Mapping the Good World: The New Cosmopolitans and Our Changing World Picture[1]

Joshua J. Yates

Cosmopolitan Renaissance

Cosmopolitanism has undergone something of a renaissance in recent years. Outside the rather small segment of cultural elites for whom the term is meaningful, however, both the fact and significance of this renaissance is easily missed. As I hope to show, renascent cosmopolitanism is important more for what it tells us about the conditions of its revival than for any specific contemporary formulation of cosmopolitanism itself. Briefly put, the renaissance of cosmopolitanism represents an acute phase of a centuries-long process of globalization, which has, according to sociologist Roland Robertson, resulted in a growing *consciousness* of both the world as a single place (think of the "Blue Marble" photo of Earth from space) and humanity as a single people (think of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the mapping of the human genome).[2] This essay will depart from most standard treatments of cosmopolitanism by focusing less on the content of various cosmopolitan thinkers and more on the context in which cosmopolitans of all stripes have become revitalized.

To anticipate the argument that follows, the word "cosmopolitan" becomes indispensible for describing a situation in which "humanity" and "world" are not merely

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thinkable but unavoidable moral categories for humans the world over. It is also a situation in which explicit appeal to cosmopolitan ideals is, for an elite minority, no longer merely a figurative and abstract gesture, but ostensibly a very literal possibility for the first time in human history.[3] But as we shall see, it is also clear that this consciousness comes with the unsettling recognition that the very processes that have brought the cosmopolitan possibilities of human cooperation and transnational coordination so tantalizingly close to hand have simultaneously aggravated existing differences and, in some cases, inspired entirely new cleavages to emerge. Culturally speaking, then, cosmopolitanism has gained plausibility and immediacy more as a widespread elucidation of humanity's collective dilemmas at the start of the third millennium than as any specific ethical or political program for their solution. Seen from this angle, the renaissance of cosmopolitanism epitomizes the crystallization of what we can call "the problem of the good world."

While more will be said of the problem of the good world at the conclusion of the essay, here is a provisional introduction: For most of history, humans have been preoccupied with two central moral questions: "What is the good life?" and "What constitutes the good society?" Every social order has offered at least implicitly its own answers to these questions. Today, however, answers to these perennial questions must increasingly, though not uniformly, be sought in the shadow of what constitutes (or detracts from) a good world. But this does not mean that history has ended. Rather, we are witness to the opening of a new chapter full of strife and controversy over the very meaning of the good *world* and, significantly, who gets to define it.

Finally, in order to make concrete what can be a highly abstract argument, this essay will illustrate the problem of the good world—and the intensification, expansion, and reflexive ramifications of consciousness that attends it—through an examination of world maps. From the medieval *mappa mundi* to the Mercator Projection Map to Google Earth, we can discern, if cursorily, critical junctures in our changing perception of the cosmos and the place of humans in it.

Reflexive Cosmopolitanism

To tell this story, we necessarily begin with the cosmopolitan renaissance itself. Dating back to the Cynics and Stoics of classical antiquity, cosmopolitanism has come down to us as that set of ethical and sometimes political aspirations emphasizing the unity of humankind and championing universal identities over particular solidarities. As such it has made sporadic, but significant appearances in the intellectual and cultural history of the West, most prominently among key figures of the European

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[3] Taking our cue from the work of Benedict Anderson, we can say that as it was for the nation, so it is today not only possible, but in some sense obligatory to "think" the world. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983) 22.

Enlightenment.[4] Yet, it has also been a term of recurrent suspicion and abuse, most conspicuously in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, during the heyday of European nationalism, and later fascism, where it became a euphemism for Jewish intellectuals and other "pariah" peoples. The term itself remained largely on the margins of intellectual and political life during the long decades of vying Cold War internationalisms (except as an urbane entry into popular culture where it became familiar as a hip cocktail and chic women's magazine), before surging back into prominence on the eve of the twenty-first century.

The recent renaissance of cosmopolitanism, however, is a highly qualified affair. At least for those who self-consciously employ the term, the ambition is one not simply of revival, but rehabilitation. As is widely noted by critics and advocates alike, the abundance of "adjectival cosmopolitanisms" is telling. There is an underlying ambivalence to the term "cosmopolitan" that calls for an expanding array of modifiers—"actually existing," "vernacular," "rooted," "discrepant," "parochial," "critical," and so on.[5] As a result, it can be difficult to fix the contours of this variegated trend, though it is possible to identify a cluster of common features. First, there is the critical appraisal of past uses of the term—especially in its western Enlightenment (read elitist, ethnocentric, and imperialist) formulations. Next, there is a desire to promote a (post)universalistic ethic that is better suited to the empirical realities of global change, but most importantly to the enduring human need for particularistic attachments. Finally, there is the assertion, as much political as analytical, of the inexorable diversity, fluidity, and disparity of experiences among so-called cosmopolitans: between, say, the attendees of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Turkish *gasterbeiters*, members of the Senegalese Murid Trade Diaspora, and elite third world professors teaching "subaltern" studies in the U.S. and U.K. Indeed, the privileged cosmopolitans in much scholarly writing are neither the captains of globalization, nor the globe-trotting denizens of the faculty club. They are refugees, exiles, internally displaced peoples, landless workers, forced migrants— the multitudes of marginal cosmopolitans. For such reasons (again both analytical and political), there is explicit resistance to attaching any determinate meaning to the term. Defining cosmopolitanism in its present dispensation turns out to be a decidedly "uncosmopolitan thing to do."[6] "As a historical category," writes a group of leading cosmopolitan thinkers, "the cosmopolitan should be considered entirely open, and not pregiven or foreclosed by the definition of any particular society or discourse. Its various embodiments, including past embodiments, await discovery and explication."[7]

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[4] Kant is the key figure, although it must be said that Enlightenment cosmopolitanism was itself not monolithic. See Pauline Kleingeld, "Six Varieties of Cosmopolitanism in Late Eighteenth-Century Germany," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60.3 (July 1999): 505–24.

[5] A number of observers have similarly mentioned this general reticence about the term itself, but see especially David Hollinger, *Cosmopolitanism and Solidarity: Studies in Ethnoracial, Religious, and Professional Affiliation in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006) xviii.

[6] Carol A. Breckenridge, Sheldon Pollock, Homi K. Bhabha, and Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Cosmopolitanism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002) 1.

[7] Breckenridge, Pollock, Bhabha, Chakrabarty 1.

