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# OF THE HUMANITIES AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL DISCIPLINE The Right to Philosophy from the Cosmopolitical Point of View (the Example of an International Institution)

Jacques Derrida

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### Article abstract

This essay engages in a rethinking of the right to philosophy in its international dimension. It grounds its reflections in a reading of Kant's "Idea of a Universal History from a Cosmopolitical Point of View", considering the essay in terms of its implications for institutions founded after World War II. In examining these implications, it discusses issues of Eurocentrism, the founding history of modernity, and the role of UNESCO in posing the question of contemporary philosophy.

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## **OF THE HUMANITIES AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL DISCIPLINE.**

### **The Right to Philosophy from the Cosmopolitical Point of View (the Example of an International Institution).**

**Jacques Derrida**

#### **ABSTRACT**

This essay engages in a rethinking of the right to philosophy in its international dimension. It grounds its reflections in a reading of Kant's "Idea of a Universal History from a Cosmopolitical Point of View," considering the essay in terms of its implications for institutions founded after World War II. In examining these implications, it discusses issues of Eurocentrism, the founding history of modernity, and the role of UNESCO in posing the question of contemporary philosophy.

#### **RÉSUMÉ**

L'auteur entreprend de repenser le droit à la philosophie dans sa dimension internationale. La réflexion qu'il engage s'appuie sur une lecture de <<Idée (en vue) d'une histoire universelle au point de vue cosmopolite>> qui fait ressortir les implications de ce texte de Kant pour certaines institutions fondées après la seconde guerre mondiale. En examinant ces implications, l'auteur aborde la problématique de l'Eurocentrisme, l'histoire de l'émergence de la modernité, et le rôle de l'UNESCO dans la réflexion sur la philosophie contemporaine.

The problematic which constitutes the charter of our international meeting compels us to take into consideration, at least by way of example, two types of relation:

1. The *interinstitutional* relation among universities or research institutes on the one hand, and among international institutions of culture (governmental or non-governmental) on the other;

2. The particular *interdisciplinary* relation between philosophy and the "humanities." "Philosophy" names here both a discipline that belongs to the "humanities" and that discipline which claims to think, elaborate and criticize the axiomatic of the "humanities," particularly the problem of the humanism or the presumed universalism of the "humanities."

It is this problematic which permits me to submit to you here part of an unpublished talk which I gave recently on these subjects at UNESCO, and which I have recast for our conference.[\[1\]](#)

### **Of Philosophy -- Debt and Duty**

I will begin with the question "where?"

Not directly with the question "where are we?" or "where have we come to?" but "where does the question of the right to philosophy take place?," which can be immediately fated by "where ought it take place?"

Where does it find today its most appropriate place?

The very form of this question concerning a question -- namely "where?, in what place can a question take place?" -- supposes that between the question and the place, between the question of the question and the question of the place, there be a sort of implicit contract, a supposed affinity, as if a question should always be first authorized by a place, legitimated in advance by a determined space that makes it both rightful and meaningful, thus making it possible and by the same token necessary, both legitimate and inevitable.

According to the French idiom -- and already the usage of this idiom, the effective authority of this idiom, brings us back to the question of the cosmopolitical and would by itself enjoin us to ask this question -- one would say that there are places where *there are grounds for* asking this question. [\[2\]](#) That is to say, that here this question is legitimately and rightfully not only possible and authorized but also necessary, indeed prescribed. In such places, such a question, for example that of the right to philosophy from the cosmopolitical point of view, can and should take place.

For example, UNESCO would thus, perhaps fundamentally, be the privileged place -- I say this not out of convention and not at all out of politeness to our hosts -- indeed, the only place possible for truly developing the question which brings us together today. In its very form, the authority of this question in a way bears the stamp of this institution, receiving from it in principle both its response and its responsibility. To say it in a word, it is as if UNESCO, and by privilege the philosophy department within it, were, if I may say so, the particular *emanation* of something like philosophy, of something like "a right to philosophy from the cosmopolitical point of view," an emanation that is particular for being circular, as if a source -- and the emanation is always from a source -- were going back to the source. UNESCO is perhaps born from the positing of a right to philosophy from the cosmopolitical point of view, and it is properly up to UNESCO to answer for

this right by responding to this question. UNESCO bears both the response and the responsibility for this question.

