The Antinomies of Cosmopolitan Reason

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The Antinomies of Cosmopolitan Reason

Cosmopolitanism serves a variety of purposes, and its objects vary widely. They are usually apprehended through the epistemological interests of the beholder, as if through the ever-changing perspective of a kaleidoscope. When one compares and contrasts the different uses of the term, the colors merge into a chaotic image. For the sake of clarity, one might say that controversies around the concept of cosmopolitanism today fall into two major categories. Reclaiming a noble literary tradition, some claim that cosmopolitanism is the best antidote against excessive demands for roots. Others, with more of a sense of social context, respond that advocates of this version of cosmopolitanism fall too easily into the trap of a barely disguised idealism. On one side, a universalistic calling and a taste for independence from social context are praised; on the other, an overly prescriptive moral attitude that does not match daily reality is blamed. This tension is due to the primary experience of the cosmopolitan, a comparative experience with a wide span, which brings to the fore “the polyphony of strivings.”

Today people are looking not simply to multiply interpretive perspectives and to disembed cultural areas from the scientific coherence traditionally associated with area studies (one place, one period). The comparativist fever that Friedrich Nietzsche invoked toward his own century, which discovered the unsuspected entanglement of human influences, has surged beyond the boundaries of classical erudition and seems to have infiltrated our attitudes to the point of determining much of our spontaneous conduct. More than ever, to be cosmopolitan requires feeling at ease amid diversity, as Richard Sennett put it regarding the public person.

Yet a critical question remains unexplored: how is it possible to subscribe to the spirit of cosmopolitanism, which suggests the definition of a common sensibility, without exiting the state of nature that seems to prevail among the disciplines dealing with cosmopolitanism? In order to answer this question, we must make explicit the underlying incompatibilities—the theses and antitheses—that separate the different fields of knowledge from one another and pull cosmopolitan reason in different directions. Today, cosmopolitanism sometimes means one thing and sometimes the opposite. I distinguish among three antinomies in contemporary debates: the antinomy of independence, the antinomy of solidarity, and the antinomy of circulation. The first applies to the condition of the “citizen of the world,” a citizen who is at times free-floating and liberated from any obligations, and at times rooted and connected to different cultures. The second concerns compassion, considered as the nec plus ultra of human empathy, but which is also criticized as artificial. The third sees cosmopolitanism either as a case study of the transnational movement of people or ideas, or as a constellation of highly specific problems.
In order not to get lost in an infinity of cosmopolitan themes, I have chosen to stylize the arguments exchanged in these debates by developing oppositional figures, as well as to dramatize these arguments as much as possible in order to identify the main sites of tension. I do not address specific authors, nor do I lay out their particular doctrines. The point is not to engage in a survey of opinion but rather to reconstruct the context in which some unnoticed conflicts abet misunderstanding and to identify the subterranean outline of antagonisms that mobilize very diverse references and thus span different historical periods. The objective is to map out the underground foundations of these controversies by making explicit what is implicit in the positions they mobilize. Inspired by the original judicial meaning of the Greek term *krasis*, this essay stages a series of trials between different arguments that attempts to get to the object of the disputes—not the themes that illustrate these disputes but the “differends” over which heterogeneous discursive blocs stumble. Not only is it impossible to be exhaustive in such a case but names may appear in unexpected places, while some questions may remain unanswered.

The essay also adopts a method that is critical in two distinct ways. First, it avoids making a mechanical distinction between what is supposedly modern and what is not. This typical distribution of roles too often confines the analytical gaze within strict disciplinary limits and breaks down selected arguments in ways that do not reflect their real use, which often ignores these limits. The first goal, then, is to avoid what Immanuel Kant called the conflict of the faculties. But the second is to avoid mixing up the spirit of the antitheses with any sort of anti-cosmopolitanism (a topic I leave aside here). Next, the goal is to clarify the unstated presumptions that accompany the more explicit argumentative logics of cosmopolitanism: these modes of reasoning are neither truly clear nor entirely obscure; they let stereotypes sit alongside logic, and they mobilize presumptions that, unlike Francis Bacon’s “idols of the tribe,” are more like floating and sometimes contradictory meanings that have taken over the collective imaginary. The goal, in sum, is to be attentive to certain indirect forms of the social. Once this judicial scene is set and a solution to the antinomies of cosmopolitan reason is outlined, I will shift perspectives. Instead of elaborating a critique of cosmopolitan discourse, I will adopt the perspective of the individual cosmopolitan in order to fine-tune this critique and to develop a more precise definition of cosmopolitanism.

**Independence: The First Antinomy**

The thesis in this antinomy is that the citizen of the world is free of all connections because he does not depend on any sovereignty and does not submit to any principle of power. In principle, this thesis is indifferent to sociological descriptions of the individual. It does not stipulate the content of a cosmopolitan identity, and it does not adjudicate the entitlement of social actors to be called cosmopolitans. Rather, it refers to an essential gesture or a defining attitude; it designates a choice of direction, or a decision over a way of life: in that sense, it is inseparable from a rhetoric of declaration or assertion. It applies to any individuals who affirm that they live as citizens of the world.

This proclamation amounts to a defense of one’s positive freedom. The cosmopolitan is not content with valuing the absence of coercion, as in Isaiah Berlin’s
conception of negative liberty. Rather, he wants to enjoy his capacity for action above all else. What he wants most, it seems, is not to be bothered by others in his activities, to be his own master and not to depend on anyone other than himself. Before turning to a criticism of the alienating influence of institutionalized codes, this thesis grounds cosmopolitanism in a declaration of independence. Before suggesting the possibility of liberation, it points toward a more basic self-affirmation.

