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NOTE

This contribution is the response piece to a larger dialogue of three articles that form the current issue of JOLCEL. The other contributions are "Latin Cosmopolitanism and the Roman Empire" by Christoph Pieper (pp. 1–26), "From Adam to Tsar' Kosmos: Cosmopolitanism in the Byzantine Tradition" by Helena Bodin (pp. 28–51), and "The Classics at World's End. A VOC Secretary Reframes the Cape Khoi" by Tycho Maas (pp. 53–71).

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Thinking about Cosmopolitanism

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I am not a scholar of classical antiquity but of modern literature, so I cannot comment in detail on the three substantial essays making up this particular issue of *JOLCEL*. Rather, what I offer are a series of remarks on cosmopolitanism triggered by my reading of these essays.

If I were asked to summarize what unites the three essays in this issue of *JOLCEL* I would say that it is the opposition between the ideal and the real cast as a distinction between in- and outgroup they see as marking the discourse on cosmopolitanism for the period leading up to the eighteenth century and as framed by classical texts. The starting point of that discourse, as recounted in Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (around AD 200), namely the Cynic philosopher Diogenes of Sinope's reply to the question where he was from that he was a cosmopolitan, that is to say "a citizen of the world," immediately raises a number of issues that have determined the various ways the term and the concept have been interpreted through the ages. As the essays demonstrate, some of these have to do with the very parts from which the original Greek term is composed: *kosmos* and *politēs*. Others have to do with how that original term has come down to us as translated in the European vernaculars; for simplicity's sake I will focus on the English version. In antiquity the opposition real/ideal takes the form of a contrast between the realms of Man and God, or, more mundanely, of those that speak Greek/Latin and those that do not—the *barbaroi*, or yet again, more legalistically, between those that by rights inhabit the Roman empire and the strangers from beyond. Modified by changing circumstances these dichotomies return in later discussions specifically inspired by classical examples, as when Valla reclaims an ideal yet virtual Roman empire through the universal use of Latin or Grevenbroek claims the Khoi, although pagan, as essentially Christian through their piety. They also return in more recent discussions of cosmopolitanism although the terms in which they are then couched may be very different, responding as they do to newer questions thrown up by later developments. As with the classical distinctions

intervening in these discussions, though, the dichotomies here too turn upon in/out-groups.

When we talk of being a citizen of the world, we first of all have to determine what the terms involved cover. Other than the *kosmos* of cosmopolitanism, which in the original Greek at least potentially extends to both the realms of Man and the Gods, *world* in English—or by extension in the various European vernaculars, let alone in non-European languages—has a more limited range, essentially covering only the realm of the human. For what extends beyond we have terms such as the planetary, comprising the very earth and all it harbours, or —indeed—the cosmos, by which we mean the universe in its widest interpretation, that is to say, everything that exists, including our planet earth. Somewhat confusingly, in English, as in most other European languages I am familiar with, *universal* may also be used to mean 'worldwide,' 'applicable to the entire world,' or, at least theoretically, 'comprising every wo/man on earth.' Now, who can be a *citizen* of such a human world? In antiquity, not everyone could be a *politēs* —for one, women and slaves were excluded. As Bodin mentions in her essay, the term basically only extended to inhabitants holding legal rights in Greek city-states, and thus in practice Diogenes of Sinope's *kosmos* confined itself to the 'world' of the Greeks. In English, 'citizen' can usefully be interpreted as equivalent to 'inhabitant'. So, inhabitant of the human world. But who is reckoned 'human'?

Taking up what I earlier referred to as one of the possible uses of the term 'universal', Appiah in his *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* addresses the issue who is considered human from the point of view of "universal truth" and what he calls "counter-cosmopolitanism." If one believes one truth and one truth only to be universal this implies excluding those that do not subscribe to the same truth. In such a view, only believers are truly 'human'; all others fail the test. Most often we think of such exclusionary views as religiously inspired, but they may also be fuelled by what in the widest sense we might call civilizational views. Often, but not always and not necessarily, the two reinforce one another, as one can see from the essay on Grevenbroek, even if in this particular case the group initially excluded—the Khoi—comes to be redefined as finally fit for inclusion. We here should note that if Grevenbroek could be said to *avant-la-lettre* turn the ethnographic look inward upon the ethnographer's own society to blur the line between what was considered human and non-human in his time and from his civilization's perspective, this in fact was not so unusual for the time in which he was writing. Already a century earlier, Montaigne had done the same in his essay *Des Cannibales*, in which he argues that:

