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Cosmopolitan Patriots

Kwame Anthony Appiah

My father was a Ghanaian patriot. He once published a column in the *Pioneer*, our local newspaper in Kumasi, under the headline “Is Ghana Worth Dying For?” and I know that his heart’s answer was yes.¹ But he also loved Asante, the region of Ghana where he and I both grew up, a kingdom absorbed within a British colony and, then, a region of a new multiethnic republic: a once-kingdom that he and his father also both loved and served. And, like so many African nationalists of his class and generation, he always loved an enchanting abstraction they called Africa.

My thinking on these topics has evolved out of discussions of multiculturalism over the past few years and was stimulated profoundly by an invitation to read and respond to Martha Nussbaum’s essay “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism,” *Boston Review*, Oct.–Nov. 1994, pp. 3–6. I am particularly grateful to Homi Bhabha, Lawrence Blum, Richard T. Ford, Jorge Garcia, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Amy Gutmann, Martha Minow, Maneesha Sinha, Charles Taylor, David Wilkins, and David Wong; and to those participants in two conferences—“Text and Nation” at Georgetown University in April 1995, and the Annual Conference of the Association of University Teachers of English in South Africa (AUTESA), at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, in July 1995—who commented on earlier versions of these thoughts.

Portions of this essay appeared in my essay “Against National Culture,” in *Text and Nation: Cross-Disciplinary Essays on Cultural and National Identities*, ed. Laura García-Moreno and Peter C. Pfeiffer (Columbia, S.C., 1996), pp. 175–90.

1. This question was first put to him by J. B. Danquah, leader of the major opposition party in Kwame Nkrumah’s Ghana, in 1962. See Joseph Appiah, *Joe Appiah: The Autobiography of an African Patriot* (New York, 1990), p. 266. My father’s column is reprinted in Appiah, *Antiochus Lives Again! (Political Essays of Joe Appiah)*, ed. Ivor Agyeman-Duah (Kumasi, Ghana, 1992).

When he died, my sisters and I found a note he had drafted and never quite finished, last words of love and wisdom for his children. After a summary reminder of our double ancestry—in Ghana and in England—he wrote: “Remember that you are citizens of the world.” And he went on to tell us that this meant that—wherever we chose to live, and, as citizens of the world, we could surely choose to live anywhere—we should make sure we left that place “better than you found it.” “Deep inside of me,” he went on, “is a great love for mankind and an abiding desire to see mankind, under God, fulfil its highest destiny.”

The favorite slander of the narrow nationalist against us cosmopolitans is that we are rootless. What my father believed in, however, was a rooted cosmopolitanism, or, if you like, a cosmopolitan patriotism. Like Gertrude Stein, he thought there was no point in roots if you couldn’t take them with you. “America is my country and Paris is my hometown,” Stein said.² My father would have understood her.

We cosmopolitans face a familiar litany of objections. Some, for example, have complained that our cosmopolitanism must be parasitic: where, they ask, could Stein have gotten her roots in a fully cosmopolitan world? Where, in other words, would all the diversity we cosmopolitans celebrate come from in a world where there were only cosmopolitans?

The answer is straightforward: the cosmopolitan patriot can entertain the possibility of a world in which *everyone* is a rooted cosmopolitan, attached to a home of one’s own, with its own cultural particularities, but taking pleasure from the presence of other, different places that are home to other, different people. The cosmopolitan also imagines that in such a world not everyone will find it best to stay in their natal patria, so that the circulation of people among different localities will involve not only cultural tourism (which the cosmopolitan admits to enjoying) but migration, nomadism, diaspora. In the past, these processes have too often been the result of forces we should deplore; the old migrants were often refugees, and older diasporas often began in an involuntary exile. But what can be hateful, if coerced, can be celebrated when it flows from the free decisions of individuals or of groups.

2. Gertrude Stein, “An American and France” (1936), *What Are Masterpieces?* (Los Angeles, 1940), p. 61.

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In a world of cosmopolitan patriots, people would accept the citizen's responsibility to nurture the culture and the politics of their homes. Many would, no doubt, spend their lives in the places that shaped them; and that is one of the reasons local cultural practices would be sustained and transmitted. But many would move; and that would mean that cultural practices would travel also (as they have always travelled). The result would be a world in which each local form of human life was the result of long-term and persistent processes of cultural hybridization: a world, in that respect, much like the world we live in now.

Behind the objection that cosmopolitanism is parasitic there is, in any case, an anxiety we should dispel: an uneasiness caused by an exaggerated estimate of the rate of disappearance of cultural heterogeneity. In the global system of cultural exchanges there are, indeed, somewhat asymmetrical processes of homogenization going on, and there are forms of human life disappearing. Neither of these phenomena is particularly new, but their range and speed probably is. Nevertheless, as forms of culture disappear, new forms are created, and they are created locally, which means they have exactly the regional inflections that the cosmopolitan celebrates. The disappearance of old cultural forms is consistent with a rich variety of forms of human life, just because new cultural forms, which differ from each other, are being created all the time as well.

Cosmopolitanism and patriotism, unlike nationalism, are both sentiments more than ideologies. Different political ideologies can be made consistent with both of them. Some cosmopolitan patriots are conservative and religious; others are secularizers of a socialist bent. Christian cosmopolitanism is as old as the merger with the Roman Empire, through which Stoicism came to be a dominant shaping force in Christian ethics. (On my father's bedside were Cicero and the Bible. Only someone ignorant of the history of the church would see this as an expression of divided loyalties.) But I am a liberal, and both cosmopolitanism and patriotism, as sentiments, can seem to be hard to accommodate to liberal principles.

Patriotism often challenges liberalism. Liberals who propose a state that does not take sides in the debates among its citizens' various conceptions of the good life are held to be unable to value a state that celebrates itself, and modern self-described patriots, here in America, at least, often desire a public education and a public culture that stoke the fires of the national ego. Patriots also seem especially sensitive these days to slights to the national honor; to skepticism about a celebratory nationalist historiography; in short, to the critical reflection on the state that we liberals, with our instrumental conception of it, are bound to engage in. No liberal should say, "My country, right or wrong" because liberalism involves a set of political principles that a state can fail to realize; and the liberal will

have no special loyalty to an illiberal state, not least because liberals value people over collectivities.

