

The humanities in deconstruction: Raising the question of the post-colonial university

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ABSTRACT

Derrida is, perhaps, the foremost philosopher of the humanities and of its place in the university. Over the long period of his career he has been concerned with the fate, status, place and contribution of the humanities. Through his deconstructive readings and writings he has done much not only to reinvent the Western tradition by attending closely to those texts which constitute it but also he has redefined its procedures and protocols, questioning and commenting upon the relationship between commentary and interpretation, the practice of quotation, the delimitation of a work and its singularity, its signature, and its context – the whole form of life of literary culture, together with textual practices and conventions that shape it. From his very early work he has occupied a marginal in-between space – simultaneously, textual, literary, philosophical, and political – a space that permitted him a freedom to question, to speculate and to draw new limits to humanitas. Derrida has demonstrated his power to reconceptualise and to reimagine the humanities in the space of the contemporary university. This paper discusses Derrida's tasks for the new humanities (Trifonas & Peters, 2005).

1. Fundamentalisms and the need for a deconstructive humanities

An appreciation of Derrida's work can shed light on the growth and clash of fundamentalisms and on the 'new moralisers' who based their authority on an unforgiving literalism and humanism. The spirit of this paper is directed against the new moralisers be they fundamentalist of any persuasion (Christian, Muslim or Jewish), old unreformed classical liberal humanists, new humanists, secular or Christian, still searching for a unified theory of human nature on which to hang their sermons, or simply those neoconservative humanists who having rallied against an amorphous and unnamed nihilistic 'postmodernism' falsely attributing the doctrine to Nietzsche or to his heirs. The new moralisers constitute a revival of an exclusive and foundational humanism demonstrating all the political and spiritual dangers of a set of essentialist beliefs in human nature – a unified theory or theology of our spiritual nature and origin – from which is derived the 'who' and what 'we' are, the moral code 'we' should follow, and both who belongs to the 'we' and how those who belong should treat non-believers. In the USA, UK and elsewhere, the term 'the new moralisers' has been consistently applied to the social conservatives who have brought a new vision of morality based on a view of human nature and made it central to public policy, making determinations of individual virtue fundamental to welfare entitlement (Super, 2004). This shift in public policy paradigm has also been accompanied by the growth of conservative politics that has drawn upon the politicisation of fundamentalist Christian groups going back to Ronald Reagan's administration.



The term *fundamentalism* itself originates in the late nineteenth century as a movement by evangelic Christians, against modernism, to affirm a set of fundamental beliefs, namely ‘the five fundamentals’ – the inspiration of the Bible by the Holy Spirit, the virgin birth, the belief that Christ’s death was an atonement for sin, the bodily resurrection and the historical reality of Christ’s miracles. The new fundamentalism in American politics began with Robert Grant’s Christian Cause in the mid 1970s and Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority in the 1980s. Fundamentalism now has been used to describe both Islamic fundamentalism and Jewish fundamentalism (Shahak & Mezvinsky, 1999; Ruthven, 2004; Sim, 2004). In each case, these fundamentalisms are a reaction to an atheistic modernism and advocate a return to Christian, Islamic, and Judaic values, law, beliefs and practices. In each case this also implies a set of literalist convictions in relation to scripture or sacred texts and a belief in the unmediated truth of the Word. Literalism has a privileged place in these belief systems: language is always taken in a non-figurative sense. In its strictest sense scriptural literalism is a denial of allegory, parable or metaphor. On this basis fundamentalism often implies a set of beliefs in an onto-theological story of creation, man’s nature and place, and the biological and social roles of men, women, and children. Scholars have applied the notion also to non-secular groups such as the militant animal rights activists, fundamentalist nationalisms or ethnicities such as Le Pen’s National Front in France, and even, neoliberals as “market fundamentalists” (Sim, 2004; Thompson, 2006). Part of the task of a deconstructive humanities, or ‘humanities in deconstruction’, in my view, is to dismantle, disassemble and undermine the fundamentalist and foundationalist readings of ‘Man’; as a set of critical practices deconstruction in the humanities has a responsibility to preserve humanity and humankind at the expense of Man – of accounts that ascribe universal necessities to human nature on supernatural or superstitious grounds that prohibit or permit no interpretations either of the Word or the diversity of cultures.

