

Symposium: Global Ethics or Universal Ethics?

Kok-Chor Tan argues that cosmopolitan liberalism can serve as a means to implement the ideal of moral universalism, if one sufficiently distinguishes non-toleration from intervention and moral universalism from dogmatism. In a further move, Tan claims that such an understanding of cosmopolitan liberalism can work to mutually regulate the behavior of states in the global arena. Tan's co-panelists engage different aspects of his vision. Steve Coutinho underscores that changes within cultures do not typically result from a dialogue across cultures but from within individual cultures. Instead of propping up universal morality on the ideal of cosmopolitan liberalism, we should, Coutinho proposes, work toward finding values that have been implemented to create practical circumstances that resemble those found in liberal cultures. Putting the spotlight on the historical context of liberal cosmopolitanism, Zachary Penman argues that to engage in a global dialogue, the onus is on cosmopolitan liberals to shift the geography of reasoning from imperialism to decoloniality. Equally, their decolonial partners in this dialogue should throw into light the normative content of their decolonial practical reason to facilitate the shift. Saranindranath Tagore encourages Tan to think about a more expanded account of autonomy that is set on a more explicit cosmopolitan register. To this end, he suggests that a cosmopolitan sensibility be fostered through education. Sympathetic to Tan's larger project of a liberal cosmopolitanism that subscribes to epistemic modesty, Inés Valdez brings into focus structures of epistemic dogmatism that currently allow for political and economic control and exploitation of other peoples and their resources. Tan's response considers how his own defense of liberal cosmopolitanism as well as his interlocutors' responses relate to the broader project of decolonizing philosophy.

Key words: cosmopolitan liberalism; global justice; moral imperialism; Zhuangzi; liberal culture; decoloniality; geography of reason; philosophy of education; unity of the human; interventionalist projects; epistemology of ignorance; decolonizing philosophy

Globalizing Cosmopolitanism¹

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1 Introduction

I will mean by *cosmopolitan liberalism* the global political morality that takes the principle of individual autonomy to be a universal ideal, applicable to all persons regardless of nationality or citizenship. Accordingly, on this conception of global justice, all just or legitimate political societies have to be liberal in some form domestically. One implication of this global commitment to autonomy is that all states must be characteristically liberal if they are to be in good standing in the international society.²

A contrast to cosmopolitan liberalism is John Rawls's "law of peoples," which rejects the view that a well-ordered "society of peoples" must be a society of only liberal peoples (Rawls 1999). For Rawls, certain kinds of states, what he calls "decent peoples," that are hierarchical and not liberal but that are nonetheless respectful of basic human rights and the rights of other nations, are admissible as societies in good standing. The non-liberal but "decent peoples" are deserving of liberal international toleration on this conception of global political morality.

The opposition between Rawls's law of peoples and cosmopolitan liberalism is well covered in the philosophic literature.³ I will not engage with this particular debate; instead, I will focus on the more general concern that cosmopolitan liberalism is objectionably sectarian and therefore is not a suitable global political morality. According to this objection, cosmopolitan liberalism is interventionist because of its strict ideal of international toleration, and it is morally imperialistic because of its faith in the universality of autonomy. While the practice and implementation of cosmopolitan liberalism historically and in contemporary international relations show that this concern is not unfounded, I will suggest that this objection against cosmopolitan liberalism *as a practice* can be assuaged by recognizing the difference between non-tolerance and intervention, and the difference between moral universalism and moral dogmatism.⁴ Globalizing cosmopolitan liberalism will require repairing other flaws in its practice, and I will note some of these in closing below. But warding off the dangers of intervention and dogmatism is an important first step towards this end.

2 The Problem of Intervention

Cosmopolitan liberalism holds that non-liberal states fail to meet the bar of international toleration.⁵ They have made arguments that non-cosmopolitan liberal conceptions of international toleration (like Rawls's, for example) are too lax in that they overemphasize the place and role of toleration in liberal political morality. Cosmopolitan liberals insist that all states ought to be domestically liberal in their constitution if they are to be regarded as just states and states in good standing in international society. In other words, only states that are protective of the autonomy of their own individual members are to be tolerated from the perspective of global justice.

Whatever the merits behind its stricter ideal of international toleration, cosmopolitan toleration arouses a more basic and general concern: Doesn't its ideal of international toleration license international intervention, in the form of outright military intervention, or at least in the form of economic and political pressures, against countries that fail to meet liberal standards in their domestic arrangements, for the sake of protecting individual autonomy? Yet given the historical and parochial origin of liberal autonomy and the history of colonialism, this is worrisome and arouses concerns of neo-imperialism or colonialism.

But this charge that cosmopolitan liberalism entails excessive intervention can be contained. It too hastily conflates non-tolerance with the permission to politically or militarily intervene. Toleration or non-tolerance is a moral judgment; intervention has to do with the enforcement of that judgment. When the liberal cosmopolitan says that a non-liberal country fails to meet the conditions of international toleration, what it is saying is that, from the perspective of justice, that country has fallen short, and that ideally it ought to be organized differently so as to better protect and promote the freedom and equality of each of its citizens. It makes the judgment that this country is not in good standing from the perspective of ideal justice.

Yet to not tolerate in this case is not right away a license to intervene. That is a question of enforcement, which inevitably raises the strategic question of how best to advance a moral end and also the moral question of how to permissibly advance that end. Indeed, it is often not wise or morally permissible to intervene in an unjust state. From the strategic point of view, interventions can be counterproductive and costly when other options are available. More significantly, interventions are not always morally permissible.

Consider the most extreme form of intervention that worries critics of cosmopolitan liberalism, namely, that of military intervention. A right cause is not by itself a sufficient justification for engaging in coercive intervention. Besides just cause, there are also other moral constraints to be

met for a justified military intervention. For instance, there is the moral requirement of proportionality, the requirement of good-faith consideration of other options, the requirement of proper authorization, and so on. That is, there are additional moral constraints against military intervention that a just cause alone does not overcome under any plausible just war theory.⁶ In other words, military interventions are subject to the limiting moral conditions for a just war, and these typically include, besides a *right cause*, some criteria of reasonable last resort, proportionality, proper authorization, and so on. Cosmopolitan liberalism is not liberated from the basic requirements of just war theory. It may have a different account of a *just cause* for war than non-cosmopolitan theories, but it is nonetheless subject to other more basic constraints that apply to both conceptions. So while a illiberal regime may be criticized for failing to respect the basic autonomy of its citizens, military intervention is not morally permissible if there are other options available to protect the oppressed individuals, if intervention is going to be a cure that is worse than the disease, if there is no proper authorization for using force, and the like. To not tolerate is just the first step—to go to war, to militarily intervene, will require the satisfaction of other moral considerations. In most cases of illiberal regimes, military intervention will not only be unjustifiable from the perspective of just war theory but also ineffectual.

But non-tolerance as distinct from intervention is still morally significant. It signals an ethical stance and makes a normative judgment as to the unacceptability of the criticized regime. And this stance can be backed up in other ways: diplomatic discussion, genuine and sincere moral dialogue, and even the offering of incentives (membership in trade blocs, favored status for trade relations, etc.). None of these nonforcible methods of practical affirmation of a moral judgment involves external interference of the sort that engages the imperialism worry.

So, one step towards a proper globalizing of liberal cosmopolitanism is greater clarity of the difference between judgment and enforcement, and to avoid conflating them. It important to stress that it is true that cosmopolitan liberalism in practice has frequently failed to respect the moral limits on intervention. In this regard, the charge that cosmopolitan liberalism is interventionistic is not without merit. But this is a criticism of its practice, not its commitments, and the success of globalizing cosmopolitan liberalism will require that defenders of cosmopolitan morality take seriously the distinction between toleration and non-intervention and observe the just war requirements of intervention.

3 The Problem of Moral Imperialism

But even if cosmopolitan liberalism should observe the moral limits on justified intervention, and therefore need not be inherently an *interventionistic* global ideology, doesn't its universalizing moral outlook reflect a form of moral imperialism? After all, so the objection goes, liberalism has a historical and cultural origin, and not all global cultures and philosophies endorse the liberal ideal of individual autonomy. Indeed, one might go on to add that this suspicion of moral cultural imperialism is not unwarranted: there is the tendency of cosmopolitan liberals to dismiss "non-liberal" cultures as morally regressive and barbaric. J.S. Mill famously called countries not ready for liberalism "backward societies," and these were, unsurprisingly, countries that were colonized by a liberal Britain.

To get some handle on this matter, one has to clarify what one is objecting to when one objects to moral imperialism. I take it that what is wrong with moral imperialism is the complacent judgment that one's moral tradition is superior by default, that other moral worldviews are inferior because of inferior cultural traditions, and that there is thus nothing to learn from them. What is needed is moral assertion, backed by political force, to advance liberalism, not moral dialogue. That is, what is worrisome is moral dogmatism, not moral universalism as such.

So, if cosmopolitan liberalism does not *just* attempt to impose a particular conception of justice globally, but offers arguments based on moral reasons that have potentially broad appeal, the concern of dogmatism can be allayed. It is the case that liberal cosmopolitanism requires a critical stance and response towards non-liberal states, and will advocate for a conception of global justice that declares in principle that non-liberal states are unjust. In this sense, it exerts significant dialogic pressures on non-liberal states to reform. But moral criticism and urging reform by appeal to a conception of justice per se is not disrespectful if the critic is prepared to give reasons for her stance. Imperialism involves political aggrandizement. Cosmopolitan liberalism need not involve political expansion, and it does not impose but argues for its morality.

Thus, if what is objectionable about moral imperialism is that it complacently and dogmatically presumes the truth and superiority of a particular moral tradition without attempting to offer reasons that others can potentially come to accept, cosmopolitan liberalism need not be morally imperialistic. What cosmopolitanism ought to propose is the more modest stance that it can be part of an acceptable liberal foreign policy to critically engage non-liberal societies regarding matters of domestic political organization, and to use peaceful measures like trade incentives to motivate reform. But critical engagement is a two-way street, and liberals have the responsibility to attend to and to respond to arguments and objections from the other side. Accordingly, liberals will occasionally have to revise their original evaluations if critical dialogue reveals that the cosmopolitan critics have failed to properly appreciate the facts of the matter. More significantly, it means that liberals will have to continually work on their defense of individual autonomy, to come up with new and better arguments in light of new challenges and counterresponses. If moral imperialism is the smug imposition of a moral view on others without listening to what they have to say, cosmopolitanism need not be a form of moral imperialism.

Responsiveness to the counterarguments from the other side implies that liberal states have to accept also criticisms of their own particular domestic practices and either provide reasoned arguments for these or revise or eliminate these practices. The cosmopolitan ideal, even though it is a globalized account of liberal justice, must not presume that all liberal states are, in practice, fully just and beyond rebuke. Problems of racism, economic inequality, and overexploitation of the environment are just some examples of failures of justice within many liberal states, and these are equally subject to external criticisms. And allowing for outside criticisms can sometimes help identify problems that internal critics for reasons of social and cultural immersion are not able to notice.

Indeed, for this reason, both sides to the cosmopolitan/anti-cosmopolitan dispute can benefit from the critical engagement. From the liberal perspective, there is the prospect that the commitments of non-liberal societies can be revised based on the collision with liberalism, while liberalism itself can be understood anew due to this confrontation.⁷ But this presumption of the truth of one's own view is not necessarily parochial—we must access the moral world from a particular point of view (and within the liberal point of view is a universalizing tendency). What is required is that cosmopolitan liberals be ready to offer reasons for their convictions, reasons that they can reasonably believe that others can accept, and be prepared to receive and respond to criticisms in turn. And, as noted, the result is not presumed to be always one-sided: critical engagement with other societies may expose actual flaws within liberal societies in need of correction.

In short, the cosmopolitan ideal is grounded on the moral belief that all persons are entitled to protection of their autonomy. Its account of toleration is motivated by the need to respond to situations in which persons are denied this protection by their own states. In this respect, it is not a refutation of the cosmopolitan ideal that it has a universalist agenda, for this is precisely and explicitly its purpose. On the other hand, concerns about possible cosmopolitan dogmatism can be assuaged if

the project of globalizing cosmopolitanism is backed by reasons and is responsive to counterarguments.

This separation of moral universalism and moral dogmatism is something that cosmopolitan liberalism can be and needs to be more explicit about. It is the case that cosmopolitan liberalism in practice, and not just historically, has tended towards dogmatism. The globalizing of cosmopolitan liberalism will require thus a more conscious recognition of the perils of dogmatism by developing a philosophy of moral fallibility. In this regard, cosmopolitan liberals can learn something from the ancient Chinese philosopher, Zhuangzi.

