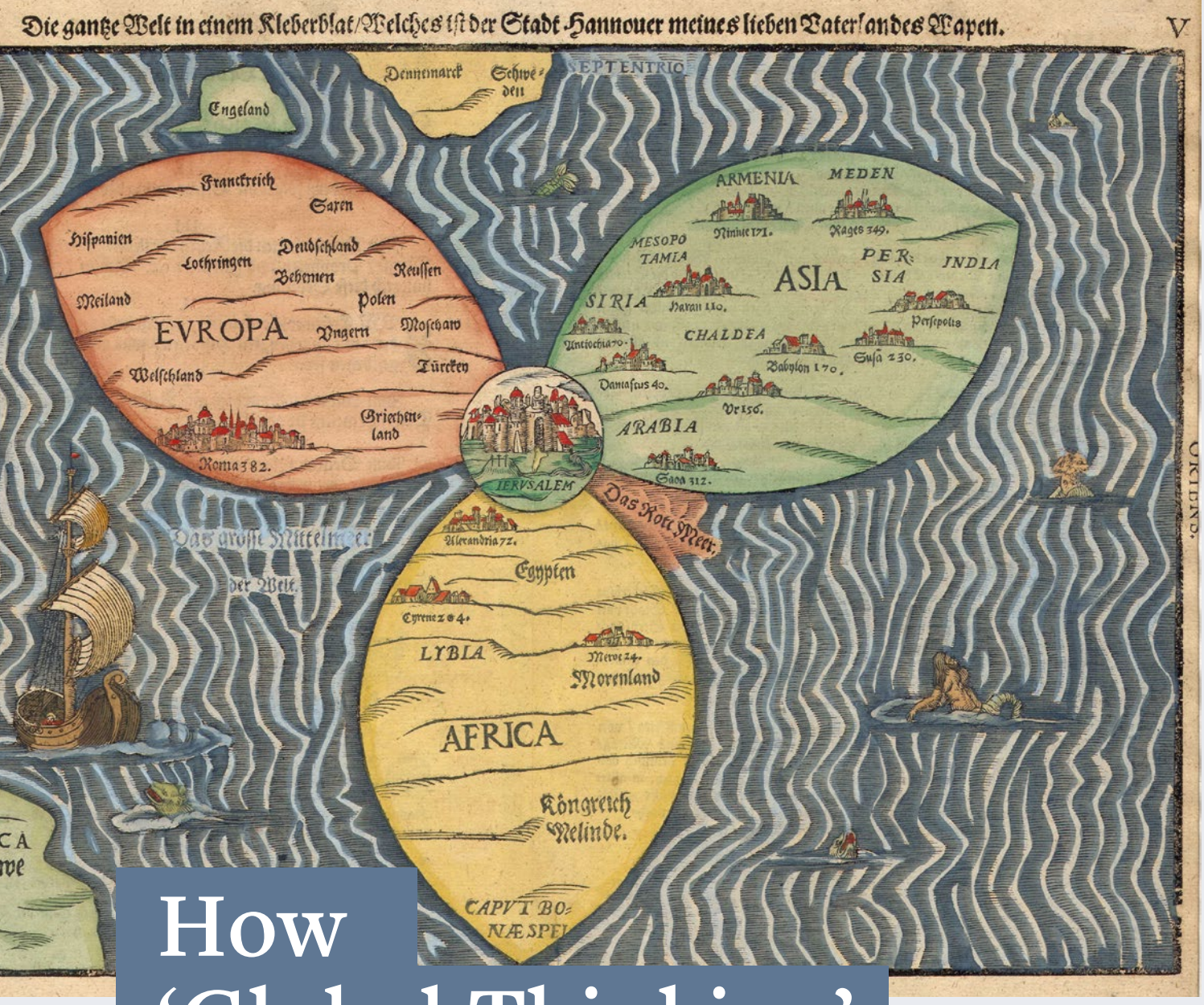

How ‘Global Thinking’ Really Works

How can we gain a truly global perspective? In the push towards cosmopolitanism and world citizenship, how should we value the local? **Sharon Rider** explores three notions of the global ...

This is an edited extract of Sharon Rider’s longer James Martineau Memorial Lecture ‘On Boundaries and Bonds’, delivered at the University of Tasmania in March 2019.

