Craig Calhoun

Cosmopolitanism in the modern social imaginary

One day in the early 1980s, I was riding in the backseat of an old Land Rover through the desert southwest of Khartoum. There was no road, but the landscape, mostly flat, was marked by the occasional saint's tomb distinctive to Sudanese Islam. My companions and I hadn't seen another vehicle for a couple of hours when one appeared as a tiny dot on the horizon. It was headed our way, and as is typical both cars slowed down to see who else might be passing through the seemingly empty desert. My curiosity was mild – I had been in the Sudan only a month or two and didn't think I'd know anyone – until I realized that in fact I did know the face looking back at me through the window of the other Land Rover. It was my friend Vaughan, an Oxford classmate from years earlier. We both shouted and our cars stopped.

The reunion was a pleasure. It seemed very old-school, and we laughed about how many Oxford classmates of different generations had run into each other in the Sudan over the last 150 years. More than a few, I'm sure, each taking pleasure in his or her cosmopolitanism (and more than a few in colonialism, too).

Vaughan and I caught up on families and careers and work on multiple continents. Being citizens of the world was going well for both of us. Vaughan was an attorney by the time of our reconnection, working for Chevron, which was developing oil fields near Bentiu in the Southern Sudan. A university professor supported by the Kellogg Foundation, I had come to Sudan on the heels of traveling through China and was teaching at the University of Khartoum while my wife Pam worked for the U.S. State Department's Office of Refugee Affairs.

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She would go on to a career in the United Nations. Vaughan's wife Mary became a photographer and founded a support group for expatriates.

Our little group exemplified much of the cosmopolitanism that was sweeping up a wide variety of young professionals and activists in a global network of relief work, diplomacy, corporate investments, journalism, and advocacy. "Small world!" at least one of us exclaimed tritely. Indeed it is for those equipped to navigate as we were. I'm sure it didn't seem small in the same way for the Eritrean refugees seeking shelter in Sudan from fighting to the east or, in some cases, being resettled in Europe or America.

Eritreans who settled in the United States also found old friends, sometimes former comrades in arms and often distant relatives: they, too, inhabited a global world. In fact the Eritreans successful in navigating the maze of international organizations and national governments to reach Europe or the United States were generally the more cosmopolitan among the migrants. They knew of far-flung events and appreciated cultural difference; they were more educated than their fellow nationals; they had more experience with cities and complex organizations. But they were less prone than the Western aid workers they met to think of globalization as a matter of nations fading into a borderless world. The refugees made connections across long distances, but they recognized these as particular, specific connections and didn't confuse them for unambiguous tokens of a universalistic type: global connections.

Common approaches to the idea of cosmopolitanism encourage people like Vaughan and me to confuse the privileged specificity of our mobility for universality. It is easy for the privileged to imagine that their experience of global mobility and connection is available to all, if only everyone would "be" cosmopolitan. We need continually to remind ourselves of the extent to which felt cosmopolitanism depends on privilege. As Anthony Appiah suggests, "Celebrations of the 'cosmopolitan' can suggest an unpleasant posture of superiority towards the putative provincial."[1] In other words, the genuinely attractive ethical orientation toward a common human community of fate can be undermined by an unattractive self-congratulation and lack of self-critical awareness of privilege.

Cosmopolitanism is in fashion. The trend started in the 1990s, after the end of the cold war and amid intensifying globalization. Cosmopolitan is now a compliment for the suave in a way it hadn't been since the 1920s or at least the 1960s, when in cold war spirit spies epitomized the cosmopolitan. The Cosmopolitan is a popular drink, a vodka-based cocktail, flavored with orange and cranberry, made famous as the favorite drink of the girls on TV's *Sex and the City*.[2] Those self-styled girls didn't show much interest in the political philosophy

1 Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism* (New York: Norton, 2006), xiii.

