

## *Speaking for the Humanities*

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Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

IN “RATIONALITY,” CHARLES TAYLOR DEFINES REASON IN TWO WAYS: consistency, which is shared by all cultures; and theoretical reason, rationality.<sup>1</sup> For rationality, leading to “theoretical cultures” in the heritage of Plato, he has a higher claim and uses it to show that “one culture can surely lay claim to a higher, or fuller, or more effective rationality, if it is in a position to achieve a more perspicuous order than another. It seems to me that a claim of this kind can be made by theoretical cultures against atheoretical ones.”<sup>2</sup> This alarming essay needs to be unpacked more carefully than I can do here. All I can point out is that it shares a common goal with Taylor’s object of criticism, Peter Winch (and indeed with Peter Winch’s object of criticism, E.E. Evans-Pritchard): “how to make intelligible in our terms institutions belonging to a primitive culture.”<sup>3</sup> I am interested in “setting-to-work,” not merely academic transcoding, “making intelligible.” I am interested in “the task of recoding the ritual-to-order habits of disenfranchised systems with the ritual-to-order habits of parliamentary democracy, with a teaching corps whose idea of education is unfortunately produced by a terrible system.” Speaking more broadly, it is an interest in how the non-scientist, the non-philosophers, the non-political scientists of the world can share the basic consistencies of a reasonable polity: the public sphere. Not every Westerner uses the arcane of “modern science” “rationally,” after all.

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<sup>1</sup> *Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Winch, “Understanding a Primitive Society,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1 (October 1964): 315; E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937).



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Pierre Bourdieu started off the mother lode of anthropologizing Europe with this presumption.<sup>4</sup> Its flip side is to realize that we do not touch the “non-European” other *only* anthropologically, however benevolent, however culturalist. The trend that third-worldizes the colored metropolitan diasporic in order to “empower” themselves (grabbing power for the metropolitan viewpoint, as if it were only the academic lefties, whose hearts are good, and the desperate underclass, whose circumstances are bad) reproduces Charles Taylor’s line. Reading Zillah Eisenstein’s “What’s in a Name? Seeing Feminism, Universalism, and Modernity,”<sup>5</sup> I went back in time to the eighties, when Taylor’s piece was written. Politically correct, narcissistic in the name of “experience” (“I identified as a socialist feminist to distinguish myself from the mainstreamed liberal movement. Then came the revolutions of ‘89 and eastern European women’s indictment of the misuses of feminism by so-called socialist states. Socialist feminism no longer felt like an effective identity. I started to just say I was a feminist. But then I also felt that anti-racism needed to be specified if feminism were to not be assumed to be white and western. Given the new excesses of global capital I am tempted to start using socialist alongside anti-racist again”), but of course an ally for those of us whose commitment to socialism does not swing on this week’s flavor.

The rhetoric of the piece is a repetition automatism of “needs to be done” and its variants. The declared stance of obsessively non-Eurocentric. Who is the appropriately placed agent of these doings in the logic consistent with this rhetoric? Go figure. If asked the question, Eisenstein would no doubt produce a list of diversified figures and organizations. I remain mindful of Barbara Herrnstein Smith’s wise caution: “Accordingly, I suggest that, insofar as we see ourselves as intellectually responsible scholars and teachers we ... expose the straw-herring ‘claims’ and ‘theses’ as what they are, and take on the task of actually engaging actually existing ideas, relativistic and other. That means engaging them capaciously, in their extended textual forms, concept by concept, analysis by analysis, argument by argument, example by example.”<sup>6</sup> For me, the mere reason that can run the state, keeping it clear of nationalism and fascism, is the commitment to consistency shared by us all. The claim to a “better reason” that only Europe has is as dangerous as it is powerful.

