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Title	The logic of alterity: is it a logical alternative?
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Publication date	2010-11-01
Original Citation	O'Donovan, P. (2010) 'The logic of alterity: is it a logical alternative?', in O'Donovan, P. and Rascaroli, L. (eds). The Cause of Cosmopolitanism: Dispositions, Models, Transformations, Oxford: Peter Lang, pp. 115-133. isbn: 978-3-0343-0139-8
Type of publication	Book chapter
Link to publisher's version	https://www.peterlang.com/abstract/title/34722
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Download date	2026-11-15 03:42:46
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/6553

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The Logic of Alterity: Is it a Logical Alternative?

Thinking Cosmopolitanism

In broaching the question which I pose in my title, I seek to point, at the outset, to the urgency of thinking about how we think when we are confronted by what we might spontaneously recognize as difficult questions about living in an inter-connected world.[1] What we could term the logic of value judgements, or the conditions of thought under which we seek to justify what we take to be important under these and other circumstances, is a challenge and for that reason it commands critical attention. What is specifically at issue here is the utility of a logic that is specifically a logic of alterity. This issue connects of itself with cosmopolitanism as it is often formulated today, as the attempt to articulate a view of the world that, though it acknowledges difference in ways of thinking as a factor, is purposefully independent of world views that might otherwise be taken for granted.[2] So, a more specific statement of what is at issue is to ask to what extent how we think about thought itself is a substantive concern in how we think about cosmopolitanism as a space of difficult questions.

What I argue from the outset, in brief, is that specific reflexive concerns impinge on the construction of spaces of thought today, a claim that is quite widely illustrated by the discourse of cosmopolitanism in particular.[3] There is scope also to connect cosmopolitanism to other discourses in which we are concerned with the question of how to live; in other words, the boundaries of the discourse of cosmopolitanism are not necessarily stable.[4] Global issues affect us today in ways which are pervasive and which on occasion may themselves seem to connect us with a global level of action, or to project us on to such a level. So, we ourselves may find ourselves implicated in the global at the level at which we act as individuals. Some of the

[1] On globalization as a multidimensional phenomenon that prompts the search for the new political institutions of a cosmopolitan democracy, see David Held, 'Democracy and Globalization', in Daniele Archibugi, David Held and Martin Köhler, eds, *Re-Imagining Political Community: Studies in Cosmopolitan Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), pp.11–27.

[2] On cosmopolitanism as a space of struggle between universalistic elements of contemporary political philosophies, on the one hand, and historical difference, on the other, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Universalism and Belonging in the Logic of Capital', *Public Culture* 12 (2000), 653–78.

[3] For comments on the claims of cosmopolitanism as a normative philosophy, and on the issue of its 'discursive scope', see Seyla Benhabib, 'The Philosophical Foundations of Cosmopolitan Norms', in Seyla Benhabib, with Jeremy Waldron, Bonnie Honig, Will Kymlicka, Robert Post, *Another Cosmopolitanism*, ed. by Robert Post (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp.13–44 (pp.18–19).

[4] See David Held on the full scope of cosmopolitanism as a discourse that 'can be taken as the moral and political outlook that offers the best prospects of overcoming the problems and limits of classic and liberal sovereignty', in 'Law of States, Law of Peoples: Three Models of Sovereignty', *Legal Theory* 8 (2002), 1–44 (p.24); cf. Benhabib, who contests the ambition to formulate so comprehensive a cosmopolitanism, in 'The Philosophical Foundations of Cosmopolitan Norms', p.43, n.36.

challenges that result are specific to cosmopolitanism thus understood and are challenges of thought – how do we acknowledge and respond to difference? how are we to embrace specific different ways of thinking without merely falling into a false universalism, into another more or less exclusive way of seeing the world? how do we generalize on so vast a scale, especially when our strategies for acknowledging difference and its impacts fall short? A tentative conclusion can be stated at this stage: the dynamics of thought, spanning both the local and the global, the individual and the collective, is itself implicated in our situation today.

