

Anyone and Everyone, Potentially:

For a Political Philosophy for all Humans, without Limits

ANYONE: The Cosmopolitan Subject of Anthropology, by Nigel Rapport, New York & Oxford: Berghan Books, 2012, ISBN 978-0-85745-519-2 (hardback).

A complex normative political theory for liberalism; an ethnography of a life; reflections on the ontological nature of human being as consciousness, body, and being in the world; a defence of the ideology of science as a norm of reason; a critique of identity politics, an opposition to all fundamentalisms; an account of the importance of manners for the civilizing process, and a reflexive account of being Jewish – these are the concerns of this book. Clearly, it ranges far and wide, something that hardly makes it an easy book to review.

I shall begin this review with an overview of the themes of the book before entering into a more detailed discussion.

The book opens by addressing ‘cosmopolitanism’¹, noting the crucial embedding of the term in Kant’s philosophy. The worth of the term, cosmopolitanism, the author suggests, depends on three main lines of argument. First, that there is an irreducible humankind; second, that anyone who is a species member is simultaneously universal and unique; third, that the glue which holds the unique in the universal is a set of norms that the author refers to as *politesse*, norms that transgress the specificities of members’ categorization devices, such as those constituting gender,

¹ The reviewer first encountered this concept in Gouldner’s (1957/1958) noteworthy discussion of ‘cosmopolitans’ and ‘locals’, which, surprisingly, is a source omitted by the author.

ethnicity, class, religiosity, and so on. With respect to this third point concerning the constitution of civil society, the author, surprisingly, does not consider the contribution of Elias (1969), perhaps because an historical account of manners, especially in the statal terms that Elias uses, would undercut the ontological focus that the author favours. If human nature is historically contingent it cannot also be universal.

Anyone is to be differentiated from Everyman. Anyone is the ontological centre of Rapport's moral universe, a category that collapses the distinction Agamben (1998) draws between bare life and human life (see Pinha e Cunha, Clegg, Rego, and Lancione 2012). In Rapport's book, a considered life of feeling, interpreting, and knowing oneself is sufficient to make Anyone human: "Anyone's birthright, it might be said, is his or her futurity: the capacity to define the human in the context of his or her individual life. The tie between Anyone and humankind microcosm to macrocosm – is immanent and irreducible" (page 4). At the core of this relation is 'liberty of choice' regarding form of life and world-view. Such liberty requires a human being free and able to navigate life's passages in terms that do not unreflexively cohere with those of "symbolic collectivization ... the predominance of thinking and acting in categorical terms" (page 7)². Essence should be created from existence, not categorical devices, from achievement, not ascription.

There is an underlying discussion of a particular form of categorical device and identity throughout the book, especially at the end. As a Jew, he argues, channelling

² In this respect there are similarities with Laclau and Mouffes' (1985) view – a position that is not discussed, it should be clear – of hegemony as consisting of an acceptance of categorical imperatives rather than sustaining a position of radical doubt and scepticism towards all such claims.

Finkelkraut (1994: 82), Israel functions as a categorical signifier above all others, as a place which those marginalized as “Jewish” by dominant categorical devices of religiosity, ethnicity and nationalism, may hold on to with *A Dream of Belonging* (Janina Bauman 1988), even as sojourners in a life lived elsewhere and otherwise.

The book challenges notions of global cultural integration and multicultural differentiation and fragmentation alike. The former privileges those fundamentalists that wish to make one set of categorical imperatives (obey only God, Allah, Nature, etc.) preeminent and enforceable while the latter blur important questions of qualitative difference in their judgement of social constructionist primacy, occluding the fact that “‘nature’ is a domain of universal truths” (page 13)³.

Above I have tried to provide an account of the introduction to the book as well as imply some of the overall qualities. Now I wish to enter into the argument of the book in more detail.

Part 1 of the book deals with a broad review of cosmopolitanism, beginning with its etymology: *cosmos*, meaning the whole, while *polites* signifies being a member of some polity. Clearly, these are terms united in tension. The tension is somewhat formal, however, because individual consciousness belongs “both to localized settings and to global possibilities” (page 21). While the local is real and immediate for everyone the global possibilities are infinitely more remote in their distribution as far as anyone in particular is concerned. Following Kant, cosmopolitan rights are

³ Latour (1993) provides an interesting point of contrast in his remarkable book, *We Have Never Been Modern*, which does much to dispel any smugness or ontological security that might attach to the categories of ‘nature’.

constituted, ideally, in terms of a hospitality that neither harms the guest nor exploits the host, in which the stranger is welcomed into the fold of local humanity⁴.

