



# THE PROFESSOR /S YOUR FRIEND

## On Hospitality, Knowledge, and the Refusal of Enmity in Academia

Hospitality—understood not simply as sentiment or moral goodwill, but as an ethical, epistemic, and institutional practice—has long structured the university as a space in which strangers are received, disagreements worked through, and knowledge produced through sustained exposure to difference. The university, in this sense, is neither a sanctuary of consensus nor a factory of certainties. It is a site of risk: a place where ideas are tested in public, where authority remains provisional, and where intellectual life depends on the willingness to host what one does not yet understand. It is against this background that J.D. Vance’s keynote address at the Second National Conservatism Conference in November 2021—widely circulated under the title “The Universities Are the Enemy”—demands careful attention. In that speech, universities are recast as hostile institutions and intellectuals as adversaries of democratic life: producers of deception rather than knowledge, enforcers of ideology rather than interlocutors in public reason. Vance’s rhetoric, if approached systematically, manifests a rather clear dependency on systematic category errors: in his speech, he collapses institutional plurality into a singular agent; treats epistemic uncertainty as moral fraud; converts critique into hostility, and, last but not least, mistakes the *limits of expertise* for the *illegitimacy of expertise*. The VP’s chain of implication moves from *isolated controversies* to *systemic deceit* to *universities as enemies* to *permission* to “attack [them] *aggressively*.” The grammar of hospitality is thus reversed: the university appears not as a contested but necessary house of welcome, but as a space of exclusion whose very existence is framed as a threat. Conversely, I claim that controversies remain discussable only if we refuse the “enemy frame” adopted by J.D. Vance, and demonstrate

Paweł Jędrzejko  
University of Silesia in Katowice,  
Poland  
RIAS Co-Editor-in-Chief



<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3251-2540>

that the university is precisely the infrastructure that keeps dispute from hardening into war. To attain this, the structure of this essay deliberately follows the pressure points of populist rhetoric leveled at the American academia—authority, crisis, children, debt, care, environment, race, expertise, and speech. I follow Vance’s order so as not to rehearse them polemically, but to expose their internal (faulty) logic by restoring the distinctions on which they fundamentally depend, even as those distinctions are systematically effaced in political practice.

Importantly, I respond to that rhetorical transformation without defending higher education as an idealized or flawless system. Universities and colleges vary widely in quality, mission, and practice; they operate under intense economic, political, and technological pressures; and in certain areas, some undeniably fall short of their stated goals. They sometimes fail to listen well enough, to consistently protect intellectual plurality, or to translate expertise into social trust. Yet acknowledging such failures does not exhaust the meaning of *critique*. The latter is an indispensable part of academic life, precisely because the university is not a closed or self-legitimizing system, but a *porous* one—exposed to disagreement, vulnerability, and historical change. What is at stake, therefore, is not whether institutions err, but whether they remain capable of sustaining a position from which someone can still speak in the first person—and be answered. Properly understood, the university is not merely a site where encounters happen incidentally; it is a space in which a student, a scholar, or an interested citizen may still say *I* without prior authorization, and in which that *I* comes into being only insofar as it is addressed to a *You*:

The You encounters me by grace—it cannot be found by seeking. But that I speak the basic word to it is a deed of my whole being, is my essential deed.

The You encounters me. But I enter into a direct relationship to it. Thus the relationship is election and electing, passive and active at once: an action of the whole being must approach passivity, for it does away with all partial actions and thus with any sense of action, which always depends on limited exertions.

The basic word *I–You* can be spoken only with one’s whole being. The concentration and fusion into a whole being can never be accomplished by me, can never be accomplished without me. I require a You to become; becoming I, I say You.

All actual life is encounter.

The relation to the You is unmediated. Nothing conceptual intervenes between I and You, no prior knowledge and no imagination; and memory itself is changed as it plunges from particularity into wholeness. No purpose intervenes between I and You, no greed and no anticipation; and longing itself is changed as it plunges from the dream into appearance. Every means is an obstacle. Only where all means have disintegrated encounters occur.

The present—not that which is like a point and merely designates whatever our thoughts may posit as the end of “elapsed” time, but the actual and fulfilled present—exists only insofar as presentness, encounter, and relation exist. Only as the You becomes present does presence come into being. (Buber 62–63)

It is for this reason that the personification of the university as an “enemy” is *fundamentally* in error. The university is *not a sovereign agent*, nor a monolithic will. It is not a set of buildings and bureaucratic systems, not an algorithm of income, evaluation, and expenditure. The university is, irreducibly, a *relation* among people: students, teachers, researchers, readers, interlocutors. To construe it otherwise is to perform a categorical reduction—to force what is constituted through encounter into the logic of objecthood. When this reduction occurs, the relation central to the very essence of the university is displaced from *I–You* to *I–It*, and the living present of intellectual exchange is replaced by a dead inventory of functions, metrics, and abstractions:

The I of the basic word *I–It*, the I that is not bodily confronted by a You but surrounded by a multitude of “contents,” has only a past and no present. In other words: insofar as a human being makes do with the things that he experiences and uses, he lives in the past, and his moment has no presence. He has nothing but objects; but objects consist in having been. (Buber 62–64)

What follows, therefore, is an insight that resists the conversion of institutional critique into a politics of siege. Of course, institutions do have administrative power, incentives, reputational economies, and sometimes coercive bureaucracies; the point is not that power is absent, but that Vance’s rhetoric treats the *existence of power* as proof of a unified hostile will. This is why, rather than asking whether universities deserve loyalty or condemnation, in this essay I propose a different ethical framework: hospitality understood as an institutional, epistemic, and civic practice grounded in relation rather than control. Read through the lens of Martin Buber’s account of encounter, the university, appears as a fragile space in which *presence* must repeatedly be attained. If it is not, wherever academic life is reduced to metrics, credentials, or ideological sorting, wherever the university is construed as *machinery* of influence or domination, the *I–You* relation collapses into *I–It*: knowledge becomes an *object* to be wielded, and authority turns into a *means* rather than emerges as a *response*.

Therefore, claiming that “the professor is your friend” I do not aim to sentimentalize academic life or deny its conflicts. I insist that intellectual authority, like ethical life itself, emerges only where relation is sustained *without guarantees*. Democratic knowledge is not produced

by unanimity or submission. It may only emerge where disagreement is *hosted* rather than *expelled*, where authority remains *answerable* rather than *sovereign*, and where the Other—student, colleague, citizen—is approached *not as a threat* to be neutralized but *as a presence* to which one *is willing to*, and *must*, respond. The democratic question is thus not whether experts influence policy—of course they do—but whether their influence remains *contestable*, *transparent*, and *institutionally non-sovereign*.

The argument that follows therefore proceeds in two movements. The first establishes a philosophical grammar of authority, uncertainty, and hospitality by returning to thinkers—Kant, Arendt, Lévinas, Buber, Derrida—who refused to equate authority with certainty or coercion. This theoretical groundwork is not ancillary: it reconstructs distinctions that contemporary public rhetoric systematically collapses.

The second movement then returns, section by section, to the recurring accusations leveled against universities in contemporary political discourse, treating them not as isolated instances of (intentional) misrepresentation, but as symptoms of a single, profound, conceptual error. Read together, these movements form a mirror to the anti-intellectual logic they contest: where political lingo invokes *authority as domination*, this essay insists on *authority as relation*, and where certainty is ideologically demanded, it defends judgment under conditions of risk.

## HOSPITALITY AND THE FANTASY OF EPISTEMIC CONTROL

Hospitality begins precisely where mastery falters. Any discourse that promises full control over truth—over what may count as knowledge, over who may speak it, and under what conditions—already betrays a fear of encounter. Such promises presuppose an isolated subject who stands outside relation, adjudicating meaning without being addressed in return. In recent public rhetoric, institutions of learning have increasingly been described as hostile powers that “control” reality itself: arbiters of truth and falsity, manufacturers of belief, enemies disguised as educators. These descriptions are rhetorically efficient, but philosophically incoherent. They confuse inquiry with command, exposure with domination, and responsibility with rule. What such claims also obscure is a more basic distinction—one between *hostility* and *right(s)*—that has long structured philosophical accounts of hospitality.

Hospitality, as Immanuel Kant insists in the Third Definitive Article of *Perpetual Peace*, is not a matter of *benevolence* or *moral sentiment*, but of *right*:

[...] *hospitality* (a host's conduct to his guest) means the right of a stranger not to be treated in a hostile manner by another upon his arrival on the other's territory. If it can be done without causing his death, the stranger can be turned away, yet as long as the stranger behaves peacefully where he happens to be, his host may not treat him with hostility. It is not the *right of a guest* that the stranger has a claim to (which would require a special, charitable contract stipulating that he be made a member of the household for a certain period of time), but rather a right to visit, to which all human beings have a claim, to present oneself to society by virtue of the right of common possession of the surface of the earth. Since it is the surface of a sphere, they cannot scatter themselves on it without limit, but they must rather ultimately tolerate one another as neighbors, and originally no one has more of a right to be at a given place on earth than anyone else. (Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace* 82)

Interpreted in Kant's perspective, the language of enmity leveled at the university reveals a categorical error. To name an institution of inquiry—honoring the Other's "right to visit," extending "household membership" universally—as *hostile* is not merely to criticize its failures: it is to deny the very *condition* under which appearance, address, and contestation become possible at all. Such rhetoric does not simply mis-describe the university; it distorts disagreement into domination and twists critique into suspicion. What is lost in this transformation is the distinction between *authority* and *coercion*—a distinction that Hannah Arendt identified as decisive for understanding modern political crises. Ideological thinking, she argues, does not emerge from curiosity or inquiry, but from the *desire to subsume reality* under a single explanatory logic:

An ideology is quite literally what its name indicates: it is the "logic of an idea." Its subject matter is history, to which the "idea" is applied; the result of this application is not a body of statements about something that is, but the unfolding of a process which is in constant change. Ideologies pretend to know the mysteries of the whole historical process—the secrets of the past, the intricacies of the present, the uncertainties of the future—because of the logic inherent in their respective ideas.

Ideologies are never interested in the miracle of being. They are concerned with becoming and perishing, with the rise and fall of cultures, even when they explain history by some "law of nature." (Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* 469)

The question, then, is not whether universities exercise influence—no institution of knowledge operates without it—but whether inquiry remains open to interruption by what exceeds its frameworks. Arendt's warning concerns the closure of thinking under a single explanatory logic, not the plural, self-corrective practices that define academic inquiry as such. In the scholar view, the danger of ideological educa-

tion lies precisely in its hostility to such interruption. As she notes with stark precision: “The aim of totalitarian education has never been to instill convictions but to destroy the capacity to form any” (Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* 468).

The fantasy of epistemic control thus reveals itself not as a defense of truth, but as a symptom of ideological anxiety. Where thinking is reduced to repetition and certainty is enforced in advance, *authority collapses into coercion*. Arendt’s distinction between *power* and *violence* makes this collapse unmistakable:

Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power’s disappearance. Violence can destroy power; it is utterly incapable of creating it. (Arendt, *On Violence* 56)

Authority, in Arendt’s understanding, depends neither on persuasion nor on force, but on recognition and respect. The erosion of authority does not *justify coercion*; on the contrary: it exposes the fragility of the relationship that once sustained it. Recoding institutions of inquiry as enemies, then, is not a gesture aimed at *restoring authority*; in fact, it is tantamount to *abandoning* it.

