

Cosmopolitanism and/in Education: What Responsibilities Now for the Philosopher and the Teaching of Philosophy?

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With the development of global processes, especially global communications and media, the notion of cosmopolitanism has become more widespread. However, cosmopolitanism is not new, as revealed by Martha Nussbaum's synopsis of its history in her book *Cultivating Humanity* — words she borrowed, along with the figure of concentric circles, from the Ancient Stoic thinker Seneca (first century AD).¹ Nicholas Burbules provided an insightful review of Nussbaum's book, and an enlightening discussion of the shortcomings of her analysis.² While she "would like to see education adopt this cosmopolitan Stoic stance," focusing "cosmopolitan education" on philosophy and ethical reasoning, knowledge, and imagination, she sidesteps the difficult challenges her position must confront.³ Although she advocates the importance of philosophical argument, she offers little debate, little examination of attendant tensions and contradictions. Zelia Gregoriou underscores these difficulties and sums up her discussion of Nussbaum's pedagogical approach: "In an effort to vernacularize Socratic pedagogy, Nussbaum's cosmopolitan proposal often collapses the problem of cultural translation to knowing 'some rudiments about others,'"⁴ excluding culture which "remains [but] an external tool to cosmopolitanism."

Gregoriou then turns to Jacques Derrida — whom Nussbaum dismissed as "simply not worth studying" — and his deconstruction of hospitality in search of "an alternative way to approximate a translation model of cosmopolitanism."⁵ In this response to Gregoriou, I follow up on her drawing on Derrida to reach a better understanding of cosmopolitanism in terms of the responsibilities it entails, as recently discussed by Derrida.⁶

In 1999, a conference at United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) addressed the general theme of "The New World Contract" being drawn up by Federico Mayor, then Director General of the Institution. Derrida was invited to speak and discussed "the task of the philosopher here, such as [he saw] it assigned and implied by the new 'world contract.'"⁷ Derrida understood this task as also being "that of whoever tends to assume political and legal responsibilities in this matter."⁸ He gave as examples four of the tightly linked themes around which have revolved his lectures, seminars, conferences, publications, and interviews (including several interventions before UNESCO) in the most recent years: work, forgiveness, peace, and the death penalty.⁹

More recently, in an interview with France 3 in May 2002, Derrida insisted that philosophy is more necessary than ever to respond to the most urgent questions raised by today's sociopolitical context, questions of politics, ethics, and especially rights and law.¹⁰ These issues concern international institutions, including "the UN, the Security Council, the role of certain sovereign states in their relation of respect

or non-respect toward these international institutions” all having to do with international law.¹¹ Derrida stressed that, if international law is to be modified, “it can be done only on the grounds of a philosophical reflection.”¹²

Another point Derrida makes, referring to Kant’s 1784 text *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht*,¹³ is that these institutions as well as international law, most of which appeared after the Second World War,

are already *philosophemes*. They are philosophical acts and archives, philosophical productions and products not only because the concepts that legitimate them have an ascribable *philosophical history* and thus a philosophical history that finds itself inscribed in the charter of UNESCO; rather because, at the same time, and for this reason, such institutions imply the sharing of a culture and a philosophical language, committing themselves consequently to making possible, and first through education [*et d’abord par l’Éducation*], the access to this language and to this culture.¹⁴

When signing the charter of such an institution, a state and its people make a commitment to uphold the culture, the philosophical heritage thus inscribed in its charter.¹⁵ Derrida pointed out that some may see in it an “infinite opening,” while others might object that “it is limiting to an apparently essentially European heritage.”¹⁶ And then some may lose sight of this implicit commitment altogether. Which stresses all the more that this commitment entails an education to culture and to philosophy which is of paramount importance for an understanding of what is at stake, and which is “indispensable to the understanding and the implementation of these commitments to these international institutions, which are... philosophical in essence” (*N*, 331).

In light of the ongoing military action in Iraq, more than ever, Derrida’s questions (though over twelve years old, but asked in the context of a similar conflict) sound most urgent:

What are the concrete stakes of this situation today? Why must the important questions concerning philosophical teaching and research, why must the imperative of the right to philosophy be deployed in their international dimension today more than ever? Why are the responsibilities which need to be taken no longer, and even less today in the twenty-first century, simply national? What do “national,” “cosmopolitan,” “universal” mean here for, and with regard to, philosophy, philosophical research, philosophical education or training, or even for a philosophical question or practice that would not be essentially linked to research or education? (*N*, 332).

In this context — Derrida had already pointed out — the right to philosophy and to the teaching of philosophy, as well as the responsibilities at stake must be considered beyond national borders, on a cosmopolitan and universal level. This position raises new questions, already discussed by Kant who stated that “a philosophical approach to universal history... is inseparable from a kind of plan of nature that aims for a total, perfect political unification of the human species” (*N*, 333). Since then, such institutions as UNESCO, the UN, and the Security Council have moved the creation of “institutions ruled by international — and thus philosophical — law” out of the realm of “fiction” into that of actual facts (*N*, 333). Whether they — that is their members who signed the charters — uphold the commitment thus made is precisely what is at issue.¹⁷

Is not one of the responsibilities of today’s philosopher, in the context of globalization and cosmopolitanism, the necessity to move beyond the opposition

Eurocentrism versus anti-Eurocentrism? While upholding the memory of a philosophical heritage essentially Euro-Christian, it is necessary to both recognize its origins, and go beyond its limits. It is also essential to be aware that the philosophical has been and is being transformed and appropriated by non-European languages and cultures. According to Derrida, this is what a close, “long and slow” study of the historical roots and development of philosophy, one which is in progress, will reveal. He believes that

[w]hat is happening today, and has been for some time...are philosophical formations that will not let themselves be contained in this dialectic, which is basically cultural, colonial and neo-colonial, of appropriation and alienation. There are other ways (*voies*) of philosophy...[Moreover, n]ot only are there other ways of philosophy, but philosophy, if there is such a thing, is the other way (*l'autre voie*) (N, 337).

