A volume on the notion of citizenship cannot fail to address, even briefly, the “broader” and super-nationalistic typology of a topic as cosmopolitanism. This concept seems to be the most authentic exponent of our age of globalization, aimed at dissolving the boundaries that define nation-states. But the massive dissemination of the word has banalized its meaning to such an extent that the richness and complexity of the term in philosophical and political discourse for over two thousand years has faded at times.¹ In fact, the etymological and conceptual roots of cosmopolitanism in the Classical Greek and Hellenistic world—as well as through centuries of Western thought and civilization—are so deep that the term has become an excellent tool for connecting distant periods and mentalities, each of which has invested the concept with its own perceptual paradigms of “world citizenship.”

For this reason, retracing the history of the notion of “cosmopolitanism” through time may contribute to the current effort of Western culture to examine itself introspectively.² This is the spirit in which I offer the present contribution, which does not attempt to be a complete and exhaustive discussion of the topic, prohibited by reasons of space and unadvisable for reasons of intellectual honesty. Instead, I have chosen to present an overview of the history of the concept from its origins to the present. Insofar as the contemporary period is concerned, I shall limit myself to charting the myriad directions in which a commentary on the notion of cosmopolitanism quickly branches out.

I knowingly reject any attempt to draw definitive conclusions here: rather than present univocal answers and interpretive strategies, I prefer to suggest some points to consider for further reflection and research by revealing the underpinnings of new research. The inquisitive reader may pursue these avenues in more depth, using the rich bibliography that has appeared in the past

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¹ See Beck (2006) 40–44 (How everyday life is becoming cosmopolitan: banal cosmopolitanism).
² I share Scuccimara’s ([2006] 7) position.
ten years which evinces the lively attention given to cosmopolitanism by the social sciences. The first clearly-stated reference in Western civilization to an idealized and borderless existence is found in a fragment of Democritus of Abdera: ἀνδρὶ σοφῶι πᾶσα γῆ βατή· ψυχῆς γὰρ ἀγαθῆς πατρὶς ὁ ξύμπας κόσμος (fr. 247 D.-K.). Such a statement crystalizes an aspiration to transcend the traditional boundaries of state (and therefore of identity) imposed by the polis and affirms the early stage of an egalitarian conception of humankind based on principles of wisdom and goodness. These concepts are echoed in contemporaneous philosophical thought and literary production, testifying to the spread in 5th-century BC Greece of a shared desire for cultural, social, and political openness that coincides with an intellectual departure from the traditional order of the polis and a new polemical redefinition of the concepts of “citizen” and “foreigner.”

It is with Post-Socratic philosophy, however, that this perception is first expanded theoretically and then condensed into the word κοσμοπόλιτης coined by Diogenes of Sinope, the founder of Cynicism, who scandalized his contemporaries with his eccentric way of living and provocative attitudes (so much so that Plato described him as “a completely deranged Socrates”). Diogenes Laertius narrates in his biography that when asked about his own origin, he appositely declared that he was a “citizen of the world.” In this neologism (which must have already seemed quite subversive, given that the politeis was by defini-

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3 Among the most recent monographs on the subject, besides Scuccimarra (2006) and Beck (2006), also see Taraborrelli 2011 (hereafter referred to in the recent English edition: Taraborrelli [2015]); Rovisco—Nowicka (2011). With regard to ancient world, a quite accurate overview is offered by Richter (2011), while the miscellany edited by Lavan—Payne—Weisweiler (2016) focuses on the relationship between cosmopolitanism and imperial power in the Near East and Mediterranean. Also see the bibliography cited throughout this article.

4 “Every country on earth is the domain of the wise man, because the homeland of a good soul is the entire universe.” For a general discussion of Greek and Latin cosmopolitanism, see Konstan (2009).

5 Cf. for instance Anaxag. test. 1 D.-K. (= Diog. Laert. 2.7), Antiph. Soph. fr. 5 Gernet; Soph. Tereus fr. 591 Radt; Eur. Alex. fr. 6 lb Kannicht; even Socrates, according to Cic. Tusc. 5.108 considered himself mundanus (but on the critical fortune of this anecdote see Heater [1996], 6–7). On Greek “cosmopolitanism” before cynicism see Baldry (1965) 37–45; Lana (1973).


8 Diog. Laert. 6.54 Σωκράτης μανόμενος.