2 One of the several bartenders with claims to have invented the Cosmopolitan, Toby Ceccini of the Odeon in New York's Tribeca, entitled his autobiography *Cosmopolitan: A Bartender's Story* (New York: Broadway, 2004) – and the pun is intentional. Tribeca is the New York neighborhood most identified with the 1990s boom, but the boom was, in general, identified with the Silicon Valley – apt then that the blogging consensus gives San Francisco the strongest claim on inventing the drink of the decade. But only in New York did the relevant bartender write his autobiography. It was that sort of decade.

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of globalization or Kantian ethics; they were cultural descendants of Helen Gurley Brown, who reinvented *Cosmopolitan* magazine in the 1960s.

Now, as then, cosmopolitanism lives a double life as a pop cultural evocation of openness to a larger world and a more systematic and academic claim about the moral significance of transcending the local, even achieving the universal. Both have flourished, especially in good times and amid optimism about globalization. (*Cosmo*, as the magazine came to be called, was founded in 1886, riding the wave of a stock market boom not unlike those of the 1920s and the 1990s.)

Cosmopolitanism, though, is not merely a matter of cocktails or market ebbs and flows. It's what we praise in those who read novelists from every continent, or in the audiences and performers of world music; it's the aspiration of advocates for global justice and the claim of managers of multinational businesses. Campaigners on behalf of migrants urge cosmopolitan legal reforms out of both concern for immigrants and belief that openness to people from other cultures enriches their countries. Cosmopolitan is the first category in the advertisements posted by would-be husbands seeking brides (and vice versa) in the *Sunday Times of India*.[3]

These different usages reinforce the fashion for the concept but muddy its meaning. Cosmopolitan can be claimed for a political project: building participatory institutions adequate to contemporary global integration, especially outside the nation-state framework. Sometimes it is claimed for an ethical orientation of individuals – each should think and act with strong concern for all humanity – at yet other times it is claimed for a stylistic capacity to incorporate diverse influences or for a psychological capacity to feel at ease amid difference and appreciate diversity. Used sometimes for all projects that reach beyond the local (with some slippage depending on whether the local means the village or the nation-state), it is used other times for strongly holistic visions of global totality, like the notion of a community of risk imposed by potential for nuclear or environmental disaster. Cosmopolitan can also describe cities or whole countries. New York or London, contemporary Delhi or historical Alexandria gain their vitality and character not from the similarities of their residents but from the concrete ways in which they have learned to interact across lines of ethnic, religious, national, linguistic, and other identities.

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Britain was a center of the 1990s boom in talk of cosmopolitanism. This was a period of renewal in the cultural and financial life of British cities, with yuppies, art galleries, and startling improvement in restaurants, and reference to "cosmopolitan Britain" became standard speech – as in "cosmopolitan Britain has emerged as one of the word's most diverse and innovative food and drink markets."[4] These references evoked sophisticated, metropolitan cul-

3 While cosmopolitan is the first category listed, the ads go on for many pages, organized also (for the less explicitly cosmopolitan) by caste, community, language, religion, profession, and previous marital status. International educational credentials are noted throughout, but only in the cosmopolitan section are alliances invited specifically in terms like "Cultured, Cosmopolitan, Westernized" or "Smart, Westernized, Cosmopolitan working for MNC."

4 U.K. Ministry for Trade and Investment, online at http://www.investoverseas.org/United_Kingdom/UK_Sectors/Food_and_Drink.htm. Examples can readily be multiplied from almost any market imaginable: "With a more cosmopolitan Britain driven by 'lifestyle' and 'design' home and garden television pro-

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ture versus the non-cosmopolitan hinterlands, multicultural Britain versus monocultural English, Scottish, or Welsh national identity. More so, British cosmopolitanism evoked a positive orientation toward European integration and engagement with the rest of the world. LSE (the London School of Economics and Political Science for those without this cosmopolitan knowledge) was academic headquarters for this, with a range of intellectual exchanges and conferences, new master's programs focusing on fields like human rights and NGO management, a clutch of international celebrity professors, and, not coincidentally, fee-paying students from all over the world. LSE became, in a sense, the first really European university.

