DOI: 10.69085/linc20262290

Galin TIHANOV
(Queen Mary University of London)

COSMOPOLITANISM AND THE MISSION OF THE HUMANITIES

Abstract. *In the first part of this article I explore various meanings of the word 'cosmopolitanism' and attempt to attain finer granularity by identifying two different strands within what has long been taken to be a unitary discourse. In the second part, I discuss the complex relationship (often also divergence) between the two types of cosmopolitanism – political and cultural – that I identify in the first part. I do so by analysing two foundational narratives of exile, the first of which bears on the humanities and their supreme capacity to cultivate creativity and freedom through estrangement. In the final part, I turn to the mission of the humanities today, which I happen to believe needs to be grounded, against the odds, in the cultivation and articulation of a cosmopolitan ethos.*

Keywords: *cosmopolitanism; internationalism; exile; humanities; literary studies*

Галин ТИХАНОВ
(Университет „Куин Мери“ – Лондон)

КОСМОПОЛИТИЗЪМ И МИСИЯТА НА ХУМАНИТАРНИТЕ НАУКИ

Резюме. *В първата част на тази статия изследвам различни значения на думата „космополитизъм“ и се опитвам да постигна по-фина яснота, като идентифицирам две различни направления в това, което дълго време се е приемало за единен дискурс. Във втората част обсъждам сложната връзка (често и разминаването) между двата вида космополитизъм – политически и културен, които идентифицирам в първата част. Правя това, като анализирам два фундаментални наратива за изгнанието, първият от които е свързан с хуманитарните науки и тяхната върховна способност да култивират творчество и свобода чрез отчуждаване. В последната част се обръщам към мисията на хуманитарните науки днес, която според мен трябва да се основава въпреки всички трудности на култивирането и артикулирането на космополитен етос.*

Ключови думи: *космополитизъм; интернационализъм; изгнание; хуманитарни науки; литературни изследвания*

This article conveys a very personal view on a topic whose significance is particularly salient at a time when cosmopolitanism is once again besieged, an embattled set of values, a worldview under attack.[1] And so are the humanities; they are undergoing profound changes that can be unsettling and motivational in equal measure.

In the first part of this article I explore various meanings of the word 'cosmopolitanism' and attempt to attain finer granularity by identifying two different strands within what has long been taken to be a unitary discourse. In the second part, I discuss the complex relationship (often also divergence) between the two types of cosmopolitanism – political and cultural – that I identify in the first part. I do so by analysing two foundational narratives of exile, the first of which bears on the humanities and their supreme capacity to cultivate creativity and freedom through estrangement. In the final part, I turn to the mission of the humanities today, which I happen to believe needs to be grounded, against the odds, in the cultivation and articulation of a cosmopolitan ethos.

1. Two Types of Cosmopolitanism

Ever since Diogenes, banished from his home town of Sinope in today's Turkey, referred to himself as "a citizen of the World" (a *cosmopolitan*), cosmopolitanism, while evading a precise definition, has been understood as a belief in the need to recognise the dignity and rights of people *across borders, cultures and communities*. This means that to be a cosmopolitan, it does not suffice to merely declare a belonging to the world, but to belong to it in a particular way: through acknowledging, appreciating, and indeed embracing, difference. Cosmopolitanism begins with a recognition of universal human nature, but only comes into its own when recognizing cultural difference: we can truly respect our fellow human beings when we learn to see them both as equal to us (in their humanness) and different from

[1] This article is a reworked and expanded version of the 4th Annual Lecture of the Faculty of Humanities, University of Cyprus, which I presented on 9 October 2025 in Nicosia. I am very grateful to the Faculty of Humanities and the University of Cyprus for their invitation and hospitality. In particular, I wish to extend gratitude to the Dean of the Faculty, Dr Michalis Michael; to the Department of English Studies and its Board, and to Professor Antonis Balasopoulos for the kind introduction and for his own contributions to literary studies. I have decided to preserve, as far as possible, the immediacy of the oral delivery and have, for this reason, not included references or notes.

us (because of their culture, background, customs and traditions). But the reverse is also true: recognising cultural difference would not suffice without the foundational act of extending respect to others *qua* humans.

1.1: History and Context: What is Cosmopolitanism, who is a Cosmopolitan?