The “reason” that is used by rational choice theorists is consistency backed by the cultural confidence of a vaguely-digested universal-exceptional theoretical reason. Its “European” identity has been class-globalized in the economic and military spheres, so that it is no longer western and white. In this sphere the class of globalized users of rational choice have inherited the so-called radical tendency in economics which claimed behaviorist psychology to make market predictions on the assumption. In *The Strategy of Conflict*, Thomas Schelling says “the assumption of rational behavior is a productive one, it gives a grip on the subject that is peculiarly conducive to the development of theory.”<sup>7</sup> A curious consequence of this, that the class-globalized folks do use rational choice, has been cultural contradictions that the economic and military at-

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<sup>4</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

<sup>5</sup> Zillah Eisenstein, “What’s in a Name? Seeing Feminism, Universalism, and Modernity,” in *Against Empire: Feminisms, Racism, and the West* (London: Zed Press, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Barbara Herrnstein Smith, From the conclusion of *Scandalous Knowledge: Science, Truth, and the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 39.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 4.

tempts to solve by quick-fix ways. This reminds one of the “morally lazy reckoning” of what Kant would call “mere reason.”

Here are words from a CEO who calls this “communication under pressure”: “When I was in charge of Lehman Brothers’ investment banking activities in Asia, overseeing the restructuring of a gigantic, near-bankrupt shipping company, headquartered in Hong Kong, I was sure that some of my Asian colleagues were hearing the words but not really understanding them. This wasn’t anyone’s fault, the American, Japanese, and Chinese experiences were just very different. I confess that I wished many times that the team was composed only of Americans like me. Ultimately the recommendation in this book are profits plus community.” A greater engagement of academic political philosophers, a disciplinary combination of social sciences and humanities, presumably to help make this happen, and in one ominous sentence, a program that is the opposite of the imaginative othering of the self in which a robust humanities education can train the imagination. I quote: “The mind of the CEO needs to get into the mind of his customers.”

Or consider the case, reported in *The New York Times*, of an Iraqi general who instructed his soldiers to read Samuel Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations*, or another short piece that instructs you what to do and not to do so as to be culturally acceptable to an Iraqi man whom you just might happen to meet. Such gestures clearly indicate that the terrain of rational choice, rather than the rational choice theory taught in schools, is full of contradictions. For example, the liberation of women from cultural constraints, one of the often repeated “goods” resulting from military intervention in “Islamic countries” is forgotten, as we are told not to offend the Iraqi man by paying any attention to the woman or women with him. As a teacher of literature, and an activist of grassroots elementary education, I have proceeded in the conviction that the pride of transcendental rationality is a cultural need. I am convinced that the logic of consistency is what binds the world. I am also convinced that, because this capacity to be reasonable is produced and nested in a psychosomatic network, that is indeed also open-ended, discontinuous, and singular, it will generate and be subject to internal and external contradictions. If we retain the notion that it is a self-sufficient system accountable only to itself, it operates by autoimmunity that is the most alarming characteristic of the history of the dominant present. On the other hand, it is the only instrument by which life is secured, and collectively imaginable. We need to know the ways and limits of consistency in order to protect its usefulness. Over the years, I have tried to write proposals outlining the ways to such knowledge. I have summarized Melanie Klein’s intuition of the biological as providing ingredients for ethical symbiosis. I have tried to put together a baseline definition of agency, as opposed to subjectship, as contained and produced by the subject in society as institutionally validated action, finding in reproductive heteronormativity the broadest and oldest institution of recourse.

Of late, trying to examine the emergence of agency by way of consistency, I have depended on analogies, with simple figurations familiar to scholars of the humanities for many centuries—metonymy and synecdoche. Your invitation obliges me to look more closely at the disciplinary use of rational choice. *Rational Choice in an Uncertain World* by Reid Hastie and Robyn Dawes is a book that is read in many many courses that bring together in many schools economics, business administration, conflict resolution, and human rights.<sup>8</sup> The book is clearly defined as helping to remove uncertainty and solve problems.

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<sup>8</sup> Reid Hastie and Robyn Dawes, *Rational Choice in an Uncertain World: The Psychology of Judgment and Decision Making* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001).

