

UNIVERSITIES AS COMMUNITIES OF DIFFERENCE

Las universidades como comunidades de la diferencia

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If universities are communities, then the communities they comprise must be inclusive of difference. This inclusivity, I argue, is central to the pedagogic practice of reasoning together that is the *raison d'être* of the secular humanist university. The predominance of the elite research-led universities —the prestige value of which is sustained and promoted through institutional «league tables» and world-wide «ranking exercises» —should not blind us to the importance of the university as a place of teaching and learning. It is this idea of the university as a community unconditionally committed to the dialogical exploration of difference that provides the university with its ethical authority —its «ethos of critical responsiveness», which, as William E. Connolly argues, radically disturbs the «traditional virtues of the community» based on assumptions regarding «the normal individual». In a world of cosmopolitan difference that defies «any fixed code of morality», the capacity for ethical deliberation is all important. Our prime responsibility as teachers and intellectuals is to provide the resources necessary for interpreting this new world in a way that recognises its newness and its potential for natality and new beginnings. We must seek to develop a pedagogy that enables us to reason together —not to reason against one another, but with one another in the disinterested pursuit of the common good. The university, I argue, is a place primarily concerned with realising and activating that capacity through the practice of pedagogy. (See Nixon, 2012a; 2012c; 2008).

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«The ethos of critical responsiveness ... pursues an ethic of cultivation rather than a morality of contract or command; it judges the ethos it cultivates to exceed any fixed code of morality; and it cultivates critical responsiveness to difference in ways that disturb traditional virtues of community and the normal individual.»

Connolly (1995: XXIII-XXIV)

Introduction

If universities are communities, then the communities they comprise must be inclusive of difference. This inclusivity, I argue, is central to the pedagogic practice of reasoning together that is the *raison d'être* of the secular humanist university. The predominance of the elite research-led universities —the prestige value of which is sustained and promoted through institutional

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The hermeneutics of globalisation

The global inter-connectivity of human life means that working together towards collective solutions is much more difficult and much more crucial than it was in the past. Our networks of inter-connectivity are no longer knowable and bounded communities, but boundless spaces the full communicative potential of which is unknowable. The emphasis on technical know-how (*techne*) and propositional knowledge derived from theory (*theoria*) ill-prepares us for confronting the collective problems we are experiencing and the collective solutions we are seeking. In this paper I argue not only that we *can* learn to reason together, but that we *must* learn to reason together —and, crucially, that the university is one of the places within which this essential capability of deliberation, or what Aristotle termed *phronesis*, can and must be sustained and developed.

Understanding, argues Hans-Georg Gadamer (2004), is not the result of our having already achieved a common language. Rather, it is the ongoing process of discovering and rediscovering such a language. «Finding a common language»,

as he puts it, «... coincides with the very act of understanding and reaching agreement» (389): understanding is dialogical and dialogue is premised on the possibility of mutual understanding (Nixon 2012a). From this perspective our increasingly globalised world presents us not only with economic, political and social challenges, but with a huge hermeneutical challenge: how in a world of difference are we to engage in conversations that are both constitutive of, and conditional upon, shared understanding? Indeed, the economic, political and social terms within which debates on globalisation are invariably couched may serve to obscure its impact on how we understand our world —and on how, in turn, that understanding impacts upon the economic, political and social construction of that world. How are we to learn to live together in a world of incommensurable difference? My starting point, in this paper, is how we might conceptualise pedagogy in such a way as to address that question.

Almost all the problems human beings now face are collective problems —problems, that is, that cannot be resolved by individuals working in isolation. They are what a group of charitable organisations in a recent report entitled *Common Cause* refer to as «bigger-than-self» problems —problems, that is, «where the “return” on an individual’s *personal* effort to help address this problem is unlikely to justify his or her expenditure of resources in helping tackle the problem» (original emphasis) (WWF-UK, 2010: 8). These are problems that can be resolved not by any appeal to private gain, but by reclaiming a notion of the public good and of the collective gains that result from that reclamation (Nixon, 2011a; 2011b).

Such problems —economic, environmental, religious, and political— are, as Martha C. Nussbaum (2010: 79-80) argues, problems that require both collective and global understanding:

«They have no hope of being solved unless people once distant come together and cooperate in ways they have not before. Think of global warming; decent trade regulations; the protection of the environment and animal species; the future of nuclear energy and the dangers of nuclear weapons; the movement of labor and the establishment of decent labor standards; the protection of children from trafficking, sexual abuse, and forced labor. All these can only truly be addressed by multinational discussions.»

