Resisting the Pedagogical Domestication of Cosmopolitanism: From Nussbaum’s Concentric Circles of Humanity to Derrida’s *Aporetic* Ethics of Hospitality

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**The Topos of Culture in Thinking Cosmopolitanism**

Between globalism and nationalism, the hegemonic Westernization of cultures and the — no less tyrannical — indigenization of non-Western cultures, the economic logic of globalization’s inevitability and grassroots efforts to “globalize from below,” cosmopolitanism re-emerges today as a guiding ideal for envisioning and institutionalizing an international civil society. Whereas modernist debates on cosmopolitanism were fueled by antinomies such as engagement versus estrangement, patriotism versus universalism, sentiment versus detached reason, today cosmopolitanism is endorsed as a dialectic that resolves such antinomies. This dialectic reconciliation of the local and the global in the cosmopolitan ideal has been transcribed pedagogically in Martha Nussbaum’s organic figure of the concentric circles. According to this cosmopolitan figure of growth and learning, the ethical self orients itself from smaller circles of local identifications and cultural affiliations to larger circles, to reach the outer and also broadest circle of belongingness, that of “humanity as a whole.” Considering local identifications and affiliations as a “source of richness” in cosmopolitan life rather than the departure point for a journey of uprootedness towards the cosmopolitan self, Nussbaum articulates the dialectic in a regressive rather than linear manner: “Our task as citizens of the world will be to ‘draw the circles somehow toward the center,’ making all human beings more like our fellow city dwellers, and so forth. In general, we should think of nobody as a stranger, as outside our sphere of concern and obligation.”

In this essay, I explore the limits and limitations of this model of cosmopolitan concentricity, particularly the totalization of cosmopolitanism as the “heritage” that needs to be diffused inter-culturally and the banishment from ethical thought and educational philosophy of question of the Other, of borders and thresholds. The Derridean deconstruction of hospitality is introduced as an alternative way to approximate a translational model of cosmopolitanism. The main thesis is that a certain spacing, a *différence* is indispensable to the hermeneutics, ethics, and pedagogies of cosmopolitanism. More specifically, I will argue that what cosmopolitanism needs to borrow from culture is not the natural sentiment of communal identification but the ethical passion of endurance, endurance of difference; not the familiarity with and mutual respect for the other’s difference but the *différence* of an impossible codification and representation of the other in our familiar categories.

Reflecting on culture — radicalizing it, multiplying it, polluting it, uprooting it from its happy coupling with ontology — Derrida re-invents receptivity beyond the ethics of authenticity. Writing at the dawn of European unification, Derrida reflects on the heading of the “young old-Europeans”: Must they re-begin? Or must they *depart* from Europe, separate themselves from an old Europe? Or else depart again,
set out toward a Europe that does not yet exist?" Oscillating between tropes of return and departure, and subjecting the pronoun “re-” to such a repetition that it signifies fatigue rather than rebirth, Derrida’s *aporia* (*lack of a passage, a way to go; an enduring question*) depletes the code of French cultural politics, of that time, of its powerful password, “Reunion.” He proposes a definition of culture that changes the whole problematic of Europe’s heading and makes it impossible for it to retreat to tropologies of home: “*what is proper to a culture is to not be identical to itself*”:

> Not to not have an identity, but not to be able to identify itself, to be able to say “me” or “we”; to be able to take the form of a subject only in the non-identity to itself or, if you prefer, only in the difference *with itself* [*avec soi*]. There is no culture or cultural identity without this difference *with itself*.

Cultural identity and cosmopolitanism envelop each other in a double bind but not in the manner of a dialectic, not by opening up the center (same) to concentric circles of distant humanity (other). Rather, by pointing to a divergence that is *already* in place, at home. Concentricity, haunted by origins and the duties of heritage, is cancelled by self-difference. For what kind of cultural identity must we, cosmopolitans, be responsible, then? The following reflects on Nussbaum’s and Derrida’s translation of the philosophical heritage of cosmopolitanism, “translation also being,” as Derrida repeatedly notes, “an enigmatic phenomenon or experience of hospitality, if not the condition of all hospitality in general.”