4 Learning from other Traditions

There are different ways of interpreting a complex historical figure like Zhuangzi (of whose personal life little is known) and his eponymous cryptic text the *Zhuangzi* (Zhuangzi 2005). Thus Zhuangzi is sometimes read as a through-and-through moral skeptic, other times as a moral relativist. But there is another reading, and this is that Zhuangzi is advocating for a kind of moral fallibilism against the tendency of unflinching moral certainty and dogmatism. Indeed, I would argue that reading the *Zhuangzi* to be a defense of philosophical fallibilism as an antidote to moral dogmatism grants him much contemporary currency.

When Zhuangzi writes, “Life is bounded. Knowledge is unbounded. Using the bounded to follow the unbounded is dangerous” (Zhuangzi 2005: 224), we can take this to be a warning against an undue overconfidence in the extent and completeness of our knowledge. To claim from our bounded, limited experience that we have true and complete universal knowledge is hubristic. Since our knowledge is limited to our socially confined and subjective experiences, we should keep an open mind. We have to acknowledge our own limits, the presence of other points of view, and other moral perspectives that we could be blind to. Consider this well-known passage:

So we have the rights and wrong of the Confucians and the Mohists. Each calls right what the other calls wrong, and each calls wrong what the other calls right. But if you want to right their wrongs and wrong their rights, it's better to throw them open to the light. (Zhuangzi 2005: 217)

This complex passage has been interpreted in different ways, including as a defense of moral skepticism, or as a defense of moral relativism. But it can also be read, I propose, as a position on epistemic and moral modesty. What the passage tells us—“throw them open to the light”—is that parties in a moral disagreement have the responsibility to better understand the competing positions, and to become more self-aware of the potential limitations of their own perspectives. Zhuangzi does not say we immediately accept our opponent to be right and that we are also right (relativism), or else renounce the truth or rightness of our own view or any view for that matter (skepticism). Rather, we take on the additional task of subjecting our own views to critical reflection and analysis—i.e., “throw them open to the light.” We are to remain on guard for epistemic failures on our own part. We don't surrender our moral commitments, but we engage the other side with an open mind, with the presumption that there are points of view that we are not privileged to, that our moral understanding and vision derive from a necessarily limited perspective, and that a more complete truth is obtained via the collision of the different perspectives. In this sense, moral universalism is consistent with anti-dogmatism.

Taking inspiration from the moral fallibilism advocated in the *Zhuangzi*, cosmopolitan liberals can guard against the dangers of moral imperialism by consciously adopting an attitude of moral modesty and fallibility. To be committed to certain universal ideals and principles is one thing; to stand by them with the clarity and zealousness of a fanatic is another. Moral modesty is not a lack of commitment; it is the awareness that one could be mistaken and be prepared to listen to other points of view. We can be committed to our values without being dogmatic about them.

The problem of moral imperialism in short is not a problem necessary or unique to liberal cosmopolitanism but a problem of moral fanaticism of any form. Indeed, in the present world, where the dangers we face are not the consequence of the lack of commitments and beliefs in moral rightness, but that of extremism of beliefs and commitments, the recommendation of Zhuangzi that we adopt a more reflective and modest stance towards our own commitments is one we will all do well to heed. Cosmopolitan liberals must stand up for their principles, but they must also realize that the moral categories they draw on and the moral judgments they pass are necessarily from a limited perspective, and are therefore fallible.

5 Conclusion

Is cosmopolitan liberalism objectionably sectarian? If by “sectarian” we mean taking a moral position and rejecting contradictory views, then cosmopolitan liberalism is openly sectarian, and this is a feature, not a bug. The issue is whether this sectarianism is *objectionable*. I have suggested that the common worry that cosmopolitan liberalism is objectionable because it is interventionist or morally dogmatic, while descriptive of contemporary and historical practice, does not indict cosmopolitan liberalism as an ideal. There is nothing about its taking a universalist stance that entails permissiveness towards intervention and dogmatism towards morality. The prospect of making cosmopolitan liberalism an acceptable global practice will require that cosmopolitan liberalism more firmly separate intervention from discussions of toleration and defend its moral universalism undogmatically but with a sense of fallibility. Globalizing cosmopolitan liberalism successfully no doubt will require attention to other matters, including making more explicit the connection between cosmopolitan liberalism and global egalitarianism, incorporating multiculturalism into its framework, and exploring the possibility of international reparative injustices for the wrongs done in the past in the name of cosmopolitan liberalism. But making cosmopolitan liberalism more consciously wary of intervention and moral dogmatism is a start.

¹ I thank Monika Kirloskar-Steinbach and a reader for their helpful comments and input.

² Versions of this idea of global justice has been defended by Brock (2009); Caney (2005); and Moellendorf (2001).

³ For a collection of commentary on Rawls, see Martin and Reidy (2006).

⁴ Disclosure: parts of this essay draw on arguments that have appeared in previously published works.

⁵ See Caney (2005); Brock (2009); and Moellendorf (2001).

⁶ For a discussion on the moral and practical constraints on intervention, see Blake (2013).

⁷ Here, cosmopolitan liberals have something to learn from J.S. Mill: that a moral view be maintained as a living truth and not degenerate into a dead dogma by continuous debate.

Mutual Openness and Global Justice: Learning from Ancient Chinese Philosophy

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I am grateful to be offered the opportunity to respond to Kok-Chor Tan's thoughtful paper. For those of us who believe that injustice is real, the question of how to deal with the injustices of other nations is a pressing one. When, if ever, are we justified in holding other nations to our most cherished values? And what form should this holding to account take? In particular, I found Tan's invitation to draw from the resources of ancient Chinese philosophy to throw light on our contemporary political concerns to be very compelling. Indeed, it inspired a multiplicity of thoughts, each revealing different aspects of the ways in which the concepts and concerns of ancient Chinese philosophy both match with ours and differ significantly. Tan was inspired by one particular passage in the *Inner Chapters*, but I am inspired to sift through other Chinese philosophies, and other passages within the *Zhuang Zi* text itself, that I believe provide more possible resources to meet Tan's philosophical needs and make possible what I believe to be a more profoundly open form of philosophical discourse.

I

Tan defines "cosmopolitan liberalism" as "the global political morality that takes the principle of individual autonomy to be a universal ideal" (Tan 2021a: 99). That is, the ideals of liberalism are taken to be obligatory for all nations and cultures. So, states that do not endorse the individual autonomy of its citizens are judged to be illegitimate in some way. Perhaps the government's right to rule has in some way been compromised, though this does not entail that any foreign military intervention against that government is justified. Presumably, any culture or philosophy that does not actively affirm the primacy of individual autonomy also falls short ethically.

The two parts of cosmopolitan liberalism sit in uneasy tension: cosmopolitanism entails a kind of universalism, insofar as it seeks to bind all individual differences under a single set of common practices—but this seems inconsistent with the insistence on the autonomy of the individual. Tan argues that this tension arises only if the universalism is enforced dogmatically. Liberalism may indeed entail universal judgments, but also requires engaging in reasoned argument: autonomous agents are rational agents. One cannot simply impose one's views and values on another by force or without reason, but must attempt to persuade the other that their practices (or basic values) are in need of correction. The force of obligation is thus attained not by coercion, but by voluntary commitment.

However, as Tan correctly points out, reasoned discourse (or "critical engagement") requires that *both* sides remain open: "critical engagement is a two-way street, and liberals have the responsibility to attend to and to respond to arguments and objections from the other side" (Tan 2021a: 102). However, I worry that Tan's openness is not sufficiently open: truly open discourse should be of the Socratic variety. As Socrates says to Gorgias, "I am one of those who are very willing to be refuted if I say anything which is not true, and very willing to refute anyone else who says what is not true, and quite as ready to be refuted as to refute; for I hold that this is the greater gain of the two, just as the gain is greater of being cured of a very great evil than of curing another" (*Gorgias* 458a). Socrates has a faith that there is indeed a universally binding Truth, but it is one that has to be *discovered* in the process of reasoning. He explicitly espouses a fallibilist position. In contrast, Tan says, "liberals will have to continually work on their defense of individual autonomy, to come up with new and better

arguments in light of new challenges and counterresponses” (Tan 2021a: 102). The only obligation in the discourse that Tan mentions is the need to marshal better arguments in defense of liberal autonomy. While this initially sounds better than imposing views by force or by fiat, our ultimate commitment to the results of rational discourse, *wherever* it may take us, is lost: instead, reason is employed *only* in defense of liberal autonomy, come what may, and appears never to be under any obligation to yield to rational critique.

There are, of course, plenty of rational arguments against the presuppositions of liberal individualism. The concept of the “rational self-interested individual” itself has been challenged by pragmatists, for example, who argue that the self must be primarily understood as social and not individual. To make this more plausible, we should remember that the application of “individuality” and “autonomy” has limits even within the systems of western liberal societies. People are not purely separate individuals, but biologically and psychologically, we exist and flourish through interactions with others, and depend on each other for growth and support. We are also not absolutely free to do anything we want regardless of its impact on others. We have laws whose very purpose is to limit the freedom of individuals (and groups). Individual autonomy is a matter of compromise, and different liberal societies function with different solutions. Freedom of speech, for example, is understood and manifested differently in England, France, Germany, and the US. There is, and must be, a continuum, between individuality and relationality, and between freedom and constraint, even in the most liberal of societies.

Also, the most prevalent forms of cosmopolitan liberalism are, in practice, complicit with global economic structures that involve unjust exploitation between states, and within states. Indeed, belief in individual autonomy coexists with extreme economic injustice within our own society, and political structures that advocate cosmopolitan liberalism even seem to permit extremes of global injustice. It seems to me that a genuine attitude of fallibilism, one that is truly to be distinguishable from dogmatism, requires that we respond with greater honesty and vulnerability to these kinds of critiques.

But there is a deeper methodological problem. Cultures that engage in this kind of mutual critique have profound differences of fundamental value. And these differences create problems for Tan’s universalist assumptions. He appears to assume that all cultures share the same concepts and value the same methods and criteria of persuasion. If these assumptions were correct, continued rational discussion would indeed be most likely to result in mutual agreement. In practice, however, this does not seem to be happening. Cultures with deep differences remain stubbornly critical of each other, despite decades, if not centuries, of mutual discussion.¹ When major cultural change does take place in a culture, it typically occurs radically from the inside, often forcefully by some kind of democratic revolution, not as a result of mutually respectful rational discourse between the old and new guards. A subculture overthrows an existing regime. This is not to deny that the subculture may have been moved in part by rational discourse, but it is to deny that rational persuasion is the primary method of social change. This is because of the mismatch between concepts, values, and methodologies of the two cultures.

I suggest that, in cases where there are profound differences of concept, value, and persuasion, we need a more radically open methodology: one in which reason plays a part, but also imagination, emotion, imagery, metaphor, and other means that can help us to stand back from, and reevaluate, our own hidden presuppositions. To be genuinely open to learning something new, we must be prepared for it to challenge what we take to be most obvious. If both sides are to be genuinely open to dialogue, then the liberal must also risk having their own sacred ground challenged.²

The fact that cultures may have profoundly different concepts and values entails another problem, regarding what it *means* to fail to endorse individual autonomy. There are *two* ways in which

a culture may not endorse the liberal ideal of individual autonomy. One is by explicitly preventing individuals, or certain classes of individuals, from exerting their autonomy, or having equal autonomy to other individuals or classes in the same society. This appears to be the sort of case that Tan is primarily concerned with. In this case, the hope is that through rational discussion, the two sides will uncover deeper shared values (perhaps concepts of fairness or justice) by which to judge their former practice. In doing so, we may come to discover that our traditional practices (slavery, sexism, racism, homophobia, etc.) have failed to live up to our own deeper values, and we are thereby able to restructure our social relations accordingly, restoring autonomy to previously oppressed people. For these cases, I am in whole-hearted agreement with Tan.

It is the second kind of case that is more problematic. The second kind of case arises when a culture challenges the very validity of the *concepts* of “individuality” and “autonomy,” or of the necessity of “rational” discourse. And in this kind of case, Tan’s methodology is unlikely to succeed. If the culture is built on concepts of relationality and mutuality, for example, then no amount of finger-wagging about “individual autonomy” is likely to have the persuasive power to move the culture to change their policies. Conversely, no amount of finger-wagging from the other culture about “relational mutuality” is likely to have much power to persuade us to change ours, especially if their methodology depends on imagery and metaphor rather than logic and reason.