Britain was especially well-placed to embrace this cosmopolitanism because English was increasingly the world language, because it had joined the European Union without losing its special relationship with the United States, because it was a major financial center, and because its former empire gave it unusually strong connections around the world. Britain remains a center of cosmopolitan discourse. Consider British Airways's rebranding as "a global, caring company, more modern, more open, more cosmopolitan, but proud to be based in Britain":

> What is vital to this new identity is its international feel. This is indicative of BA's desire to be a global player. Also, according to BA, it shows Britain's own multicultural mix. However, the emphasis is on presenting the positive aspects of different cultures and how British Airways truly supports its operations, including its many joint ventures, in different countries. All this leads to a positive image for the 60 percent of BA customers who are not British.[5]

But the message is not just for foreigners. As British Airways's branding consultants point out, "The United Kingdom is not keen on being seen as the country of outmoded traditions and old castles. The new surface shows a youthful, cosmopolitan Britain, confidently looking to the future."[6] Indeed, this example of commercial cosmopolitanism comes on the heels of the late-1990s rebranding of Britain itself as "Cool Britannia." New Labour was in power, but hints of the mod '60s and the once mighty empire were not accidental. Britain was by no means unique; nation-branding flourished around the world with nearly every nation claiming to be cosmopolitan but with distinctive arts and culture and delightful local scenery.[7]

In both popular culture and political science, cosmopolitanism often figures

grammes . . . " (http://hiddenwires.co.uk/resourcesarticles2004/articles20040503-05.html). In Britain, as elsewhere, though, the years after 2001 marked a change. "Suddenly the celebration of postnational, cosmopolitan Britain has been eclipsed by the return of 'security and identity' issues," as David Goodheart put it in 2006 (http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=3445).

5 Bob Ayling (Chief Executive Officer, British Airways), in *British Airways News*, June 10, 1997; see also http://www.euran.com/BC/art&BritishAirways.htm (accessed April 7, 2007).

6 See http://www.jyanet.com/cap/0614fe1.htm (accessed January 15, 2007).

7 See Melissa Aronczyk, "Nations, New and Improved: Branding National Identity," in C. Calhoun and R. Sennett, eds., *Practicing Culture* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2007).

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as an attitude, a style, a personal commitment; this is not necessarily political or even ethical. Contrast the significance of the phrases "citizen of the world" and "man of the world." The latter is as likely to be about expanded tolerance for ethical lapses – or simply about more fashionable clothes. Cosmopolitanism does signal a direct connection between the individual and the world as a whole.[8] But if this is sometimes given ethical emphasis, equally often cosmopolitanism imagines a world that is simply an object of consumption, there for individuals' pleasure. "The goal of cosmopolitanism is self-expression and self-realization," writes Kimberly Yuracko. "Cosmopolitanism presents individuals with a wide range of options; they choose the one that will bring them the most pleasure and gratification."[9]

More commonly, being cosmopolitan is glossed as being a "citizen of the world." Contemporary usage gives this almost unambiguously positive valence – who wouldn't want to be a citizen of the world? – but the idea can be terrifying if what world citizenship means is exclusion from citizenship and rights in particular states: past demonizations of "rootless cosmopolitans" shouldn't be forgotten. Complicating matters further, positive and negative estimations of cosmopolitanism often coexist. For example, there is no upper class in the world more dedicated to cosmopolitan shopping than that of Russia. But it is not just ignorant rural Russian masses with minimal access to the new megamalls that participate in xenophobic nationalism. State elites and well-connected millionaires press anti-cosmopolitan policies. Even oligarchs who drive Bentleys and have homes in the south of France are complicit, though they may also become objects of nationalist attack.

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Consumerism versus ethics, or the coexistence of stylistic cosmopolitanism with political nationalism, isn't the issue. It is the tendency to substitute ethics or style for deeper senses of politics. Cosmopolitan typically suggests an attitude or virtue that can be assumed without change in basic political or economic structures, which are external to the individual. Much of the appeal comes from the notion that cosmopolitanism (a version of ethical goodness) can be achieved without such deeper change – a key problem in an otherwise attractive concept.