Today, the concept of the cosmopolitan presents a tension which for some borders on a paradox: it represents the durable urge to be a citizen of the world; but it also implies an acute awareness of the extent to which that very gesture exposes us to difference as an issue that remains irreducible.[5] The cosmopolitan subject is originally identified with a kind of cosmic indifference towards any or all of the available ways of thinking about the world: politically speaking, the Cynic, for instance, is motivated by a negative cosmopolitanism, in that he denies the possibility of belonging to any political community on a rational basis.[6] Today, the cosmopolitan consists in accommodating difference in the name of some common interest, though this very gesture often makes it a contested notion. And today the cultivation of an 'eccentric' stance finds its motivation – again, paradoxically – in the desire to intervene, to shape responses to what are often urgent, but intractable, political problems.[7] This amounts to a negation of the negative gesture of the Cynic. Perhaps what scope such a stance can be said to possess derives from the equivocal outlook it embodies. The polis becomes the focus of a series of contests and conflicts in which the individual is implicated, once the question of how to live comes to be affected by global concerns which we can describe as cosmopolitan in scope. The specific identity of the citizen of the world is predicated on indifferentiation, meaning a state where difference is not the primary issue. A kind of indifference can also be said to result from a movement of identification with the incommensurable or unquantifiable other. The Cynic cultivates a negative political stance, as we have seen, placing himself voluntarily outside prevailing social norms. Today, by contrast, the externality of the subject results from the limits of interpretative grids; or so argues Michel de Certeau, citing the emblematic case of the

[5] On cosmopolitan discourse as a continuing hermeneutic dialogue, but one which is not necessarily to be understood as making universal claims, see David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), pp.164–67; cf. Jeremy Waldron who argues for a concept of cosmopolitanism which attenuates the impact of difference, 'Minority Cultures and the Cosmopolitan Alternative', in Will Kymlicka, ed., *The Rights of Minority Cultures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp.93–119.

[6] For comments on the negative character of the cosmopolitanism of Diogenes the Cynic, see Raymond Geuss, *Public Goods, Private Goods* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p.29. I refer exclusively to contemporary sources in characterizing cosmopolitanism, ancient and modern, as I am concerned with it as a distinctive space of thought today.

[7] On hospitality and the demands of the other, and in turn their implications for a conception of cosmopolitanism in which the boundaries between ethical and political discourses are indeterminate, see Jacques Derrida, *Cosmopolites de tous les pays, encore un effort!* (Paris: Galilée, 1997).

Wandersmänner, whose passage through the city is a matter of individual practices which neither agent nor observer can document in a comprehensive way.[8] The emblematic walker belongs within a global space towards which we can only gesture, whether we are up or down, on high or at street level. If cosmopolitanism amounts to a cultural and cognitive project, we must somehow incorporate into it an acknowledgment of its limits in the face of alterity. The unquantifiable individual generates at one and the same time a sublime indifference to prevailing forms of knowledge. One outcome of all of these forces is a reaffirmed desire to know, but on a different basis.

In each of these different orientations, the cosmopolitan is a constructed position, one which seems to require at a minimum a preparedness to suspend or to move beyond familiar frames of reference, be they traditions, ideologies, disciplines. Here, one is operating within what may be termed the logic of the limit. Once you resist the limit as boundary (for instance, the boundary of established knowledge), its identity as a concept shifts: by gesturing towards as yet unrealized possibilities, the limit, now apprehended as limit of what is possible, redefines your relation to the constructed space you inhabit. So, the limit is multi-dimensional (it is a pre-defined frontier, but also the limit of the knowable); but its identity and significance can also shift as a function of your actions. And then, in turn, in a second stage, open-mindedness emerges as a process of thought, in that it requires an acceptance of the outcome of thought, including even the possibility that the project of thinking differently is perhaps not something that can be sustained indefinitely.