Derrida, both the man and his work, represents an ongoing struggle against all fundamentalisms, against all easy definitions, dogmas, and literalisms that proclaim truth and universalism on the basis of religious and supernatural explanations of the origins of the world. His own background born into a Sephardic Jewish family near Algiers immediately calls into question his own identity as ‘French’, ‘Jewish’ and ‘Algerian’. He experienced anti-Semitism in the French Algerian school system still under Vichy laws; the marginalisation and “feeling of nonbelonging”, as Brian Reilly (2006: 498) points out, “would come to affect all areas of his life”. Reilly (2006: 498) continues:

With the tools he acquired while living in the margins of identity, Derrida offered radical critiques that challenged the stability of origins; he displaced and transgressed border by refusing exclusive definitions.

His historical formation and progressive self-understanding stands against all fundamentalisms and foundationalisms. He recognised with Nietzsche the inescapable autobiographical elements that insinuate themselves into interpretation marked by the author’s signature.

2. Representing Derrida

How does one represent Derrida and his writing? The linguistic notion of representation is central to Derrida’s work and to his critique of Western metaphysics. He is suspicious of the view that language represents the world, at least in any straightforward sense. But ‘representation’ is also important to him as a political principle indicating the ethical and political stakes in presenting an argument or representing a people, a text, an image, or (one’s relation to) another thinker – the so-called ‘politics of representation’. Not least, the word ‘representation’ captures his concerns for the genres of autobiography and confession, of philosophy as a certain kind of writing, of the ‘personal voice’, and of the signature. Derrida was also careful of journalists and tended to refuse most invitations for interviews, especially by the popular press. Paradoxically, *Points ... Interviews, 1974–1994* (Derrida, 1995), a collection, consisting of twenty-three interviews given over the course of the

last two decades, provides a good introduction to Derrida, (see especially his “The Work of Intellectuals and the Press”).

Perhaps, more than any philosopher before him, and from his earliest beginnings, Jacques Derrida has called attention to the form of “philosophical discourse” – its “modes of composition, its rhetoric, its metaphors, its language, its fictions”, as he says – not in order to assimilate philosophy to literature but rather to recognise the complex links between the two and to investigate the ways in which the institutional authority of academic philosophy, and the autonomy it claims, rest upon a “disavowal with relation to its own language”. (His doctoral thesis, never completed, based on an investigation of Joyce was entitled “The Ideality of the Literary Object”). The question of philosophical styles, he maintains, is itself, a philosophical question.

Deconstruction, the term most famously associated with Derrida, is a practice of reading and writing, a mode of analysis and criticism that depends deeply upon an interpretation of the question of style. In this, Derrida follows a Nietzschean-Heideggerian line of thought that repudiates Platonism as the source of all metaphysics in the West from St Paul to Kant, Mill and Marx. Where Heidegger still sees in Nietzsche the last strands of an inverted Platonism, tied to the metaphysics of the will to power, and pictures himself as the first genuinely post-metaphysical thinker, Derrida, in his turn, while acknowledging his debt, detects in Heidegger’s notion of Being a residual and nostalgic vestige of metaphysics. He agrees with Heidegger that the most important philosophical task is to break free from the ‘logocentrism’ of Western philosophy – the self-presence, immediacy and univocity – that clouds our view and manifests its nihilistic impulses in Western culture. And yet ‘breaking free’ does not mean overcoming metaphysics. Deconstruction substitutes a critical practice focused upon texts for the ineffable or the inexpressible. It does so, not by trying to escape the metaphysical character of language but by exposing and undermining it: by fixing upon accidental features of the text to subvert its essential message and by playing off its rhetorical elements against its grammatical structure. Heidegger’s strategy for getting beyond ‘man’ will not do the trick: Derrida suggests that “a change of style” is needed, one which will “speak several languages and produce several texts at once”, as he says in an early essay, “The Ends of Man” (Derrida, 1982: 135).