This patriotic objection to liberalism can also be made, however, to Catholicism, to Islam, to almost any religious view; indeed, to any view, including humanism, that claims a higher moral authority than one's own particular political community. And the answer to it is to affirm, first, that someone who loves principle can also love country, family, friends; and, second, that true patriots hold the state and the community within which they live to certain standards and have moral aspirations for them, and that those aspirations may be liberal.

The cosmopolitan challenge to liberalism begins with the claim that liberals have been too preoccupied with morality *within* the nation-state. John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*, which began the modern reformulation of philosophical liberalism, left the questions of international morality to be dealt with later: how to develop the Rawlsian picture in an international direction is a current preoccupation of professional political philosophy. The cosmopolitan is likely to argue that this order of priorities is all wrong.³

It is all very well to argue for, fight for, liberalism in one country—your own; but if that country, in its international operations, supports (or even tolerates) illiberal regimes elsewhere, then it fails, the cosmopolitan will argue, because it does not sufficiently weigh the lives of human beings as such. Liberals take it to be self-evident that we are all created equal, that we each bear certain inalienable rights, and then seem almost immediately to become preoccupied with looking after the rights of the local branch of the species, forgetting—this is a cosmopolitan critique—that their rights matter as human rights and thus matter only if the rights of foreign humans matter, too.⁴

This is surely more of an objection to the practice of liberalism than to its theory (and, as I shall argue later, cosmopolitans have a reason for caring about states, too). At the heart of the liberal picture of humanity is the idea of the equal dignity of all persons: liberalism grows with an

3. Like most philosophers who have thought about justice recently, I have learned a great deal from reading Rawls. This essay obviously draws sustenance from his work and the discussions it has generated; indeed, his *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971) was the most important book I read the summer I was deciding whether or not to be a philosopher! I find it hard, however, to relate the position I am taking here explicitly to what I understand of his current views; and so, much as I would have liked to do so, I have found it best not to take them on.

4. We liberals *don't* all agree on where the rights come from. I favor an "antirealist" view in which human rights are embodied in legal arrangements within and between states rather than one in which they somehow exist as antecedents or are grounded in human nature or divine ordinance.

increasing appreciation of the inadequacy of an older picture in which dignity is the possession of an elite. Not every premodern society made its elite hereditary, as the eunuchs who ran the Ottoman empire would have attested. But it is only in the modern age that the idea has grown that every one of us begins life with an equal entitlement to respect, an entitlement that we may, perhaps, lose through misbehavior but that remains with us otherwise for all our lives.

This idea of the equal dignity of all persons can be cashed out in different ways, but it undergirds the attachment to a democracy of unlimited franchise; the renunciation of sexism and racism and heterosexism; the respect for the autonomy of individuals, which resists the state's desire to fit us to someone else's conception of what is good for us; and the notion of human rights—rights possessed by human beings as such—that is at the heart of liberal theory.

It would be wrong however to conflate cosmopolitanism and humanism because cosmopolitanism is not just the feeling that everybody matters. For the cosmopolitan also celebrates the fact that there are *different* local human ways of being; humanism, by contrast, is consistent with the desire for global homogeneity. Humanism can be made compatible with cosmopolitan sentiments, but it can also live with a deadening urge to uniformity.

A liberal cosmopolitanism of the sort I am defending might put its point like this: we value the variety of human forms of social and cultural life; we do not want everybody to become part of a homogeneous global culture; and we know that this means that there will be local differences (both within and between states) in moral climate as well. As long as these differences meet certain general ethical constraints—as long, in particular, as political institutions respect basic human rights—we are happy to let them be.

Part of what the equal dignity of all persons means for the liberal is that we respect people's autonomous decisions for themselves, even when they are decisions we judge mistaken—or simply choices we would not make for ourselves. This is a liberal principle that fits well with the cosmopolitan feeling that human cultural difference is actively desirable. The requirement that the state respect basic human rights is, as a result, very demanding. It rules out states that aim to constrain people beyond what is necessary to enable a common life. Voluntary associations that are the product of autonomous affiliations may demand a very great deal of people, as long as they retain the right of exit (a right that it is one of the state's proper purposes to sustain). Thus I can bind myself with a vow of obedience, as long as I retain my autonomy: as long as, that is, if I finally decide that I can no longer obey, whoever I have bound myself to is obliged to release me. Broad freedom of contract—and the state's enforcement of contracts freely made—is rightly seen as a liberal practice,

giving force to the autonomous decisions of free individuals; but not every contract can be enforced by a state that respects autonomy—in particular, contracts to give up one’s autonomy.⁵

In short, where the state’s actions enable the exercise of autonomous decision, my sort of liberal will cheer it on. Cosmopolitanism can also live happily with this liberal individualism. The cosmopolitan ideal—take your roots with you—is one in which people are free to choose the local forms of human life within which they will live.

Patriotism, as communitarians have spent much time reminding us recently, is about the responsibilities as well as the privileges of citizenship. But it is also and above all, as I have been suggesting, not so much a matter of action—of practical morality—as of sentiment; if there is one emotion that the very word brings to mind it is surely pride. When the national anthem plays, when the national team wins, when the national army prevails, there is that shiver down the spine, the electric excitement, the thrill of being on the winning side. But patriots are surely also the first to suffer their country’s shame; patriots suffer when their country elects the wrong leaders or when those leaders prevaricate, bluster, pantomime, or betray “our” principles. Patriotism is about what the nineteenth-century Liberian scholar-diplomat Edward Blyden once so memorably called “the poetry of politics,” which is the feeling of “people with whom we are connected.”⁶ It is the connection and the sentiment that matter, and there is no reason to suppose that everybody in this complex, ever-mutating world will find their affinities and their passions focused on a single place.

My father’s example demonstrates for me, more clearly than any abstract argument, the possibilities that the enemies of cosmopolitanism deny. We cosmopolitans *can* be patriots, loving our homelands (not only the states where we were born but the states where we grew up and the states where we live); our loyalty to humankind—so vast, so abstract, a unity—does *not* deprive us of the capacity to care for lives nearer by.