Cosmopolitanism should not be simply a free-floating cultural taste, personal attitude, or ethical choice; it must be a matter of institutions. What seems like free individual choice is often made possible by capital– social and cultural, as well as economic. Take Singapore's president, who spoke of that island's "cosmopolitans" and "heartlanders." After the speech, a local blogger posted mock advice on how to be a cosmopolitan: "Many Heartlanders think that to become a Cosmo, you need a lot of money. Nothing could be further from the truth. Being a Cosmo is essentially a state of mind, and has nothing to do with that overdraft that keeps you awake at

8 In this, as in other ways, cosmopolitanism echoes rather than transcends nationalism, emphasizing direct connection rather than institutional mediation; see Calhoun, *Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997). There are exceptions, including efforts to understand cosmopolitanism from within various scales of relationships across lines of difference rather than categorical similarity on a global scale. See Sheldon Pollock, "Cosmopolitan and Vernacular in History," *Public Culture* 12 (3) (2000): 591 – 625.

9 Kimberly Yuracko, *Perfectionism and Contemporary Feminist Values* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 91.

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night."[10] He continues with advice on wine and watches, cars and condos. But, as he says, "Travel is the true measure of a Cosmo. 'Been there, done that' is their motto." Sadly, his readership is "those of us who haven't been, primarily because we haven't a bean."

The class consciousness of frequent travelers involves not only privilege, but the illusion that our experience of diversity and mobility reveals the world as a whole.[11] I have met my friend driving through the Sudanese desert. I have friends around the world. I have traveled on every continent. I feel at home in cities (and hotels and airports) I have never before visited. I drive a foreign car and happily eat food from widely varying cuisines. I care about distant victims of disasters and injustices. The world seems small. Yet none of this makes the world a whole or reveals it to anyone in that wholeness.

The dominant strands of cosmopolitan theorizing draw heavily on the experience of frequent travelers like Vaughan and me, moving freely across borders and, sometimes, creating expatriate communities where businesspeople, academics, and aid workers of several nationalities mix in once-imperial cities. The theories do at times make reference to less privileged border-crossers: Bolivian musicians who play on street corners around Europe, Filipina housekeepers who serve locals and expatriates alike in Southeast Asia and the Persian Gulf, Sikhs who drive taxis in Toronto and New York, Mexicans who migrate to Spain and the United States. These migrants are certainly sources of multicultural diversity and global connections. They may be cosmopolitans in the sense of having loyalties that cross borders, but they do not exemplify the abstract universalism of much cosmopolitan theory. Migrant experience seldom reflects the privilege of, say, Anthony Appiah's account of how ties he made in his father's royal compound and later private schools remain active through friends and relatives who have moved to several countries. For that reason, it seldom supports a synoptic view of the world as a whole as distinct from multiple particular connections. Cosmopolitan theories need to be supplemented by emphasis on the material conditions and social institutions that make this sort of cosmopolitan inhabitation of the world possible – and much more likely for some than others.

Webs of specific connections position us in the world, from friendship and kinship through national states or religions to markets and global institutions. These make possible meetings like mine in the desert, even though it is more typical to equate cosmopolitanism with either a personal style or with universalistic ethical commitments. Navigating beyond one's state is largely the product of particular networks of ties, material resources like credit cards, and the support provided to individuals by states, such as the issuing of passports. It is not by a relationship to any encompassing institution that defines belonging to the world as a whole. Though there are growing institutions and private agreements for global governance – for policing, regulation of the Internet, arbitration of contract disputes – most of these do not offer "citizens" opportuni-

10 Mahesh Krishnaswamy, http://mahesh.sulekha.com/blog/post/2000/06/how-to-be-cosmopolitan.htm.

11 Craig Calhoun, "The Class Consciousness of Frequent Travelers: Toward a Critique of Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101 (4) (2003): 869 – 897.

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ties either to participate politically or to make claims in the ways that different states do.