However, this situation is not as hopeless as it may sound. It is also possible that, despite the absence of the *concept* of individual autonomy, in practice, their people live in a manner that *we* might still successfully describe with the language of individuality and autonomy. Or it might even be the case that we come to recognize that their societies based on a different set of values (mutual nurturing, perhaps) enable their citizens to flourish in ways that our own citizens do not. Their people may live fulfilled lives, enjoying what they do, despite not thinking of themselves as separate individuals whose rights to choose cannot be infringed. And yet, they may be seen to flourish, either in similar ways to us (I give an example of this in my discussion of the utopian Daoist ideal, below), or in ways that we autonomous individuals may fail to flourish. True openness requires us to be open to these possibilities. I hasten to add that this does not require us to fall into a mindless relativism, where we fail to make any judgments whatsoever.

If that is the case, then we might be able to find ways to encourage changes for explicitly non-liberal societies whose citizens are not flourishing to their fullest capacity (even by their own standards), or who we can see are being treated unjustly. For such societies, perhaps what we should be doing is attempting to find the alternative values within their own cultural system that might allow them to create the *practical* circumstances that *we* would think of as sufficiently similar to individual autonomy. We could do so by appealing to their own deeper values and showing that their own current social structures are inconsistent with those deeper values. We could effectively increase the ability of citizens to live in a manner similar to autonomous individuals (according to our evaluation) without ever attempting to engage in the far more difficult task of changing the ideological values of the whole culture.

II

I would like to end by briefly reconsidering just a few of many ways we might genuinely learn something new from Chinese philosophy as we attempt to engage in these sorts of tasks. I believe that there are several traditional Chinese philosophies that could prove useful for this purpose: Ruism (Confucianism), Legalism, Mohism, and Daoism. There are indeed several traditional concepts that we might try to appeal to, to critique oppressive governments in our attempt to convince them to change the way they treat their own people. I suggest that these should include the Ruist concepts of

ren (仁) “humanity,” *yi* (义) “rightness” (vs. *li* (利) “selfish gain”), and *burenzhexin* (不忍之心) “compassion”; the Mohist concept of *xiang* (相) “mutuality”; the Legalist concept of *gong* (公) “public-mindedness” (vs. *si* (私) “selfishness” and *bie* (别) “partiality”); and the Daoist concepts of *zizhi* (自治) “self-regulation” (of a group), *zizheng* (自正) “self-correction” (of a group), and *wuwei* (无为) “minimal interference.” I shall end with a couple of reflections on how we might learn something new from Ruist and Daoist thought.³

Ruist Example

From the Ruist Meng Zi (and from the Ruist text, the *Da Xue*), we might learn about extending moral concern without presupposing individualism, universalism, or the primacy of logical argument. Meng Zi is no cosmopolitan liberal, and yet he attempts to convince, at no small risk to his own well-being, the brutal tyrant, King Xuan of Qi, that he is treating his subjects inhumanely. He exhorts ethical transformation and encourages him to cultivate his humanity and compassion—his natural tendency to care about the suffering of others. He does not attempt to engage the King in rational argument in order to demonstrate the superiority of this theory. Rather, he attempts to awaken, and nurture, the King’s compassion by reminding him of the compassion he has shown for a suffering animal. He then tries to get the King to extend his feelings of care and concern to his own subjects. He appeals to the ruler’s memory and feelings and to his imagination in order to bring about these changes.

Yet, Ruism is not individualist in spirit (the Confucian “self” is a “social self”), nor is this extension of ethical concern necessarily a form of universalism. Certainly, one should apply what one has cultivated at the center of the social group and extend (致 *zhi*) it outwardly, first to one’s family, then further out to the community, and on to the state, in an ever-expanding circle. This could (theoretically) continue indefinitely, but it is not clear that the specifics of the ethical principles would remain the same as the distance from the center increases. At the very least, the force of obligation weakens as the distance increases. For this reason, this extending outwards of ethical concern parts company with a strict universalism. What we have is something like universalism, but very different: an emergent, organic, indefinite expansion.⁴

Daoist Example

Another interesting possibility is supplied by the *Lao Zi*, and the Utopian chapters of the *Zhuang Zi*. These Daoist philosophies also espouse an ontology of holistic interconnection that is inconsistent with the concept of the individual, and yet they propose an organic society in which the people are left untrammelled to regulate themselves. These utopian Daoists are close in spirit to liberalism, and are sometimes even mistaken for being individualists, but their concepts are profoundly different. The *Lao Zi* proposes a minimalistic form of rulership, *wuwei* (“non-manipulative action”), which allows the people (民 *min*) to regulate themselves (*zizheng*). They advocate small-scale communities in which people live without constraint and are self-determining (*ziding*), self-governing (*zizhi*), and live spontaneously (自然 *ziran*).

These concepts (“self-regulating,” “self-determining,” “self-governing”), however, should not be hastily equated with the concept of “autonomy” as there is no obvious sense of agency involved, and they do not involve the concept of the “individual.” Rather, the subject of self-regulation is the *people*: it is a holistic, *mutual* regulation that takes place spontaneously (*ziran*). To live freely is not understood in terms of having the ability to choose, but rather in the sense of engaging naturally and spontaneously within the natural world. All that is required is the absence of any artificial coercion, control, or interference (whether physical, legal, psychological, social, or cultural). Even the presence

of judgment (“planning”) is considered to diminish the spontaneity of action, so it would be inappropriate to equate this kind of spontaneity with *rational* self-determination.

Thus, while the Utopian Daoists promote a life of free spontaneous self-ordering, it would not be appropriate to judge this as “granting individual autonomy” to citizens. The people are not treated as “rational,” “autonomous,” or “individual”—the liberal ideal of individual autonomy is not endorsed by the Daoist ruler—and yet their way of life is indeed free from oppressive constraints. In this case, though the Daoist ruler rejects the concept of individual autonomy, no persuasion is necessary, and no critique required, since the people have their own Daoist counterpart of individual freedom.

Lastly, in a spirit of true openness and anti-dogmatism, I suggest that we should ourselves be willing to learn from these concepts, if we find that they are consistent with our own deeper values. We should be open to the possibility of learning that the cultivation of humanity and compassion could result in a rich kind of human flourishing, and that cultivating mutual regulation could possibly result in a new kind of “freedom” for our own people.

¹ I am thinking specifically of the mutual suspicion between China and Europe that has persisted over the last few centuries.

² Tan suggests that we look outwards, globally, to other philosophical traditions in order to develop a global ethic of engagement. In particular, he turns to the ancient Chinese Daoist philosopher, Zhuang Zi, whose epistemology he interprets in a new way: not as a relativist or skeptic, but as a fallibilist. Tan quotes the following passage: “But if you want to right their wrongs and wrong their rights, it’s better to throw them open to the light” (Tan 2021a: 103). He explains that “our moral understanding and vision derive from a necessarily limited perspective” and that “there are points of view we are not privileged to” (Tan 2021a: 103). So, “a more complete truth is obtained via the collision of the different perspectives” (Tan 2021a: 103). Tan takes this to be espousing a form of universalism, and reinterprets the passage as an invitation to rational discourse: the “light of reason.” Tan thus draws Zhuang Zi closer to a form of rationalist universalism. This line of interpretation would surprise a great many Zhuang Zi scholars, as there is so much in the text that is inconsistent with rationalism and universalism. Moreover, if we assimilate Zhuang Zi to western rational universalism, then I worry that we haven’t really *learned anything new* that can throw light on the political discussion of cosmopolitan liberal.

³ These concepts might also be used to encourage Chinese rulers to treat their own people less oppressively, without appealing to concepts (such as the “individual” and “rational autonomy”) that they may find unpersuasive, though I do not have the space to explore this possibility here.

⁴ Mo Zi, on the other hand, does advocate a strict universalism, and is also very concerned about how the rulers of other states treat their people. He tries to convince rulers, with rational argument, that the best course of action is to treat all others with equitable concern (*jian'ai*). Mo Zi is firmly convinced of the superiority of his position and is not open to persuasion. Indeed, he interprets all forms of disagreement as inherently dangerous and a threat to social harmony. It is only when this fails that he resorts to threatening military intervention, though the goal is always preventive action to defend the weaker against the aggressor. Mohist universalism involves utilitarian ethics—humanity (*ren*) and right action (*yi*) consist in bringing the greatest benefit (*li*) to the people, while minimizing harms—and a form of the golden rule: “treat others as you would treat yourself.” He advocates principles of minimizing harm to the weak, the elderly, and, generally speaking, those who lack power. But, as with Ruist philosophy, it is far from individualist liberalism in spirit. The harmonious functioning of the whole always outweighs the interests of the individual, where these differ. Indeed, individuals who assert their difference are treated as dangerous to the whole and punished severely. Here we see the tension between universalism and individualism taken to its extreme.

Decolonizing Cosmopolitanism Versus Globalizing Cosmopolitanism

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Recall that Kok-Chor Tan's first book, *Toleration, Diversity, and Global Justice*, was, like John Rawls's *Law of Peoples*, framed as a normative liberal critique of the positivist realist tradition in international relations theory. At the time of writing his doctoral thesis on which the book was based, realism, liberalism, and Marxism were the three major rival traditions, and liberalism was hegemonic. Constructivist, English School, Copenhagen School, international/global political economy, critical theory, postmodern, poststructuralist, postcolonial, feminist, queer theory, and green "approaches" or "perspectives" today feature in any standard undergraduate textbook or syllabus on international relations. After the positivist/post-positivist methodological and ontological debates underlying the pluralization of approaches and perspectives plateaued, the big debate now is over the reconstruction of international relations as a "global," "non-western," "post-western," or "decolonial" historical social science.¹ Books with titles like *Decolonizing International Relations*, *Recentering Africa in International Relations*, and *International Relations and Non-Western Thought: Imperialism, Colonialism and Investigations of Global Modernity* are rewriting the dominant narratives of the discipline and canonizing a new generation of scholars of world politics.

Western political philosophy, too, is reckoning with topics of racism, imperialism, colonialism, slavery, and genocide,² and Tan has contributed to these debates (Tan 2007). Cosmopolitanism is now a focal point for postcolonial and decolonial critique.³ "Globalizing Cosmopolitanism" should be read in this wider context. The title highlights a strange irony: cosmopolitan liberalism, *viz.*, "the global political morality that takes the principle of individual autonomy to be a universal ideal, applicable to all persons regardless of nationality or citizenship" (Tan 2021a: 99), is insufficiently *global* and must be *globalized*. The global turn across the disciplines has typically meant challenging Eurocentrism by revising inclusions and exclusions from disciplinary canons, opening debates to include a diverse range of global interlocutors, adopting normative and epistemic pluralism, and admonishing privileged subjects to cultivate embodied habits of epistemic humility and non-domination (Kirkoskar-Steinbach 2019: 1497–8). Margaret Kohn, in "Globalizing Global Justice," for example, argues that sustained engagement with global thinkers and thought is *necessary* for theorizing global justice (Kohn 2019: 163). As Krushil Watene argues, it follows from a sincere ethical commitment to "pursuing and realizing justice in our world today" that western liberal philosophers "must accept that much more cross-cultural and intercultural conversations about justice are urgently required" (Watene 2016: 147).

Tan takes cosmopolitan liberalism to be hegemonic, embedded in the existing liberal world order, and *as a practice* to be, potentially but not actually, objectionable because it is *sectarian*. Tan divides the problem of objectionable sectarianism into two parts. The first is that cosmopolitan liberalism is presumed (mistakenly, but understandably) to be *a priori* interventionist because it imposes strict limits on international toleration, and *a posteriori* interventionist because liberal constraints on intervention have not, in practice, been respected (Tan 2021a: 100–1). The second is that cosmopolitan liberalism is presumed (mistakenly, but understandably) to be morally dogmatic because of its strong commitment to the universality of the modern liberal ideal of autonomy and because some liberals, past and present, have not been dialogical but monological (Tan 2021a: 101–3). So, by globalizing cosmopolitanism, Tan means defending cosmopolitan liberalism in theory against objections to its practice, and repairing defects in its practice to make it acceptable as a global political morality. Cosmopolitan liberals must first clarify their toleration-intervention nexus; second, observe the just war requirements of intervention; and third, offer reasons for their convictions that they can

reasonably believe that their interlocutors could accept, and receive and respond to external criticisms in turn (Tan 2021a).