Here again, the cosmopolitan, in one of its many versions, has a specific role to play, in that it points to ways in which its conditioning as concept and experience retains a margin of indeterminacy. Pierre Hadot defines the cosmic consciousness as the 'dilation' of the I within the realm of universal nature. This form of consciousness is linked to an acute awareness of the incommensurable and infinite nature of existence in the cosmos, such that the identity of the individual is open to a particular kind of transformation: thus, the wise person acknowledges that he or she belongs within a whole that exceeds the limits of individuality. The state of indifferentation that results is the ultimate enigma of human existence: our fates as individuals are irreducibly separate, but they play out in a context where we find ourselves in constant contact with innumerable others.[9] There is a hint here of the possibility of self-transformation as an outcome of thought, a possibility that I shall want to explore further when, towards the end of this chapter, I compare the logic of the cosmopolitan with models of thinking developed

[8] *L'Invention du quotidien*, I, *Arts de faire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), p.141.
[9] *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002), pp.292, 301–2.

within two further specific projects, one being the psychoanalysis of Jonathan Lear, and the other, the feminism of Michèle Le Dœuff.

I now turn to an instance where an encounter with difference reveals itself as a process of thought with scope to influence the question of how to live. François Jullien's *Traité de l'efficacité* is one of a series of works in which he seeks to defamiliarize Western thought by confronting it with other major systems of thought, notably that of ancient China. Jullien argues that, on the basis of a prolonged exercise in theorizing the will, Western thought has consolidated a conception of the self as self-sufficient subject. Chinese thought, by contrast, does not elaborate a theory of the will in accounting for action: it contrasts what one does with what one could possibly do, rather than with what one would do. But the Chinese model, if we were to follow it, would come at a price in that it would place severe limits on the Western conception of action which, based as it is on the attempt to engage with the world on the basis of confrontation, provides an understanding of freedom that is in the last analysis enabling. Jullien ends by giving at least a tentative endorsement of the subject, even though exposure to Chinese conceptions, as something different, leads him to articulate an expanded notion of subjectivity, open to the other within the subject (as manifested, for instance, in the passions). This is a version of open-mindedness that impinges ultimately on the subject who is more or less constrained to operate within a prevailing frame of reference: it amounts to the capacity of an expanded view of subjectivity to sustain a modified concept of agency.[10] Difference provokes us, it shakes us out of a state of indifference; and this impact is felt ultimately in how we think. What emerges, then, is that a reflexive concern with thought is central to ethical thinking. But we shall also see that how we deal with these problems of thought might even have unexpected outcomes in the wider social world.

Cosmopolitanism and the Logic of Value Judgements

In dealing with the significance of diversity for reason, I shall be concerned with the scope of thought to sustain a perspective where the possibility of a move in the direction of alterity can be justifiably sustained, where it can, in other words, here and now be said to be a logical alternative. This would seem like a move beyond Jullien's stance. I am prompted to ask the question I pose in my title by the very trenchancy with which one version, at least, of cosmopolitanism today places diversity at the centre of the attempt to say how we can understand reason.

[10] See François Jullien, *Traité de l'efficacité* (Paris: Grasset, 1996), pp.222–35.

David Held's model of reasoning is beyond all doubt a logic of diversity.[11] It is a way of characterizing cosmopolitanism that proceeds also in a quite different direction from that of Kwame Anthony Appiah. In justifying a cosmopolitan attitude, Appiah argues that values represent a shared space of debate to which we have recourse when, in collaboration with others, we seek to 'get things done': we think about values and then we are at liberty to apply any conclusions we reach specifically to cosmopolitanism.[12] Held claims at the outset that he will provide an 'alternative formulation' of how we are broadly to approach contemporary cultural and political life (48). This ambition arises in part from a form of political 'interconnectedness' which Held takes to be a fact (58); it is important to note here that this outlook would seem to suggest that difference matters in part because it co-exists with this state of interconnectedness. In parallel, a related, but slightly different, claim is made, to the effect that ethical discourse is re-oriented because of the impact of what Held refers to as globalism and because, at the moment where we are concerned to address the political community and the political good (55; 48), national boundaries cannot be said to have an absolute bearing on our thinking. What we seem to witness here is a gesture towards a general level of argument that is specific to cosmopolitanism (if so, this is an important point, because some of the same general claims could be made on behalf of globalism).

