

## Chapter 4

# Three Notions of the Global



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**Abstract** Why do universities go to so much effort to become “international”? Is it to create cosmopolitan global citizens, or to propel themselves up league tables? Is it to promote liberal democratic ideals, or to better recruit international students? There are actually different ways of understanding what is meant by “global thinking”. Currently, the predominant thinking is centred around economic development. But the political ideal of “internationalism” and the philosophical concept of the universal as an intellectual virtue are also alternatives. In this paper, I discuss the sometimes uneasy relationship between these three types of “global thinking”, while at the same time pointing out a common denominator - the connection between the global and the local.

Educational institutions throughout the world, universities especially, for very pragmatic reasons devote a great deal of time, effort and resources to achieving “internationalization”. Aside from practical needs (student recruitment, climbing to better positions in rankings and league tables, etc.), there is a more idealistic notion that the meeting of different cultures is itself of inestimable value for the cultivation of the mind. The ideal is to transform students and faculty into world citizens through intercultural encounters and international experiences, which are thought to advance a desirable, and, for society, even necessary, liberal, progressive and democratic point of view. Further, social as well as scientific progress is thought to depend on the capacity for critical thinking that is assumed to emerge out of a cosmopolitan diversity of impressions, associations and ideas. But there are actually different ways of understanding what is meant by “global thinking”.

The currently predominant conception, *globalism* properly speaking, is essentially concerned with *economic* development, in particular, the operation or planning of economic policy on a global basis. The governing ideal in this conception is

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that of the market, in which free competition between individuals, institutions and regions in the exchange of goods and services leads to innovation and efficiency, to the benefit of all. In a different conception, which we may call *internationalism*, the guiding principle is a *political* ideal, having to do with the advocacy of cooperation and understanding between nations, where states and societies aim at inculcating in people the sense of solidarity between individuals, groups and nations required for a broadening of the rights and duties associated with citizenship (“international socialism”). The ideal is one of human freedom, to be advanced by the fostering of the values of mutual recognition and equality. Finally, there is a third conception, one which we may call *philosophical*. This is the ideal of *universalism* as an intellectual virtue, at the heart of the University at its inception, which culminated in the Enlightenment. In this paper, I will discuss the sometimes uneasy relationship between these three ideal types of “global thinking”, while at the same time pointing out a common denominator, namely, the connection between the global and the proximate. My point is simply this: when we have “global” aims, or strive to be “world-class”, we should be clear about what it is that we want.

While these three ideals (the economic, the political and the philosophical) *can* overlap, they can also come into conflict with, even undermine, each other. At that point, we have to choose what we see as the guiding principle, or mission, of the university. A “world-class” university in the economic sense is not necessary one from the perspective of the goals of internationalism or universalism.

I will begin with *internationalization*, that is, the aim to adapt the institutions of science, scholarship and higher education to the global market.

## **The Globalization of HE: From “Generous Mother”<sup>1</sup> to Tough Competitor**

As many of the essays in this volume attest, there is much evidence indicating that institutions of higher learning are reconceiving their missions—who they are and what they do—in order to accommodate their roles as players on a global market (see also e.g. Connell 2019). The global activities of universities are certainly increasing: universities invest in branch campuses abroad, or offer what is sometimes called “offshore delivery”; universities devote substantial resources to attract foreign students as an important indicator of quality as well as a vital source of (tuition) revenue; they seek to enhance the prestige of the university or department through international recruitment of faculty; they emulate corporate business strategies to become more efficient, flexible and adaptable actors on the global higher education market through innovation hubs etc. That university management sees their role of global market player as primary is clear from the mission statements prominently displayed on university websites, which often include terms such as

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<sup>1</sup>The use of the term *alma mater* meaning, in a general sense, something or someone providing nourishment dates back to the seventeenth century.

“world-leading” or “world-class”. Even universities not counted among the top 50 by the main rankings (especially Academic Ranking of World Universities, or the “Shanghai Ranking” as it is usually called; QS World University Rankings; and Times Higher Education World University Rankings), but seeing themselves in the running, such as Uppsala University (n.d.), describe their mission, for instance, as being “active in a global context characterised both by partnerships and competition for talent and resources. Improving and strengthening our position as a dynamic and vital environment for education and research requires active and intentional efforts”. This development is generally lauded by global, national and regional policy actors, student associations and the media, who salute efforts to respond to consumer demands and stakeholder expectations.