Cosmopolitanism can be understood differently. It can be thought of, first of all as an ethos and a set of values that includes openness to other cultures, and tolerance and respect for others; secondly, it can also be construed as a foundation for a specific world order built on peace and mutual recognition amongst states and communities; thirdly, cosmopolitanism also designates a particular methodology in the social sciences since the fall of the Berlin Wall that looks at social phenomena not through the prism of the nation state (what is known as 'methodological nationalism'), but from a more global ('cosmopolitan') perspective. The first of these three uses pertains to a number of interconnected areas: philosophy, politics, culture, and the arts. Historically, this is the earliest manifestation of cosmopolitanism; it points to the need for humans to go beyond the comfort zone of their own cultures and accept other cultures, thus learning to inhabit, potentially, the entire world as its citizens. Philosophically, cosmopolitanism rests on two premises: 1) the assumption that it should embody a certain order and even convey a sense of harmony (cf. the Greek 'cosmos' as opposed to 'chaos'; and try also to discern the notion of beauty nestling in the semantic root that survives in our word "cosmetics"), and 2) the assumption that being human is not an abstract feature but a quality that needs to be validated and recognized again and again as we move across different cultures and different communities (ideally to the point where this validation can occur everywhere in the world). It is clear from this that cosmopolitanism is not value-free or value-neutral: it already comes loaded with ideas of order, and with notions of human dignity, human rights, etc. The second understanding (cosmopolitanism as a foundation for a specific world order) is a more recent strand that begins in what we still tend to refer to as the age of Enlightenment, more specifically with Kant. Today Kant's project of eternal peace and universal hospitality is put under pressure: isolationism is gathering momentum, and resurfacing nationalisms and anti-migrant sentiments, not least in Europe, are questioning the notions of cosmopolitan law and the importance of the global institutions that are meant to uphold human rights, fairness, dignity, and assist in cases where humanitarian intervention is necessary. There are also serious philosophical objections to Kant, some of which I am going to touch upon later.

1.2: Two Types of Cosmopolitanism (Political and Cultural Cosmopolitanism)

I insist, however, that cosmopolitanism is not a homogeneous concept. In fact, there are two different types of cosmopolitanism: cultural and political. They do not coincide, and there is an underlying distance between them. Cultural cosmopolitanism has at its core the appreciation of difference, and language is central to this understanding of the world as the site of interaction between distinctive cultures which can be translated into one another but can never be entirely reduced to a denominator of commonality. (Whether actually language does serve as an indispensable foundation for cultural cosmopolitanism is a larger philosophical question, which one should discuss separately.) This type of cosmopolitanism could be called, for convenience sake, Herderian, even though – or perhaps precisely because – Herder's work displays the complex tendency of appreciating cultural difference and conceiving of it through a mixed lens: one that delivers a cosmopolitan perspective on it, while often also sponsoring a notion of organically rooted (sub)national collectivities (cultural cosmopolitanism, historically speaking, has recurrently been embedded in, and has functioned in amalgamation with, discourses evoking nationalism and a sense of collective cultural uniqueness). The second type of cosmopolitanism I single out could be called 'political cosmopolitanism' (or, for convenience sake, Kantian cosmopolitanism), although it could, with the same justification, perhaps also be referred to as 'moral cosmopolitanism', for it insists on upholding moral values such as respect for human dignity and the closely related practice of hospitality. The reason why I do believe it would be better to use the appellation 'political cosmopolitanism' is because Kant's project of a cosmopolitan order was essentially a political one, asking and answering the question of how political power should be used by governments to attain and safeguard the morally laudable values of cosmopolitanism. Compared to cultural cosmopolitanism, political cosmopolitanism rests on a different assumption: the latter is usually language-neutral and sees the world as a place that evolves towards some measure of homogeneity; while not neglecting difference, this version of cosmopolitanism believes that commonality, attained through various procedures of equivalence and reciprocity (think of Kant's imperative of hospitality towards the foreigner by any state whose citizen s/he is not), ought to be the ultimate goal of history, the horizon that should navigate all nations' journeys through it. Let me repeat: dissimilar as they are, both of these two types of cosmopolitanism retain the notion of difference as their foundation: Kant's *cosmopolitan* law (unlike *international* law) presupposes two different