This echoes Jürgen Habermas’s argument from the other side of the Atlantic that the pragmatic presuppositions of global dialogue about the “foundations of a more just international order” given the “continuing vitality of world religions” are that these processes “can no longer be conducted one-sidedly,” but now must be *open and inclusive* with the west as “one participant among others” who must all be “willing to be *enlightened by others* about their respective blind spots” (Habermas in Mendieta 2010; emphasis added). Further, Tan’s argument that “cosmopolitan liberals can guard against the dangers of moral imperialism by consciously adopting an attitude of moral modesty and fallibility” echoes Amy Allen’s argument that a further condition of possibility for dialogue is that “we” must conceptualize “our” modern liberal conception of practical reason in a more “humble, contingent, and modest or self-effacing” way at the second order than Habermas does, without sacrificing its first order commitment to the universality of autonomy (Allen 2016: 125). This stance of epistemic humility, Allen argues, makes it possible for “us” to be open and inclusive of Others in global dialogue and processes of mutual (un)learning (Allen 2017: 197). I argue that the conditions of possibility for global dialogue are more demanding than Tan states. Sharpening the conceptual distinction between non-toleration and intervention in theory and practice and cultivating the epistemic virtue of humility—two leitmotifs in Tan’s thought—though not unnecessary, are false starts for globalizing cosmopolitan liberalism.

1 The Toleration-Intervention Nexus (Non-)tolerance versus (Non-)intervention

Realist assumptions of sovereign equality, rationality, and structural anarchy are violated not only by the actuality of rules-based order and cooperation, but by the actual history of patterns of hierarchy in world order (Buzan and Schouenborg 2018: 123). Tan and I share the view that, ontologically, world orders (and all other forms and levels of social, economic, political, and legal order) are intersubjectively *constructed*, and do not emerge merely as a natural or unintentional consequence of rational human interaction (Acharya 2018; Raymond 2019). The primary way that world order is constructed is by making rules and norms that establish criteria for admission into or rejection from international society, and which are, *in extremis*, enforced against violators. Liberalism has been the hegemonic public morality of the modern/colonial world order from the long nineteenth century, under British hegemony, until now (Mehta 1999; Bell 2007, 2016). So, as Charles Mills argues, actual historical liberalism is an “ethico-juridical set of concepts, norms and principles, underlying assumptions and overarching narratives, which will necessarily be a central reference point for debate, whether as an accepted framework or one to be challenged, modified, and built upon” (Mills 2019: 106).

Cosmopolitan liberalism is a modification of the theory and practice of liberalism that extends the scope of the liberal conception of justice, grounded in the modern liberal ideal of autonomy, to all human beings irrespective of their identities, affiliations, or solidarities. Tan takes this premise to imply that, “on this conception of global justice, all just or legitimate political societies have to be liberal in some form domestically,” and further that, “all states must be characteristically liberal if they are to be in good standing in the international society” (Tan 2021a: 99). He contrasts cosmopolitan liberalism against an alternative liberal global political morality that has not autonomy but toleration as its ground norm—as exemplified by Rawls’s *Law of Peoples*. Such a liberal global political morality would extend admission into global international society to *decent* non-liberal peoples hierarchically organized by

common good conceptions of justice but who are respectful of a minimal list of human rights and observe a minimal set of global norms of behavior such as non-aggression and respect for treaties.

While Rawls's view is *prima facie* more amenable to pluralism in world politics—although Tan argues that in fact his comprehensive liberalism is more amenable to “third generation” collective rights—from a decolonial perspective, both liberal views are objectionable. Whereas Rawls categorizes state-societies into “liberal,” “decent,” and “burdened” or “outlaw” categories, Tan categorizes state-societies into “liberal,” “non-liberal,” and “illiberal” categories. For both Rawls and Tan, western liberal democracy is the normative referent culture in global ordering that establishes the standards of the global international society. Neither Rawls nor Tan assumes that western liberal democracies perfectly realize liberal justice internally or that they always behave justly externally. And so, they are open to external critique on these grounds—for example, their structural racism and the institutional racism of their police, or their unilateral interventions and support for corrupt regimes and dictators in the global south, etc.

What is objectionable about cosmopolitan liberalism, *contra* Tan, is not simply that it entails “excessive intervention” (Tan 2021a: 100). The solution, then, is not simply to clearly differentiate non-toleration and intervention, with non-toleration and its consequent rejection from international society thereby providing insufficient justification for military intervention, which is reserved for illiberal peoples under conditions of just war (Tan 2021a: 101).⁴ The problem is the innate tendency of modern liberal western civilization to categorize and order the world with itself at the geographical center and sociohistorical apex, and to justify its presumed right to order the world on the grounds that its modern liberal western conceptions of reason, order, and justice are the most progressive. The *epistemic coloniality* of the global core-periphery power structure is precisely this ordering of the world into racialized categories (Quijano 2007: 169). Linda Tuhiwai Smith argues that imperialism in conjunction with modern social science “provided the means through which concepts of what counts as human could be applied systematically as forms of classification, for example, through hierarchies of race and typologies of different societies,” which came to shape colonizer/colonized international relations (Smith 2012: 27).

The assumed cultural and racial supremacy of western liberal imperial nation-states was codified in the nineteenth-century international legal doctrine of the standard of civilization, which granted European powers the right, in the name of modern civilization, to colonize so-called barbarians and savages, govern their development, and westernize their institutions (Buzan 2014: 578). The standard of civilization maintained that European powers had the right to judge whether non-European societies had *matured* sufficiently to have their sovereign equality recognized, and thus to be admitted to the Eurocentric international society and so subject to the ground norm of non-intervention. This stay in the waiting room of history (Chakrabarty 2008: 8–9) may be a period of decades or centuries depending on their perceived level of social, political, and economic development, measured against the referent culture of western liberal modernity (Linklater 2015; Hobson 2012: 33). The western imaginary of sovereignty was based on the ideal-type of the modern western liberal imperial nation-state (Grovgoui 2015: 40). Amitav Acharya reminds us that this “self-serving, ahistorical, and brazenly racist formulation by the European colonial powers ignored the fact that even the most sophisticated forms of statecraft already existed in many early non-western civilizations” (Acharya 2014: 651).

Cosmopolitan liberals may argue that their version of the toleration-intervention nexus ruptures with the past insofar as the cosmopolitan liberal conception of global justice explicitly delegitimizes racial, imperial, and colonial international hierarchy. But as Branwen Gruffydd Jones argues on her reading of Walter Benjamin, the “present contains and is structured by the past; the present exhibits an accumulation and intensification of the past” (Gruffydd Jones 59–61).⁵ Liberal

conceptions of world order and justice based on the categories of liberal, non-liberal, and illiberal inherit the European Enlightenment metanarrative of progress through successive stages of modern development from the savage to the barbarian to the civilized. Decolonization made explicit talk in the western humanities and social sciences of civilization, barbarianism, savagery, and racial hierarchy impolitic, yet post-1945 western conceptions of formal and informal hierarchy and gradated sovereignty, including Tan's liberal cosmopolitan conception of the toleration-intervention nexus, subliminally encode racial, imperial, and colonial categories and implicit assumptions about world order (Hobson 2012: 186; Buzan and Schouenborg 2018: 129). These surface in representations of lack, deficiency, failure, deviance, noncompliance, backwardness, traditionalism, or underdevelopment against the norms of the modern liberal west (Wai 2018). They are expressed in the English language by the prefixes "non-" and "il-" used to negate the adjective "liberal" where once "un-" negated "civilized," "pre-" negated "modern," "im-" negated "mature," and "sub-" negated "human." The standard of civilization continues to operate in postcolonial differentiations of "development," "good governance," and "state failure" (Buzan 2014: 585), which are the targets of decolonial critique.⁶ So, Tan's distinction between *judging* another state-society and *intervening* to enforce that judgment does not help the global acceptability of cosmopolitan liberalism. For the liberal toleration-intervention nexus is based on sublimated but not abolished racial, imperial, and colonial categories and imaginaries of world order and assumptions about world ordering.

2 Cosmopolitan Liberals and Their Others

Moral Universalism versus Moral Dogmatism

The image of the encounter with the non-western Other is one of non-simultaneity in which the non-west is represented as the west's own past, and the future of the non-west is represented as the west's present (Hutchings 2011: 190). Tan writes how historical and contemporary liberals have assumed that the ethical stance toward "morally regressive," "barbaric," or "backward" non-liberal state-societies is one of liberal imperialist monologue backed by force (Tan 2021a: 101). A fair reading of Tan is that his argument for clarifying this distinction between non-toleration and intervention is not a standalone solution to the problem of the sectarianism of liberalism. It is internally related to his argument about cosmopolitan dialogue and his claim that "what is wrong with moral imperialism is the complacent judgment that one's moral tradition is superior by default, that other moral worldviews are inferior because of inferior cultural traditions, and that there is thus nothing to learn from them" (Tan 2021a: 101). On this reading, rupture with the past is still to come about by the mutual exchange of reasons in global dialogue that will *vindicate* cosmopolitan liberalism and its toleration-intervention nexus (Tan 2021a: 101). The global, reasoned acceptability of cosmopolitan liberalism will thus make it different from past discursive practices of world ordering. Tan cautions cosmopolitan liberals that their dogmatic and imperialistic tendencies threaten the global acceptability of their commitment to the universality of the modern ideal of autonomy on which their conception of global justice is based. This caution is based on a close reading of a cryptic passage from the ancient Chinese philosopher, Zhuangzi.

On Tan's reading, Zhuangzi problematizes what rival traditions or schools typically do when their encounter produces a substantive disagreement: "Each calls right what the other calls wrong, and each calls wrong what the other calls right" (Tan 2021a: 103). Dialogue is reduced from the mutual exchange of reasons to the *dogmatic* modes of attack and defense which close our minds to the possibility of mutual learning, or even being persuaded to switch sides and revise our core beliefs. *Two monologues do not make a dialogue*. For Zhuangzi, there are no neutral context-transcendent validity criteria

(there is no external “judge”) to adjudicate who is really right (*guo shi*) and who is really wrong (*guo fei*) in a disagreement between rival traditions or schools (Liu 2020: 189). Zhuangzi argues that the way out is therefore not to escalate substantive philosophical disputes from the first order to the second order, but to throw the competing positions “open to the light” (Tan 2021a: 103).

Tan reads this as inviting cosmopolitan liberals to “acknowledge our own limits, the presence of other points of view, and other moral perspectives that we could be blind to” in order to become capable of *self*-correcting our *self*-diagnosed defects (Tan 2021a: 103). It is our *own* rights and wrongs that we throw into the light in order to right our wrongs and wrong our rights, on Tan’s reading of Zhuangzi. “We are to remain on guard for epistemic failures on our own part” (Tan 2021a: 103). Yet the complex passage in Zhuangzi has another, more obvious reading about both internal and external moments of critique. Our tradition or school is to be thrown into the light by the Other, just as we immanently critique ourselves and the limits and problems in our historically contingent modes of thought and practice. The dialogical encounter with the Other, not unlike the conflict between the Hundred Schools, occurs in a power-laden global historical context. This is implicit in Tan, who casually switches from problematizing liberal moral imperialism to problematizing liberal moral dogmatism without paying attention to the ways in which these are quite different, though related, problems with different solutions. Defending the universal ideals of cosmopolitan liberalism in dialogue “undogmatically but with a sense of fallibility” (Tan 2021a: 104) may correct for *subjective* morally imperialist attitudes but does not correct the *intersubjective* normative and epistemic dimension of the *objective* racialized global power structure of colonial modernity.

Miranda Fricker argues that there are two kinds of epistemic injustice that distort our epistemic social practices: testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice. Testimonial injustice occurs when a hearer discounts the credibility of a person’s testimony due to a group-based prejudice against her social identity (Fricker 2007: 28). Hermeneutical injustice occurs when subordinate social groups are at a harmful and wrongful structural epistemic disadvantage in relation to superordinate social groups who are structurally privileged in the creation of social meaning. Hermeneutical injustices prevent subordinated groups and individuals within a community of language and practice from accessing the interpretive resources they need to make sense of critical aspects of the suffering or injustice they experience (Fricker 2007: 158–9). Both species of epistemic injustice are produced because of the prejudicial group identity-based marginalization of subordinated social groups from meaning-making activities. Fricker’s conception of *social power* is “a practical socially situated capacity to control others’ actions, where this capacity may be exercised (actively or passively) by particular social agents, or, alternatively, it may operate purely structurally” (Fricker 2007: 13). *Identity power* is the primary form of social power, exercised by members of superordinate groups over members of subordinated groups based on shared conceptions or schemas of social identity. These structure our social relations, norms, practices, and institutions, and are internalized by subjects in our embodied habits and patterns of thinking, feeling, acting, seeing, hearing, and communicating through our socialization.