Educational institutions throughout the world, universities especially, devote a great deal of time, effort and resources to 'internationalisation'. Aside from practical needs (student recruitment, better positions in rankings, 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 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. 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 different ways of understanding what is meant by 'global thinking'.

The currently dominant conception, 'globalism' properly speaking, is essentially concerned with *economic* development. The governing ideal in this conception is that of the market, in which free competition among individuals, institutions and regions 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, in which states and societies aim to inculcate in people the sense of solidarity between individuals, groups and peoples required for a broadening of the rights and duties associated with citizenship. The ideal is one of human freedom, to be advanced by fostering values of mutual recognition and equality. A third conception is *philosophical*. This is the ideal of the *universal as an intellectual virtue,* at the heart of the inception of universities, which culminated in the Enlightenment.

The relationship between these three types of 'global thinking' is sometimes uneasy; however, there is a common denominator: the connection between the global and the proximate. My point is simply this: *when we aim to achieve globalisation, we should be clear about what it is that we want.* While the economic, political and philosophical conceptions *can* overlap, they can also come into conflict with, or even undermine, each other.

Higher Education in the Global Market

Are our educational institutions changing who they are and what they do in order to become players in a global market? Evidence suggests that they are. Universities are certainly increasing their global activities: opening branch campuses abroad, or 'offshore delivery'; increasing the recruitment of international faculty; advertising at home and abroad to attract international students (and tuition fees); and emulating global businesses to become more efficient and adaptable (strategic plans, internationalisation strategies, innovation hubs). The idea of the university as a global market player is altering the way universities describe their missions, with slogans such as to become 'world leading' or 'world class'. This development is generally applauded by observers: global, national and regional policy actors, student associations and the media welcome intensified attention to 'consumer demands', and support the view of the university as an actor in the 'knowledge economy' on the assumption that the market mechanism will ensure better quality at lower cost, and all the more so when the competition is most fierce, which is to say, 'global'.

This market mechanism, fundamentally, is the notion of *competition*. But what does competition in the case of

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academic activity (research and teaching) really mean, and what are its consequences?

While policy stresses global competition with other universities worldwide, in fact many, indeed *most*, universities are regional, and primarily serve local populations, organisations and institutions. This is particularly clear in the case of educational programs, which are locally embedded and serve local and national labour markets. Research, on the other hand, is, and has always been, international. International networks, collaborations and disciplinary ties have boundaries of their own, which do not correspond to national borders.

The so-called global competition between universities is in the main related to creating, enhancing and maintaining status; one speaks of a 'reputation race'. But while competition for reputation can very well be global, the competition for resources – funding, in the first instance, but also for students and faculty – remains largely a national or a regional matter.

Internationalism as Educational Ideal: The Politics of Human Perfectability

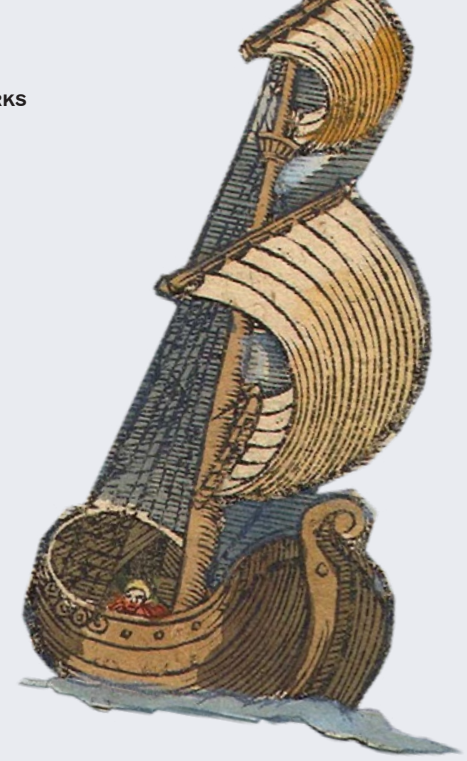
The notion of higher education providers and academic activity becoming a form of competition between isolated players in the abstract 'space' of the world market is at odds with a previously popular ideal of education that I call 'internationalism'.

By 'internationalism', I mean theories that emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries in conjunction with a period of radical political, cultural and socio-economic change in European society: continuous wars until 1871; revolutions in industry, trade, communications, technology and science; state-building; major economic fluctuations; a demographic explosion; urbanisation; and violent uprisings. These all had far-reaching effects on the development of political and educational theories and practices.