5. A (lifetime) vow of obedience—even if, because I receive something in return for my vow, it may look like a legal contract—should be enforced only if enforcing it is consistent with respecting the autonomy of the person who made the vow. There are difficult issues here. On the one hand, moral persons are historically extended in time, and treating someone as a single moral person requires holding one’s later “stages” responsible for the commitments of earlier “stages.” On the other, there are moral limits on what people can bind their later selves to do: and one relevant limit is that we may not bind our later selves to abstain from rational ethical reflection. (An enforceable lifetime vow of obedience looks awfully like a contract to enslave oneself, which would presumably be unconstitutional in the United States. But it turns out to be quite hard to say what’s wrong with offering “freely” to be a slave in return for some benefit, if you believe in freedom of contract.)

6. Edward W. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam, and the Negro Race* (London, 1887), pp. 226, 227.

But my father's example makes me suspicious of the purportedly cosmopolitan argument against patriotism (my father's Ghanaian patriotism, which I want to defend) that alleges that nationality is, in the words of a fine essay by Martha Nussbaum, "a morally irrelevant characteristic." Nussbaum argues that in "conceding that a morally arbitrary boundary such as the boundary of the nation has a deep and formative role in our deliberations, we seem to be depriving ourselves of any principled way of arguing to citizens that they should in fact join hands" across the "boundaries of ethnicity and class and gender and race."⁷

I can say what I think is wrong here only if I insist on the distinction between state and nation.⁸ Their conflation is a perfectly natural one for a modern person—even after Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Amritsar, Bosnia, Azerbaijan. But the yoking of nation and state in the Enlightenment was intended to bring the arbitrary boundaries of states into conformity with the "natural" boundaries of nations; the idea that the boundaries of one could be arbitrary, while the boundaries of the other were not, is easy enough to grasp, once we are reminded of it.

Not that I want to endorse this essentially Herderian way of thinking: nations never preexist states.⁹ A nation—here is a loose and unphilosophical definition—is an "imagined community" of culture: or ancestry running beyond the scale of the face-to-face and seeking political expression for itself.¹⁰ But all the nations I can think of that are not coterminous with states are the legacy of older state arrangements—as Asante is in what has become Ghana; as are the Serbian and Croatian nations in what used to be Yugoslavia.

I want, in fact, to distinguish the nation and the state to make a point entirely opposite to Herder's, namely, that if anything is morally arbitrary it is not the state, but the nation. Since human beings live in political orders narrower than the species, and since it is within those political orders that questions of public right and wrong are largely argued out and decided, the fact of being a fellow citizen—someone who is a member of the same order—is not morally arbitrary at all. That is why the cosmopolitan critique of liberalism's focus on the state is exaggerated. It is exactly because the cultural variability that cosmopolitanism celebrates has come to depend on the existence of a plurality of states that we need to take states seriously.

7. Martha Nussbaum, "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism," *Boston Review*, Oct.–Nov. 1994, pp. 3, 6.

8. The tendency in the anglophone world to sentimentalize the state by calling it the nation is so consistent that if, earlier, I had referred to the state team or the state anthem, this would have made these entities seem cold, hard, and alien.

9. For discussion of Herder's views, see my *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York, 1992), chap. 1.

10. The expression "imagined community" was given currency by Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983).

The nation, on the other hand, is arbitrary, but not in a sense that means we can discard it in our moral reflections. It is arbitrary in the root sense of that term because it is, in the *Oxford English Dictionary's* lapidary formulation, "dependent upon will or pleasure."¹¹ Nations often matter more to people than states: monoethnic Serbia makes more sense to some than multicultural Bosnia; a Hutu (or a Tutsi) Rwanda makes more sense to others than a peaceful shared citizenship of Tutsi and Hutu; only when Britain or France became nations as well as states did ordinary citizens come to care much about being French or British.¹² But notice that the reason nations matter is that they matter to *people*. Nations matter morally, when they do, in other words, for the same reason that football and opera matter: as things desired by autonomous agents, whose autonomous desires we ought to acknowledge and take account of, even if we cannot always accede to them.

States, on the other hand, matter morally, intrinsically. They matter not because people care about them but because they regulate our lives through forms of coercion that will always require moral justification. State institutions matter because they are both necessary to so many modern human purposes and because they have so great a potential for abuse. As Hobbes famously saw, the state, to do its job, has to have a monopoly of certain forms of authorized coercion, and the exercise of that authority cries out for (but often does not deserve) justification even in places, like so many postcolonial societies, where many people have no positive feeling for the state at all.

There is, then, no need for the cosmopolitan to claim that the state is morally arbitrary in the way that I have suggested the nation is. There are many reasons to think that living in political communities narrower than the species is better for us than would be our engulfment in a single world-state: a cosmopolis of which we cosmopolitans would be not figurative but literal citizens. It is, in fact, precisely this celebration of cultural variety—within states as well as between them—that distinguishes the cosmopolitan from some of the other heirs of Enlightenment humanism.

It is because humans live best on a smaller scale that we should defend not just the state but the county, the town, the street, the business, the craft, the profession, the family *as* communities, as circles among the many circles narrower than the human horizon that are appropriate spheres of moral concern. We should, in short, as cosmopolitans, defend the right of others to live in democratic states, with rich possibilities of association within and across their borders; states of which they can be patriotic citizens. And, as cosmopolitans, we can claim that right for ourselves.

11. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s. v. "arbitrary."

12. See, for example, Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, Conn., 1992).

The fundamental thought of the cosmopolitanism I defend is that the freedom to create oneself—the freedom that liberalism celebrates—requires a range of socially transmitted options from which to invent what we have come to call our identities. Our families and schools, our churches and temples, our professional associations and clubs, provide two essential elements in the tool kit of self-creation: first, they provide ready-made identities—son, lover, husband, doctor, teacher, Methodist, worker, Moslem, Yankee fan, mensch—whose shapes are constituted by norms and expectations, stereotypes and demands, rights and obligations; second, they give us a language in which to think about these identities and with which we may shape new ones.

Let me offer an example to give concreteness to these abstractions. Seventeenth-century England endowed English people with gender identities as men and as women; beginning with these ready-made identities, and drawing on a host of ideas about sex, gender, and social life, the urban men who created the Molly culture of London—which is one ancestor of modern Western European gay identities—shaped a new identity as a Molly, which interpreted sexual desire for men in a man as evidence that he was, in certain respects, a kind of woman.¹³ This is, of course, much too simple-minded a story: what actually happened is that the Molly identity shaped a new gender option for people who were morphologically male, an option that led them to express their sexual desire for other men by feminizing themselves, cross-dressing, and giving each other women's names.