Yet from another perspective, and today more than ever, we have to remember that the strict distinction between public and private still holds only in theory. It is not that the public and the private are hopelessly entangled; it is just that the public and the private bleed into each other. And if you apparently solve the problem by sticking to legal definitions alone when you are thinking, and so you have in the private the sort of behaviorist pattern and the public the sort of legal machinery, if you apparently solve the problem by sticking to legal definitions alone, when you are thinking and acting as a citizen, rather than as a member of the state machinery, or the administrative machinery of the European Union, or indeed of the United States, of the legislative machinery of state or union, as a member of the judiciary of either, or yet, as a law professor or student, inclined to rational choice alone, you will be solving the problem of the internal contamination of the public and the private by the letter of the law alone, and the problem will exacerbate, fester, get worse and worse. We certainly need strict definitions in order to legislate, although not necessarily in order to enforce or dispense the law. Philosophers of different traditions have known for a long time that to be able to state the problem may mean more than apparently to solve it, except in mathematics, or in philosophy on a mathematical model.

The attempt to understand the complexity of a problem in order to be able to state it according to our capacities and the circumstances of our lives is the obligation of the citizen, most especially of those who crave citizenship in a foreign state, and are denied the privilege. Two questions may arise here. The first—can interdisciplinarity be of any help? Can the social sciences learn from the humanities and vice versa, when you are trying to solve problems rather than describe the rules? And the second—are we speaking of some unavoidable characteristic of the humanities? I hope I will not disappoint you by offering a guarded “no” to the first question and an emphatic “no” to the second. Let me take them up one by one. I think quantitative sociological or economic knowledge would find this approach completely relevant. Yet I am not speaking of the qualitative side of these disciplines either. I am thinking of commonsense thinking that gives into the formulation of the generalizations that lead to the methods of counting human data. Charles R. Brigg wrote a handy revision of the interview in *Social Science Research* twenty years ago: “Opening up Questions that We Already think are Solved.” But I am also thinking of how one interviews oneself, as it were. Is there any hope that rational choice quantitative social scientists will voluntarily subject themselves to a matricial (?) humanities training that will rearrange their desires, so that they will note move toward the most easily quantifiable aggregations? I have no such confidence. Yet my “no” is qualified, it is hesitant, because I feel this answer is future-oriented and the future may always surprise us.

I’ve argued, and will continue to argue, that such a future is imaginable, rather different from predictable, if, world-wide, education in the humanities—literature and philosophy, in other words—is, in a certain way, undertaken, and on all levels. Let me say at once that this is not as utopian as it may seem. Let me spend some time offering justification for this preposterous statement before I speak of that “certain way.” First, imagining is not predicting. Second, I do not expect the international establishment of the same system of education, and the consequent disappearance of the evils of capitalism, or imperialism. If nothing else, the vicissitudes of international socialism will have taught us the folly of such a plan. As I am accustomed to saying, the schools do not close, no generation is born with redistributive assumptions. Human children must be reared, adults educated.

My confidence lies on two fronts. One—benevolent rational choice allows the right to education as an inalienable human right. That is something to fight with. Most new nations pitch for

free primary education. Another instrument to fight with. Using these provisions, it is possible to think of developing a focus on the quality of education. Think of the right to real, rather than mere formal, education. In order to develop good teachers on the primary level we need humanities training on the higher level. And insofar as on the primary level a good education trains the imagination, there also a humanities model is important. But the teaching of the humanities must be undertaken in a certain way for this hope to find fruit. One must cope with the fact that the humanities are not usually taught this way, anywhere.