The lack of collective and global understanding can have immense consequences. For example, Sandy Gall (2012), the British journalist, author and former news presenter, has shown how there is a vicious circle linking the drugs problem as manifest on the streets of, say, Barcelona, London, Madrid and Paris to the poppy fields of Afghanistan and the widespread and deep-rooted corruption engendered in that country by the hugely lucrative heroin trade. Quoting Antonio Mario Costa, former executive director of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, he estimates that «drugs and bribes are the two largest income generators in Afghanistan: together they amount to about half the country's (licit) GDP» (Costa, 2010, quoted in Gall, 2012). The corruption, in turn, fuels and sustains the terrorism, with the drugs funding the terrorists and the terrorists protecting the drug traffickers. «[I]t is not possible», concludes Gall, «to treat the Taliban insurgency and the opium trade as separate issues». Echoing Gretchen Peters, he argues that what is needed is «a comprehensive, holistic strategy» that is «global in scope, reach and purpose» (Peters, 2009, quoted in Gall, 2012: 144).

The point is that our problems are increasingly not only collective problems, but also globally collective problems requiring globally collective solutions: problems which at every level of impact—the individual, inter-personal, institutional, national, and international—are experienced

globally. The collective solutions will emerge not from any totalising consensus, but from a willingness to reason together and in doing so to acknowledge and respect our differences. «People love homogeneity and are startled by difference», Nussbaum (2008: 362) writes in her defence of religious equality; but it is the willingness to be «startled by difference» that finally wins through in the long haul towards collective solutions: the collective, open-ended argument that constitutes deliberative democracy and locates within it mutual respect for our shared human dignity. Within a deliberative democracy reasoning together is ordinary and commonplace—as opposed to extraordinary and exceptional—and the language of deliberative democracy is similarly attuned to the vernacular. It is a common language (Nixon, 2004).

So, how might we conceive of pedagogy in such a way as to enable us to address this hermeneutical challenge? What would pedagogy look like if it were conceived as a response to that kind of question? And what, then, would be the implications for pedagogic practice?

The dimensions of practice

Pedagogy is, first and foremost, a practice. Insofar as it is a practice, it is *social*: it is what happens when practitioners act within a social context that recognises and values their actions. Insofar as it is social it is inter-connective in its processes and cosmopolitan in its outreach. Those actions, collectively understood as having a collective purpose, constitute a practice. Pedagogy is in part the social glue whereby society coheres around particular norms. But because that cohesion relies crucially and increasingly on the recognition of different values—values that resist and even oppose cohesion—pedagogy also defines itself in critical relation to those norms. Pedagogy inflects two ways: towards consensus and towards dissensus. As consensus, it is centrally

concerned with how dissensus is comprehended and integrated into a comprehensive and shared mode of understanding; as dissensus it is centrally concerned with resisting any such comprehensive and shared mode of understanding and with refusing foreclosure.

Located within a broader framework, this is the tension between equality and liberty: equality inflecting towards the homogenous; liberty inflecting towards the heterogeneous. But, of course, life is not quite as simple as that. We have to understand the social dimension of pedagogic practice as a kind of ongoing quarrel with that rather too easy dichotomy. Equality does not have to focus on sameness; liberty does not have to focus on the individuality of the individual: equality can take cognisance of difference and liberty can encompass collectivity. What the political theorist Chantal Mouffe (2005: 117) writes of democratic politics is true, also, of pedagogy conceived as democratic practice: «the crucial problem is how to transform *antagonism* into *agonism* ... to provide the framework through which conflicts can take the form of an agonistic confrontation among adversaries instead of manifesting themselves as an antagonistic struggle between enemies» (original emphasis). How one addresses that problem, and whether or not one perceives it to be a problem, depends in large measure on the tradition within which the practice of pedagogy is framed.

All practices must reproduce themselves over time and, if they are to survive, across generations. Practices, as well as being social, are also *historical*. This continuity is achieved through traditions of practice whereby the «goods» intrinsic to that practice —dispositions, understandings, know-how— are passed on. These traditions become institutionalised over time, but their relation to the institutions with which they become associated may vary considerably: some become central to the continuity of a particular tradition, while others may be peripheral and/or provisional. Chess could probably

survive without its chess clubs, but medicine as currently practiced would be unsustainable without hospitals. Pedagogy as a practice is loosely attached to various institutional settings, but is tightly embedded within institutions specifically designated as institutions of education and of higher education.