But, as this case should make absolutely clear, our social lives endow us with the full richness of resources available for self-creation: for even when we are constructing new and counternormative identities, it is the old and the normative that provide the language and the background. A new identity is always post-some-old-identity (in the now familiar sense of *post* in which *postmodernism* is enabled by the very modernism it challenges).¹⁴ If, like some of our fellow mammals, we lived with a parent only long enough to be *physically* independent, we would have a hugely impoverished range of such conceptual implements and institutional frameworks for exploring our autonomy.

These conceptual and institutional contributions are hugely important, but it would be a philosopher's mistake not to mention that it is social life, shaped (but not determined) by the state—particularly in the form of the modern market economy—that has provided the material conditions that have enabled this exploration for a larger and larger proportion of people, especially in the industrialized world.

13. See Rictor Norton, *Mother Clap's Molly House: The Gay Subculture in England, 1700–1830* (London, 1992).

14. See my "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?" *Critical Inquiry* 17 (Winter 1991): 336–57.

Among the resources thus made available in our contemporary form of social life is something that we can call a national identity, a form of identity that is central to the possibility of a modern patriotism. And I want to ask now how we are to understand national identity and more particularly what, for a cosmopolitan patriot, the role of a national culture might be in it.

Here is one model of the role of the national culture: we might call it the tribal fantasy. There is an ideal—which is to say imaginary—type of a small-scale, technologically uncomplicated, face-to-face society, where most interactions are with people whom you know, that we usually call traditional. In such a society almost every adult speaks the same language. All share a vocabulary and a grammar and an accent. While there will be some words in the language that are not known by everybody—the names of medicinal herbs, the language of some religious rituals—most are known to all. To share a language is to participate in a complex set of mutual expectations and understandings, but in such a society it is not only linguistic behavior that is coordinated through universally known expectations and understandings. People will share an understanding of many practices—marriages, funerals, other rites of passage—and will largely share their views about the general workings not only of the social but also of the natural world. Even those who are skeptical about particular elements of belief will nevertheless know what everyone is supposed to believe, and they will know it in enough detail to behave very often as if they believed it, too.

A similar point applies to many of the values of such societies. It may well be that some people, even some groups, do not share the values that are enunciated in public and taught to children. But, once more, the standard values are universally known, and even those who do not share them know what it would be to act in conformity with them and probably do so much of the time. In such a traditional society we may speak of its shared beliefs, values, signs, and symbols as the *common culture*; not, to insist on a crucial point, in the sense that everyone in the group actually holds the beliefs and values, but in the sense that everybody knows what they are and everybody knows that they are widely held in the society.

There is a second crucial feature of the common culture in the tribal fantasy: it is that the common culture is, in a certain sense, at the *heart* of the culture of every individual and every family.¹⁵ And by this I mean not just that, for each individual, the common culture encompasses a significant proportion of their culture—the socially transmitted beliefs, values,

15. I should hasten to add that it would be preposterous to claim that most of the societies that have been called traditional fit anything like this pattern, though we might suppose that, for example, congeries of related hunter-gatherer groups, speaking closely related dialects, might have fit such a pattern.

signs, and symbols that populate their mental lives and shape their behavior—but that, whatever other socially transmitted skills or beliefs or values or understandings they have, the common culture provides a majority of those that are most important to them.¹⁶ Where the common culture of a group is also, in this way, at the heart of an individual's culture, I shall say that that individual is centered on the common culture; being centered on a common culture means, in part, that those who are centered on it think of themselves as a collectivity and think of the collectivity as consisting of people for whom a common culture is central.¹⁷

Now the citizens of one of those large "imagined communities" of modernity we call nations are not likely to be centered on a common culture of this sort. There is no single shared body of ideas and practices in India that sits at the heart of the lives of most Hindus and most Moslems; that engages all Sikhs and excites every Kashmiri; that animates every untouchable in Delhi and organizes the ambitions of every Brahmin in Bombay. And I am inclined to say that there is not now and there has never been a centering common culture in the United States, either. The reason is simple: the United States has always been multilingual and has always had minorities who did not speak or understand English. It has always had a plurality of religious traditions, beginning with American Indian religions, and Iberian Catholics, and Jews, and British and Dutch Puritans, and including now many varieties of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Jainism, Taoism, Bahai, and so on. Many of these religious traditions have been quite unknown to each other. More than this, Americans have also always differed significantly even among those who do speak English, from north to south and east to west, and from country to city, in customs of greeting, notions of civility and in a whole host of other ways. The notion that what has held the United States together historically over its great geographical range is a citizenry centered on a common culture is—to put it politely—not sociologically plausible.

The observation that Americans are not centered on a national culture does not answer the question whether there *is* an American national culture. Comments about American culture, taken as a whole, are routine, and it would be taking on a fairly substantial consensus to deny them all. American culture is, for example, held to be individualist, litigious, racially obsessed. I think each of these claims is actually true because

16. My dictionary—*American Heritage Dictionary III for DOS*, 3d ed. (Novato, Calif., 1993)—defines *culture* (in part) as "the totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought." The focus on social transmission in defining *culture* is extremely important.

17. I don't think we should require that people can't be mistaken about exactly who is in the group or exactly what is in the common culture, but I think that the less they are right about either of these things the less it makes sense to speak of the group as really centered on a common culture.

what I mean when I say that Americans are not centered on a common culture of the United States is not what is denied by someone who says that there is an American culture; such a person is describing large-scale tendencies within American life that are not invariably participated in by—and are certainly not equally important to—all Americans. I do not mean to deny that these exist. But for such a tendency to be part of what I am calling the *common culture* it would have to derive from beliefs and values and practices (almost) universally shared and known to be so; and for it to center the lives of Americans, a common culture would then have to be at the core of the individual cultures of most Americans. I want to deny that there is any common culture that *centers* most Americans in this way.

At the same time, it was always true that there was a dominant culture in these United States. It was Protestant, it spoke English, and it identified with the high cultural traditions of Europe and, more particularly, of England. This dominant culture included much of the common culture that centered most members of the dominant classes—the government and business and cultural elites—but it was familiar to many others who were subordinate to them. And it was not merely an effect but also an instrument of their domination.