For literature, it is to teach in fact how one can learn without regard to verification, to work in the interest of justice. It is an extremely difficult thing to learn. It is also training in suspending oneself in the text, which is of course in turn training in accessing the Other. Thus is what I mean by training the imagination. We get to this by learning how to attend to the rhetorical signals in the text. This is of course close reading—a literary training is not necessarily devoted to close reading. And everybody who teaches close reading doesn't necessarily give up the idea of verifying it and presenting it in a legalist framework. Prestigious schools of morphological and classificatory work court rational choice. Literary history takes a qualitative historical model where a linear model offers didactic value. I'm urging literary studies not to ignore what is specific about the literary—learning to learn from the singular and the unverifiable. I believe I could make a case for this characteristic even in most ancient traditions, where myth and history are imbricated. And today this is certainly the defining characteristic of the literary. It is this skill, this craft, that we teach when we teach literature as such. And this, I believe, is what takes, by way of rhetoric and figure, the accountability of consistency as reason outside of its own merely logical outlines.



On the subaltern, elementary level, where the trainer attempts to develop the intuitions and rituals of a deliberative democracy and a sense of the public sphere, it is the details of learning to learn from below in order to devise a viable philosophy of education that is sustained by a training of the imagination,

It is a bit amusing for me that, in this abstract language, what I am describing is the practical details of varieties of classroom pedagogy. What the students learn is also an exercise of the imagination, for such an education emphasizes the working out of meanings, in conjunction with the basic skills of numeracy. Democracy is caught in a special double bind of self, autonomy and other—equal rights for all. And the training of the imagination allows this double bind to operate in this special way. If democracy were a matter of rational choice alone, and the conventional idea of the oneness of reason were correct, either the ground of choice would be annulled, or democracy would depend on data alone—a very old Aristotelian theme, but it hasn't gone away.

It is in order to accede to the double bind that the student's desires are rearranged. Not transformed, that is in the hands of chance, but rearranged again and again so that the possibility of using, guarding, and keeping responsible reason, accountable reason, can at least emerge. This persistent effort at rearrangement is not a means to an end, but an end itself. It affects teacher and taught both, it operates in different ways on all levels. Broken down this way, I do not believe my proposal—teaching the humanities in a certain way—does not seem so preposterous or utopian at all. Indeed, what strikes me as unrealistic by contrast is that general rational choice theory seems to assume a simple model of the human mind that even if we are very diversified there are areas where we behave in a similar way. Whereas my model does not take democracy as

a natural or as a matter of style of government alone. It does not accept the generalization that most people in democracies leave well enough alone, while the State works its benevolence.<sup>9</sup> I offer this activist notion, dependent upon a humanities education as a prefigurative and effortful substitute for mere prediction.

When the disciplines that use rational choice wish to complicate the idea of the human mind, they rely, as I have already said, on behavioralism, a view of the mind that is peculiarly suited to the predictive instrumentality of rational choice, so much so that one justifies the other.<sup>10</sup> Rational choice and behavioralism do not only run a certain spectrum of social science disciplines, they also run the disposition of capital, in capitalism and socialism, as well as policy.<sup>11</sup> This is indeed my feeling about all policy, all social engineering based on rational choice laced with behavioralism. No reform will last if the beneficiaries are not treated with developed imaginations to an uncoercive rearrangement of desires.

The method is literary in the broadest sense, however cut and dried the goods. Let me use a passage from the South African writer Bessie Head as an example of activist writing. It is from the beginning of *A Question of Power*:

It seemed almost incidental that he was African. So vast had his inner perceptions grown over the years that he preferred an identification with mankind to an identification with the particular environment. And yet, as an African, he seemed to have made one of the most perfect statements: "I'm just anyone." It was as though his soul was a jigsaw; one more piece being put into place. How often was a learner dependent on his society for his soul-evolution?<sup>12</sup>

Suppose I were a humanities teacher, teaching this opening paragraph to a class of global undergraduates, full of enthusiasm, or graduate students who would become teachers soon. I would point out to all of us that I was cutting the opening off from the novel. Thus cut, how do the words instruct us? They instruct us by asking us to imagine the imagining of the inside of an unidentified person who felt so many different kinds of things, apparently absent in his environment, that he felt more general than his particular environment.

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<sup>9</sup> Here I am thinking of Bruce Ackerman's ideas in *We, the People* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991–98).