Starting with the premise that the university *is* an actor in the “knowledge economy”, and confident that the market mechanism will ensure better quality at lower cost, it stands to reason that where the competition is most fierce, which is to say, “global”, the quality will be better. On this view, the best way to achieve maximum efficiency in the system is to create a functional market, that is, a system in which actors are forced to lower costs and increase productivity and/or quality to gain a competitive edge in the pursuit of clients and customers (in the case of universities, these being student fees, government contracts, grant capture, donations, etc.). The construction of a market or market-like framework or field of activity is thus tied inextricably to competition—or at least to the perception of competition. Universities therefore adapt their ideals and practices to meet the requirements of competition on a global market, which is to say that they are being *transformed*, both through their own efforts to “compete” as well as through state and policy efforts to regulate and govern *how* they compete (Rider and Waluszewski 2015; Rider et al. 2013). But what does competition in the case of academic activity (research and teaching) mean, really? Who is competing with whom, and for what? In what does this competition consist, and what are its consequences?

While policy stresses global competition with other universities worldwide, in point of fact many, indeed *most*, universities are regional, and primarily serve local populations, organizations and institutions. This is particularly clear in the case of educational programs, which are locally embedded and serve local and national labor markets. Research, on the other hand, is, and has always been, transnational in character (see Giebel and Stevens in this volume). Whatever boundaries exist between international networks, collaborations and disciplinary identities, they do not follow or even respect national borders. On the other hand, what is true, even in the case of research, is that it is the regional and national higher education and research systems that provide the lion’s share of the funding and other resources, both through state block grants and through competitive research funding mechanisms and agencies. However global the research program, funding, in most cases, begins at home.

Leaving aside that proviso, let us consider the idea of *competition* as such, to see what it means, or can mean, for research and teaching. To begin with, the term can be used as a mass noun: the activity or condition of striving to gain or win something by defeating or establishing supremacy over others, as in “the competition for customers”. Or it can be used more specifically, as a number noun: a contest or

event in which participants attempt to establish superiority in a particular area, say, as in a beauty competition. It can also be used in the definite singular: to designate a person/group/organization over whom one is attempting to establish superiority or supremacy, as in the phrase, “I walked around the field to size up the competition”. Finally, there is an ecological use, for the interaction between species or organisms to gain a share of a limited environmental resource, as in “the competition with ungulates seems to have led to the elimination of marsupials in North America.”

Notice then that there is a distinction to be made between two forms of competition: competition for resources, as in the case of the customers and marsupials, and competition for status, as in the case of the athlete and the beauty queen. Naturally, a heightened status can lead to a gain in resources, and an abundance of resources can bring with it enhanced status, but they are nonetheless distinct kinds of competition: the beauty queen gets modelling contracts because of her having established herself as Miss America. She doesn’t win the Miss America contest in virtue of having secured modelling contracts. In the case of economics, competition arises when actors compete to achieve something or obtain more of it, usually capital, but it can also be qualified personnel, technological advantage or some other thing. Competition for status, on the other hand, is about attention, reputation and recognition, which may or may not reap other benefits.

In short, competition for status and competition for resources are distinguishable, if not always distinct. As Wedlin (2014) notes, there are two differences that deserve special notice: While the grounds for resource competition is scarcity, a matter of increasing one’s share of a limited commodity, status is primarily comparative. Status is a matter of supremacy or superiority relative to some other person, group or organization. Thus, unlike the given facts of what resources are or are not available, status competition depends on the framework or system which sets the terms for the comparison, and determines with whom or with what one is compared. Secondly, the reality of status is in the eye of the beholder: if it is not acknowledged by others, it does not exist. Hoofed animals in North America weren’t trying to impress other mammals when they beat the marsupial competition. The competition in this case, as opposed to the beauty contest and the sporting event, did not require a judge or an audience in order for it to be a competition. But in the case of competition for status, the judgment of others is decisive. This means, among other things, that the competitors are not autonomous with regard to establishing their status, since their supremacy is something existing in the opinion of others. Further, having established superiority over another once is no guarantee for having it in perpetuity; status must be jealously guarded and upheld. By contrast, in a competition for real and unevenly distributed resources, one can defeat the competitor once and for all by driving him into bankruptcy, or by buying up the company; similarly, once extinct, the marsupial competition for resources is gone forever.