Held also presents the cosmopolitan in part as a strategic reorientation of the framework within which we can reason about ways of living in the process of reasoning about values, including the values of others. This is a potentially radical step, in that it acknowledges not just the multiplicity of values, but the multiplicity of ways of reasoning. A perspective along these lines, because it provides an account of how reason operates under conditions of plurality, is relevant to the attempt to understand the prevailing situation of the world as one governed by difference: a concern with alterity, as distinct from diversity, implies a concern with the co-existence of different ways of reasoning within something like a global framework, where the sudden compression of the gap between self and other has dramatic implications for thought: again, we encounter the problem of accommodation. There is a specific reason why the cosmopolitan, considered as a version of the logic of the limit, matters: it provides a focus for exploring the possibilities of thought and of reason, these possibilities being powerfully implicated in relation to ourselves, to others, to the world we inhabit. In one way, this does not seem controversial. But in fact to think this way *can* be to operate at the limits of thought, in that it embodies both the commitment to reason at a global level and, in turn, to justify whatever

[11] I draw primarily on Held's essay 'Culture and Political Community: National, Global, and Cosmopolitan', in Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen, eds, *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context, and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp.48–58. Further page references will be given in parentheses in the text.
[12] *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: Norton, 2006), p.28.

claims that may result. If the answer to my initial question – is there such a thing as a logic of alterity? – is to be in the affirmative, then the issue that confronts us is that of how such an outcome could be achieved.

So as to explore this problem, I shall draw some contrasts between Vincent Descombes' logic of value judgements and what I term Held's logic of alterity. In fact, this latter model of reasoned thought is not developed at length by Held, though his brief formulation of what I take none the less to be a logical model, at least in outline, is striking. Descombes's model is potentially productive.

Descombes seeks to give an account of the logic of value judgements which acknowledges the multiplicity of specific branches of reason. The role of philosophy, says Descombes, is to reach a general perspective. But how is this to be achieved where reason branches into many discrete ways of thinking? Such a division is a justifiable practical distribution of categories, but it does not have any ultimate rational basis. Descombes's proposal is as follows: each specialized branch of reasoning is to be regarded as absolute in itself; we seek to advance argument by drawing conclusions from the conclusions reached when operating within the frame of reference of a specific way of reasoning. This is the route to the general level of thought which philosophy aims to attain.[13]

Descombes implicitly acknowledges the urgency of thinking about how we might handle reason by subsuming it under philosophy, or the commitment to seek and articulate a general perspective. The general, thus understood, is in no way given. What Descombes's argument shows is that it is possible to ascribe specific roles to reason, to articulate a specific project as being one of reason, even while acknowledging that it is of necessity pursued in parallel with the multiplicity of specific other branches of reason that can also be identified and enumerated. As well as providing a specific and quite detailed account of how to understand the logic of value judgements, Descombes's discussion also brings this important duality into view. The understanding and the use of reason are affected both by the plurality of its many branches and by the attempt to say how a general perspective could be sketched out, if not achieved. The interaction between the two sides of the duality is implicated in the attempt to contextualize and to theorize the workings of reason.

To the extent that the cosmopolitan is a philosophical issue, anyone who is concerned with it can look outwards and think about how the claims made regarding it come to be validated within the general frame of discussion which Descombes identifies as being characteristically philosophical. In some ways, Held's approach is compatible with such an understanding of a process of reasoning. He presents mediation as transitive in the sense that it has the wider effect

[13] *Philosophie par gros temps* (Paris: Minuit, 1989), pp.180; 182–3.

of expanding the agent's own horizons. The problems that result are specifically logical ones in that they have to do with how we justify claims we make about those things which, individually or collectively, we regard as being important.[14]

