

12-7-2012

Kant's Mochlos: The Destination of American Studies in the Arab University

Christopher Wise

Western Washington University, christopher.wise@wwu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://cedar.wwu.edu/english_facpubs

 Part of the [American Studies Commons](#), and the [Comparative Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

"Kant's Mochlos: The Destination of American Studies in the Arab University," in *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Arab Spring and Its Implications For American Studies*, Edited by Amine Moumine. Casablanca, Morocco: U.S. Embassy & Casablanca University

This Conference Proceeding is brought to you for free and open access by the Humanities at Western CEDAR. It has been accepted for inclusion in English by an authorized administrator of Western CEDAR. For more information, please contact westerncedar@wwu.edu.

Kant's *Mochlos*: The Destination of American Studies in the Arab University

By

Christopher Wise, Professor of English & Comparative Literature
Western Washington University, U.S.A.

[*Note: This paper was delivered in Marrakesh, Morocco at Plenary Lecture 5 at "Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Arab Spring and Its Implications for American Studies in Arab Universities: First Interdisciplinary American Studies Conference," Hassan II Mohammedia/Casablanca University. December 7, 2012.*]

Re-reading the conference proceedings from the 2004 conference in Cairo that Mounira Soliman and I helped to organize, I am struck by a few key themes that merit revisiting: First, many who participated at the conference expressed their concerns about the destabilizing potential of cultural comparison between the U.S. and Arab settings. Eight years later, as we meet today in the context of the "Arab Spring," it seems clear that such concerns were well-founded. However, I am doubtful that the fostering of cultural comparison by American Studies educators in the Arab university— something that I strongly urged at that time — played a significant role in fomenting the profound changes that we now see taking place in Arab society. Teaching cultural comparison in these challenging times is merely a modest service that American Studies educators can provide to their respective communities and universities, helping students to ask the right questions and think more deeply about what is happening in the world. As I stated then, the job of the professor is to ask questions rather than assert theses, or to modestly pursue the truth rather than to claim to be in possession of it. At that time, I cited William J. Fulbright who once wrote, "The proper function of the scholar is not to exclude certain questions in the name of practicality, or in the name of a spurious patriotism, but to ask all possible questions, to ask what has been done wisely and what has been done foolishly and what these questions imply for the future" (*The Arrogance of Power* 43). This is also a defining feature of what it means to be a professor of the "lower faculty," according to Immanuel Kant, and it is Kant's historically influential remarks on the task of the professor in his *Conflict of the Faculties* (1798) that I would like to reflect upon here in Marrakech, as we consider possible destinations of American Studies in the Arab University in 2012. The question of the destination of both American Studies and the Arab Spring is also linked to the difficult question of "Arab" identity politics today, a dynamic that was noted when some in attendance at Cairo in 2004 expressed their ambivalence about the very concept of the "Arab" evoked in the title of the conference proceedings.

If it is currently untenable to found a broad based political movement upon the fragile and embattled concept of the "Arab," the need to establish non-sectarian or at least ecumenical political alliances nonetheless seems more urgent than ever in Africa and the Middle East. To support the dissociation of the spheres of the political and the religious does not necessarily make one a "liberal," but, on the other hand, university professors need not apologize for their frank support of free and uncensored critical inquiry, even

within the theocratic state. For Kant, the spirit of questioning that is essential to the health of the university, and hence the sovereign state that the university ultimately serves, is unambiguously predicated upon the necessary separation of religion and state, at least within the university setting. It bears recalling here that Kant's *Conflict of the Faculties* was written in response to his own historical situation as a professor who taught and lived in a theocratic and monarchic state in the late 18th century. In this context, Kant's recommended motto for the King of Prussian, Frederick the Great, whenever addressing university professors was as follows, "Argue as much as you will, about what you will, but obey" (ix). But, if I suggest to you today that Kant's vision of the professor and the professor's relation to the sovereign state are relevant to our concerns here in Marrakech in 2012, two hundred and ten years after Kant first published his book on the university, I do not appeal to you as someone who inhabits any idealized space inside the Kantian university of the U.S. As a matter of fact, it is far from certain to me that the liberal arts university has much of a future in the U.S., and such a thought had certainly never occurred to me back in 2004, when we met in Cairo.