This distinction between competition for resources and competition for status can help us better understand a given conception of the “global”. The so-called global competition between universities is in the main related to creating, enhancing and maintaining status; one speaks of a “reputation race” (Hazelkorn 2015). But recall what we said earlier: while competition for reputation can very well be global,

the competition for resources—funding, in the first instance, but also for students and faculty—for most colleges and universities, remains largely a national or a regional matter. This qualification will return in another form at the end of this article, with respect to the local or proximate conditions of thinking itself. For now, the main point that I want to stress in this short survey of globalism in the economic sense is the central role of a competition between isolated players, and the idea of the world market as some abstract arena that constitutes the playing field. This notion is strictly at odds with a previously popular ideal of higher education, one that I have labelled “internationalism”.

## **Internationalism as Educational Ideal: The Politics of Human Perfectibility**

I will make a few general observations about “internationalism” as an ideology. Following Rodriguez (2018), by ‘internationalism’, I mean ideas that emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in conjunction with a period of radical political, cultural and socio-economic upheavals in European society: continuous wars until 1871; revolutions in industry, trade, communications, technology and science; state-building; major economic fluctuations; a demographic explosion; urbanization; violent uprisings, etc. These all had far-reaching effects on political theories and practices of education.

In the middle of the nineteenth century until after WW II, socialist and liberal internationalists alike saw the struggle for political and social reforms as something that necessarily begins as a national struggle. As Rodriguez points out, both shared the Enlightenment’s belief in universal historical progress. In the case of socialism, the main sources of influence were Hegel and Marx, while liberal internationalism was indebted to Kant, Bentham and Mill, especially the utilitarianism of the latter two. What all shared was a commitment to the ideals of scientific and social advancement, and faith in the intrinsic potential of human beings to transform the world according to the dictates of reason, the cultivation of the capacity for which would demand equal opportunity for education to achieve these ideals, all of which amounted to nothing short of universal human emancipation. The comprehensive adoption of the principles of reason, the enemy of tradition and superstition, would lead to progress on a worldwide scale toward the realization of freedom, equality, justice, peace and democracy.

Political internationalism emerged as a reaction to authoritarian regimes and the violation of individual liberties. Absolutism, colonialism and imperialism were to be abolished; they were not just unjustifiable crimes unto themselves, but they also led to war and impeded the continuation of the liberal or socialist reforms which would otherwise culminate in the realization of human potential everywhere (Rodriguez 2018). Education played a central role for both socialists and liberals, as it promoted the use of reason and, thus, freedom, progress and equality. The failure to achieve these aims was thought to result inevitably in violent conflict. Access to

education was thus a guarantor of both peace and prosperity. For liberals, this could be achieved by enforcing a minimal set of laws that would provide opportunities for individuals to realize their potential as full-fledged members of society. Liberals promoted reforms to achieve this objective at home and abroad within the existing order. The spread of liberal democracy, through its institutions and through education, would be a vehicle for the realization of human freedom everywhere.

Socialists did not think this was possible under prevailing conditions, which they therefore sought to abolish. Class society was itself the cause of social disharmony and antagonisms, and only its disappearance in favor of a universal classless order could insure peace and prosperity. In contrast to liberals, who saw no necessary antagonism in the capital-labor relation insofar as it is viewed as a contract between equals, the legality of which was secured by the state, socialists viewed the state itself as an instrument of the ruling class (the bourgeoisie in capitalist society), something to be overcome at the highest stage of human development. Or rather, when the state becomes the real representative of the whole of society, it renders itself obsolete (Rodriguez 2018). For laissez-faire liberal internationalists (who seem to be legion in our own day), to the extent that there exist economic inequalities between individuals or peoples, these provide an incentive to improvement through unrestricted competition and minimal government regulation. Progressive liberal thinkers, however, viewed social ills largely as imperfections of the system. And an imperfect system, like all situations deriving from human action, was perfectible. Indeed, human perfectibility was a central notion for liberal theory, which is why access to education came to play such a fundamental role for Enlightenment thinkers. Progressive liberal thinkers and statesmen insisted on the introduction of political and social reforms to turn workers into citizens.