More contemporaneously, cosmopolitanism develops five specific characteristics, suggests Rapport: as moral, as normative, as a social condition, as an orientation, and as a specific kind of actor. Moral cosmopolitanism may be seen in Rawls' (1971) theory of justice. Notions of universal human rights and attempts to institutionalize them characterize normative cosmopolitanism. To be human today, Rapport suggests, is to partake in a specific kind of social condition, one of global consciousness of oneself as a unique constituent of a lonely planet, whose members are helter-skelter in a trajectory of reflexive modernization. (Many, perhaps the vast majority, must be less than fully human in real terms in consideration of this calculus.) Cosmopolitanism is open as an orientation to the world, eschewing nostalgia and sentimentality for local differences held fondly, a capacity to live with radical difference. As a kind of actor the cosmopolitan is polymorphic, plural, and disembedded.

Cosmopolitanism begins to sound like something one might encounter, if one is (doubly) lucky, in the first class lounge at an airport. Perhaps one might find it in rare moments in the congress halls of the great academies of the social sciences and humanities, although the chances are slim. These institutions have overwhelmingly

⁴ Empirically, less ideally and more often, strangers will barely be noticed or, if noticed, tolerated. Asylum seekers are shunned not welcomed; put into camps. The homeless are an invisible presence, splashed by mud from the Bentley in the passing traffic, unseen and in all probability having less in the way of Kantian rights and global possibilities than the chauffeur, let alone the oligarch in the rear.

national rather than cosmopolitan themes, suggests Rapport. Moreover, a global elite of privileged white males, mostly embedded in capitalist political economies, ideologies, and practices, carry these themes through the airport lounges and into the program. Although there are claims to cosmopolitanism from outside of Western European Enlightenment traditions these are various forms of realist critique that Rapport will not admit in his imaginary for Anyone, situated between the facts of human uniqueness and sensemaking capacities and aspiration that “human beings everywhere should be afforded the space and opportunity to fulfil this potential for sense-making” (page 41).

A cosmopolitan anthropology is sketched next in a space conceived as one always marked by social tolerance but never intellectual tolerance (after Gellner 1974). Such anthropology is both a practical and teleological enterprise in a liberalism that stands opposed to multiculturalism, globalization, and pluralism as sources of entrenching differences in the social. It opposes and is opposed everywhere by “flawed consumers” of modernity, fundamentalists of faith and cultural identity alike, to use Zygmunt Bauman’s (1998) felicitous term, those characters unable, reluctant, or fearful of imagining a life story of their own making, and thus incapable of being ironic about the choices the fates have bestowed and reflective enough to imagine a life other than that which the fates script. Cosmopolis must be peopled by “free and autonomous individuals” (page 57), free to choose. In many ways the individuals imagined are those for whom opportunity rather than confusion is offered by “liquid modernity” (a term that might usefully have been introduced into the discussion of “The fluidity of experience”, pages 59-62: see Bauman 2000; Clegg

and Baumeler 2010). In these pages, discussing the free and autonomous individual and the fluidity of experience the idealism and normativism of the book shines through most clearly.

Sources of cosmopolitan hope are next discussed in aspirations towards a “universal humanism”, carried by human rights discourse, world cities, and global issues. None of these will secure global governance, something that Rapport addresses through five potential processes: extending, or allying, the cultural community; multiplying, civilizing or regulating the liberal state. From community the aspirations work out and upwards; for the state aspirations work out, down and envelop territory in networks and entanglements.

Finally, in this first part of the book, there is a brief discussion of “cosmopolitan politesse” as the informal procedures that should buttress the formal procedures of global governance. Together with “formal and constitutional procedures” there must be “informal norms of mannerly exchange” (page 75), regulating laws and mores of a civil society cast in a liberal and democratic mode in which illiberalism – a lack of tolerance for otherness – is contained.

Thus ends the first and most difficult part of the book. Part of the difficulty is an effect of the writing style: serial consideration of sources discussed in detail for a paragraph or two, layered on each other, and with an implicit assumption that the reader may have some familiarity with the sources, to ease the reading. On second read things fall into place but there is missed opportunity to say things more clearly,

to signpost the way more often, and to offer succour to the reader less versed and immersed in the issues than the author.