Perhaps even more so than the Arab university, the U.S. university today stands in need of reassessing its deeper philosophical foundations, as well as its current willingness to promulgate state dogma without asking the kinds of questions that were once urged by Fulbright. In fact, the university in the U.S. today seems to have grown careless if not entirely oblivious to its own liberal foundations. In the years since 9/11, the American university has allowed itself to become an increasingly blunt object of government and corporate interests, a utilitarian instrument for the militarized state. Though Kant's historical circumstances were obviously very different from our own, *The Conflict of the Faculties* remains an indispensable text for us in these circumstances. In addition to Kant's seminal work on the university, I would also like to draw your attention to Jacques Derrida's provocative reading of Kant and the university in his book, *Eyes of the University* (2004), especially Derrida's discussion of Kant's *mochlos*. A *mochlos* is a wooden beam that is used to launch a ship, as it sails off to a new destination. Homer employs this ancient Greek word in *The Odyssey* for the lever that Odysseus uses in order to launch his ship, but also, as Derrida reminds us, Odysseus uses this very same *mochlos* to escape the cave of Polyphemus by thrusting it into the Cyclops' one eye. In contrast, Kant speaks of the *mochlos* as a device for springing forward into battle, for instance with one's foot as one crosses a stream. The left foot for Kant can become a kind of *mochlos* or a lever for springing the body into action. In the case of Derrida, his remarks on Kant's *mochlos* are offered as a reflection upon the modern university in the U.S., which Derrida sees as having run aground or become stuck in the mud and in need of launching towards a new destination. The Cyclops, in Derrida's reading of Homer, is a strikingly phallic figure of the rationalist and utilitarian university within the military industrial state. Derrida therefore alerts us to two possible uses for the *mochlos* in the university setting, first to gouge out the eye of the monster of instrumental reason – and it is not incidental that he describes the university as an embodied and anthropomorphic entity -- and, second, to launch the now stranded university towards a new and better direction, one which includes a renewed respect for the university's historical basis in philosophy, not merely science and technology. Implicit in Derrida's critique is an argument first made by Martin Heidegger in his *Principle of Reason* (1957), that the university of

Western Europe and the U.S. no longer knows or understands the reason for its existence. For Heidegger, what is even more troubling is that no one in the university today is even interested in asking the question. The question of the reason for the university's existence has become irrelevant, forgotten in advance.

In 2003, I returned to my home university in Washington State after nearly two years of helping to develop the American Studies program at the University of Jordan in Amman. As I was to discover, many unsettling changes to American society had occurred since 9/11. My family and I had relocated to Jordan exactly one week after 9/11, and we did not return until two weeks before the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. Troubling changes had also come to the liberal arts university in Washington State where I have been a faculty member since 1996. One notable instance in my own department was the implementation of competency assessment procedures, something that Kant had warned against in his *Conflict of the Faculties*. After being pressured by an external accreditation team, which in its turn had been pressured by state legislators' noisy demands for "accountability" in higher education, the department where I teach gave in to the state's demands that it must now assess student competencies. The traditional Kantian view that the university shows its highest responsibility to the state by remaining vigilant against the state's demands that it convert itself into a *mere* instrument of the state was now disregarded as a matter of political realism. Times had changed, it was said, and the university must change as well. The war economy demanded it. Faculty in this context assumed the term "competence" to be a purely intuitive and rational form of perception exclusively possessed by credentialed professors within the university, but not students who were deemed a priori deficient in the art of seeing. In language departments in the U.S. university, the term "competence" is often evoked with reference to a revitalized form of Cartesian rationalism, or a disembodied, mathematical, and quasi-scientific notion of cognition asserting the priority of deductive over inductive forms of thinking. Contemporary concepts of competence in the U.S. language department are highly indebted to the thought of the Neo-Cartesian linguist Noam Chomsky, who has argued that his research in human language has no political significance whatsoever, despite the fact that most of his early work in linguistics was funded by the U.S. military.

