



Will Kymlicka &
Kathryn Walker,
editors

Rooted Cosmopolitanism

Canada and the World

Will Kymlicka and Kathryn Walker

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Rooted Cosmopolitanism: Canada and the World

Will Kymlicka and Kathryn Walker

In the contemporary world, human beings often combine profound local, ethnic, religious, or national attachments with a commitment to cosmopolitan values and principles that transcend those more local boundaries. The aim of this volume is to explore the interplay between local attachments and cosmopolitan values, through a critical exploration of the idea of “rooted cosmopolitanism.” Cosmopolitanism itself is a theory originating in the fourth century BCE. It posits that our political and moral existence should be played out on a world stage and that each of us belongs to a community of human beings that transcends the particularities of local affiliation. Although cosmopolitanism is usually understood as requiring us to set aside our more local attachments, a new school of thought argues that the outward-bound cosmopolitan perspective requires and involves the very roots it claims to transcend. This idea of rooted cosmopolitanism was popularized by Kwame Anthony Appiah (1996, 2006) in the mid-1990s, and has since been adopted in various forms by a range of political theorists and philosophers. The essays in this volume examine rooted cosmopolitanism using Canada as a test case, exploring how the local attachments and identities that characterize Canadians facilitate or impede cosmopolitan concerns.

Canada provides particularly fertile ground for exploring these ideas. As we discuss below, the idea that “being Canadian” includes or entails “being a good citizen of the world” has a long history in Canadian public debate and academic discourse, and is underpinned by several structural features of Canada’s internal political dynamics and its position in the world. We can therefore learn a great deal about the potential for rooted cosmopolitanism, and its limits, by examining the Canadian case.

In the process, we hope to bring into dialogue three bodies of scholarship that have remained relatively isolated from each other. There is

considerable work in the social sciences devoted to how nations and national identities have adapted to processes of globalization, but this is rarely linked to the normative debates about rooted cosmopolitanism. Similarly, there is a great deal of important work by normative theorists on ideas of cosmopolitanism and global justice, but few attempts have been made to study how these ideas are manifested (or not) in particular national contexts. Finally, although much has been written on Canadian nationalism, it tends to focus on either our internal ethnic/linguistic diversity or our relations with the United States rather than on its links to cosmopolitanism. Our aim is to link these debates so as to enrich and deepen our understandings of national identity, cosmopolitan values, and Canadian studies.

Why Rooted Cosmopolitanism? Why Now?

Since the 1990s, there has been a dramatic revival in philosophical discussions of cosmopolitanism. Commenting on this trend, David Miller (2008, 23) claims that “‘cosmopolitan’ is probably now the preferred self-description of most political philosophers who write about global justice.” It is no accident that this renewed interest in global conceptions of humanity coincides with concrete trends of globalization in economic, political, technological, cultural, and social sectors. Indeed, we could say that globalization has made some form of cosmopolitanism virtually inevitable. The pressures of globalization – environmental concerns, refugees, the migration of peoples, awareness of the crimes of genocidal regimes, terrorism, multinational trade, and advances in communication technology – have made older ideas of national autarky or isolation increasingly untenable. There is growing recognition of the need for some normative conception of global community, responsibility, and governance.

However, if current realities have made some form of cosmopolitanism inevitable, these realities have also made clear that we need to revise our inherited ideas of cosmopolitanism. In the past, self-styled cosmopolitans typically endorsed an amalgam of moral, political, and cultural cosmopolitanism. *Moral* cosmopolitanism holds that all human beings are subject to a common moral code and that birthplace is morally irrelevant to someone’s moral worth. *Political* cosmopolitanism maintains the need for institutions of global governance. *Cultural* cosmopolitanism emphasizes the idea of a common global culture, and/or the ability of individuals to move freely and comfortably between different cultures, so that people feel culturally at home wherever they are in the world. For many Enlightenment cosmopolitans, these dimensions were strongly inter-

connected: we should recognize the equal moral worth of all human beings by creating a single world political order united around a single common language and global culture. (For Condorcet, for example, the language and culture of this cosmopolitan order would of course be French.)