The United States of America, then, has always been a society in which people have been centered on a variety of common cultures. Recognizing that we in America are not centered on a national common culture is, as I have said, consistent with recognizing that (with, no doubt, a few exceptions) American citizens do have a common culture. What is interesting and important is that for many Americans that American core—and, in particular, the attachment to the constitutional order and the rights it conveys—is not what centers their lives. They support those institutions, they favor them. Many people have come here precisely because they exist; but, still, these values are instrumental in their lives. What they desire centrally, what shapes their lives, is what the American freedoms make possible—your experience in a temple or mosque or church; my life with my family and the cultural riches of New York City or Boston; her search for philosophical understanding; their existence in a lesbian commune. They need America—they will defend it, especially, against foreigners who deplore its materialism or its vulgarity—but it is not at the heart of their dreams.

We have come to a crux: for if this is the situation, shouldn't the cosmopolitan who is an American patriot resent these fellow citizens for whom their country is a mere instrument, a means, not an end? My answer is no. For the French and American revolutions invented a form of patriotism that allows us to love our country as the embodiment of principles, as a means to the attainment of moral ends. It is true that the patriot always values more than what the state makes possible for me and

mine, but if among the ideals we honor in America is the enabling of a certain kind of human freedom, then we cannot, in consistency, enforce attachment either to the state or to the principles. In valuing the autonomous choices of free people, we value what they have chosen *because they have chosen it*: a forced attachment to a fine principle does not diminish the principle, but the force makes the attachment unworthy.

But if force is not the answer there is, of course, another possibility. Why not argue out democratically a common culture on which to center our national life? My first answer is that we do not have to do so. The question presupposes that what we *really* need is shared core values, a centering common culture. I think this is a mistake. What I think we really need is not citizens centered on a common culture but citizens committed to common institutions, to the conditions necessary for a common life. What is required to live together in a nation is a mutual commitment to the organization of the state—the institutions that provide the overarching order of our common life. But this does not require that we have the *same* commitment to those institutions, in the sense that the institutions must carry the same meaning for all of us.

We live already with examples of this situation so familiar that they are easily forgotten. The First Amendment, for example, separates church and state. Some of us are committed to this because we are religious; we see it as the institutionalization of a Protestant insistence on freedom of conscience or, because we are Catholics or Jews or Moslems, we do not want to be pressed into conformity by a Protestant majority. Some of us are atheists who want to be left alone. We can live together with this arrangement provided we all are committed to it for our different reasons.

There is a useful analogy here with much mass culture and other mass-produced goods. People in London and in Lagos, in New York and New Delhi, listen to Michael Jackson and drink Coca-Cola. They exist, in part, as an audience for his work, as consumers of that drink. But nobody thinks that what either of these products means in one place must be identical with what it means in every site of its consumption. Similarly, the institutions of democracy—elections, public debates, the protection of minority rights—have different meanings to different people and groups. Once more, there is no reason to require that we all value them in the same way, for the same reasons. All that is required is that everybody is willing to play the game.

A shared political life in a modern nation is not like the life of the tribal fantasy. It can encompass a great diversity of meanings. When we teach children democratic habits we are creating a shared commitment to certain forms of social behavior. We can call this a political culture, if we like. But the meanings citizens give to their lives, and to the political within their lives, in particular, will be shaped not only (through the pub-

lic school) by the state but also by family and church, reading and television, and in their professional and recreational associations. If American political culture is what Americans have in common, it is pretty thin gruel. And, so I am arguing, none the worse for that.

This sanguine conclusion will cause many patriots to object. “In a world of changing challenges, shared institutions (shared laws, for example) need interpreting to fit new situations (new cases). And in thinking about these new cases, doesn’t appeal have to be made to shared values, to substantial principles, even, in the end, to deep metaphysical convictions?”¹⁸ If we are to decide, say, whether to permit abortions, this argument suggests, we must decide first whether our shared commitment to the preservation of innocent human life—a commitment some derive from the thought that we are all children of a loving God—applies to the fetus in its first three months. For many—though certainly not all—Americans would oppose abortion if it were uncontroversially clear that it was the killing of an innocent human being.¹⁹ Don’t our difficulties in discussing this question flow, in part, from precisely the lack of shared values that I am arguing we must accept?

I am not sure that the answer to this last question is yes. I suspect that the difficulties about abortion have at least as much to do with the refusal of those who oppose it to acknowledge how large a part views about the control of women’s sexuality—indeed, of sexuality in general—play in shaping the intensity of some of their responses. But this, too, may turn in the end on deep differences about metaphysical and moral questions; so, in the end, I agree that these will sometimes have to be faced.

It is here that the political values of the American republic must come to have some weight of their own: our democratic traditions require us to engage respectfully with our fellow citizens who disagree with us. In this sense, a political culture—the shared commitment to the political institutions of the republic, the content of a common citizenship—is more than an agreement to abide by the Constitution and the laws, by the judgments of courts, by the decisions of democratically elected lawmakers. It also involves a shared—and *evolving*—sense of the customary practices of political engagement in the public sphere.

Now I admit that there are circumstances in which such a sense of common citizenship is unavailable to some. While Jim Crow laws held in the American South, it is hard to see why African Americans should have

18. This is an objection Charles Taylor proposed to me in private conversation.

19. *Innocent* here should presumably be understood, as it is in discussions of just killing in warfare, to mean “posing no harm” and not “guiltless.” It seems pretty clear that we can’t blame the fetus even if its existence threatens the life or well-being of the woman who bears it.

felt a commitment to the customary practices of the American republic (even if they could and did feel attachment to most of the principles expressed in the Constitution precisely because they were at odds with the practice of Jim Crow). It is, of course, just *because* citizens are entitled to participation in the political culture of their state that the effective exclusion of blacks from voting was inconsistent with democratic political morality. It follows, I concede, that if the state's actions so repudiate you and if, as a result, you are unable to accept and participate in the political culture in this sense, your fellow citizens cannot expect you to conform to the law.

Here then is a point where defenders of a centering national culture might find a new starting point. Why not admit, they might say, that you must guarantee at least this much: that citizens are trained in (and immigrants taught and required to assent to) the essentials of the political culture? And if that is desirable, will it not be best achieved by centering Americans on a broader common culture: by centering every American on shared values, shared literary references, shared narratives of the American nation?