That his approach is up to a point compatible with that of Descombes is confirmed by his treatment of how cosmopolitanism relates to other discourses which continue to have a hegemonic standing in the interconnected world. The first is that each of these frameworks has its own horizons within which general claims can, in effect, be articulated. Thus, arguments for national cultures – based on a discrete and distinctive shared identity, on a shared political project, prevailing institutional structures, a formal commitment within the social and political framework to egalitarianism (51–52) – have as their general horizon one of the strong claims of communitarianism, namely that ethical discourse is rooted in the characteristic '"form of life" of a community' (52). The globalist outlook gives rise, inter alia, to the claim that both how we should understand the prevailing social and economic conditions of life and how we should engage with principles of justice and political participation must involve the acknowledgement of categories which result from prevailing complex patterns of interaction as general constraints on our thinking (55). We have already seen that, in articulating what he sees as the essential components of the cosmopolitan outlook, Held, with an eye to the rival claims of a nationalist or communitarian standpoint, makes the point that cosmopolitanism is not at odds with cultural difference. The specific demands of difference must be something that a cosmopolitan theory can accommodate; and, conversely, cosmopolitanism, if it is to be worthwhile in the face of the legitimate claims of a nationalist outlook, must make some specific contribution to how we handle difference as a concept and as a constraint on our thinking.

So, we can conclude that the general claims of the cosmopolitan, in turn, derive *in part* (the qualification is important) from its engagement with and acknowledgement of the claims both of the national and the global perspectives – more specifically, the claims (perhaps now the residual claims) of national identity and the strong, but strictly limited and narrow, claims of economic arguments when it comes to understanding the effective conditions of global aspects of our lives. Again, Held's approach is compatible with that of Descombes.

What emerges from an argument that rehearses the different perspectives of the national, the global and, as we shall see, the cosmopolitan, is that the last is indeed a *logical* alternative, in that it seeks justification in a critical assessment of prevailing arguments. And this perspective

[14] Compare Geuss, who defines enlightenment today as the capacity to identify what is genuinely important in life; to draw conclusions from what we may think about these important things; and to incorporate these conclusions into everyday life, in *Outside Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp.9–10.

is self-consciously developed as an *alternative*: it is a response to active concerns about the world, developed on a basis other than that of more or less received ways of understanding it.

A Logic of Alterity?

Now, my title hints at there being the possibility of a specific logic of alterity: this would be the outcome if we answer the question I ask in the affirmative. This possibility is in fact powerfully evoked in the work of Held, and it is to this that I now again turn. Held's theory goes some way, then, to justify the claims on our attention of cosmopolitanism if we are at all concerned with difference.

The existence of general levels of argument emerges fairly clearly from the specific frameworks with which he engages in succession, namely the national, the global and the cosmopolitan, as we have just seen. But this is not the whole story. The logic of value judgements is under any circumstances a challenge. Given the ambition to think globally, what is at issue here is the utility of a logic that seems to present itself specifically as a logic of alterity. Descombes's approach aims to show how a general level of thinking can be achieved, while acknowledging the plurality of ways of reasoning. I am interested in Held's brief, but significant, gesture in the direction of such a logic because it happens to present one sharp divergence from Descombes's approach; and, in proceeding in this way, Held defines the cosmopolitan in a specific sense, one in which exactly how we think about what we are doing when we claim to act in the name of the cosmopolitan is itself an issue. I shall elaborate an account of how such a logic could possibly work, in part by sketching an account of a possible project of individuation, to which, of course, the cosmopolitan, in its different forms in the ancient world, is linked.[15] And today the individual is also in play, but, as we have seen, for instance, in looking briefly at Certeau's social theory, as an unquantifiable factor which is itself at the limit of what we can say, on a rational basis, about the world we inhabit.