Returning as I was from Jordan in 2003, it did not seem coincidental to me that competency assessment was now being implemented in the U.S. university, especially the English Department. After all, the field of English and literary studies in the 1980s and 1990s had gone through a time of great political changes, leading to the rise of postcolonial studies, deconstruction, feminism, minority studies, and many other new fields of critical inquiry, some of which sparked public and legislative backlash against the university, especially against literature departments. Edward W. Said was instrumental in helping to inaugurate some of these important changes, particularly in the field of postcolonial studies. As a point of comparison, the Marxist literary critic Terry Eagleton once described the American New Criticism in the U.S. English Department as the quintessential Cold War form of criticism, since it equipped literature professors with a methodology for performing close readings of texts without reference to history itself, which is often messy and uncomfortable. In the aftermath of the U.S. led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, it also did not seem coincidental to me that American professors at

this time would opt for a quasi-scientific pedagogy of academic competence, one that enabled them to evade controversial political and historical topics like the U.S.-led war in Iraq, the Bush administration's "war on terror," Abu Ghraib, water-boarding, and so on. History had gotten messy once again, and the pedagogy of competence now seemed to provide some cover for confused and frightened American faculty. By teaching apolitical and quasi-mathematical competencies, humanities faculty might also enhance the scientific legitimacy of their programs and thereby counteract politically motivated criticisms of state legislators that the university in any way sought to indoctrinate students into leftist ideologies. Teaching linguistics, for instance, was now said to be akin to teaching chemistry rather than the philosophy of language, a kind of brain science rather than a potentially destabilizing political ideology. The faculty members in my own language department now taught competencies, and though the concept of "competency" could not be articulated in actual human language, other than as a form of "unconscious knowledge" to cite Chomsky, the obviously articulated language of competency nevertheless was said not to be a philosophical, religious, or political dogma since it militated for a purely intuitive concept of cognition that is external to all empirical forms of discourse. Nevertheless, faculty members in this new dispensation could also not refuse to teach professional competencies, for fear of losing their jobs or facing other reprimands in the workplace.

Seen from outside the university, the debate that I am adumbrating here may seem somewhat arcane or even bizarre. Henry Kissinger once famously quipped, "The debates in academe are so vicious precisely because the stakes are so small." Kissinger certainly hits the nail on the head with regard to most university debates and the petty power struggles that take place within the university. In this case, however, the stakes do not seem so small to me, for the stakes are nothing less than the university itself, even the possibility of its existence as anything other than an instrument of the militarized state. To cite Derrida's paraphrase of Kant,

"Faculty must be able to teach freely whatever it wishes without conferring with anyone, letting itself be guided by its sole interest in truth. And the government must arrest its own power, as Montesquieu would say, in the face of this freedom, must even guarantee it. This freedom of autonomy, and this unconditioned condition is nothing other than philosophy. Autonomy is philosophical reason insofar as it grants its own law, namely the truth" (*Eyes of the University* 104-105).

Hence, Derrida observes that to divest faculty of this freedom inevitably leads to "the death of the university" (107). Against the more traditional Kantian but also Derridean and Heideggerian view, the pedagogy of competence ignores the fact that it too is a dogma, not unlike any other articulated dogma. The university that teaches competence without attending to the groundless grounds of its claims to competence wishes to imagine that it occupies a higher ground than, let us say, the university in the setting of the theocratic state, or even the private religious university within the U.S. setting. For instance, appeals to the authority of the Qur'an in the university classroom would in this context be rejected on grounds first laid out by Kant in his *Religion Within the Limits of Mere Reason* (1794) and in his *Conflict of the Faculties*, namely because such appeals are grounded with reference to the authority of actually revealed scripture, which is available to us in an empirical sense. For the university that requires competency assessment, this

is business as usual: that is, the traditional prescriptions of Kant are reflexively followed, as if a natural matter of course rather than a deliberate university politics. For Kant, the theologian in contrast to the philosophy professor of the “lower faculty” belongs to the “higher faculty,” and it is the job of the theologian to teach dogma rather than to practice philosophy. As Kant might put it, the professor of philosophy alone is entitled to exercise the critique of pure reason, whereas the theologian must instruct the populace in the truths of revealed religious doctrine. By way of contrast, the pedagogy of competence is not construed in my university in Washington State as a form of dogma although it too is certainly available to us in an empirical sense and is articulated like any other set of written doctrines, including revealed scripture. Because what is called competence is a form of “unconscious knowledge” – an obvious oxymoron – it is not for its advocates a matter of religious faith but is instead an objective and natural “science,” despite the fact that the dogma of competence is founded upon the purely intuitive hypothesis that human thought is a kind of “secretion of the brain” or an organic structure that is claimed to be as “real as the liver” although unavailable for human perception.