Why? Why is UNESCO, in its proper destination, in the mission which it has assigned to itself, the institution which today is par excellence qualified to ask this question, to do it justice in its turn, to elaborate it and to draw the practical teachings from such an elaboration?

My subtitle transparently alludes to the famous title of a great short text by Kant, *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht* (1784), *Idea (in View) of a Universal History from a Cosmopolitical Point of View*.<sup>[3]</sup> As we know, this brief and difficult text belongs to that ensemble of Kant's writings that can be described as *announcing*, that is to say, predicting, prefiguring and prescribing a certain number of international institutions which only came into being in this century, for the most part after the Second World War. These institutions are already philosophemes, as is the idea of international law or rights that they attempt to put into operation. They are philosophical acts and archives, philosophical productions and products, not only because the concepts which legitimate them have an assignable philosophical history and therefore a philosophical history which is inscribed in UNESCO's charter or constitution but also, by the same token and for that very reason, because such institutions imply sharing a culture and a philosophical language. And from that moment on, they are committed to make possible the access to this language and culture, first and foremost by means of education. All the States that adhere to the charters of these international institutions commit themselves, in principle and philosophically, to recognize and put into operation in an effective way something like philosophy and a certain philosophy of rights and law, the rights of man, universal history, etc. The signature of these charters is a philosophical act which makes a commitment to philosophy in a philosophical way. From that moment on, whether they say so or not, know it or not, or conduct themselves consequently or not, these States and these peoples contract a philosophical commitment by dint of joining these charters or participating in these institutions. Therefore, these States contract at the very least a commitment to provide the philosophical culture or education that is required for understanding and putting into operation these commitments made to the international institutions, which are, I repeat, philosophical in essence. (Let us note in passing that this may be interpreted by some as an infinite opening, and by others as a limit to universality itself, if one considers, for example, that a certain concept of philosophy and even of philosophical cosmopolitanism, indeed of international rights and law, is too European -- but this is a problem that will undoubtedly come up again in the discussion.)

What are the concrete stakes of this situation today? Why should the large questions of philosophical teaching and research, and the imperative of the right to philosophy, be more than ever developed in their international dimension? Why are the responsibilities to be assumed no longer simply national, less national today than ever, and even less tomorrow than ever, in the 21st century? What do "national," "international," "cosmopolitical," and "universal" signify here, for and with regard to philosophy, philosophical research, philosophical education or training, and indeed for a philosophical

question or practice that would not be essentially linked to research or education?

A philosopher is always someone for whom philosophy is not given, someone who in essence must question him or herself about the essence and destination of philosophy. It is necessary to recall this fact even if it seems trivial or too obvious. For such a situation and such a duty are more particular than it seems. And this can lead to fearsome practical consequences. The existence of places such as UNESCO, that is, of international institutions that not only imply a philosophy, indeed, imply philosophy in the discourse, and I would even say in the language, of their charter, but have also deemed it necessary to endow themselves with a specialized department of philosophy (which is not at all self-evident and which recalls the whole debate, open ever since [Kant's](#) *The Conflict of Faculties*: why would an essentially philosophical institution need a department of philosophy? Contrary to Kant, Schelling thought that, since the university is nothing but a large philosophical institution, philosophical in all its parts, and since philosophy is supposed to be everywhere in the university, there was thus no reason to confine it to one department); the existence, then, of a properly philosophical place like UNESCO, and the fact that UNESCO's mode of being is one that is *a priori* philosophical, constitute, it seems to me, a sort of axiomatic, a system of values, norms and regulating principles in virtue of which we are here, of course, but which also prescribe every philosopher to question him or herself concretely about such a situation, and not to take it as an established and obvious fact without serious consequences.

