

The Cosmopolitical From the Deconstructive Point of View

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HOW DOES ONE envision the ethics of subjectivity with respect to articulating a way of *being-in-the-world* given the changing horizons of a new “global community” that is cosmopolitan and cosmopolitical? Deconstruction weighs in heavily here. A deconstructive ethics implies an unconditional responsibility we bear to recognize and safeguard the difference of the other without end.

A good example of Jacques Derrida’s deconstructive ethical stance is the lecture, “The Right to Philosophy from the Cosmopolitan Point of View,” he first presented at the first International Conference for Humanistic Discourses hosted by UNESCO in Paris during the month of May 1991 (Derrida & Trifonas, 2002). The ethical ramifications of who should ask the question of “the right to philosophy” or *philosophy as thought in action or praxis* is invoked by the notion of a cosmopolitan subject. “Where, in what space and place?” is the question Derrida addresses by invoking the concept of debt and duty within institutions whose function it is to instantiate states of being that point toward an ethic of care or *being-for-the-other*. The text exemplifies the ethical moment of a deconstructive reading that works on the two-fronts of our debt and duty to recognize the past while re-visioning (it in) the future.

The analysis focuses upon how the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) represents a post-Kantian, cosmo-political institution that imbibes a practical philosophy or ethics for the global or cosmopolitan subject in a cosmopolitical world by intermingling thought and action. As a teaching machine, UNESCO presents an instructive vision of what the international community of nations, states, and peoples is and should be beyond a separation between particular interests and universal aims or goals. The combination of constation (theory) with performativity (practice) that is the heart of any institution gives rise to the possibility of re-visioning subjectivity in particular terms outlining modes of *praxis*. In the case of UNESCO, it affects representations of subjectivity according to the effects of the cosmopolitan global condition that it represents by the joining of nations and peoples from a cosmopolitical point of view.

Any institution with an educative intentionality is always already at the crossroads of a past historicity and a future history. As a teaching body, it configures itself by asking those who are part of it, are it, to ground its concepts as the keys for the “perfectability” of human being. UNESCO *predicts* a Western trajectory of thinking along a “teleological axis” with respect to the epistemologico-cultural ideal of the “infinite progress” of Being and the temporal procession of beings toward perfectability, achievable or not. Derrida anticipates a future cosmopolitan subject after metaphysics, taking place along these lines of a debt and duty to the tradition of the past traced out by the limitations of memory and its openness to an expansion of the difference of itself within the space of an interminable otherness. For what is *unthought* and therefore *untaught* within and outside of the subject always already opens the future of a history of thinking and directions of teaching that are “yet to come.”

The specific headings of principle and of practice, of ethics and of politics, that deconstruction suggests would move us beyond the opposition of Eurocentrism and anti-Eurocentrism and the binary basis for an exclusionary thinking that threatens the cosmopolitan subject from the cosmopolitical point of view. The right to knowledge—the right of knowledge and its pedagogical rites—after the hermeneutical violence of deconstruction upon the archive of Western epistemology as “the death of metaphysics” presents a wider reading of the ethical question of *being-in-the-world*. Is there any good reason as to why we should protect and conserve the past and present of metaphysics while building upon the horizons of its excesses and limitations in order to look forward to a future for a cosmopolitan subject in a cosmopolitical world? The question of what subjectivity is and how it includes the Other within the historicity of its *corpus* to betray the image of itself is a product of Western ideology. The notion of the cosmopolitical arises from an anti-utopian thrust, contrary to the ideal of a natural universalism of thought and action uniting thinking and subjectivity in the image of the global citizen. It enables us to link the problem of human rights and difference with the Derridean conception of the Kantian cosmopolitical point of view in a positive rather than a negative way via the notion of mondialization. We must remember that knowledge and knowing are articulated by the continual re-aggregation of the logic of the letter, the terms of its reading as production and reproduction, and the domain of its archive. The problem of how to go about securing both private and public “access to this language and culture, first and foremost by means of education,” involves, more or less, the working-out of the problems of subjectivity, community, and difference central to answering the question of academic privilege (who has the right to knowledge?) and the power of location (how? and why?) (Derrida & Trifonas, 2002, p. 3).

The pedagogical onus on an affable (simple, crude, vulgar) modality of cultural production and reproduction without the complexity of resistance or complications of difference fixes the parameters of an institutional ethic of response and responsibility on the conditional boundaries of knowledge and limits the horizons of new forms of thinking and research. But this reduction of the frame of reference to categorical imperatives that willfully ignore the limitations and boundaries of a project of repeating the historicity of Western education occurs only if and when the cosmopolitical nature of difference as a source for new professions of faith is not taken into account. It would be wrong to ignore the diversity within the composition of what we call knowledges and to cull a universal thinking without a diversity of knowledge and being. The emanation of the cosmopolitical view is a gathering of multiplicity in knowledge communities that articulate the ethical terms of a responsibility to acknowledge the profundity of differences within the same archive of knowledge and thinking. A call to welcome the unimaginable manifestation of many its parts and partners, nations, states, and peoples whose materiality

comprises and cannot but exceed the conceptual totality of its essence. These aspects are not unrelated insofar as such ethico-qualitative judgments require an identification of who would have the privilege and opportunity of participation regarding curricular decisions about the future of the right to education, and why.

The global diaspora of subjectivity is the open ground of a *democracy-to-come*, with a *pedagogy-to-come*, and the potentially diverging paths of its filiations, friendships, what is held close, in affinity, to the spirit and the heart, not the mind. This does not simply mean a securing of the opportunity for freedom in thinking and teaching; neither does it defer pedagogically, nor ethically, to the teaching of thinking without reference to the tradition of Western episteme. The notion of the cosmopolitical reawakens and resituates the Eurocentrism of the concept and its implications for reinscribing the “horizon of a new community” of the question and the impossibility of the question that teaches the Other to question the sources of the Self and the Other through meditations on difference (Derrida & Trifonas, 2002). This may sound strange to those who envision and portray deconstruction as a *destruction* of Western metaphysics, its institutions, and its teachings. Deconstruction breaks down the misinformed generalizations and stereotypes of a Western philosophy that leads the call for a recognition of the end of being, when it does exactly the opposite by acting upon the desire to bring the history of being into the future as a subject yet to come. This, of course, involves an ethics of practice, a teaching and a learning that does not recognize the end of subjectivity within open spaces and formations of community, democracy, and unlimited horizons of representation and otherness without end.

REFERENCE

Derrida, J., & Trifonas, P. P. (2002). *Ethics, institutions, and the right to philosophy*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

