

## Shared Futures: Learning for a World Lived in Common

Grant H. Cornwell

St. Lawrence University

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Global citizenship begins with the insight of interdependence.<sup>1</sup> In the next few minutes I want to sketch the complexity, but also the urgency, of helping our students develop this insight. Fortunately, the sessions that will make up this day will fill in the depth and colors, the contours and textures of this sketch. You have before you an array of colleagues who are doing the work on their campuses. As you see from the descriptions, the goals are deep and the strategies are carefully thought out. This is because so much is at stake.

In our post-9/11 world, in our nation, lead by a President – and I am sorry, but I must speak the truth here – lead by a President who seems to lack the very insights, qualities, and understanding we are trying to develop in our students, in a moment in history when our campuses are and will be engaged in the controversies over our interventions in Iraq, there is an urgency to our work. We have an obligation not just to our students, but to the world in which they are situated.

This is one of the most difficult things we have to help them understand; as graduates of our institutions, our students enter adult life with extraordinary privilege and influence – when viewed in global comparison – and therefore extraordinary responsibility. It doesn't feel this way to them, of course, because most of our students leave with significant burdens of debt, they struggle to find employment that they thought their degrees would give them access to, and their sense of political agency is fragile at best. Still, compared to their global peers, the prospects of our graduates, and the capacity for their choices to make

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<sup>1</sup> Parts of these remarks are taken from a longer work in progress in collaboration with Professor Eve Stoddard. Please do not cite without permission.

a difference, means that they occupy a position in the global order that they need to understand, take responsibility for, and act responsibly with. Many of our students will be members of a transnational, multicultural cosmopolitan class; they will have access to leadership positions, to the ranks of those conceptualizing and influencing the direction of globalization. Some will be stockbrokers, business executives, corporate lawyers. Others will be U.N. workers, Peace Corps volunteers; some will work for NGO's, or environmental or social activist groups. Others still will be teachers, lobbyists, artists, and writers. Whatever they do, they will likely be voters, consumers, and, yes, stockholders.

In all of their social roles they will need the kind of insight of interdependence that I referred to at the start. Of course, this understanding is easy to mention, and very difficult to achieve. The web of human interdependence in our era of globalization has a myriad of threads, some of which are political and economic, many of which are cultural, and the most profound of which are ethical and epistemological.

In *Globalizing Knowledge*, my co-author, Eve Stoddard and I suggest that students need to learn to read back and forth between the local and the global, between multiple forms of identity and difference. In particular, they need to be aware of the invisible links behind and around the local lives they live, foods they consume, clothes they wear, furniture they buy, medicines they use. They need to learn to ask questions about the commodity chains that link their actions, their choices, their lives to the destruction of rainforests in Brazil or coral reefs in Costa Rica, farmers in the Philippines, or, most pressingly, oil fields in Iraq. McWorld isn't just a critique of Western hegemony; it is also a calling to consciousness that the material privilege enjoyed in the West, is not only not shared uniformly or globally, but is actually made possible by the very dynamics of inequalities within global capitalism.

In *Cultivating Humanity* and elsewhere, Martha Nussbaum advocates an education designed to produce "citizens of the world," people of cosmopolitan subjectivity who see a world full of equally valuable human persons, all of whom

have a claim on our sense of moral obligations. This is in large part a question of knowing, of knowing that these people exist around the world and knowing that, as others who share our humanity, we should care about whether they are starving or being exploited. Most importantly we should not be able to dismiss the deaths or sufferings of those half way around the globe as insignificant and unrelated to us. Nussbaum believes that education and literature are means to help us imagine the realities of distant peoples, For these reasons Nussbaum believes higher education should provide students with an ideal of cosmopolitanism and with the critical reasoning skills that will help them liberate themselves from ethnocentrism or from the kind of patriotism that says "My country, right or wrong."

Nussbaum's cosmopolitanism, however, is another expression of privilege. Like the Greek society she draws it from, the ideal she proposes speaks to a certain class, a global elite. Homi Bhabha draws out this class critique. He calls for a "vernacular cosmopolitanism" that sees from the margins, from the peripheries of global centers of power and wealth. Bhabha wants to see the world from the bottom up, from the vantage point of peripheries. And he sees the creation of a cosmopolitan episteme, or set of knowledges that construct the world for us, not as an ongoing process of selecting what is cool and interesting from all the world's traditions, but rather as a montage of overlapping perspectives, experiences, and cultures brought into contact by global migrations of refugees, guest workers, and other subaltern populations.