**THE COSMOPOLITAN HERITAGE: THE PEDAGOGICAL “HUNGER” OF MARTHA NUSSBAUM**

This form of cosmopolitanism is not peculiar to Western traditions... But for people who have grown up in the Western tradition it is useful to understand the roots of this cosmopolitanism in ancient Greek and Roman thought. Brothers and friends can no longer look at each other, or each at himself, without a “weariness,” perhaps a “mistrust,” which does not suppress friendship but gives it its modern color and replaces the simple “rivalry” of the Greeks. We are no longer Greeks, and friendship is no longer the same. Nussbaum’s cosmopolitan turn also marks a methodological rupture from her earlier approach to the de-sedimentation of Antiquity’s energies. Bernard Williams turn to ancient Athens is set aside as a pessimistic paradigm that “contemplates the horrors.” Contingency and unpredictability which in the *Fragility of Goodness* were valorized as constitutive for the fragility of the human condition and the richness of human goodness now give way to the stoic goals of self-command, “taking charge of one’s own life through reasoning.” The enormous influence of Kantian ethics on Western intellectual tradition, criticized in the *Fragility of Goodness* for its neglect of the tension between deliberation and mutability of the human condition, is now re-valORIZED and used to posit a certain version of the human, that of the rational human being. The image of Kant as the Nietzschean thinkers’ “arch-foe” is parodied and, instead, the “debt Kant owned to ancient Stoic cosmopolitanism” is traced in his readings on natural law and his cosmopolitan ideas.

In this recovery of debts and roots, the historical continuity and *autochthony* of cosmopolitanism in the Western philosophical tradition is established. From the Cynics to the Stoics, from the Stoics to Christianity and the Kantian “kingdom of ends,” cosmopolitanism draws energy from Classical tradition and spreads branches...
throughout the Enlightenment and beyond, to our days, to acquire a new force through the weakening of the nation state. The recovery of cosmopolitanism’s classical roots is understood as the return to an always larger home. Antiquity is treated as the ultimate translating interface, a system of thought that can receive and accommodate almost everything without risking its own identity: the Greeks were already multiculturalists before multiculturalism (that is, Herodotus’ cross-cultural inquiry);\textsuperscript{11} Plato’s characters Thrasymachus and Callicles had “already” grasped, before Foucault, power’s infusion with the articulation of ethical and social categories;\textsuperscript{12} the writings of Marcus Aurelius emit the same “boundless loneliness” as the writings of his “American followers” Emerson and Thoreau.\textsuperscript{13} The urgency to establish the continuity and “our” belongingness to the cosmopolitan tradition is reaffirmed through the performativity of patriotic addresses to the audience, addresses that invoke a common identity, a common concern for the nation, and a common vision for a prosperous future in a global economy: “nation of students,” “our campuses,” “rigor in the nation,” “a democracy such as ours.” Why this urgency to recover continuities and to establish a performative sense of “we”? The search for cosmopolitan resources from classical Antiquity to the Enlightenment, Nussbaum concedes, aims to bring to the political world “lessons” and resources of “practical application”: to give the world a paradigm from the Greco-Roman world to inform its engagement with the political life in a time of ethical violence, genocidal war."\textsuperscript{14}