agents (an individual human being and a state) and, even more important, a radically different status for each of these two agents: the foreigner, unlike the locals (the cultural aspect makes an unavoidable, if only implied, appearance here, much as Kant seems to be willing to neglect it), does not possess the rights citizens do. But these two types of cosmopolitanism, while both grounded in the recognition of difference, handle this difference dissimilarly: cultural cosmopolitanism embraces, cultivates, and proactively encourages difference; political cosmopolitanism rather works towards its negotiation and eventual accommodation under a regime of commonality. The trouble with our thinking about cosmopolitanism is that we have so far failed to recognise with due clarity the existence of these two different types of cosmopolitanism, and have therefore operated with an undifferentiated blanket notion of cosmopolitanism. Today, we must think of how these two types of cosmopolitanism intersect historically (and in the current situation), but also how they diverge. The demands and values of cultural cosmopolitanism are different from those of political cosmopolitanism, and so attaining the objectives of the former does not ensure the objectives of the latter would necessarily be met. We could readily refer to a plethora of cases where accomplished cultural cosmopolitans embrace and uphold the principles of totalitarian societies that despise, hamper, and reject the values of political cosmopolitanism (think of all those sophisticated Nazi *Bildungsbürger* who would listen to classical music and read poetry in several languages in the evening, then go out and murder Jews in the morning). And vice versa, one can be a political cosmopolitan (in the Kantian sense of extending universal respect, hospitality, and tolerance – charged as this latter concept might be – towards any human being, including those who are not citizens of the country they found themselves in), without necessarily being a cultural cosmopolitan. Multiculturalism as a doctrine that seeks to encourage the peaceful and mutually respectful coexistence of different communities – but at the price of maintaining largely parallel lives, without proper involvement in the culture of the other – might be a good example of political cosmopolitanism *without* cultural cosmopolitanism.

All of this has various important implications for how we think about cosmopolitanism. There is, unfortunately, no reliable symmetry between cultural and political cosmopolitanism, and the political condition of exile – fleeing a totalitarian regime or various forms of state-sponsored hatred and discrimination, foremost anti-Semitism – does not always beget (contrary to what we are accustomed to think) a disposition in favour of cultural cosmopolitanism. It is indeed frequently assumed that exile facilitates cultural

or political cosmopolitanism, but we need to revisit this sweeping claim. I shall return to this point later on.

Furthermore, on the basis of this differentiation between cultural and political cosmopolitanism, we can also distinguish between what I call cosmopolitanism 'from above' and cosmopolitanism 'from below'. This differentiation can indeed be mapped onto the one we have just made: political cosmopolitanism is mostly a classic manifestation of cosmopolitanism 'from above', while cultural cosmopolitanism is more often than not a manifestation of cosmopolitanism 'from below' (as an ethos, a set of values, and a phenomenon of material culture, the latter particularly relevant from the vantage point of left-leaning preoccupations with popular culture). We are facing here the central question (amongst some others) of whether cosmopolitanism is the exclusive domain of high culture, or whether it is embodied in acts of everyday life, such as fashion, shopping, and tourism. This is not a trivial question: it goes right to the very heart of the larger questions: how do we conceive of cosmopolitanism: as a norm-setting ideal ('cosmopolitanism from above') or as a particular life-style ('cosmopolitanism from below'), and – flowing from this – who is a cosmopolitan?

1.3: Cosmopolitanism Today: Contestation and Precarity

Cosmopolitanism has always been a contested territory. A decade or so ago, the proponents of cosmopolitanism have still been searching, rather optimistically, for a political and legal framework that could ensure it thrives across the globe. A good example might be Habermas' work on world governance, as well as other proposals from the social-democratic Left in Europe, including those seeking to deploy cosmopolitanism in mitigating the unpalatable effects of globalisation and mobilising solidarity to deal with global risks (the work of the late Ulrich Beck is case in point). At the same time, such efforts are constrained by the skepticism of those who see in cosmopolitanism little more than a theory of emphatically Western provenance, and thus just another conceptual tool of establishing domination and subjugating others by smuggling in and imposing notions of universal culture and morality. This argument has a long tradition and has been changing hands between those espousing political conservatism (invoking the erosion of communities and of cultural specificity, etc.) and those (usually) on the Left who would consider cosmopolitanism a doctrine of cultural re-colonisation by the West. But the enemies of cosmopolitanism also take heart from the concerns of those who believe that mainstream cosmopolitanism is too prescriptive, a rigid set of principles dictated from above (through global

political and juridical bodies or by global cultural elites), which denigrates and neglects grassroots activities and everyday experiences. It is the intersection of these two vantage points that bears out the most important struggle over cosmopolitanism today.