Education in particular was a key sector for reforming not only social institutions, but the minds and hearts of the people who constitute them. Employers and workers would no longer be rivals, but rather partners in the market economy, and members of society endowed with equal rights and obligations. For liberals, it was a matter not of creating equality as such but of creating equal opportunities for all individuals. Liberalism aimed for a society that rewarded its citizens according to their merit, not according to their needs. At the international level, this meant equality of opportunity for participation in commerce and equity in access to the world's resources and the ability to cultivate them. All of this would require greater access to education. It was in this context that the US and the UK, for instance, started expanding their educational systems to train adults from different walks of life, not only in the latest in industrial and agricultural science and engineering, but also in the art of citizenship, by offering them the opportunity to study liberal arts together with their vocational or professional training at the university level, together with students destined by virtue of birth and upbringing to become lawyers, doctors and parliamentarians. Further, the hope was that the mingling of social and economic classes and ethnic backgrounds would expand the horizons of all, and lead to mutual understanding and cooperation. It is against this historical backdrop that the contemporary valorization of globalism and internationalization, combining political, economic and moral elements, should be understood.

## On Knowing One's Place in the World<sup>2</sup>

Let us now consider the idea of education as the cultivation of capacities, ones that are thought by some to be indispensable for a good (fair, just, democratic) society and a good (dignified, fully human) life. What is the connection that many of us assume exists between the human faculty of reason and the idea that cosmopolitanism, or a global perspective, is crucial to its development? What is the conceptual relationship between a liberal attitude and “critical thinking” or rational self-examination?

In this section, I will look closely at the relationship assumed between the human capacity for reason and the idea that cosmopolitanism is crucial to its development. Martha Nussbaum is a noted proponent of the view that there exists an intimate relation between a liberal or democratic attitude, both toward politics and toward one's own life, and “critical thinking” or rational self-examination. In her essays on world-citizenship (see Nussbaum 1997, 2010a<sup>3</sup>), Nussbaum cites Kant's “political” essays (Kant 1983a, b). But oddly, given that the cultivation of enlightened, rational judgment is central to Nussbaum's educational project, she does not discuss in detail the question of the connection between rational thought and a cosmopolitan point of view. Let us begin then by noting what Kant seems to have regarded as what one might call “the cosmopolitan capacity of thought”.

The faculty of learning through the free exchange of ideas and evaluations is summed up, famously, in Kant's three maxims for human understanding formulated in §40 of the *Critique of Judgment* (1951), to wit, the intention and capacity to:

- (i) Think for yourself;
- (ii) Put yourself in your thinking in the place of everyone else;
- (iii) Always think consistently.

These three maxims are, respectively, the maxim of unprejudiced thought, the maxim of enlarged thought, and the maxim of consecutive thought.

Kant explains that reason can never be passive, since passivity belongs to the heteronomy of reason, also called prejudice. According to Kant, the greatest prejudice of all is to assume that the world is beyond the grasp of human reason. This picture, Kant says, renders us passive, enslaved by and obligated to the authority of others. A man whose mind has been enlarged, on the other hand, however limited his natural gifts, can be educated to disregard the “subjective private conditions of his own judgment, by which so many others are confined, and reflect upon it from a universal point of view (which he can only determine by placing himself at the standpoint of others”). In short, Enlightenment means being able to see clearly that one has starting points that are contingent, and can reasonably be called into question. The 3rd maxim, viz. that of consecutive thought, “is the most difficult to attain,

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<sup>2</sup>Parts of this section have been previously published in Rider (2019).