The superordinate and subordinate subject positions constituted by the racialized global order of colonial modernity are systematically distorted in the following three major ways:

1. Privileged white subjects are socialized into the structural, group-based motivational and cognitive deficiency Mills terms “global white ignorance” (Mills 2015b: 225). This motivated ignorance is “the kind of hermeneutical inability [...] to recognize and make sense of their racial identities, experiences, and positionality in a racialized world,” José Medina explains (Medina 2012: 202). This ignorance is especially historical. Robbie Shilliam calls the strategic forgetting and misremembering of the past “colonial amnesia” (Shilliam 2017: 125). Zubairu Wai argues that western conceptions of world order and

politics are generally amnesiac about “imperial relations of power, past systems of exploitation, in essence past colonial regimes of violence and domination, appropriation and exploitation” (Wai 2018: 53–4). The categories by which progressive and conservative white subjects apprehend the modern world are based on a systematic misreading of history “that severs the present from any legacy of racial domination” that is sustained by the “the retrospective whiting-out, the whitewashing, of the racial past” (Mills 2015b: 219).

2. The critical-hermeneutical resources of entire populations of subordinated subjects have been damaged or destroyed by modern global historical processes of imperialism, colonialism, slavery, and genocide, Catherine Lu argues (Lu 2019: 269). In the white settler colonies, the hermeneutical resources of Indigenous peoples and enslaved Africans were damaged or destroyed by state-sanctioned cultural and epistemic genocides and through the control techniques of European slave traders and owners used to “break in” slaves (Raboteau 2004). The epistemic injustice of colonialism, Rajeev Bhargava explains, is that “the concepts and categories by which a people understand themselves and their world” have not only been damaged and destroyed in the process, but “replaced or adversely affected by the concepts and categories of the colonizers” (Bhargava 2013: 414). Western liberal world ordering, and the western academic disciplines that are complicit in the discursive practice, create liberal understandings of ourselves and our world that, insofar as they reflect hegemonic perspectives, are ill-fitted to rendering intelligible and explaining the experiences of the oppressed to themselves, to each other, and to their oppressors (Mills 1997: 6–7).
3. *Where there is power there is resistance*, and this comes to the consciousness of subordinated subjects as the experience of cognitive dissonance, which leads to conceptual innovation (Fricker 2012: 167–8). Even in adverse hermeneutical contexts, there are nascent conceptual innovations that emerge from struggles to make sense of “negative experiences of suffering that are silenced” as well as “positive experiences and life-affirming situations” for oneself and others (Medina 2012: 209). But Mills argues that, for subordinated racialized subjects, Fricker’s concepts of testimonial and hermeneutical injustice are mutually reinforcing, insofar as white subjects exhibit a “general skepticism about nonwhite cognition” and “nonwhite categories and frameworks of analysis” are excluded from acceptable discourse (Mills 2015b: 222).

Dialogue is not a reliable procedure for testing the global acceptability of cosmopolitan liberalism because the subjectivities of the participants in the dialogue—though they may be sincere and willing to offer reasons for their convictions that they reasonably expect others to accept and in turn receive and respond to criticism—are systematically distorted by asymmetrical power relations (cf. Allen 2007: 641). The capacity of subjects in both oppressor and oppressed positions for autonomous practical reasoning is limited by the epistemic coloniality of the modern western liberal world order, and so no global, critically reasoned, autonomous acceptance or rejection of the cosmopolitan liberal conception of justice with the ideal of autonomy as its basis is possible.

The decolonial critique of the enduring structural epistemic injustices of global colonial modernity makes the explicit, non-ideal theoretical assumption that these forms of *heteronomous* practical reasoning are defective, but it is not thereby committed to an idealized liberal conception of autonomous practical reasoning. Decolonial critics argue that the second order rules of global

modernity/coloniality—the epistemic hegemony of modern western liberal practical reason—must be disobeyed from *without* (Capan 2017: 8–9; Mignolo 2011a: 24). Mills argues that our first steps include the “rethinking of familiar categories,” such as modernity, liberalism, toleration, intervention, and cosmopolitanism, “*in the light* of their imperial genealogy”; second, “the admission of new categories” such as global white supremacy and global coloniality, “that *illuminate* structures of domination not registered in the official lexicon”; and third, the “complicating of standard [read: ignorant and amnesiac] narratives” (Mills 2015a: 23). Only then could the mutual exchange of reasons in global dialogue possibly be a reliable testing procedure for the validity of cosmopolitan liberalism as a global political morality.

3 Conclusion

Decolonial Dialogue versus Imperial Monologue

Imperial liberalism, like the *racial* liberalism Mills’s critique targets, is one deep tendency in liberalism that must be thrown into the light before it can be reconstructed in a way that truly recognizes and respects the normative freedom and equality of all human beings in the “im-”perfect, “non-”ideal, “un-”just world of racial, imperial, and colonial patterns of “sub-”ordination and “in-”equality. Duncan Bell argues that there are three possibilities for the theoretical and practical connections between liberalism and imperialism. The *rejection thesis* denies the conceptual connection while affirming the historical connection by rejecting that liberal premises imply support for imperialism. The *necessity thesis* posits a necessary conceptual connection between liberalism and imperialism. The *contingency thesis* posits that liberal premises do not necessarily entail support for imperialism in theory or practice (Bell 2019: 4–5). On my reading of Tan’s argument for globalizing cosmopolitanism, to reject the necessity thesis *and* affirm the contingency *or* rejection thesis, liberal cosmopolitans must:

1. clarify the cosmopolitan version of the liberal toleration-intervention nexus, *and*
2. observe the just war conditions on liberal intervention, *and*
3. vindicate the cosmopolitan version of the liberal toleration-intervention nexus.

Meeting this third condition involves, according to Tan, liberal cosmopolitans in superordinate subject positions cultivating the epistemic virtues of humility and modesty and unlearning the epistemic vice of dogmatism. Further repairs to flaws in the practice of liberal cosmopolitanism will also be required to globalize cosmopolitan liberalism, including measures of reparative justice (Tan 2021a: 104). My focus has been on the cosmopolitan liberal toleration-intervention nexus.

I hope to have illuminated that the catastrophe of modernity/coloniality makes the conditions of possibility for global dialogue far more demanding on cosmopolitan liberals than being critically conscious that imperial monologue backed by hard or soft power interventions threatens the global acceptability of modern liberal practical reason based on the universal ideal of autonomy. To understand the world anew, cosmopolitan liberals in the situation of global dialogue must be open to shifting their geography of reasoning from imperality to decoloniality⁷ by acting on Frantz Fanon’s imperative to “switch sides” at the militarized border between the “zones” of being and non-being, of modernity and coloniality, divided by what W.E.B. Du Bois called the global “color line” (Anievas, Manchanda, and Shilliam 2015). Whether a *decolonial* cosmopolitan liberalism—opposed to the racist and imperialist tendencies of actual historical western liberalism and its conceptions of reason, order, and justice, but sectarian about the liberal ideal of autonomy—is possible in theory and practice is a circle for cosmopolitan liberals to square. For decolonial cosmopolitans who reject this possibility,

there is a need for the reconstructive moment to return to the “matrix of rational dialogue and reasoned agreement and disagreement” after the deconstructive moment, or else lapse into moral relativism or a self-contradictory critique of reason (McCarthy 1991: 7). If not the modern western liberal ideal of autonomy, the normative content of decolonial practical reason, too, must be *thrown into the light*.

¹ See Acharya and Buzan (2019); Qin (2020).

² See: Hutchings (2008); Buck-Morss (2009); McCarthy (2009); Mills (2015a); Allen (2016); Lu (2017); Bell (2019).

³ See for example: Breckenridge, Pollock, Bhabha, and Chakrabarty (2002); Mendieta (2009); Rao (2010); Gilroy (2012); Go (2013); Barreto (2013); Jensen (2016); Bhambra (2016).

⁴ These conditions, Tan believes, are so restrictive as to rule out military intervention in most cases.

⁵ See also Baucom (2005).

⁶ E.g., Gruffydd Jones (2015); Anghie (2006).

⁷ Mignolo (2011b: 285).

On the Idea of Globalizing Cosmopolitanism

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I

In his paper, “Globalizing Cosmopolitanism,” Kok-Chor Tan defends a statist version of cosmopolitanism, namely a *political accounting of liberalism*, by which he means “the global political morality that takes the principle of individual autonomy to be a universal ideal, applicable to all persons regardless of nationality or citizenship” (Tan 2021a: 99). Even though by Tan’s definition, the concern is with the universal value of autonomy, it is clear nonetheless that the version of cosmopolitanism he is defending is statist because the discussion is pitched at the level of inter-state relations. For instance, further defining the creed of the cosmopolitan liberal, while attempting to assuage the challenge that universalizing liberalism across national boundaries would inevitably lead to intervention, Tan writes “that all states ought to be domestically liberal in their constitution if they are to be regarded as just states and states in good standing in international society” (Tan 2021a: 100). Similarly, while confronting the challenge that universalizing liberalism may be based on “moral imperialism,” Tan writes “what cosmopolitanism ought to propose is the more modest stance that it can be part of an acceptable liberal foreign policy to critically engage non-liberal societies regarding matters of domestic political organization, and to use peaceful measures like trade incentives to motivate reform” (Tan 2021a: 102). I submit these extracts in this instance to substantiate my point that Tan’s defense of cosmopolitanism amounts to the defense of the political universalization of liberalism across national boundaries. In one sense, it appears that such a move is not globalizing cosmopolitanism at all because you cannot globalize cosmopolitanism as the concept’s relation to the global is analytic; that is, in another parlance, already and always globalized. A tension emerges then between cosmopolitanism as a *global* concept— that is to say, the cosmopolitan is by her very constitution globally attuned—and its political incarnation. I do not want to make the facile suggestion in the following comments of merely pitching one definition against another, which will at best generate an empty objection, but rather I want to suggest for Tan’s consideration that a conceptually prior attention to a humanist conception of cosmopolitanism analytically tethered to the global would aid in the fostering of the political conception, which if it did not completely dissolve would surely mitigate the charges of intervention and moral imperialism that concern the universalizing liberal. This consideration hopefully will go some distance in more precisely answering the question of how cosmopolitanism *can be globalized as a practice* in inter-state relations. One final point before proceeding: I share Tan’s basic commitment to liberal autonomy as a political value that has universal significance. Accordingly, my response is not philosophically antagonistic; rather, it ought to be taken as an invitation to engage with a more expanded account of autonomy that remains liberal but is set on what I take to be a more explicit cosmopolitan register. This response-piece allows me to think a bit more, albeit briefly, about how two ways of conceptualizing “globalizing cosmopolitanism” can relate to each other.

II

Political liberalism, in the Rawlsian sense, crucially depends on the possibility of widening the overlapping consensus *within* a political order after the suspension of the hegemonic hold of any one

comprehensive conception of the good. The liberal hope indicates that the wider and deeper the consensus is the more stable the political order of a given nation-state would be. For the liberal cosmopolitan, in Tan's sense of the term, it is the stability of the world-order that is at stake. Thus the overlapping consensus now has to be globally construed. This possibility lies at a pre-political level (conceptually, not temporally), at the level of the human where comprehensive conceptions cannot be so easily suspended and their plurality can emerge as a problem. Jeremy Waldron makes this point of transition from the political to the human with formidable force when he comments on Kant and the source of the cosmopolitan attitude in the very human trait of hospitality:

I don't think hospitality is about states or political communities at all, whether at the level of a world republic or an individual republic. It is about relations between people and peoples, and it needs to be read in that determinedly non-state-centered way in order to capture the distinctive contribution it is supposed to make to Kant's practical philosophy. (Waldron 2008: 89–90)

Kant seems to be defending a political conception of hospitality when he writes: “our concern here is not with philanthropy but with *right, hospitality* (hospitableness) means the right of a stranger not to be treated as an enemy when he arrives in the land of another” (Kant 2003: 15). Waldron is urging us to expand the notion of right, beyond the political, towards the possibility of a humanist alchemy that transforms the stranger into a friend. The concern here is not so much to figure out whether Waldron has Kant right, but rather to profile a sense of the cosmopolitan self that must ground any political conception of cosmopolitanism that normatively operates at the level of interstate relations where questions of intervention and imperialism can arise. This account of cosmopolitanism turns on a notion of hospitality wherein the individual does not merely tolerate difference but under the canopy of a common humanity *welcomes* alterity.