Before drawing some preliminary consequences -- less abstract than these first axioms -- allow me to recall Kant's text. If it announces and prescribes a "universal *cosmopolitical state*" (state, *Zustand* in the sense of the state of things, of the situation, of the real constitution, and not of the State with a capital S), if Kant specifies at least the hope (*Hoffnung*) for it, the hope that after many revolutions and transformations this cosmopolitism "in the end" (*endlich*) becomes a fact, and if Kant founds this hope (which remains a hope) on the purpose which is "the highest in nature" (*was die Natur zur höchsten Absicht hat*), this hope is everything but the expression of a confident optimism and, above all, of an abstract universalism. By briefly underlining some *limits* that give to the Kantian discourse its very form -- its form at once the most positive, the most modern, the most richly instructive, but also the most problematic -- and by insisting rather on the *difficulties*, I would like to introduce the presentations and the discussion that will follow, introduce them and not, obviously, anticipate them, precede them, and even less foresee them or program them.

What are these difficulties? What do they prefigure concerning the tasks and problems of our time? But also, what do they not prefigure? And what in our time could, indeed, should, exceed a discourse such as Kant's?

The idea (in the Kantian sense) which brings us here together in the awareness that the definition of a philosophical task and of a right to philosophy should be formulated in its cosmopolitical, and therefore international or inter-state dimension (and it is already a serious question to

know whether the cosmopolitical traces a link among the cities, the *poleis* of the world, as nations, as peoples, or as States), this idea supposes, and Kant says so himself, a philosophical approach to universal history that is inseparable from a sort of plan of nature that aims at the total, perfect political unification of the human species (*die vollkommene bürgerliche Vereinigung in der Menschengattung*). Whoever would have doubts about such a unification and, above all, about a plan of nature, would have no reason to subscribe even to the fact of sharing a philosophical problematic, of a supposedly universal or universalizable problematic of philosophy. For anybody having doubts about this plan of nature, the whole project of writing a universal -- and therefore philosophical -- history, and thus as well the project of creating institutions governed by an international -- and therefore philosophical -- law, would be nothing but a novel. "Novel" is Kant's term; he is so aware of the risk that, several times, he deems it necessary to confront this hypothesis or this accusation, and, for that matter, to reaffirm that this philosophical idea, regardless of how extravagant it may appear to be, is neither a fiction nor a novel-like story -- and that philosophy, in the body of its institution that is in formation, is above all not literature, and more generally not a fiction, in any case not a fiction of the imaginary. Yet the danger of literature, of the becoming-literature of philosophy is so pressing, and so present to Kant, that he names and rejects it several times. Yet, in order to do so, it is necessary for him both to invoke the guiding thread of a pattern of nature (the guiding thread, i.e., a convenient instrument of representation [*Darstellung*], which is not the surest way of being free from the novel), and also to take the history of the European nations as the surest guiding thread for following this guiding thread, first of all taking this history in its Greek, and then Roman, beginnings -- in opposition to that of the so-called barbaric nations. This is why this text, which is cosmopolitical in spirit, according to a law that could be verified well beyond Kant, is the most strongly eurocentered text that can be, not only in its philosophical axiomatic but also in its retrospective reference to Greco-Roman history and in its prospective reference to the future hegemony of Europe which, Kant says, is the continent that "will probably legislate some day for all the others."

Since this difficult and acute question of the European, indeed continental, model of philosophy for our problematic today will not fail, I suppose, in truth I hope, to re-emerge in the debate that will follow, I would like to evoke a few lines of Kant's text. They indicate that the only means of opposing philosophical reason to the novel or to extravagant fiction is, at least in Kant's eyes, to trust the European history of reason and first of all the Greco-Roman history of history. In the Seventh Proposition, Kant recalls that nature will have naturally and paradoxically used the natural unsociability of men (and Kant is a pessimist insofar as he believes in this natural unsociability of men and in the natural or originary state of war among men) to push them into contracting artificial and institutional links, and into entering a Society of Nations:

Nature has thus again used the unsociability (*Ungeselligkeit*, *Unvertragsamkeit*) of men, and even among the large societies and state bodies which human beings construct, as a means of arriving at a state of calm and security through their inevitable *antagonism*. Wars, tense and

unremitting military preparations, and the resultant distress which every state must eventually feel within itself, even in the midst of peace -- these are the means by which nature drives nations to make initially imperfect attempts, but finally, after many devastations, upheavals and even complete inner exhaustion of their powers, to take the step which reason could have suggested to them even without so many sad experiences -- that of abandoning a lawless state of savagery and entering a Society of Nations of peoples in which every state, even the smallest, could expect to derive its security and rights not from its own power or its own legal judgment, but solely from this great Society of Nations (of peoples: *Völkerbunde*) (*Foedus Amphyctionum*), from a united power and the law-governed decisions of a united will. However novel-like (more precisely, however exalted, enthusiastic, *schwärmerisch*) this idea may appear, and it has been ridiculed as such when put forward by the Abbé St. Pierre and Rousseau (perhaps because they believed that its realisation was imminent), it is nonetheless the inevitable outcome of the distress in which men involve one another. For this distress must force the states to adopt exactly the same resolution, ... etc.

The logic of this teleology is that we ought to be grateful to nature -- and Kant literally says so -- for having created us so naturally, so originarily unsociable and so scarcely philosophical in order to push us, through culture, art and artifice (*Kunst*), and reason, to make the seeds of nature blossom.

That which resembles a novel-like story yet isn't one, that which in truth is but the very historicity of history, is this ruse of nature. Nature makes use of the detour of violence and of primitive, thus natural, unsociability in order to aid reason and thereby put philosophy into operation through the society of nations. Here we would find a paradoxical incitement to today's debates. For, in this teleological ruse of nature, Greco-Roman Europe, philosophy and Western history, and I would even dare saying continental history, are the driving force, both capital and exemplary, as if nature, in its rational ruse, had assigned Europe this special mission: not only that of founding history as such, and first of all as science, not only that of founding philosophy as such, and first of all as science, but also the mission of founding a rational philosophical (non-novel-like) history and that of "legislating some day" for all other continents. In the Ninth Proposition, Kant admits for the second time that the philosophical attempt at treating universal history according to a hidden design of nature and with a view towards the total political unification of humanity resembles a Novel (and here he names the novel by its name, *Roman*). Yet in order to contradict this novel-like hypothesis and to think human history, beyond the novel, as a system and not as an aggregate without plan, program nor providence, he refers to what he calls the guiding thread (*Leitfaden*) of Greek history (*griechische Geschichte*), "the only one," he says, "in which all other earlier or contemporary histories are preserved or at least authenticated."<sup>[4]</sup> In other words, Greek historicity or historiographicity would be the sign, the index and therefore the guiding thread that allows us to think that a history which brings together everything that concerns the universality of humankind is at all possible. Of this Greek history (history both in the sense of *Geschichte* and *Historie*, history in the sense of event and of narrative, of the authenticated account,

of historical science), one can trace the influence, Kant says, upon the formation and decline of the political body of the Roman people insofar as it first "swallowed" the Greek *polis*, and then sketched the *cosmopolis* by influencing or colonizing the Barbarians who in turn destroyed Rome. To this, Kant adds:

if, finally, we add the political history of other peoples *episodically*, insofar as knowledge of them has gradually come down to us through these enlightened nations, we shall discover a regular process of improvement in the political constitutions of our continent (*in unserem Weltteile*) (which will probably legislate some day for all other /pp. 13-14/ continents [*der wahrscheinlicher Weise allen anderen dereinst Gesetze geben wird*]).

The teleological axis of this discourse has become the tradition of European modernity. One encounters it again and again, intact and invariable throughout variations as serious as those that distinguish Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger and Valéry. One also encounters it in its practical form, sometimes through denial, in a number of politico-institutional discourses, whether on the European or world scale. This eurocentric discourse forces us to ask ourselves -- I'll say this very schematically so as not to keep the floor for too long -- whether today our reflection concerning the unlimited extension and the reaffirmation of a right to philosophy should not both *take into account and de-limit* the assignation of philosophy to its Greco-European origin or memory. At stake is neither contenting oneself with reaffirming a certain history, a certain memory of origins or of the Western history (Mediterranean or Central European, Greco-Roman-Arab or Germanic) of philosophy, nor contenting oneself with being opposed to, or opposing denial to, this memory and to these languages, but rather trying to displace the fundamental schema of this problematic by going beyond the old, tiresome, worn-out and wearisome opposition between Eurocentrism and anti-Eurocentrism. One of the conditions for getting there -- and one won't get there all of a sudden in one try, it will be the effect of a long and slow historical labor that is under way -- is the active becoming-aware of the fact that philosophy is no longer determined by a program, an originary language or tongue whose memory it would suffice to recover so as to discover its destination, that philosophy is no more assigned to its origin or by its origin, than it is simply, spontaneously or abstractly cosmopolitical or universal. What we have lived and what we are more and more aiming for are modes of appropriation and transformation of the philosophical in non-European languages and cultures. Such modes of appropriation and transformation amount neither to the classical mode of appropriation that consists in making one's own what belongs to the other (here, in interiorizing the Western memory of philosophy and in assimilating it in one's own language) nor to the invention of new modes of thought which, as alien to all appropriation, would no longer have any relation to what one believes one recognizes under the name of philosophy.