Despite the strenuous ambivalence it generates, the language of cosmopolitanism nevertheless remains indispensible. Animating the so-called "new" cosmopolitans is a sense that we are living through a profound transition in the history of the world, one necessitating a fundamental epistemological shift in how humans conceive of the natural and social worlds and of the actions of humans in them. On this point, otherwise divergent cosmopolitan theorists converge. The political philosopher Seyla Benhabib writes: "a fundamental *rethinking* of the meaning of distributive justice [is] required." "And for this task," she concludes,

> we need a fundamental *reconfiguration of the world map in our minds*
> such that economic and ecological interdependence are understood to
> be not episodic aspects of the life of nations but crucial buildings blocks
> of the formation of modernity as global human history.[8]

Arguably the dean of cosmopolitan philosophers today, Anthony Appiah concurs: "The challenge then is to take *minds and hearts* formed over the long millennia of living in local troops and equip them with ideas and institutions that will allow us to live together as the global tribe we have become."[9] The same call for a new mode of world thinking and feeling is operative in the human sciences. "As the world becomes increasingly a single place," declares anthropologist Ulf Hannerz,

> I believe, there is a growing need to cultivate *a cosmopolitan imagination*,
> a sense of informed citizenship of the world which combines a sense of
> human compassion and responsibility for the welfare of humanity with
> respect for, even an appreciation of, cultural diversity.[10]

Few have been more outspoken in this respect than the German sociologist Ulrich Beck. Arguing vociferously against habits of thought associated with a world of nation-states, Beck writes that we need a "*cosmopolitan outlook*, from which we can grasp the social and political realities in which we live and act." He adds that this outlook is both a "presupposition and the result of *a conceptual reconfiguration of our modes of perception*."[11]

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From this sample of prominent academic advocates, it should be apparent that the felt need to catch up with a rapidly changing world is a task of urgent cognitive reorientation, at once empirical and normative. Yet, for all the evident critical intensity of the new cosmopolitans, the cultural significance of this plea has gone largely unexamined. A central purpose of this essay is thus to make explicit what

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[8] See Seyla Benhabib's essay, "Democratic Possibilities in an Era of Legal Cosmopolitanism," in this issue of *The Hedgehog Review* (italics added).

[9] Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: Norton, 2006) xiii (italics added).

[10] Ulf Hannerz, "Journalists, Anthropologists and the Cosmopolitan Imagination," lecture at the American Anthropological Association, Washington, D.C. (November 28–December 2, 2001)(italics added).

[11] Ulrich Beck, *Cosmopolitan Vision* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006) 2.

has been largely tacit to this point: the cultural (and specifically moral) significance of the revival of cosmopolitanism. One way to grasp this cultural significance is to view it as a symptom of upheavals *in how humans apprehend the world*—in what, borrowing from Martin Heidegger, we can call the "world picture."[12]

Changing World Pictures

As the statements of the new cosmopolitans suggest, there is a lot at stake in how we "see," imagine, or picture our world. What is commonly presumed to be a simple act of observation—a physical object directly perceived—turns out, upon reflection, to be mediated through a complex array of culturally constructed and morally freighted categories and abstractions taught to us from the cradle. Commonplace concepts such as stars, traffic lights, and dogs, while forming the basic mental furniture of our lived reality, do not supply a merely descriptive interpretation of sensory data. The starry heavens have, after all, been a source of the transcendent and a sign of its portents since humans first walked the Earth; the mundane instrumentality of traffic lights also functions as a marker of economic development and a testament to the technological achievements of modern progress; and dogs, as Marshal Sahlins reminds us, are sacred cows in America, where eating man's best friend would be akin to cannibalism.[13] The point here is that the categories by which we apprehend the world are freighted with highly normative information. We might say that for every cosmos there is a corresponding *nomos*, or moral order. As I hope will become clear, the exhortations of the new cosmopolitanism to re-imagine the world are no different in this regard.

But first we need to develop the analytical framework a bit further. Taken as a whole, concepts like stars, traffic lights, and dogs constitute symbolic universes, which provide individuals with the necessary cultural information—the requisite distinctions, classifications, and evaluations; the structures of thinking and feeling, of ethos, pathos, and *nomos*—to live as fully human beings in particular social settings. "The extreme generality, diffuseness, and variability of man's innate (that is, genetically programmed) response capacities," Clifford Geertz once memorably wrote,

> means that without the assistance of cultural patterns he would be functionally incomplete, not merely a talented ape who had, like some underprivileged child, unfortunately been prevented from realizing his full potentialities, but a kind of formless monster with neither sense of direction nor power of self-control, a chaos of spasmodic impulses and vague emotions.[14]

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[12] Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture," *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977) 115–54.

[13] Marshall Sahlins, *Culture and Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 174.

[14] Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic, 1973) 99.

Figure 1. Although familiar the world over today, pictures of Earth from space have only recently constituted the stock images humanity has had of its planetary home. The earliest such photo came as recently as 1947, a partial, grainy image from a V-2 rocket, and it took another twenty years before the famous "Earthrise" photo was taken by Apollo 8 astronauts in 1968. This was followed up a few years later with what became known as the "Blue Marble" photograph, the first photo of a fully illuminated Earth, taken by the Apollo 17 mission on December 2, 1972. This photograph of the Earth was taken on December 7, 1972. Source: Image Science and Analysis Laboratory, NASA-Johnson Space Center. "The Gateway to Astronaut Photography of Earth."

Scholars have developed a number of terms of art to describe such orienting conceptual schemes, including "worldview" (or "*weltanschauung*"), "episteme," "mentalité," "zeitgeist," and "social imaginary." I have chosen Heidegger's notion of "world picture," as it is most immediately evocative of the global dimensions of culture I want to highlight. As the image of Earth above is meant to indicate (figure 1), we live quite literally in the age of the world as picture.[15]

With such an analytical framework in mind, it is possible to discern the world pictures of different historical epochs, given their distinctive understandings of cosmol-

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[15] It is important to point out that Heidegger coined the phrase "world picture" long before he saw the earliest photos of Earth from space and that the phrase was not all neutral. He was extremely critical of what he conceived to be the objectification and instrumentalization of the world by technology.

ogy, as well as of the properties and demarcations of the physical world, their spiritual and moral sensibilities, their modes of feeling and thinking, and so on.[16] We can, in fact, illustrate transformations in, and the eventual globalization of, our world pictures by considering how they have been rendered into historically specific images of the world—the most common of which have been world maps.[17]

Consider briefly the Psalter Map (figure 2), a prominent example of the medieval *mappa mundi*, and the Mercator Projection Map (figure 3), arguably the epitome of early modern cartography. The most immediate thing that we notice is the asymmetry of information they contain. In their seminal history of cartography, J. B. Harley and David Woodward identify at least four main functions of maps: "geographical wayfinding and inventory of the physical world; sacred and cosmological representation of the world of the religious mind; the promotion of secular ideology; and an aesthetic function or decoration." "In the world of the ancients, however, and throughout medieval times," they write, "all four functions were represented, sometimes on a single map."[18]

Figure 2. The World Map from the "Map Psalter." © The British Library Board. Add. MS 28681, f.9.