Of course, the goal here is not the absolute unity of all that is different in a final Hegelian synthesis. Instead, the cosmopolitan is committed to a more modest attitude of keeping the self open to the continuing impress of difference. In the evocative phrasing of Derrida, the “relations between people and peoples” (individual difference and cultural difference) that Waldron invokes can be grounded in the hospitable when the following formulation is considered: “Interruption of the self by the self, if such a thing is possible, can or must be taken up by thought: this is ethical discourse—and it is also, as the limit of thematization, hospitality” (Derrida 1999: 51). The self is interrupted at the precise juncture when the stranger becomes a friend. If the concept of autonomy is to emerge as a *cosmopolitan* value, not so much applicable but as constitutively possessed by all persons for the liberal, it should be understood as the self's freedom to interrupt itself to welcome the different.¹

Cosmopolitanism, as suggested by Waldron and Derrida, appears to lead us in this direction of formulating the cosmopolitan's creed as a liberal value. Amartya Sen underscores this observation when he writes that “an enriching identity need not be obtained only through where we find ourselves. It can also be acquired and learned” (Sen 2006: 36). Further, Sen continues, “when the person discovers something very important about himself or herself, there are still issues of choice to be faced” (Sen 2006: 39). The freedom that allows for the welcoming of difference, where the cosmopolitan value intersects with the liberal creed, translates into Sen's declaration that “life is not mere destiny” (Sen 2006: 39). The interrupted self transcends destiny by not being overdetermined, through the assertion of autonomy, by what Sartre would call the “facticity” of inheritance. Cosmopolitanism rejects the reification of tradition, while not ignoring its formative foundations. This briefly described humanist conception of cosmopolitanism has a bearing on the political conception, which I turn to next within the context of Tan's remarks.

III

Individual autonomy that is inflected by the cosmopolitan value, I wish to argue, has direct consequence for the program of universalizing the liberal value of individual autonomy that Tan also names cosmopolitanism. Tan wants to rescue the cosmopolitan liberal (his conception of it) from two charges, namely, the charge of interventionism and the charge of moral imperialism; further, by way of acknowledging the cultural dimensions of cosmopolitanism, he ends his essay by considering the possibility of learning from other traditions. I take up each of these positions and arguments in turn.

[A] Tan summarizes the charge of interventionism in the following manner: as “only states that are protective of the autonomy of their own individual members are to be tolerated from the perspective of global justice” (Tan 2021a: 100), international intervention would be sanctioned whereby the liberal state could in principle have moral and political justification to intervene in the internal affairs of the illiberal state. This consequence is, of course, problematic, as Tan deftly points out, because of the historical and parochial origin of liberal autonomy and the history of colonialism. Tan’s response is that the charge mistakenly conflates non-tolerance of illiberal values with the permission to politically or militarily intervene. “Toleration or non-toleration is a moral judgment,” Tan writes, whereas “intervention has to do with the enforcement of that judgment” (Tan 2021a: 100). In extreme cases of military intervention, Tan points out that the universalizing liberal is not free of the basic requirements of just war theory, which, apart from including just cause as a criterion of intervention, also typically would include reasonable last resort, proportionality, proper authorization, and so on. Tan ends his discussion by making the point that the charges that cosmopolitan liberalism is interventionist “is a criticism of its practice, not its commitments” (Tan 2021a: 101). The obvious question that emerges then concerns the practice that ought to flow from the commitments. Without some indications of the correlative practices, the commitment to individual autonomy on an international scale would ring somewhat hollow, especially within the orbit of political thinking. Tan goes some way in settling our worries when he lists “diplomatic discussion,” “genuine and sincere moral dialogue,” and “the offering of incentives” as correlative practices to liberal commitment (Tan 2021a: 101). Stability of the global order, cosmopolitan liberalism dictates, would rest on the possibility of producing a generalized consensus of norms that can only be sustained when the “peoples” of the world, that is, different cultural frameworks, can be brought into conversation with each other. Such conversations, according to the sense of cosmopolitanism advanced earlier, informs a sensibility that shelters in the human wherein commensurability does not erase difference. The belief in the unity of the human, which I take to be a liberal value, that would include but need not narrowly focus on political autonomy, is a sensibility that has to be arrived at in each life, and cannot be *imposed* from the outside. Thus the question of correlative practice becomes important as Tan correctly, in my view, profiles. If not imposition through intervention, what sort of liberal practices in international politics ought to be summoned? This is where the problem should be deepened.

It is not entirely clear to me what Tan means by autonomy. The account of autonomy inflected by cosmopolitanism that I have briefly indicated earlier can be invoked. The goal of the liberal should be to foster an educational philosophy wherein the conditions of the “interruption of the self by the self” can be cultivated. If cosmopolitanism is to be defended as a “way of life” that can generate a sense of common humanity by arguing that inheritance cannot dictate destiny, then surely an education that stresses the importance of generating such a sensibility is important. Globalizing cosmopolitanism then in this sense would amount to the universal fostering of a certain form of education as a liberal commitment. The hope is that the development of a cosmopolitan sensibility, committed to freedom from the inscriptions of a pre-given destiny, would aid in the constitution of a human consensus wherein the question of intervention would not arise. Further, it is worthy of note

that the universal advocacy of an educational practice that fosters cosmopolitan sympathies would not be interventionist in any morally objectionable way.

[B] Related to [A], Tan proceeds to respond to the charge of moral imperialism against the cosmopolitan position that argues for the universalization of the liberal value of autonomy. Here Tan substantiates the charge by writing: “what is wrong with moral imperialism is the complacent judgment that one’s moral tradition is superior by default [...] what is needed is moral assertion, backed by political force, to advance liberalism, not moral dialogue” (Tan 2021a: 101). In the formulation of Tan’s two charges, interventionism and imperialism seem to overlap, if not reduce to a single charge. He is right in saying that the formulation of the charge indicates a worry about moral dogmatism and not moral universalism. Tan further responds by saying that the adoption of autonomy as a universal value ought to lead the liberal to further refine her arguments so that “concerns about cosmopolitan dogmatism can be assuaged if the project of globalizing cosmopolitanism is backed by reasons and is responsive to counterarguments” (Tan 2021a: 102–3). This seems to be an exercise in academic philosophy, and not a practice in international relations. The issue of correlative practice to liberal commitments emerges again.

Given the cosmopolitan account of autonomy, the liberal emphasis of commitment in my view should be on the sense of common humanity and the active promotion of this sensibility through the fostering of educational values. Such activity can hardly be called imperialistic, riding as it does on the concept of the human. It also goes beyond the academic exercise of finding arguments and counterarguments with dubious motivational impact. So far in both cases my urging is that the political universalizing of the liberal values should attend to a cosmopolitan account of autonomy (freedom) that refuses to render the facticity of inheritance into the final vocabulary of destiny. This for me is the deepest site in which the problem of cosmopolitanism has to be thought and indeed it is of salient significance for political thought. It follows quite well that J.S. Mill, cited by Tan, widely considered as a progenitor of liberal thought, would have been more careful in characterizing the inheritors of a deeply plural Indian civilization as illiberal barbarians if his study of the subcontinent’s culture had ventured beyond the dubious contributions in this direction by his father, James Mill. He would have noted then that from a very early historical stage the Indian philosophical tradition thought deeply about the metaphysical foundations of freedom, and perhaps he would have found a more radical species-universal application of a version of the harm principle in classical Indian ethics. This is as good an example as any that I can think of in defense of my contention that the political application of liberal freedom can learn from the formulation of cosmopolitanism sketched earlier. This consideration nicely brings us to Tan’s final point wherein he considers the issue of learning from other traditions.

[C] I begin by stating a puzzlement. Tan begins this section by referring to Zhuangzi’s oft-cited remark, “if you want to right their wrongs and wrong their rights, it’s better to throw them open to the light” (Tan 2021a: 103). Tan offers an entirely reasonable interpretation of this claim whereby Zhuangzi is taken to be offering a defense of epistemic modesty. What the passage tells us, Tan explains, is that “parties in a moral disagreement have the responsibility to have a better understanding of the competing positions, and to become more self-aware of the potential limitations of their own perspectives” (Tan 2021a: 104). Initially I thought that by “other tradition” Tan meant to invoke the cosmopolitan sense of the notion—the thought concerning freedom alluded to earlier where inheritance (the facticity of tradition) is not allowed to reify the self, where the self is always welcoming of “other” traditions in a gesture of transcendence—as he wishes to bring two philosophical traditions in conversation with each other by pointing to a liberal direction in classical Chinese philosophy. I quickly realized, reading on, that by “tradition” Tan meant primarily a *philosophical point of view* because “we are to remain on guard for epistemic failures on our own part” (Tan 2021a: 104). In general

agreement, I have no objection to offer on this count. I just want to register a plea that a cosmopolitan sensibility dictates, especially as it relates to international relations, that we not only think of traditions in the abstract as bearers of epistemic formulations, but as profoundly complex life-worlds wherein all human expressions play a role. The cosmopolitan ideal then would be to envision a human community informed by tradition but always *open* to the summons of hospitality towards the different, the other tradition. Globalizing cosmopolitanism in this sense, I want to argue, is primary and should ground the political concerns of the liberal cosmopolitan, and therein lies the hope that the tensions of inter-state relations that rightly concern Tan can be assuaged.

IV

I will end with three final considerations. First, the protection of liberal values is not at all an issue only for international engagements, but increasingly is also relevant for domestic politics in multicultural societies governed by liberal states. Thus, the championing of the cosmopolitan norm is as much an issue for local politics as it is for international political concerns. Second, in making the suggestions here I am of course mindful of the scenario wherein the realization of the cosmopolitan ideal may not as a *political fact* eliminate the possibility of an illiberal state. The response to this claim ought to be that in the absence of elimination, mitigation of illiberal urges is surely of value to the liberal. Moreover, this mitigation is connected to the observation, ubiquitous almost, that the critique of illiberal policies of a state emerges from *within* society and does not passively wait for external intervention, military or otherwise. Finally, if these somewhat briefly sketched out remarks are headed in the right general direction, political philosophy and the philosophy of education need to converse with each other, especially in the context of contemporary socio-political reality.

¹ I have to be very brief here, necessarily. I have discussed a version of cosmopolitanism that attempts to balance inheritance and transcendence on the one hand and unity and difference on the other in some of my writings on the thought of Rabindranath Tagore. See my (2008, 2020).

Globalizing Cosmopolitanism from Below: Difference, Contestation, and Political Economy

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Kok-Chor Tan's "Globalizing Cosmopolitanism" defends liberal cosmopolitanism from the dual charges of interventionism and moral imperialism. This is a welcome intervention that introduces conceptual clarity, considers problems of moral dogmatism, and proposes an account of epistemic and moral modesty that can counter these failings. In this essay, I offer a sympathetic critique of Tan's globalized cosmopolitanism that expands on the cultural, transnational, and political economic dimensions of global politics in order to inform and support practices of epistemic modesty.

Tan defines liberal cosmopolitanism as the global political morality or conception of global justice that takes the principle of individual autonomy to be a universal ideal, applicable to all persons regardless of nationality or citizenship. This means that all political societies have to be liberal in some form domestically to be considered just, legitimate, and in good standing in the international society. At the same time, Tan acknowledges that there are grounds for critiquing liberal cosmopolitanism's strict idea of international toleration (which can make it interventionist) as well as its faith in the universality of autonomy (which can make it "morally imperialistic"). These critiques are particularly warranted, Tan acknowledges, given the "practice and implementation" of these principles in history. Ultimately, Tan contends that these objections can be assuaged by distinguishing between non-tolerance and intervention, on the one hand, and between moral universalism and moral dogmatism, on the other hand. These distinctions offer a cosmopolitan liberalism that is more defensible and can be distinguished from flawed practical applications.

Regarding the distinction between non-tolerance and military intervention (i.e., between judgment and enforcement), Tan argues that there is no reason the latter must follow from the former. "Right cause" is never enough for intervention, given that cosmopolitan liberalism is subject to the rules of just war, which require proportionality, good faith consideration of other options, and proper authorization (Tan 2021a: 101). In most practical cases, moreover, Tan considers military intervention not only unjustifiable, but also ineffectual from the perspective of just war (Tan 2021a: 101). Even without intervention, though, non-tolerance is an important ethical stance to sustain, a normative judgment that assesses the criticized regime and finds its legitimacy wanting and can lead to alternative methods like diplomacy, trade sanctions, or incentives (Tan 2021a: 101).