<sup>3</sup>The idea of a cosmopolitan ideal of culture and education is also sketched out in Nussbaum (2010b).



and can only be achieved through the combination of both of the former, and after the constant observance of them has grown into habit.” Kant summarizes: “We may say that the 1st of these maxims is the maxim of understanding, the 2nd of judgment, and the 3rd of reason” (Kant 1951, pp. 135–138).

Kant thinks that the faculties of the human mind (or, as Nussbaum would say, human capabilities) can be cultivated through the right sort of education. Such a cultivation is first and foremost directed toward the actualization of the human potential for autonomy (self-legislation), in the individual, the community, and, ultimately, the species. The real substance of education is enlightenment, not information or skills; learning how to think, not what to think. Indeed, toward the end of the *Metaphysics of Morals*, in a section on method in teaching ethics, Kant asserts that the core of moral education is to make the student aware that he himself can think (Kant 1964, §50, p. 146).

The point of all of this is that unprejudiced, broadminded and consistent thinking does not arise spontaneously or without effort. It is something that *can* be brought about and fostered, i.e. while it can’t be taught as such, it can be learned or developed. Kant goes so far as to say that it is through education, and *only* through education, the basic scheme of which is cosmopolitan, that humanity can achieve autonomy.

Nussbaum’s (1997, 2010a, b) *Cultivating Humanity* and *Not for Profit* are attempts at providing such a global program suited to our interconnected but also fragmented way of life. Nussbaum thinks that she can provide a general framework for the development of the capacity for responsible action, autonomous judgment and conscientious decision-making, in public affairs as well as in private life, in matters both theoretical and practical. To the objection that ideals of, say, logical coherence, are white, European, male and heteronormative, Nussbaum responds: “We do not respect the humanity of any human being unless we assume that person to be capable of understanding the basic issues of consistency and validity and the basic forms of inference. We sell that person short as a human being unless we work to make that person’s potentiality for logical thought into an active reality” (Nussbaum 1997, p. 38). This is reminiscent of Donald Davidson’s (1973) “Principle of Charity”, the charitableness of which consists in attributing to others the capacity to reason in such a way as to be amenable to our way of thinking, that is, in such a way that we could, in principle, understand their thoughts and actions and deem them rational or reasonable by our own lights.<sup>4</sup> In this view of charity, openness demands of us that we do our best to assimilate alternative or alien forms of thought

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<sup>4</sup>Of course, Davidson’s Principle of Charity is intended to make a purely logical point, not one about human dignity: “Since charity is not an option, but a condition of having a workable theory, it is meaningless to suggest that we might fall into massive error by endorsing it. Until we have successfully established a systematic correlation of sentences held true with sentences held true, there are no mistakes to make. Charity is forced on us; – whether we like it or not, if we want to understand others, we must count them right in most matters. If we can produce a theory that reconciles charity and the formal conditions for a theory, we have done all that could be done to ensure communication. Nothing more is possible, and nothing more is needed.” See Davidson (1973, pp. 5–20)



into our conceptual apparatus. Nussbaum (1997, p. 60) writes: “Our task as citizens of the world, and as educators who prepare people to be citizens of the world”, will be to make all human beings like our neighbors. This, in her view, is possible insofar as we are all, through enlargement of our thought and vigilant undoing of preconceived notions through education, potential “world citizens”: “Above all, education for world citizenship requires transcending the inclination of both students and educators to define themselves primarily in terms of local group loyalties and identities” (Nussbaum 1997, p. 67).