Striking to the modern reader, these various facets of apprehension were not perceived as distinct from one another, but as fully integral. The physical and the spiritual worlds were inseparably and organically linked.[19] Ornamental and instrumental, political and pedagogical, such premodern representations presumed fateful ontological correspondences in a seamless cosmological order. This is clearly not the case with the early modern maps such as the Mercator Map, which is concerned exclusively with a single instrumental

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[16] A number of fine historical works have laid the groundwork for such comparison. See especially E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (New York: Vintage, 1960); Stephen L. Collins, *From Divine Cosmos to Sovereign State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); and, David Newsome, *The Victorian World Picture: Perceptions and Introspections in an Age of Change* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

[17] Maps are cultural and social artifacts expressive of symbolic content. Although they do not offer an exact reflection of our world, they are not simply metaphors either. They are graphic languages or idioms like any other form of discourse, which possess the potential of orienting people not only in time and space, but in terms of how time and space are conceived in the first place—that is, orient them to the organization of reality and knowledge characteristic of a given people and cognitive style.

[18] J. B. Harley and David Woodward, eds., *The History of Cartography, Volume I: Cartography in Prehistoric, Ancient, and Medieval Europe and the Mediterranean* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) 504.

[19] For a classical discussion, see Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936).

Figure 3. Gerhard Mercator's 1587 World Map, "Orbis terrae compendiosa descriptio." Source: Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library University of Georgia. Used by permission.

task: providing the most geographically accurate navigational information for sailors trying safely and successfully to cross oceans and reach the riches of the New World.

However useful in illustrating the distinct cartographic purposes of medievals and moderns, the differences between the *mappa mundi* and the Mercator maps also display profound cultural changes. Beginning around 1500, about the time of the publication of the first Mercator Projection map, the medieval European picture began undergoing a series of radical transformations that would eventuate, albeit over the course of some 400 years, in the breakup of its coherence and plausibility. A host of well-documented factors contributed. World exploration relativized it through increased encounters and competition with other civilizations and their world pictures, while at home revolutionary scientific theories undermined not only the older notion of a geocentric universe, but that of a universally unified, planetary landmass with a single humanity under one imperial jurisdiction.[20] The wars of religion only compounded matters, sundering Christendom as a coherent untity and introducing political and religious pluralism along with the rise of what would become the modern state. And, of course, the impact of nascent world capitalism played a leading part in all of these changes. The net effect of these and many other such factors was an extraordinary transformation in world pictures, first in Europe, and then through Europe, in the rest of the world.

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[20] Harald Kleinschmidt, *Ruling the Waves: Emperor Maximilian I, the Search for Islands and the Transformation of the European World Picture c. 1500* (Utrecht: Hes & De Graaf, 2008). But see also, John M. Headley, *The Europeanization of the World: On the Origins of Human Rights and Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

Figure 4. A screenshot of the "Google Earth" application.

The Globalization of the World Picture

As visually dramatic as it can sometimes seem in the era of global mapping and posi-
tioning systems like Google Earth, arguably nothing as epochal as the modern break
with the medieval is occurring with the globalization of the world picture (see figure 4).
What has occurred, and with enormous consequence, is the diffusion and intensifica-
tion of the elemental features of that original modern break. The moral order implicit
in the early modern world picture has, in the words of the philosopher Charles Taylor,
undergone a "double expansion," by which he means "more people live by it" and "the
demands it makes are heavier and more ramified."[21] The results for the world picture
are hence far from straightforward. Consider but two ramifications.

The first involves the "both/and" character of our empirical situation. On the one
hand, there is today a real, if still rudimentary, global-level culture extending and insti-
tutionalizing itself through the panoply of international nongovernmental organizations

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[21] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 2007) 160.
Gerard Delanty expresses a similar idea: "Under the conditions of advanced globalization the radical impe-
tus within modernity has a more general sphere of application." See "The Cosmopolitan Imagination:
Critical Cosmopolitanism and Social Theory," *British Journal of Sociology* 57.1 (2006): 38.

and intergovernmental agencies that span the globe.[22] This global culture is in crucial respects hegemonic as it increasingly underwrites the legitimacy of democratic govern-ments, the United Nations system, the world financial institutions, and civil society networks. This global culture furthermore increasingly penetrates localities through its scientific, educational, and technical organization and standardization. On the other hand, this global culture neither stamps out local, or "sub-global," cultures, nor rules out the rise of would-be rival global cultures; if anything, it aggravates the former and inspires the latter, all the while setting the terms (and providing the means) by which such aggravation and rivalry are meaningful to various global publics. Therefore, rather than a grand convergence of all human cultures into a single Earth culture, such that every individual human being will have equally internalized and appropriated this uni-versal culture as his or her own, any cursory inspection reveals a planet rife with social and cultural difference at every level, but also one in which such difference normally comes to be organized and legitimized in universal terms.[23] Borrowing from two popu-lar metaphors, we might say that in the emerging world picture, the world is both "flat" and "bumpy,"[24] but either way, it is the character of the local in light of the larger global human order that we are debating with such images.

The other, equally significant aspect of this double expansion has been the impact on consciousness itself. A number of prominent social theorists have characterized this impact in terms of what they call reflexive modernization, or simply reflexivity.[25] The basic idea is that modern peoples are forced to confront a host of highly contingent and contradictory facts about the realities of daily life. Two such facts stand out: first, there is the pervasive relativization of all cultural outlooks and the troubling of tradition and authority that inevitably accompanies it; second, there is the heightened recognition of the negative human impact on the natural world, especially the systemic risks generated by modern industrial societies. The social and psychic volatility wrought by cultural relativization, on the one hand, and the recognition of risk, on the other, generate enormous discontent, which in turn inspire various political and social movements for reform and resistance. Yet again, such projects are typically justified in the most univer-sal terms—that is, explicitly in the name of humanity or the planet. The universality of such claims, moreover, is not created out of thin air, nor by some utopian aspira-tion, but presents itself as globally available cultural models of protest and resentment,

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[22] The work of Stanford sociologist John Meyer and his students has done the most to describe the empirical character of this world culture and society. Two useful introductions are John Boli and George M. Thomas, eds., *Constructing World Culture: International Nongovernmental Organizations Since 1875* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); and Frank J. Lechner and John Boli, *World Culture: Origins and Consequences* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

[23] "In an increasingly globalized world," writes Roland Robertson, "there is a heightening of civilizational, societal, ethnic, regional, and indeed individual, self-consciousness. There are constraints on social enti-ties to locate themselves within world history and the global future. Yet globalization in and of itself also involves the diffusion of the *expectation* of such identity declarations" (Robertson 27).