This individualism based on independence goes hand in hand with a praise of displacement. The citizen of the world proclaims his liberty vis-à-vis political authorities, economic necessities, social conventions, and even cultural traditions in order to enjoy more fully the diversity of the world. Traveling is thus a virtuous activity in at least two ways: it allows the cosmopolitan to discover aspects of human diversity that he did not know existed. It also enables him to perceive, beyond the dullness of everyday life, what his habits prevented him from seeing. Travel illuminates the dark corners of the mind; it awakens numbed senses and facilitates the reading of the great book of the world. This is what is presupposed: the more the cosmopolitan abides by the national duties that are incumbent upon the citizen, the more he risks falling asleep again; the more he concerns himself with rank and status, the less he is able to tread the roads of the world. But as long as he is master of himself, the cosmopolitan is able to adapt to the fluctuating circumstances of a universe in perpetual motion.

The citizen of the world is not attached to a place by birth. He owes nothing to his origins and sometimes goes as far as trying to erase the traces of his provenance. Freed from all traditions, his imagination can roam more easily. But one must take care not to overlook three points.

First, nothing guarantees that movement can be a source of unconditional happiness. The cosmopolitan may well illustrate the fact that our unhappiness does not derive from idleness but from the tactics we deploy in order to escape immobility—this is indeed the meaning that Pascal gives to distraction. If we continuously invent bad remedies for avoiding confrontation with ourselves, then it is better to accept that our nature benefits from a frequent change of place, whereby we increase our chances to feel at ease everywhere. By refusing to be constrained by local duties, we keep at bay the melancholy that could result from too little movement.

Second, the celebration of wandering can sometimes conceal a posture of defiance toward mankind. Navigating the wide world does not necessarily diminish the tyranny of prejudice, and the thesis does not exculpate cosmopolitanism from the presumption of misanthropy. Proclaiming his positive freedom, the cosmopolitan libertine actively points out what makes each individual nation ridiculous. Perpetually contemplating the spectacle of the world, he can only study man superficially, for any further knowledge of mankind would make him aware of its many vices and push him toward indifference. Travel can thus confirm what an instinctive suspicion cannot always express.

Finally, the cosmopolitan rarely adheres to the image of a chaotic universe. Rather, he locates his desire for latitude within an orderly world. The individual free from any attachment often sees the cosmos in a very specific way: if living here or there makes no difference when one is a citizen of the world, it is because the world is the sole source of rules and is therefore the true homeland.
The notion of a cosmopolitan world is also an argument justifying social criticism. When Diogenes of Sinope asked Alexander the Great to move so that he could benefit from the sunlight, he was suggesting to the prince that the world was not something that conquest could master and that it was rather paradoxical to find pleasure in the constant discovery of places not yet forced into submission, since it could only prove frustrating. What Alexander took from this impromptu encounter was a profound jealousy toward this foreign agitator, who despite being deprived of rights could nonetheless find contentment in so little. In this primal scene of the antinomy of independence, two worldly practices oppose each other: on the one hand, that of Alexander, who hopes to gather all the peoples of the world into a single state; and on the other hand, that of Diogenes, who would rather alert humanity to the (lack of) consequences of its choices. A posture of conquering domination is confronted by an attitude of admonition. The thesis, which combines the longing for independence with the criticism of power, relies on the second practice, and its marginality is often the price to pay for its provocative nature. The program of the rights of the mind, a power beyond all powers, is grounded in this practice. Centuries later, in an era in which individual reason substituted for the rule of nature, Friedrich Schiller confided to his friend F. H. Jacobi that if the bodily envelope recalls for us all our first belonging, it is the duty of anyone who desires to transcend prejudice and to avoid dependence on any prince to cultivate himself so as to suppress his affiliations to a people, time, or place in particular. Though the body, we are “citizens of our time” (Bürger unserer Zeit), and through the mind we become free and “contemporaries of all times” (Zeitgenossen aller Zeiten).

The antithesis in the first antinomy contends that the citizen of the world is far from free from all connections because he experiences the need for belonging. In contrast to the thesis, the antithesis is built upon the desire to paint the sociological portrait of the cosmopolitan, and it is guided by several questions focusing on the individual: who are we talking about when we evoke cosmopolitanism as a quality? Do we have in mind exiles, expatriates, refugees, globalized elites, or tourists? What does being cosmopolitan mean in an age in which the everyday consequences of globalization overlap with the bureaucratic agendas of global governance? Should we dub the migrant who still remembers his point of origin but is no longer able to imagine a destination a “cosmopolitan”?

The antithesis illustrates an important aspect of contemporary societies: while we increasingly circulate, whether deliberately or against our will, we try to recreate familiar contexts of socialization wherever we go. Increasingly, individuals are uprooted only to find new roots elsewhere. The majority of those who cross borders end up locating their lives within the broader context of a world whose limits are ill defined. “Rooted cosmopolitanism” thus goes hand in hand with a feeling of “ethical glocalism.” As it is featured in the antithesis, the world, though not a space of independence, is not a useless fiction either: it provides the master framework of the “polygamous” and exponentially responsible relationship that the cosmopolitan has with both space and cultures. A “cultural omnivore,” the cosmopolitan has both “roots and wings.” Yet this dynamic is far from being univocal. Proclaiming oneself a citizen of the world is not enough to develop a cosmopolitan way of life. The
antithesis refutes the declarative rhetoric that illustrates the thesis. First, claiming that one possesses this or that quality does not necessarily mean that such a quality is socially acknowledged. Cosmopolitanism is not so much about words as it is about actions situated within the overall logic of differentiated and reciprocal behaviors located within social contexts. The staging of the self is less a matter of words than a matter of attitudes. Second, the capacity to choose a lifestyle based on a freedom of circulation that expresses the absence of any ties does not necessarily enable one to decipher the entire range of cosmopolitan situations. Circulation is not a valid interpretive lens for understanding globalization. One can be relatively sedentary and yet develop a lifestyle that reflects the constant changes of scale characteristic of modern societies. In this case, therefore, the opposition between fluidity and fixity turns out to be deprived of any sociological value.