When cosmopolitans are described as "citizens of the world" this is clearly not directly analogous to citizenship of a state – and in fact may be a more inferior or less protected type of citizenship. Not all states offer very much chance for participation or response to claims, but most do offer some. They offer a structure in which individuals are recognized to belong and gain certain entitlements. Citizens may fight to extend their rights and improve their states. Many individuals are denied full rights, and not all are recognized and empowered as citizens – precisely the exception that proves the value of the rule: to be stateless is not a happy circumstance.

If cosmopolitans are citizens of the world, we have not only to ask what kind of polity this world is (if it is any) but what makes this cosmos whole. Divine creation would be a possible answer; the world is whole by virtue of its single maker. Likewise, we could derive unity from the notion of the *tao* existing before the differentiation of the world as we know it. Or we could follow "deep ecology" in focusing on nature itself as creator not creation, as sacred and beyond the human.

None of these is what most self-declared cosmopolitans mean when they use the term. Most mean something like the abstract equivalence, or at least equal value, of human beings considered as individual tokens of a global type: humanity. This understanding underwrites most philosophical accounts of ethical universalism and is the basis – explicit or implicit – for much cosmopolitanism.[12] But categorical equivalence among all human beings describes only an abstract whole, not the more complicated and heterogeneous world in which human beings differ for cultural and other reasons, claim identities, and forge solidarities and enmities. There is nothing wrong with employing a logic of universal equivalence, such as that of Kantian ethics or human rights ideals, in order to grasp the inequalities and other injustices of the world. But this is one-sided and needs to be complemented by a cosmopolitanism oriented to the connections that link people to each other in several scales of solidarity and social and cultural organization.

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From the perspective of abstract equivalence, essential similarities are the main ground for cosmopolitanism, and differences tend to appear as potential problems: members of one religion tolerate adherents to others – hardly a source of cosmopolitan unity; nations are often understood as only self-interested sectional loyalties; and strong cultural loyalties often appear as prejudices. Embracing global fashions and opportunities is good; however, it would be a mistake to imagine that embracing local or national cultures and solidarities instead was somehow a personal failing. For thick or strong cultural loyalties not only join people to each other and enable both individual and collective life but also, along with creativity, offer variety to the world. The development of nations (and the social institutions that organize national societies, including, but not limited to, governmental ones) is also a cosmopolitan achievement. Nations knit together smaller

12 For important and forceful recent statements of cosmopolitanism as universalism, see Seyla Benhabib, *Another Cosmopolitanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) and Martha Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

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regions and provinces, however imperfectly. And though religions divide human beings, religions also offer some of the largest-scale and most influential forms of transnational, cosmopolitan solidarity.

It, too, would be a mistake to understand the wholeness of the world as already complete, based on the abstract equivalence of human beings rather than as an always incomplete but richly open building of more and hopefully better social connections. Connections allow us to ground cosmopolitanism, instead of in the categorical equivalence of human beings, in our relationships to each other. Another answer lies in history and the lateral connections human beings create with each other – that is, the connections among people and places (and animals and plants and flowing waters) are not those of divine creation or of fate but, rather, products of human action in history. In this view, humans are joined not just by abstract equivalence but by the interpersonal relationships and the social institutions – from language to states to religions – that we have created. The capacity for such creation is basic to humanity.[13]

We are connected, but incompletely. We have responsibilities because of our connections, because we are affected by and affect others, not only because of abstract similarities. At the level of both individuals and culture more broadly, we are transformed by the historical processes of interaction; these give us capacities for mutual understanding. These capacities are always in some degree specific to the cultural and historical circumstances in which they are forged; they are not simply universal. We should not confuse the experience of roaming the world and appreciating its constitutive differences with grasping it as a whole. This seems a more robust way to ground cosmopolitan thinking than the universalism of abstract categorical equivalence.

Today, markets may be the most widespread of all historically made connections. Markets do not precisely coalesce into a single global totality – *the* market – except in ideology. They, too, link imperfectly and incompletely, just more extensively and intensively than ever before. Even if certain aspects of markets approach complete abstract categorical equivalence – the reduction of qualitative differences among goods to mere monetary prices – markets are historical connections. And insofar as we are concerned with how human beings around the world might be joined in a cosmopolitan whole, we need to break with the ideology of an abstract market and see global markets – even those in arcane derivatives and those managed in part by computerized trading programs – as relationships among actors: people, places, institutions (including states).