In \textit{Cultivating Humanity}, Socratic citizenship is reconstituted in terms of cross-cultural understanding and cultivation of the imaginative capacity to see the world from the cultural viewpoint of the others through a curriculum on cultural diversity. Multicultural education is accommodated as a comparative cultural study, which, in essence, according to Nussbaum, is liberal education in that it leads to the same end: it “liberates the mind from the bondage of habit and custom.” The cosmopolitan gadfly has to sting the student’s narrowness and naturalness of cultural perspective by arousing the student’s interest in cross-cultural comparisons. However, the risk of identity regression from cultural recognition to sectarianism and from cultural diversity to cultural relativism is systematically localized, anticipated or diagnosed, in \textit{topoi} of non-Western cultures. Non-Western others are usually depicted as the tragic carriers of culture. They belong to culture, are immersed in \textit{their} culture; “we,” however, are only its [culture’s] traffickers, merchants or thieves. But, in an epoch of economic globalism, if “our efforts in business are to be successful”\textsuperscript{15} and if debates on human rights are to make progress, “we” also have to be its [culture’s] students. “Socratic Self-Examination,” the “soul” of the American democratic tradition, is bridged, conceptually and pragmatically, to world citizenship” through Anna’s “passage” to China.\textsuperscript{16} In order to climb the ladder of a corporate career in an age of globalization, Anna, a political science graduate, has to perform well at transnational crosscultural fronts. But nothing in Anna’s education had prepared her for this crossing of the concentric circles. From the perspective of Nussbaum’s liberal universalism, sluggishness of thought becomes the political and economical equivalent of cross-cultural illiteracy. Would “she” (Anna, or any other American graduate going cosmopolitan, or any American business going global) not have been better off if she had known the “other” (that is, non-Western culture) better?
In an effort to vernacularize Socratic pedagogy, Nussbaum’s cosmopolitan proposal often collapses the problem of cultural translation to knowing “some rudiments about others.” Others are excluded as subjects and partners from this political culture of ethical reasoning. Tainted as essentialist, either prone to indigenization or codifiable into rudiments of culture, they join the cosmopolitan discourse only as the objects of a cultural study that infuses the cosmopolitan quasi-Western project with the non-Western perspective. The other reveals to the reflective inquirer the conventions and tropologies of culture, thus enables him or her to denaturalize the cultural conventions that might obscure ethical judgments. Culture remains an external tool to cosmopolitanism, a therapist for its suppressed sentiments and a therapeus [servant] for its pedagogies: providing a pool of examples and figures for its rhetorical articulation and primers of the exotic for the study of others.

**HOSPITALITY: THE COSMOPOLITAN ASCETICISM OF JACQUES DERRIDA**

Derrida’s response to the tradition of cosmopolitanism unfolds like a tracing that subverts any origin or delivery of lessons. Presencing is not possible. In fact, his engagement with concepts that have traditionally belonged to the thinking of cosmopolitanism — for example, hospitality, host, stranger — implicates a double philosophy: philosophizing about the response to ideas as a philosophical endeavor and philosophizing about the response to the Other as a cosmopolitan ethics. It would be impossible to trace a philosophy of cosmopolitanism in his writings if one overlooked the “how” of his thinking. For his philosophizing on cosmopolitanism constitutes itself a cosmopolitan invention: “The question of translation is always the question of hospitality.”

Deleuze and Guattari warn against the didactics, pedagogical or political, of any cosmopolitanism that claims to restore the universal society of friends. Friendship, constituent to both philosophy (love [philia] of wisdom [sophia]) and cosmopolitanism (love of humanity), “must reconcile the integrity of the essence and the rivalry of claimants.” Derrida’s thinking on cosmopolitanism is infused with this double movement of friendship (and philosophia) as “amorous love” that unites and as “rivalry” that cancels such an amorous conquest or absorption of the Other. Thus friendship bestows an agonistic character to both cosmopolitans, the society of friends, but also to the philosophy of cosmopolitanism itself since this philosophy cannot be understood as the possession of a concept but only as its approximation, that is, a philosophy that renders only singularities in its approximations to the concept of cosmopolitanism: “Concepts are not waiting for us ready-made, like heavenly bodies. There is no heaven for concepts. They must be invented, fabricated, or rather created and would be nothing without their creator’s signature.”

Cosmopolitanism, heir to the Greek concepts of philia (friendship), xenos (stranger), xenia (hospitality), and the Kantian concept of Wirtbarkeit (hospitality), must be inherited by Derrida not as a gift (such as a philosophical tradition, cultural heritage, foundation for a juridical program) but as the duty for a distrustful receiving.