Thus, Arendt’s analysis ultimately reveals that the crisis of authority is inseparable from the crisis of relation. Authority does not collapse because disagreement exists, but because the conditions under which disagreement can appear as meaningful relation land “under erasure.” Once institutions are imagined as *sovereign powers* rather than *relational spaces*, exposure itself begins to look like threat. At this point, the political language of hostility no longer serves to formulate a response to concrete failures, and no longer can it be construed as motivated by *honest concern*; instead, it becomes a medium of *denying the fact that the world is shared* (Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace* 82), of questioning the existence of the world in which authority, recognition, and responsibility might still arise within the dynamics of the encounter. Such *abandonment of authority* thus coincides with an attempt to seal borders—conceptual as well as political—against interruption, arrival, and, ultimately, address.

From the perspective of hemispheric and transoceanic American studies, this displacement of authority by hostility becomes especially revealing. The United States has never been intelligible as a self-contained epistemic space *precisely* because its knowledge formations have always been exposed to movement: to people, texts, theories, and conflicts circulating across the Atlantic, the Pacific, and the Americas them-

selves. American universities (including Harvard Divinity School or West Point) did not emerge as guardians of a *singular national truth*, but as sites where heterogeneous traditions encountered one another under conditions of uneven power, historical asymmetry, and mutual vulnerability. To project the contemporary university as *an enemy within* is therefore to erase a longer history, in which “American” knowledge systems have been constituted—not by *insulation*, but by *sustained exposure* to what arrives from elsewhere.

Universities exist, at their best, to institutionalize this exposure without neutralizing it. They are not engines of consensus nor factories of loyalty, but fragile architectures of encounter: spaces in which claims are advanced provisionally, contested publicly, and revised in the presence of others, whose perspectives cannot be fully anticipated, much less controlled. Accusing such institutions of “controlling truth” reveals a misunderstanding of their function at the most basic level. Control seeks *closure*; inquiry depends on *exposure*. Where Vance argues that legitimacy comes from diplomas rather than democracy, and frames this as quasi-usurpation, Tadeusz Sławek reminds us, following Henry David Thoreau, that friendship does not begin in proclamation, but in listening—listening to the “friend across the pond,” whose voice reaches us distorted, delayed, and demands patience.<sup>1</sup> When the university remains faithful to this ethos, it is not an enemy of the public. It is one of the few remaining spaces in which society practices the difficult art of remaining exposed to difference before deciding whom it is safe to hear.

## FROM HOSTILITY TO HOST: UNIVERSITIES AND THE ETHICS OF WELCOME

Let me then reiterate the point I have made at the onset of this essay: any attempt to describe the university as a hostile institution is an attempt to present it in a false mirror, inverting, almost perfectly, its ethical grammar. Whatever their failures, universities are not structured as *fortresses* but as *hosts*: places designed—sometimes awkwardly, sometimes inadequately—to receive what comes from elsewhere. Students arrive displaying uneven levels of preparation, shaped by divergent histories, and often harboring incompatible expectations. Ideas arrive already marked by prior use, translation,

1 I recall this formulation from a lecture delivered by Professor Tadeusz Sławek to students of the University of Silesia in Katowice. To the best of my knowledge, the remark has not appeared in print *verbatim*. I cite it here as an instance of oral academic transmission that has informed my own understanding of hospitality, listening, and friendship within the university.

and conflict. Scholars arrive from different national, cultural, and linguistic communities, carrying with them intellectual debts that cannot be easily repaid. Hospitality, under such conditions, is not an ideal state, but a continuous practice of *negotiation*.

Therefore it seems comprehensible that the rising popularity of the managerial idiom “now we get down to business” may be unavoidable in a variety of contexts of our daily lives. The danger arises when this idiom is allowed to redefine the ethical horizon of the university itself. On this point, Tadeusz Ślawek, former Rector of the University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland, is unsentimental and precise:

This *now we get down to business*—undoubtedly necessary in the contemporary world of difficult economic conditions—should never become the battle cry of the university. Were it to dominate the university’s activity, the institution would turn into something akin to a notary’s office, where, in exchange for an appropriate fee, the apprentice obtains guarantees of the fulfillment of their ambitions.

If we are to use the word *business* at all, we should remember and emphasize the element of risk and uncertainty that is always inherent in it. To speak of the university’s “business,” then, is not to speak of guarantees of success achieved by subjecting reality to the pressure of individual ambition, but rather of a readiness to assume responsibility for what is contingent and risky.

The university teaches, among other things, that I cannot deal with the world according to my will and ambitions. It is *mystery*, not *secret*, that constitutes the proper element of an education conducive to the human future. Not what I have and know, not what I plan and strive for—important though these matters are—but rather what I do not have and do not know, what lies beyond the strict outlines of my ambitions, will, to a significant degree, shape my future, which itself already belongs to the realm of *mystery* rather than *secret*. (Ślawek, *Antygonia* 37–38)<sup>2</sup>

This insistence on *mystery* rather than *mastery* already situates the university within an ethical horizon in which *openness* is not a *weakness*, but a *condition of responsibility*. Such an understanding of education—as exposure to contingency rather than the manufacture of certainty—has been central to the American university, largely because American culture itself has been formed through *movement* rather than *stasis*.

What then is the American, this new man? [...] He is an American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. He becomes an American by being received in the broad lap of our

2 All quoted texts originally written in Polish have been translated by the author.

great Alma Mater. Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world. Americans are the western pilgrims, who are carrying along with them that great mass of arts, sciences, vigour, and industry which began long since in the east; they will finish the great circle. The Americans were once scattered all over Europe; here they are incorporated into one of the finest systems of population which has ever appeared, and which will hereafter become distinct by the power of the different climates they inhabit. [...] The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions. From involuntary idleness, servile dependence, penury, and useless labour, he has passed to toils of a very different nature, rewarded by ample subsistence.—This is an American. (St. John de Crèvecoeur)

Crèvecoeur's figure of the "new man" casts Americanness, already in the late eighteenth century, as the *product of movement*—of departure, circulation, and reception into the "broad lap" of an imagined Alma Mater—anticipating a conception of formation in which identity is shaped through exposure to contingency rather than the manufacture of certainty, a logic that would become central both to American self-understanding and to the ethical imagination of the American university. Yet this expansive metaphor of mobility ultimately rests on a surprisingly static horizon of belonging. For all his rhetoric of mixture and incorporation, Crèvecoeur's "new man" remains implicitly white: his account quietly presupposes the erasure of Indigenous peoples and the enslaved, and it is exactly this constitutive exclusion—this selective hospitality—that a hemispheric and transoceanic frame must bring back into view as we turn to the university's own ethics of welcome. Hemispheric and transoceanic approaches remind us that "American" knowledge has never emerged in isolation but has been shaped by Indigenous epistemologies suppressed by Atlantic modernity and its violences, by transpacific migrations, by Cold War circulations of theory, and by contemporary global entanglements that refuse neat cartography. Therefore, the importance of teaching history does not lie in *assigning guilt*; it is about *training perception*, it is about what a democracy is *willing to notice*. Thus, the university does not function as a host by *harmonizing* varied trajectories, but by allowing them to *coexist in tension*; whenever hostility emerges, it does not emerge from this dynamics; conversely: it is a result of the attempts to deny it.

If such coexistence is to be sustained rather than merely proclaimed, it must be underwritten by an ethical capacity for judgment in the face of imposed certainties, cultivated within individuals. If the university has a civic vocation, it is not to enforce unanimity. Tadeusz Sławek frames this mission by invoking Antigone—not as much as a figure

of heroic refusal, as one of critical fidelity: a figure of insistence that power and authority remain answerable to judgment.

The university should follow Antigone's way of thinking, because its task is to educate in such a manner that a person—both within the walls of the university and beyond them, in professional life and in the private sphere—retains a potential for critical reflection, and is capable of evaluating the actions of power and authority.

The university safeguards, at the very least, the necessary minimum of that space within us, in which we do not identify with the given state of affairs and do not capitulate before it by accepting, under the pretense of objectivity, whatever conditions are imposed. Nothing obscures the image of the university more thoroughly than an uncritical surrender to an idea which—in my understanding—ought to become an idea shared by everyone. (Sławek, *Antygona* 126)

Major philosophical approaches to hospitality help clarify why such denial may be tempting. Hospitality always carries the shadow of the desire to control “who enters” and “on what terms.” The host seeks guarantees, or at least assurances, that the guest will not disrupt the household, challenge its norms, or demand its reconfiguration. When these guarantees are not forthcoming, welcome may curdle into suspicion. In contemporary political rhetoric, the university becomes the scapegoat for this anxiety. It is not accused of *failing to welcome*: it is charged with *welcoming too much*—admitting voices, histories, and questions that transgress the thresholds of the comfort zone of inherited narratives.

Admittedly, hospitality is *not a simple virtue*. Jacques Derrida's point is that the very practices that make hospitality possible—name, status, family, legal legibility—also limit it. One welcomes the Other, as it were, only by placing them under a regime of recognition; and yet the demand for recognition can itself become a refusal of welcome:

[...] this right to hospitality offered to a foreigner “as a family,” represented and protected by his or her family name, is at once what makes hospitality possible, or the hospitable relationship to the foreigner possible, but by the same token what limits and prohibits it. Because hospitality, in this situation, is not offered to an anonymous new arrival and someone who has neither name, nor patronym, nor family, nor social status, and who is therefore treated not as a foreigner but as another barbarian [...]. [T]he absolute or unconditional hospitality I would like to offer him or her presupposes a break with hospitality in the ordinary sense, with conditional hospitality, with the right to or pact of hospitality. In saying this, once more, we are taking account of an irreducible pervertibility. The law of hospitality, the express law that governs the general concept of hospitality, appears as a paradoxical law, pervertible or perverting. It seems to dictate that absolute hospitality should break with the law of hospitality as right or duty, with the “pact” of hospitality. To put it in different terms, absolute hospitality requires that

I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner ... but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other [...] without asking of them either reciprocity ... or even their names. (Derrida, *Of Hospitality* 23–25)

Hospitality worthy of the name, then, cannot be reduced to affirmation. *To host* is neither *to agree in advance*, nor *to shield oneself from discomfort*. It is to accept the ethical burden of encounter: the obligation to listen, to respond, and sometimes to refuse—but it means to do so without erasing the other's presence. The very first movement of hospitality, Derrida suggests, can take the form *interrogation* rather than *welcome*—an apparently humane gesture that nonetheless installs the other within the grammar of law:

Now the foreigner, the *xenos* of whom Socrates says, “him at least you would respect, you would tolerate his accent and his idiom,” or the one of whom Benveniste says that he enters into a pact, this foreigner who has the right to hospitality in the cosmopolitan tradition which will find its most powerful form in Kant and the text we have read and reread (*Perpetual Peace*), this foreigner, then, is someone with whom, to receive him, you begin by asking his name; you enjoin him to state and to guarantee his identity, as you would a witness before a court.