I am not sorry that we should here take notice of the barbarous horror of so cruel an action, but that, seeing so clearly into their faults, we should be so blind to our own. I conceive there is more barbarity in eating a man alive, than when he is dead; in tearing a body limb from limb by racks and torments, that is yet in perfect sense; in roasting it by degrees; in causing it to be bitten and worried by dogs and swine (as we have not only read, but lately seen, not

among inveterate and mortal enemies, but among neighbours and fellow-citizens, and, which is worse, under colour of piety and religion), than to roast and eat him after he is dead.¹

In the eighteenth century, which Grevenbroek is leading up to, such a reverse auto-ethnographic approach, looking at and critiquing one's own society through the eyes of a purported stranger, is practised by Montesquieu in his *Lettres persanes* (1721) but also by Voltaire in his *Lettres philosophiques* (1734), first published in English as *Letters Concerning the English Nation* (1733), and Oliver Goldsmith in *The Citizen of the World* (1762). The latter contains a series of letters purportedly written by a Chinese traveller in England. The choice for a Chinese is not as outlandish as may seem. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries European writers/philosophers/historians like Montesquieu and Voltaire saw China as the only civilized counterpart to Europe in a world otherwise constituted by barbarian nations. The Dutch seventeenth-century playwright Joost van den Vondel called China “het oostersche Europe” (fol. A4r: the Europe of the East) and “het Azaiensche Euroope” (fol. B2, at 8; Asiatic Europe).² The British philosopher and statesman Edmund Burke in a 1777 letter rejoiced that the advances in knowledge made in his time allowed one to compare “The very different Civility of Europe and of China; The Barbarism of Persia and Abyssinia. The erratic manners of Tartary, and Arabia. The Savage State of North America, and of New Zealand.”³ The true distinction, then, as Goldsmith put it in his preface to *The Citizen of the World*, was between refined and non-refined, civilized and non-civilized.⁴ “The truth is,” he says, “the Chinese and we are pretty much alike. Different degrees of refinement, and not of distance, mark the distinctions among mankind. Savages of the most opposite climates have all but one character, of improvidence and rapacity; and tutored nations, however separate, make use of the very same methods to procure refined enjoyment.” Goethe in January 1827 remarked to Johann Peter Eckermann that based on his reading of a Chinese novel in translation he found that “the Chinese think, act, and feel almost exactly like us; and we soon find that we are perfectly like them, except that all they do is more clear, pure, and decorous, than with us.”⁵

The civilizational and the religious definitions of who is reckoned human and therefore deserving of cosmopolitan empathy and who not come together in the racial arguments underpinning colonialism, imperialism, and slavery, commonly wielded in Europe, or the West, for most of what we refer to as modernity. The discussion often hinged upon elements of purity and contamination. Caliban, the native inhabitant of the fictive island in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611), upon which the exiled duke of Milan Prospero and his daughter Miranda find themselves, is pictured as a cross between a nature spirit and an African witch, a slave, a “thing of darkness,” and an intentional violator of Miranda, and is denied any form of humanity. But the taint of non-humanity because of “impure” blood

- 1 Montaigne, *Of Cannibals*.
- 2 Van Kley, *An Alternative Muse*, 27.
- 3 Osterhammel, *Unfabling the East*, 7.
- 4 Goldsmith, *The Citizen of the World*, ii.
- 5 Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* 11.

extends also to Bertha Mason, Rochester's first wife in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) because of her Caribbean creole provenance, and to Heathcliff, who is labelled a gypsy, a Lascar, and a vampire in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847). The memory of a Lascar, a South-East Asian sailor, in this particular case a Malay, visiting his cottage haunted Thomas De Quincey's dreams in his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1822):