In order to enable practices to reproduce themselves, traditions of practice and the institutional frameworks within which they operate must be responsive to changing circumstances and when necessary and appropriate adapt accordingly. This openness to change necessarily brings with it discontinuities and disjunctions without which traditions of practice close in on themselves and eventually close down. However, those same traditions of practice also require continuities and consistencies without which they would risk complete dispersal and eventual disintegration. This ongoing process of nurture and renewal is essential for the sustainability of any practice whether it be farming, plumbing, or indeed pedagogy. The historical dimension of practice necessarily extends towards openness and receptivity on the one hand and towards closure and containment on the other.

The social dimension: dissensus and relationality

On the social dimension, pedagogy struggles with the problem of how in a complex and interconnected world to acknowledge the conflicting demands of both dissensus (in respect of commitment to value) and consensus (in respect of commitment to action). This is what Mouffe (2005) terms «the democratic paradox». In *The Return of the Political* she explains this paradox in the following terms:

«A pluralist democracy is constantly pulled in opposite directions: towards exacerbation of differences and disintegration on one side; towards homogenization and strong

forms of unity on the other. I consider ... that the specificity of modern democracy as a new political form of society, as a new “regime”, lays precisely in the *tension* between the democratic logic of equality and the liberal logic of liberty. It is a tension that we should value and protect, rather than try to resolve, because it is constitutive of pluralist democracy» (original emphasis) (Mouffe, 1993: 150).

Mouffe argues that what is required is civic engagement and that what, in turn, civic engagement requires is value pluralism: «we need to make room for the pluralism of cultures, collective forms of life and regimes, as well as the pluralism of subjects, individual choices and the conceptions of the good» (151). This has important consequences not only for politics but also for education. Value pluralism, she maintains, can only be sustained «by developing and multiplying in as many social relations as possible the discourses, the practices, the “language games” that produce democratic “subject positions”. The objective is to establish the hegemony of democratic values and practices» (151). The hegemony of consensus and homogeneity is overturned by that of dissensus and heterogeneity.

The sense of belonging to a community need not obliterate—or overwhelm—this commitment to value pluralism. However, it frequently does so, not least because it demands conformity to a particular notion of «the normal individual»—of a personal identity that is defined by, and largely determined by, the norms of the community. Communities that value difference and privilege dissensus acknowledge what Amartya Sen (2006) has called «the plurality of identity» and, in doing so, work towards the ultimate harmonisation of difference: «the main hope of harmony in our troubled world lies in the plurality of our identities, which cut across each other and work against sharp divisions around one single hardened line of vehement division that allegedly cannot be resisted» (16). Our differences—of value, identity and

affiliation—cannot be «narrowed into one devised system of uniquely powerful categorization» (p. 17). They constitute our humanity.

«Even the identity of being human», argues Sen (2009: 142), «may have the effect, when fully seized, of broadening our viewpoint correspondingly». To fully seize such an identity requires the capabilities necessary for reasoning together and the freedom necessary to exercise choice. The university conceived as a community of difference provides those capabilities and that choice—and one of the ways in which it does so is through its commitment to teaching. Pedagogy lies at the heart of the university as a community open to the recognition and exploration of difference. Crucial questions then arise as to how dissensus can be sustained within an agreed pedagogic framework: how, that is, might we ensure that the framework does not simply buckle under the strain of dissensus? What agreements constitute the conditions necessary for the exploration of disagreement within a pluralist and cosmopolitan society? What are the minimal relational conditions necessary for the development of human understanding?

First, within any pedagogic relationship there must be a shared understanding that understanding itself matters and that what one is seeking to understand is a worthwhile object of enquiry. In order for the pedagogical relationship to work, both teacher and taught must agree that understanding matters and that it matters in the context of this particular enquiry. Within our tabloid and celebrity culture understanding is in short supply. Regarding certain sorts of criminal behaviours, for example, the immediate response is one of condemnation and recrimination. Indeed, to seek to understand certain sorts of behaviour is considered inappropriate or plain wrong. Under such circumstances, to seek to understand is confused with «making excuses for» or «justifying» that which is deemed inexcusable or beyond justification. Understanding is rendered out of bounds.