This is someone to whom you put a question and address a demand, the first demand, the minimal demand being: “What is your name?” Or then: “In telling me what your name is, in responding to this request, you are responding on your own behalf, you are responsible before the law and before your hosts, you are a subject in law.”

That, following one of the directions it takes, is the question of the foreigner as the question of the question. Does hospitality consist in interrogating the new arrival? Does it begin with the question addressed to the newcomer (which seems very human and sometimes loving, assuming that hospitality should be linked to love—an enigma that we will leave in reserve for the moment): what is your name? Tell me your name, what should I call you, I who am calling on you, I who want to call you by your name? What am I going to call you? It is also what we sometimes tenderly ask children and those we love.

Or else does hospitality begin with the unquestioning welcome, in a double effacement: the effacement of the question and the name? Is it more just and more loving to question or not to question? To call by the name or without the name? To give or to learn a name already given? Does one give hospitality to a subject? To an identifiable subject? To a subject identifiable by name? To a legal subject? Or is hospitality rendered, is it given to the other before they are identified, even before they are (posited as or supposed to be) a subject—legal subject and subject nameable by their family name, etc.?

The question of hospitality is thus also the question of the question; but by the same token the question of the subject and the name as hypothesis of descent. (Derrida, *Of Hospitality* 27–29)

Analyzed in this perspective, the figure of the *xenos* can no longer be confined to the semantic field of the word “foreigner” taken

in a narrow, or juridical, sense. In contemporary American political discourse, the logic Derrida describes has expanded to the point where xenicity itself becomes detachable from its origin: *dissenting citizens, critical scholars, racialized minorities, and even liberal, American-born Americans may be rendered strangers within their own polity*. The question “What is your name?”—what do you stand for, where do you belong, whose side are you on—no longer functions as a threshold of welcome. Conversely, it propels the mechanism of expulsion, transforming hospitality into a test of loyalty rather than asserting it as an act of openness to encounter.

Universities, when they function as hosts, tackle this burden institutionally. As has already been stressed, they preserve spaces in which disagreement does not collapse into expulsion, and where conflict can be articulated without being resolved by force. But they do so under conditions that are never innocent: hospitality requires a threshold, and the threshold introduces power, mastery, and self-limitation. The political fantasy that the university can be either purely “open” or purely “secure” mistakes the structure of hospitality for a policy preference. Derrida observes:

[T]he host, the one who offers hospitality, must be master at his house, he (in the masculine, first of all) must be assured of sovereignty over the space and the goods that he offers or opens to the other as stranger or foreigner. This seems to be both the law of laws of hospitality and what appears to us as common sense in our culture. It does not seem that I am able to open or offer hospitality, no matter how generous, and even for it to be generous, without also implying: this belongs to me, I am at home, be welcome at my house, without implying, then: “make yourself at home” but on condition that you observe the rules of hospitality, that is to say, respect the being at home of my home, the being oneself of what I am. [...] There, within the law of hospitality, an axiom of self-limitation or self-contradiction can be found whose consequences and corollaries we have not finished exploring. As reaffirmation of mastery and of being oneself at home, hospitality limits itself already from the threshold on its own threshold (*dès le seuil sur le seuil d'elle-même*), it remains always on the threshold of itself, it commands the threshold—and to that very extent it forbids in a certain way crossing the threshold whose crossing it seems to permit. Hospitality becomes the threshold. That is why we do not know what it is, and cannot know. The minute we know it, we no longer know it, what it is properly, what is its identity threshold. (Derrida, *Hospitality*, 46–47)

Hospitality, as Derrida shows, is ethically indispensable yet, bordering on the threshold of identity, structurally unstable. It can never be fully pure, because to welcome another one must (always)-already occupy a place, exercise responsibility for it, and set conditions for encounter. Hospitality therefore does not unfold as unlimited

openness, but as a *practice* reified at the threshold between welcome and restraint, exposure and care.

This paradox illuminates the figure of the “professor as friend.” The professor does not relinquish authority, expertise, or responsibility—nor does she wield them as instruments of sovereignty. Instead, authority is exercised specifically through the maintenance of conditions under which thinking can occur without coercion—conditions that invite students into a shared space of inquiry while refusing both *domination* and *abdication*. Friendship, in this sense, does not resolve the tension between authority and openness; it inhabits it ethically, acknowledging that education, like hospitality itself, is always practiced under conditions of risk, responsibility, and imperfect welcome.

[...] in saying [...] that hospitality in a certain way always does the contrary of what it claims to do and comes to a standstill on its very threshold, the threshold that it re- marks and constitutes, on itself in short, on both its phenomenon and its essence, I am not claiming to say that hospitality is this double bind or this aporetic contradiction, and thus that where it is, there is none. No, I am saying that this apparent aporetic paralysis on the threshold “is” (I place quotation marks around “is” or I cross it out, if you prefer) what must be crossed, this “is” “is” in order that, beyond hospitality, hospitality may come about. Hospitality can take place only beyond hospitality, only by deciding, while letting come, to cross over that hospitality that lets itself get paralyzed on the threshold that it is. It is necessary to let come beyond hospitality, if that is possible. It is in that sense perhaps that “we do not know (not yet, but always not yet)” what hospitality is, and that it awaits its chance and stretches toward its chance beyond what it is, namely, the paralysis on the threshold that it is. In this sense, it is always to come, but from a to-come that does not present itself and will never present itself as such, as present. To think hospitality on the basis of the future, on the basis of this future that will not present itself, or will present itself only where it will not be awaited as present or presentable, is to think it on the basis of death no less than of birth. (Derrida, *Hospitality*, 47)

Derrida’s account of hospitality thus explains why the figure of the professor-as-friend is necessarily uneasy, albeit ethically indispensable. Hospitality, he insists, can never be secured as a stable condition: the host must assert responsibility, authority, and limits, yet these very conditions threaten to neutralize welcome by turning it into control. Hospitality occurs only when this tension is *embraced* rather than *resolved*—when one decides to remain open without the guarantee that openness will remain safe, reciprocal, or affirmed. The professor who teaches *as-a-friend* inhabits precisely this threshold: she speaks from a position of responsibility and expertise, yet risks that authority by addressing students as interlocutors rather than subordinates. Such friendship does not abolish hierarchy, but exposes it to relation. It calls

into existence an authority willing to remain answerable—to teach without mastery over outcomes, and to welcome thought that may not return as agreement. The fact that *Thou* becomes *You*, however, is not tantamount to the claim of sovereignty: in fact, it propels dialogue, or—in the case of the university, a polylogue, or a polyphony of voices-in-an-encounter.

Thus, to recode academic practice as hostility is to mistake exposure for aggression and plurality for threat. Such rhetorical gestures ultimately reject the very fundamentals upon which shared intellectual life—national or transnational—can endure. What such a formulation refuses to acknowledge is the *aporetic structure* of hospitality itself. The difficulty of academic friendship does not arise from the fact that hospitality *hesitates* or pauses at the threshold, but because it *cannot be stabilized into a transparent rule* without betraying its own ethical claim. Yet, the tension between openness and limitation is not a *defect to be corrected*; it is the very condition under which hospitality can become reified at all.

At this point, hospitality-by-right reveals its paradoxical capacity to generate the very hostility it seeks to prevent. Conditional welcome, once absolutized, becomes indistinguishable from exclusion; “protection” slides into “suspicion,” and “order” into the “production of the enemy.”

It is therefore no accident that, at the moment when hospitality threatens to transmogrify into its opposite, Derrida turns explicitly to Lévinas. His gesture is not but a rhetorical flourish: it points to a decisive ethical reorientation. When the grammar of “law” and “contract” proves insufficient, Derrida invokes a figure that cannot be accommodated within the logic of mastery or reciprocity—the figure of the *hostage*, exposed to the other *prior to sovereignty*, prior to assurance, prior even to the promise of return:

It is then the opposite of pure hospitality, precisely because this hospitality by right is too hospitable to its opposite. The perhaps impossible hospitality against which I am here measuring this hospitality of rights is an infinite hospitality, one which, faced with the singularity of each other who is received, renounces every prerogative, indeed every inviolability of ipseity, every power, if you prefer; it is an infinite hospitality in which the host who receives would in that way become the invitee delivered over to the invitee, the guest of the guest, if not their hostage—or anyway their hostage in a Lévinasian sense. (Derrida, *Hospitality* 88)

In this perspective, the university’s vulnerability—its openness to voices that unsettle inherited narratives, its refusal to guarantee comfort or consensus—seems to emerge as the condition of the pos-

sibility of productive dynamics and not as a deviation from its mission. What anti-intellectual rhetoric often denounces as *hostility* is often nothing more than the visible trace of an institution *willing to remain exposed* to positions or phenomena it cannot (or could ever) fully anticipate or domesticate. Gestures leading to the rejection of that exposure do not lead to the restoration of order; conversely—they *foreclose* the very encounters through which knowledge, responsibility, and shared intellectual life come into being.

### KNOWLEDGE AS ENCOUNTER, NOT INDOCTRINATION

The charge that universities exist to indoctrinate rather than to educate rests on a deeply impoverished understanding of how knowledge functions. Indoctrination presupposes a closed circuit: a fixed doctrine transmitted unidirectionally from an alleged authority to a subject expected to *receive* rather than *respond*, insulated from challenge, contestation, and revision. Knowledge, by contrast, emerges through encounter. It takes shape in the friction between claims, in the exposure of assumptions to critique, and in the slow labor of translation across difference. To confuse these two processes is not merely an error of description; it is a refusal to recognize the ethical structure of learning itself.