According to Kant, who obviously follows John Locke, every text that is actually written down, or that acquires an externally available form, is meaningful only insofar as it exists as an empirical trace or actual phenomenon in the world of the five senses. For Kant, censorship is linked to the word that exists as an actual trace of the real and is a form of critique that is always backed up with force. A law that is not backed up with force is no law at all, at least not for Kant. In Jean Jacques Rousseau’s *Social Contract* (1762), which was a text that influenced Kant, Rousseau remarked that religious faith in the law that is inscribed on the human heart, as opposed to this actually existing law, is “the secret faith” that all legal systems and all law-givers depend upon, and in this respect he singled out the Prophet Muhammad, as well as other great law-givers in human history such as the Prophet Moses and the Protestant reformer Jean Calvin. In contrast, by formulating as “unconscious knowledge” what Rousseau and Kant assert is a matter of religious faith, the neo-Cartesian and competent professor imagines that he has solved the unavoidable problem of the groundlessness of his claims to rational competence. According to Chomsky, to even raise the question of ontological inquiry or the topic of grounds amounts to little more than “harassing” those like himself who are busy performing the “serious” work of scientific research.

In raising the question of the destination of the university today, Derrida describes the university as a ship that has run aground and that he seeks to dislodge with the help of Kant’s *mochlos*. He also asks the following questions,

To ask whether the university has a reason for being is to wonder ‘why the university?’, but the question ‘why’ verges on ‘with a view to what?’ The university *with a view* to what? What is the university’s view? What are its views? Or again: what do we see from the university, whether, for instance, we are simply in it, on board; or whether, puzzling over destinations, we look out from it while in port or, as French has it ‘au large,’ on the open sea, ‘at large’? (*Eyes of the University* 130).

There are many faculty in the U.S. today who have scrambled on board the ship that is the state-supported American university, for there are clearly benefits to being on board this hefty ship, including professional prestige and the leisure time necessary to perform

creative research, but there are also the not negligible benefits of a stable salary, retirement, and lifelong health care, etc. Whatever the destination of the university today, there are many reasons why one might want to climb aboard this ship without raising the troubling question of where the university in the 21st century is actually headed – and why. In *The Principle of Reason*, Heidegger thoughtfully reflects upon the question of the university's destination in a careful, close-reading of Leibniz's *reddere rationem* or 'the principle of reason,' which asserts that reason must always be rendered.

On the one hand, the principle or reason shows that the ground of reason is always already transcendent and therefore must necessarily be "re-presented": this is reason in the form of competent representation, which is akin to "hanging a picture on a wall," as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak puts it. On the other hand, if reason *must* be re-presented, the question of the "must" is also an ethical one: Why *must* reason be represented and *for whom*? As Heidegger suggests, this is posing the principle of reason in another "tonality" (*Principle of Reason* 39). To "render reason" in this other tonality means rendering a valid reason for the existence of reason. For Heidegger, those who render reason must also be reasonable. The "reasonable" have a responsibility to others, who are figments of their imagination, nor mathematical abstractions. but real human beings -- living entities who inhabit the planet earth with many other animals, at this particular moment in time.

Though dissimilar in many important respects, Heidegger and Derrida share with Edward W. Said the altogether *reasonable* concern that representation in academe not be degraded into a *merely competent* and therefore *irrational* form of representation; in other words, all three of these thinkers urge us to attend to this other "tonality" of the principle of reason. Said's most famous book is a critique of academic competence in the sense I am describing here. When Derrida asserts that, "the university must not be a schlerophthalmic and hard-eyed animal," he is essentially reiterating Said's view that Orientalism in U.S. and European universities is problematic because it is a demeaning discourse of theatrical representations that converts the other into a dead object for the sake of the all-powerful man of reason (*Eyes of the University* 132).