What is happening today, and what I believe has been happening for a long time, are philosophical formations that cannot be locked into this fundamentally cultural, colonial or neo-colonial dialectic of appropriation and alienation. There are other ways for philosophy than those of [appropriation](#) as expropriation (to lose one's memory by assimilating the



memory of the other, the one being opposed to the other, as if an *ex-appropriation* was not possible, indeed the only possible chance). Not only are there other ways for philosophy, but philosophy, if there is any such thing, is the *other way*. And it has always been the *other way*: philosophy has never been the unfolding responsible for a unique, originary assignation linked to a unique language or to the place of a sole people. *Philosophy does not have one sole memory*. Under its Greek name and in its European memory, it has always been bastard, hybrid, grafted, multilinear and polyglot. We must adjust our practice of the history of philosophy, our practice of history and of philosophy, to this reality which was also a chance and which more than ever remains a chance. What I am saying here of philosophy can just as well be said, and for the same reasons, of law and rights, and of democracy.

In philosophy as elsewhere Eurocentrism and anti-colonialism are symptoms of a colonial and missionary culture. A concept of the cosmopolitical that would still be determined by such opposition would not only still concretely limit the development of the right to philosophy but also would not even account for what happens in philosophy. In order to think in the direction of what happens and could still happen under the name of philosophy (and the name is both very serious and unimportant, depending on what is done with it), we must think about what the concrete conditions for respecting and extending the right of philosophy may be.

I will juxtapose very quickly here the *headings* of problems that are in truth systematically or structurally coordinated.

1. *First heading*. Whoever thinks that s/he has to make the right to philosophy from a cosmopolitical point of view be respected, accorded and extended should take into account what is -- but also what has always been -- the competition among several philosophical models, styles and traditions that are linked to national or linguistic histories, even if they can never be reduced to effects of a nation or a language. To take the most canonical example, which is far from being the only one and which itself includes numerous sub-varieties, the opposition between the so-called continental tradition of philosophy and the so-called analytic or anglo-saxon philosophy is not reducible to national limits or linguistic givens. This is not only an immense problem and an enigma for European or Anglo-American philosophers who have been trained in these such traditions. A certain history, notably but not only a colonial history, constituted these two models as hegemonic references in the entire world. The right to philosophy requires not only an appropriation of these two competing models and of almost every model by all, men and women (*par tous et par toutes*, and when I say *toutes*, it is not so as to be formally prudent regarding grammatical categories -- I'll come back to this in a moment), the right of all (men and women) to philosophy also requires the reflection, the displacement and the deconstruction of these hegemonies, the access to places and to philosophical events which are exhausted neither in these two dominant traditions nor in these languages. These stakes are already intra-European.