Accounts of education grounded in responsibility have long insisted that knowledge cannot be severed from relation. From Epicurus's understanding of philosophy as a practice of life, through Florian Znaniecki's relational sociology of knowledge, to Alfred North Whitehead's processual account of learning, education repeatedly appears as the opposite to the *imposition of certainty*: it is construed as an *event that unfolds between persons*. For Emmanuel Lévinas, this relationality acquires its most radical ethical form: the encounter with the Other interrupts the sovereignty of the self, calling it into question *before any doctrine can be secured*. Learning, on this account, is not the accumulation of correct positions but the willingness to be addressed by what one does not yet understand. As Lévinas insists, the ethical relation that makes such learning possible cannot be absorbed into cognition or systematized as knowledge:

The same and the other cannot enter into a cognition that would encompass them; the relations that the separated being maintains with what transcends it are not produced on the ground of totality, do not crystallize into a system. ... It involves a calling into question of oneself, a critical attitude which is itself produced in face of the other and under his authority. [...] The face-to-face remains an ultimate situation. (Lévinas 80–81)

Universities institutionalize this interruption. They do not guarantee enlightenment; they preserve the conditions under which claims may be tested without being immunized against dissent. Contrary-wise, *indoctrination eliminates risk by foreclosing response*. Education, properly understood, accepts risk as its ethical price. Education never suspends freedom: what is at stake is the ethics of the encounter. Lévinas insists that the relation enacted in teaching does not confirm the sovereignty of the subject, but places it under judgment—not in order to command obedience, but *to prevent freedom from collapsing into self-certainty*. Teaching, in this sense, is not the transmission of content nor the enforcement of doctrine, but an *as-sociation* that calls freedom itself into question:

But what can it mean that the teacher who calls forth attention exceeds the consciousness? How is the teacher outside of the consciousness he teaches? He is not exterior to it as the content thought is exterior to the thought that thinks it; this exteriority is assumed by thought, and in this sense does not *overflow* the consciousness. Nothing that concerns thought can overflow it; everything is freely assumed. *Nothing—except the judge judging the very freedom of thought*. The presence of the Master who by his word gives meaning to phenomena and permits them to be thematized is not open to an objective knowing; this presence is in society with me. The presence of being in the phenomenon, which breaks the charm of the bewitched world, which utters the *yes* of which the I is incapable, which brings the preeminent positivity of the Other, is ipso facto as-sociation. But the reference to commencement is not a knowing of the commencement; quite the contrary: every objectification already refers to this reference. Association, a preeminent experience of being, does not disclose. One may call it a disclosure of what is revealed—the experience of a face; but one thus conjures away the originality of this disclosure. In this disclosure there disappears precisely the consciousness of solitary certitude in which every knowing is enacted, even that one can have of a face. Certitude rests, in fact, on my freedom, and is in this sense solitary. Whether it be through a priori concepts which enable me to assume the given, or whether it be by adherence of the will (as in Descartes), it is finally my freedom alone that takes the responsibility for the true. As-sociation, the welcoming of the master, is the opposite course: in it the exercise of my freedom is called in question. If we call a situation where my freedom is called in question conscience, association or the welcoming of the Other is conscience. (Lévinas 100)

Teaching is commonly understood as the transmission of content: something is presented, evaluated, and either accepted or rejected by a subject whose freedom of judgment remains intact throughout the process. Even when learning is demanding, consciousness appears *sovereign*, since assent ultimately belongs to the learner. What Lévinas asks us to recognize, however, is a fundamentally different structure of address—one in which teaching does not merely offer something

to be known, but places the subject's very freedom under judgment. In such moments, the teacher does not confront the student as an object of cognition, but as an interlocutor whose presence renders indifference impossible. One is no longer deciding whether a given proposition is true; one finds oneself *answerable*. This answerability *precedes* comprehension and cannot be reduced to *agreement* or *refusal*. Crucially, it does not *abolish freedom*, but *interrupts its self-sufficiency*. The subject remains free, yet no longer sovereign over the terms on which truth appears. For Lévinas, this interruption is not a pedagogical failure or a lapse into authority as domination. It indicates the ethical origin of teaching itself: the point at which freedom encounters a demand it cannot fully assume, and consciousness discovers that it is not alone.

Philosophically, Lévinas's argument evolves by undoing the deeply ingrained assumption about how *anything* can address us at all—namely, that whatever confronts consciousness must do so as an object *available for cognition*. Ordinarily, consciousness secures itself through *mastery*: it assumes contents, applies a priori forms, and takes responsibility for truth through the freedom to assent or withhold assent. Even certainty, in this model, remains an achievement of freedom. From this perspective, nothing that concerns *thought* can exceed *consciousness*—except, as Lévinas insists, the judgment of that very freedom. The teacher is therefore “outside” consciousness not as an external object, but as the one whose presence interrupts this economy of assumption by calling freedom itself into question. Teaching, on this account, neither transmits content nor solicits agreement; it exposes the subject to a claim that cannot be fully appropriated, neutralized, or mastered. This exposure does not occur within cognition, nor through reciprocal exchange, but in what Lévinas calls *as-sociation*: an ethical *being-with* that breaks the solitude of certainty without abolishing freedom. Language here does not begin as dialogue between equals, but as an *irreversible address*, in which the interlocutor remains beyond the system of my knowing. What Lévinas names “mastery” in this context does not denote domination, but the irreducible exteriority of the Other, whose presence judges freedom and thereby renders responsibility—and truth—possible. It is this interruption of sovereign consciousness that opens onto the concrete life of conscience.

The originality of this situation does not only lie in the formal antithesis it represents with regard to the cognitive consciousness. The calling in question of oneself is all the more severe the more rigorously the self is in control of itself. This receding of the goal in the very measure one approaches it is the life of conscience. The increase of my exigencies with regard to myself aggravates the judgment that is borne upon me, increases my responsibility. It is in this very

concrete sense that the judgment that is borne upon me is never assumed by me. This inability to assume is the very life, the essence, of conscience. My freedom does not have the last word; I am not alone. And we shall say then that conscience alone leaves itself. In other words again, in conscience I have an experience that is not commensurate with any a priori framework—a conceptless experience. Every other experience is conceptual, that is, becomes my own or arises from my freedom. [...] Conscience and desire are not modalities of consciousness among others, but its condition. Concretely they are the welcoming of the Other across his judgment. (Lévinas 100–101)

Freedom is indispensable for Lévinas because responsibility can only be addressed to a subject who remains capable of refusal; ethical judgment does not abolish freedom, but exposes it to a demand that it did not originate, and cannot finally discharge. Judgment here is not a form of *predication* or *evaluation* performed by consciousness, but its ethical questioning: an address that places consciousness itself in question prior to any conceptual determination. What Lévinas calls conscience is therefore not a moral faculty added to cognition, but the experience in which the subject discovers that its freedom is no longer sovereign. This discovery does not arise from confusion or weakness, but from lucid self-mastery encountering a responsibility that expands rather than contracts as one strives to meet it. Conscience lives in this paradoxical movement: the more rigorously the self governs itself, the more severely it is called into question. Lévinas names this insatiability “desire”—which, however, is not conceived as *a lack seeking fulfillment*, but an *openness* to what cannot be possessed or mastered. Conscience and desire are thus not *modalities* of consciousness among others, but the *condition* of conscious interaction with the world, because they mark the point at which the self is no longer enclosed within itself. Concretely, this condition takes the form of “welcoming the Other across his judgment”—a relation that cannot remain *internal to the subject*, but necessarily unfolds *between persons*. It is at this juncture that Lévinas turns from the interior life of conscience to the ethical structure of teaching and language, insisting that truth does not arise from inward recollection, but from a transitive relation in which the self is addressed by an irreducibly exterior other:

The transitivity of teaching, and not the interiority of reminiscence, manifests being; the locus of truth is society. The *moral* relation with the Master who judges me subtends the freedom of my adherence to the true. Thus language commences. He who speaks to me and across the words proposes himself to me retains the fundamental foreignness of the Other who judges me; our relations are never reversible. This supremacy posits him in himself, outside of my knowing, and it is by relation to this absolute that the *given* takes on meaning. The “communication” of ideas, the reciprocity of dialogue, already hide

the profound essence of language. It resides in the irreversibility of the relation between me and the other, in the Mastery of the Master coinciding with his position as other and as exterior. For language can be spoken only if the interlocutor is the commencement of his discourse, if, consequently, he remains beyond the system, if he is not *on the same plane* as myself. The interlocutor is not a Thou, he is a You; he reveals himself in his lordship. Thus exteriority coincides with a mastery. My freedom is thus challenged by a Master who can invest it. Truth, the sovereign exercise of freedom, becomes henceforth possible. (Lévinas 101)

In this final movement, Lévinas completes his shift from an ethics of conscience to an ethics of teaching and language by rejecting any account of truth grounded in inward recollection or self-transparent reflection. Against philosophical traditions that locate meaning in “interiority” or “reminiscence,” he insists that it is the “transitivity of teaching” that “manifests being,” because truth does not arise from the subject’s return to itself but from being addressed by another. For this reason, “the locus of truth is society”—not in the sense of consensus, exchange, or agreement, but insofar as truth becomes possible only where freedom is exposed to judgment rather than secured against it. The “*moral* relation with the Master who judges me” does not negate freedom; it “subtends the freedom of my adherence to the true,” making assent meaningful rather than arbitrary. It is at this point, Lévinas writes, that “language commences,” yet it does not simply “commence” as communication or reciprocity, but as *ethical address*.

In other words, the one who speaks “retains the fundamental foreignness of the Other who judges me,” and this relation is “never reversible,” because responsibility does not depend on symmetry. The Other remains “outside of my knowing,” not as an object beyond reach, but as an *absolute exteriority* in relation to which “the *given*” takes on meaning at all. It is precisely this exteriority that Lévinas names “mastery”: not domination, command, or authority enforced from above, but the *refusal of assimilation*—the impossibility of reducing the Other to my system, my concepts, or my freedom. The Master is a master *not because he controls*, but because *he cannot be mastered*. He does not override freedom; he questions freedom’s tendency to coincide with itself. This is why Lévinas can insist that even the “communication of ideas” or the “reciprocity of dialogue” may obscure the essence of language, insofar as they suggest symmetry where ethical irreversibility is at stake. Language, he argues, is possible only if the interlocutor “remains beyond the system,” as the “commencement of his discourse,” not “on the same plane as myself.” Hence the striking formulation: “the interlocutor is not a Thou; he is a You.” As opposed to *Thou*,

the *You*—once a plural form denoting politeness or hierarchy—in the philosopher’s understanding denotes the irreducible exteriority of the other whose address preserves distance and responsibility. In this exact sense, “exteriority coincides with mastery,” and it is only because “my freedom is thus challenged by a Master who can invest it”—that is, *inform with weight*, stakes, and answerability—that “truth, the sovereign exercise of freedom, becomes henceforth possible.”

As follows, Lévinas’s account of teaching and language does not at all authorize indoctrination; on the contrary: it makes apparent why indoctrination is conceptually *parasitic* on the very freedom it claims to defend. The professor who “judges” does not replace the student’s thinking with doctrine, nor does the asymmetry of the pedagogical relation license command or submission. What it names instead is the ethical situation in which thought becomes answerable to what it cannot fully anticipate, absorb, or control. Freedom is not suspended here but intensified, because it is not exercised as self-affirmation but as responsiveness—a willingness to be addressed, corrected, and obligated without being coerced. Far from closing inquiry, this exposure prevents freedom from hardening into certainty or collapsing into self-reference. Education thus appears neither as neutral exchange nor as enforced transmission, but as the maintenance of a space in which judgment remains possible *precisely* because it is never final. In this light, the familiar charge of indoctrination misidentifies what it claims to oppose.

Analyzed in this perspective, the accusation that universities undermine freedom by placing it under judgment mistakes ethical exposure for constraint. Indoctrination seeks to protect freedom by insulating it from challenge, reducing responsibility to assent or refusal. Education, as Lévinas understands it, does the opposite: it intensifies freedom by exposing it to an authority that cannot be mastered, instrumentalized, or converted into doctrine. The university does not negate autonomy; it refuses to let autonomy close in upon itself.