The antithesis focuses on the ways in which individuals try to freeze the stream of interactions and establish limits within the flux of globalization. Being a citizen of the world cannot mean that one tries to evade at all costs the bonds that places offer, and that one feels deprived of the social world that provides civic rights. For migrants, integration within a new culture presupposes the safeguard of a modicum of a nation-state. If they are not associated, through voting rights or social security, to national responsibilities, they will lose or fail to obtain the fundamental rights that entitle them to remain in the country. The desire to “localize” cosmopolitanism thus requires giving only so much credence to the “nomadic” metaphor. In the antithesis, therefore, nomadism is no longer a catchword: either it disguises a lack of scientific precision, or it reveals the excess of an uncontrolled theorization. Freedom of movement does not grant any certificate of cosmopolitanism.

The antithesis places the accent on citizenship and its improvement in order to incorporate new populations. Even if he lives beyond borders, the cosmopolitan needs rights that are still largely attached to being within borders when he arrives in an unknown country. Instead of being a citizen of nowhere who feels at home everywhere, he frequently experiences the travails of the foreigner in search of rights and duties. His appetite for belonging, or even roots, distinguishes him from his contemporary, the tourist. The notion of an individual bearing civil rights, which encourages the quest for belonging, is in the antithesis the heart of the cosmopolitan attitude. While it is true that tourists also have some rights, they are often weaker in content. While cosmopolitanism invites each person to argue on behalf of citizenship and the equal dignity of individuals in all states under the sway of globalization, whether they are postcolonial states or not, tourism tends to take these as given, as if everyone enjoyed them already. The tourist is interested in other rights, notably those to consume goods or to use various technologies. The criticism of tourism is in any case rooted in the impression that a short holiday someplace could never suffice to demonstrate a real interest in otherness, when it is in fact the issue of otherness that should redefine our vision of an ordered world.

More generally, the set of affiliations referred to under the antithesis differs from the one associated with the thesis. As it is defined in the antithesis, cosmopolitanism sees the world as a more layered system of affiliations. It goes with the core intuition of Roman stoicism and rejects the tension between the jus gentium and natural law
that allowed the Cynics to keep open a space for social criticism. The overlap between the *polis* and the *cosmos*—or the law of peoples and natural law—has two consequences. On the one hand, the thesis is now curtailed, since serving the “world city” (*cosmopolis*) now requires serving some “homeland” (*patria*), as opposed to the Cynic desire for a direct and exclusive relation to the whole cosmos. On the other hand, the antithesis offers the means to alter the experience of borders from the perspective of the populations from places that were once colonized.

Through the staging of the kind of alterity that the postcolonial aftermath illustrates, the antithesis raises anew the questions of national construction, cultural pluralism, exile, multiple belongings, and the possible demand for the establishment or restoration of roots. It pays particular attention to the forms of interdependence and transnational circulation; new angles from which to criticize power appear, while solitude is no longer of the same kind. The solitary cosmopolitan accepting the risk involved in his unsettling meditations is now replaced by groups of non-governmental workers who act on behalf of displaced populations and victims of natural catastrophe, or by people of all countries who now fight more spontaneously against modern conditions of life and the diffuse threat of a uniform world. The troublemaking philosopher from the ancient school of the Cynics is no longer the paradigm here, but rather the transnational migrant or the anonymous and “indignant” protestor of globalized society.

**Solidarity: The Second Antinomy**

The thesis of the next antinomy states that compassion is the cosmopolitan emotion par excellence, since it bears witness, at a distance, to the unity of mankind through solidarity. The thesis is developed within the framework of a moral injunction that consists in identifying the sites of transnational ills. Compassion requires a modicum of geographic sensitivity, sometimes even the professional fiber of a cartographer, when the spaces of affliction are kept secret and are difficult to pinpoint, as in the case of political regimes that practice torture. The task, then, is to circumscribe and make visible the territories of pain, in order to contribute to its prevention. But preventing suffering does not depend on individual action: it succeeds by relying on international regulations and on the feeling of the existence of a universal community. This community can turn out to be so strongly integrated that the “violation[s] of rights in one part of the world [will be] felt everywhere.” In such cases, compassion sees the world as a vast echo chamber. It presupposes that human sensitivity is the sole medium through which the reverberations of remote suffering can be heard. Compassion demands that each and every one see the world as a structure of resonance, where no tears remain without a response for too long.

The certainty that the world is made of suffering presupposes an interpretation of the evolution of psychological structures. This interpretation is implicitly based on the assumption that modern societies, as they have undergone a process of centralization, have simultaneously modified emotional behaviors. By internalizing the norms of self-control, the individual has been able to master his aggressiveness and repress the pleasure he may have felt by witnessing cruelty. Contemporary compassion universalizes the subjective effects of the monopolization of violence by
the modern state and extends them to mankind as a whole. But it not only suggests
that the more stable social institutions are, the more individuals may be able to refine
their behavior; it also displaces the moral consequences of such rationalization into a
space of international practices. Compassion not only generalizes the acquired reflex
of pacification; it objectifies it, and in so doing it subordinates the human penchant
to take emotional distance to two imperatives: on the one hand, it must make
everyone alert to the interdependent forms of unjustifiable violence, and on the other
hand, it should contribute to the emergence of a collective spirit of vigilance.