Today, however, these Enlightenment images of cosmopolitanism seem paradoxically both utopian and dystopian. They are utopian in their expectations of a democratic world state, but dystopian in their suppression of cultural and linguistic diversity and in the way they open the door to imperialism. Indeed, European colonialism was often justified as a means of spreading a cosmopolitan order and ethos. The core idea of cosmopolitanism may be to recognize the moral worth of people beyond our borders, particularly the poor and needy, but its historical practice has often been to extend the power and influence of privileged elites in the wealthy West while doing little if anything to benefit the truly disadvantaged. In this sense, cosmopolitanism has been aptly described by Craig Calhoun as the “class consciousness of the frequent flier” (Calhoun 2002).

Any defensible conception of cosmopolitanism for today’s world must avoid these connotations. It must be a postcolonial cosmopolitanism, divorced from ideas of either cultural homogenization or political unification, accepting of cultural diversity and of the rights of the world’s peoples to local autonomy. And it is in this context that ideas of rooted cosmopolitanism have emerged. (Some authors prefer slightly different terminology, such as “anchored cosmopolitanism” [Dallmayr 2003], “situated cosmopolitanism” [Baynes 2007], “embedded cosmopolitanism” [Erskine 2008], “vernacular cosmopolitanism” [Werbner 2006], or “republican cosmopolitanism” [Chung 2003], to express a similar idea.) Rooted cosmopolitanism attempts to maintain the commitment to moral cosmopolitanism, while revising earlier commitments to a world state or a common global culture, and affirming instead the enduring reality and value of cultural diversity and local or national self-government.

Even as rooted cosmopolitanism affirms the legitimacy of national self-government, however, it also entails revising our traditional understanding of “nationhood.” For many rooted cosmopolitans, the nation can no longer be seen as the locus of unqualified sovereignty, exclusive loyalty, or blind patriotism. People’s attachment to their ethnic cultures and national states must be constrained by moral cosmopolitan commitments to human rights, global justice, and international law. Rooted cosmopolitanism, in short, attempts to redefine our traditional understandings of both cosmopolitanism and nationhood.

Rooted cosmopolitanism is not a monolithic doctrine, and it is worth distinguishing weaker and stronger forms of the claim that cosmopolitanism requires roots. The weakest form merely argues that rooted attachments (to local self-government and to cultural diversity) are not inherently inconsistent with global responsibilities. In this view, cosmopolitanism leaves room for meaningful rooted attachments and vice versa. A stronger form argues that rooted attachments are functionally required to achieve cosmopolitan goals. For example, it is often argued that the achievement of cosmopolitan goals requires the existence of political units capable of engaging in legitimate collective decisions and effective agency, and this requires building a sense of membership in and attachment to bounded political communities. To achieve any political goals, including cosmopolitan goals, there must be cohesive and legitimate political units, and such cohesion and legitimacy in turn requires building a sense of belonging or, if you prefer, patriotism. Without bounded communities that inspire feelings of patriotism, there will be no political units with the functional capacity to pursue cosmopolitan commitments.

An even stronger form of rooted cosmopolitanism holds that particularist attachments can be the moral sources of cosmopolitan commitments. Particularist attachments can serve as “sources” in at least two different senses. One version of this argument states that particularist attachments are epistemologically required even to understand cosmopolitan goals. In this view, we can come to understand the moral significance of “the other” only because we have first been immersed in our own particular communities and ways of life, which give us a “thick” or “deep” sense of moral value and moral responsibility. If we lacked these particularist attachments, and hence saw the world only as a collection of abstract and undifferentiated human beings with their universal human rights, we would lack the concepts, virtues, and practices needed to understand truly why the lives of others matter, or what justice requires of us. People must first be successfully socialized into the habits and practices of moral particularism before they are epistemologically or psychologically capable of morally engaging with the claims of distant others.¹

Rooted attachments may serve as moral sources in a second and even stronger sense: namely, they may contain within them the seeds of more universalistic commitments, such that we can appeal to people’s sense of rooted attachments to help motivate cosmopolitan commitments. In this view, people pursue cosmopolitan commitments because this is what their particular attachments require of them. For example, people

become good citizens of the world because this is part of what it means to be a good Canadian: being Canadian motivates being or becoming a cosmopolitan. Immersion in the loyalties and attachments of “being Canadian” does not just help to develop certain moral capacities that are presupposed by cosmopolitanism, such as a sense of responsibility; rather, Canadianness itself may impel people toward cosmopolitanism, as people attempt to more fully explore or express their sense of being Canadian.