How then does Derrida “approximate” cosmopolitanism? How does he invent, or re-invent the philosophical resources of cosmopolitanism? Derrida rejects humanism as the moral ground of cosmopolitanism. He refers to “cosmopolitics” as a
program, an agenda, or even a regime that is conducted as a series of treaties between states, reconfirming the power (and borders) of both the nation state and those who dominate global economics and politics in the name of international law. Derrida configures our heading towards cosmopolitanism as a heading oriented to something that is not present yet (conceptually or politically), “oriented by something which is more than cosmopolitical, more than citizenship,” something that which would redefine politics beyond citizenship and the “cosmopolitical” itself. His own contribution to this heading is to receive concepts that belong to the “heritage” of the Western tradition (for example, hospitality, friendship, forgiveness) but have also suffered a certain sedimentation in the politics and self-projection of the Western or the European identity as humanitarian. Tracing the multiple loci of these concepts’ singularization (the Hebraic tradition of cities of refuge, Greek tragedy, Kant, Pauline Christianity) while at the same time subjecting them to a semantic deconstruction, Derrida reveals (stages) at the heart of their “politico-semantics” a logical contradiction, and envelops this contradiction with an ethical imperative that is at once double and contradictory.

Though the concepts’ displacement is playful, their choice is deliberate and their critique politically arduous. They are chosen in order to address critically a specific historical context, that is, the porosity of globalization and the steps towards its containment: nationalisms and fundamentalisms, the re-emergence of national competitiveness and national security (what Kearney calls “a cordon sanitaire around the nation state”), European enlargement and the new typologies of others, xenophobia and the “regulation” of immigration. Derrida’s purpose is to initiate a renewal of international law by delivering an “audacious call for a genuine innovation” in the history of the right to asylum or the duty to hospitality and by exposing the “perverse” and “hypocritical” implementation of the Law of hospitality (for example, the politico-juridical distinction between economic and political refugees). My focus here will be on how Derrida radicalizes cosmopolitanism by responding specifically to the concept of hospitality in his “translation” of Kant’s *Perpetual Peace*.

Tracing the semantico-political co-implications of hospitality’s double meanings and double duties, Derrida turns to Kant’s *Perpetual Peace*. Already the question of conditionality, of conditional or unconditional hospitality, presents itself in the title of the “Third Definite Article”: “Cosmopolitan Right shall be limited to Conditions of Universal Hospitality.” The ethical imperative is stated in the opening paragraph of the article:

As in the foregoing articles, we are concerned here not with philanthropy, but with right. In this context, *hospitality* means the right of a stranger not to be treated with hostility when he arrives on someone else’s territory. He can indeed be turned away, if this is done without causing his death, but he must not be treated with hostility, so long as he behaves in a peaceable manner in the place he happens to be.25

The imperative of hospitality is bound, already, by certain conditions as its formulation mimes the stylistics of clauses and articles as in a peace treaty. First, the right to hospitality is protected “so long as he [guest] behaves in a peaceable manner.” Second, “[t]he stranger cannot claim the right of a guest to be entertained,
for this would require a special friendly agreement whereby he might become a member of the native household for a certain time. He may only claim a right of resort." In other words, cosmopolitan right extends to welcoming but not to residence.

Whereas other theorists of “the cosmopolitan” perceive this Kantian formalization of cosmopolitan right as a juridico-political prototype (for example, Habermas, Bohman and Lutz-Bachmann), Derrida sees in that only a singular formulation. In its clauses of conditionality, this formulation applies the nation state’s law of identity and violates the universal Law of hospitality, that is, the unconditional welcoming of the Other. In the political context of today’s xenophobia, the opening of Europe to new member states and the concurrent pressure for “control of” immigration, the discernment between benign and evil others, this specific formulation of conditionality needs to be questioned. Opening up Wirtbarkeit (the word Kant uses for hospitality) to a semantico-political questioning, Derrida writes:

Wirt (Wirtin in the feminine) is at the same time the patron and the host [hüt], the host* who receives the Gast, the Gastgeber, the patron of a hotel or restaurant. Wirtlich, like gastlich, means “hospitable,” “welcoming.” Wirtshaus is the café, the cabaret, the inn, the place that accommodates. And Wirt governs the whole lexicon of Wirtschaft, which is to say, economy and, thus, oikonomia, law of the household <where it is precisely the patron of the house — he who receives, who is master in his house, in his household, in his state, in his nation, in his city, in his town, who remains master in his house — who defines the conditions of hospitality or welcome; where consequently there can be no unconditional welcome, no unconditional passage through the door.> 27