Derrida also believes that letting philosophy, even under the label of cosmopolitanism, be determined by the opposition Eurocentrism vs non-Eurocentrism would be limiting the right to philosophy and to the teaching of philosophy. In order to follow up and understand “what is happening and can still happen under the name of philosophy,” Derrida suggests three fields of reflection, under three “titles.” According to him, they “could be the concrete conditions for respect and the extension of the right to philosophy” (N, 337-40).

First title. Whoever thinks that the right to philosophy from a cosmopolitan point of view must be respected, granted, extended will have to take into account the competition that exists and has always existed between several models, styles, philosophical traditions.

Second title. The respect and extension of the right to philosophy to all people also presupposes...the appropriation but also the overflowing of what are said to be...the founding or originary languages of philosophy — the Greek, Latin, Germanic, or Arabic languages.

Third title. Although philosophy does not simply amount to its institutional or pedagogical moments, nonetheless the many differences of tradition, style, language, and philosophical nationality are translated or embodied in the institutional or pedagogical models, at times even produced by those structures (N, 337-40).

CONCLUSION

In the current context of globalization, cosmopolitanism, socio-political conflicts and war, rights to philosophy and the teaching of philosophy take a new dimension and urgency and present new challenges. Declaring philosophy to be cosmopolitan is not sufficient to make it universal. One must recognize the role played by appropriation and transformation of the philosophical and of the institutional and pedagogical models in non-European languages and cultures. In addition, today, access and rights to philosophy and the teaching of philosophy are ever more necessary, for they are indispensable to understand our renewed responsibilities in a broader world, and to make responsible decisions from a cosmopolitan point of view.

1. Martha C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

2. Nicholas C. Burbules, “Review Essay on *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*, Martha C. Nussbaum (Harvard University Press: 1997),” *Harvard Educational Review* 69, no. 4 (1999).

3. Martha C. Nussbaum, "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism," <www.phil.uga.edu/faculty/wolf/nussbaum1.htm>; Martha C. Nussbaum, "Globally Speaking – The Politics of Globalisation. Program 6: Global Citizenship." Extended Interview: Professor Martha Nussbaum and Barry Clarke. <www.abc.net.au/global/radio/nussbaum.htm>, last checked March 23, 2003.

4. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, 11.

5. *Ibid.*, 41.

6. When I first read Gregoriou's essay, it was in the context of the past months' socio-political events, against the backdrop of acute pressure from the aftermath of terrorist acts on the territory, conflicts in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, and a mounting rhetoric of war. As I was writing my response, the war in Iraq broke out, compelling me to re-orient the discussion which follows.

7. Jacques Derrida, "La mondialisation et la paix cosmopolitique," first delivered at UNESCO's headquarters in Paris, 6 November 1999, as part of the "Discussions of the Twenty-first Century." Transcribed and published in *Regards* 54 (February 2000, 16-19), trans. Elizabeth Rottenberg as "Globalization, Peace, and Cosmopolitanism," in *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews, 1971-2001* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002), 376. For all subsequent references *Negotiations* will be cited as *N*.

8. *Ibid.*

9. UNESCO has deemed it necessary to establish for itself a department of philosophy, which is why, in a previous address before UNESCO in 1991, Derrida declared that "UNESCO may in fact be this privileged place...perhaps the only possible place in which to truly deploy the question" of the right to philosophy. He continued: "As if, in a word, UNESCO and, within UNESCO in a way that was privileged, its department of philosophy, were, if I can say this, the singular *emanation* of something like *philosophy* as 'a right to philosophy from a cosmopolitan point of view'"; *Negotiations*, 330, Derrida's emphasis.

10. Jacques Derrida, "Culture et dépendances — Spécial Jacques Derrida." Presented by Franz-Olivier Giesbert. France 3 Television. (May 2002). Not available in print.

11. See also Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London: Routledge, 2001).

12. Derrida, "Culture et dépendances."

13. *Idea* [in view of] *of a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*.

14. Derrida, *Negotiations*, 331, Derrida's emphasis. Translation modified: in the French text, "first of all" relates to "education" (thus emphasizing the importance of education) and not to "access" to language and culture.

15. Following an eighteen-year absence from UNESCO, on 12 September 2002, speaking before the UN General Assembly in an effort to gain support to go to war against Iraq, President Bush announced the return of the United States to UNESCO (188 Member States; as a founding member, the United States helped shape the 1945 Constitution). UNESCO Press Release # 2002-64, Paris, 12 September 2002. <http://www.unesco.org>

16. Derrida, *Negotiations*, 331 (also 371-86). They may overlook the fact that this is no simple heritage, and "combines and accumulates powerful traditions within it"; *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, 31. See also, for example, Jacques Derrida and Elisabeth Roudinesco, *De quoi demain... Dialogue* (Paris: Fayard Galilée, 2001) and Jacques Derrida, *Foi et Savoir suivi de Le Siècle et le Pardon* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2001).

17. In fact, after much preparation, President Bush opted to go to war against Iraq regardless of the UN and other Member States' respective positions, not to mention the United States Congress's own opposition.