Derrida’s work reflects and engages with the tradition of Western metaphysics going back to Plato promoting an understanding of the critique of *phallogocentrism* as a response to the Western metaphysical tradition. Derrida systematically engages with the Western tradition with a humanity, passion, generosity, and with patient and stunning scholarship. Phallogocentrism, (along with logocentrism and Eurocentrism) refers to the privileging not just of European culture over all others but more deeply to the Western metaphysical tradition that holds to a hierarchy of values sustained by a binary logic that cannot do otherwise than privilege one term over another (reality/appearance, speech/writing, presence/absence, identity/ difference, life/death). It is the general economy of an inherited humanism propping up all the ideological remnants of Man in his essence and all of the substitutions played out since Nietzsche that deconstruction seeks to destabilize, unmask and undermine. Deconstruction, going beyond *Abbau* and *Destruktion*, works to undo “the metaphysics of presence” which holds that thought and speech (the *logos*) is the privileged center through which all discourse and meaning are derived. *Gott ist tot* (“God is dead”) is the shorthand that Nietzsche uses to proclaim this deepening of humanism. The “madman” in *The Gay Science* (1974) pronounces:

God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? (Section 125)

God can no longer act as a source or foundation for moral authority so what now can conceivably anchor the system of values? Nietzsche’s observation heralds a new secularism in Europe and the end of the effective history of the Church. At least, this is how Heidegger interprets it. The



proposition “God is dead” as he says “has nothing to do with the assertion of an ordinary atheism. It means: The supersensible world, more especially the world of the Christian God, has lost its effective force in history” (Heidegger, 1985: 475). What would it mean to talk of Europe without God, or that the Christian God had become unbelievable, especially after the experiences of the WWI and WWII? On what could a replacement code be based? Moral law derivable from our own rationality? The beginning of liberal humanism and the turn to subjectivity with Descartes and Kant? A kind of naturalism advocated by Hume, that is, a natural sympathy for others? Or should one give up on the search for foundations altogether and deny that moral codes and beliefs have any objective foundation? Can they only be explained psychologically?

3. Nietzsche’s legacy in Derrida’s humanism

Nietzsche’s legacy is still very much a part of the contemporary intellectual landscape and he generates diametrically opposite appropriations of his work that define the context for the present debate about the role and status of the humanities. All the works of major philosophers have their ‘right’ and ‘left’ interpreters and defenders – this is true of Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche and Wittgenstein (indeed, of Plato himself). The modern quarrel in the humanities has been read often as a struggle over Nietzsche by a ‘right’ Leo Strauss and a ‘left’ Jacques Derrida. Peter Levine (1995: xviii–xix), for instance, argues that “Strauss and his followers are essentially duplicitous writers, holding an exoteric, conservative doctrine for the herd, and an esoteric, postmodern position for their *übermenschlich* readers”. He argues that Alan Bloom and the Straussians are not genuine conservatives for they do not hold that the Western canon contains the accumulated wisdom of the Western tradition. By contrast, Levine argues that Derrida occupies the opposite end of the spectrum. He sees Derrida as a thinker who ‘saves’ Nietzsche from Heidegger’s reading of him as the “last metaphysician” only to herald Nietzsche as the first non-metaphysical thinker who helps to fashion Derrida’s deconstructive practice recognising that logocentrism or “the metaphysics of phonetic writing” is “a contingent but inescapable value” (1995: 169).