What we can extrapolate from Held could be said to be an inversion of Descombes. Descombes identifies important features of philosophical thought with the momentary suspension of the range of possibilities offered by specific branches of reason, for the purpose of drawing conclusions. Held seems to identify a way of thinking that is specific to cosmopolitanism: an attempt to reason and presumably to generalize, but without any break

[15] On ancient cosmopolitanism, see J. L. Moles, 'Cynic Cosmopolitanism', in R. Bracht Branham and Marie-Odile Goulet-Cazé, eds, *The Cynics: The Cynic Movement in Antiquity and its Legacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp.105–20; Malcolm Schofield, *The Stoic Idea of the City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

with plurality. The contrast with Descombes suggests just how difficult this will be: the originality of Descombes's logic of value judgements lies precisely in how it provides a way of attaining generality, while acknowledging the plurality of reason. But Held specifically links a capacity for political agency to the ability '"to reason from the point of view of others"' (57).[16] He makes reasoning from the point of view of and with others internal to reasoning about how we live and does not provide for the adoption of some position external to it.

How, then, are we to determine the significance of Held's gesture? The daunting multiplicity of the world understood globally or indeed cosmically calls for an attempt – however overwhelming it seems as a prospect – to understand the ways in which reason operates in the world, however strange or remote they may seem. What is distinctive about Held's formulation is its gesture towards an indefinite commitment to sustain openness to reason in all its forms. He seems to broach a process in which our kinds of reasoning may reveal their limits when combined with those of others in this way. This stance, though it is rehearsed only very briefly, would seem to contrast with that of Jullien, who brackets or suspends difference, in the end.

Held elaborates an account of cosmopolitanism as a distinct problem for thought: the plurality of ways of thinking and reasoning about the world requires us to acknowledge the possibility of a logic of alterity, because the space of reason must explicitly acknowledge the limits of one way of reasoning when confronted with others. An approach along these lines could be said to be comparable to that of Descombes in that it seeks to generalize having regard to specific different ways of reasoning; but quite different in that it labels cosmopolitanism itself as a discrete perspective with claims to a general validity. It is a way of characterizing cosmopolitanism that proceeds also in a quite different direction from that of Appiah: it presents it as a strategic reorientation of the framework within which we can reason about ways of living in the process of reasoning about values, including the values of others.

Now this is the ultimate test of practical reason. Jonathan Lear, following Aristotle, claims that, 'in determining the shape and extent of the polis, practical reason should set its own boundaries'.[17] Held acknowledges the multiplicity of reason in the world. What is more, because his project is to theorize cosmopolitanism as a response to what he terms the advent of 'another age' (57), he is concerned with how reason, in its multiplicity, can allow us to establish a global relation to the world. The challenge that results is formidable, in that the sphere in which practical reason can be said to operate is practically limitless.

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[16] In fact, this conception is derived in part from Seyla Benhabib, as Held acknowledges in a further essay, 'Principles of Cosmopolitan Order', in Gillian Brock and Harry Brighouse, eds, *The Political Philosophy of Cosmopolitanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.10–27 (p.21). See Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), pp.9–10.

[17] *Open-Minded : Working out the Logic of the Soul* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), p.167.

Can, then, the logic of alterity be regarded as having legitimately established a distinctively general perspective? The utopian dimension of the cosmopolitan has a potentially salutary impact, in that it can reveal the limit of some prevailing situation. A complex mode of thought results. In exposing such limits, the cosmopolitan itself is open to re-evaluation, in that it must then be reformulated to meet needs of the sort that Held and others present. This is where the logical element comes in: it is necessary to rethink the project critically, indeed it may be necessary wholly to reinvent it. What is distinctive about Held's gesture is that it does not presuppose a break with alterity. The logic that results presents special challenges: if the potential intractability of different ways of thinking is acknowledged, then the logic that results will on occasion be one that seeks to govern thought as it operates at the limits of its own possibility.