<sup>10</sup> I was appalled at how much this idea that we behave in similar ways that can be roughly quantified is promulgated. For example, at a recent seminar a behavioralist looked at certain words in *Webster's Dictionary* to tell us what we should think about them. Forget about the fact that Voloshinov long ago talked about the fact that the mode of a language as we use it is precisely what is not found in dictionaries, or that dictionaries are made by human beings, or that one doesn't look at *Webster's* but at examples as the centuries unroll.

<sup>11</sup> Look at Sanjay Reddy's recent review of Jeffrey Sachs's book in *The Hindu*, an Indian newspaper, where Reddy talks about how if you want to eradicate poverty, if you want to eradicate disease, if you do not access with patience the ethical idiom for whom disease and poverty are eradicated through an unquestioned view of economic growth, in fact, they will not last. For a homespun example, doing primary health care for many years among the rural people in Bangladesh, when one would suggest to the women that they should dip in a vial of iodine the cord with which to tie the umbilicus after birth, it seemed like we were offering one kind of magic in the place of another. And then when we would say that defecating under the sun by the clear water in fact was what was making them sicker, and if they actually relieved themselves in these terrible, stinking latrines, that it would somehow make them healthy. This was put among the absurdities that the ruling class handed out regularly. And yet these absurdities must be obeyed because, after all, it was coming from above, and so if they didn't do this then, dot dot dot.

And then in less than a decade the conclusion is made that there must be something wrong with the people, because we gave them everything, but they just could not do it. This kind of idea is what I am talking about when I say that the use of rational choice is not only in the disciplines I described but also in this kind of civil society benevolence.

<sup>12</sup> Bessie Head, *A Question of Power* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 11.

What is it to feel absent things? This is the baseline definition of the imagination, in all languages. The reader is invited then to imagine the imagining of an extraordinary imaginer. It is not a question of power yet, just a question of identity. This is what is being offered, as being as big as the world. “Just anyone,” not an agent of world governance. I want to connect this “anyone” to the anyone in Derrida’s last published book, *Voyous*, where he actually is unable to name certain questions because, he says, again and again, that “I will not tell you the questions that torture me because if I told you the questions I would not be able to say what I am saying.”<sup>13</sup> Then, about three-quarters of the way into the book, he starts talking about the questions. One of them is, and he is very serious about this, if I am indeed talking about democracy, which is what that book is about, my words should be intelligible, acceptable to just anyone, *quiconque*. If we really think that democracy is for *quiconque*, anyone, then what we are looking at is indeed, a problem of the translation of “anyone” into “everyone.” To be as big as the world is to be just anyone. It is a matter, not of choice (that word stinks of the posturings of democracy), but of preference—“He preferred an identification with mankind.” Yet the identity does not disappear.

If I leave the cut passage alone, I see the desire to fragment, to be a fragment, “jigsaw” as noun, verb, and adjective, the soul a place of fragments, but also of fragmenting. What happens on the page is prose, and I learn to read that fragment, “one more piece being put into place,” as suspended in the paragraph, perhaps, in the existential temporality of the passage, always describing a putting together, an action phrase in the present continuous. And I learn to feel that perhaps our problem is that we are not fragmentary or fragmenting enough. This idea that we should work as a fragment in a world like a jigsaw, respecting linguistic difference, yet encouraging translation as a practice rather than as a solution.

Let me explain the “action phrase” a bit more. It is a little phrase. Simply, “one more piece being put into place.” Literature, as I have been saying, trains the imagination so that we can reach out. All disciplines are imaginative, but the main task of literature teaching is training the imagination through teaching reading. We teach reading by not only understanding the logical content, but also by acknowledging the rhetorical signals. Language is dancing and singing in literature, not just talking. If we read the Bessie Head passage with this in mind, every time we *activate* the passage in reading. This is what I meant, existential temporality in reading, every time. Every time we activate the passage in reading the rhetorical status of the fragment is problematic. “One more piece being put into place”—what to do with it, our trained eye asks? It is thus that we generalize from literature. What we see here is the singularity of an imagination of collectivity. Of course, we cannot take this as a psychological description of a general human subject. The singular, as I say again, again and again, is not verifiable. But a lecturer trained in reading this way will, one hopes, as a generality, have the possibility of protecting mere reasonableness rather than be the victim of phantasmatic theories produced by the powerful that insist that they speak for everyone.