Regarding Tan's defense against the claim of moral imperialism, Tan acknowledges that there is a particular "historical and cultural origin" attached to liberalism, and that the idea of individual autonomy is not equally endorsed by cultures across the globe. Indeed, he goes on to acknowledge that the suspicion of moral cultural imperialism is not unwarranted: cosmopolitan liberals have a tendency to dismiss "non-liberal" cultures as morally regressive and barbaric. To diffuse this critique Tan distinguishes between moral universalism and moral dogmatism, the latter of which characterizes moral imperialism, and entails a "complacent judgment that one's moral tradition is superior by default" and other moral worldviews and cultural traditions are inferior, meaning that there is nothing to learn from them. Moral dogmatism thus leads to moral assertion, backed by political force, to advance liberalism, rather than to moral dialogue. Ultimately, moral universalism is not worrisome in and of itself, but it may become so when paired with moral dogmatism (Tan 2021a: 102).

Instead, Tan envisions moral universalism as working through dialogic pressure that can orient non-liberal states to reform in a respectful way, which requires liberal states to engage in reason-giving rather than political aggrandizement. Cosmopolitan liberalism, importantly, "need not involve political

expansion” (Tan 2021a: 102). As to how this dialogic moral universalism may work, Tan redirects our views toward Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi’s account of moral fallibilism that advocates against “unflinching moral certainty and dogmatism” (Tan 2021a: 103). Relying on a famous passage where Zhuangzi advocates throwing the differences between Confucians and Mohists open to the light, Tan advocates for liberals to adopt a position of epistemic and moral modesty, which entails a responsibility to attain a better understanding of competing positions, the requirement that they provide reasons for their demands of transformation, and the acknowledgment of potential limitations in their own perspectives (Tan 2021a: 103).

Tan’s intervention is a welcome work of ground-clearing vis-à-vis a dominant cosmopolitan strain of liberalism whose rhetorical might and ambitions have been enlisted in projects of aggression, partly through its politically naïve contestation of sovereignty for the sake of universal principles. This literature gave way to critiques that highlighted how defenders of the doctrine of humanitarian intervention risk becoming apologists for imperial projects, unless they can also provide an explicit account of how internal and external sovereignty can be democratized rather than abandoned (Cohen 2004: 3). I understand Tan’s account of epistemic and moral modesty to be operating in this direction, but I also find that Tan’s framework remains incomplete in faithfully characterizing the political context in which the dialogue he envisions would take place.

In particular, the picture of the political context is incomplete because, first, the dominance of individual autonomy as a value and reality embraced in the west could be further problematized. Second, Tan’s assessment of other cultures as entering into contact and dialogue with liberal actors seems to take cultures as homogeneous wholes, an account that contrasts with the recognition of cultures as internally contested, permeated by external forces, and subject to continuous negotiation. If this is the case, it follows that there are currents of contestation within the west and non-west that offer a picture in which understanding and cooperation along Tan’s desired lines appear more likely. Finally, expanding scrutiny to the political economy of intervention would encourage a stronger account of the limitations of liberal perspectives and the cultivation of moral modesty.

Individual autonomy as a descriptive and normative principle has been contested by feminist theorists, who highlight the extent to which human beings become themselves (“their identities, their capacities, their desires”) through their participation in relationships (Nedelsky 2012: 4). A relational account of autonomy recasts our understanding of both flourishing and oppression. Autonomous decision-making oriented toward human flourishing, on the one hand, is indebted to familial, intimate, and other cooperative relationships. Oppression, on the other hand, should also be understood as connected to destructive or hierarchical relations alongside lines of race, gender, and other markers of differences. Oppression, however, should be understood not in opposition to autonomous individuality, but to the existence of nurturing and enabling relationships that allow individuals to thrive. Beyond this conceptual point, it is the case descriptively that within western liberal societies a very uneven distribution of autonomy exists, and that the establishment of constraints over certain subjects’ ability to flourish within family, work, and political spaces is significantly constrained by their gender/sexual orientation, race, disability, and other markers (Pateman 1988; Mills 1997; Knight 2016). These relations of domination, moreover, are centrally about enabling the (relational) autonomy of the privileged, by putting certain subjects to work strenuously to harvest, deliver, cook, and care for them. This account puts in perspective the general liberal cosmopolitan framework because it relativizes its ability to claim a commitment to liberal autonomy beyond rhetorical and/or aspirational terms, given how such a value only obtains for a privileged subset of the population. This means that the epistemic humility that Tan champions is warranted not only vis-à-vis other peoples’ customs but could be productively put to work in the self-examination of liberal societies. Moreover, it could be opposed not to moral dogmatism but to the “epistemology of ignorance,” i.e., an unassailable

framework that declares the exceptionalism and superiority of the west (Mills 2007: 25). In this case, liberal cosmopolitanism's epistemic failure disavows the relationality of autonomy, a relationality that can be both enabling and, when reliant on oppressive societal structures, destructive of those who enable it.

Regarding the underlying notion of societies that animates Tan's account of dialogue and epistemic moral modesty, his diagnosis seems to hinge on an assumption that different accounts of the good life guide different cultures in self-contained ways. This shows up in the distinction between two types of societies (liberal and non-liberal), which can be clearly distinguished from each other. Tan's ultimate goal is, of course, to relativize these differences, which he argues can be bridged through the adoption of a dialogical (rather than dogmatic and interventionist) stance, in which the parties acknowledge the fallibility of their positions and commit to give reasons for their critiques. Yet it is hard to imagine that the actors that participate in this dialogical encounter are not already in conversation with each other; it is also hard to think of the moral traditions of societies outside the west as untouched by alternative views, including that of liberalism, just as liberal societies exhibit their fair share of non-liberal currents (more on this below). In other words, moral perspectives are shared and exchanged between the center and periphery, in "multiple, creative, and sometimes conflict-ridden ways" (Preis 1996: 289). Values such as human rights or autonomy have become universalized not in the sense of being homogeneously accepted and understood around the world, but in the sense of being everywhere known and subjected to "interpretation, negotiation, and accommodation" (Preis 1996: 290). In other words, societies around the world are—without exception—heterogeneous and complex, meaning that the conceptions they hold and the behaviors they practice are constantly being influenced by other perspectives and revised (Barth 1989: 140; Narayan 2000).

This process, however, can be better ascertained by looking at internal struggles within these countries, rather than at the abstract level of state or society units. By looking at these internal struggles we would also be shifting focus to include not only morality but also politics. This would require attending to how discontented subjects or oppressed groups within particular societies contest these measures and demand transformations. One could think about activism demanding access to education for women in rural regions in Pakistan (as exemplified by the activism of Malala Yousafzai) or the massive demonstrations by women around the world contesting rollbacks in abortion rights or demanding their expansion (the United States, Poland, and Argentina are examples of societies where, at the time of writing, abortion rights are contested and either advancing or being subjected to rollbacks). Or consider the global demonstrations that came to be known as the Arab Spring in the early-2010s. Who should we consider "representative" of these societies' moral tradition(s)? Those demonstrating in the streets, or elites attempting to regain control of the government via violent means? Groups contesting both the expansion of neoliberalism and the dogmatism of the government, or the government itself?

In addition to shifting our sight from morality to politics, establishing promising dialogical connections requires a shift from internationalism to transnationalism. Attending to more variegated channels of exchange between societies might point us toward conversations that are already taking place, though not at the state level. As opposed to presuming a stark difference between liberal and non-liberal societies, this approach attends to existing commonalities among sub-groups of societies. Whether because they experience a similar form of oppression at the hands of states or global forces or because they have already established forms of transnational communication that bypass state-sanctioned exchanges, these connections illuminate that there may be more continuity of moral concerns across the world than liberal cosmopolitan approaches allow for (Valdez 2019: 4). A focus on inter-state politics makes these groups disappear from view, because they seldom have access to representation at the level of elite western and non-western politics. A reconstruction of Black activism

in the US in the interwar period is a case in point. Affinities between the struggles against racial injustice in the US and anti-colonialism were salient to activists in both realms and resulted in productive encounters that were disavowed by state actors on both sides (Valdez 2019, chapters 4 and 5). Similar dynamics operate today regarding the lack of representation of convergent anti-capitalist demands by Indigenous environmental activists in Canada, the United States, Guatemala, and Brazil, among other places.

Finally, a stronger account of the limitations of liberal perspectives and the cultivation of moral modesty could benefit from expanding scrutiny to the political economy of intervention. Further engagement in this direction would, however, require more precision on Tan's part regarding the features of societies that liberals currently approach dogmatically. What role does political economy play in justifying interventions, and how are these actions entwined with morally dogmatic claims? Are liberals equally concerned with all kinds of heteronomy, regardless of the causes? The essay's implicit reference to post-9/11 debates suggests that the author is thinking about the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, which were supported by humanitarian narratives of women's rights. Yet, one could argue that the heteronomous condition of non-western citizens is less important in explaining western interventions than political and economic interests. In fact, during the Cold War, one of the most active periods of US aggression, the goal of preventing socialist projects—whether fueled by counterinsurgency or democratically elected—from making headway in particular locales was an important predictor of US intervention. In many instances of these direct and covert actions, the result was the establishment of authoritarian regimes friendly to the US as well as to international investors. The political and economic grounds explaining western aggression and its autonomy-restricting implications means that Tan's critique could be productively expanded and re-articulated to encompass this dimension and its interaction with moral and cultural claims about non-liberal societies. A focus on the west's role in globalizing the harms of capitalism through imperial and neo-imperial means may lead to the conclusion that its avowed commitment to political liberalism is countered by its embrace of free market capitalism, leading to the loss of its moral authority to judge others (Grovgui 2006). Such a conclusion may be supported by the stunning consolidation of a multilateral legal regime of enforcement of investors' rights, particularly in comparison to the poor clout of international human rights enforcement capabilities (Isiksel 2016). The connections between western power and an economic globalization, moreover, exceed the international realm to shape domestic "liberal" institutions. As my own work on the political theory of empire shows, the formation of liberal states was entangled with imperial economic priorities of labor control that were racially filtered and shaped decisive moments of enfranchisement (Valdez forthcoming).

My aim in this reconstruction is ultimately sympathetic to the core goal in Tan's essay—to prescribe an orientation of epistemic modesty—but suggests such a goal can be reached through a more critical engagement with the structure of the epistemic dogmatism that he condemns. This critical path entails acknowledging the very unequal championing of individual autonomy in western societies, the already contested character of moral values in political communities around the world and the transnational affinities that unite these struggles, and the dubious commitment to individual autonomy contained in the west's embrace of a global project of free market capitalism. A detour from morality into politics and political economy, I suggest, may clarify the epistemic problem as having less to do with dogmatism and more with disavowal and epistemologies of ignorance, which attempt to dress in liberal garb projects that are concerned with political and economic control of peoples and resources. This reconstruction may, in turn, make liberal principles less likely to be successfully manipulated into aggressive projects of intervention.

Decolonizing Liberal Cosmopolitanism: Reflections on Coutinho, Penman, Tagore, and Valdez

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My essay, “Globalizing Cosmopolitanism,” does not do justice to the rich commentaries that followed. Zachary Penman, Steve Coutinho, Inés Valdez, and Saranindranath Tagore have given us a set of papers that probe more deeply into the problem of imperialism, universalism, and cosmopolitanism than my essay does. Their contributions can be read as stand-alone analyses of this challenging issue. Indeed Penman, Coutinho, Valdez, and Tagore have written extensively on the general topic of “decolonizing” political philosophy and world philosophy elsewhere.¹ In my short remarks here, I can only note places where we agree and disagree, and where further questions await the task of decolonizing cosmopolitanism.

To set the stage, here are the main claims in my original paper. “Globalizing Cosmopolitanism” simply assumes ethical universalism from the beginning. Indeed, it takes for granted the liberal idea of the universal value of individual autonomy—namely, the capacity to form, pursue, and revise one’s conception of the good. Its specific question is this: How can liberalism be the basis of a theory of global justice while avoiding the specter and moral pitfalls of imperialism? This is a serious challenge in light of the history of imperialism and colonialism associated with liberalism as well as current practices of liberal internationalism.

While my paper addresses a real question, it is obviously limited in scope. I do not there engage with any meta-ethical debates surrounding ethical universalism, let alone more specifically go on to defend the universality of individual autonomy. The goal of the paper is to see how liberalism can be justifiably promoted as a global ideal in light of the charge of imperialism. I claim (i) that the problem can be assuaged by respecting the distinction between judgment and intervention, and (ii) that arguing for universal values in the face of cultural diversity is compatible with reasonableness, mutual respect, and a sense of fallibility.