The word "schlerophthalmic" means "scarred-eyed," like the cold and deadened insect eye that fixes its gaze upon an object without blinking. Derrida himself once suffered a debilitating illness for several weeks during which he could not close one of his eyes. This illness taught Derrida an important lesson: We need to blink in order to coat our eyes with water, so that they do not dry out and become scarred or "hard-eyed". Perhaps blinking is an art that we need to cultivate, Derrida provocatively asks. However, an eye that is wet with human tears is not an eye that will ever see the object that it beholds in a clear and focused way. If we lower the sheath of our eyes, thereby coating the eyes with tears, we may even lose sight of the object that is finally not an object at all but a human being whose essence is hidden from us. Hegel once called the eyes "windows to the soul," and yet he did not mean by this that we ever see directly into the soul of another human being: All we will ever see in the eyes of another person is our own reflection two times over, or the traces of ourselves that we deposit within the body of the other. Hence, to see with the eye of water is to see not with the dry eye of the insect, but with the only eye that ever really sees anything at all, the eye of water. Only the eye of water can see

water. Orientalism is, in this sense, a dried eyed or schlerophthalmic “science,” as is the Neo-Cartesian pedagogy of academic competence.

Said’s hope was that American Studies in the Arab university might avoid the mistakes of European and U.S. Orientalism, that it would not become the Occidental mirror-image of Orientalism, perpetuating a dehumanizing rhetoric of otherness that is *merely* competent. Kant’s *mochlos* can help to launch the university towards a new destination, but it can also do more than that: It can also be pressed into service to blind the terrible Cyclops eye. Odysseus does this through ruse, namely by refusing to give his name to the Cyclops, or by telling the Cyclops that his name is “No Man,” so that when the Cyclops cries for help, he tells his friends, “*No Man has hurt me*” – and so the friends of the Cyclops do not rush to his assistance. They cannot help him, for they do not even grasp the fact that he has been wounded. With cunning and intelligence, but also by remaining anonymous, Odysseus defeats the Cyclops and thereby launches his ship to a new and better destination.

Derrida pays careful and close attention to Kant’s writings on the university, finding a great deal that remains relevant some two centuries later. But, Derrida also concludes that it may be “too late” for much of what Kant recommends, or that much of what Kant thinks about the university may no longer be translatable in the world that we live in today. While Derrida is probably correct in his assessment, he is also speaking in the specific context of the university in the U.S. (and France). When it came to the question of the university in Africa and the Middle East, Derrida professed that he was not qualified to make any recommendations regarding the situation of the university despite the fact that he was born in Algeria and lived there until he was nineteen. Derrida’s views are also complicated by the complex question of his identity as a postcolonial French citizen, as well as his ethnic and religious identity as a Sephardic Jew. For instance, in Derrida’s reading of Kant, he makes much of Kant’s alleged “Judaism.” Kant is said by Derrida to “secretly” be a German Jew, influenced as he was by the Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn. However, Kant’s Judaism is overstated at best. Derrida tends to over-dramatize Judaic contributions to European philosophy, while eliding the role of Egyptian, African, Arabic, and Islamic thought in shaping the philosophy of the West. In fact, Kant was a Protestant Christian from a Germanic region in Europe that is now part of Russia. Many of Kant’s remarks about Judaism and Islam both were ignorant and intolerant, when not shockingly anti-Semitic. However, if Kant was neither a Jewish nor a Muslim philosopher, and if he was regarded by the church authorities of his day as a heretic, Kant was nonetheless a philosopher who remained in dialogue with the Abrahamic faiths. What must be emphasized then is not Kant’s affinity with any particular Abrahamic tradition, but rather the fact that he was a philosopher whose thought is inconceivable outside the historical framework of the Abrahamic faiths.

In contrast to Derrida, I would like to adumbrate here a few aspects of Kant’s views that remain very much relevant in the year 2012, especially here in Marrakech. First, as you no doubt are aware, U.N. law is deeply indebted to Kant, as is the very notion of a “United Nations” which was first articulated Kant’s essay “Towards Perpetual Peace.” Derrida is often overly hasty and even dismissive in his criticisms of Kant and U.N. law,

which he suggests “globalatinizes” cultures that are not Greco-Roman and never were. For instance, Derrida is critical of the Kantian concept of the citizen, which he criticizes as a latently religious concept, but which for Said was the basis of the Palestinian case for civil rights, including the basic right to occupy the earth of the town (or “*cit *” in French) where one was born. The “citizen” in this sense is one who dwells in a town, which is the classical liberal definition of the citizen, as opposed, for instance, to the ethnic or religious concept of the Israeli “citizen.”