The law of hospitality, affirmed as the law of a place (the law of the household, the law of the nation, the law of language), subsumes the ethical alterity of the Other. Welcoming is formalized into the right of hospitality on the condition that the host remains the master of his own home, the subject whose household authority is enacted in the delineation of thresholds, the de-termination of borders and the delimitation of others: their identification, their classification, their filtering, and selection.

Would this conditional cosmopolitanism not legitimize the unconditional assimilation and colonization of the Other? “At bottom, before even beginning,” contemplates Derrida, “we could end our reflections here in the formalization of a law of hospitality which violently imposes a contradiction on the very concept of hospitality in fixing a limit to it, in de-termining it.” 28 Yet reflections on hospitality do not end here, at Kant, in the formalization of this algorithmic conditionality, this comfortable contradiction. Here, the indeterminacy of deconstruction, its ability to subvert its own ends (conclusions and limitations), appears to contradict critics’ claims that textual indeterminacy is coterminous with an impasse of the political and the cancellation of any positive ethical and political proposals. Reversing the criticism that in the Derridean deconstruction of limits “we can see another case of reification: the ethical becomes the indeterminable,” 29 we could argue that the indeterminacy of deconstruction helps to open up cosmopolitanism to the experience of a new ethics but also to the thinking of a new subject: “To the pacified reason of Kant, Derrida opposes the primary haunting of a subject prevented by alterity from closing itself off in it its peacefulness.” 30 The question now is not what clauses
of conditionality can secure the sovereignty of this subject in his or her role as a hospitable patron but rather, how the insomnia of absolute hospitality — perverse and perversible in its unconditionality — re-constitutes (does not cancel) the subject as an-other guest, one who can offer hospitality only by enduring the experience of being deprived of a home:

The absolute or unconditional hospitality I would like to offer him or her [stranger] presupposes a break with hospitality in the ordinary sense, with conditional hospitality, with the right to or pact of hospitality. ... To put it in different terms, absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner (provided with a family name, with the social status of being a foreigner), but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I give place to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names. The law of absolute hospitality commands a break with hospitality by right, with law or justice as rights.

Moving from the “right to hospitality” to the absolute “hospitality of justice,” Derrida’s obsessive displacement of hospitality defies a stable definition of host and stranger and a demarcation of their roles and rights which would reintroduce the circle of conditionality in the manner of a pact, or conditional clause, that we find in the Kantian formulation of cosmopolitan right. This is not a mere reversal of roles. To speak of the host as hostage to the stranger prevents couples like subject and object, self and other from forming a dialectic, a binary or even an ethic of recognition and reciprocity. Decoupling the other and the stranger, the different and the enemy — a coupling that underwrites scapegoating and other rituals furnishing collective identity — places difference within the subject. As the question of cosmopolitanism expands to an experience of philosophical obsession and ethical insomnia, the question of the stranger also becomes the question of the home, of the subject, of being at home in the other. We shift from the vertical I of autonomy to the responding I whose response is conditioned by a state of being hostage (here I am, responding), as well as a new concept of home: not as mastery but as ipseity, passivity, receptivity (Levinas). Hospitality is also about ipseity, how one inhabits the home.

How then does one inhabit a home? After all these circles of deconstruction does Derrida’s insomniac cosmopolitanism renounce mastery only to terminate back home in search of comfort and peace? If the articles of Perpetual Peace were too definite to sustain the arrival of the Other as surprise, astonishment and invasion, this turn to home marks the ultimate withdrawal from politics. Unless the home is also redefined as an-Other place. Here, in this estranging articulation of hospitality, Derrida approximates a new cosmopolitan politics by inventing a politics of the home. What does it mean to open my home when ipseity, my being at home, enables and cancels at the same time absolute hospitality? Assimilation in the form of a political program would be absolute violence. But, at the same time, a certain acculturation is inevitable in what Levinas would call the “enjoyment [we would modify this to include ‘the shared enjoyment’] of elements” which structures interiority: “if I want to open my house of course my bed is your bed, you want to use my bed? — it is still a bed, you have to get used it; this is what I eat, I can give you what I eat; you have to get used to it.” Similar to the contradiction of the Latin hostis (host and enemy) that hospitality harbors within its body, it is this welcoming’s
torsion with its subject’s erosion. It cannot preclude the possibility that other, greater than myself, could also colonize me, “overwhelm the space of my house”.

