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## “Cosmopolitanism is today one of the most important ways of making sense of the contemporary world” (Delanty, 2009)

Cosmopolitanism, as in the above quote by Gerard Delanty, is indeed the dominant way of theorizing a contemporary consciousness of global reach. What Ulrich Beck calls ‘the cosmopolitan moment of world risk society’ (Beck 2006, 2009), is used as a framework to conceptualise social and material processes across the world (Hulme 2009; Tyfield and Urry, 2009).

And although it is consistently reiterated that the term is European in origin and therefore only ever partially valid in other contexts, it is exported nevertheless, as it is the traditional Western way of looking beyond its own boundaries.

To critically explore the historicity of cosmopolitanism and the limits of its applicability today, the typical genealogy given in the chapter ‘The rise and decline of classical cosmopolitanism’ from ‘Cosmopolitan Imagination’ (Delanty 2009), can be read against Dussel’s critique of a Eurocentric development narrative in ‘Europe, Modernity and Eurocentrism’.

Delanty distinguishes two types or phases of Cosmopolitanism, a ‘classical’ one and a post-universalist contemporary global cosmopolitanism. He concedes that the older notion may be Eurocentric, but defends it by pointing towards contributions from Others to Europe in the construction of its cosmopolitanism.

He describes a genealogy of the classical cosmopolitanism from the Cynics and Stoics of ancient Greece, via the Roman Empire, Christianity of St. Paul and the Enlightenment of Kant, to end up in modernity and its universalist projects - into which it has been absorbed, but from which it can be disentangled as the new cosmopolitanism.

He makes clear that the historical context of the first emergence of the concept is important, as the Hellenistic period is marked by the cultural negotiations resulting from the imperial excursion of Alexander the Great. So cosmopolitanism is not a Greek and or even a European invention, but "The multiethnicity and transcultural nature of the Hellenistic Empire offered a context for cosmopolitan thought to emerge." (Delanty, 2009:23)

From there he traces the cosmopolitan thinking further to Rome, as “The Roman Empire was based on a principle of universal rule that had no territorial limits.” (Delanty, 2009:24) But

he expressly refutes it to be a philosophy of empire. While he says that Rome was indeed a geopolitical unit, it was rather the social, cultural and economic exchange that made up its cosmopolitan character.

“Roman civilization was based on a culture that was based on the reworking of those cultures it came in contact with, in particular Greek, Hebraic, Near Eastern and African. (Delanty, 2009:25)

This he takes to constitute what makes the Roman Empire into a world empire, while at the same time making Europe into a self-reflective Europe, as its constituent elements came from outside it.

Finally Delanty arrives at Kant, whom he calls “the main figure in classical cosmopolitanism and a pivotal reference point for contemporary cosmopolitanism.” (Delanty, 2009:31) With knowledge and science as the pillars of humanity, the European Enlightenment created the consciousness that was to become the predecessor of the current new cosmopolitanism. It did so via the detour of the national states as necessary step, as cosmopolitanism seems contingent on nationalism (Delanty, 2009:43, 47).

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century cosmopolitanism made only a short reappearance, before being subsumed in the universalism of communism, the UN and the West respectively.

Contrasting this with Enrique Dussel’s ‘Europe, Modernity and Eurocentrism’ problematises the narrative given by Delanty in several ways: First, he criticizes the sequence *Hellenistic – Roman – Christian – Modern* as Eurocentric ideology stemming from German romanticism. It does not take into account the more complex interplay of cultures over that period of time, which would include the Arab Muslim world who preserved the ancient Greek texts for European Enlightenment and the maritime discoveries of Portugal and Spain that led to an expansion of European horizons.

Delanty tries to pre-empt a critique to that effect in that he stresses the importance of cultural transmission in the Hellenistic and Roman eras. But his account reduces the co-construction of knowledge and culture to a one-way path that fostered cosmopolitanism in Europe and not necessarily in the others<sup>1</sup>.

The second main point of Dussel is the positioning of the start of modernity in time, which also has implications for Delanty’s argument. According to Dussel modernity begins in 1492 with the conquest of America. It was in the encounter with the New World, the trade connections to Asia since the Portuguese opening of the seaway to India and the

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<sup>1</sup> Because, as Delanty notes in footnote no.1, self-consciousness is required for ‘real’ cosmopolitanism, conviviality of cultures alone does not suffice to fit this definition.

circumnavigation of the globe by Magellan that the form of thinking that might be called 'cosmopolitan' took shape.

The accounts that describe modernity as a product of European Enlightenment - precisely as Delanty does in ascribing the birth of modern thought to Immanuel Kant - Dussel denounces as Eurocentric. "for it indicates intra-European phenomena as the starting point of modernity and explains its later development without making recourse to anything outside of Europe. ... this is a provincial, regional view that ranges from Max Weber ... to Habermas." (Dussel, 2000:469-470) Weber (Delanty, 2009:45) and Habermas (Delanty, 2009:43) being exactly the references called upon by him.

The issue that arises from this juxtaposition of Delanty and Dussel is multi-layered: On the one hand a false ontology – Greece-Rome-Modernity– is reified, even if mitigated by alluding to outer influences.

Combining this with the emergence of modernity in European Enlightenment, the view of Europe occupying a special place in world history can be justified. – A special place that makes it uniquely apt for the new cosmopolitanism of today.

The elements of colonialism, imperialism and universalism that mark European expansionist theory and practice, the violence and racism that formed its history, are entirely left out in favour of a romanticising view that foregrounds the 'cosmopolitan'.

A focus on the universalism of rationality hides its inherent exclusivity. As for Kant reason is the domain of white European Christianity, it is always implied that the path to Enlightenment is in the footsteps of Europeans. While such ethnocentrism is not unique to Europe, it is its pretension of universalism in spite of it, which makes it so dangerous (Dussel, 2000:471).

To the post-colonial critique, which Delanty sums up in referring to Said's 'Orientalism' (Delanty, 2009:39), the reply is that German Enlightenment thinkers were genuinely interested in Asia and used it as a point for critique of Europe, and furthermore that Germany was anyway not an imperial power yet (Delanty, 2009:41).

This argument is obviously complicated if one takes Dussel's starting point of modernity in time and location: The philosophy of cosmopolitanism is then contingent on Spanish and Portuguese colonial conquests and thus shaped from the beginning by Europe's dominant position in international power relations. This puts the Orientalism of German philosophers and writers not before, but in the middle of modernity. So Orientalism is not a deliberate strategy of domination, but must be seen as the workings of an unconscious element of European superiority in the encounters with the colonial other.

As to the question of German colonial interests, Delanty seems unaware that Prussia, of

which Kant's Königsberg was an imperial city, had possessions in Africa and the Caribbean from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards until they were sold to the Dutch West India Company.

To sum up, Gerard Delanty is aware of the shortcomings in trying to apply a European concept to the rest of the world. He tries to save it by highlighting its interconnectedness with others outside of Europe and wants to separate it from the universalist aspects it contains.

But even in doing so, he perpetuates what Enrique Dussel calls the "myth of modernity": That European modernity is the only form of development possible. In that he constructs cosmopolitanism as something that is European in origin and not just valid, but also *important* for the whole world, Europe or 'The West' is once again functioning as a model for the rest of humanity and the very concept of cosmopolitanism becomes a new form of colonialism. As such it cannot be separated off, but must be seen as a part and continuation of modern European universalism.

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