This sounds reasonable enough, if all that is meant is that each and every one of us can recognize the difference between saying “Germany invaded Poland”, and saying, “As a Pole, it is important for me to maintain and propagate the claim that Germany invaded Poland”. But Nussbaum seems to want to say something more than that we should distinguish between what is good or desirable for ourselves or a certain group or community, on the one hand, and states of affairs which are not amenable to revision by virtue of consideration of such interests. Rather, she is at great pains to use education as a way of lifting college students out of their presumably limited and limiting social and cultural contexts by exposing them to what Max Weber called “uncomfortable facts”, things that can only be assimilated in their understanding by widening the latter. She asserts, “There are no surer sources of disdain than ignorance, and the sense of the inevitable naturalness of one’s own way”. For this reason, “awareness of cultural difference is essential in order to promote the respect for another that is the essential underpinning of dialogue” (Nussbaum 1997, p. 68). A recurrent theme throughout Nussbaum’s work on education is the idea that there is a necessary connection, not only between “ignorance” of other cultures, histories and ways of life, on the one hand, and a monolithic, insensitive and hegemonic attitude, on the other; Nussbaum also infers, *ipso facto*, that exposure to a broad spectrum of ideas, histories and identities, together with training in discussing, challenging and arguing about them will lead to a tolerant, respectful and creative atmosphere that encourages intellectual and social advancement, progress and innovation.

I have referred to Nussbaum at length because she is such an eloquent exponent of a certain idea of universalism that is at once a perplexing and recurring feature of our current ideas about the value of globalism in questions of higher education. On the one hand, there is emphasis on the need to break out of the bubble of one’s own upbringing, one’s native language, community traditions and parochial concerns, etc. On the other, these tend to be described in the most general ideal-typical terms: “Western”, “heterosexual”, “white”, “Christian”, and so forth. But these kinds of “identities” are arguably constructed for and within the realm of the political.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, as Goodhart (2017) among others has noted, this kind of argumentation gives the impression of performative inconsistency. Expressions of cultivation, erudition and cosmopolitanism tend to display “the sense of the inevitable

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<sup>5</sup>An argument to this effect is offered by bell hooks’ observations about the production of white supremacy in rural Kentucky (see hooks 2009).

naturalness of one's own way" (Nussbaum 1997, p. 68) that, in other contexts, are quite emphatically associated with egoism and even narcissism—traits that are thought to be dissipated and, ultimately, eradicated with adequate education.

Here is the dilemma for cosmopolitanism as it is presently understood. Perhaps it is not possible to revise, amend, enhance or cultivate an education that has been so fragmented as to fail to constitute a genuine identity or culture. Aside from deviant desperate cases, such as neo-Nazis, the problem for many "white, Christian Western males", for instance, is not that they're too embedded in their own language, local traditions and regional culture, but that they're not embedded at all. They don't know why water comes out of the tap in the kitchen, what can and can't be grown given the weather conditions and soil type in the area in which they live; they are unaware of the labors involved when their grandparents first learned to speak English, and clueless as to what decisions were made on what bases and by whom when their hometown was recognized as a municipality; they haven't the foggiest idea about the theological differences between their own Baptist upbringing and the practices and beliefs of their Anabaptist neighbors next door. They are, as it were, "culturally disinherited"; they've lost the cultural capital of self-sufficiency that is so important for cosmopolitan ideals, and this, among other things, because schooling has taken so little of genuinely local conditions and practices into account. "Place" has, as it were, no place in education. It's difficult to see how you will negotiate your way in foreign territory if you don't know where you are to begin with. "Europe", for instance, isn't a place in this sense. A place has a particular climate, specific material and social conditions, distinct forms of interaction and patterns of behavior, often its own dialect and idioms. The envisaged liberal world-citizen has to start from somewhere, but this "somewhere" in liberal arts education tends to be nowhere in particular. "American History" and "Anglo-American literature", for instance, are already far too general to serve as a starting point for self-reflection.

Strikingly, Nussbaum (1997, p. 128) herself stresses that "real cultures have varied domains of thought and activity", but she makes this point only to address the problem that "non-western" cultures are too often studied with a focus on "an urban elite, ignoring daily life and the lives of rural people". Somehow this insight is lost when we consider higher education in the Global North.

The idea that a cosmopolitan liberal education (i.e. the production of "truly free and self-governing citizens") is something that can be accomplished through planning and reforms formulated by those who have already to a high degree "achieved" their humanity, who are already "citizens of the world", has the character, in the eyes of those who question its value, of self-promotion. Nussbaum (1997, p. 156) writes: "There is a common human tendency to think of one's own habits and ways as best for all persons in all times," but doesn't seem to notice that the kind of globalism that she herself advances does not escape the rubric of a "common human tendency".