Second, there must be agreement that disagreement is worthwhile and that the acknowledgment of divergent and sometimes diametrically opposed views is an essential element in the process of understanding. Divergent or opposing viewpoints are often difficult to receive and engage with—which is precisely why they are «divergent» or «opposing». We have to approach understanding with a recognition that difficulty is integral to the process. To seek to understand is in part at least to discover what is difficult in that which one is seeking to understand. Difficulty is the stuff of understanding. This again cuts across the grain of a sound bite culture that prizes instant gratification and immediacy of communication.

The historical dimension: relationality and openness

Third—and here we move to a consideration of the historical dimension of practice—the pedagogic relationship must acknowledge the historic open-endedness of all human understanding. To understand is to engage, not as a passive respondent but as a questioning agent in the development of human understanding. How we question what we receive—particularly when what we receive is deemed canonical within our discipline or field of study—is crucial to this process of engagement. What we receive originated as a response to earlier sets of questions and can only be understood in that historical context. Our questioning of what we receive will in turn prompt new questions. To enter this process of question-and-answer is to enter an ongoing conversation the purpose of which is to develop our understanding. We enter a tradition of thought and, in so doing, locate ourselves within that tradition and help carry it forward.

The idea of «tradition» is central to hermeneutics as developed by Gadamer (2004: 45): «we stand in traditions, whether we know these traditions or not; that is, whether we are conscious of these or are so arrogant as to think we

can begin without presuppositions—none of this changes the way traditions are working on us and in our understanding». Traditions pose questions in response to which we define ourselves and our own sense of purpose. The coherence of any tradition, as understood by Gadamer, can only be defined with reference to its intrinsic plurality and potential for innovation. Traditions are constantly evolving as new generations interpret and re-interpret them and, by so doing, modify and elaborate them. Traditions may initially present themselves to us as assertions, but, as Gadamer (1977: 11-13) insists, «no assertion is possible that cannot be understood as an answer to a question, and assertions can only be understood in this way... The real power of hermeneutical consciousness is our ability to see what is questionable».

Central to the argument of Gadamer's (2004) *Truth and Method* is what he calls «the hermeneutic priority of the question» (pp. 356-371). «Understanding begins», as he puts it, «when something addresses us. This is the first condition of hermeneutics» (298). In becoming receptive to that which addresses us we are opening ourselves to the question it asks of us: «the essence of the *question* is to open up possibilities and keep them open» (original emphasis) (298). Interpretation is the process whereby we receive the object of interpretation as a question. In clarifying and addressing that question the interpreter makes plain its meaning. Gadamer's major contribution to the interpretive—or hermeneutic—tradition is his insight into the dialogical nature of all interpretive acts. The inherent structure of that tradition, he argues, is that of question and answer. We develop our understanding through the formulation and refinement of questions.

One of the surest guides to the pedagogical implications of this claim is the philosopher, historian and archaeologist, R. G. Collingwood. The fifth chapter of Collingwood's autobiography (first published in 1939) is devoted to what he terms «question and answer»—or «the

“questioning activity” in knowledge» (Collingwood, 1978: 29-43). His awareness of the importance of the «logic of question and answer» developed gradually through his vast range of scholarly interests (philosophy, art, history, etc.) and passionate enthusiasms (archaeology, music, sailing, etc.). Question and answer, Collingwood maintains, are «strictly correlative». An answer can only be «right» in relation to the specific question being addressed. Moreover, the detail and particularity of the answer has to match the detail and particularity of the question. To illustrate this point he takes the example of his car failing to start and his spending an hour searching for the cause of the failure:

«If, during this hour, I take out number one plug, lay it on the engine, turn the starting-handle, and watch for a spark, my observation “number one plug is all right” is an answer not to the question, “why won’t my car go?” but to the question, “is it because number one plug is not sparking that my car won’t go?”» (1978: 32)

He goes on to argue that any one of the various experiments he might make during the hour would be the finding of an answer to some detailed and particularized question and would contribute to «the logic of question and answer» —the cumulative «complex consisting of questions and answers»: «The question “why won’t my car go?” is only a kind of summary of all these taken together. It is not a separate question asked at a separate time, nor is it a sustained question which I continue to ask for the whole hour together» (32). This process of deliberative reasoning through question and answer carries our collective reasoning forward into the future. The question and answer logic is the hermeneutical practice of history: how we make and remake history. It is something we all to a greater or lesser extent learn, but also something that can be taught: how to correlate question and answer, how to sequence and order questions, how to interpret statements, propositions, texts, etc. with reference to the

«question-and-answer complex» within which they were originally located.