From an ethical point of view, compassion is the sentiment of impartiality. In a
world characterized by inequality, compassion provides the foundation of universal
justice and legitimates the willingness to act of an entity situated beyond all frontiers.
Of course, it requires that suffering be territorialized, so as to know where to apply its
affective compass. All the same, it transforms the geography of emotions into some-
thing accidental. To the extent that cosmopolitan belonging attaches to the human
race as a whole, neither distance nor proximity is helpful in setting the moral bound-
aries of the emotions. If some choose to care more for those who are closer, this is still
justified by the standard of a universal humanity. Compassion is governed by the
theme of an organic and originary unity of humankind. It reminds those who expe-
rience it that humans are made to respect their own kind, including when they become
enemies. The cosmopolitan reaction to suffering is not supposed to take account of
geographic distance, and its ethic requires an equal consideration of the various forms
of suffering.

The moral cosmopolitanism of compassion nevertheless depends on two proposi-
tions that personalize impartiality and, in a sort of boomerang effect, broaden the
social impact of emotions. One maxim stems from Roman Stoicism: do not treat
anyone as a foreigner who would then fall outside the circle of our concern. The other
bears the traces of a long tradition that encourages the adoption of the perspective of
the other, thanks to the power of the imagination, whether through sympathy or
empathy. Compassion requires that everyone enter fictively into the mind of the other
in order to interpret his or her actions. This postulate implies the recognition that
emotions in general involve value judgments. Compassion of this sort is related to a
threelfold judgment. First, one must deem that the situation is serious, that somebody
is in danger, and that he or she cannot be abandoned to his or her fate. Then, one
must speculate that this situation is not normal, even that it is unjust, since that
person does not deserve the suffering that is inflicted upon him or her. Finally, one
should ask whether what this person is currently going through could not eventually
happen to oneself.

In order to focus the attention, suffering must carry a meaning that is open to
both objective and subjective perspectives: it must be so blatantly obvious that I
cannot help relating it to my intimate life. This “eudaemonistic” aspect of compassion
explains why we cannot stand the sight of suffering, and it justifies the power of
emotion across any given distance. The traditional stance expressed as “pity” thus
takes different forms: it partakes in a rhetoric of denunciation and indignation, it
serves as a tool of aesthetic valorization, or it shows attitudes of excessive tenderness.
It also enlists the services of the sentiments of shame and guilt, which contribute, all
things being equal, to align the structures of personality with social norms. Finally, the eudaemonistic element distinguishes between empathy and sympathy only to privilege the former. While sympathy seems to stop at the outer limits of inter-individual relationships, empathy refers to a more internalized understanding that makes identification possible. Whatever the shape of its general grammar, compassion validates the principle of the personalization of impartiality. Whenever a tragic event takes place, the compassionate individual realizes the extent to which the moral affects of the deceased have contributed to shaping her own existence.

The antithesis in the second antinomy holds that compassion is not the cosmopolitan emotion par excellence, for its frailty reveals what it is the daydream of a unity of humankind based on solidarity. The antithesis refutes the premises of the thesis, in which it discerns a version of compassion that overlooks its constitutive ambivalence. It tries to solve the following puzzle: why is it that distance, whether spatial or chronological, always blunts emotions? Compassion is an ephemeral emotion, and its motivations never survive distance. They exhaust themselves naturally. In the context of terrorist attacks, the instinctive solidarity of targeted populations develops following a standard sequence: first, an initial stage of shock, during which all express their emotions independently; later, moments of ritualized consolidation followed by periods of collective hysteria; and, finally, a gradual decline of attention. Obviously, there is no need to try to experience compassion oneself in order to guess at its fragility. In spite of its official altruism, the sentiment of generosity turns out be the casualty of expectable disappointment. It is the irreversibility of time itself that makes emotions so volatile. Like all things destined not to last, compassion cancels itself out on its own.

The antithesis explains the volatility of compassion in two other ways. On the one hand, compassion is haunted by the temptation to convert the suffering of others into a secret and egotistical opportunity for self-love. Compassion compensates for the relief felt when one avoids pain, or it even becomes a sort of condign enjoyment for those dispensing aid. Moral cosmopolitanism does not stand up to the skeptical criticism that what lies behind altruism is personal satisfaction, and that caring is simply another mirror for vanity. According to the antithesis, the ancient desire for the tranquility and even the pleasure that an individual experiences from the coast as he spies a shipwreck from afar has not disappeared in modern societies. On the other hand, compassion shelters the negative ideal of a being over whom the imperative of coherence has no sway, one free to shoulder fictive relationships. When history accelerates, the cycles of our reactions become shorter and the physiognomy of our emotions more indecisive. The objects of narcissistic motivation multiply. Today even more than yesterday, compassion is not up to the task of providing action-guiding norms. To the extent that the power of its volatile inclinations increases with the dictatorship of emergency, it is increasingly incapable of expressing a disinterested obligation. Compassion cannot explain why the moral conscience of an individual is concerned with a given tragic event and not with another one. It does not enable individuals to behave as cosmopolitans and to contribute in a systematic fashion to correcting the injustices caused by globalization. At best, the invocation of a common humanity through eudaemonistic charity can only give rise to a form of
“thin” cosmopolitanism that carries little constraint. To the extent that it cannot be universalized, compassion generates no consistent obligation, or “thick” cosmopolitanism.