Of these different formulations, it is this final and strongest articulation of rooted cosmopolitanism that is the most controversial.² As various essays in this volume discuss, the idea that cosmopolitan commitments leave room for more particularistic attachments is widely accepted, although how much room is very much open to debate. Similarly, the idea that bounded communities can provide the effective collective agency necessary for the attainment of cosmopolitan goals is widely recognized, particularly given the dystopian nature of older ideas of a single world state. And the idea that immersion in particularistic attachments precedes more abstract or impartial reasoning is familiar – it is widely recognized, for example, that if children do not form bonds of love and trust within the family, they are unlikely to develop an effective sense of justice later in life.

But to argue that our rooted attachments – including our national attachments – are the very source of our cosmopolitan commitments is more controversial and counterintuitive. The fact that nation-states can draw on strong national identities and patriotisms makes them potentially effective vehicles of collective agency for achieving cosmopolitan goals, if and when citizens decide to pursue such goals, but can we really say that these strong national identifications and patriotisms *motivate* cosmopolitanism? Does not history tell us that the most serious obstacle to cosmopolitanism in the modern world is precisely the moral blinders and national egoism associated with nationalism?

Yet, as Alison Brysk (2009) notes, national identity politics can be constructive. Indeed, her empirical study of “global good Samaritans” suggests that countries that act as good global citizens do so precisely because of their national identities. It is worth quoting her summary in full:

In a world riven by resurgent nationalism, reactive fundamentalism, and constructed clash of civilizations, modernist social science counsels universalist materialism as a bulwark against parochial chaos. But political communities are inevitably constituted and oriented by some set of values, and national versions of cosmopolitan values can serve as an

alternative to both neoliberal homogenization and the defensive, competitive particularism it evokes. Canadian soldiers sacrificing their lives in Afghanistan, or Swedish taxpayers bankrolling African refugees are not just trying to be better human beings – they take national pride in expressing their identity as Swedes or Canadians through these global contributions, and acting globally builds national identities as “Canadian peacekeepers” or “Swedish volunteers.” The lesson of the post-Cold War world is that identities do not melt away with modernization, so that our best bet for global cooperation is to enhance and mobilize constructive national values, and promote national identification with positive aspects of global good citizenship. (Brysk 2009, 221)

This is the promise of rooted cosmopolitanism: that the very same national identities that bind people deeply to their own particular national community and territory can also mobilize moral commitment to distant others, and that inculcating and affirming a sense of Swedishness or Canadianness among co-nationals can simultaneously inculcate and affirm a sense of global citizenship.

This helps to clarify what is new and distinctive about the idea of rooted cosmopolitanism. Questions about how insiders should treat outsiders and strangers are as old as political philosophy, dating back to the ancient Greeks, and addressed in all the major world religions (Sullivan and Kymlicka 2007). But the idea of rooted cosmopolitanism is not just a new name for this old debate about duties toward insiders versus duties toward outsiders. Rooted cosmopolitanism is born of historically specific political circumstances, and is intimately tied to the evolving nature and function of modern democratic nation-states and the role they play in mediating moral and political cosmopolitanism.

Moral cosmopolitanism is a straightforward invitation to appreciate the moral equality of humanity in general, and many people throughout the ages have found this idea compelling, for the same basic reasons. Beliefs about how to translate this moral position into political practice are much more variable historically, however, and the rise of rooted cosmopolitanism reflects a specific set of political circumstances. In the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, it was widely assumed that the best hope of achieving moral cosmopolitan values lay in (1) overcoming national partialities and nationalist ideologies, and (2) creating new forms of transnational and global governance. Cosmopolitanism has often been defined as antagonistic to nationalism (see Beck 2006; Brighouse and Brock 2005; Cabrera 2004; Habermas 1998; Held 2002,

2005; Moellendorf 2005; Nussbaum 1996) and as requiring individuals to renounce national partialities, and the bloody history of twentieth-century Europe seemed to confirm that supremacist nationalist ideologies are prone to violence, aggression, and ultimately genocide against those who are seen as “not one of us.” The hope for cosmopolitanism, therefore, lay in overcoming nation-based politics through the building of transnational global institutions, such as the United Nations and the European Union.