Covid-19 and recent technological quantum leaps, notably AI, have ushered in a new situation of heightened vulnerability, most of all with reference to the previously relatively safe Anthropocene belief in a human-centred, rational, and progressive West. Added to this is the current (rather painful) realisation that the West itself is no longer necessarily united in the face of political calamity. One of the concerns that fill the air at present is that underlying Western ideas could as a result find themselves in a state of precarity, from which only a very conditional recovery might be possible. Cosmopolitanism is not immune to this precarity, and it will be up to us to make sure it remains a constructive and viable proposition for a world that faces a momentous redefinition of culture and the human.

2. Cosmopolitans without a Polis

I wish now to probe deeper into the resilient notion that exile produces, somehow automatically and unfailingly, cosmopolitan attitudes. Exile, on this reading, is a dependable machine for churning out cosmopolitans who emerge from the exilic experience as reliably enriched, unfailingly energized, and dependably cultivated and tolerant citizens. Crucially, I also want to think about the inherent complexity and multi-layered nature of the very idea of cosmopolitanism, in which there exist recognisable overlaps and tensions between cultural and political cosmopolitanism, and examine the restrictions and conditionality these different types of cosmopolitanism face in exile.

2.1: First Foundational Narrative of Exile: Exile as a Site of Creativity; Cultural Cosmopolitanism's Attainments and Compromises

In a book published a few years ago, I set forth a working hypothesis essaying to explain the birth of modern literary theory in the twentieth century, a branch of the humanities that was flourishing for some six decades between World War I and the 1980s. Exile, rather than acting as an impeding factor, was right at the heart of salutary developments that promoted the growth of literary theory in the interwar period. On this reading, exile was part and parcel of a renewed cultural cosmopolitanism that transcended local encapsulation and monoglossia. For a number of years, the activities of the Russian Formalists, for example, were taking place in a climate of enhanced mobility

and exchange of ideas between the metropolitan and émigré streams of Russian culture. The most gifted ambassadors of the Formalists abroad were, at various points, Viktor Shklovsky, during the time he spent as an émigré in Berlin, and Roman Jakobson, while in Czechoslovakia (where he arrived as a Soviet citizen, deciding eventually not to return to Moscow). Jakobson is a particularly important example. His subsequent cooperation with Pyotr Bogatyrev, also in Prague, then in Münster, before eventually returning to Moscow, with Nikolai Trubetzkoy, a Vienna-based Russian émigré scholar, and with Yuri Tynianov (who stayed in Russia but was involved in the work of his Prague colleagues), were all crucial in attempts to revive the Society for the Study of Poetic Language (Opoyaz) in the Soviet Union. The work of Russian Formalism in its concluding stages, and later the formation and flourishing of the Prague Linguistic Circle, thus became possible through intellectual exchanges that benefited from the crossing of national borders, often under the duress of exile. The activities of the Prague Linguistic Circle, in particular, proceeded in the situation of a veritable polyglossia, which rendered narrow nationalistic concerns anachronistic.

This interpretation of exile as an enabling factor that unlocks creativity can be reinforced and extended by examining the birth of a related discipline in the interwar decade. In equal measure, one could argue, modern comparative literature begins life in exile, with the Istanbul works of Auerbach and Spitzer and their post-war continuation in the United States. The qualifier "modern" is not trivial here: I mean by this a comparative literature that had moved beyond the nineteenth-century model of examining cultural bilateralisms and exchanges between nations and had instead embraced a wider perspective that focuses on larger supranational patterns: mode of representation, style, genre, etc.