This emphasis on exposure rather than insulation also clarifies the place of dialogue. In Martin Buber’s terms, indoctrination corresponds to an *I–It* relation, in which knowledge circulates as an object to be possessed or rejected. Education, by contrast, depends on the preservation of an *I–Thou* relation—one that resists reduction to utility, symmetry, or reassurance. Lévinas seems to radicalize this insight by insisting that relation does not culminate in *reciprocity*, but in *responsibility*: not mutual agreement, but the *endurance of address*. The “You” marks precisely this ethical asymmetry—the presence of the other

as irreducibly exterior—whose interruption prevents freedom from collapsing into self-certainty.

The fantasy of indoctrination becomes even harder to sustain in the context of translocal knowledge systems. American knowledge has always been shaped by contact zones rather than doctrinal centers. Ideas central to US intellectual life—democracy, sovereignty, freedom, race, labor—have circulated across oceans and borders, absorbing contradictions and contestations along the way. Universities serve as sites where these circulations become legible: where students do not encounter a single narrative, but competing genealogies that refuse easy synthesis. What appears as indoctrination to those seeking closure is often an effect of the misreading of the disorientation that inevitably accompanies genuine encounter.

For these reasons, anyone demanding that universities deliver unambiguous moral reassurance displays a profound misunderstanding of their task. Knowledge that never unsettles the limits of one's comfort zone is not *knowledge* but *affirmation*. Hospitality, in this context, is the practice of the ethical courage to remain open to what arrives without advance assurance of comfort or agreement. *The university that practices such hospitality does not produce loyal subjects; it produces interlocutors—individuals capable of inhabiting disagreement without converting it into enmity.*

## UNCERTAINTY, AUTHORITY, AND THE DEMAND FOR CERTITUDE

Modern public discourse often treats uncertainty as a moral failure. Claims that do not arrive fully formed, unambiguous, and final are suspected of concealment or bad faith. In this climate, institutions that traffic openly in provisional knowledge—science, scholarship, historical inquiry—are accused not merely of error, but of deception. Authority is demanded in the form of certainty, and when certainty cannot be delivered, authority itself is declared illegitimate. The result, of course, is a paradox: the more honestly uncertainty is acknowledged, the more aggressively trust is withdrawn. Yet this expectation rests on a model of authority that Enlightenment thinkers explicitly rejected. For Immanuel Kant, maturity does not consist in being spared uncertainty, but in assuming responsibility for judgment where guarantees are unavailable. Enlightenment, on this account, is not the replacement of one authority by another, but the refusal of tutelage as such.

*Enlightenment* is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. *Immaturity* is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is *self-imposed* when its cause lies not in lack of understand-

ing, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another. *Sapere aude!* "Have courage to use your own understanding!"—that is the motto of enlightenment. (Kant, *An Answer*)

In modern era, ever since the onset of Enlightenment, thinkers have long warned against this confusion. Kant's refusal of tutelage rests on the conviction that maturity consists not in being spared uncertainty, but in learning to reason within it. Authority worthy of respect does not eliminate ambiguity; it accompanies judgment where guarantees are unavailable. Universities, when they remain faithful to this task, do not promise security of belief. They cultivate the capacity to live with incomplete knowledge without surrendering responsibility. This posture is easily misread as weakness by those who equate authority with command rather than counsel.

Nothing is required for this enlightenment, however, except freedom; and the freedom in question is the least harmful of all, namely, the freedom to use reason publicly in all matters. But on all sides I hear: "*Do not argue!*" The officer says, "Do not argue, drill!" The tax man says, "Do not argue, pay!" The pastor says, "Do not argue, believe!" (Only one ruler in the world says, "*Argue* as much as you want and about what you want, *but obey!*"") In this we have [examples of] pervasive restrictions on freedom. But which restriction hinders enlightenment, and which does not, but instead actually advances it? I reply: the *public* use of one's reason must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among mankind; the *private* use of reason may, however, often be very narrowly restricted, without otherwise hindering the progress of enlightenment. (Kant, *An Answer*)

Kant's distinction does not weaken authority; it specifies its conditions. Authority, in his view, does not rest on eliminating disagreement, but on sustaining a space in which judgment can be exercised without coercion. The *public* use of reason names the scholar's responsibility to address others as capable of judgment rather than as subjects requiring protection from uncertainty. By contrast, the *private* use of reason refers to the functional obedience required within specific institutional roles. Confusing these two domains produces the error that fuels contemporary accusations against universities: the belief that public disagreement constitutes institutional betrayal rather than intellectual responsibility. The philosopher explains further:

By the public use of one's own reason I understand the use that anyone, as a *scholar*, makes of reason before the entire *literate world*. I call the private use of reason that which a person may make in a *civic post* or office that has been entrusted to him. In many affairs conducted in the interests of a community, a certain

---

3 Frederick II (The Great) of Prussia (Translator's note).

mechanism is required by means of which some of its members must conduct themselves in an entirely passive manner, so that through an artificial unanimity the government may guide them toward public ends, or at least prevent them from destroying such ends. Here one certainly must not argue; instead one must obey. However, insofar as this same person also regards himself as a member of the community as a whole, or even of the world community, and as a consequence addresses the public in the role of a scholar, in the proper sense of that term, he can most certainly argue, without thereby harming the affairs for which, as a passive member, he is partly responsible. (Kant, *The Answer*)

What Kant establishes here is not a hierarchy of obedience over thought, but a distinction between roles: obedience governs action within an entrusted office, while reason retains its full critical authority when addressed to the public as such. The same individual may therefore be bound to comply in practice and yet remain fully entitled—and indeed obligated—to question, criticize, and revise the principles governing that practice when speaking as a scholar. Kant clarifies this distinction through a series of concrete cases that show how public reasoning not only survives institutional constraint but depends upon it for its proper scope and responsibility:

Thus it would be disastrous if an officer on duty who was given a command by his superior were to question the appropriateness or utility of the order. He must obey. But as a scholar he cannot be justly constrained from making comments about errors in military service or from placing them before the public for its judgment. The citizen cannot refuse to pay the taxes imposed on him; indeed, impertinent criticism of such levies, when they should be paid, can be punished as a scandal. But the same person does not act contrary to civic duty when, as a scholar, he publicly expresses his thoughts regarding the impropriety or even injustice of such taxes. Likewise a pastor is bound to instruct his congregation in accordance with the symbol of the church he serves, for he was appointed on that condition. But as a scholar he has complete freedom—indeed, even the calling—to impart to the public all of his carefully considered and well-intentioned thoughts concerning mistaken aspects of that symbol, as well as his suggestions for the better arrangement of religious and church matters. [...] Thus an appointed teacher's use of his reason for the sake of his congregation is merely *private*, because, however large the congregation is, this use is always only domestic; in this regard, as a priest, he is not free and cannot be such because he is acting under instructions from someone else. By contrast, the cleric, as a scholar who speaks through his writings to the public as such—that is, to the world—enjoys in this *public use* of reason an unrestricted freedom to use his own rational capacities and to speak his own mind. For that the (spiritual) guardians of a people should themselves be immature is an absurdity that would insure the perpetuation of absurdities. (Kant, *An Answer*)

Kant thus offers a powerful account of authority *without tutelage*: an authority grounded not in certainty, command, or protection from

error, but in the freedom of public judgment exercised under conditions of risk. Yet Kant also writes at a moment when the institutional conditions of authority—church, state, university—still appeared capable of sustaining this distinction between obedience in action and freedom in thought. What his account does not yet fully confront is what happens when this distinction collapses in practice: when public reasoning itself is re-described as a threat, and when uncertainty is no longer tolerated as the price of freedom but denounced as evidence of illegitimacy. It is distinctly this historical transformation that Hannah Arendt will later diagnose by showing how modern demands for certainty convert authority into coercion and substitute violence for judgment.

The demand for certainty reveals its own parochialism especially when one observes that knowledge, shaped by local histories, material conditions, and epistemic traditions that do not align seamlessly, circulates unevenly across borders. Hemispheric and transoceanic American studies have repeatedly shown that what counts as evidence, relevance, or urgency *in a given context*—shifts as ideas move *between contexts*. Universities function as mediating spaces where these shifts can be examined, their validity being acknowledged rather than denied. Insistence on a single, unchanging truth in such conditions is not fidelity to reality, but resistance to its complexity.

Hospitality offers a crucial ethical corrective to such a position. To host another's claim is not to accept it uncritically, but to grant it the dignity of being heard and examined. This requires patience with uncertainty and restraint in judgment. The alternative—demanding immediate closure—turns disagreement into threat and inquiry into suspicion. Universities that acknowledge uncertainty do not abdicate authority; they practice it responsibly. They refuse the false comfort of final answers in favor of a more demanding ethic: remaining answerable to evidence, to critique, and to those who must live with the consequences of knowledge that is always, inevitably, incomplete.

## EMERGENCY, ETHICS, AND THE LIMITS OF SCIENTIFIC AUTHORITY

States of emergency exert a peculiar pressure on knowledge. In moments of pandemics, environmental crises, or large-scale social disruptions, scientific expertise is asked to speak with a decisiveness that exceeds its own epistemic conditions. What is sought is not *judgment under uncertainty*, but *certainty itself*—final, unambiguous, and, most importantly, *enforceable*. When such certainty cannot be delivered, provisional findings are reinterpreted as evasions, and revision is mis-

taken for duplicity. Institutions devoted to inquiry are then accused not merely of error, but of illegitimate power—of having assumed an authority they were never entitled to exercise, especially if the outcomes fail to satisfy the propagandist ambitions of the funding bodies.

This pattern is not historically new. Hannah Arendt's work situates such accusations within a longer crisis of authority that predates contemporary emergencies, but, as it seems, becomes especially visible under their pressure.

This crisis, apparent since the inception of the century, is political in origin and nature. The rise of political movements intent upon replacing the party system, and the development of a new totalitarian form of government, took place against a background of a more or less general, more or less dramatic breakdown of all traditional authorities. Nowhere was this breakdown the direct result of the regimes or movements themselves; it rather seemed as though totalitarianism, in the form of movements as well as of regimes, was best fitted to take advantage of a general political and social atmosphere in which the party system had lost its prestige and the government's authority was no longer recognized. (Arendt, *Between Past and Future* 91–92)

What distinguishes this crisis of authority, is not simply the erosion of trust in particular institutions, but the collapse of the conceptual frameworks through which authority itself was once understood:

The most significant symptom of the crisis, indicating its depth and seriousness, is that it has spread to such prepolitical areas as child-rearing and education, where authority in the widest sense has always been accepted as a natural necessity, obviously required as much by natural needs, the helplessness of the child, as by political necessity, the continuity of an established civilization which can be assured only if those who are newcomers by birth are guided through a pre-established world into which they are born as strangers. Because of its simple and elementary character, this form of authority has, throughout the history of political thought, served as a model for a great variety of authoritarian forms of government, so that the fact that even this prepolitical authority which ruled the relations between adults and children, teachers and pupils, is no longer secure signifies that all the old time-honored metaphors and models for authoritarian relations have lost their plausibility. Practically as well as theoretically, we are no longer in a position to know what authority really is. (Arendt, *Between Past and Future* 92)

In emergency conditions, this loss of conceptual clarity becomes politically volatile. When authority is no longer intelligible on its own terms, it is easily conflated with whatever forms of power remain visible—command, enforcement, and control. Advisory expertise, precisely because it cannot compel compliance or guarantee outcomes, is then recoded as domination the moment it fails to deliver certainty.