Today, however, many commentators have become both more pessimistic about the prospects of transnational governance and more optimistic about the transformative and constructive potential of nation-based politics. On the one hand, it has become increasingly clear that any attempt to put moral cosmopolitanism into political practice requires serious attention to issues of legitimacy and authority, and schemes of global governance fall short in this regard. For example, what legitimacy does the United Nations have, given that its members are not elected by the people they represent? Legitimate government must be democratic government, and democratic government appears to require bounded political communities. All schemes for global governance are faced with serious “democratic deficits,” undermining their potential to advance moral cosmopolitan goals.

Conversely, the idea of the nation-state, which was widely discredited by the horrors of the Second World War, has regained (some of) its legitimacy, as (some) nation-states have proven their capacity to combine a commitment to the welfare of their own citizens with a commitment to good global citizenship. To be sure, nationalism needs to be moderated by commitments to human rights and global justice, but studies such as Brysk’s (2009) suggest that a suitably chastened form of nationalism or patriotism can help provide sources of moral motivation, help identify and respect morally relevant particularities that are essential aspects of our moral lives, and help provide sites for effective political participation and democratic accountability.

It is this constellation of factors that helps to explain the specificity of rooted cosmopolitanism. Like all forms of cosmopolitanism, rooted cosmopolitanism appeals to the moral worth of all human beings, including those far away from us. But it takes seriously the political power of nation-states and of national identities in the modern world, as well as the weakness of global political institutions, and attempts to make both moral sense of these facts and moral use of them, placing them at the service of cosmopolitan goals.

Rooting Cosmopolitanism in State, Nation, and Community

The various versions of rooted cosmopolitanism differ not only in their account of the roles that roots play – philosophical, political, epistemological, motivational – but also in their account of what these roots consist in. Which kinds of particularistic attachments and loyalties serve as appropriate roots for cosmopolitan values? An almost infinite list of such attachments can be (and have been) invoked in the literature, but for our purposes it may be worth distinguishing three broad (but also overlapping) accounts of how and where cosmopolitanism should be rooted.

First, some theorists explore how attachment to a particular(ist) *state* is compatible with, or necessary to, cosmopolitanism. The focus here is on the importance of bounded political communities, without necessarily assuming or hoping that these boundaries of the state coincide with those of a “nation.” This statist approach is evident in Lea Ypi’s “Statist Cosmopolitanism” (2008) and James Bohman’s “Republican Cosmopolitanism” (2004), both of which argue that moral cosmopolitanism, even though it involves a moral commitment to others transcending state boundaries, requires the bounded political community of the state. For example, Ypi (2008, 48) argues that if we accept that every needy individual in the world has a justified claim to certain primary goods (moral cosmopolitanism), and if the nature of the claim is such that it requires the transformations of political institutions, then political communities provide the “unique associative sphere in which cosmopolitanism obtains political agency, may be legitimately enforced and cohesively maintained.” Similar arguments are advanced by Bohman (2004), Fred Dallmayr (2003, 438), and Philip Pettit (2010).

The idea shared by all of these theories is that state-based political communities offer necessary motivation, legitimacy, agency, cohesion, and accountability. Yet these theorists often insist that relying in this way on bounded political communities does not require appealing to distinctly nationalist identities or ideologies, and that citizens of bounded political communities need not (and indeed should not) be assumed to share national identities. Ryoa Chung (2003), for example, argues that the conditions of globalization require a new non-nationalistic conceptualization of republicanism, one that challenges the belief that republican citizenship must be tied to a specific nation,³ therefore making the cosmopolitan extension of citizenship viable (see also Benhabib 2006). A republican cosmopolitanism, in this view, can and should be “postnational.”