Nietzsche is certainly central to the ‘quarrel’ in the humanities today and in a real sense we can take Strauss and Derrida as representing opposite ends of the spectrum. Allan Bloom was drawn increasingly to criticise deconstruction not only on the basis of its interpretation of Nietzsche and to develop a conception of literature that differed from Derrida’s. Bloom (1987: 379) described deconstruction as a “predictable ... fad” based on a “cheapened interpretation of Nietzsche” and as “a dogmatic, academic nihilism of the Left” (Bloom, 1990: 28). In this connection we should not forget that Nietzsche, Derrida and deconstruction, Foucault, and ‘post-modernism’ were at the very heart of American debate surrounding the humanities during the chairmanship of the National Endowment for the Humanities by Lynne Cheney (wife of the Vice President) from 1986 to 1993. *American Memory: A Report on the Humanities in the Nation’s Public Schools* (Cheney, 1987) warned about the failure of schools to transmit knowledge of the past to future generations, and *Telling the Truth* (Cheney, 1996) examined the alleged effects of post-modernism and relativism in academia and politics.

Nietzsche’s critique of morality and in particular his attack on prevailing conceptions of moral agency based on notions of free will, self-transparency and moral sameness (one code applying universally to all), begins to work historically to erode the moral certainty that invests fundamentalist forms of Christian humanism and acts as a source of critique for those theorists who wish to expose the illusion of bourgeois morality or the thin veil of ignorance that cloaks religious teachings. Existentialism, in Sartre’s famous phrase, is a humanism, and many who followed Nietzsche and/or Kierkegaard tended to give up on an objective or universal account of moral law or behavior to embrace a mode or way of being. Meaning is a product and outcome of existence so no formal account can be given in advance and certainly not an account derived from the *nature* of human beings or indeed any pre-given framework of ideas. Human existence cannot be approached in the same way as we approach things in terms of concepts or categories that we apply to

understanding the external world. The question of self-description or self-examination or self-interpretation is crucial such that I cannot be dissociated from an account of what I am.

I present Derrida as a *profound* humanist who, committed to the value of truth and the promise of humanity, endeavors to steer us away from its easy ideological fabrications that ultimately support only a very tawdry and temporary cultural image of ourselves in one particular historical period (Peters, 2008). I present him so because he stands in a tradition not only within both contemporary modern traditions influence by Nietzsche-Heidegger nexus and the immediate French tradition dating from Kojève's lectures on Hegel, but also in terms of the immediate inheritance from Sartre and his associates as well as Levinas, Blanchot, Althusser, and his many contemporaries including Deleuze, Lyotard, Kofmann, and Foucault. Clearly, one has to say that he stands also in the modern tradition from Descartes and Kant, and, indeed, the tradition all the way back to Plato. I do not want to suggest a unity or origin of tradition but perhaps sustaining threads of a complex skein and we must then also embrace the Hebraic tradition and various modern literary movements as well as those in the European avant-garde. By calling Derrida a profound humanist I mean to indicate that Derrida engages directly and systematically with the question of humanism – what it is to be human and its limits and boundaries in technology and animality – and with its continuance by some means. Thus, a continuance which is sought through its encompassing of new extensions and mutations of rights in international law, in democracy to come, in the right to philosophise, in the author/ writer/reader, in tasks for the new humanities, in an ethics of the Other – of hospitality – in the changed conditions for scholarship and media, in the promise of Europe in providing an alternative vision for world institutions and the governance of globalisation.

4. Surpassing structuralist thought

The American reception of deconstruction begins with the essay “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” that Derrida delivered to the International Colloquium on Critical Languages and the Sciences of Man at John Hopkins University in October 1966. It was a prestigious event involving the participation of renowned French thinkers such as Jean Hyppolite, Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, Tzvetan Todorov, Lucien Goldman, Georges Poulet and others. In the Preface to the proceedings, the editors Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (1970: x), describe the conference as “the first time in the United States that structuralist thought had been considered as a cross-disciplinary phenomenon”. Of the proceedings, only a paragraph in Macksey's Concluding Remarks signals the importance of Derrida's “radical reappraisals of our [structuralist] assumptions” (1970: 320).

In the now classic essay “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” Derrida (1978: 279–280) questions the “structurality of structure” or notion of “center” which has served to limit the play of structure. He writes:

... the entire history of the concept of structure . . . must be thought of as a series of substitutions of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations of the center. Successively, and in a regulated fashion, the center receives different forms or names. The history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphors and metonymies. Its matrix ... is the determination of being as *presence* in all senses of this word. It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence – *eidōs, arche, telos, energeia, ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject) *aletheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth.