The Malay has been a fearful enemy for months. I have been every night, through his means, transported into Asiatic scenes. ... The causes of my horror lie deep; and some of them must be common to others. Southern Asia, in general, is the seat of awful images and associations. ... All this, and much more than I can say, or have time to say, the reader must enter into before he can comprehend the unimaginable horror which these dreams of Oriental imagery, and mythological tortures, impressed upon me. Under the connecting feeling of tropical heat and vertical sun-lights, I brought together all creatures, birds, beasts, reptiles, all trees and plants, usages and appearances, that are found in all tropical regions, and assembled them together in China or Indostan. From kindred feelings, I soon brought Egypt and all her gods under the same law. I was stared at, hooted at, grinned at, chattered at, by monkeys, by paroquets, by cockatoos. I ran into pagodas: and was fixed, for centuries, at the summit, or in secret rooms; I was the idol; I was the priest, I was worshipped; I was sacrificed. I fled from the wrath of Brama through all the forests of Asia: Vishnu hated me: Seeva laid wait for me. I came suddenly upon Isis and Osiris: I had done a deed, they said, which the ibis and the crocodile trembled at. I was buried, for a thousand years, in stone coffins, with mummies and sphynxes, in narrow chambers at the heart of eternal pyramids. I was kissed, with cancerous kisses, by crocodiles; and laid, confounded with all unutterable slimy things, amongst reeds and Nilotic mud.⁶

As Barrell (1991) has argued, De Quincey saw the East as a source of infection and disease, a direct threat to the health of Britain and by extension of civilization. Although many parts of that East were part of the British Empire, their inhabitants are not part of the civilized world and hence underserving of cosmopolitan empathy.

I return to my earlier question: who is human? Even after at least most forms of discrimination have been addressed, the question is less tautological than it may seem, especially these days. Cyborgs and other technologically enhanced forms of human life challenge the borderline between the human and the non-human. In contemporary literature and film this topic has been prominently taken up by, for instance, Philip K. Dick in his 1968 novel *Do androids dream of electric sheep?*, which was very loosely adapted by Ridley Scott into the 1982 movie *Blade Runner*, in which Rutger Hauer plays the role of Roy Batty, an android replicant that attempts to outlive his pre-ordained lifespan and is therefore pursued by Rick Deckard, played by Harrison Ford, a bounty hunter specializing in retiring the likes of Batty. Batty, although an artificial fabrication, behaves "humanly" when at the end of the movie he saves Deckard's life. Actually, doubt is raised in the film whether Deckard himself is not in fact a replicant because of the way he handles memories triggered by photographs he apparently prizes—the memories Batty, like all other replicants, has had implanted are also reinforced by photographs. Scott takes things a step further in *Prometheus*, a 2012 movie in which David, an humanoid

⁶ De Quincey, *Confessions*, 108–9.

played by Michael Fassbender, looks and acts in all respects human-like but who, not unlike many recent AI applications, as a self-teaching unit is much more knowledgeable and perhaps even intelligent than his human masters. While consistently denying to his human interlocutors that he has human feelings, his acts leave no doubt that he is swayed by what we can only label jealousy, a craving for praise, and the like. In the 2009 Jonathan Mostow movie *Surrogates*, based on a comic book series with the same title by Robert Venditti and Brett Weldele, humans no longer venture outside of their homes but instead lead idealized vicarious lives by means of humanoid remote-controlled robots. In this movie the human world is restored through the intervention of FBI agent Tom Greer, played by Bruce Willis. In the 2017 sequel to *Blade Runner*, though, *Blade Runner 2049*, the thin line separating humans and replicants is further erased when it turns out that the female replicant to whom Deckard in the earlier movie made love has given birth to a child. That same borderline separating the human and the non-human is also being challenged at the very opposite end of the spectrum, where the difference between the human and the animal is increasingly being questioned. Should a contemporary cosmopolitanism then extend Appiah's ethics of empathy to these "strangers" on a par with humans?