From a cosmopolitan point of view, the supposition that one need not take into account the lived experience of others is profoundly illiberal. Yet the heady discourse of "internationalization" and "global citizenship" today suggests that the

best way to counter the critique of the liberal ideal of world citizenship as a “subtraction story”, i.e. what you have left when local, religious, cultural and linguistic factors are removed, is to replace it with an “addition story”, an ideal of the world citizen as within herself “containing multitudes”.

But while knowledge of ancient Greek, acquaintance with the role of the trickster in contemporary Latinx novels, appreciation of raga in traditional Indian music, study abroad and colleagues from around the world are all good and advantageous things in many respects, they are not pre-requisites for a properly human life or for the use of reason. To claim that they are is to suggest that nothing is to be gained by looking around one’s own corner. From the point of view of global commerce, root-ness is a problem. But from the perspective of teaching and learning, it is rather a possible solution. Our own specific place in the world, our home, has something to teach us about ourselves and others; to define it as inherently parochial, provincial, confined and confining as a starting point is to deny the very real and necessary conditions of thought.

As an example of an alternative notion of enlarged thinking, one might consider Timothy Larsen’s (2014) *The Slain God: Anthropologists and the Christian Faith*, where it is argued that the canonical anthropologists E. E. Evans-Pritchard and Mary Douglas were profoundly influenced by their experience of the Catholic faith and their own religiosity. On Larsen’s account, their capacity to recognize the rationality of tribal cultural practices, to understand the nature of ritual from the point of view of a believer, to see the value of hierarchy as an ordering structure, and to acknowledge the centrality of spiritual concerns in cultural systems were directly related to their immersion in Christianity and the Church. In short, it was the richness of their self-understanding that enabled their openness toward other cultures. This requirement that self-knowledge begins at home, i.e. within a living tradition, receives little attention today: we think that we understand ourselves first when encountering the Other and seeing ourselves with her eyes. One might also object to the thought that exposure to distant societies, alternate forms of life, religious and sexual minorities, etc. is in the first instance a means to enhance self-awareness among white, middle-class American and European college students, as if they for some reason were in need of enlightenment that others are not.

The issue is how we understand “openness”, that is, in good liberal fashion as cosmopolitanism in the cultural sense, rather than the philosophical sense. On Nussbaum’s account, a cosmopolitan is at ease with people, artefacts and practices from many countries and cultures, as in phrases such as “her knowledge of French, German, Hindi and Latin made her genuinely cosmopolitan”; or “an influx of students and faculty from around the globe has transformed Euphoria State University into a cosmopolitan hub of international intellectual exchange”; or associated with travel and novel experiences, as in “our research program has collaborations with groups in numerous countries, and is on the cutting edge of the latest global developments.” The idea here is that higher education and science are by their nature universal. This is essentially correct. The university has since its inception been relatively “open” in comparison to other institutions at the time, in the sense that joining the community of students and scholars was thought to free its members

from the shackles of linguistic parochialism, clan loyalties and provincial prejudices. And universities today indeed stress the value of “openness”, “tolerance” and “dialogue”.

The problem is that this emphasis often supposes that we either learn to be liberal cosmopolitans, or we are left in the dark cellar of irrational bigotry and narrow-minded dogmatism. *Heimat und Volk, Blut und Boden*. But to argue that human beings and their institutions, including universities, have a definite place is merely to say that they are real, not virtual. They are actualized in the activities and aspirations of people, who are themselves always somewhere. We all have parents and histories; we are not mushrooms sprung from spores and spread by the winds. To know our place is to know who we are, and it is a precondition for grasping the alien and engaging in reasoned dialogue with others. The dissemination of cosmopolitan cultural capital to the benighted masses is in essence the replacement of local doxa with the code of the salon, on the assumption that the latter has achieved a higher state of moral perfection than the former. But according to what criterion? We should take care to notice that the tolerance and openness ostensibly engendered by higher education can be redolent of the principle of noblesse oblige. As is often the case when privilege speaks, the public is not invited to participate on an equal footing in the conversation.