Arendt therefore insists on a distinction that “emergency rhetoric” persistently obscures:

Since authority always demands obedience, it is commonly mistaken for some form of power or violence. Yet authority precludes the use of external means of coercion; where force is used, authority itself has failed. Authority, on the other hand, is incompatible with persuasion, which presupposes equality and works through a process of argumentation. Where arguments are used, authority is left in abeyance. Against the egalitarian order of persuasion stands the authoritarian order, which is always hierarchical. If authority is to be defined at all, then, it must be in contradistinction to both coercion by force and persuasion through arguments. (The authoritarian relation between the one who commands and the one who obeys rests neither on common reason nor on the power of the one who commands; what they have in common is the hierarchy itself, whose rightness and legitimacy both recognize and where both have their predetermined stable place.). (Arendt, *Between Past and Future* 92–93)

This dynamic has clear historical precedents. Twentieth-century regimes that governed through permanent states of emergency repeatedly targeted academic and scientific institutions not because they were politically neutral, but because they embodied forms of authority that could not be fully subordinated to command. In Nazi Germany, disciplines ranging from anthropology and biology to history and philology were reorganized to conform to racial doctrine, while research that resisted ideological closure was denounced as decadent, foreign, or subversive. In the Soviet Union, the natural sciences, humanities, and economics alike were subjected to political litmus tests that transformed provisional inquiry into enforced certainty, with catastrophic consequences for both knowledge and life. In each case, in eyes of the totalitarian regimes, the problem was not that science claimed too much authority, but that it claimed *the wrong kind*: authority grounded in judgment, evidence, and revisability rather than in ideological finality. Emergency governance thus did not merely suppress dissent; it redefined the conditions of legitimacy themselves, recoding uncertainty as betrayal and expertise as conspiracy. Anti-intellectualism, in this sense, is not a cultural accident but a recurrent political strategy, activated when authority can no longer tolerate the ethical limits of knowledge.

What these histories make visible is a structural contradiction at the heart of authoritarian emergency politics. Knowledge is tolerated only so long as it can be made to serve predetermined ends. When research produces stable, well-founded conclusions that conflict with ideological objectives, it is dismissed as corrupt, foreign, or politically motivated. When, by contrast, inquiry remains necessarily

provisional—when evidence is incomplete, contested, or evolving—it is denounced as evasive, incompetent, or unworthy of public trust. Certainty becomes suspect when it resists power; uncertainty becomes suspect when it resists instrumentalization. In both cases, the problem is not epistemic failure but ethical independence. Institutions of knowledge are thus placed in a double bind: condemned either for knowing too much or for not knowing enough, depending on what political authority requires at a given moment. Emergency discourse does not merely exploit uncertainty; it weaponizes the very conditions under which responsible knowledge is produced.

What states of emergency—whether genuine or politically manufactured—therefore intensify is not simply the demand for compliance, but the expectation that authority should eliminate uncertainty altogether *while remaining obedient to power*. Authority is no longer recognized as a relation sustained by judgment and trust, but reimaged as a capacity to command outcomes, guarantee safety, and confirm political narratives in advance. Where such guarantees fail to materialize, authority is declared fraudulent. The crisis Arendt describes thus becomes operative in a new register: institutions that can neither coerce nor persuade, but only advise under conditions of risk, are experienced not as *authoritative* but as *evasive*. Emergency rhetoric does not create this confusion; it exploits it, translating uncertainty into suspicion and responsibility into liability.

What emergency discourse ultimately reveals, then, is not the overreach of scientific authority but its systematic misrecognition. Scientific expertise neither commands nor coerces; it does not operate through force, nor does it persuade by offering moral absolution or political reassurance. It advises under conditions of uncertainty—and it is precisely this refusal to collapse judgment into certainty, or evidence into loyalty, that renders it suspect. When authority is expected to function as domination, its ethical form becomes unintelligible, and responsibility is reinterpreted as weakness.

This accusation rests on a fundamental misunderstanding of both science and authority. Scientific knowledge does not govern; *it advises*. Its claims are conditional, probabilistic, and open to revision as evidence accumulates. Kant's distinction between enlightenment and tutelage remains instructive here: to be enlightened is not to be spared uncertainty, but to be treated as capable of reasoning within it. *Demands that expertise eliminate risk or moral ambiguity mistake knowledge for command and counsel for coercion. They ask of science what only ideology can provide: infallibility without accountability.*

The demand for absolute scientific certainty appears especially untenable when one broadens one's scope of inquiry. Emergencies do not unfold uniformly across regions, cultures, or political systems. Public health knowledge, for example, circulates through vastly different infrastructures, histories of trust and mistrust, and material constraints. Universities and research institutions operate as transnational nodes within these circulations, translating findings across contexts rather than imposing them wholesale. Insistence on interpreting this translational labor as domination is nothing but misreading mediation as control.

Again, hospitality as a concept offers a more adequate ethical framework. To offer guidance under conditions of uncertainty is not to dominate, but to accept responsibility for one's best judgment in the absence of guarantees. In theological terms, this posture aligns more closely with humility than with sovereignty. It acknowledges finitude without retreating into silence. Universities, when they function properly, cultivate this exact stance: the capacity to say "this is what we know now," while remaining open to correction, lies at the core of their mission. To reject such counsel because it cannot promise absolute safety is not an act of moral seriousness; it is a refusal of the shared vulnerability upon which any ethical community—scientific, political, or civic—ultimately depends.

#### UNCERTAINTY AS CARE: MEDICINE, EVIDENCE, AND RESPONSIBILITY

It is therefore necessary to distinguish between genuine emergencies and those deliberately manufactured for political or economic gain. Pandemics such as COVID-19, environmental disasters like Hurricane Katrina, or the long-term contamination of water and land in Indigenous territories are not rhetorical constructs; they are material crises that unfold regardless of political acknowledgment and exact their cost in human lives. Other "emergencies," by contrast, are engineered: abrupt tariff regimes, regulatory shocks, or policy reversals designed to produce volatility, consolidate authority, or enable speculative profit for those positioned to anticipate reversal. These manufactured crises do not arise from uncertainty; they instrumentalize it. Yet authoritarian politics treats both forms through the same distorted logic. When genuine crises demand humility before complex and evolving evidence, uncertainty is denounced as incompetence or bad faith. When instability is deliberately produced, uncertainty is invoked to justify exceptional measures and suspend accountability. In both

cases, what is rejected is not uncertainty itself, but the ethical limits it imposes on power.

Perhaps the one discipline in which these limits become particularly obvious is medicine. Medical knowledge does not operate at a safe distance from lived experience; it intervenes directly in bodies, identities, and futures. Decisions must often be made before evidence has stabilized, and care must be extended unconditionally, even without any promise of cure. Under such conditions, uncertainty is not a flaw to be eliminated but a condition to be borne responsibly. To treat this condition as deception is to misunderstand not only medicine, but the moral grammar of care itself.

This misunderstanding persists in part because *care*, not unlike education, is often mistaken for *control*, and philosophical debates on hospitality enhance one's understanding why this conflation may be so seductive—and why it is dangerous. To care for another is to accept exposure to their vulnerability without claiming mastery over its outcome. In the medical context, Lévinas's insistence that *responsibility precedes knowledge* resonates powerfully: the obligation to *respond* arises *before* certainty is achieved. Evidence-based medicine does not *promise* final truths; it practices disciplined attentiveness—ongoing evaluation, transparency about limits, and a willingness to revise judgment as new information emerges. Universities and teaching hospitals remain among the few institutions structurally committed to sustaining this attentiveness, even when it generates disagreement rather than reassurance.

The ethical stakes of medical uncertainty become still sharper when viewed across national borders. Transnationally, medical knowledge is shaped not only by essential philosophical differences in defining health (for instance, Western medicine is often juxtaposed with, rather than complemented by, Indigenous or Eastern medicine), but also by disparities in infrastructure, culturally rooted histories of trust and mistrust, and divergent political conditions. What counts as responsible care in one context may require careful adaptation in another. Needless to say, universities function as mediating spaces within these circulations, translating research into practice without erasing contextual difference, but adopting any position that demands uniform certainty across such uneven terrain is a gesture that could not be further from realism; it is abstraction masquerading as rigor.

Public debates about medicine also tend to neglect a theological dimension long present in traditions of care. Ethical frameworks grounded in compassion, humility, and the sanctity of life have never equated care with control. Medical knowledge cannot speak

with a single, unchanging voice: to require it politically is to impose upon the audience a false image of authority—one that denies finitude of means (intellectual and otherwise) and treats vulnerability as a scandal. A hospitable medical ethic does the opposite. It assumes that patients and communities are capable of engaging complexity when it is offered honestly. In this sense, uncertainty becomes the opposite of the negation of care: it is one its expressions—a refusal to simplify processes of life in order to protect doctrines, and a commitment to remain answerable to those whose lives are at stake.

### SPEECH, FEAR, AND THE MISUSE OF “TOTALITARIANISM”

What ultimately links the controversies surrounding expertise, medicine, and emergency governance is not merely a conflict over ideas, but a struggle over bodies. States of emergency—whether genuine or manufactured—do not ask only for belief; they demand compliance at the level of *embodied life experience*. Health, movement, labor, reproduction, and exposure to risk, become objects of political management. In such conditions, authority is no longer evaluated by the quality of its judgment but by its capacity to discipline outcomes: to secure obedience, enforce conformity, and neutralize vulnerability. Knowledge that cannot guarantee such control—because it remains provisional, revisable, and ethically restrained—appears intolerable. Uncertainty becomes politically dangerous not because it is false, but because it resists the conversion of judgment into command. The suspicion directed at scientific and academic institutions thus converges with a deeper anxiety: the fear that bodies capable of judgment are bodies that cannot be fully governed.

It is within this atmosphere that the language of *totalitarianism* is increasingly—and recklessly—invoked. Indeed, few terms in modern political vocabulary carry comparable moral weight. Totalitarianism, of course, refers to regimes defined by enforced unanimity, the eradication of dissent, and the systematic transformation of free thinking into obedience. When this language is applied to universities, the effect is rhetorically explosive but conceptually incoherent. Institutions hosting visible disagreement, welcoming internal critique, and open to public contestation are redescribed as *spaces of terror*—not because *they prohibit speech*, but because speech is *consequential*. This charge functions less as diagnosis than as displacement: the anxiety produced by pluralism is projected onto the institution that refuses to dissolve disagreement into silence, and when it insists on this refusal, it risks retaliatory actions on the part of the political bodies that govern funding.

What is displaced in this gesture becomes clearer once speech itself is taken seriously as an ethical relation. To speak in a shared space is to risk being answered, challenged, or refused. Fear arises not where speech is forbidden, but where speech matters—where others are present and cannot be neutralized in advance. Again, in this context, Martin Buber's distinction between *I-It* and *I-Thou* relations returns as particularly instructive. An *I-It* world permits speech without consequence: "others" are "objects" to be managed, instrumentalized, or ignored. An *I-Thou* world exposes the speaker to relation, and therefore to vulnerability. Universities, at their best, insist on this exposure. They do not promise immunity from offense or conflict; they preserve the conditions under which response remains possible and responsibility cannot be deferred.