From the middle of the 19th century until after World War II, socialist and liberal internationalists alike shared the Enlightenment's faith in historical progress, and saw the struggle for national political and social reforms as a first crucial step. Free trade, economic integration and capital–labour cooperation within a system of collective bargaining were seen as tools for raising the living standards of workers at the national level, and preserving peace at the international level. Trade unions tried to strengthen liberal forms of democracy, and, along with many liberals, they believed that progress, modernity and development could best be guaranteed by supranational structures (such as those set up for European unification), in close cooperation with national labour unions and international organisations.

Internationalism was a product of the Enlightenment. In the case of socialism, the main source of influence was Marxism (and through it, German Idealism), while liberal internationalism was indebted to Kant, Bentham and Mill, especially the utilitarianism of the latter two. What they shared was a commitment to the ideals of scientific and social progress, and faith in the intrinsic potential of human beings to transform the world according to the dictates of a *universal reason*, the cultivation of which would demand equal opportunity for education to achieve these ideals, which amounted to nothing less than human emancipation. Universal education and the adoption of the principles of reason, the enemy of tradition and superstition, would lead to progress on a worldwide scale toward the realisation 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 impeded the continuation of the liberal or socialist reforms which would otherwise culminate in the realisation of human potential everywhere. 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. Education was thus a guarantor of both peace and prosperity. The spread of liberal democracy, through its institutions and through education, would be a vehicle for the realisation of human freedom everywhere.



According to Kant, the greatest prejudice of all is to see the world and its workings as beyond the grasp of human reason, including and especially your own.

Progressive liberal thinkers 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. Education was a key sector for reforming not only social institutions, but also the minds and hearts of the people who constitute them. Employers and workers would no longer be rivals, but *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. At the international level this meant equality of opportunity for participation in commerce and for the development of the world's resources. 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 vocational or professional training at the university level, together with students destined by virtue of birth and upbringing to become lawyers, doctors and parliamentarians. 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.

We should understand current calls for education for 'global citizenship' combining political, economic and moral elements in this historical context.

Liberal Thinking, Liberal Education

Let us now consider the idea of education as the cultivation of the *capacities* 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 capacity for 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? Let us begin by noting what Kant seems to have regarded as 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 the *Critique of Judgment:* the intention and capacity to (1) think for yourself; (2) put yourself and your thinking in the place of everyone else; (3) 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 (having your thoughts come to you ready-made and accepting them as is) belongs to *prejudice*. According to Kant, the greatest prejudice of all is to see the world and its workings as beyond the grasp of human reason, including and especially your own. This picture, Kant says, renders us passive, enslaved by and obligated to the authority of others. A person whose mind has been enlarged, on the other hand, however limited their natural gifts, can be educated to disregard the 'subjective private conditions of his own judgment, by which so many others are confined, and

to 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 one's own but are not necessarily the starting points of others, which is to say that they are contingent and can reasonably be called into question. The third maxim, that of consecutive thought, 'is the most difficult to attain, and can only be achieved through the combination of both the former, and after the constant observance of them has grown into habit.' Kant summarises: 'We may say that the first of these maxims is the maxim of understanding, the second of judgment, and the third of reason.'

Kant thinks that the faculties of the human mind can be cultivated through the right sort of education. Such a cultivation is first and foremost directed toward the actualisation of the human potential for autonomy (self-legislation) in the individual, the community and, ultimately, the species. The point of education is to be *enlightened* rather than *informed*; to learn *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 writes that the core of moral education is to make the student aware that *he himself can think*.

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. 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. This carefully considered and well-devised program of cultural development cannot be the work of a few individuals, but is an accomplishment requiring the involvement of the 'whole human race'. It is education that makes possible responsible action, autonomous judgment and conscientious decision-making, in public affairs as well as in private life, in matters both theoretical and practical.