Auerbach and Spitzer behaved, however, in a markedly different way in Istanbul. Spitzer was eager to learn Turkish; he even wrote a brief essay, in which he praised the "phonetic sensibility" of Turkish, its melodic variations, and its "harmony of front and back vowels". Auerbach hardly looked further than German and French in his communication with colleagues and in his teaching (he spoke, in his own words, "just a bit of Turkish"). Was Erich Auerbach a cultural cosmopolitan during his exile in Istanbul, given that he showed little interest in the Turkish language as such and continued to write in German and teach in French? That Auerbach's work in Istanbul would be difficult to interpret as evidence of cultural cosmopolitanism – much as he was himself insisting on the right of intellectuals in exile to preserve their dignity, and was thus no doubt attuned to the moral values of a political cosmopolitanism in the Kantian sense – becomes increasingly clear when one

considers his perspective on Turkish history and culture. While Kader Konuk has rightly emphasised Atatürk's indigenous – and proactive – revival of humanist values that marked the scene at the time of Auerbach's work in Istanbul, the fact remains that Auerbach perceived these pro-Western cultural reforms as too fast and inadequate, pushing Turkish culture into "triviality" and ushering in, just as in the rest of the world, a lamentable "Esperanto culture" (*Esperantokultur*) that would wreck the uniquely non-Western habitus he clearly hoped to see preserved in Turkey (Auerbach's essentialising approach to Turkish culture can be discerned here). What is more, Auerbach displayed a tendency towards orientalising Turks and Turkish culture in a manner that should have provoked a sense of discomfort in Edward Said, one of his most insightful admirers. Thus in a letter to Walter Benjamin of 3 January 1937, Auerbach refers to the Turks of Anatolia as "used to slavery and hard but slow labour" (*gewohnt an Sklaverei und harte, aber langsame Arbeit*); on the same page, the Turks of Anatolia are compared to the South Europeans through a string of negative attributes, but are in the end declared to be "easy to tolerate and full of vitality" (*aber doch wohl gut zu leiden und mit viel Lebenskräften*).

This propensity was not entirely alien to Spitzer either; his own cultural cosmopolitanism presents an uneasy compromise between a repeated insistence on acknowledging and appreciating cultural and linguistic difference, on the one hand, and seeking to establish an implied scale of comparison in which languages can be measured according to their proximity to the Indo-European family. He compares Turkish with French, only to conclude that Turkish is the language of "emotion" vs. the "logic" that French exemplifies; to him, Turkish has lesser capacity (and interest) in conveying abstract concepts – it moves more sovereignly in the sphere of the concrete, fragmentary, and that which works through imitating rather than conceptualising real life (Spitzer adds Hungarian, alongside Turkish, as another insufficiently "abstract" language). Spitzer's comparison is bound to remind us of Hegel's rejection – as powerfully couched as it was misguided – of the capacity of the Chinese language to serve the procedures of abstract (Western) thinking.

Be that as it may, in both cases – the birth of modern literary theory and of modern comparative literature – one can legitimately construct a narrative of exile that foregrounds, and for good reasons, creativity, seminality, and the desirability of cosmopolitan attitudes fostered by denaturalising one's own cultural inheritance and standpoint. But these attitudes are put to the test when cultural cosmopolitanism is at stake; the foundational dispositives of European (Western) culture and its inherent binaries often restrict the space in

which cultural cosmopolitanism can be sustained and survive its encounters with that which is different beyond essentialisation or exoticisation.

2.2: Second Foundational Narrative of Exile: Exile as Suffering and Affliction: The Limits of Political Cosmopolitanism

Let me now dwell in more detail on the other mainstream modern narrative of exile: that of suffering, anguish, and distress – a narrative that captures exile as affliction and an incapacitating reality. My protagonists in this section are a host of Hungarian-Jewish and Polish-Jewish Left intellectuals and literati (Georg Lukács, Béla Balázs, Aleksander Wat, and Bruno Jasieński), all of whom found themselves in the Soviet Union at the end of the 1920s or in the 1930s. The "East-East exilic experience", as I have termed this complex texture of actions, beliefs, and dispositions exhibited during the long-enforced stays of Left intellectuals from Eastern and Central Europe in the Soviet Union during the 1930s, carried the deeper meaning of a tirelessly pursued, yet culturally and politically frustrated cosmopolitanism. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels had famously asserted the spirit of a proletarian cosmopolitanism that should envelop the awakening working class and lend its emancipatory ambitions a truly global scale. Proletarian solidarity was envisaged as a world-wide network that defeats the supremacy of a bourgeoisie profiting from an equally globalised mode of production. But by the mid-1930s cosmopolitanism was becoming a word of denunciation in Moscow; it was employed to stigmatise the enemy – without and within the Party, Soviet and foreign alike – as a rootless agent who evades Party control and gives the lie to the ever more vociferous propaganda of Russianness.

The resulting distrust towards foreign communists and the concerted policies of control and Russification shot through and affected profoundly the life worlds of numerous East- and Central-European Left émigrés and exiles in Moscow during the 1930s.