In this respect, Valdez and Tagore are on my side. They share my universalist normative aspiration (although in the course of their remarks, they point to gaps or missteps in my own approach). In contrast, Penman and Coutinho both put pressure on the presumptive universalism of liberalism. But their challenge is fairly posed since, ultimately, a complete defense of liberal cosmopolitanism has to confront the relativist or skeptic who rejects the universality of autonomy.

I will start with Valdez and Tagore, both of whom, as noted, endorse the idea of globalizing *cosmopolitanism*. But Valdez correctly notes that my advancement of individual autonomy as a global ideal ought to be “further problematized” (Valdez 2021: 124). In particular, she calls for a “critical engagement with the structure of the epistemic dogmatism” (Valdez 2021: 126). What she has in mind are the following: the uneven “championing of individual autonomy” in western (liberal) societies themselves; the fact that non-western political communities are not monolithic and are themselves sites of value contestations; and the “dubious commitment” to autonomy on the part of liberal countries that allows them at the same time to condone autonomy-undermining global economic injustices (Valdez 2021: 126).

In this respect, Valdez is right that my attempt to globalize cosmopolitan, by showing that its imperialistic practice can be disengaged from its values, is “incomplete” (Valdez 2021: 124). It is not enough to disentangle cosmopolitan liberalism from intervention and to ensure greater deliberative respect when advancing its values. For liberal cosmopolitanism to be a truly non-imperialistic political

morality, there must be greater consistency between liberal theory and its actual practice in other dimensions. The global defense of liberal values will not only fail to take, but will also be rightly morally suspect and dubious if it is enforced unevenly, regularly turns a blind eye to the global economic conditions that impair autonomy, and caricatures and essentializes the traditions it wants to critique.

I am in complete agreement with Valdez on this general point. Although I left these matters unaddressed in my paper, I discuss them in an earlier work.² But Valdez delves deeper into the matter. She very usefully introduces the element of epistemic injustice into the discussion. She outlines the “structural epistemic dogmatism” that has to be corrected if the project of decolonizing cosmopolitanism is to gain traction (Valdez 2021: 126). This is an important addition to focusing on the political and economic injustices that must be repaired if liberalism is to be endorsed as a global morality.

Tagore, like Valdez, is also a defender of cosmopolitanism. And like Valdez, he importantly warns against the tendency to “essentialize” non-liberal societies. He writes: “that we not only think of traditions in the abstract as bearers of epistemic formulations, but as profoundly complex life-worlds wherein all human expressions play a role” (Tagore 2021: 122). With respect to the idea of cosmopolitanism, Tagore is even more of a universalist: he wants cosmopolitanism to be reconceptualized as a *humanistic* value and not uniquely as a *liberal* one. The value of autonomy does not belong to the liberal tradition alone, but can be found in many other world philosophies and traditions. In this way, autonomy can be grounded on a “more explicit cosmopolitan register” (Tagore 2021: 118). That is, Tagore does not reject the idea of autonomy, understood here as the capacity of persons to review their traditions and social roles while recognizing that these are normatively formative. What he rejects is the presumption that *this* is a liberal idea.

Is this merely a semantic disagreement? I agree with Tagore that the ideal of individual autonomy in the way he has described it—the capacity to revise formative values—is not as uniquely Eurocentric as both proponents and critics sometimes like to claim. (Proponents claim this so as to give themselves a pat on the back for discovering these superior but universal values; critics claim this to reject these as parochial ethnocentric values.) Rather this basic ideal of individual freedom can be uncovered in different world philosophies and traditions, as Amartya Sen has long argued and as Tagore further shows in his own paper. So what I would call a liberal ideal (which can be found in some form in many traditions), Tagore prefers to call a humanistic cosmopolitan ideal (see here Tagore’s paper).

On the other hand, perhaps there is more to Tagore’s point than that of word choice. In light of history, advancing *humanistic* cosmopolitanism has a very different connotation from advancing *liberal* cosmopolitanism. On his approach, we are still firmly committed to the ideal of individual autonomy, but this ideal is liberated from the vocabulary of liberalism and the imperialist connotations that go with it. If this is Tagore’s point, it is worth contemplating. My own response, however, is that the term “liberalism” is not inherently insidious, and that it is more useful to show that liberalism is not the exclusive property of the west than to reject its title altogether.

Tagore might reply that the difference is more than just that of perception. He might say that liberal autonomy, standardly understood, dismisses attachments and social ties as morally insignificant, and claims that the liberal individual should be able to transcend and reject these contingent relational and societal facts. The humanistic cosmopolitan ideal of autonomy, by comparison, recognizes the value and worth of these factors even as it acknowledges that these are subject to individual evaluation. If this is Tagore’s substantive motivation for eschewing liberalism, it invites further debates about the proper form of liberalism. This move will recall the liberal-communitarian debate of the 1980s. One lesson we can glean from that debate is that there are many liberals who will in fact endorse a conception of liberal autonomy not unlike Tagore’s humanistic conception.³

In contrast to Valdez and Tagore, both Penman and Coutinho are less sanguine about the universalist credentials of cosmopolitanism. Penman says that the globalizing of cosmopolitan liberalism must go beyond decoupling it from interventionism and deliberative disrespect. What is needed is a deeper soul-searching. We need to tackle the “epistemic coloniality” of liberal cosmopolitanism, such as its innate tendency to “categorize and order the world” in terms of “liberal, non-liberal, and illiberal” (Penman 2021: 113). These categories are inherited from the “European Enlightenment metanarrative of progress through successive stages of modern development from the savage to the barbarian to the civilized” (Penman 2021: 113). The liberal ideal of autonomy is itself a product of a racist and imperial history. My very assumption, the ideal of liberal autonomy, has to be “thrown into the light” (Penman 2021: 114). What is needed is a deep critique of the “structural epistemic injustices of the global colonial modernity” (Penman 2021: 115).

Penman raises important and challenging questions. His careful unmasking of the colonial history that attended the advancement of liberal cosmopolitanism deserves attention. It adds to the self-awareness of the liberal project. His discussion of the imperial history of liberalism will explain, at the very least, why attempts to globalize liberalism can meet with well-founded resistance. And like Valdez, he reminds us of the epistemic challenges surrounding liberalism.

But must this historical understanding and self-reflection necessarily entail a rejection of liberal cosmopolitanism as a principle? The answer to this will turn on the nature of the conceptual tie between liberalism and imperialism. Penman usefully draws on Duncan Bell to draw our attention to three possibilities on this point. There is the (i) “rejection thesis” that acknowledges the deep historical and practical connection between liberalism and imperialism, but denies any necessary conceptual connection between them. Next, there is the (ii) “necessity thesis” that holds that there is a necessary conceptual connection between imperialism and liberalism. Finally, there is (iii) the “contingency connection” that takes both historical and any conceptual ties between liberalism and imperialism to be contingent. As Penman notes, I reject the “necessity thesis” (Penman 2021: 116). But he is less confident that this can be done. Penman is absolutely right that the connection between liberalism and imperialism ought not to be too confidently dissolved.

My own inclination here is that we should not let history tie our hands and prevent us from challenging the “necessity thesis.” Even if we assume the most intimate case scenario, that the development of liberalism and imperialism went hand-in-hand with one providing the other with a moral rationale, it does not follow that the “necessity thesis” must stand. Normative ideas need not be shackled permanently to their historical origins. Principles can transcend their unique histories and come to acquire moral force of their own. The United States Declaration of Independence’s “All Men Are Created Equal” is not understood to apply only to white men in principle, its original limited scope notwithstanding. The principles of the Magna Carta are seen as expressions of the rights of persons against the authority of the state, and not just the rights of nobles vis-à-vis the monarch. Liberal toleration has evolved from a *modus vivendi*, a pragmatic compromise, into an ideal or virtue. And communitarians can draw on Confucian social philosophy while rejecting its patriarchal original form. So, even if liberalism is the product of imperialism, is there something about liberalism and imperialism that makes it impossible for liberalism to break from its historical origins? My belief is that the ideal that the capacity of persons to form, pursue, and revise their ends in life has universal appeal and validity, whatever its historical origin. (And like Tagore, I understand that this basic ideal is present in many world philosophical traditions.) But this requires careful unpacking, and this is exactly what Penman has been doing.⁴

Coutinho’s instructive essay explicitly makes the case for global pluralism. He worries that my attempt at openness is not “sufficiently open” (Coutinho 2021: 105). Against my claim that liberal critical but respectful and productive engagement with non-liberal societies is possible, Coutinho says

that “[c]ultures that engage in this kind of mutual critique have profound differences of fundamental value [...] and these create problems for [my] universalist assumptions” (Coutinho 2021: 106). Some world views have starting points that are too much at odds with the ideal of autonomy such that engagement from that standpoint straightaway is already presuming too much.

Coutinho offers overviews of some different schools within Chinese philosophy so as to illustrate the deep value divergences in worldviews. Specifically, he shows how different philosophies can understand individual “flourishing” in ways fundamentally opposed to the liberal idea of autonomy (Coutinho 2021: 109). From Mengzi, Coutinho writes, we can learn that moral concern can be based on appeal to compassion (as opposed to rationality) and social relationships (as opposed to abstract and individualistic values). From the Daoists, we can learn that “[t]o live freely is not understood in terms of having the ability to choose [pace liberal autonomy and deliberation], but rather in the sense of engaging naturally and spontaneously within the natural world” (Coutinho 2021: 108). For Mengzi and the Daoists, compassion and humanity are basic, not individual autonomy and rationality.

Coutinho is a well-established interpreter of Chinese philosophy, and it is beyond my competence to engage in an interpretative debate of these texts with him. I will only note that there are competing interpretations of the very traditions that Coutinho presents, interpretations that obviate the fundamental value differences that he suggests.⁵ Granted these are complicated matters of how to read ancient texts, and my defense of cosmopolitanism should not turn on interpretation. Rather, it should turn on moral arguments: even if some Chinese philosophies affirm fundamentally different values, we can still ask if there are nonetheless compelling reasons to endorse autonomy over Daoist relativism or Confucian communitarianism. If there are indeed opposing world philosophical moral traditions, this does not put an end to the debate. For the universalist, the philosophical engagement must continue.⁶ But it is the work of people like Coutinho that is making this mutual engagement of different traditions productive and constructive.⁷

In the end, cosmopolitan liberalism is a political philosophy. It is a position with respect to social and political justice, with how best to organize the basic institutions of society and the international order. If what different philosophical traditions teach us is the fact of value pluralism, that there are different and divergent forms of human flourishing, then it would seem that a world order informed by liberal principles is more conducive to this plurality of goods compared to any alternative arrangements. In other words, the fact of pluralism proves the necessity of cosmopolitan liberalism rather than its demise.

Coutinho’s and Penman’s important commentaries identify further questions that a project like mine has to address and the challenges that lie ahead. Their commentaries together with Valdez’s and Tagore’s also nicely illustrate two broad but different strands in the project of decolonizing philosophy.

One strand proceeds in this way: we decolonize philosophy by showing that there are alternative but equally compelling and valid worldviews: sentiment, responsibility, and community are as attractive as western ideals of reason, freedom, and individuality. The acceptance of pluralism, not universalism, is the outcome of a decolonized philosophy.

The second strand is very different. It goes about decolonizing liberalism by showing the so-called western enlightenment ideals, like reason, freedom, and individuality, are not in fact uniquely or even characteristically western. The west can claim no special ownership of these values. They are in fact present in many of the dominant world traditions and philosophies. This is a project of decolonization because it rejects the supposed moral superiority of the west and the presumption that somehow the west had some privileged access to progressive human values. Rather, the value of individual freedom and autonomy is one that is present in many different world philosophical

traditions even if it is not expressed in the exact same vocabulary. The outcome of this second strand is enhanced universalism in that there are different routes and grounds for shared universal ideals and values. Thus, in spite of the richness and diversity of world philosophies, we can be universalists. This is the aspiration of decolonizing philosophy that I share.

¹ See for example, Coutinho (2013); Tagore (2017); Penman, (2020); Valdez (2019).

² See “From Theory to Practice,” in *Toleration, Diversity, and Global Justice* (2000: 193–217).

³ See, for example, Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1989).

⁴ Here, and in his dissertation, above note 1.

⁵ For one example, see Chan (1999).

⁶ These are matters I discuss in *Toleration, Diversity and Global Justice*, chapter 6.

⁷ Above note 1.

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