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Local Culture and World Citizenship

Now some, such as Martha Nussbaum, think that this requires 'transcending the inclination of both students and educators to define themselves primarily in terms of local group loyalties and identities.' But how is this transcendence to be achieved? It is tempting to think in terms of an accumulation: the more languages, cultural references, experiences of studying or working abroad that one has amassed, the more easily one can see things from a variety of points of view. Here I think we tend to be misled. The sheer fact of having studied Russian, or spent a summer on an internship at an orphanage in Laos, or learnt about the beliefs and fate of the Cathars under the Inquisition does not in and of itself constitute the capacity for self-correction. Cosmopolitanism as the accumulation of a certain set of manners and skills is, after all, one way of life among others, and in that respect no more or less delimited than the accumulation of another set of manners and skills – say, those that make for an able and reliable hunting mate in Northern Sweden: knowledge of the terrain, a sharp eye, the capacity to communicate succinctly in the local dialect, patience, etc. Learning languages, histories and literary or artistic canons, or even exposure to different cultures, does not in itself bring about a universal point of view.

What advocates of globalism – understood as education for world citizenship – fail to notice is that 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 young 'white, American 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 be grown and can't be grown given the weather conditions and soil type in the area in which they live; they are unaware of the labours involved when their grandparents first learned to speak English, and are clueless as to what decisions were made on what bases and by whom when their hometown was recognised 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 neighbours next door.

They are, as it were, '*culturally disinherited*'; they've lost the cultural capital of self-sufficiency so important for liberal thinkers, among other things, because for many years schooling has taken so little of genuinely local conditions and practices into account. 'Place' has, as it were, no or little 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 when you start out. To talk, for instance, of 'European culture' doesn't say very much, since 'Europe' isn't so much a place as an idea. A *place* has a particular climate, specific material and social conditions, distinct forms of interaction and patterns of behaviour, often its own dialect and idioms.

Sophisticated, urban, intellectual, cosmopolitan life in the 21st century is one cultural form among others, and as such cannot serve as the template in which everything meaningful about ethical matters can be contained. Many of us involved in education, culture, politics, research and media are prone to consistently forget this. We tend to think that theorising about tolerance and conceptions of productive activity instils understanding on a par with actually *having to be* tolerant due to one's living environment, or *having to* work under particular conditions. As a consequence, we are inclined to understand liberal education (i.e. the production of 'truly free and self-governing citizens') as 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'.

We all have parents and histories; we are not mushrooms sprung from spores 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.