[24] Thomas L. Friedman, *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2006); Joshua Kurlantzick, "The World is Bumpy," *New Republic* (15 July 2009).

[25] See, especially, Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Scott Lash, *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition, and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

which, when enacted by activists and social movements, inspire new cycles of human agency and responsibility to change, save, or otherwise repair the world. Put more squarely in terms of this essay, as the world picture globalizes, our orientation to the world grows ever more critically reflexive, yet—and this is crucial—it grows more universalist, interventionist, and prescriptive at the same time.

The reorientation of our moral imaginations in the direction of seeing humanity as a single people and the world as a single place, in other words, is as much a product of reflexivity as it is reflexivity's author. This fundamental yet dynamic tension animates both the revived interest in and the abiding ambivalence toward cosmopolitanism as an indispensible idea for our time. Let us consider these seemingly contradictory facets briefly in turn.

For all its supposed realism, the modern/European/Western world picture has become a lightening rod for controversy over the past half century.[26] Not surprisingly, controversies have raged within the field of cartography itself. Though not the first to do so, a historian by the name of Arno Peters sought to challenge the entire field in the 1970s with his critique of the imperial and ethnocentric premises of the Mercator Projection Map. As cartographers have always known, the mathematical formulas

Figure 5. Source: Lars H. Rohwedder. Creative Commons ShareAlike.
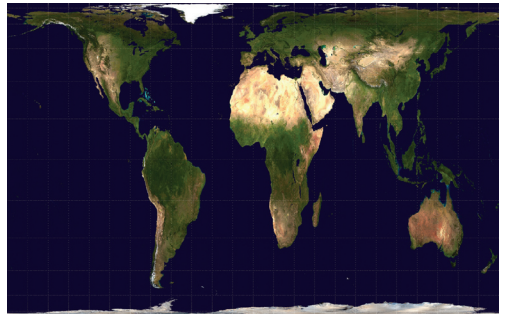
Figure 6. Source: Wikimedia Commons, public domain.

and methods of projecting what is essentially an elliptical sphere onto the flat, one-dimensional surface of a paper map inevitably distort the actual landmass of some parts of the Earth. As they have also known, the Mercator Map's projection makes countries furthest away from the equator look bigger while those closest to it look smaller than they are in reality, so much so, for example (see figure 5), that Greenland appears bigger than all of Africa, though Africa is in fact fourteen times as large. Similarly, Alaska appears bigger than Mexico, and Europe appears to occupy as much space as South America. This inflation of what turn out to be the generally wealthy, white, and developed countries of the northern hemisphere, and the diminution of the generally poor,
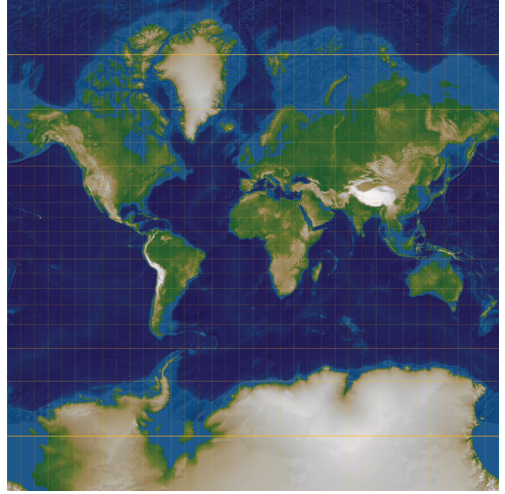
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[26] To avoid misunderstanding, I must add that modernity has long had its critics. What is arguably distinct about the present moment is how such criticism has become thoroughly ingrained, not just in the minds of alienated intellectuals, but in the consciousness of average citizens.

nonwhite, and underdeveloped countries of the so-called Global South became the basis of Peter's charge of "cartographic imperialism." In its place, Peters championed his new "Equal Area" map (figure 6) as the more accurate and just alternative. In his *New Cartography*, Peters asserted that: "The cartographic profession is, by its retention of old precepts based on the Eurocentric global concept, incapable of developing this egalitarian world map which alone can demonstrate the parity of all peoples of the earth."[27]

There are a couple of things to note here. The first thing, however, is neither the novelty nor accuracy of Peter's critique, but its familiarity and normality. Where once such a critical act of de-centering might have been radically unsettling and disorienting, today it is a commonplace. It is today, for instance, the map of preference in most schools, humanitarian organizations, and United Nations agencies.[28] More substantively, the critical work of de-centering was once intent on undermining the metaphysical referents of the medieval world picture under the banner of a new, modern "scientific" mode of realism. Today, in the name of yet a more radical realism, it trains its sights on any and all forms of immanent privileging—whether of the wealthy, white peoples of the Northern Hemisphere, or of the Westphalian state system, or, as we have already seen, of elitist, imperialist, and ethnocentric forms of cosmopolitanism itself.

Secondly, such efforts to radically relativize sites of modern privilege ground their legitimacy and mobilizing appeal in the universality of an arguably more advanced science and progressive notion of justice. For Peters, the ultimate normative referent point is nothing less than "the parity of *all the peoples of the earth*."[29] The aim is thus not merely to level the playing field, but to level it in the interests of human equality. The appeal is to our common humanity. Consciousness of humanity as a single people thus acts as a fixed point, a virtual North Star, by which to orient identities and mobilize solidarities in the otherwise storm-tossed seas of cultural relativization—and, of course, political injustice. Moreover, with each successive development and refinement—from the establishment of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to the successful mapping of the human genome—the idea of humanity becomes, in the words of Roland Robertson, increasingly "thematized." As Robertson goes on to suggest, the chief significance of the principle of human rights, for instance, has to do less with its enforcement in practice or its confrontation with rival ethical systems (for example, Asian values), but with "the consolidation of the conception of humanity."[30] Today, not surprisingly, all kinds of particularistic identities, from indigenous peoples to advocates of multiculturalism to the movement for gay, lesbian, and transgender rights are validated by some ultimate reference to human dignity, human rights, or human responsibility, which are

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[27] Arno Peters, *The New Cartography* (Klagenfurt: Carinthia University; New York: Friendship, 1983) PAGE.