In Part 2 of the book, the tack changes sharply. We are introduced to Rickey Hirsch in an extended, almost auto-ethnography (see Reed-Danahay, 1997), peppered with some authorial reflections. The particulars of Rickey's fascinating life need not detain us here; suffice to say, that he is, indeed, a global cosmopolitan with long-lived experiences. What is important for Rapport is that the tale is told in his own words by Rickey, illuminating a life of individual movement and contingency, great risk and danger, adventure and misadventure. The focus is very much on Rickey as the competent author of his circumstances but in this celebration of agency perhaps the realities of agencies' relations of duality with structure are minimized? I think so: without reference to Rickey's Jewish identity and to a Europe beset by fascism, war and endless flows of refugees, the story makes little sense. It is a story of one remarkable life but what is remarkable in part is that, unlike so many others, this life was not snuffed out, made dust by categorical devices and associated technologies of power (Clegg, Courpasson and Phillips 2006: chapter 6).

The third part of the book deals with the nature of a human science and of social order. A human science, Rapport insists, must deal with the whole person: their consciousness, body, and environment. His way into this discussion is through two famous dead bodies: those of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Kierkegaard, deeply unfashionable for many years, is celebrated because of his unflinching focus on a passionate subjectivity as the state of being. Being is explored through accounts of personal truth as political and physiological, and as a feature of the physical

environment. Kierkegaard is quickly consigned to the wings however, and after a brief trot through John Stuart Mill (1972) *On Liberty*, we are taken into a discussion of a Foucauldian-inspired account of the “standardized child” as a subject of “surveillance medicine” in James’ (2005) work. The point of this is to suggest the tyranny of the bureaucratically regulatory gaze and the loss of autonomy of selfhood of those subjected to it.

A further exegesis follows as we move from childhood to earthworms via discussion of reflexivity. Earthworms, in Turner’s (2000) work, are valued for their environment shaping capabilities, transforming the nature they are in so that it serves their vital needs. Earthworms burrow where humans lead through their activity in the world from prenatal life onwards (Edelman 1992). Some serious shifting of levels occurs in this analysis from evolutionary arguments about natural selection in populations, in Popper and Eccles (1977), back to personal truths and Kierkegaard. The stitching is pretty loose even while the method, of serial discussion of disparate works, is now clearly evident as a matter of style.

And so to Nietzsche and an excursus on the physical and mental health of the last years of his life (his *Umnachtung*): the research questions are – did Nietzsche have syphilis or not and to what extent did his writings interact with the health of his body? The focus is on the will to power in these later writings, where every living thing is seen to be in a state of constant struggle to assert itself, against all the resistance of other things, living or not, in the environment through which bodies move, grew, deteriorate and die. Nothing stays the same; everything is in process, flux, transition, becoming and decaying as “federations of separate and ultimately

antagonistic forces which temporarily exploited their mutual alliance” (page 147). All things should be seen as constellations of power, the outcome of tensions and struggles with no structural determination. Whatever sense of structuration is constructed by (any) Anyone is to be interpreted as nothing other than strategies of power. In these musings Rapport sees the truths by which Nietzsche sought to live as bearing a homology with his personal truths. Again, the stitching seems pretty loose. What is patterned in this section is a distinction between the purity of the sciences as a disinterested pastime that can be rendered objective (without any account of how this is done) and the purity of the human sciences as a capture of personal truths, which will be quilted in the following chapter.

Simmel (1971) provides the entry to the question of the relation of the individual and the whole. His work serves as a lesson in “distortions”. These distortions are those of the type, the ideal, and the representative, the forms that veiled individual things-in-the-world, the phenomenal ways of categorizing the essential numina of the person, which remained opaque. The excursus through Simmel, ultimately, prepares the ground for a question that could, perhaps, have been more fruitfully reached through a discussion of realist theories of science: how to “ground the relation between individual human beings in empirical reality and not merely in a socially constructed phenomenalism”? The ambition is explicitly political:

“[G]enuine knowledge of the way in which the individual instantiates the human as well as a route to genuine democracy in which the individual and the liberal state share a relation of mutual identification (the individual sees himself or herself in the state, the state sees itself as an aggregation of

individuals) ... [in which] ... [t]he individual is unique and yet scientifically accommodated as an exemplar of the species; the individual is unique and yet the subject of statal policies of universal recognition and attention” (page 157).

Three ways of relating the one and the whole are envisaged through metaphors of flowering, family resemblance, and a spectrum of possibilities. Human embodiment is taken as a fundament. The properties of this fundament are a distinct materiality, spatiality, temporality, environmental range, and genetic capacities, creating an overall set of capacities that define the person. While all humans share these properties each individual occupies a unique configuration of them. The proper question for Rapport’s political philosophy thus becomes how each individual as a thing-in-itself is treated and treats others. Ruled out by fiat is any deployment of categorical devices; instead, it is the unique and potential capacities that must be deployed.