The Polish-Jewish writer Aleksander Wat, in his youth amongst the founders of the Polish Futurist movement, fled Warsaw in 1939. Later imprisoned in Russia, in 1941, in Saratov, he converted to Christianity, referring to himself, with a degree of self-irony, as "a Jew with a cross around his neck". Another Polish-Jewish writer whose early work shaped Polish Futurism, Bruno Jasieński, was twice expelled from Paris for Left propaganda and found safe haven in Leningrad in 1929, becoming closely involved in Soviet literary and political life and enjoying huge literary success until his arrest in Moscow in 1937.

Georg Lukács's Moscow exile, from March 1933 to the end of August 1945 (with a brief spell in Tashkent), was the result of persecution and insecurity. Having found himself in Moscow, Lukács, like so many of the other East-Central European exiles, was confronted with a pressing identity problem: was he Hungarian, Soviet, Russian, German, Jewish? Or did all these cultural codes interplay, shaping a multi-layered, flexible, yet vulnerable perspective on the surrounding world? With reference to language, Balázs's answer to these vexing questions was recorded in his Moscow diary in January 1940, "a poet without a people and a homeland who must write in two languages and employ both without the perfection that befits a master". Often deprived of the opportunity to write in their *Muttersprache* (mother tongue), these literati felt the loss of a more general sense of language comfort: they were bereft, to quote Jean Paul, of a *Sprachmutter* (language mother). Politically, things were not any easier. Attempts to normalise one's precarious situation were not always successful. Balázs arrived on an Austrian passport, applied in 1937 for a Soviet citizenship but was rejected, and became eventually a *displaced person*. Lukács totally confounded the Soviet officials: a Hungarian by nationality, a Soviet citizen, and for eight out of his twelve years in the Soviet Union a member of the German Communist Party, he was a Hungarian-Jewish intellectual writing mostly in German, a person impossible to pigeonhole. Arousing suspicion all along, he could not escape being taken into custody for two months in 1941.

These East-European exiles thus cut insecure and imperilled figures on the Moscow cultural and political scene. None of them ever reached the inner circles of power; often they were not trusted even within the narrow confines of their professional environments, where their work was monitored, censured, and publicly attacked, not least by their Soviet peers. Eisenstein kept Balázs at a distance; Shklovsky, at the time himself a hostage of the regime, stopped the publication of Lukács's book *The Historical Novel* with a negative internal review. There was a growing sense amongst these exiled intellectuals that they didn't own the project they had subscribed to. They were cosmopolitan in their beliefs and aspirations, yet they had no polis to apply their civic ethos to, excluded as they were from the real political process. Instead, they were not trusted, and they didn't trust each other, denouncing friends and fellow exiles, sometimes even family members, as was the case with Balazs. Thus, in Moscow, "at the heart of the world", as Ervin Sinko would refer to the Soviet capital at the time, political cosmopolitanism and the moral values it would uphold had ceased to be an aspiration that could mobilise and steer everyday action and had instead become a melancholically distant horizon.

2.3: Cosmopolitanism and/vs. Internationalism

Far away from Stalin's Moscow, the American East Cost would confront European Jewish intellectuals in exile with other frustrations. There were undoubtedly opportunities, but there were also limitations and compromises. The outcome often was a characteristic vacillation between a renewed political cosmopolitanism that would insist on upholding the dignity of the non-citizen (Arendt), on the one hand, and a pragmatic internationalism, on the other, with its own institutional framework that would seek to discourage war and guarantee peace (Broch).

In "We Refugees", dated January 1943, Hannah Arendt fathoms the abyss between being human and being a citizen. She speaks in the plural, on behalf of the many Jewish refugees and exiles who had to leave Germany under Nazism. But the stories she populates her essay with are very personal. They are about the forced optimism of the newcomer who eventually, after multiple displays of cheerfulness, turns on the gas or jumps to his death off the top of a skyscraper; or about the deeply misleading agility with which refugees acquire new identities. At the core of her narrative, however, is the philosophical problem of how one can validate one's own belonging to humanity. To their horror, refugees and exiles discover that introducing oneself as a human being does not suffice. This overarching, reassuringly universal attribute fails to convince. One needs to take a step down the natural hierarchy of attributes and refer not to being human but to having the right citizenship. Without that much narrower and accidental attribute, one can no longer claim to be a part of humanity. Thus, what is unfolding in the pages of Arendt's essay is the critical project of a political cosmopolitanism with its – sometimes rather painful – acceptance and negotiation of particularity and difference.

