

Seven Theses on Human Rights: (7) Cosmopolitanism, Equality & Resistance

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Thesis 7: For a cosmopolitanism to come (or the idea of communism).

Against imperial arrogance and cosmopolitan naivety, we must insist that global neoliberal capitalism and human-rights-for-export are part of the same project. The two must be uncoupled; human rights can contribute little to the struggle against capitalist exploitation and political domination. Their promotion by western states and humanitarians



turns them into a palliative: it is useful for a limited protection of individuals but it can blunt political resistance. Human rights can re-claim their redemptive role in the hands and imagination of those who return them to the tradition of resistance and struggle against the advice of the preachers of moralism, suffering humanity, and humanitarian philanthropy.

Liberal equality as a regulative principle has failed to close the gap between rich and poor. Equality must become an axiomatic presupposition: People are free and equal; equality is not the effect but the premise of action. Whatever denies this simple truth creates a right and duty of resistance. The equality of legal rights has consistently supported inequality; axiomatic equality (each counts as one in all relevant groups) is the impossible boundary of rights culture. It means that healthcare is due to everyone who needs it, irrespective of means; that rights to residence and work belong to all who find themselves in a part of the world irrespective of nationality; that political activities can be

freely engaged by all irrespective of citizenship and against the explicit prohibitions of human rights law.

The combination of the right to resistance and axiomatic equality projects a humanity opposed both to universal individualism and communitarian closure. In the age of globalization, of *mondialization* we suffer from a poverty of world. Each one is a cosmos but we no longer have a world, only a series of disconnected situations. Everyone a world: a knot of past events and stories, people and encounters, desires and dreams. This is also the point of *ekstasis*, of opening up and moving away, immortals in our mortality, symbolically finite but imaginatively infinite. The cosmopolitan capitalists promise to make us citizens of the world under a global sovereign and a well-defined and terminal humanity. This is the universalization of the lack of world, the imperialism and empiricism to which every cosmopolitanism falls.

But we should not give up the universalizing impetus of the imaginary, the cosmos that uproots every polis, disturbs every filiation, contests all sovereignty and hegemony. Resistance and radical equality map out an imaginary domain of rights which is uncannily close to utopia. According to Ernst Bloch, the present foreshadows a future not yet and, one should add, not ever possible. The future projection of an order in which man is no longer a “degraded, enslaved, abandoned or, despised being” links the best traditions of the past with a powerful “reminiscence of the future.”¹ It disturbs the linear concept of time and, like psychoanalysis, it imagines the present in the image of a prefigured beautiful future, which however will never come to be. In this sense, the imaginary domain is necessarily utopian, non-existing. And yet, this non-place or nothingness grounds our sense of identity, in the same way that utopia helps create a sense of social identity. We have re-discovered in Tunisia and Tahrir Square, in Madrid’s Puerta del Sol and Athens’ Syntagma Square what goes beyond and against liberal cosmopolitanism, the principle of its excess. This is the promise of the cosmopolitanism to come – or the idea of communism.²

The cosmopolitanism to come is neither the terrain of nations nor an alliance of classes, although it draws from the treasure of solidarity. Dissatisfaction with the nation, state, and the inter-national comes from a bond between singularities, which cannot be turned into essential humanity, nation, or state. The cosmos to come is the world of each unique one, of whoever or anyone; the polis, the infinite encounters of singularities. What binds me to a Palestinian, a *sans papiers* migrant, or an unemployed youth is not membership of humanity, nation, state, or community but a bond that cannot be contained in the dominant interpretations of humanity and cosmos or of polis and state.

Law, the principle of the polis, prescribes what constitutes a reasonable order by accepting and validating some parts of collective life, while banning, excluding others, making them invisible. Law and rights link language with things or beings; they nominate what exists and condemn the rest to invisibility and marginality. As the formal and dominant decision about existence, law carries huge ontological power. Radical desire, on the other hand is the longing for what has been banned and declared impossible by the law; what confronts past catastrophes and incorporates the promise of the future.

The axiom of equality and the right to resistance prepare militant subjects in the ongoing struggle between justice and injustice. This being together of singularities in resistance is constructed here and now with friends and strangers in acts of hospitality, in cities of resistance, Cairo, Madrid, Athens.

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1. Ernst Bloch, *Natural Law and Human History* trans. J.D. Schmidt (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), xxviii.



2. Costas Douzinas, *Philosophy and Resistance in the Crisis* (Cambridge, Polity, 2013), Chapters 9, 10, and 11.



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