[28] For an example of its use in educational curricula and humanitarian initiatives, see Oxfam's "Mapping the World" program: <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/mapping_our_world/mapping_our_world/>.

[29] Peters PAGE (italics added).

[30] Robertson 184.

in turn calibrated to humanity itself.[31]

As we shall now consider, the future of the human species has, according to Robertson, been "increasingly thematized via controversies about the relationship between that species and its environment and the quality of life of the species as a whole."[32] Alongside the relativization of modern sites of privilege, typically asserted in the name of humanity, is a heightened problematization of the material achievements of modernity, increasingly pursued in the name of the planet.[33]

Figure 7. Note that this cartogram uses as its cartographic baseline a version of the Equal Areas Projection discussed above. Source: <http://pthbb.org/natural/footprint/>. Creative Commons ShareAlike.

Consider the 2003 World Consumption Cartogram depicting total ecological deficit by country (figure 7). It is characteristic of a host of recent attempts to illustrate the scope and scale of the human impact on the environment. It is intended to illustrate what's become colloquially known as the global human "footprint."

Ulrich Beck's concept of "risk society" provides perhaps the most striking example of recent theoretical attempts to make sociological sense of such mapping projects and the reflexivity they exhibit. Put simply, risk society signals a new phase of modernity in which what were once pursued and fought over as the "goods" of modern industrial societies, things like incomes, jobs, and social security, are today off-set by conflicts over what Beck calls the "bads."[34] These include the very means by which many of the old goods were in fact attained. More pointedly, they involve the threatening and incalculable side effects and so-called "externalities" produced by nuclear and chemical power, genetic research, the extraction of fossil fuels, and the overall obsession with ensuring sustained economic growth. Beck highlights the acute contradictions of a situation
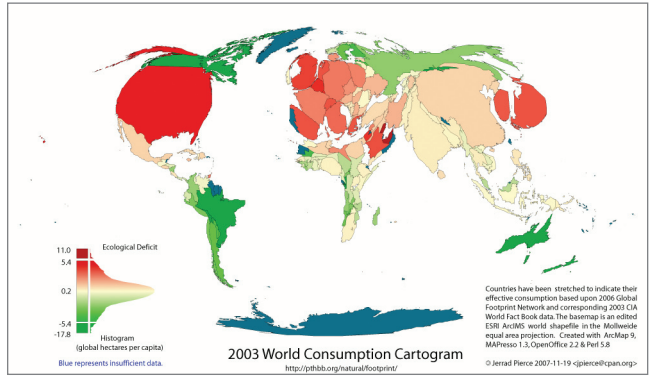
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[31] The word "calibrated" is intended to leave open whether (and to what extent) identity is understood in terms of the globally-defined categories of "humanity" or "human dignity," or only in relation to them. I'm grateful to Slavica Jakelić for this qualification.

[32] Robertson 184.

[33] Recall the image of Earth from space (figure 1). The "Blue Marble" and "Earthrise" photos are arguably the most widely disseminated images in human history, making it quite plausible that it is with their dissemination that the crystallization of the world as a single place becomes a possibility for humans around the world. At the very least, we might find compelling Robert Poole's suggestion that such photos "marked the tipping point, the moment when the sense of the space age flipped from what it meant for space to what it means for Earth." *Earthrise: How Man First Saw the Earth* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2008) 8.

[34] Ulrich Beck, "The Reinvention of Politics: Towards a Theory of Reflexive Modernization," *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition, and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994) 6.

where global risk and contingency follow directly from the modern drive to know, and through its knowledge, to control the world for human purposes.

Today, under conditions akin to Beck's concept of "risk society," the realm of ambivalence and uncertainty has struck back with a vengeance around an ever-expanding array of environmental concerns—climate change, declining fisheries, desertification, water scarcity, species extinction, and so on. All such issues demand active engagement and problem solving on the part of experts and elected officials, just as they provoke criticism and dissent from activists. Crucially, science and science-inspired policy become principal targets of political controversy, with constituencies and special interests battling over the veracity of everything from global warming to peak oil to the risks of childhood immunizations to the dangers of genetically modified foods.

Few developments epitomize just how deeply the problematization of modern industrial society extends in the emerging world picture than the present obsession with "sustainability" that has become ubiquitous across the developed world. Overcoming the problem of material scarcity was once widely heralded as industrial modernity's seminal achievement; it was the indisputable evidence of world-historical human progress. To be sure, the belief in this achievement is still both materially and rhetorically powerful. But there is a growing sense in which such faith in our abilities to maintain, let alone expand, that achievement in the face of present problems, threats, and risks is at least momentarily on the defensive. It is certainly clear that once widespread enthusiasms about a future of unending economic growth and progressive human improvement have presently evolved into more uncertain and sober assessments. The language of "sustainability" captures something of this reflexive mood. Employed by countercultural dissenters and the cultural mainstream alike, sustainability offers a rather equivocal articulation of our present circumstances: on the one hand, it highlights the provisionality (for some, the illusion) of our material abundance; on the other hand, it holds out the possibility of a more enduring, humane, and just abundance, if only we take immediate action to change the ways we humans live upon the Earth.

This consciousness extends even to what humans have long considered the perennial hazards of existence—the threat of famine, drought, pestilence, flood, and earthquake; these are no longer experienced by significant segments of humanity as purely "natural" events, or fatalistically as "acts of god," but as the direct consequence of human action (or, as is more often the case, inaction). This awareness has led some environmental scientists to announce the advent of a new geological era, the so-called "Anthropocene Era": a situation in which the human impact on the natural world is perceived to be as, if not more, consequential than nature's impact on the human world.[35] At its most extreme, such reflexivity has inspired attempts to unsettle and challenge the very place of human beings at the apex of the natural order—for instance, deep ecology's critique of anthropo-

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[35] See Will Steffen, Paul J. Crutzen, and John R. McNiell, "The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature?" *AMBIO: A Journal of the Human Environment* 36.8 (December 2007): 614–21.

centric speciesism.[36] But even here, the critique is offered in the name of the planet as a whole and its nonhuman organisms, which are deemed worthy of the same rights and respect we humans ideally accord one another.