Cosmopolitanism Begins at Home: Or, On Knowing One's Place

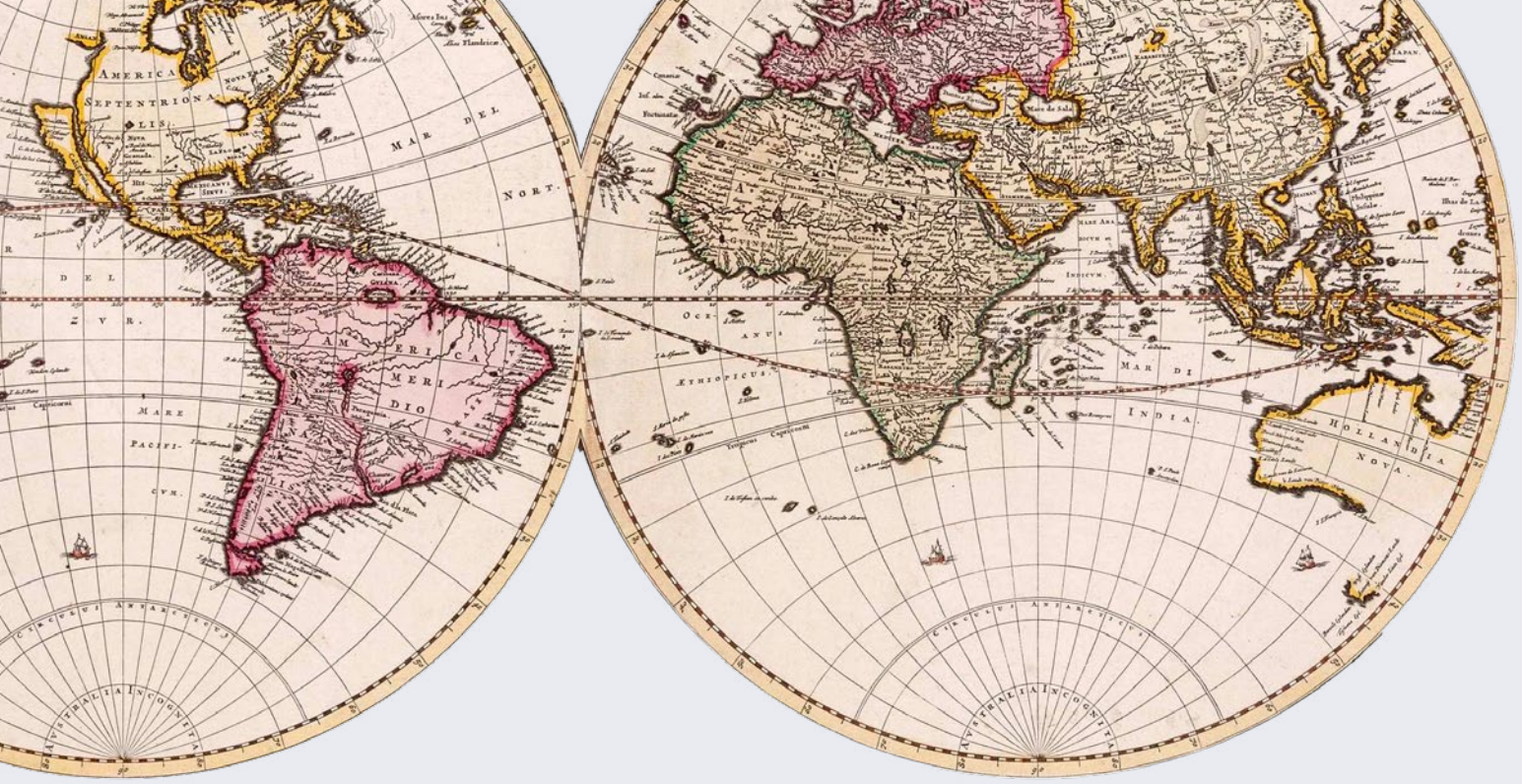
Liberalism as it is applied to education is problematic if it assumes that *rootedness* is a *problem* rather than a possible *solution*. That assumption seems to suggest that nothing is to be gained by just looking around one's own corner. Our own specific place in the world, our home, has nothing to teach us about ourselves or others; rather, it is defined as inherently parochial, provincial, confined and confining.

As an example of an alternative notion of enlarged thinking, one might consider Timothy Larsen's *The Slain God: Anthropologists and the Christian Faith*, where it is argued that anthropologists EE Evans-Pritchard and Mary Douglas were more able to recognise 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 due to their own deep 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, within a tradition, receives too little attention.

The issue is how to understand 'openness'. For someone like Nussbaum, openness is a matter of *culture*: 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'. The idea here is that higher education and science are by their nature universal. The university has since its inception been relatively 'open' in comparison to other institutions, 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'.

But we should be wary of the supposition that *either* we 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. 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 actualised 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 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.

To be 'cosmopolitan', according to Kant, was to be capable of impartiality in one's judgments and universality in one's reason. What a higher education can do is offer an intellectual experience that makes students *think: actively, logically and self-critically*; to see that they *have* assumptions, to interrogate those assumptions, and to learn to address those assumptions disinterestedly, 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 Australian tax law to non-Euclidean geometry to Gaelic syntax) means learning how to deal with the cognitive challenges posed by difficult tasks and texts. That is really all, and it is quite enough. The material can be anything at all that actually matters.



At Home with Reason

A *philosophical* ideal of cosmopolitan or global education ought to take its bearings from Kant's third critique: 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 Socratic: 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 step 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. Its essence is simply self-regulation and self-correction, nothing more, which 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 does not require the accumulation of exotic experiences or intellectual artefacts.

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. Aristotle, the father of science, was one of those deadwood academics who remained and taught for twenty years at the seat of learning where he had received his training, the Academy. He didn't leave to establish international networks, but for political reasons – to avoid persecution. And Kant, famously, never left Königsburg. When asked why he never travelled, he is reported to have replied that he didn't have time. He was too busy learning about the world. ▼

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Image pp. 42 & 45: Heinrich Bünting, *Die ganze Welt in einem Kleberblat (The entire world in a cloverleaf)*, 1581

Image p. 46: Abraham Ortelius, *Maris Pacifici*, 1589

Image p. 49: Detail from Nicolaes Visscher, *Orbis Terrarum Nova et Accuratissima Tabula*, 1658