To identify and characterize the logic of alterity as a logical alternative is, then, a complex enough task. The confrontation of Descombes and of Held does two contradictory things. It reinforces the ambition to justify the process of reasoning while exposing reason to plurality as an intractable problem. The ambition to reason on the basis of a sustained and unbroked commitment to difference (following Held) confronts us with the question as to whether this commitment can be a logical alternative. Alterity, as we have seen in considering Jullien, confronts us with a breach in a model or way of reasoning that might otherwise be taken to be primary; but, in Jullien's case, the primary model is, in the end, reaffirmed. So, the attempt to elaborate a model or process directly and comprehensively based on the salient features of otherness proves to be not wholly realizable. Jullien's account of features of Chinese and Western thought confronts us with a dynamics of thought exposed to more or less radical shifts in direction and to the possibility of a kind of incompleteness vis-à-vis the process that is primary or that which is other. Jullien's model itself shifts from being one about categories of thought – subjectivity and chance – to one where the process of thought – and its capacity to operate wholly according to the terms of a system that is different – is implicitly at issue. Considering Held's model, the claim can be made that a process of thought tending in some way towards alterity will be abstract. It is also in a sense alternative. The task that is imposed – that of reasoning from the point of view of others – may prove in the last analysis impossible, but it is nonetheless explicitly inscribed *within* the process of reasoning, and specifically within the process of drawing conclusions concerning the interconnected world. As a result, the mode of reasoning which we label cosmpolitan is itself modified. The act of reasoning is accompanied by the act of conceptualizing it, a process that proves to have a radical outcome at the point where the pull of the global reveals the alterity of reason, actual or potential. Held's statement can thus be interpreted as a metastatement, in part, at least: a characterization in miniature of

a project of reason fully committed to alterity and in a state of dynamic tension as a result. Its mode of operation as thought is likely to be inferential, and directed at problems of thought or reason as they arise, as much as to substance. It is likely to be open-minded in the sense that it is open to unforeseeable movements of thought. It is also a metastatement in that a move in the direction of alterity is to a greater or less extent a move in the direction of the limits of thought (understood both as the limit of our capacity fully to assimilate the reasoning of others and as the limits of the project of thinking globally on the basis of the acknowledgement of each and every way of reasoning).

Open-Mindedness, Individuation and Beyond

I shall conclude by suggesting a framework within which we can say something about why we might attribute any importance to thinking at the limits of thought. The first move is in the direction of psychoanalysis. The issue here, as in the brief account of Le Dœuff's feminism which follows, is that of how to establish a connection between individuation and levels beyond that of the individual.

For Lear, the individual is always engaged in an interaction that embraces the psyche and the polis alike: the 'human psyche is in dynamic interaction with the cultural-political environment'. Lear frames the question of how to live by insisting on the interdependence of I and we; open-mindedness consists, then, in living openly with this question in all its ramifications. Then again, the norms that prevail in some specific historical context may amount to a defence against open-mindedness. So the risk is that, without open-mindedness, we may lapse into dogmatism. Lear makes a conspicuously strong claim for open-mindedness: 'one of the most important truths about us is that we have the capacity to be open minded: the capacity to live non defensively with the question of how to live' – a question in which the we, as well as the I, is implicated.[18] Our interactions with others are affected by the success of open-mindedness and in important ways our attempts to theorize it are negative, in that we need also to understand why open-mindedness tends to be evaded. However well adapted to plurality our logic of value judgements may be, open-mindedness can still demand a commitment to otherness that can itself under certain conditions be absolute. If we now compare this conclusion with the perspective on Held previously sketched, we should note that,

[18] *Open-Minded*, p.10. For a fuller account of the implications of seeing self–world relations as conditioned by Eros, see Lear, *Love and its Place in Nature: A Philosophical Interpretation of Freudian Psychoanalysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

paradigmatically, the cosmopolitan dimension exposes practical reason to the I–we interdependence at its most daunting.