2. *Second heading.* Respecting and extending the right of all (men and women) to philosophy also supposes, and I'm saying it too quickly again, the appropriation but also the *surpassing of languages* which, according to the schema that I was putting into question just a bit ago, are called foundational or originary for philosophy, i.e., the Greek, Latin, German or Arab languages. Philosophy should be practiced, according to paths that are not simply anamnestic, in languages which are without filiation with these roots. If the most often hegemonic extension of this or that language, in an almost all-powerful way -- and I mean the extension of English -- can serve as a vehicle for the universal penetration of the philosophical and of philosophical communication, philosophy demands by the same token, and for that very reason, that we liberate ourselves from the phenomena of dogmatism and authority which language can produce. It is not a matter of removing philosophy from language and from what ties it forever to the idiomatic. It is not a matter of promoting an abstractly universal philosophical thought that does not inhere in the body of the idiom, but *on the contrary* of putting it into operation each time in an original way and in a non-finite multiplicity of idioms, producing philosophical events which are neither particularistic and [intranslatable](#) nor transparently abstract and univocal in the element of an abstract universality. With a sole language, it is always a philosophy, an axiomatic of philosophical discourse and communication, which imposes itself without any possible discussion. I would say something analogous, or in any case stemming from the same logic, for science and technology. It goes without saying that the development of sciences and technologies (whether theoretical physics, astrophysics or genetics, computers or medicine, be they in the service of economy or even of military strategy) breaks open the path, for better or worse, for a cosmopolitical communication, and as such opens the ways, through scientific research yet also through epistemology or the history of the sciences, for what in philosophy will have been, and always has been, in solidarity with the movement of science, in different modes. The hypothesis or the wish which I would be tempted to submit to the discussion is that, while taking into account or taking charge of this progress of the sciences in the spirit of a new era of Enlightenment for the coming new millennium (and in this respect I remain Kantian), a politics of the right to philosophy for all (men and women) not be only a politics of science and of technology but also a politics of thought which would yield neither to positivism nor to scientism nor to epistemology, and which would discover again, on the scale of new stakes, in its relation to science but also to religions, and also to law and to ethics, an experience which would be at once provocation or reciprocal respect but also irreducible autonomy. In this respect, the problems are always traditional and always new, whether they concern ecology, bio-ethics, artificial insemination, organ transplantation, international law, etc. They thus touch upon the concept of the proper, of property, of the relation to self and to the other within the values of subject and object, of subjectivity, of identity, of the person, i.e., all the fundamental concepts of the charters that govern international relations and institutions, such as the international law that is, in principle, supposed to regulate them.

Considering what links science to technology, to economy, to politico-economic or politico-military interests, the autonomy of philosophy with

respect to science is as essential for the practice of a right to philosophy as the autonomy with respect to religions is essential for whoever wants philosophy not to be off limits for anyone (man or woman). I am alluding here to what, in every cultural, linguistic, national and religious area, can limit the right to philosophy for social, political or religious reasons, for belonging to a class, age or gender -- or all of that at once. I'll take the risk here of affirming that, beyond what would link philosophy to its Greco-European memory, or to European languages, even beyond what would link it to an already constituted Western model of what one calls, in Greek, democracy, it seems to me impossible to dissociate the motif of the right to philosophy-from-the-cosmopolitical-point-of-view from the motif of a democracy to come. Without linking the concept of democracy to its past givens and even less to the facts classified under this name -- all of which hold within themselves the trace of the hegemonies that I mentioned more or less directly -- I do not believe that the right to philosophy (which an international institution like UNESCO is duty bound to uphold and to extend in its effectiveness) is dissociable from a movement of effective democratization. You can easily imagine that what I am saying here is everything but an abstract wish and conventional concession to some democratic consensus. In today's world, the stakes have never been as serious, and they are new stakes, calling for a new philosophical reflection upon what democracy and, I insist, the democracy to come, may mean and be. Not wanting to be too lengthy in this introduction, I'll wait until the discussion to say more on this subject.

3. *Third heading.* Although philosophy does not amount to its institutional or pedagogical moments, it is obvious that all the differences in tradition, style, language and philosophical nationality are translated or incarnated in institutional or pedagogical models, and sometimes even produced by these structures (primary and secondary school [...], university, research institutions). They are the various places for the debates, competitions, war or communication of which we will speak in a few moments; but, in order to conclude on this subject, I would like for the last time to turn to Kant, so as to situate what today may constitute the limit or the crisis most shared by all the societies which, be they Western or not, might wish to put into operation a right to philosophy. Beyond political or religious motivations, beyond the motivations -- at times apparently philosophical -- that may lead to limiting the right to philosophy, and indeed even to prohibiting philosophy (for a particular social class, for women, for adolescents not yet of a certain age, etc., for specialists of this or that discipline or for members of this or that group), and even beyond all the discriminatory motivations in this regard, philosophy is everywhere suffering, in Europe and elsewhere, both in its teaching and in its research, from a limit which, even though it does not always take the explicit form of prohibition or censure, nonetheless amounts to that, for the simple reason that the means for supporting teaching and research in philosophy are limited. In liberal-capitalist as well as in socialist or social-democratic societies, not to mention in authoritarian or totalitarian regimes, this limitation is motivated -- I am not saying justified -- by budgetary balances that give priority to research and training for research that is, often correctly, labelled useful, profitable and urgent, to so-called end-oriented sciences, and to techno-economic, indeed, scientifico-military imperatives. For me, it is not a matter of indiscriminately contesting all of