I should respect the singularity of the Other and not to ask him or her that he respect or keep intact my own space or my own culture. That’s what I said at the beginning about the unconditionality. I have to accept if I offer unconditional hospitality that the Other may ruin my own space or impose his or her own culture or his or her own language.

The experience of home is now reconstituted as an experience of thresholds between unconditional hospitality and the laws of hospitality. There is no house or interior without a door or windows that establish the possibility of its opening to the other: “The monad of the home has to be hospitable in order to be ipse, itself at home.” But on the other hand, there can no longer be hospitality without finitude, without the inviolable immunity of home: “Wherever the home is violated, wherever at any rate a violation is felt as such, you can foresee a privatizing and even familialist reaction, by widening the ethnocentric and nationalist, and thus xenophobic, circle.” At a time of globalization, when flows and border-crossings restructure human interconnectedness, inspire the grammar of cosmopolitan visions and eulogize cross-cultural literary as the pharmakon for patriotism’s perversions, Derrida is warning against the perversion of hospitality by absolute porosity and the cancellation of limits between the private and the public effected by global technologies (tele-technologies and bio-technologies).

APORIAS

Going back to our “home” now, to the aporias [aporia as inquiry and difficulty of passage] of education. How does one teach cosmopolitanism? Definitely not only as the heritage, a lesson, a civics course, a curriculum supplement, a moral attitude. If hospitality, as Derrida argues, is culture itself and not simply one ethic amongst others, if “ethics is coextensive with the experience of hospitality,” then cosmopolitan education should avoid good conscience and the subsumption of responsibility under a program. One cannot develop cosmopolitan thinking simply by cultivating ties of recognition and concern for other human beings or by inspiring sympathy for distant lives through narrative imagination. Territorializing cosmopolitan education to such a list of competences and inter-cultural experience to knowledge of the other, like “cosmopolitics,” remains oriented to the “challenges” of global connection but also faithful to its economical logic: it works within the logic of efficiency, advantage competitiveness, quantification; it preserves its alibi of humanitarianism. The Derridean problematic on hospitality ruptures globalization, its borders but also its flows, through the experience of aporia. Aporia, as “the coming without a pass,” would not mean paralysis between incommensurable values or tasks but the continuous negotiation of contradictory duties: the unconditional welcoming of the Other and the necessary condition to organize educationally this hospitality, which means laws, rights, conventions, borders. Such an antinomy is not an ethical impasse but the condition for responsibility and decision, what prevents ethical thinking from sliding to good conscience and praxis to technical application. It means to cultivate respect for the Other and accept the possibility of a certain assimilation by the Other. But, at the same time, it means to translate while enduring the essential incompleteness of such a translation. Can education, today, endure this cosmopolitan aporia in reflecting on its own genealogies, philosophies and ethics?


3. Ibid., 9.


12. Ibid., 40.

13. Ibid.


15. Nussbaum, Cultivating Humanity, 52.

16. Ibid., 50-51.

17. Ibid., 11.


20. Ibid., 5.


22. Ibid.


26. Ibid.

27. “Hostipitality,” 4. Comments made by Derrida during the symposium are indicated by < >. An asterisk after a word or phrase indicated that it appears in English in the original.

28. Ibid., 6.


31. Derrida, Of Hospitality, 25
32. Derrida and Bennington, “Politics and Friendship.”
33. Derrida, “Hostipality,” endnote 20, 17
34. Derrida and Bennington, “Politics and Friendship.”
35. Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 61
36. Ibid., 53.