Cosmopolitan inter-connectivities

The social and historical dimensions of pedagogic practice are framed within a broader context of globalisation and cosmopolitanisation: the social and historical reality of our contemporary life-world. Although, as David Held (2010: 77-80) points out, there are distinctions to be drawn between those who argue that «cosmopolitanism is an overriding frame of reference» and those for whom it is «a distinctive subset of considerations», cosmopolitanism is nevertheless «layered» into the human experience of balancing reasonable assent and irreducible plurality within an increasingly globalised world. We cannot opt out of that world, since it is the human condition of plurality and difference into which we are all born. However, our understanding of that world is grounded in specificities and particularities. We require, therefore, pedagogies that acknowledge the shifting effects of globalisation and cosmopolitanisation, while recognising our rootedness in the local and the particular.

That is why Kwame Anthony Appiah’s (2005) notion of «a tenable cosmopolitanism» —or «rooted cosmopolitanism» —has such purchase: «a cosmopolitanism with prospects must reconcile a kind of universalism with the legitimacy of at least some forms of partiality» (223). A cosmopolitan outlook does not necessitate or even encourage an uprooting of affiliation and association from the partial to the universal, although it does necessarily involve shifts of perspective. «Rooted cosmopolitanism» may be grounded in the particularities of local loyalty and community while branching out into the civic and flourishing within the broader interconnectivities of the global. There is a need for higher education practices that develop the cosmopolitan dispositions necessary for this rooting and flourishing: this recognition of the interdependency of the local and

the global; this sense of the global-in-the-local and the local-in-the-global.

An ethic of «rooted» —or «tenable»— cosmopolitanism would value institutional loyalties and affiliations, but locate them within a broader cosmopolitan vision. The rooted particularity of the institution and its history and of the students and their backgrounds is of supreme importance. However, that rooted particularity is now being shaped by a process of what Ulrich Beck (2006: 19) calls «*really existing cosmopolitanization*» (original emphasis), the impact and significance of which can only be understood by really existing people who seek to relate its impact and significance to their own and others' really existing circumstances. Conceived in this way, cosmopolitanism is not some kind of ethical abstract, but involves recognition of our global interconnectivities and interdependencies and an acknowledgment of the need for collective responses to challenges that although global are experienced as local and contingent. They are experienced, that is, differentially. «Tenable cosmopolitanism» reminds us of the deep inequalities implicit in these locally-rooted and globally shifting differentials.

It reminds us, also, of what Edward Said (2004: 80) termed «widening circles of pertinence». He warned against «the leap to mobilized collective selves —without careful transition or deliberate reflection or with only unmediated assertion— that prove to be more destructive than anything they are supposedly defending». These «transitionless leaps» lead to «totalities, unknowable existentially but powerfully mobilizing»; they are forceful «exactly because they are corporate and can stand in unjustifiably for action that is supposed to be careful, measured and humane». A «rooted cosmopolitanism», refusing these leaps into totalising universals, widens its «circles of pertinence» carefully, with measured pace, and humanely.

The word «humane» should be a privileged item in the lexicon of «rooted cosmopolitanism», for as Said goes on to argue «the only

word to break up the leap to such corporate banditry is the word «humane», and humanists without an exfoliating, elaborating, demystifying general humaneness are, as the phrase has it, «sounding brass and tinkling cymbals» (81). To be «humane» is to abandon, as «the abiding basis for all humanistic practice», any premature recourse to «general or even concrete statements about vast structures of power» or to «vaguely therapeutic structures of salutary redemption»: it is to be concerned with, and attentive to, «human beings who exist in history» (61). The worldliness («secularity») implicit in cosmopolitanism does not and should not imply any lack of *locus*, of place. On the contrary, to be worldly is to be rooted —variously and complicatedly— within the world.