these imperatives. But the more these imperatives impose themselves -- and sometimes for the best reasons in the world, and sometimes with a view to developments without which the development of philosophy itself would no longer have any chance in the world -- the more also the right to philosophy becomes increasingly urgent, irreducible, as does the call to philosophy in order precisely to think and discern, evaluate and criticize, philosophies. For they, too, are philosophies, they that, in the name of a techno-economic-military positivism and according to diverse modalities, tend to reduce the field and the chances of an open and unlimited philosophy, both in its teaching and in its research, as well as in the effectiveness of its international exchanges.

It is for these reasons -- and I'll stop here for now -- that, for whatever reservations I thought needed to be made with respect to the Kantian concept of the *cosmopolis* (both too naturalist and too teleologically European), I will still cite Kant in conclusion. I will cite what he calls exemplarily an example. His short treatise, *Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitical Point of View*, is also obviously a treatise on education, and it could not be otherwise. In his Eighth Proposition, after having announced and acclaimed the Enlightenment era and the universal freedom of religion, Kant writes the following, which still remains worthy of meditation today, almost without transposition. If I had to give a title to this passage, it would perhaps be "Of Philosophy -- Debt and Duty."

...This enlightenment, and with it a certain sympathetic interest which the enlightened man inevitably feels for anything good which he comprehends fully, must gradually spread upwards towards the thrones and even influence their principles of government. But while, for example, our world rulers have no money to spare for public educational institutions or indeed for anything which concerns the world's best interests (*das Weltbeste*), because everything has already been calculated out in advance for the next war, they will nonetheless find that it is to their own advantage at least not to hinder their citizens' private efforts in this direction, however weak and slow they may be. But in the end, war itself gradually becomes not only a highly artificial undertaking, extremely uncertain in its outcome for both parties, but also a very dubious risk to take, since its aftermath is felt by the state in the shape of a constantly increasing national debt (a modern invention) (*Schuldenlast (einer neuen Erfindung)*) whose repayment becomes unforeseeable (*unabsehlich*) [repayment is *Tilgung*, the annulation, the erasure of the debt, the destruction which Hegel distinguishes from the *Aufhebung* which erases while conserving]. And in addition, the effects which an upheaval in any state produces upon all the others in our continent, where all are so closely linked by trade, are so perceptible that these other states are forced by their own insecurity to offer themselves as arbiters, albeit without legal authority, so that they indirectly prepare the way for a great political body of the future, for which the past world has no example to show [such a consequence not only relaunches the large question of debt in terms of its geopolitical effects which are decisive today for the future of the world; it also opens the way for a reading of Kant that is less, let us say, traditionalist and perhaps less teleologicistic than that which I sketched above]. Although this political body exists for the present only in the roughest of outlines, it nonetheless seems as if a feeling is beginning to

stir in all its members, each of which has an interest in maintaining the whole (*Erhaltung des Ganzen*). And this encourages the hope that, after many revolutions, with all their transforming effects, the highest design of nature, a universal *cosmopolitical state*, will at last be realised as the matrix within which all the original capacities of the human race may develop.

With this citation I wanted to suggest that the right to philosophy may require from now on a distinction among several registers of debt, between a finite debt and an infinite debt, between debt and duty, between a certain erasure and a certain reaffirmation of debt -- and sometimes a certain erasure in the name of reaffirmation.

**Jacques Derrida**

**Trans. Thomas Dutoit**

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