The antithesis casts doubt on whether globalization can foster cosmopolitan attitudes relayed through the media. When it introduces suffering into households, nothing guarantees that a higher visibility of distant suffering will trigger action, and for a simple reason: compassion is not indifferent to geography. On the contrary, from Francis Hutcheson to Adam Smith, the representatives of the Scottish tradition of moral philosophy have pointed out that compassion is stronger when the suffering is close. The antithesis, however, does not imply that human relationships are characteristically cool and that the limits of solidarity are those of the community or of the nation. Rather, it posits that living somewhere (as opposed to elsewhere) always makes a difference, and that the citizen of the world is never a citizen of nowhere. The dream of a compassionate unity of humankind is a source of moral illusions. The greatest danger is to consider social life as a romance in which the twin wishes of an emotional form of intersubjectivity and an unconditional sincerity would transform all human relations into intimate ones. Driven by the ideal of universal brotherhood, compassion is deprived of political value. It does not prevent humankind from contradicting itself, nor from engaging in war or genocide. Its apolitical character follows from a model of fusion. Compassion absorbs the individual into a representation of suffering; unfit for dialogue, it is diametrically opposed to speech. Yet only speech strengthens the public sphere by shielding it from the making of distinctions between human beings. Without the interstitial spaces created by speech (which then can be assimilated to an action), nobody would be in a position to communicate thoughts and feelings.

Unable to take the concrete form of an argument, compassion does not succeed in protesting against the pain of the other, for it ultimately gets the distance wrong. While it frequently directs its gaze far away, it nevertheless neglects the true distance, that of the nearby, which allows individuals to recognize one another in the interstices of speech. In order to make sure that the equilibrium of distance and proximity through which a common world is established does not dissolve into silence, it is preferable to cultivate emotions that make people talkative.

Circulation: The Third Antinomy

According to the thesis of the last antinomy, cosmopolitanism is a form of transnationalism in which the framework of social experience has become similar. This thesis initially appeared within postcolonial criticisms of “Eurocentrism.” Cosmopolitanism was perceived as the self-conception of what turned out to be an elite tradition narrowly circumscribed to a single continent whose aspirations were inseparable from colonialism. The historical process that juxtaposed a progressive intellectual project and a catalog of illegitimate episodes expresses the ambivalence of the European triumphalism of the Enlightenment. While the notion of a universal human reason was clearly contradicted by its local origins, it was also falsified by the gap between the proclamation of democratic values and the realities of slave raids (not to mention other crimes).
Cultivated and oriented toward the objective of world peace while maintaining the attachment of a homeland (following the Stoic tradition), the cosmopolitan spirit was also supposed to lose the characteristics of its rapacious evil twin. Despite multiple attempts, efforts to conceptualize world government have never succeeded in deterring militarism, nor in preventing the tragedies of history. This failure reveals the existence of a relationship of antagonistic solidarity between cosmopolitanism and nationalism. Postcolonial studies, then, seeks to produce empty signifiers. In order to break with the hegemony of the European legacy, it often discards national histories and places emphasis on the indeterminacy of the concept of cosmopolitanism. It advocates against defining the latter too specifically, so that this may become a vehicle for other histories. This desire for floating signifiers is not unlike the precautions that an explorer would take in order not to stop twice in the same port of call. The discovery of *terrae incognitae* requires one to proceed outside the beaten tracks, to put away the maps already drawn, and to abandon all known bearings. The bracketing-out of European references makes it possible to discern cosmopolitanisms that were absent from the common atlas.

The transnational approach aims to generate a more complex cartography of cosmopolitanism and of its contradictions. No doubt it also aims to register the indigenous pulse of other world regions, to collect the signs left by the circulation of people, ideas, or practices that have given birth to different cultures. It makes visible the various circuits of human interactions, along with the sometimes unexpected encounters they have made possible. It shares the imperative of substituting a plurality of perspectives (multiple cosmopolitanisms) for an exclusive vision (cosmopolitanism). Rather than the great narrative of reason, it prefers the small narratives dispersed around the globe. But the classical topos of the “provincialization” of Europe is echoed today by the indispensable transnational “deprovincialization” of the world. When it is generalized, the decentered gaze requires a universe of multiple rich signifiers, including old ones. It requires an even attention to all traditions, and it calls for examining as well the pathways through which the nationalistic disposition is disseminated in the world with the cultural lexicon of civilization. One no longer seeks to eradicate embarrassing national histories; rather, they are projected beyond their own boundaries, onto a nuanced map of global circulations.

The construction of transnational spaces proceeds along variable scales—local, national, international, global. Generally, the transnational perspective increases the anthropological tropism of cosmopolitanism, which calls for transgressing the arbitrariness of borders, and it strives to overcome the elitist distinction among social classes between cultivated “cosmopolitans” and less literate “locals,” a pattern that belongs to the national scene. One can then develop an interest for the practices of migrants straddling two states, who find in the mechanisms of reciprocity, exchange, and solidarity the resources allowing them to avoid both assimilation and return. One can focus on a main event, such as World War I, and show the various perceptions of French society among the Indian soldiers at the front who developed ties to the local population living behind the lines.

Whatever the discipline, the transnational approach focuses less on the traditional boundaries of events or situations than on the forms of practical knowledge in them.
that were a priori excluded from view. It diminishes the importance of regimes and laws, dates or treaties, and increases that of the frameworks of thought or action, as well as the intimate lines of influence set up by parallel worlds of circulation. It privileges the unexpected continuities across conventionally drawn ruptures. Several epistemological demands have to be respected: one must break down the preconstituted monolith (East versus West, for example) into fragments; diversify the notion of regional influence; bring down the walls of contingent asymmetries (center versus periphery, local versus global, cosmopolitan settler versus vernacular); substitute the historicized effect of contacts between individuals for ideas previously regarded as having spread of their own accord; and discover behind the visible faces of exchange the less prominent go-betweens who make sociability possible.