As with the thematization of humanity, the net effect of the problematization of modern industrial society's impact on nature has been the crystallization of the image of the world as a single place—the whole Earth—or, what Robert Wuthnow memorably called "the production and reproduction of 'the world' as the most salient plausibility structure of our time."[37]

There is a third and final point to make about the globalization of the world picture. As the first two cases indicate, whether focused on humanity or the natural world, pervasive reflexivity focuses attention on a universe of discrete social and technical problems. It would not be a stretch to say that the present world picture posits the entire universe—reality itself—largely in terms of the proliferation of such problems (figures 8 and 9). This distinctive ontology weighs heavily on our leading institutions and those charged with running them. After all, we judge the credibility and legitimacy of our experts and officials precisely in terms of our perception of how well they managing such problems.

HIV infected persons, 2007. UN Millennium Indicators.

Figure 8. See <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/oxfam_in_action/flash/education.html>. Source: Mapping Worlds. Used by permission.

Persons under $1.25 a day. World Development Indicators.

Figure 9. See <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/oxfam_in_action/flash/education.html>. Source: Mapping Worlds. Used by permission.

Once again, the globalization of the world picture only intensifies and ramifies what was already present in the modernization of the world picture. In comparison with earlier pictures, the modern world picture was founded on a distinctive confidence in a god-given or otherwise innate capacity to manage the problems of existence with progressive precision and effectiveness. To a large extent, we still live as if this is true. Every day, the headlines tracking undulations in the rates of literacy, childhood diabetes, adult heart disease, automobile fatalities, gross domestic products, carbon dioxide emissions, homicides, and so much else remind us of this deep cultural premise.
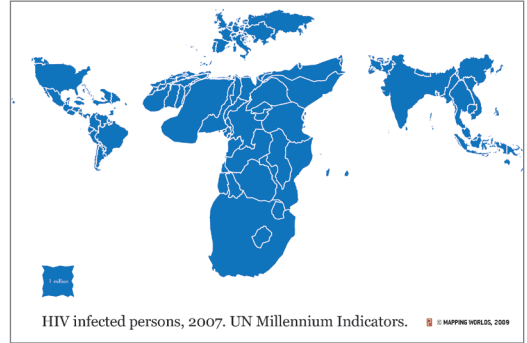
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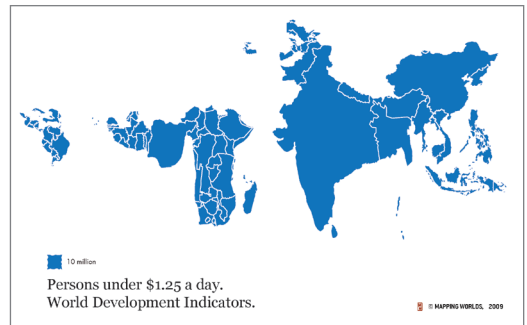
[36] As Derek Heater suggests, James Lovelock's "Gaia Hypothesis" provides the basic formulation of this insight, arguing that "the whole planet is a living system." See Derek Heater, *World Citizenship: Cosmopolitan Thinking and Its Opponents* (London: Continuum, 2002) 68.

[37] Robert Wuthnow, "Religious Movements and the Transition in World Order," *Understanding the New Religions*, ed. Jacob Needleman and George Baker (New York: Seabury, 1978) 65.
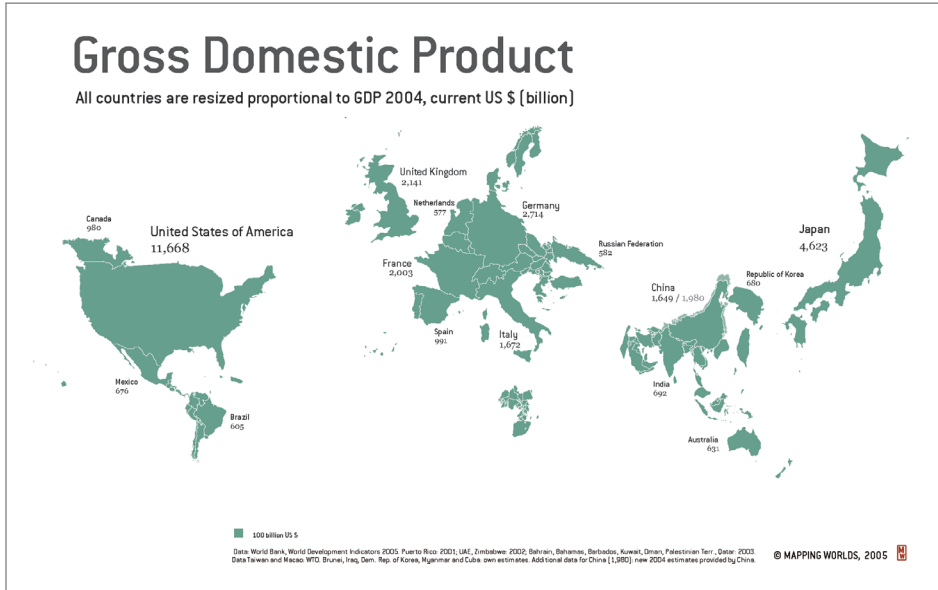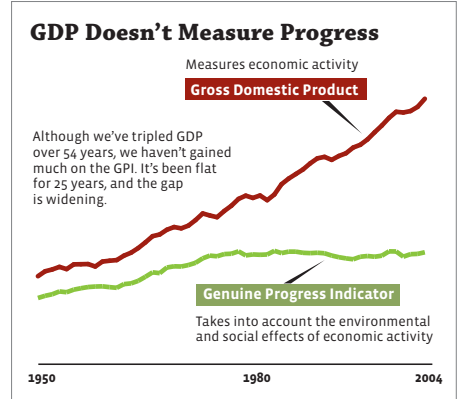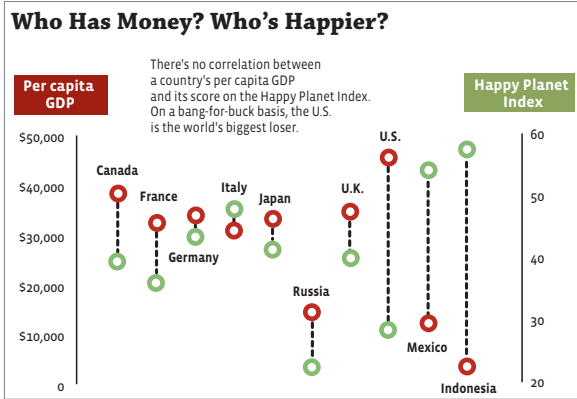
Figure 10. Source: Mapping Worlds. Used by permission.