We cosmopolitans, meeting in our various ostensibly empty deserts, may sometimes link our sense of immediate inhabitation of the world – our oyster! – with a misleading notion of its universal accessibility. Moving among different places, cosmopolitans feel that they inhabit the world as a whole. But what, if anything, makes the world whole? In asking this question, we confront the limits of universalism and are forced to take seriously the people whose lives are

13 See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958). Arendt's account of the creative capacity at the heart of being human is inspired largely by ancient Greek thought. Christians and Jews may also draw similar ideas from the biblical book of Genesis, where creative potential is part of what humans derive from being created in the image of God.

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constituted and constrained by their ties to particular settings. Vaughan and Mary and Pam and I were but weakly connected to the Sudan. The Sudan was the backdrop to our story; it provided the terrain of difference that marked us as cosmopolitan. But we didn't *have* to be there, and the Sudan wasn't really about us.

Certainly, thinking in terms of the abstract equivalence of human beings is helpful – in theories of justice and human rights, for example. But cosmopolitanism shouldn't be equated with such universalism. Cosmopolitanism becomes richer and stronger if approached in terms of connections rather than (or in addition to) equivalence. And cosmopolitans who think in terms of connections – and their incompleteness and partiality – are less likely to turn a blind eye to the material inequalities that shape the ways in which different people can belong to specific groups while still inhabiting the world as a whole.

The Catholic Church has confronted this issue in relating the universality of Christian faith to the need for working and living through particular groups. It developed the notions of modalities (locality-based groups like parishes) and sodalities (task-based groups like missionary organizations) to mediate the universal faith. This way of thinking about Christian ministry offers a reminder of more general importance: the organizations, networks, and pathways by which we transcend locality are still particular, specific – to people, dimensions of human life, ways of bringing some human beings closer rather than others. Accordingly we need to pay more attention to specific connections – political and economic, as well as cultural – among people that offer both solidarity and encourage division.

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Within a year of my meeting in the desert, the briefly latent civil war between Northern and Southern Sudan would again become a devastating open conflict. The Chevron oil fields would become part of the stakes of the struggle, and Chevron would be replaced by other multinationals, with China eventually becoming the main customer for Sudanese oil. And the oil trade wasn't the only multinational enterprise shaping events in Sudan. Global Islam was already important, and in the next twenty years Sudan would undergo a revolution, a radicalization of Islamic politics, and then a split between military and religious leaders. Osama bin-Laden would find Khartoum a hospitable base for a while, leading the United States to fire missiles to destroy a factory possibly linked to international terrorism. Not least, even as war died down in the South, the Western Sudanese province of Darfur would become nearly synonymous with the failure of global good intentions faced with nasty government and deeply complex local politics.

In this same intervening period, as the Soviet Union collapsed and capitalist globalization intensified, international civil society became ever more prominent. From religious charity to human rights campaigns to regulating the Internet, a range of organizations and networks worked across national boundaries. Versions of cosmopolitanism became a natural self-understanding of this work. This was not without ideological distortions. Business leaders attending the World Economic Forum at Davos and social movement activists attending the World Social Forum in Porto Allegre tended each to think they were the *real* cosmopolitans. And both tended to describe global civil society as more autonomous from states than it really was.

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Craig Calhoun on cosmopolitanism

Precisely because the world is so intensively connected today, cosmopolitanism has become a crucial theme in politics and social science, not only ethics. But in an important way, these different discourses are all embedded in a larger cultural cosmopolitanism that is, among other things, a sort of class consciousness of frequent travelers. Each of us, we might say, has a duty to consider the implications of our actions for everyone. But thinking in terms of a set or category of human individuals misses part of what makes cosmopolitanism a compelling concern today: the extraordinary growth of connections among human beings and variously organized social groups – relationships mediated by markets and media, migrations and infectious diseases, but nonetheless social relationships.

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