Once more, to the first question, I answer yes, sure. And to the second I say no. If the political culture carries some weight for us, we will accept the laws and the terms of debate that it entails, and we will struggle within that framework for justice, as each of us understands it. If, as some claim is true of abortion, there are central debates that we cannot resolve within this framework, this is certainly a problem we would not face if every American was brought up with the same metaphysical convictions. But constraining a quarter of a billion American citizens into a life centered on a common culture—cultural Americanism, let us call it—would be too high a price to pay for the dissolution of this conflict. If, after all, the disputes about abortion seem contentious, think how bitter would be the argument if we insisted—as the Bill of Rights wisely insists we should not—on a single religion (or even, more modestly, a single view of family life) to teach all our children.

American citizenship, in other words, does require us to accept the political culture; and, as the case of African Americans shows, it is important that that culture has built into it the possibility of change. But if, as a result of the processes of democracy, laws are passed that are deeply repugnant to you—as is perfectly possible in a society not centered on a strong common culture—you may well reach the point where you consider that you have been, in the phrase I used earlier, repudiated by the state. The price of having no common culture to center our society is that possibility; but the cosmopolitan patriot believes that the creation of a common culture rich enough to exclude this possibility would exact a higher price. This is something that many in the world—Catholic bishops in Ireland, Buddhist politicians in Sri Lanka, ayatollahs in Iran, Communist Party members in China—do not believe. They want to live in socie-

ties where everyone has a common cultural center, where every political dispute can be resolved because everyone has been constrained to accept a common sense of the meaning of life. The political culture of the American state excludes this vision because it is (in the understanding of the term long forgotten in our public debates) a liberal political culture, one that values individuals and celebrates, with cosmopolitanism, the great variety of what individuals will choose when given freedom.

There must be some who believe the rhetoric about the murder of infants that (in my judgment) pollutes the debate about abortion. For them, perhaps, religious duty transcends the demands of citizenship. But I do not see that one can resolve a disagreement with them by finding a common metaphysics of the person on which to center the next generation of Americans; it is precisely our disagreements about *that* which account for some of the intensity of the debate.

Surely, however, most of those who believe abortion should not be legal do not really think that the abortion of a first-trimester fetus is really *exactly the same* as the killing of a living child. If they did believe that, they would surely not even contemplate exemptions for rape and incest, for even those of us who favor laws allowing choice would not favor a rape-exception for infanticide. Like many who favor choice, I believe, as I say, that some of the intensity of the debate about abortion has to do with attitudes about sexuality and women that the feminism of the last few decades and the practical successes of the women's movement have challenged. I think this is a fair thing to argue in the debates about choice. But I also think the political culture we have inherited in America requires us to take on their merits the arguments of those who oppose choice, and, where the disagreements flow from fundamentally different visions of the human good, I do not see that it profits us to deny or ignore this fact.

So, unlike many who favor the liberalism of our Constitution and the political culture that surrounds it, I do not favor silence in the public sphere about the religious views that underlie some of our deepest disagreements. Our laws and customs require us not to impose religious ideas on each other, but they also encourage us to debate among equals.

Finally, we should be skeptical, for historical reasons, about the creation of a national common culture to center our lives; for us to center ourselves on a national culture, the state would have to take up the cudgels in defining both the content of that culture and the means of its dissemination. I have already argued that this would create deep schisms in our national life. But history suggests an even deeper difficulty. Collective identities have a tendency, if I may coin a phrase, to go imperial, dominating not only people of other identities but the other identities whose shape is exactly what makes each of us what we individually and distinctively are.

In policing this imperialism of identity—an imperialism as visible in national identities as anywhere else—it is crucial to remember always that we are not simply Americans or Ghanaians or Indians or Germans but that we are gay or straight or bisexual, Jewish, Christian, Moslem, Buddhist, Confucian—and also brothers and sisters; parents and children; liberals, conservatives, and leftists; teachers and lawyers and auto-makers and gardeners; fans of the Padres and the Bruins; aficionados of grunge rock and amateurs of Wagner; movie buffs; PBS-aholics, mystery readers; surfers and singers; poets and pet lovers; students and teachers; friends and lovers. The state makes much possible for all of us, and we owe it at least the consistent support to which it is entitled in virtue of those possibilities; it would be a grand irony if the price we paid for the freedom the state creates was to allow it to subject us to new tyrannies.

This is an especially powerful thought here in the United States. For so many have loved America, in part, exactly because it has enabled them to choose who they are and to decide, too, how central America is in their chosen identity. Those of us who are Americans not by birth but by election, and who love this country precisely for *that* freedom of self-invention, should not seek to compel others to an identity we ourselves celebrate because it was freely chosen.

I have been arguing, in essence, that you can be cosmopolitan—celebrating the variety of human cultures; rooted—loyal to one local society (or a few) that you count as home; liberal—convinced of the value of the individual; and patriotic—celebrating the institutions of the state (or states) within which you live. The cosmopolitanism flows from the same sources that nourish the liberalism, for it is the variety of human forms of life that provides the vocabulary of the language of individual choice. And the patriotism flows from the liberalism because the state carves out the space within which we explore the possibilities of freedom. For rooted cosmopolitans, all this is of a single piece.

But I have also been arguing that we do not need to insist that all of our fellow citizens be cosmopolitans, or patriots, or loyal to the nation; we need them only to share the political culture of the state. And sharing that political culture does not require you to be centered on it and certainly doesn't require you to be centered on a culture wider than the political.²⁰ What *is* essential is only—though this is, in fact, a great deal—that all of us share respect for the political culture of liberalism and the constitutional order it entails.

This formula courts misunderstanding: for the word *liberal* has been

20. I think that in the United States that grasp of the political culture probably requires knowing (some) English. But since English, like the rest of the political culture, needn't center your life, speaking and even loving other languages is consistent with participating in the political culture.

both divested of its original content and denied a solid new meaning. So let me remind you again that, for me, the essence of this liberal culture lies in respect for the dignity and autonomy of individual persons.²¹ There is much to be said about the meaning of autonomy and of dignity; there is much to be said, too, about how, in practice, individuals are to live with other values, political and not, that we cherish. This is not the place for that exploration. But let me say one thing: since I believe that the state can be an instrument for autonomy I do not share the current distaste for the state that drives much of what in America is now called conservatism; and so I am often a liberal in the more colloquial sense as well.