After a brief aside on Iris Murdoch (1970) and William Golding (1988) the focus on capacities leads into a discussion of Humphrey’s (1997) Amnesty lecture on children’s rights, and social responsibilities for ensuring them, which is to guarantee a scientific education in order to prepare children to loosen and question dogmas and fundamentalisms, making them free to become whatever they might be free to be. The state’s role is to ensure that this can happen. These freedoms of agency are, as all sociologists of education realise, deeply structurally constrained and embedded in specific national and local practices.

Implications flow from this argument. One is that a proper education should be a right not a privilege only the wealthy can buy; a second is that there is no role for religion or any other form of fundamentalism in shaping the education of children – their potentialities must flower as untrammelled as possible. How these outcomes might be achieved is not entirely clear: the argument would hardly seem to prepare the ground for either community or state control of education. Perhaps the solution would be Durkheimian, the inculcation of civic morals premised on professional ethics, where these ethics are those of science, albeit a science whose parameters remain unclear from the book (Durkheim 1992).

The penultimate chapter of this exploration of Anyone is consideration of politesse as a virtue, where the individual is recognised as an end in themselves. However, the highly individualistic liberalism begins to break up at this point: politesse is acknowledged as existing within “cultural milieu”, “speech communities”, “front stage” and “back stage” repertoires, “language codes” and “forms of life” (pages 175-7). It would seem that we are back in the world of those members’ categorization devices (Sacks 1972 – another likely source that, oddly, is never mentioned) that so much effort has been expended on avoiding. The subsequent discussion seems anthropologically to favour a contractarian and negotiated order model of society comprised of interactional routines sustained by ceremonial and taken-for-granted aspects of everyday talk: politesse as the constitutive and preferential rules outlined by Garfinkel’s (1967) ethnomethodology? One issue suggests itself: if “cosmopolitan politesse is conceived of as a moral means to engage with Anyone on a potentially global scale” (page 185) only liberal subjects, as

defined, will have the capacities to so engage with other forms of life – so how does politesse deal with radical alterity, with actants such as a drone or suicide bomber? The death and destruction wrought by one may be rooted in rationalism and the other mired in faith but the effects of each are equally destructive. What price irony in these circumstances?

Penultimately, we have a projection of the liberal values on a global scale as a general good, which would be fine in a global world shaped by post-Enlightenment virtues, but that is hardly the case. There are myriad Anyones composed of tensions that have no bearings in the post-Enlightenment world for which the liberal notion of the individual is literally, meaningless. How can we speak of cosmopolitanism if we do not go out of our comfort zone, our philosophical tradition, our epistemology, our ontology - if one wants to be a cosmopolitan one needs to engage with other traditions than those that nourish one.

Towards the end of the chapter the focus is on a number of anthropological studies of specific communities, specific ethnographies. Each is discussed as a case in itself in turn. While each case is clearly an example of good anthropology at work each case is very contained: an English village; Lebanese status and honour codes; the Mechinacu of Brazil, and dissimulation in Indonesian Java. By treating each as its own universe, as an anthropological microcosm, the interaction effects, as it were, are played down.

Rapport seeks to ground his analysis (pages 193-5) in the category of “perfectionism”. Not all social formations strive for excellence in the individualistic

terms that are accommodated by the category of “perfectionism, however. Good manners are nice to have but are no basis for a universal order. Manners are deeply culturally embedded and the good varies generationally, culturally, situationally.

Finally, there are some reflections on Jewish Cosmopolitanism⁵. Here, perhaps as much as anywhere, one can see the limits of the argument. The one term, “Jewish”, is a category that is ascribed not achieved⁶; the other term, “cosmopolitanism”, is a state of being that would dispense with all categorical imperatives. They simply are not bedfellows.

Overall, as a reviewer of many books, some of which have been less straightforward than one might wish, this is perhaps the least straightforward and the most fascinating of all. While it builds a marvellous moral case for a specific form of liberalism as an ideal it is silent on all those actually existing forms of practice that would subvert its realization, those ‘circuits of power’ (Clegg 1989) that choke its noble ambitions, that divert its obligatory passage points, and constitute the normalcy of the political life. As moral philosophy the book gets top marks; as political theory it scores well, as a prognosis for empirical realism it is considerably more constrained.

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⁵ In which the phrase “history is bunk” is attributed to the film director John Ford, who assuredly did not think this, rather than the carmaker, Henry Ford, who said he did.

⁶ Being Jewish is ascribed through lines of matrilineal descent.

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