Stated in this way, the thesis leads to at least several consequences. First of all, the appearance of unknown places refutes the opinion that globalization has compressed our perception of the world or even that it has objectively reduced the space for travel. The emergence of a polycentric cartography expands our emotional attachment to the place in which we live. This new cartography can even fortify the imagination of our home’s future riches on the basis of a new appreciation of its past treasures. Next, the historicization of other parts of the world allows for a new reading of European history with corrected vision. The distancing of an excessively present heritage renews the gaze one places on it. The decolonization of the European imaginary makes it possible to examine old paradigms in a new way, among them that of empire itself. Further, the transnational approach contributes to the decompartmentalization of the disciplines. It leads to social analyses outside national structures. It insists, for example, that the perimeter of social history can (and must) be enlarged to incorporate global “zones of interaction.”33 Finally, individuals develop cosmopolitan visions of their own existence from the vantage points of the places they visit, thus exercising a nomadic freedom. The development of their identities keeps pace with the succession of episodes illustrating the repertoire of their social experiences. Once immersed in the analysis of circulations, cosmopolitanism designates the individual bricolages that reflect various encounters and reshape everyday life. It thus blends into the transnational approach, of which it becomes a mere expression at many levels. Nothing really distinguishes the one from the other.

The antithesis of the last antinomy posits that cosmopolitanism and transnationalism must be distinguished because the criteria shaping their points of view are various. The antithesis takes its cue from one specific aspect of the transnational approach. It rejects the idea that the concept of “society” is equivalent to the notion of “mobility,” as suggested by John Urry.34 The antithesis assumes that the latter term may capture contemporary and historical phenomena more adequately than the former. Nevertheless, it advocates maintaining a methodological distinction between descriptive and evaluative dimensions. One can observe that an increasing number of individuals move across borders, become familiar with more than one culture, and have a historicized knowledge of their provenance, thus fostering the constitution of a transnational ethos. And yet it is difficult to avoid the critical question that weighs on the cosmopolitan mind: is transnational mobility synonymous with openness? Any tentative answer must dispense with the prototypical image of the
cosmopolitan. If what distinguishes the cosmopolitan is his inclusive disposition, he is not, by nature, a cultivated spirit; any social actor solves with the tools he has at his disposal the conjunctural dialectic between values he sees as universal and commitments that seem to be situated. In a transnational world, cosmopolitanism cannot be understood exclusively in terms of social class; it designates first and foremost a set of actions and individual dispositions.\textsuperscript{35}

The antithesis states that the proliferation of transnational exchanges does not necessarily increase the ratio of cosmopolitan attitudes. Strictly speaking, the cosmopolitanization of individual lives does not include the motivations that bring an individual to act like a cosmopolitan. Double citizenship indicates a transnational way of life; the daily tasting of a foreign cuisine, the use of means of transport that open access to the antipodes, communications that are not constrained by time and space: all these factors bear witness to our capacity to standardize some effects of globalization. If so, cosmopolitanization seems no different from transnationalization. And yet the logics of attachment to a territory, a culture, or a community differ in intensity; as a result, it is not possible to consider all transnational individuals as cosmopolitans. The existence of a continuum between individuals reveals attitudes that can be variable. Depending on the scale taken into consideration (global, national, intimate), choices enter into combinations, and the various ways of reacting to the incidence of globalization, whether defensive or inclusive, reflect specific individual dispositions. This is why a transnational society does not necessarily resemble a cosmopolitan society (and it is possible to give many examples of transnational forms of nationalism). At the conceptual level, the constitution of a cosmopolitan point of view remains distinct from transnational experiences.\textsuperscript{36}

The factors of mobility, deracination, and creolization of everyday life do play a role in cosmopolitanism, but nevertheless without becoming dominant elements. Thus the cosmopolitan perspective can also take shape in another way, for instance in reaction to a lack of generosity in the awarding of rights to foreigners. The antithesis places immigration at the center of political reflection. It insists that hospitality requires a synthetic conception of justice that spells out the criteria of the right of migration in general (rights of citizenship or permanent residency as well as entry and exit). The challenge is to avoid granting this juridical panoply only to the members of particular networks of transnational activity—churches, social movements, and so on. A cosmopolitan society does not adapt its objectives based on the claims of groups of individuals.

From this perspective, it is always possible to affirm that a general ethic of hospitality extends beyond matters of immigration and cross-border exchange, just as it is also necessary to connect group claims to the contextual demands of an egalitarian politics of access to rights.\textsuperscript{37} On this basis, the premise of a common humanity becomes legitimate again; it still has a universalistic meaning but is now situated with respect to justice. A society vastly increases its chances of reducing its spaces of desolation if a conception of justice frames relationships of conviviality and compassion. When global justice fails to offer a constitutional minimum of cross-border hospitality, migrants experience specific sorts of distress. Cosmopolitan studies then traces the byways of the anxiety that grips transnational lives situated outside legal spaces.
Nostalgia is a typical pathology, one married to conditions of displacement (for the expatriate, exile, or refugee). It plunges individuals into the travails of memory. It testifies to how difficult it is to maintain a sense of identity when the order of the familiar world collapses or merely becomes distant.\(^3^8\)

That a form of distress is revealed at the heart of cosmopolitanism is, indeed, another notion on which the antithesis lays emphasis. The experience of instability always calls for the definition of a point of view. One can rediscover a parallel equation, with similar methodological implications, in World War I and its aftermath. At times, a discourse of European unity emerged within a national framework characterized by the rise of expansionist and hegemonic policies, with the result that the militant cosmopolitanism of some was constantly deflected and tarnished by the radical transnational nationalism of others.\(^3^9\) At other times, the representatives of a “cultural cosmopolitanism” (such as Rabindranath Tagore) were aware that the consequences of World War I went far beyond the predictable outcomes of decolonization and national independence. They wandered through the world to collect the universalizable ingredients of different cultures and oppose the “traditionalists,” who also cultivated transnational exchanges, by denying that civilizations had an essence or by rejecting the more extreme critiques of the Western legacy.\(^4^0\) Here transnational circulations set the stage for dramatic awareness of the sudden dissolution of a world and for the simultaneous rise of unprecedented social ties.