The point, in sum, is this: it is important that citizens should share a political culture; it is not important (in America, without massive coercion, it is not even possible) that the political culture be important to all citizens, let alone that it matter to all of them in the same way. (Indeed, one of the great freedoms that a civilized society provides is the freedom *not* to preoccupy yourself with the political.) Only politicians and political theorists are likely to think the best state is one where every citizen is a politician (and when Western theorists think this, it may be because they are overinfluenced by the view of politics taken by some in the small self-governing town of Athens in the fifth century B.C.E.).

Not being political is not the same as being unsociable (though that is something we should be legally free to be also!). Many people express concern for their communities by acting through churches and charities, and, as observers of America since Tocqueville have pointed out, this is a distinctively American tradition. Part of what makes this tradition attractive is that it reflects elective affinities rather than state-imposed obligation.

You will notice, now, that I have been arguing for a form of state and of society that is pretty close to the model of a multicultural liberal democracy, and, you may ask, Where now is your much-vaunted cosmopolitanism? After all, the world is full of people—Chinese party leaders, Hindu nationalists, British Tories—who insist precisely on centering all

21. Despite recent communitarian arguments to the contrary, I do not think that the liberal respect for autonomy is inconsistent with recognizing the role of society in creating the options in respect to which free individuals exercise their freedom. As Taylor has argued so powerfully, it is in dialogue with other people's understandings of who I am that I develop a conception of my own identity; and my identity is crucially constituted through concepts and practices made available to me by religion, society, school, and state and mediated to varying degrees by the family. But all of this can, in my view, be accepted by someone who sees autonomy as a central value. See my "Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction," in *Multiculturalism: Examining "The Politics of Recognition,"* ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, N.J., 1996), pp. 149–63.

citizens on a single culture that extends beyond the narrowly political. Do I not want to make allowances for this option, too?

When I first thought about this question, I was tempted to bite the bullet and say yes. But I didn't believe it; and I now understand why I must answer no. Cosmopolitanism values human variety for what it makes possible for free individuals, and some kinds of cultural variety constrain more than they enable. In other words, the cosmopolitan's high appraisal of variety flows from the human choices it enables, but variety is not something we value no matter what.²² There are other values. You can have an enormous amount of diversity between societies, even if they are all, in some sense, democratic.²³ But the fundamental idea that every society should respect human dignity and personal autonomy is more basic than the cosmopolitan love of variety; indeed, as I say, it is the autonomy that variety enables that is the fundamental argument for cosmopolitanism.

A society could in theory come to be centered on a single set of values without coercion. I might be skeptical about the virtues of such a homogenized society as a place for me to live (even if the culture it was centered on was in some sense mine). I would think it might risk many cultural and economic and moral perils because it might require in the end a kind of closing oneself off from the rest of the world. But those in such a society would no doubt have things to say in response—or might refuse to discuss the matter with me at all—and, in the end, they might well find their considerations more weighty than mine. Freely chosen homogeneity, then, raises no problems for me; in the end, I would say good luck to them. But what British Tories and Hindu chauvinists and Maoist party bosses want is not a society that chooses to be uniform, but the imposition of uniformity. That the cosmopolitan patriot must oppose.

One final corollary of the grounding of cosmopolitanism in individual freedom is worth insisting on. Cosmopolitans value cultural variety, but we do not ask other people to maintain the diversity of the species at the price of their individual autonomy. We can't require others to provide us with a cultural museum to tour through or to visit on satellite television's endless virtual safari; nor can we demand an assortment of Shangri-Las to enlarge the range of our own options for identity. The options we need in order for our choices to be substantial must be freely sustained, as must the human variety whose existence is, for the cosmopolitan, an endless source of insight and pleasure. But, as I said at the start, there is

22. This is one reason why I think it is not helpful to see cosmopolitanism as expressing an aesthetic ideal.

23. There is no reason to think that every society needs to implement the idea of popular choice in the same way; so different democratic institutions in different societies are consistent with the basic respect for autonomy, too.

no ground for thinking that people are rushing toward homogeneity, and, in fact, in a world more respectful of human dignity and personal autonomy such movement toward homogeneity as there is would probably slow down.

Skepticism about the genuinely cosmopolitan character of the view I have been defending may flow in part from the thought that it seems so much a creature of Europe and its Enlightenment.²⁴ So it may be as well to insist in closing, as I did at the start, that my own attachment to these ideas comes, as much as anything, from my father, who grew up in Asante, at a time when the independence of its moral climate from that of European Enlightenment was extremely obvious. Of course, he also went on to live in London for many years and acquired there the training of an English lawyer; and, of course, the school he went to in Ghana was a Methodist school, a colonial variant of the English boys' public school, where he was taught to think morally through Cicero and Caesar as much as through the New Testament. It would be preposterous to claim, in short, that he came to his cosmopolitanism or his patriotism or his faith in human rights and the rule of law unaffected by European cultural traditions.

But it would be equally fatuous to deny that the view he arrived at had roots in Asante (indeed, as one travels the world, reviewing the liberal nationalisms of South Asia and Africa in the midcentury, one is struck not only by their similarities but also by their local inflections). Two things, in particular, strike me about the local character of the source of my father's increasing commitment to individual rights: first, that it grew out of experience of illiberal government; second, that it depended on a sense of his own dignity and the dignity of his fellow citizens that was almost entirely the product of Asante conceptions.

The first point—about experience—is crucial to the case for liberalism. It is the historical experience of the dangers of intolerance—religious intolerance in Europe in the seventeenth century, for example, for Locke; racial intolerance in the colonial context for Gandhi (or for my father)—that often lies behind the skepticism about the state's interventions in the lives of individuals that itself underlies much liberal sentiment. My father saw the colonial state's abuses of his fellows and, in particular, the refusal to pay them the respect that was their due; he was imprisoned, later, by Kwame Nkrumah, without trial (and then released after a year and a half in detention with as little explanation as when he

24. I should explicitly record my opposition to the view that this origin in any way discredits these ideas, either for non-Europeans or, for that matter, for Europeans. The issues I want to explore have to do with the ways in which these views can be rooted in different traditions. I am not interested in the nativist project of arguing for these principles in the name of authentically Asante (or African) roots. The issues raised in the following paragraphs are thus historical, not normative.

was arrested). As a lawyer and a member of the opposition, he travelled Ghana in the years after independence defending people whose rights were being abused by the postcolonial state.