He suggests that conceptual resources for the “decentering” of structure, of the transcendental signified, can be found in Nietzsche, Freud and Heidegger and he distinguishes two interpretations: one, Hegelian in origin and exemplified in Lévi-Strauss' work, “dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign” and seeks the “inspiration of a new humanism”; the other, based on “Nietzschean *affirmation*, that is the joyous affirmation of the play of the world and of the innocence of becoming, the affirmation of a world of signs without fault, without truth,

without origin which is offered to an active interpretation”, passes beyond man and humanism (Derrida, 1978: 292). As he explains, “The *paradox* is that the metaphysical reduction of the sign needed the opposition it was reducing. The opposition is systematic with the reduction” (1978: 281). By defining itself against the philosophies of consciousness (e.g. existentialism), structuralism participates in shaping itself in relation to those philosophies and can never succeed in surpassing them.

5. ‘What humanism is possible?’: Philosophical extension and ethical revitalisation

It is not entirely surprising that at the beginning of the twenty-first century two towering figures dedicate themselves to defining the meaning of humanism and attempt to renew humanistic scholarship: Jacques Derrida, an Algerian ‘French’ Jew, and Edward Said, a Palestinian Christian. Both immensely literate men are responsible, though in different ways, for altering the course of scholarship in the humanities and for introducing a new set of critical practices that mark out a philosophical extension and ethical revitalisation of the meaning of literature, philosophy, and criticism. Through “orientalism”, a concept that laid bare the ethnocentrism of Western assumption about the East, Said at once extended the work of Foucault and Derrida into the arena of post-colonial theory, demonstrating how exoticised and romantic images disguised the imperial basis of colonial rule. He argued how orientalism functions to harbor a persistent Western bias and prejudice against Arab Islamic peoples and their cultures. In essence his work exposed the systematic alliance between the Enlightenment and colonialism while embracing a secular humanism himself that denied comfort to fundamentalists of all persuasions.

In 2001, when asked “What humanism is possible?” Said responded:

... the difficulty to begin with is that humanism in many ways is discredited. It has participated in, for example, systems like apartheid and colonialism that were exported to the non-European world by European thinkers and powers who thought they were doing humanism’s work – civilizing the natives and bringing the benefits of Western technology to the peripheries. And of course in this process they brought racial discrimination, racial hierarchies, and systems of exploitation, which were established in the interests of a humanism that said, ‘We are the bearers of an advanced culture and we should have the benefits of that even if it means subjugating lesser people.’ The whole concept of ‘lesser’ civilizations and so on is, unfortunately, one of the burdens that humanism has to bear.

In his posthumous work, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, Said defines humanism in a deconstructive way as “the practice of participatory citizenship” whose “purpose is to make more things available to critical scrutiny” and thus disclose its “human misreading and misinterpretations of a collective past and present” (2005: 22). Said confirms that a form of humanism is still possible and his radical humanism draws on a form of democratic criticism based on self-knowledge, self-criticism, and the attempt to emancipate, enlighten and educate.

Derrida, by comparison, also took on political work even although his detractors painted him as someone removed from the world of political action. Said himself dismissed Derrida’s playfulness and insisted on the historical embeddedness of the text. Perhaps, Said was more committed to the rationalist tradition, to the individual, to philology, and to Vico’s notion of self-knowledge and rhetoric. Yet both were displaced and both early on experienced the colonial condition. Both agree that humanism is not only still possible but it is imperative that we must search for viable forms that revitalise the humanities and reclaim for it a more active role in the public sphere.