Finally, the question should be raised whose cosmopolitanism we are talking about when we use the term. Appiah, in his afterword to *Cosmopolitanisms*,⁷ features his own family, with members living in Ghana, the UK and the United States, and gathering in Namibia's Ovamboland, to celebrate a wedding as a living example of cosmopolitanism or world citizenship. A first thought passing through my mind when reading this was that Appiah's family must be quite wealthy, not to say elite, given their respective professions and descent. In his own *Cosmopolitanism* he mentions that his family is quite influential in Asante, the old African kingdom now part of Ghana, that he is related to the royal family in fact; that while his father was Ghanaian his mother is English, and that he himself attended English boarding school as well as Oxford before moving to the United States. Still, I can think of a similar example, from my own experience. A number of years ago, in a village not far from Brussels, we had a cleaning lady of Assyrian origin. Under the pressure of ongoing conflicts between Kurds and Turks, her family had moved from a remote village in the eastern part of Turkey first to Istanbul, where, as a seven-year-old she had been put to work as a kitchen and scullery maid for French diplomats, and then on to a refugee camp in Germany, and finally to a Parisian suburb. She herself at the age of seventeen had been given in marriage to a Belgian Assyrian. Other family members had moved on to Chicago, Toronto, and elsewhere. They still regularly gathered for huge wedding parties around the world, but mostly in Paris, where the pater familias resided. Now I would call this a global family, united by descent, origins, language and religion, but I would never think of them as cosmopolitans as they continued to think of themselves as belonging to—precisely—a specific family, characterized by the features I just mentioned. Any wider allegiance they recognized was marked by language, religion and an awareness of a historical and geographic link. The difference between this family

⁷ See Robbins and Horta, *Cosmopolitanisms*.

and Appiah's is both material—while some of them have done well in their new abode others have remained decidedly poor—and mental. They certainly did not see themselves as *world* citizens.

It seems to me, then, that whether or not one is a cosmopolitan is not so much a matter of actual residence than of how one looks upon the world, or more specifically how one situates oneself in the world. Appiah obviously feels at ease everywhere and probably at the same time a little alien everywhere too. In any case, he can make sense of almost anywhere he lands. My contention would be that he is able to do so because, by privilege of position, profession, descent and undoubtedly also because of native intelligence and hard work, and probably also because his working language is English, the world's present *lingua franca*, he can *choose* to be cosmopolitan. My Assyrians on the contrary have not chosen to become citizens of the world—different from “world citizens” *à la* Appiah, they have been forced out into the world through circumstances beyond their own volition. This is where we enter the territory of what Silvano Santiago calls the “cosmopolitanism of the poor.”

Something similar pertains to what I just read in a book by the British travel writer Colin Thubron. In *Shadow of the Silk Road* (2007) Thubron relates how in the early 2000s he travels, by public transport, from Xian in China, the beginning or end of the silk road (although it was only labelled such at the end of the nineteenth century by the German geographer and traveller Ferdinand Von Richthofen and it never was one road but rather a system of both land and maritime routes between China and Europe), depending on which direction one favours, to Antioch, on the Mediterranean coast of Syria. In the oasis towns in Western China, in what is now the Chinese province of Xinjiang, he goes in search of Chinese with European facial or body features. His reasons for doing so lie in his having read about a Roman legion, under command of Crassus, the third member next to Caesar and Pompey of the first triumvirate, in 53 BCE somewhere beyond the Euphrates having been defeated by a Parthian force, with the remaining survivors being taken east as soldiers-slaves in the service of a Central Asian nomad warlord and, after having been defeated once again, this time by a Chinese army, forcibly being settled in an oasis town east of the Taklamakan desert, present-day Yongchang. Thubron succeeds in locating some few individuals that seem to fit the category he is looking for. Moreover, these individuals themselves, though in all other respects Chinese, seem to have a vague awareness of their being of different descent. Regardless of whether these are in fact descendants of Roman legionaries or not, what is striking again, as with Appiah and my Assyrians, is the difference obtaining between the privileged Western traveller/observer and his Chinese interlocutors. The former, by dint of his superior knowledge, fortune and experience can feel and behave quite cosmopolitan, and notwithstanding the fact that he sometimes lands in somewhat alarming situations with Chinese officials, he is always protected by his European passport, his financial means, and—although he says he never uses it—his satellite telephone in case of emergency. Again, he has the choice to be a citizen of the world; his Chinese interlocutors, even if they should be of remote European descent, do not.

Ever since the eighteenth century and Kant, cosmopolitanism has been put forward as a moral obligation for modern man. As such it is a laudable and worthwhile principle that however in different ways and for different reasons has been and continues to be curbed in practice.

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