The political tradition of liberalism is rooted in these experiences of illiberal government. That liberal restraint on government recommends itself to people rooted in so many different traditions is a reflection of its grasp of a truth about human beings and about modern politics.

Just as the centrality of murderous religious warfare in the period leading up to Locke's *Treatises* placed religious toleration at the core of Locke's understanding of the liberalism he defended, so the prime place of the persecution of political dissenters in the postcolonial experience of tyranny made protection of political dissent central to my father's liberalism.²⁵ (My father worried little about the state's entanglement with religion; once, I remember, as the national television came to the end of its broadcast day, my father sang along with the national hymn that they played some evenings, the religious twin of the more secular national anthem that they played on others. "This would be a much better national anthem," he said to me. And I replied, ever the good liberal, "But the anthem has the advantage that you don't have to believe in God to sing it sincerely." "No one in Ghana is silly enough not to believe in God," my father replied.²⁶ And, now, I think he was right not to be worried about the entanglement; there is no history of religious intolerance in Ghana of the sort that makes necessary the separation of church and state; a genial ecumenism had been the norm at least until the arrival of American TV evangelism.)

But more important yet, I think, to my father's concern with individual human dignity was its roots in the preoccupation of free Asante citizens—both men and women—with notions of personal dignity, with respect and self-respect. Treating others with the respect that is their due is a central preoccupation of Asante social life, as is a reciprocal anxiety about loss of respect, shame, disgrace.²⁷ Just as European liberalism—

25. Such historical context is important, I think, because, as Michael Oakeshott once observed, political education should instil in us "a knowledge, as profound as we can make it, of our tradition of political behaviour" (Michael Oakeshott, "Political Education," *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* [New York, 1962], p. 128). We might say: liberal institutions are to be recommended, in part, as a practical response to the circumstances of modern political life.

26. My father's thought clearly wasn't so much that there aren't any atheists in Ghana but that their views don't matter. Locke, of course, agreed: "Those are not at all to be tolerated who deny the being of a God. Promises, covenants, and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist. The taking away of God, though but even in thought, dissolves all" (John Locke, "A Letter Concerning Toleration," *Political Writings of John Locke*, ed. David Wootton [New York, 1993], p. 426).

27. There are scores of proverbs on this theme in *Bu Me Be: The Proverbs of the Akan*, the more than seven thousand Akan proverbs that Peggy Appiah, my mother, will be publishing, with my assistance, in 1998.

and democratic sentiment—grew by extending to every man and (then) woman the dignity that feudal society offered only to the aristocracy, and thus in some sense presupposed aspects of that feudal understanding of dignity, so Ghanaian liberalism—at least in my father's form—depends on the prior grasp of concepts such as *animuonyam* (respect). It is clear from well-known Akan proverbs that respect was precisely not something that belonged in the past to everybody: *Agya Kra ne Agya Kwakyereme, emu biara mu nni animuonyam* (Father Soul and Father Slave Kyereme, neither of them has any respect; that is, whatever you call him, a slave is still a slave). But just as *dignitas*, which was once, by definition, the property of an elite, has grown into human dignity, which is the property of every man and woman, so *animuonyam* can be the basis of the respect for all others that lies at the heart of liberalism.²⁸ Indeed, *dignitas* and *animuonyam* have a great deal in common. *Dignitas*, as understood by Cicero, reflects much that was similar between republican Roman ideology and the views of the nineteenth-century Asante elite: it was, I think, as an Asante that my father recognized and admired Cicero, not as a British subject.

“In the course of my life I have seen Frenchmen, Italians, Russians etc.; I even know, thanks to Montesquieu, *that one can be Persian*; but *man* I have never met.”²⁹ So wrote Joseph de Maistre—no friend to liberalism—in his *Considérations sur la France*. It is a thought that can, ironically, be made consistent with a liberal cosmopolitanism; a thought that may even lead us to the view that cosmopolitanism is, in certain ways, inconsistent with one form of humanism. For a certain sort of humanist says that nothing human is alien; and we could gloss this as saying that a humanist respects each human being *as* a human being. Maistre is suggesting that we never really come to terms with anybody as a human because each actual person we meet, we meet as a French person, or as a Persian; in short, as a person with an identity far more specific than fellow human.³⁰ Exactly, the cosmopolitan says. And a good thing too. But we do not have to deal decently with people from other cultures and traditions *in spite of* our differences; we can treat others decently, humanely, *through* our differences. The humanist requires us to put our differences aside; the cosmopolitan insists that sometimes it is the differences we bring to the

28. The European history is taken up in Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989).

29. Joseph de Maistre, *Considérations sur la France*, 3d ed. (1797; Paris, 1821), pp. 102–3: “J’ai vu, dans ma vie, des François, des Italiens, des Russes, etc.; je sais même, grâce à Montesquieu, *qu’on peut être Persan*: mais quant à l’*homme*, je déclare ne l’avoir rencontré de ma vie.”

30. If you communicate on the internet, think about how difficult it is not to imagine your email correspondents (who present, after all, only strings of unspoken words) as having, for example, a specific race, gender, and age.

table that make it rewarding to interact at all. That is, of course, to concede that what we share can be important, too; though the cosmopolitan will remind us that what we share with others is not always an ethnonational culture: sometimes it will just be that you and I—a Peruvian and a Slovak—both like to fish, or have read and admired Goethe in translation, or responded with the same sense of wonder to a postcard of the Parthenon, or believe, as lawyers with very different trainings, in the ideal of the rule of law.

That is, so to speak, the anglophone voice of cosmopolitanism. But, in the cosmopolitan spirit, let me end with a similar thought from my father's, no doubt less familiar, tradition: *Kuro korɔ mu nni nyansa*, our proverb says. In a single *polis* there is no wisdom.³¹

31. *Kuro* is usually translated as *town*, but towns were relatively self-governing in the Asante past, so *polis* seems a translation that gets the right sense.