The pedagogical implications of this position have been explored by Fazal Rizvi (2009) in terms of what he calls «cosmopolitan learning», which he sees as being centrally concerned with understanding the global interconnectivities with reference to specific cases and contexts. «In developing such an understanding», he argues, «education has a major role to play in helping students to realize that each experience of connectivity has a specific history from which it has emerged, and that global connectivity is a dynamic phenomenon, politically and historically changing —and that it is not only experienced differently, but is also interpreted differently in different contexts» (263). The implications of this insight are far reaching at all levels: from inter-personal relationships to inter-state relations.

Rizvi suggests that «cosmopolitan learning involves pedagogic tasks that help students explore the criss-crossing of transnational circuits of communication, the flows of global capital and the cross-cutting of local, translocal and transnational social practices» (265) —how, in other words, «*really existing cosmopolitanization*» works at precise points and within specific sectors. Rizvi further suggests that «such learning encourages students to consider the contested

politics of place making, the social construction of power differentials and the dynamic processes relating to the formation of individual, group, national and transnational identities, and their corresponding fields of difference» (265) —how, at those precise points and within those specific sectors, relationality serves to reinforce and resist the existing structures of power (see, also, Rizvi, 2008).

Sensus communis and worldliness

Globalisation challenges not only our existing economic, social and political systems and structures, but also our understanding of the world. It presents us with a hermeneutical challenge that, in turn, challenges our existing epistemological and pedagogical assumptions. A globalised world is a world of inescapable plurality, indeterminacy, and uncertainty —a world which calls for what Zygmunt Bauman (1989: 143) defined as «the art of civilized conversation»:

«To talk to people rather than fight them; to understand them rather than dismiss or annihilate them as mutants; to enhance one's own tradition by drawing freely on experience from other pools, rather than shutting it off from the traffic of ideas; that is what the intellectuals' own tradition, constituted by ongoing discussions, prepares people to do well. And the art of civilized conversation is something that the pluralist world needs badly. It may neglect such an art at its peril. Converse or perish.»

This new world calls, not for legislators, but for interpreters. Our prime responsibility as teachers and intellectuals is to provide the resources necessary for interpreting this new world in a way that recognises its newness and its potential for natality and new beginnings. We must seek to develop a pedagogy that enables us to reason together —not to reason *against* one another, but *with* one another in the disinterested pursuit of the common good. This is what Aristotle meant by *phronesis* or reasoning together: the ability to

deliberate on matters of common concern where the outcomes of those deliberations are indeterminate and contested. Universities constitute an institutional space within which deliberation is valued and sustained and the capabilities necessary for reasoning together are nurtured and allowed to flourish: a space within which —to return to Gadamer— we seek «a common language» of shared understanding.

Reasoning together —as I claimed earlier— is ordinary and commonplace and the language of deliberative democracy is similarly attuned to the vernacular. It is, as Hannah Arendt (1994) insists, a kind of «common sense», which in her essay on *Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding)* she distinguishes from the «stringent logicity» of totalitarian thinking. «The chief political distinction between common sense and logic is», she argues, «that common sense presupposes a common world into which we all fit» (318). Later, in *The Human Condition* she evokes the image of the «common world» as a table around which we sit and which both relates and separates us: «to live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time» (Arendt, 1998: 52). Reasoning together is not some exclusive or specialised form of reasoning. It is what human beings do when they seek collective solutions to collective problems —and when they do so in recognition of the differences that divide them.

Without a robust public sphere, common sense —conceived as «community sense» or *sensus communis*— collapses into unthinking assent; but, equally, without a robust «community sense», the public sphere loses its deliberative dynamic. «In Arendt», as Sophia Rosenfeld (2011: 251-252) puts it, «political action and common sense stand and fall together... [C]ommon sense keeps people related to the world. It also keeps them related to one

another... Common sense, for Arendt, is ultimately a noncoercive but vital form of social glue suitable to a pluralist and talkative world». Against those who would argue that reasoning together requires exceptional skills and as such is the preserve of an elite managerial cadre, Arendt insists that —on the contrary— reasoning together is grounded in the *sensus communis* and is therefore a necessary and constitutive element of the polity. Reasoning together is an expression of our worldliness —our shared sense of belonging to a common world.

There are, of course, vested interests within the university that are highly resistant to this emphasis on common sense. Institutions that have been constructed upon the assumption that specialisation is a necessary condition for the advancement of knowledge are likely to see such an emphasis as a threat to their academic authority. One consequence of this is that hugely important debates —such as the fate of the global economy and its political implications— are conducted in terms that exclude even an educated public. This is not an argument against the use of fine distinctions and nuanced thinking, but is a reminder that within a deliberative democracy knowledge cannot be the preserve of the expert. The prime purpose of the university within a

democratic society is to ensure that knowledge is mediated, translated, negotiated and brokered into the pursuit of the common good (Nixon, 2012b, 2011a, 2011b).