“Speak for everyone”—in the seventies, when we began, all over the world, the alternative movements of feminism, and what I will broadly call ethnic studies, one of our strongest concerns was to question the idea of speaking for disenfranchised identity groups. Yet the activity of speaking for the human being as such, in terms of inalienable rights, that hard core of humanism as such, not only did not stop, but continued within rational choice, and this is where I speak with great trepidation and admiration of extraordinary efforts like Jon Elster’s as well as my ally

<sup>13</sup> Jacques Derrida *Rogues: Two Essays on Reason*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005). Originally published as *Voyous: deux essais sur la raison* (Paris: Galilée, 2003).

Chandra Mohanty's who, in a deservedly popular book, *Feminism Without Borders*, gives us the achievement of global feminist solidarity. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, completely unmindful of feminism and the considerations of what is called ethnicity, transform the Spinoza/Deleuze tradition of singularity and, in Deleuze at least, the transcendental, into another species of rational generalities—speak for everyone. And Slavoj Žižek and Alain Badiou, of course, completely unmindful of feminism and ethnicities, produce another set of generalities about the uses of universalism.

I had thought to avoid including the notion of agency and figuration to which I had alluded to earlier, that I seem to insist upon these days, in everything, but it claims its place here. The point is not, I think, to nuance rational choice by bringing in a consideration of commensurable irrationalities, or responsibility rationalized within rights as in Amartya Sen's powerful notion of capabilities. I acknowledge the importance of these initiatives, although I remain, with many, skeptical of the notion of capabilities once it is enumerated as Martha Nussbaum does, because of its close alliance with corporatist philosophy.

The point for me is to consider feminism and ethnicities in my special sense as providing the opportunity to look at the difference between everyone and anyone. I will touch upon Castoriadis, who comes, by way of psychoanalysis and European Marxism, closest to providing an alternative to rational choice from within philosophy, and be obliged to repeat myself on questions of gender and agency. If there is a concept metaphor here, it is that of translation. Translating, as I said, everyone to anyone. I see gender, among many other things, as a name for the tendency to generalize. Why can gender be the name of such a thing? That is where I go to Melanie Klein. Let me summarize.<sup>14</sup> The human infant begins to construct a plus and a minus—pleasure and pain, need and desire. With this plus and a minus, good, bad, wanting and not wanting, others, myself, this entire language begins to formulate itself. And indeed Klein secondarizes Oedipus. Klein secondarizes the European male's tendency to go toward Greek myth as narratives that will give you ideas of ethical behavior, and she would call these "permissible narratives."

In this sense, you can see that culture can also be seen as a name of a package of largely unacknowledged assumptions, loosely held by a loosely outlined group of people mapping negotiations between the sacred and the profane by way of the relationship between the sexes. Within this scenario, gender, as it begins to be that which produces the generalization as such, produces the institution of resort. It produces, in fact, commensurability as such, what Marx would call the value form. But of course since Marx was looking at it in terms of capital, he thought that it was the abstract average that gave you commensurability as such.

But in this, almost prehistorical narrative, it is not the abstract average that you see, but a different way in which commensurability is produced. Therefore, when you want to take gender into account, it is not a question of factoring in the feminine or, if you are fashionable, of factoring in the queer. It is a question of retooling oneself, so to speak. It is a question of retraining oneself, rearranging one's desires to produce knowledge, and one cannot rearrange one's own desires, alas. This is where I would talk about the constitutive and the regulative in Kant.