Unlike Derrida, Said was unapologetically Kantian in his outlook, without imagining that he was thereby promoting the “Neo-Hellenization” or “globalatinization” of the Arab world. In his essay “Towards Perpetual Peace,” Kant makes the case that we are all of us entitled to human rights because the world we live on is a big round ball. The fact that the earth is a big round ball means that we all have to put our feet somewhere. This right to inhabit the earth includes the Palestinians, as well as every other human being on this planet. None of us can simply go floating off into the heavens if our presence is inconvenient to those we happen to live among. For this reason, we have the right to hospitality, or the right to be welcomed by the other. Hospitality is a universal human right and there are no exceptions to this rule. Hospitality is also one of the oldest and most enduring features of the Abrahamic religions, for Abraham is of course the Prophet of Hospitality, and the very theme of the “Abrahamic” is at one with the deconstructive and Kantian theme of hospitality.

In a lecture that I heard Derrida give at the University of California, Irvine in 1991, he observed that teaching also is a form of hospitality. It is the professor who issues the invitation to the student, and, as Derrida stated, for the invitation to be a true invitation the professor must sincerely hope that the student will indeed accept his invitation to learn. But, as Derrida also noted, if the invitation to learn is truly an invitation, the student must also have the option to decline it. The student must be free from all forms of political coercion.

In similar remarks Derrida made to some of his Marxist critics in 1994, many who harshly criticized his political views, Derrida stated that he did not wish to speak wounding words in retaliation to his critics, but that he preferred to “lay down his weapons” before them. In both cases, Derrida appealed to the Kantian notion of hospitality, but this notion is obviously far older than Mr. Kant. Unlike those of us who base their epistemological views upon a purely interior and incommunicable mental experience, Kant insists that what he calls “a priori concepts” are only significant when they are activated on the occasion of experience. Secret intentions are not available to living others unless they are articulated in human language that is available in an obviously external and empirical sense. This is why the Kantian view of the university, unlike the view of those who naively uphold the “scientific” pedagogy of competence, is a profoundly ethical one: It is a responsible pedagogy that is *other-directed*, that is based upon the real duties that we have to others. Kant knew very well that truth-telling is not just a matter of competent representation, but also a matter of promise-keeping, of honoring one’s vows to others. Unlike the neo-Cartesian notion of truth as competence, the meaning of the vows we make to others always lies in the future. Vows are not

objects that we may hold in our hand. No one knows at the moment that a promise is uttered if it will be kept, and yet such promises *must* be kept as a fundamental condition of human survival. In the Abrahamic traditions, circumcision is the signature that marks the “here-now,” or the physical presence of the one who makes his pledge to the other.

Derrida is motivated for obvious political reasons to read Kant as a “Jewish” philosopher, just as he prefers to insist upon the untranslatable nature of the name or “scar” or “trace,” which he emphasizes always comes to us in a particular idiom. Derrida repeatedly suggests that the “gramma” or mark that is the sign of the covenant is a *shibboleth* or untranslatable password guaranteeing a particular tribal identity. For Derrida, the State of Israel and the Jew who resides within the State of Israel are *figures* of “absolute singularity” (*Sovereignities in Question* 50-51). Not surprisingly, Derrida also insists that “the existence of the State of Israel [as a Jewish state] must be recognized by all and definitively guaranteed” (*Acts of Religion* 138).

Born and raised in Algeria, Derrida described himself as “a little black and very Arab Jew,” but he never described himself as a “little black and very Jewish Arab” (“Circumfession” 58). The terms “black” and “Arab” remained for Derrida adjectives that he subordinated to the sign of the “Jew.” In contrast, Said championed the unspecific and translatable notion of the “secular wound” or the “worldly trace,” which was not for Said a tribal shibboleth but a general trace that cannot be reduced to any particular tribal identity (*Freud and the Non-European* 54). The “secular trace” for Said, which is a concept Said introduced in one of his final lectures, should be construed as universal because it refers to a trauma that is experienced by all people everywhere, whatever their particular tribal identity. In recommending this notion, against those who prefer to emphasize the particularity of any singular trace, Said stated his view that, “identity cannot be thought or worked through itself alone” (54). Said further elaborated,

“The strength of this thought is, I believe, that it can be articulated in and speak to other besieged identities as well – not through dispensing palliatives such as tolerance and compassion, but rather, by attending to it as a troubling, disabling, destabilizing secular wound – the essence of the cosmopolitan, from which there can be no recovery, no state of resolved or Stoic calm, and no utopian reconciliation even within itself. This is a necessary psychological experience...” (54).