Eve and I are currently working on a project where we ask what kind of epistemological methods are appropriate to undergird a geo-ethics of global citizenship. We begin, like Bhabha, that knowledge is perspectival and that all knowers are situated; globalization is a complex of phenomena each of which looks very different depending on one's point of view – here meant very literally as the geo-political location of the knower. We want to suggest **not** that alternative views need to be seen as competing, each vying for the status of achieving hegemony as the single truth, but that the multiplicity of points of view

makes truth a collaborative project. We are advocating an epistemology that seeks out narratives generated from multiple points of view, but that pays special attention to stories told from the margins, not because they have a special purchase on truth, but because in the U.S. the volume of the dominant narrative is turned up so high, one has to listen with very focused attention to hear other voices.

By a geoethics of citizenship we are suggesting a project of seeking understanding quite literally through the triangulation of different points of view. We want to use a GPS, short for Global Positioning System, as a model for this methodology. A GPS is a piece of technology that locates a place on earth, literally plotting its coordinates, by receiving signals from orbiting satellites. They are used by hikers and sailors for navigation. They are available in rental cars now for street navigation. A GPS is not reliable when it is trying to position one on the globe through information coming from only one satellite. In fact, a GPS determines one's position by reconciling the information from multiple sources; it works on an epistemology of triangulation. The more satellites being used as sources of information, the more certain the location is.

This serves as a model for the way one needs to collect perspectives from differently-situated knowers and citizens around the world in order to be able to make informed judgments, to have a sufficient basis for knowledge.

The relevance of this locating device for geo-citizens, particularly those who live in the more powerful nations, is that they need to perceive their socio-political locations as others see them. On the GPS model, they need many more perspectives, both from within their own nations and from without.

Geocitizens need to work in the same way. They cannot be confident that they are on solid ground if they are taking their information from only one or even two perspectives. They need to seek points of view globally; hence critical thinking becomes the project of triangulating the sources, clearly identifying the contradictions and incommensurabilities, building a reconciled narrative to the extent possible. This last point is key. The Internet and cable/satellite television

offer different points of view on shows like *Crossfire*, but those are different points of view screaming past each other, or piling up many voices as personal opinions while the voice of authority becomes more and more monolithic. They are not trying to piece together and layer multiple perspectives toward some kind of agreed upon description of phenomena.

The chief epistemological virtue here is the capacity to listen for and across differences. Second in line is a disposition not to meet differences with a desire to win, to have one's own point of view triumph over others, but instead to meet differences as a project, a sign that power and point of view are likely in play. Intercultural communication skills emerge by this analysis not simply as useful in getting by in a diverse world, but as capacities essential to build a complex account of what is the case and what it is important to do. Filling out the meaning of responsible global citizenship is necessarily a collaborative process, and the more points of view that are brought into triangulation, the more confidence one can have about where one is standing.

I would like to close by reading an excerpt from a student paper. The course is one Eve and I teach on global citizenship. The student writes,

*Both globalization and national identity are issues that must be addressed when discussing how we treat and relate to each other as people of the world. Understanding our economic interrelationships as people and states is perhaps the most important way to look at cosmopolitanism and global citizenship today. The reality that there is a massive difference in access to resources and that certain segments of the world's population struggle to meet basic needs is an issue that true global citizens are aware of and would like to see changed.*

*As a person who agrees with cosmopolitan ideals, I am not directly involved in politics and am not a full-time activist who is looking out for other people's rights at all times. However, I am aware of my surroundings, the effects on the world as a result of my decisions, willing*

*to educate others, and willing to take a reasonable course of action in the name of helping other members of the human race.*

I share this because I think it captures a stance taken by many of our students, and indeed, perhaps by many of us. I am grateful for his honesty and clarity, and I treat this position with due respect. But I want to call attention to its explicit limitations of commitment. Here is a student who is liberally educated about globalization and inequality. He has entertained the obligations entailed by global citizenship, and agrees with what he calls "cosmopolitan ideals." What is clear though, is that his commitment to taking "a reasonable course of action" stops well short of a willingness to trade his place. And who would? But this is the question that has to be asked. At what point does awareness entail activism? To understand globalization is to understand that middle and privileged-class ways of life in the U.S. are environmentally unsustainable and made possible by profound global social inequalities. It seems on the face of it that this understanding would entail an ethical unwillingness to continue to enjoy and benefit from privilege. Is "a reasonable course of action in the name of helping others" even in the ballpark? I am troubled by these questions personally, as I examine my own life, and as a teacher who sees complacency and resignation where something else seems called for.