Judith Butler says in the new edition of *Subjects of Desire* that at Yale, as undergraduates, they were all joined together in thinking in terms of constitutivity in Hegel. And she says that constitutivity means the alterity constituting you. This is more our everyday understanding of constitutivity. I share this, Laclau-Mouffe share this, but this is not what the constitutive is in Kant.

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<sup>14</sup> See also Spivak, "Translation as Culture" *Parallax* 14 (January-March 2002): 13-34.

When Kant talks about the fact that the human being cannot access pure understanding, cannot access the idea of reason directly, and that it must follow true analogies with sense data, the schemata of the senses, taking the body as writing and the mind as reader, as it were, in that area he says that it can be done two ways. The analogies are constitutive, as in mathematics, where you can predict results, but in a certain form—no empirical cognition comes there. Or they are regulative, which only produces approximations. As Klein tells us, it is in terms of the first events, when in fact we are even constructing a language for ourselves, that the body begins to generate an ethical semiosis. In this area, the commensurability that is produced is gendering, gender as the name of the ability to be reasonable. It is a commensurability in terms of the regulative.

If we understand agency as such (the institutionally validated action, not the subject), when somebody like Derrida says that the event is what escapes the performative conventions, when we bind democracy to this notion, it escapes the performative conventions. Similarly, when Luce Irigaray says that the sexual is what escapes the conventions of gendering, they are trying to tap something that goes beyond the regulative.

If we keep the idea of agency as within the regulative as institutionally validated action, and if we think of reproductive heteronormativity as the broadest and oldest institution, then let us think of agency in terms of this scenario. Agency is a desire to act collectively. Also, that validation comes through collectives. Every situation where such a call arises is like a metonym; we are contingent in that situation. We are adjacent to something. In that situation we have the need to follow collectivity and we do so by self-synecdochtizing. We take one part of ourselves as standing for the whole and by that synecdochtizing we form a collectivity.

Now some of us in the public sphere have the right to go from one type of synecdoche to another. Homespun example—I am a citizen of India. I teacher-train among the aboriginals in Western Bengal. Now, I self-synecdochtize. I have one vote, they have one vote. Their votes are bought, okay. So I establish a collectivity of agency by distancing Columbia professor, distancing dollar income, distancing class/caste privilege, try to learn and become a collective. Now I can do this and I can then go back to claim the same rights for all when I am in the public sphere—civil rights, political rights. They can't. They cannot in fact just simply choose this one to make a synecdochical collective self. Now this power to self-synecdochtize within metonyms, this is how one understands agency.

Now when, in fact, this kind of agency is denied, in other words, the same rights for all, sameness is denied, difference itself is found to be that which will give an opportunity to synecdochtize. So you form a collective in terms of difference. From that difference slides into culture, culture slides into religion, and religion goes on to the agency of the institution of last resort—reproductive heteronormativity. We start calling those cultures gender-oppressive. In fact, it is a dynamic scenario. It is within this broad matrix that I give the idea of a humanities education as a kind of social movement as well as a kind of future-oriented activity.

If in the private-public sphere—before the letter as it were—humanities-style education at all levels as a social movement within heteronormativity, in the private-public sphere of building infrastructure and follow-up, so that metonymic self-synecdochtizing becomes possible without danger, my proposal is the same.<sup>15</sup> When I speak for the humanities (I have no more than one string to my

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<sup>15</sup> Because sometimes, when you give this kind of follow-up, and here again my experience is terrible, the Hindu villagers or the police will destroy them because they are perceived as having no rights at all. So the work is not just educating.

bow, and have I ever spoken for anything else?), “humanities” is a misnomer, a catechresis, tied to the legacy of humanism. Better a dirty word than a deliberately clean one, I say.

Let me summarize, in conclusion. A humanities-style education at all levels can let us think of a more just future than rational choice. The issue is not a better definition of the human being, but an undoing of the mechanisms of the production of reason, which shows us reproductive heteronormativity is the matrix institution. The power to synecdochize oneself when the situation calls for it in the field of one law for all translates anyone to everyone. Judge this, please. [A]