Transoceanic, but also pan-American, perspectives sharpen image of the blatant misuse of the concept in reference to the academia. The histories that give *totalitarianism* its meaning are not abstract scenarios, but lived realities across Europe, Latin America, Asia, and beyond. These are tragic histories of censorship, surveillance, imprisonment, torture, vanishment, and non-answerability. As a rule, in countries under totalitarian regimes, universities have been among the first targets of authoritarian consolidation *precisely* because they sustain spaces of critique that cannot be fully disciplined. To apply the concept of totalitarianism as a descriptor of institutions that welcome protest and dissent, adjudicate conflict publicly, and submit themselves to legal and ethical scrutiny is not merely inaccurate: it empties the term of its historical substance and obscures the very forms of domination it was meant to name.

An intellectually hospitable culture therefore demands restraint as well as courage. Disagreement is not persecution; accountability is not terror. The willingness to remain in relation under conditions of conflict—to speak without the guarantee of affirmation and to listen without the promise of comfort—is not a symptom of tyranny. On the contrary: it is one of the few remaining signs of democratic vitality. A politician who abandons this labor in favor of a rhetoric of enmity does not engage in an act of resistance: she retreats from the ethical demands that shared speech inevitably entails.

## DEBT, ACCESS, AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF WELCOME

What this rhetoric of fear ultimately conceals is that the governance of bodies and speech is inseparable from the governance of access. The same political imagination that recasts uncertainty as weakness

and disagreement as threat also treats education as a private risk to be individually borne, and not as a shared public responsibility. Universities are condemned for refusing ideological certainty while being compelled to operate within economic structures that determine “who may enter,” “who may remain,” and “at what cost.” Control thus shifts registers: where speech cannot be disciplined without resistance, futures can be disciplined through debt. Hostility toward universities therefore does not end at language or ideas; it extends into the material conditions under which learning is made possible. To understand how welcome is withdrawn, authority must be traced not only into classrooms and curricula, but into contracts, loans, and obligations that bind students long after speech has ended.

Anger over the cost of higher education is neither irrational nor misplaced. In the United States, the conversion of access to learning into a regime of long-term indebtedness has altered the very meaning of welcome. Entry into the university increasingly requires not only intellectual readiness, but a willingness to mortgage one’s future. When hospitality is extended on such terms, it risks becoming indistinguishable from extortion. Yet it is precisely here that a telling inversion occurs. Institutions structurally denied the resources to offer education as a public good are recast as the primary agents of exclusion, while the political and economic arrangements that make free or affordable education impossible recede from view. Responsibility is displaced downward, onto universities and their faculty, rather than upward, toward those who shape funding priorities, tax regimes, and public investment.

Hospitality, understood ethically, cannot be separated from material conditions. One cannot meaningfully welcome the other while demanding a price that forecloses freedom. Kant’s insistence on dignity—that persons must never be treated merely as means—casts a long shadow upon the ethical substratum of the system that conditions American education. The contemporary debt regime violates this principle not because professors mislead students, but because collective responsibility has been systematically withdrawn. As public funding declines and market logics advance, universities are pressed into roles they *did not choose*: revenue generators, credential vendors, risk managers. To treat these consequences as evidence of moral duplicity on the part of universities is to mistake structural coercion for pedagogical intent.

The contrast with other political choices is absolutely clear. Across much of Europe, higher education is treated as a public investment rather than a private wager: tuition is minimal or nonexistent, student

stipends are common, and access is understood as a matter of social continuity rather than individual speculation. That such models are dismissed as unrealistic while vast resources are devoted to spectacle, consolidation of wealth, or symbolic displays of sovereignty is not an economic necessity; it is a political decision. Political tendencies to indict universities for inequality while refusing to imagine, let alone implement, pan-American solutions to student debt, blatantly turn critique into deflection.

A broader analysis of the political economy of educational debt reveals deeper asymmetries across regions, classes, and racialized histories within the Americas. Transoceanic comparisons further complicate the picture, showing how divergent funding models reflect different assumptions about education's social purpose. Universities have been implicated in these inequalities, but they have also been among the primary sites where such patterns are documented, analyzed, and challenged. Much of the most sustained scholarship on student debt, labor precarity, and educational exclusion has emerged from within the academy itself. Crucially, however, a hospitable university does not deny these failures; it indicates them as requiring revisions. It is so, because university hospitality is not a function of benevolence but solidarity: an insistence that welcome must be affordable, that learning must not require lifelong penance, and that responsibility for education belongs not to individuals alone, but to the societies that claim to value it. Recasting this insistence as elitist deception, politicians either demonstrate their deep misunderstanding of the university's ethical direction, or manipulate their audiences on purpose, to sway them to dismiss the "uncomfortable" authority morally bound to seek zetetic truths. The real betrayal lies not in acknowledging the costs of education, but in normalizing those costs, like the costs of medical care, as unavoidable facts of life rather than political choices open to collective revision.

## FEMINISM, LABOR, AND THE FALSE CHOICE BETWEEN CARE AND WORK

What these economic arrangements ultimately regulate is not only access to education, but the conditions under which lives can be lived at all. Debt disciplines *time* as much as it does *money*: it reorganizes futures, constrains choice, and casts dependency as a personal failure rather than a shared condition. When learning is framed as a private investment, the whole responsibility for sustaining life—care for children, elders, partners, and oneself—is silently shifted from collective structures onto individual endurance. Hospitality, under such condi-

tions, cannot be reduced to the moment of admission. It must also account for how societies distribute the ongoing work of sustaining vulnerability once entry has been granted.

It is at this juncture that contemporary critiques of universities take a familiar turn. The ethical language of care, interdependence, and relational responsibility—long central to debates about access and inequality—is reimagined as a cultural threat. Feminism, in particular, becomes a convenient target, one accused of “promoting overwork,” “eroding family life,” or “subordinating care to ambition.” Such framing, of course, rests upon an obvious paradox: what it marginalizes, or perhaps even strives to render null and void, is the fact that feminist scholarship has been among the most ardent critics of economic systems that demand total availability while systematically refusing to support the labor of care on which all productivity depends. The attack, then, is less a rejection of feminism than a refusal to confront what feminism makes visible: that the governance of education, debt, and labor is inseparable from the governance of care.

Public denunciations of universities frequently invoke feminism as a shorthand for moral and social decline—a doctrine reduced to caricature, blamed for careerism, demographic anxiety, or the dissolution of traditional bonds. This portrayal gains its force by compressing a heterogeneous intellectual tradition into a single accusatory image. Yet feminism, particularly as it has developed within academic contexts, has persistently challenged labor regimes that equate worth with output and treat care as a private inconvenience. *The problem, as feminist thinkers have long argued, is not the existence of work, but its organization: systems that deny human finitude, punish dependency, and externalize the costs of sustaining life.*

Yet, to welcome another is to acknowledge that lives are sustained not only by productivity, but by relations of care—relations that cannot be indefinitely outsourced without consequence. Feminist analyses of labor, social reproduction, and family life have repeatedly emphasized this point, insisting that care is neither a private indulgence nor a moral failure (if conditions make it impossible to grant), but a social practice upon which all others social subsystems depend. Universities are the primary sites where this insight has been articulated, even as they often struggle to efficiently turn it into institutional practice. Beyond doubt: that tension is real, but by no means can it be construed as evidence of deception. It is evidence of an *unresolved conflict* over how societies value care.

It is beyond question that in various economic models, both across the Americas and beyond, care is distributed differently—across genders,

classes, and borders—while “autonomy” is being elevated to an “unquestioned” ideal. Migrant labor, global care chains, and the feminization of precarity expose how deeply care is embedded in transnational circuits of work. Academic feminism did not invent these realities; it rendered them legible. Dismiss this scholarship as ideological excess, populist politicians refuse the ethical demand it poses: labor must be evaluated not only by efficiency or output, but by its effects on the fragile networks of care that sustain social, and individual, life.

There is, finally, yet another theological resonance worth recovering. Traditions that prize family, community, and covenant have long understood that *work is ordered toward life, not the reverse*. Politicians casting *care* and *labor* as mutually exclusive “goods” do not, therefore, propose a “conservative insight,” but a distinctly modern distortion. A genuinely hospitable vision of education refuses to condone this evidently false choice. It recognizes that intellectual labor and relational life do not stand in opposition, but are *interdependent* forms of human flourishing. When universities are accused of privileging one at the expense of the other, the more pressing question is whether our economic and cultural systems have made it possible for either to thrive without sacrifice.

## ENVIRONMENT, EXTRACTION, AND THE GEOGRAPHY OF INHOSPITALITY

What the preceding debates ultimately expose is that hospitality is never only a matter of speech, norms, or institutional culture. It is also a question of *where* vulnerability is permitted to settle—and where it is displaced. The same political imagination that treats care as a private burden and education as an individual risk extends this logic outward, redistributing exposure across landscapes as readily as it does across lives. When societies refuse to bear uncertainty collectively, they do not eliminate it; they relocate it onto other bodies, other regions, other futures. The governance of care thus shades imperceptibly into the governance of space, and the ethics of labor into the politics of land. It is here that the question of hospitality reaches its environmental limit: in decisions about *whose soil may be poisoned, whose water may be sacrificed, and whose livelihoods are rendered collateral* in the pursuit of stability elsewhere.

Environmental debates in contemporary political rhetoric are often staged as moral theater: spectacles that allow some to signal virtue while others absorb loss. This framing gains traction where environmental policy is experienced primarily as displacement of jobs, of industries, of inherited ways of life—rather than as shared responsibility. Yet this

drama obscures a more unsettling truth: the large-scale relocation of labor and pollution is not an unintended consequence of environmental concern; it is the predictable outcome of economic systems that have long treated certain places and populations as expendable. What is at stake, then, is not just the hypocrisy of political rhetoric. It is the geography of suffering: the patterned distribution of harm across space.

Postcolonial and decolonial approaches to hospitality put this insight in sharp focus. They remind us that welcome and exclusion are never fairly distributed, and that the comforts of some are routinely secured through the exposure of others. Extraction, offshoring, and environmental degradation follow historical routes shaped by empire, capital, and the asymmetry of sovereignty. Universities have played their part in these histories, but it is also the universities that trace such patterns, expose them, study, and propose the remedial measures to inflicted harm. Environmental humanities and social sciences have insisted—often against political convenience—that ecological consequences of capitalist economy cannot be understood apart from the human lives it affects.

Hemispheric and transoceanic American Studies demonstrate that the geography of inhospitality has always-already been unavoidable. The Americas have long functioned as laboratories of extraction, where land, labor, and resources circulate outward while costs remain localized. Transpacific and transatlantic supply chains further complicate responsibility, binding consumption in one region to degradation in another. Universities, operating across these circuits, realize a part of their mission by rendering such connections visible. Populists dismissals of this work as elitist moralism are not merely tantamount to irrational rejection of a scholarly perspective; such acts refuse the ethical demand that the findings of such research pose: hospitality worthy of its name extends beyond national borders and immediate self-interest.