There is scope to compare this stance with Le Dœuff's theorization of gender. She proposes a break with inflexible thinking that is gender-specific: the claim to a specific gender identity, because it is inflexible and assumes that identity's specific claims, reinforces assumed limits. She argues, in a sense, that we start out undifferentiated, in a state of indifferentiation, given that she presents as an important claim the statement that individuation is not given. But the project of individuation does not consist in trying to establish a determinate identity; rather, it is a way of thinking which is exposed to alterity from the outset and through which 'an ethics of sympathy', which remains – critically – always on the horizon, can be realized.[19] This, then, is not just a substantive intervention: what is aimed at is a rectification of a way of thinking, leading to a shift in prevailing ethical outlooks. Philosophy has less to do with specific discrete problems, or with the technical refinement of conceptual theories, that with the elaboration of new ways of thinking, indeed new epistemologies. If individuation is Le Dœuff's focus, then – logically – anything can be a logical alternative, provided that we demonstrate a commitment to thinking about how we think, about how we justify one alternative rather than another: this is the scope of the new epistemology.[20] The same construction of the space of thinking applies. A limit as boundary is a constraint on thinking; to think independently of the boundary is to operate with reference to a limit which is absolute and which yields a different relationship to the space of thought. At first glance, Le Dœuff's strategy seems different from that of Held, in that, controversially enough, she resists the idea of difference where it amounts to an insistence on the claim to a specific and distinct gender identity. But this is in fact what the logic of alterity upholds: it is a space of thought dedicated to individuation, not as something given, yet different in a polar way from other identities, but as something different from prevailing conceptualizations of identity in and of themselves. The result could be said to be something like a global perspective on individuation or indeed on whatever cultural project might be in play.

The point, then, is to understand how we understand. But this commitment does not, in fact, preclude the possibility of change. Where all of these models can be said to converge is where they articulate individual projects some of whose effects play out at the social level. Le Dœuff presents a view of individualization one of whose effects is to give rise to an expanded 'ethics of sympathy': this is the salutary outcome of the break with identitarian claims.[21]

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[19] *Le Sexe du savoir* (Paris: Aubier, 1998), pp.326, 350.
[20] Le Dœuff refers specifically to her project as the elaboration of an 'epistemology of hope', in *Le Sexe du savoir*, p.232.
[21] *Le Sexe du savoir*, p.349.

Part of what I claim, then, is that open-mindedness can allow us to capture something of the magnitude of the cosmopolitan project. Indeed, it is a feature of the logic of the global that at any moment what we might at the outset think to be idiosyncratic or marginal may come to occupy a central position in how we think about the world. Thinking from the point of view of others is a potential corrective, if core elements of such a process of thought can be shown to have some general validity or scope when it comes to defining a political project.

In Held's essay, a gesture towards a logic of alterity co-exists with a logic of value judgements along the lines elaborated by Descombes. Because this is so, the former then is indeed an alternative, even if it should prove to be something that it may be practically impossible to sustain in the long run. In a framework of reasoning that is not transcendental (a view common to Descombes and to Geuss[22]), then it is necessary to maintain a view of reasoning that remains open-ended. If this is so, then the logic of alterity is not so much an alternative, as one element of the system of reasoning.

I said at the outset that this exploration was exposed to the risk of abstraction. But perhaps what we are seeing is that this is not altogether so. Lear makes the point that 'it is of the essence of a world to present itself as given'.[23] Held's approach has the merit of acknowledging that we seek to relate to other ways of reasoning as they are embedded in specific environments, then we do so in just such a world. Even more extensively than Descombes, he acknowledges the embeddedness of reason in the world. In other words, what if we perceive as given is the alterity of ways of reasoning. But Held also powerfully suggests that there is still scope to develop a process or use of reason, in the face of this plurality, which is not at all given, which is anything but given, and which, if we are to think globally, is central to how we do so.

If what Le Dœuff argues can be said to be true, then the answer to the question I ask is 'yes', in that we look to others, as they reason on the basis of their individuation, and to our engagements with them, to create, as Le Dœuff would have it, an ethical and also an affective space in which we might live differently. Our task, then, is that of constructing a worthwhile understanding of the relationship between the individual and the global in which the potential truth of the logic of alterity is fully assumed. An attitude of open-mindedness would apply both to the act of thinking and to any process by which thought comes to be acted upon. A stance along these lines can, in turn, be aligned with cosmopolitanism as an intellectual cause, in that it offers some prospect of mediation between the ethical and the political, between the global and the historically rooted.

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[22] On the limits of Kantian models as a framework for valid generalizations, see respectively Descombes, *Philosophie par gros temps*, pp.181–82, and Geuss, *Outside Ethics*, pp.1–4.
[23] *Outside Ethics*, p.79.