There is no doubt that the humanities needs new tasks and Derrida has sought to provide a programmatic picture: that the humanities must also contextualize itself, escaping its local origins and trajectories, and broaden its account to take in the radical pluralism existing as part of a new globalism that also recognises the claims of local autonomy made by first peoples, indigenous peoples, sub-state cultural minorities, international religious movements, youth cultures, gender

groups, and all sorts of political associations. Here the question of self and other looms large, as do questions revolving centrally around notions of ethics and politics. Derrida provides us with the rejuvenation of ancient concepts of friendship, the ethics of hospitality, forgiveness, the gift, the invitation that outlines his account of responsibility to the other.

6. The university without conditions

For Derrida (2005) the unconditionality of the university *without conditions* is deemed to have close links to the 'humanities' to the extent that it relates to two historical ideas: the rights of man (human rights); and crimes against humanity. The university without conditions does not exist, but it presupposes a place of critical resistance, a form of dissidence. This is its strength and also its vulnerability: what enables it to be bypassed or recuperated by instances of power. Within the university, professors profess, perform acts of profession. Derrida relates profession to "confession" in terms of the general structure of any performative – promising, witnessing, etc. – and in order to relate professing to an act of faith, which in turn relates to the structure of literary fiction that takes the form of a performative rather than a constative set of utterances, as well as to what he calls a "politics of the virtual". He also alludes to the proliferation of forms of confession currently evident in public and private discourse.

The task of the humanities to come would be "*ad infinitu*, to know and to think their own history in terms of professing, the theology and history of work, knowledge and faith in knowledge, the questions of man, of the world, of fiction of the performative, of the 'as if', of literature, and of the oeuvre, etc." (Derrida, 2005: 21). He advances seven programmatic (and telegrammatic) tasks for the humanities which I present in extremely truncated form. These new humanities would treat:

1. The history, idea and figure of man, especially in terms of the traditional opposition between man and animal, via the rights of man and the idea of crimes against humanity;
2. The history of democracy and the idea of sovereignty – that of the humanities themselves, but also the question of international law, the limits of the nation-state, and relations between man and woman;
3. The history of professing, the profession and the professoriat (and confession) as it relates to democracy (citizenship, the nation-state and the theological idea of sovereignty);
4. The history of the concept of literature, its canons and its links with fiction, the performative 'as if', and its concepts of *oeuvre*, author, signature, national language, etc.;
5. The history of profession, the profession of faith, professionalisation, and the professoriat and the production of performatives and 'oeuvres' (are we witnessing the end of a certain figure of the professor?);
6. The history of that very relation between performative and constative, to begin with via Austin, but also in terms of the limits of the Austinian distinction;
7. To the seventh point, which is not the seventh day, I arrive finally now. Or rather I *let perhaps* arrive at the end, now, the very thing that, by *arriving*, by taking place or having place, revolutionises, overturns, and puts to rout the very authority that is attached, in the university, in the Humanities:
 - i. knowledge (or at least to its model of constative language);
 - ii. the profession and profession of faith (or at least to its model of performative language);
 - iii. to the *mise en oeuvre*, the putting to work, at least to the performative putting to work of the 'as if'.

(He says in an earlier version: "Where there is a performative, an 'event' cannot arrive; only the impossible can arrive. This idea has been discussed in terms of invention, the gift, forgiveness, hospitality, justice, friendship, etc. in recent work, and is not without relation here to the 'perhaps' or 'as if' of professing of/in the humanities to the extent that that implies an exposure to the unforeseen limit, outside, future." Derrida, 2005: 21).

I take it that the legacy of Nietzsche's critique of modernity for Derrida is to point us towards recognising the twin dangers to the university and to understanding German idealism and the Kantian idea of the university in a critical sense within a context transformed by global capitalism. This theme is creatively explored in terms of the performative acts of profession and the humanities as the site and production of performative 'works' in the sense of *oeuvres* rather than *travail*. Nietzsche's critique also, I think, impels us to analyse the different nationalist forms and historical models of the university in their own native traditions, not least in order to understand their colonial and post-colonial manifestations. Perhaps, more affirmatively, Nietzsche's legacy offers some signposts for the future by steering us back, against the anti-traditionalism of modernity to ruminate over and question our historical sources of cultural renewal – not only Oxford, Paris and Bologna, but also Athens and Alexandria – that we might in future define different institutions upon a re-evaluation of old values, or new institutions out of different values.