Nussbaum deserves credit for noticing that a truly broadened perspective must be found also in more intimate contexts. Internationalization and a global point of view are not things that can be attained merely at the level of policy and politics, but must be an ongoing, daily effort on the part of individuals and institutions. We must open ourselves to the world by enlarging our cognitive and moral capacities, which, in turn, requires that we meet with people different from ourselves, who speak other languages and whose beliefs and ordinary assumptions are unlike our own. Such meetings can, of course, lead to toleration and sympathy, but can just as easily lead to conflict and dissolution. The question is what in the enriched program of study envisioned guarantees the effects sought, and how it achieves this.

It is worth considering that while “globalization” tends to be associated primarily with the free market, and “internationalism” with socialist ideals, “cosmopolitanism” is thought to be somehow “above” or “beyond” the fray of current political agendas. As we saw, it has its beginnings in Enlightenment thinkers, for whom it connoted the liberation of the individual from religious and political authority, as well as from the biased grasp of the world that loyalty to one’s own group or culture can entail. To be “cosmopolitan”, for someone like Kant, it will be recalled, was to be capable of impartiality in one’s judgments and universality in one’s reason. What a higher education can do for students is offer an intellectual experience that makes them think: actively, objectively and logically. They are to be led to see that they have assumptions, to interrogate those assumptions, and to learn to address those assumptions critically, without being told by a higher authority what ideas they should or should not embrace. Confrontation with alien thought (which can be everything from the intricacies of tax law in the EU to non-Euclidean geometry to Farsi syntax) means learning how to deal with the cognitive challenges posed by difficult tasks and texts. In principle, even if exposure to ethnic, gender, religious

and cultural diversity is surely helpful, it is not the key to cognitive and moral development.

## **At Home with Reason**

If universities have higher ambitions and deeper aims than preaching to the choir or writing handbooks for likeminded colleagues and policymakers, then we should be prepared to consider more seriously the consequences of the insight that human dignity is in the eyes of the beholder, that there can be other “dignified”, indeed rational, forms of life than that of a worldly sophisticate.

A more philosophical ideal of cosmopolitan education would take its bearings from Kant’s third Critique, i.e. the ideal that education means training in a rigorous kind of self-discipline in which the student is consistently challenged to think and think again. The first step is to get her to see that she doesn’t know what she takes herself to know intimately (for instance, her native language), and make her hungry to know more. The second is to force her to articulate what she might know very well (her local surroundings, for instance) in such a way as to make her knowledge comprehensible to others and explicit to herself. Finally, she should submit herself to the demands of coherence. As Kant points out in a footnote, even if Enlightenment might seem to be quite a simple matter, in practice it is very difficult to accomplish; it is both arduous and slow. Not to allow one’s reason to remain passive, but to attain and maintain self-legislation is something that is often accompanied by the desire to move beyond what is strictly speaking possible to know, and, importantly, there is no dearth of self-appointed authorities who will satisfy that desire. The most demanding part of enlightenment is to acknowledge that its constitution is only “negative”. Its essence is self-regulation and self-correction, nothing more. For this, it requires confrontation with a world of other minds and other thoughts, as well as laws of nature. This encounter ought to begin with what is so immediate that it is barely noticed, like the air we breathe. It is unlikely that Plato knew any other language than his mother tongue, yet we have inherited the idea of an Idea, general principles apart from any particular group or collective holding them, from him. And Kant, famously, never left Königsberg.

## **Concluding Thoughts**

The notion that there is a real referent object to the term “world-class university” only makes sense within the framework of the “global” idea of competition for status. In the context of internationalism, the good performed by the university in question would have to do with how well it succeeds in refining or “cultivating” the raw material at hand, to wit, its students. It is likely that many small rural colleges produce greater “added value” than elite schools such as Harvard or Stanford. Similarly,

from the point of view of Kantian enlightenment or “enlarged thinking”, it would be difficult to quantify “success” at all. “Enlarged” relative to what starting point, and in which respect? The aim of the reflections above is not to disavow rankings altogether, but merely to point to the very good reasons that many of us have to doubt their validity beyond the very particular interests of what is increasingly an educational-industrial complex for the production and maintenance of status and privilege.

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