One can choose to confine this alchemy within the limits of a territorialized space (Europe), to make it dependent on the role played therein by one nation (Germany), and therefore independent from global influences. When the task is to rebuild a common world upon the ruins of a luminous memory, it is also possible to show that innovative positions become entangled with confused representations of society. Ultimately, it is the political dimension of the decision in favor of a certain kind of society that distinguishes (for the observer) the development of a cosmopolitan perspective from a series of transnational experiences—or which, on the contrary (for the participant), blends them together. Instead of the primordial equation of an organic nation and a tradition written in stone, the cosmopolitan imagination elaborates the forms taken by transnational cooperation. One does not need to be highly literate in order to experience such dilemmas. Any migrant experiences the need for the old, the fear of the new, and the desire for a future.

**A Brief Attempt to Resolve the Antinomies**

The point is not to choose among the theses or the antitheses, and this is not the purpose of the method developed here. The antinomies are articulated as a series of stylized oppositions that highlight the underlying assumptions, and their staging aims to bring into focus the terms that implicitly govern a number of controversies over cosmopolitanism. But critique also has the virtue of “revealing,” as when one processes photographic film, for the antinomies ultimately reveal a common denominator in the equation of independence, solidarity, and circulation. Let us review it.

The thread of the first antinomy is provided by the motif of *independence*. The reflection on nomadic displacement is lived and judged as a possible alternative to belonging as a rule of identity. It concerns the manner of life that seems the most
appropriate to the desire to establish a direct connection between the self and the cosmos, without the intermediation of any homeland. When this dream of independence is criticized, it is to connect the various forms of dependence and to reinscribe the individual in the center of a scene of social and civic affiliation. The figure of the involuntary migrant contradicts the fiction of a citizen of the world liberated from all law and all duty. In a society, individuals are part of several collectives. But more than any other, perhaps, the migrant depends on a multitude of spheres of action. He must relate the rule of differentiation that characterizes modern societies to his own existence, shot through as it is by contingency. He must find the correct relationship between the normative criteria of the common culture of a given society and the complex system of loyalties that he has forged in the course of his peregrinations.

Meanwhile, solidarity lies at the heart of the second antinomy. From this perspective, the theme of the individual way of life is integrated into a reflection on the common sense of humanity. Either one imagines that the individual, through his emotions, represents the link to the species of which he is a member. In that case, compassion plays a central role in the circle of human sympathy. It is supposed to enlarge that sympathy by abolishing the illusion of distance, and to consolidate it by developing the sense of collective responsibility. Or else one insists that compassion struggles to surmount its egotistical motivations and that individuals turn out to be contemplating themselves in the mirror that compassion directs their way. In this case, compassion is shown to offer no satisfactory response to the debate on the nature of cosmopolitan obligation. In order to define common sense, a vision of moral obligation and social justice is contrasted with the feeling of charity, and a belief in equality replaces the doctrine of an empathetic humanity.

The third antinomy rests on the notion of circulation. It has to do with how much negotiation can take place between social experiences and the way they are perceived. Less stringent than the first two, the third antinomy does not oppose the description of transnational exchanges and the composition of a cosmopolitan conscience. Rather, it relates the general knowledge about circulations to particular forms of subjectivation that I associate, in this essay, with the “point of view.” Cosmopolitanism and transnationalism differ by the way in which they distribute these elements hierarchically. At times, the point of view is internal to the movement and takes shape within its trajectory. At other times, the mobility is a coordinate of the point of view and provides the backdrop to a wary reflexivity looking for norms. The antinomy of circulation ends up raising the question of the level at which a cosmopolitan subjectivity could be defined.

The three antinomies thus coalesce into an interrogation about the ways to be oneself and to conduct one’s life in a society mostly made up of close or remote individuals we do not know. By way of conclusion, we must briefly focus on this argument, since it brings us back to the social actor and allows us to specify the meaning of this critique. To cut to the chase, I would say that cosmopolitanism relates the different ways to be oneself to a frustrated desire for sociability. One of the assumptions here is that a majority of “citizens of the world” experience problems typical of the “approach situation,” that is, when an individual joins a community, tries to secure acceptance, and experiences inhospitable reactions. As an ideational
assemblage, cosmopolitanism is oriented to the dream of a coincidence of the self with others, as well as to a normative ideal of transparent relationships. As a mosaic of attitudes and emotions, it is nevertheless corroded by the awareness of a discrepancy between the self and the world, and by the sentiment of social misalignment and illusory independence.

The increasing number of circulation networks, of social experiences of the betwixt and between, and of transitional conjunctures between different moral worlds contributes to destabilizing the capacity to remain confident about oneself when confronted with perpetual movement. It weakens the feeling of security that enables individuals to participate in the public space without being gripped by anxiety. Today, very few citizens of the world manage to avoid these states of uncertainty and the experience of a gap in which exhaustion finds room to take hold. Being a stranger to oneself may have become the defining trait of our lives and a permanent feature of our world, to the extent that the traditional borders defining familiarity and intimacy may have collapsed.\textsuperscript{42} In that sense, a cosmopolitan society would resemble a society of strangers in which the feeling of an irreducible discrepancy between the self and the world would be generalized—so long as we immediately add that this society simultaneously seeks to define criteria for diminishing this discrepancy, in particular in terms of rights.