In this brief review it is important to take stock of the contemporary discourse of *Internationalisation* in the university. Internationalisation is a set of processes in search of a theory and/or concept of internationalism yet to be articulated. Internationalisation most often figures as a discourse of strategy with an emphasis on 'how to' questions rather than a reflective discourse examining political ends or purposes. Yet internationalisation as a set of processes has changed over time, most recently reflecting changes in the political economy of higher education and the global economy. There are different forms of internationalisation that differ according to colonial past, geopolitics, and global position so we should talk of 'internationalisations' (in the plural). In this respect we might talk of internationalisation before globalisation. Internationalisation took place in the ancient world with first academies in Pakistan, India, Egypt, China and Persia (*Takshashila, Nalanda, Al-Azhar, Yuelu, Gandishapur*) in the seventh and ninth centuries BC that attracted students from all over Asia and the Middle East. The Academy was established by Plato in 387 BC (but remember also Kos, Rhodes and Alexandria) and traveling 'itinerant' scholars – Sophists (Protagoras, Gorgias, Prodicus, Hippias) wandered about Greece teaching rhetoric. The first wave of internationalisation took place in Europe during the period of the establishment of the medieval university (Magnaura, 849; Salerno, 9th century; Bologna, 1088; Paris, 1100) and cathedral schools established by papal bull.

Translation can be considered as a form of internationalisation with the spread of texts into Arabic during the 'Golden Age' (750–950) of Muslim scholarship and into Latin with great revival of Greek texts fuelled by proliferation of texts from the East in fifteenth century Italy exerting an influence on sixteenth century Britain. A history of internationalisation in the ancient world needs to take into account a complex set of movements that emphasise the interrelationships between trade, conquest and travelling scholarship, including, for example, at the following moments: the Hellenisation of Syria and the foundation of Gandishapur as a centre of learning (how Greek science passed to the Arabic world); Christianity as a Hellenising force and Christian Syriac writers, scholars, and scientists; the Nestorians and the Monophysites; the Indian influence, Alexandrian science, the sea route to north-west India and Buddhism as a possible medium spreading west; Khalifates of Damascus and Baghdad (762) and early Arabic translators (*Abu Mahammad Ibn al-Muqaffa', Al-Hajjaj Ibn Yusuf Ibn Matar Al-Hasib, Yuhanna Ibn Batriq, 'Abd al-Masih Ibn 'Aballah Wa'ima al-Himse, Abu Yahya al-Batriq, Jibra'il II, Abu Zakariah Yahya Ibn Masawaih*) who translated Buddhist and Greek texts, including Euclid's *Elements*, Aristotle's *Poetica*, Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*, Galen's texts, etc.

At the same time we must take account of the complex processes of colonisation based on the export of the form of the university, resistance to the colonial form, and later not only indigenisation of the university but also the indigenous university.¹ How might the development and humanisation of the new humanities – which grows out of a Eurocentric culture – and now is modulated according to the new keys of digitalisation and virtualisation (even as Derrida says “mondialisation”), make room for the humanity of other cultures? How might such unconditionality of the university restyle the concept of man, add to the history of truth, and contribute to producing new events to transform the colonial and post-colonial university into places of resistance?

Note

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1. I am thinking of the ‘Zapatista’ University near San Cristobel in Chiapas I visited briefly in 2006 and also the Maori universities in Aotearoa/New Zealand. See, for instance, Te Whare Wananga o Awanuiarangi that carries a Mihi on its website with the following “We commit ourselves to explore and define the depths of bicultural knowledge in Aotearoa – to enable us to rediscover ourselves, to know who we are, to know where we come from and to claim our own place in the millennium ahead. We take this journey of discovery, of reclamation of sovereignty; establishing the equality of Maori intellectual tradition alongside the knowledge base of others. Thus, we can stand proudly together with all people of the world”. See <<http://www.wananga.ac.nz/>>

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