Kant had anticipated these problems in his 1795/96 "Towards Eternal Peace", a much admired and critiqued manifesto for what he calls "universal hospitality". But Kant never experienced exile, he was never a refugee. In fact, he would spend most of his life as a philosopher in the port town of Königsberg, never venturing out. Hannah Arendt's essay speaks to the problem of exclusion of humanity with the power stemming from one's personal experience of exclusion and marginalisation as a German and European Jew. What is at stake in her essay is human dignity that is always inextricably bound up with identity.

Arendt's essay would later prove enormously influential for a young Italian philosopher, Giorgio Agamben, who, aged 27 at the time, had already written to her to express his admiration of her work. This type-written letter

from Rome, with an idiosyncratic (mis)spelling of the verb "write" in the penultimate line, is an early document of engagement, by Agamben, with Arendt's philosophy. In his eponymous essay of 1995, "We refugees", which deliberately replicates the title of Arendt's essay, Agamben sees the experience of being a refugee as a universalizable condition that shakes up the trinity of state, nation, and territory. What was to unfold in Europe some 20 years after he had written his essay only came to confirm his foresight.

But I would now like to dwell briefly on a writer and intellectual who was deeply committed to the causes of refugees and exiles, and who spent a lot of his time thinking and writing about human dignity, and about the future of the university. Hermann Broch and Hannah Arendt became friends almost by accident in May 1946, both exiles on the US East Coast. Broch was almost 60 at the time, Arendt 20 years younger. She very much welcomed Broch's novel *The Death of Virgil*, which was published almost simultaneously in German and in an English translation in 1945 (the last great work of Western Modernism, fittingly coinciding with the end of World War II). In her brief review (September 1946, published in *The Nation*), and especially in her later article, "The Achievement of Hermann Broch", Arendt placed Broch and his novel next to Proust, Joyce, and Kafka. The alignment with Joyce must have been particularly pleasing for Broch; his extensive correspondence with Daniel Brody, the publisher, reveals, even before his first major novel, *The Sleepwalkers*, was to appear in print, Broch's ambition to emulate and outstrip Joyce.

Broch's first document as a thinker concerned with human rights and dignity, especially those of refugees, was his draft "Resolution on the League of Nations" (1936-37) which insisted that human dignity be protected by law, and violations of dignity be prosecuted internationally. This draft Resolution didn't advance very far in its implementation, even as Broch tried to enlist the support of notable dignitaries. The core principle, formulated in it, was: "that which is good for the human being should take priority over that which is good for the state".

Unlike Arendt, Broch was thinking about human dignity not so much philosophically and not as often from a cosmopolitan perspective, but – much more frequently and more energetically – through the prism of internationalism and its institutions. He would tirelessly propose various new bodies, including an International Criminal Court, and an International University, both of which materialised only decades later.

3. Cosmopolitanism and the Mission of the Humanities

Broch's programme of institution building in which he envisaged a new university that cultivates pacifist rejection of war and seeks to safeguard human dignity could be a pointer to our current predicament. What are the humanities for in a world that – because of aggression, relentless identity politics, and the eco-chambers of post-truth is actually shrinking instead of expanding? And how is cosmopolitanism to survive and thrive in a world of humans that has lost the contours of the universe? Diogenes, in a sentence no one ever cites, was imagining the ideal state as a state that is located in the universe (*en te kosmou*), a state that has adopted the natural dimensions of the universe. Only with this sentence in mind can we understand his otherwise frequently cited claim to being a citizen of the world (the cosmos).

If there is one lesson the tribulations of cosmopolitanism, its multiple historical endorsement and detraction at the hands of philosophers, politicians, writers, and ordinary citizens, can teach us, it is this: the most precious possession we have is our shared humanity, and it is shared through diversity. The humanities' most urgent mission is to uphold and cultivate this notion of shared humanity in the face of particularisation and division.

But this mission would not materialise unhampered, in the pristine environments of benevolent institutions. The intrinsic dynamics of the humanities would shape this mission in a way that would mean responding creatively to various challenges.

