist and cosmopolitan trends. Moreover, although cosmopolitans think in term of an imagined a-national community, this is often perceived by their critics as a rhetorical device to impose one nation's or one continent's hegemonic norms and values -- the classical case being the Russian project of a new 'Soviet man'. Cosmopolitanism thus betrays a rational way to 'legitimately' impose particularistic values, habits, language and norms upon the entire ecumene. More generally, cosmopolitanism is often equated with Westernization.

Another point of convergence between nationalism and cosmopolitanism is the fact that the founders of nationalist movements are usually highly assimilated intellectuals who can move effortlessly inside the dominant (or ethnically antagonist) culture -- as well as in the more general Western culture. By being fully imbued with such dominant norms and values the nationalists aspire to operate as a bridge between two worlds and hence their goal is a highly syncretic one. One of their tasks is hence to present the nation as a viable project in terms of adherence to international values in a world of nation-states. To a great degree, this implies adherence to a wide range of norms and values of Western culture, while stressing the nation's uniqueness as an indispensable legitimizing principle.

A final problem is that different cosmopolitan visions inevitably clash with each other, as they usually purports themselves to be unique repositories of the ultimate truth. In the end, in spite of sincere universal aspirations, cosmopolitan projects risk becoming weapons of confronting armies and dummies of clashing civilizations.

Clearly, there is no single cosmopolitan vision, but a plurality of competing cosmopolitan projects. A convincing cosmopolitan agenda can only be pursued by encompassing the human variety of local, national and universal ideals, making them compatible, rather than competitive (or mutually exclusive). And, if the only feasible rational goal is human coexistence (rather than destructive processes such as domination, hegemony, obliteration or assimilation), then cosmopolitanism can only be conceived as incompatible with homogenization and indeed with contemporary globalization.

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