Here, the “Christian” Said affirms the empiricist notion of the “secular wound,” but unlike Freud and Derrida, Said is secure in the knowledge that the doctrine of the trace is not the property of any single ethnic or religious group from Africa and the Middle East. In contrast, Freud wondered if psychoanalysis was a “Jewish” science, and Derrida sought to accord to Judaism an especially privileged place in the history of European philosophy, while ignoring the contributions of Islamic philosophers like Ibn Rushd, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Tufayl. As a Palestinian Arab man, Said knew very well that the doctrine of the trace was not the exclusive domain of any particular tribe or creed. For Said, Freud’s anxieties about the “Jewish” dimensions of psychoanalysis most likely resulted from his ignorance of African and Middle Eastern cultures, the historical plight of the European Jew in isolation from the lands where many, though not all, of his customs originated. It is worth noting also that Said distances himself from what he calls “the

palliatives of tolerance and compassion,” explicating rejecting, as did Frantz Fanon, the mainstays of the European humanist tradition.

But it is important to note, in this respect, that Said subsumed the Jew, as well as the Berber, the Circassian, the Kurd, and members of other ethnic groups under the master concept of the “Arab,” which he unapologetically linked to Islam. In one of his final interviews, Said stated, “My definition of pan-Arabism would comprise [all regional] communities within an Arab-Islamic framework, including the Jews” (“My Right of Return” 456). As I stated at the beginning of my talk today, we can probably all agree upon the need to strengthen non-sectarian alliances in the North Africa and the Middle East, especially those that emphasize a shared cultural heritage and historical identity. Following Louis Massignon, Derrida speaks of the Abrahamic as a concept that has much to recommend it. However, Said’s concept of what he calls the “secular wound” – rather than what Said calls in his remarks on Israel an “Arab-Islamic wound” – is enough, maybe more than enough. Like the ecumenical concept of the “Abrahamic,” it is a powerful lever that can launch the Arab Islamic world towards a new destination.

Kant was the philosopher who provided the blueprint for what later became the liberal arts university of the West. Kant bequeathed to us a “*mochlos*,” which Derrida rightly reminds us not to neglect in the 21st century. The *mochlos* is a writing implement, like the beak of the Ibis-headed God Thoth, who Plato tells us was the inventor of writing, but also the knife of Abraham, who circumcised his sons Ishmael and Isaac. For Kant, as for the Prophet Abraham, “truth “seems to be a matter of keeping one’s promises as well as having faith that the other will do so too, rather than a matter of rational calculation. Kant observed that the university is instituted as a historical, political, and social event. Real human beings institute universities and university programs at particular moments in time for particular reasons. This is true both for the dogmatically “competent” university in the U.S., even if it has forgotten that it was once instituted as a real political event, and also for the Arab university where American Studies programs are now being instituted.

The Kantian idea of a university that exists within the state, while remaining autonomous, may seem like a utopian dream today, not unlike Kant’s dream of “eternal peace” that he hoped would exist between all the nations of the earth, the dream that led to the founding of the United Nations. And in a sense both *are* indeed dreams, which is to say their meaning is not available to us now, but lies in the future. If the university in the U.S. or the Arab world no longer wishes to preserve a space within it where the questions “why?” and “for whom?” may be asked, it does not mean that such questions will no longer be posed by anyone, both within and without the university. The philosophical impulse to ask “why?” and “for whom?” will not be eradicated (we may be sure of that), for such impulses are inextricable from what make us human beings. There will always be those who will ask such questions even if the university today no longer wishes to accommodate such individuals within its walls.

Today, as we gather here in Marrakech, I would like to express my gratitude to all of you who have helped to organize this conference on so important a topic. That fact that we are drawn together this weekend to discuss the Arab Spring and its impact on American

Studies in Arab universities shows that there is indeed a strong desire among educators in the Middle East and North Africa to ask “*why?*” American Studies -- and “*for whom?*” As I see it, it would be better that American Studies *not* be taught at all in Arab universities, than that American Studies be instituted merely because powerful interests that are external to the university want it.