Conclusion

To conceive of the university as a community of difference that disrupts what William E. Connolly —quoted at the head of this paper— terms the «traditional virtues of community and the normal individual» is to conceive of it as an ethical institution: an institution that «pursues an ethic of cultivation rather than a morality of contract or command». This conceptualisation has implications for how we construct both pedagogic practice and the institutional structures and systems that support and sustain that practice. In this paper I have argued that one such implication relates to what I see as the overriding importance of learning to reason together in ways that recognise difference while acknowledging the need for collective action based on shared understanding. This is one of the supreme ethical —and pedagogical— challenges posed by the complex geopolitics of the early 21st century. It is a challenge to which the university is uniquely qualified to respond.

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Resumen

Las universidades como comunidades de la diferencia

Si las universidades son comunidades, estas deben ser, necesariamente, inclusivas. Esta idea de inclusión resulta central para la práctica pedagógica del pensar juntos, razón de ser de la universidad secular humanista. La predominancia de las universidades como élite de la investigación —el prestigio sostenido y promovido a partir de rankings mundiales— no debe hacernos olvidar la relevancia radical de la universidad como espacio para la docencia y el aprendizaje. Esta idea de la universidad como una comunidad incondicionalmente comprometida con la exploración dialógica de la diferencia, es la que ofrece a la universidad su autoridad ética —su «ethos de sensibilidad crítica»—, que, como William E. Connolly sostiene, perturba radicalmente las virtudes tradicionales de la comunidad basada en supuestos de «la persona normal». En un mundo de diferencia cosmopolita que desafía cualquier código rígido de moral, la capacidad para la deliberación ética es especialmente importante. Por ello, nuestra primera responsabilidad como profesores e intelectuales es proporcionar los recursos necesarios para interpretar y comprender este nuevo mundo, de tal manera que reconozca su novedad y su potencial

para la natalidad y los nuevos comienzos. Debemos tratar de desarrollar una pedagogía que nos permita razonar juntos —no como contrarios, sino juntos en la búsqueda desinteresada del bien común—. La universidad, a mi juicio, es el lugar principal de la realización y la activación de esa capacidad a través de la práctica de la pedagogía (Nixon 2012^a; 2012c; 2008).

Palabras clave: *Disenso, Cosmopolitismo, Globalización, Pedagogía, Pluralidad, Universidad.*

Résumé

Les universités comme des communautés de la différence

Si les universités sont des communautés, elles doivent nécessairement être inclusives. Cette idée de l'inclusion est au cœur de la pratique pédagogique du penser ensemble, raison d'être de l'université humaniste laïque. La prédominance des universités comme l'élite de la recherche —le prestige soutenue et promu en fonction des classements mondiaux—, ne doit pas nous faire oublier l'importance radicale de l'université comme un espace pour l'enseignement et l'apprentissage. Cette idée de l'université comme une communauté inconditionnellement engagée avec l'exploration dialogique de la différence, c'est celle qui offre à l'université son autorité éthique —son « ethos de la sensibilité critique », qui, comme William E. Connolly soutient, perturbe radicalement les vertus traditionnelles d'une autre communauté fondée sur des suppositions envers la « personne normale ». Dans un monde de différence cosmopolite qui défi tout code moral rigide, la capacité de délibération éthique est particulièrement importante. Donc, notre première responsabilité en tant que professeurs et intellectuels est de fournir les ressources nécessaires pour interpréter et comprendre ce nouveau monde de façon qui reconnaisse sa nouveauté et son potentiel pour la natalité et les nouveaux commencements. Nous devons essayer de développer une pédagogie qui nous permet de réfléchir ensemble —pas comme des contraires, mais tousses ensemble dans la poursuite désintéressée du bien commun. À mon avis, l'université est le meilleur endroit pour exécuter et activer cette capacité à travers la pratique de la pédagogie (Nixon 2012^a, 2012C, 2008).

Mots clés: *Dissentiment, cosmopolitisme, globalisation, pédagogie, pluralité, université.*

Perfil profesional del autor

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