As the following series of cartograms and tables are intended to demonstrate, the reflexive awareness of our struggles to solve or adequately manage a galaxy of problems provoke controversies over how best to characterize the world empirically.

The first map is a standard world map displaying a comparison of national Gross Domestic Products, or GDP (figure 10). GDP has been taken as a rough, but useful measure of a country's overall level of material prosperity. Over the years, however, a number of alternatives have been created to provide a richer and more accurate picture of human wellbeing and social progress. For instance, the Human Development Index adds to standard measures of GDP indicators of life expectancy and education, while an entire line of more recent alternatives, from the so-called Genuine Progress Indicator to the Quality of Life Index to the Ecological Footprint to the Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare, seek to replace GDP altogether. As a group, such indices attempt to highlight levels of inequality within societies as well as gaps in human development between societies. They also try to measure quality of life and environmental impact (figure 11 and figure 7 above) as part of the "true costs" of global-modern ways of life (figure 12). Taken together, this ever-expanding and elaborating accounting system provides a dominant imaginative framework for the globalization of the world picture.

Culturally speaking, this elaborate and iterative conceptual scheme does something more than keep accounts and provide benchmarks in the effort to manage and progressively solve problems. Every day, accounting mechanisms such as these also measure and track failure. Consider but a few prominent examples: There have been *acute failures* to detect and heed early warnings, whether of natural disasters like the Indian Ocean Tsunami or of political and economic crises such as the genocide in Rwanda

Who Has Money? Who's Happier?

Per capita GDP

There's no correlation between a country's per capita GDP and its score on the Happy Planet Index. On a bang-for-buck basis, the U.S. is the world's biggest loser.

Happy Planet Index

$50,000
$40,000
$30,000
$20,000
$10,000
0

Canada
France
Germany
Italy
Japan
U.K.
U.S.
Russia
Mexico
Indonesia

60
50
40
30
20

GDP Doesn't Measure Progress

Measures economic activity
Gross Domestic Product

Although we've tripled GDP over 54 years, we haven't gained much on the GPI. It's been flat for 25 years, and the gap is widening.

Genuine Progress Indicator
Takes into account the environmental and social effects of economic activity

1950   1980   2004

Left: Figure 10. Sources: CIA World FactBook. "Rank Order - CDP - per capita (PPP)." Accessed October 16, 2008. New Economics Foundation. "The Happy Planet Index." Accessed October 16, 2008. *Yes!* magazine graphic, 2009.
Right: Figure 10. Source: Redefining Progress, rprogress.org. *Yes!* magazine graphic, 2009.

and the 2008 worldwide financial meltdown. And there have also been the *chronic failures* to address extreme poverty, inequality, and racism that consistently frustrate attempts to ameliorate them.[38] Both sudden and recurrent failures, moreover, become occasions for mobilizing political dissent and activism, which in turn create the pressures and pretense for all manner of globally patterned spectacles and ritualized action. Examples are both ample and routine; we encounter them daily in the form of countless advocacy crusades such as Fair Trade, the Stop Human Trafficking Campaign, the Red Campaign to fight HIV/AIDS, or the One Campaign to end extreme poverty. We give regular audience to world-wide charity events hosted by famous singers, athletes, and movie stars, most famously LiveAid's "global jukebox" to raise funds for famine stricken Ethiopia in the 1980s; we experience them from afar in the form of frequent world summits, such as the UN Millennium Development Summit or the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, but we also witness such spectacles in the form of recurrent protests of the World Trade Organization and World Bank by ad hoc coalitions of indigenous farmers, environmentalist groups, consumer advocates, women's NGOs, and landless workers movements. With each episode of social injustice, natural disaster, epidemic, and complex humanitarian emergency, in other words, humanity's awareness of failure, but also of itself, accumulates—a situation only made more acute in an age of satellite broadcasts, twenty-four hour cable news stations, and real-time internet communication. As the world recently beheld in the aftermath of the Iranian presidential elections, with every single Twitter broadcast and Facebook posting, the embers of reflexivity grow yet brighter and more volatile for various global publics.[39]

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[38] The distinction between acute and chronic failure I owe to my collaboration with George Thomas.
[39] For an important discussion of "global publics," see Delanty, "The Cosmopolitan Imagination."

The point I am driving at is that as the world picture globalizes, the modern quest to domesticate reality (social and natural) for human ends has led to an intensifying awareness of and ritualized confrontation with failure across the world. As we have already discussed, even our ostensible achievements are routinely shown to have their darker sides. Yet such failures, and the mobilization and elaboration that are their result, do not only become flash points of protest and activism, but are also increasingly recognizable, if no less ramified, as episodes in the ongoing saga of humankind. In keeping with Roland Robertson's framework, we might characterize this last claim in terms of the thematization of history as the shared story of the human race.[40]

Cumulatively, humanity's confrontation with the rampant relativization of cultures, the pervasive situation of risk, and the routine confrontation of failure that now permeates human society are principle features of the globalization of the world picture. Recognition of such features has understandably led many astute observers to conclude that we are witness to the unraveling and fragmenting of any coherent world picture—not least the presumed universalism of the world picture of the modern West. Of course, there are those who place greater weight on the ways global capitalism is relentlessly pressing the world into its uniform (neo-liberal) image, for better or ill. Doubtless either conclusion will possess a certain phenomenological validity depending on one's social location.

Nevertheless, both perspectives are analytically misleading. What they miss is the both/and, reflexive quality of our situation, and this brings us, finally, to the problem of the "good world" mentioned at the outset. *Briefly put, the problem of the good world expresses a fact, at once empirical and normative: the world as a single place (that is, the picture of Earth from space), humanity as a single people (that is, the map of the human genome and the UN Declaration of Human Rights), and history as a shared story (that is, real-time coverage of global crises and ritualized global spectacles) have become salient and unavoidable moral categories for human beings everywhere.* This means mainly—and this is the fundamental contention of this essay—that the world and humanity have now become every bit as much the focal points of contention and controversy as they are icons of cooperation and conciliation, as much stimuli for competing ideological projects as for collaborative undertakings. Again, it is the both/and rather than the either/or character of our situation that is revealed (but also produced) by the globalization of the world picture. The problem of the "good world," in other words, has now taken its place alongside the longer-standing problems of the "good life" and the "good society" as one of the primary compass points of moral life.

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[40] Again, drawing on my work with George Thomas, it is worth noting how in older, premodern world pictures, theodicies of various kinds functioned as the official explanations for human suffering, mortality, and disaster. While theodicies continue to abound in the present, anthropodicies are officially the rule. In the modern world picture, who but humans can be prosecuted for failure? Who else can be blamed? We are thus not only witness to a situation where each of our separate "local" histories are increasingly implicated in the unfolding drama of humankind as a whole, but where the official chronicles of that history can only conceivably have humans as their authors.