The first one, as I see it, is the vanishing value of overspecialization. We have entered an age of exponential growth of knowledge, and of even faster reproducibility of knowledge. Erecting artificial boundaries between various disciplines within the humanities blinds us to this process. Forecasts can be a very silly thing to do, but it seems to me that for various reasons – intellectual, economic, demographic, or to do with technology – we will witness in our lifetimes the hybridization of knowledge in the humanities; combinations between knowledge produced on the borderline with area studies and the liberal arts will become the norm, enfeebling the protocols of particular disciplines, be they literary studies, or art history, or musicology. We have to take this in our stride and re-emphasise interdisciplinarity; after all, the biggest challenges humanity faces cannot be addressed by single disciplines, nor is the human soul that the humanities are supposed to touch and nurture artificially segmented.

Or think of the challenges history is facing in a society whose instincts of remembrance are severely undercut by a new technology of unrelenting presentism, what Hartog has called the "treadmill" of a never-ending now.

Does AI have a sense of the past, what is a robot's idea of temporal depth? As we are bombarded by discourses of immortality (Putin and Xi believing that a life of 150 years should be within reach) and of transhumanist possibilities, aren't we at the same time inching ever closer to a notion of disposable lives? And how is staying in touch with "deep time" going to help us resolve this dilemma? In other words, how much past, and which narratives of the past do we need to engage with and immerse our students in?

The humanities can enrich our sense of a meaningful life by asserting the duty of thinking, the privilege of feeling, and the rare gift of creating without producing immediate use value. The call for the humanities to constantly justify their existence with reference to economic models of efficiency and utility are the wrong calls: the mission of the humanities is to maintain the domain of public and private life that functions as surplus to utility, and without which no healthy society can exist. Imagine a world built entirely on the rules of pragmatism and immediate use value: the humanities have to keep such a horrendously dystopian scenario at bay.

For literary studies, the discipline I have spent more time in than any other, I would like to imagine a future that tears down the barrier between learning about literature and experiencing literature. This is not just – and certainly not solely – about students continuing to read the actual texts (rather than relying on AI summaries or films), it is about literature being taught not only by scholars but also by people who actually produce it: if we want to teach our students what literature is, we better invite poets and writers into the seminar room who can furnish a different perspective. Students can talk about literature through the filter of their own experience, but poets and writers can discuss literature not just through that prism, but also by considering the pliability, or recalcitrance, language carries, its own inertia, and the weight of form – in ways an academic can only explain as something external rather than as a lived act of creativity. Writers and poets in the class room might also help us resist the most profound change, I think, that is shaping how literature is read these days by our students: its radical de-fictionalisation, its treatment as a mere document of human life, or sheer illustration of the state of society.

***

In this article, I have essayed to draw a distinction between political cosmopolitanism, on the one hand, and cultural cosmopolitanism, on the other. As my analysis progressed, it became clear that these two types of cosmopolitanism, far from being identical, have their own distinctive values that do not always coincide. I was also at pains to demonstrate that exile and cosmopolitanism abide in a relationship that is far less straightforward than

habitually assumed: the best way to describe this relationship is perhaps to refer to exile and cosmopolitanism as bound by a rather uncertain affinity. Finally, I asked how the humanities can articulate our sense of shared humanity through diversity, even as the very category of the human is under unprecedented pressure, having to fight for its existence in the face of discourses and technologies that seek to de-centre and de-emphasise it. The humanities and their work on expanding the limits of humanity within the individual human being *can* uphold cosmopolitanism in a world that is in danger of shrinking, a world that is questioning the very foundations of an understanding of culture grounded in difference. The mission of the humanities, it seems to me, is to recreate diversity while continuing to acknowledge and embrace uncertainty in a manner that is edifying and constructive rather than escapist or acquiescent.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This work was funded by the EU's NextGenerationEU instrument through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of Romania – Pillar III-C9-I8, managed by the Ministry of Research, Innovation and Digitalization, within the project entitled *Theorizing (Sub)peripheries:Strategies of Synchronization in Southeast European Literary and Cultural Criticism (STRASYN)*, contract no. 760247/28.12.2023, code CF 141/31.07.2023.

Galin Tihanov, George Steiner Professor of Comparative Literature (DPhil, PhD), FBA, MAE
Queen Mary University of London
London, UK
e-mail: g.tihanov@qmul.ac.uk
ORCID: 0000-0002-0007-6908