The fact that people are strangers to themselves constrains individuals to find the best equilibrium between a point of view and social experiences, between a conceptual grid and a sequence of practices. More and more, the individual must reconcile the world that he understands with the world in which he acts. The wager is at once anthropological and hermeneutic. It relates to a form of anthropology because cosmopolitanism is neither a matter of theory nor simply a practice but instead aims for a “pragmatic” knowledge of the ways in which individuals “participate in [the] play” of the world, equipped with their points of view.\textsuperscript{43} The wager amounts to a hermeneutical gesture, too, since none of us possesses the vision of the whole which would allow us to orient ourselves a priori in the normative circumstances of a foreign culture.

All orientation is first of all provisional. Details are selected that one then uses to connect oneself to a presumed totality of significance, and then one looks again for new elements that might confirm the initial attempts at holistic interpretation. The citizen of the world spends almost all of his time managing his entries into and exits from the world, anticipating the meaning of his actions in the eyes of others, and being simultaneously inside and outside the social game. Common sense is built and trained in view of this experimental circularity between the knowledge of a system of norms and the practices of the world. Envisaging cosmopolitanism from a pragmatic point of view, one might offer the means to relativize the contrast between the theoretical and the practical. By concentrating on the practices of the world and how social actors themselves lend their own interpretations to them, one might lessen the now habitual opposition between the so-called cosmopolitanism from above and cosmopolitanism from below. In that case one would rediscover the two general roles of the critical method mentioned initially, now applied to the universe of discourse. At the beginning of this essay, I argued that both recommend dispensing with the struggles between jurisdictions as well as contests of the faculties in order to direct attention to the contradictory forms of judgment awaiting the resolution of their tensions.
From another angle, analysis of social attitudes shows that the question of judgment very much occupies the heart of the criticism. One seeks then to define the tactics deployed by the individual in the cosmopolitan situation and to grasp the strategies that permit him to exit the labyrinth with which the antinomies confront him. To be cosmopolitan is also to make a judgment in a life context that is not familiar and to consider the reflexive nature of this judgment. It is to attempt to find a place in a foreign world by means of judgment. In order to structure his actions, and without always having to deploy a corresponding discourse, the cosmopolitan rehabilitates the critical function of the situated judgment. In his view, judgment should operate as a life compass and allow him to decipher the differential relationship that ties him to the world—a relationship that is sometimes polemical and sometimes contemplative but never neutral. When he approaches an unknown social environment, the cosmopolitan does not immediately assimilate what is dissimilar; rather, he values difference wherever he finds it, in order to apply it to the understanding of the world and of himself.

There is a simple explanation for this: for the cosmopolitan, social existence rarely takes the form of contracts premised on identities. Often forced to start afresh, he does not rely on the fiction of a preconstituted society that confirms its existence through the narrative of its own origins, as in the tradition of the social contract. For the cosmopolitan, society is built upon both the experience of estrangement and the absence of any preestablished harmony between individuals and the world. Here critique is not the rationalized substitute for a normative universe covered by a veil of illusions, just as it is not limited to the struggle against the abuse of power. For the social actor who experiences cosmopolitanism, in particular when either travel, migration, or the absence of a fixed residence does not result from a decision, the critical form his judgments take includes the risk of an inability to compose a world, as well as a difficulty with prioritization of the various purposes of his actions. Conversely, it calls for a reflexivity capable of providing these actions with orienting principles adapted to the conduct of one’s life.

In a world that increasingly expresses the deregulation of its social systems, estrangement becomes more and more internal. It resides not only in the minds of people but also in the interstitial spaces of contemporary living conditions. In such a situation, how can trust be established in a society whose members are strangers to one other, but also when individualization is nonetheless mediated by society (according to the assumptions of modernity)? Connected to this structural anxiety, cosmopolitanism refers not simply to the goal of a society regulated by the power of law and driven by a search for improvement. It is not limited either to a desire to build stable social systems, an international peace regime regulated by human rights, or a European federalism representing a step toward meta-national governance. Rather, it distinguishes a relationship to humanity that starts with its concrete images, its ordinary customs, its dramaturgical codes, and with the practical margins of maneuver that stem from an overwhelming or transient sentiment of distanciation from the world. The cosmopolitan individual is organically connected neither to the univocal vision of a progress of humankind nor to a set of institutionally established purposes, for being cosmopolitan means first and foremost being marginalized, having
the sentiment of not fitting in, living among strangers and being oneself a stranger to
the world. Tellingly, cosmopolitanism comes into being during periods of change,
when ordering narratives lose their cohesion, and when disoriented minds seem griev-
ously threatened by loneliness, destruction, lack of care, and hostility. It encompasses
the spiritual untidiness that follows founding events (a historic tragedy, a forced exile,
an emigration within oneself). At the same time, it expresses the numerous tactics
that are used to build the most credible frames of readjustment. Cosmopolitanism is
a form of archive that registers the intimate wounds of societies. Deeply tethered to
the awareness of a crisis that it attempts to solve, it is also an art of finding one’s
bearings within the vast maze of humankind.

NOTES

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, Human, All-Too-Human: Parts One and Two, trans. Helen Zimmern
   (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).
8. Friedrich Schiller, letter of January 25, 1795, in Schillers Werke: Nationalausgabe, vol. 27,
   Winter (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), 27.
    Humanist Ideal and Grounded Social Category,” Theory, Culture, and Society 21, no. 6 (2004):
    115–36.
    beyond the Nation, ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota
13. Benedikt Köhler, Soziologie des neuen Kosmopolitanismus (Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissen-
14. Immanuel Kant, “Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch,” in Kant’s Political Writings,
    Blackwell, 2000).
23. The classic image is from Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 2.1–6.
26. Ibid.
43. The key issue is to get the right balance between “knowing the world” (*Welt kennen*) and “having the world” (*Welt haben*). See Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, ed. and trans. Robert B. Louden (1798; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 4.
44. Olivier Remaud, *Si loin, si proche: Essai sur le point de vue cosmopolitique* (forthcoming).