The Problem of the Good World, or The Cosmopolitan Predicament

It is with the problem of the good world squarely in view that we can finally begin to make sense of the contemporary renaissance of cosmopolitanism. Where historically cosmopolitanism dramatized the possibilities and liabilities of what sociologist Gerard Delanty calls "world openness," it can today be understood in all its actually existing and adjectival forms as dramatizing the emergent "problem of the good world"—or what, for present purposes, we can usefully refer to as the "cosmopolitan predicament."[41]

Why cosmopolitan? Television reports of natural disaster and a litany of manmade crises kindle cosmopolitan sympathies and humanitarian action; advocacy campaigns exposing human rights abuses, genocide, and crimes against humanity mobilize worldwide movements of social solidarity and political justice. Scientific and technological innovation reorients our vision of the "world" as planet Earth, at once a biosphere constituted by diverse but overlapping ecologies and the "island" home of the human race. Interlocking markets and flows of capital and labor raise questions about the meaning of human flourishing and wellbeing, of social responsibility and a just standard of living. Taken together, such social circumstances seemingly make the ethical aspirations of universal brotherhood and the respect for the fundamental dignity of all humans no longer appear a figurative and abstract aspiration.

However long they may have been anticipated, the realities of globalization both expand and heighten such moral aspirations considerably. There is something inherent in the global situation that asks us to extend our moral commitments and concerns to greater categories of people and across further social and geographic distances, and makes us believe in the efficacy of our efforts in this regard.[42] We appear to have passed over the threshold into an era in which cosmopolitan hopes are revitalized, where dreams, if not of perpetual peace then of some reasonable approximation thereof, appear within reach if only we have the political will to realize them. Against the light of history, this global quickening of moral concern, and the aspirations for justice, benevolence, and material wellbeing it generates, represents a dramatic transformation in world pictures every bit as significant as that initiated by Copernicus. Such features are what warrant the appellation *cosmopolitan*.

But, as we have seen, it is no less a predicament for all this. The same processes that seem to be making cosmopolitan hopes possible—both the institutional expansion of a global-level culture *and* the diffusion of "world" and "humanity" as morally salient and politically charged categories—are generating an extremely high degree of reflexiv-

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[41] Delanty, "The Cosmopolitan Imagination," 27.
[42] Charles Taylor puts it most poignantly: "our age makes higher demands for solidarity and benevolence on people today than ever before. Never before have people been asked to stretch out so far, so consistently, so systematically, so as a matter of course, to the stranger outside the gates. A similar point can be made, if we look at the other dimension of the affirmation of ordinary life, that concerned with universal justice. Here, too, we are asked to maintain standards of equality that cover wider and wider classes of people, bridge more and more kinds of difference, impinge more and more in our lives." *A Catholic Modernity?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 31.

ity and normative complexity. In some cases, longstanding differences are aggravated; in others, new lines of conflict are created which in turn inform and inflame a whole range of ethical and political debates about the meaning and demands of justice— economic, political, and social; about the socially acceptable limits of human suffering and the minimum threshold of wellbeing; about the meaning of citizenship, national sovereignty, and political authority; about the legal and ethical obligations of business, and so on. Everywhere, "locally" situated relationships, and the social, economic, political, religious, and moral orders that constitute them (including our own), are relativized and problematized. Modernities proliferate.

Yet to assert the ubiquity of the cosmopolitan predicament would be risking bad faith without adding a critical (dare I say, reflexive) qualification: we do not all suffer the predicament equally. Craig Calhoun provides the needed insight when he reminds us that "felt cosmopolitanism depends on privilege."[43] To state the obvious, most people do not "feel" cosmopolitan at all. For this reason, it would be easy to see the cosmopolitan predicament exclusively as the existential condition of the well-to-do, in Calhoun's colorful description as, "the class consciousness of frequent travelers."[44] Yet, most of the new cosmopolitans are not only alive to Calhoun's critical reminder, it is the central theme in their writing. Again, it is the exiles, refugees, and those otherwise forced into a "cosmopolitan" existence of migration and diaspora (of homelessness) that make up the primary topics of the new cosmopolitan's critical analysis and the objects of their "subaltern," "cosmopolitical" projects. It is thus analytically necessary to distinguish between what we might refer to as manifest and latent cosmopolitanisms, between those who self-identify with the term given their social location and those to whom the term can only be applied from afar.

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In just such pointed ways, the new cosmopolitanism exhorts us to pay heed to how we humans apprehend our world. Still, whatever its analytical and political contributions may turn out to be, the symbolic importance of the revival of cosmopolitanism calls us to attend to the full range of the empirical and moral challenges of our changing world picture—when our "local" social worlds confront the realignment of their imaginative boundaries, if not perfectly along the contours of the planet and humanity, then with dynamic reference to them. Consideration of the globalizing world picture shows the human species living amid the tensions generated by reinvigorated ethical and political aspirations for a better, more humane, and just world (and the global institutions which attempt to make these aspirations a reality) and repeated confrontation with the intractable disorders, dislocations, and failures wrought by these very same

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[43] Craig Calhoun, "Cosmopolitanism in the Modern Social Imaginary," *Daedalus* (Summer 2008): 106.
[44] Calhoun 110.

forces. As a result, human beings are undergoing a difficult and uncertain period, not only of economic and political reordering, but of profound moral reorientation.

Yet far from either a static, monochromatic world picture, where the forces of global capitalism and Western liberalism supposedly homogenize all that was once culturally pristine and distinct, or a kaleidoscopic world picture of radical disjuncture, where all that was once perceived to be culturally cohesive supposedly melts (deconstructs?) into air—as so many discontinuous flows, networks, and processes—ours is in actuality a highly interactive and reflexive world picture better described in terms of the universal organization and legitimation of difference.[45] While we humans may not all identify as cosmopolitans, nor would we all possess anything like a cosmopolitan ethical sensibility if surveyed, we nonetheless all share in the cosmopolitan predicament. With the dawning of the problem of the good world, we are all in a profound, if provisional sense, cosmopolitans now.

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[45] This idea draws from the work of a number of scholars. See, especially, Ulf Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity: Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); John Boli, "Contemporary Developments in World Culture," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 46.5–6 (December 2005): 398; and, of course, Roland Robertson's idea of universalization of particularity and the particularization of universality, in *Globalization*, 100.