A genuinely hospitable environmental ethic neither denies the suffering of displaced workers nor sanctifies policy abstraction. It insists instead on a broader frame of responsibility—one that asks how environmental harm is distributed, who is expected to bear it, and on what grounds is the burden delegated for some, and not others, to carry. Kant's intuition that the earth's surface belongs to all in common acquires renewed urgency in an era of climate displacement. Hospitality, in this sense, is not a matter of moral comfort or symbolic gesture. It is the difficult labor of acknowledging entanglement and refusing solutions that merely relocate vulnerability elsewhere.

Environmental displacement not only exposes a systematically traceable geography of inhospitality, but also its temporal dimension. Analyzed from a diachronic perspective, decisions about whose land may be sacrificed, whose labor may be exhausted, and whose lives may be rendered expendable do not arise spontaneously; they are inherited, normalized, and reproduced across generations. Extraction follows routes long cleared by law, custom, and memory. Refusing inquiry into these histories, therefore, politicians do not defend *neutrality*: on the contrary, they actively *protect continuity*, allowing structures of advantage and exposure, which no longer are “visible” as intentional, to persist.

When these issues are at stake, resistance to historical analysis becomes most pronounced. When the past is declared irrelevant, closed, or morally settled, present arrangements can be officially construed as “natural” rather than “produced.” Historical attention is then presented to the public as threat: universities are shown as institutions casting accusations, rather than providing explanations and solutions. The language of “division” and “resentment” emerges exactly at the point where inquiry begins to show how inequality endures without requiring individual malice. What is rejected in such moments is not a particular interpretation, but the ethical demand to recognize that present conditions are shaped by accumulated decisions whose effects do not expire with their authors.

The controversy surrounding Critical Race Theory must be understood within this broader refusal of historical attention. Like environmental analysis, it unsettles the comfort of abstraction by tracing how power operates across time as well as space. And like environmental critique, it is often attacked not for what it argues, but for what it renders visible: that injustice need not be actively willed in order to be actively maintained. Therefore, it is particularly Critical Race Theory that is subject to systematic distortion. In public discourse, it is routinely reduced to a moral doctrine that assigns guilt to individuals, fractures communities into fixed identities, and undermines social cohesion. Admittedly, this reduction is rhetorically efficient because it bypasses engagement with what Critical Race Theory actually is: a mode of legal and historical analysis concerned with institutional durability, path dependence, and the persistence of structural inequality beyond individual intent. Its object is not personal virtue or vice, but the historical sedimentation of law, policy, and practice.

Viewed through the lens of hospitality, resistance to such analysis reveals a deeper unease with historical attention itself. The fact that,

as scholars, we attend to the past does not mean that we remain imprisoned within it: as academics, we acknowledge that the present does not emerge *ex nihilo*. If we agree that responsibility precedes self-justification, then hospitality requires the willingness to hear narratives that do not flatter inherited self-images, to make room for accounts that complicate national myths without presuming their total collapse. This is not an act of accusation, but of listening. The refusal to listen, by contrast, often disguises itself as a defense of unity while quietly enforcing silence, and therefore, let me reiterate, *teaching history* is not *assigning guilt*; conversely, it aims at training perception as to what a democracy is willing to notice, and what the limits of the comfort zones of the privileged groups may be.

It is common knowledge that the histories of race, labor, and sovereignty in the Americas are inseparable from colonial expansion, forced migration, and uneven incorporation of spaces and communities into what we could dub “global modernity.” Consequently, it leaves no doubt that these histories do not “belong” to a single nation, nor can they be contained within a single moral narrative. Structurally committed to sustaining this difficult and often unsettling attention across borders and generations, universities, as the loci of hospitality, protect such inquiry *precisely* because its findings may resist reassurance, closure, or political convenience, whose consequences, across centuries, have proven tragic to countless human beings. While a hospitable society does not require *consensus* about the past, it does require the courage to encounter it. The ethical alternative to historical attention is not *innocence* but *amnesia*—and amnesia, however comforting, has never provided a stable foundation for justice or community. Studying history critically does not result in automatic assignment of moral roles a priori, its goal is to refuse the rhetorical erasure, dismissal, or marginalization of the importance of conditions that *continue to shape the present*. In this sense, Critical Race Theory does not undermine social life; its work is socially indispensable, as it participates in the demanding, yet necessary process of making social life *intelligible to itself*.

#### CHILDREN, EDUCATION, AND THE VIOLENCE OF MORAL SIMPLIFICATION

It would be hard to disagree that few figures in public debate are invoked with greater urgency—and fewer allowances for complexity—than the child. Appeals made in the name of protecting children routinely suspend deliberation, converting anxiety into certainty and disagreement into emergency. In contemporary controversies

over education, children are cast as *passive recipients of ideological harm*, imagined as fragile vessels endangered by exposure to difficult histories, contested identities, or moral ambiguity. This image carries enormous rhetorical force exactly because *it simplifies what it claims to defend*. It replaces the lived conditions of children's actual experience with an abstract figure of innocence that must be guarded at all costs.

What this moralization obscures is the distinction between symbolic protection and material care. Children do not encounter vulnerability first through ideas, but through hunger, illness, instability, and the absence of reliable support. Policies that withdraw healthcare access, dismantle school nutrition programs, or erode social safety nets do not merely fail children—they actively shape the conditions under which learning becomes precarious or impossible. To invoke children as grounds for moral panic while declining responsibility for their bodily well-being is *opposite to protection*; it is tantamount to *displacement*. Ethical concern is redirected from sustaining lives to policing narratives.

Again, the prism of hospitality exposes the cruelty of this displacement with particular clarity: philosophically speaking, to *welcome* a child into a *shared world* is not to preserve innocence indefinitely, but to assume responsibility for the welcomed child's *accompaniment*. If *relation precedes instruction*, then understanding does not arise by way of insulation, but in the course of sustained encounter grounded in trust. Moral development, like learning itself, requires exposure to difference within a framework of care. When education is reduced to the avoidance of discomfort, hospitality gives way to fear—and fear, once institutionalized, hardens into prohibition.

The consequences of this tendency towards moral simplification become even more tangible when one considers educational systems across the Americas, where social difference—racial, linguistic, cultural, economic—is either engaged or, to a greater or lesser extent, denied. Political efforts to administratively impose moral simplicity in classrooms frequently mirror broader political strategies that suppress historical complexity while leaving structural inequality untouched. Universities shape this terrain indirectly but decisively, through teacher education, developmental research, and pedagogical practice. Across these domains, the evidence is consistent: children do not learn by being shielded from complexity, but by encountering it with guidance, stability, and care.

A genuinely hospitable educational ethic therefore refuses false choices. It does not ask whether children should be *protected or educated*, but *how protection and education can be sustained together*.

It does not assign children fixed moral identities, nor does it demand premature judgment. Instead, it equips them with language, context, and imagination—capacities that allow them to encounter others as participants in a shared, if uneven, social life. The real violence does not lie in complexity, but in the demand for simplicity in contexts in which understanding unquestionably requires time and patience. To protect children ethically is not to seal them off from the world, but to remain answerable for the material and relational conditions under which they learn to inhabit it. And certainly, not to deny them lunches, medical care at school, or structural access to high quality educational formulas that would not deepen the abyss between privilege and precarity, but that would systematically narrow the gap in an upwards movement.

### ORDINARY LIVES AND THE RHETORIC OF RESENTMENT

What connects the preceding debates over children, care, and moral simplification is a deeper struggle over who may speak for vulnerability, and to what end. Appeals to protection often slide imperceptibly into claims of representation, transforming those imagined as at risk into moral instruments rather than interlocutors, those “spoken for,” rather than those “speaking.” In this shift, complexity becomes “inconvenient,” and lived experience is stripped of its texture in order to serve a political narrative whose ends have already been decided in advance.

Invocations of “ordinary people” carry a powerful moral charge. They appeal to authenticity, lived experience, and the dignity of those who feel unseen by institutions that speak in unfamiliar idioms. Yet when “ordinary lives” are mobilized primarily as evidence against knowledge-producing institutions, they risk being reduced to rhetorical instruments rather than encountered as complex social realities. Suffering becomes “proof,” and “proof” becomes accusation. What is lost in this conversion is unequivocally what hospitality requires: sustained attention to the *irreducible* texture of another’s life, untranslatable into slogans or moral shortcuts. The authority to speak for “ordinary people” is thus quietly reserved for those least exposed to the conditions being invoked—those whose distance from precarity enables resentment to be curated rather than endured.

Hospitality, understood as an ethical practice, resists such appropriation. Tadeusz Ślawek’s reflections on *be-littlement*—his insistence on listening to the “friend across the pond,” whose voice reaches us faintly, belatedly, and without any guarantee of clarity—offer a necessary corrective. Against political rhetorics that reward volume,

speed, and certainty, Sławek recalls an ethics grounded in attentiveness to what cannot immediately assert itself.

The code of the “Moral Law” recognizes only concrete, already articulated human claims; it is governed not by an ethics that listens for what remains mute, but by a politics that listens to whoever has articulated their—often dubious—reasons most forcefully. (Sławek, *U-bywać* 457)

To listen hospitably, then, is to suspend the urge to translate another’s pain too quickly into political utility. It is to acknowledge that economic precarity, addiction, family disruption, and loss are not arguments to be won, but realities to be understood. Resentment thrives where listening is replaced by ventriloquism—where care is claimed on behalf of others without the patience of attention that their lives truly demand. This ethical demand acquires additional weight when considered from the perspective of political and military hegemony of the US. Across the Americas, narratives of “ordinary people” have often been mobilized to justify exclusion, silence, or the redirection of blame away from structural conditions, and even more often to render military control over resources both moral and legal. Universities, in this context, are “inconvenient”: examining these dynamics, they oppose their exploitation, developing intersubjectively verifiable insights through ethnography, public health research, labor studies, and community-engaged scholarship that, first and foremost, seek to render suffering legible without converting it into spectacle. The work of the academics does not romanticize hardship, nor does it presume to speak for those who endure it. It traces how policy, markets, healthcare systems, and historical inequities converge in individual lives or in the lives of communities. Understandably, partisan or individual interests drive politicians towards manipulative public dismissals of such inquiries as elitist, even if they do understand the ethical orientation of such studies. Such gestures, however, go counter hospitality, which refuses to align with anger, but translates into solidarity grounded in understanding, not in accusation. Hospitality rejects the comfort of resentment in favor of the much more demanding labor of care: listening long enough to recognize complexity, and resisting the temptation to reduce lives to symbols in someone else’s “moral” *theatrum*.

#### EXPERTISE, DEMOCRACY, AND THE HOSPITALITY OF COUNSEL

What resentment ultimately refuses is not knowledge as such, but the *discipline of being answered*. Attentive “listening to ordinary lives” (as opposed to invoking them rhetorically), involves the acceptance

of the fact that suffering is not resolvable with ready-made conclusions, nor with a single political demand attached. It calls for mediation, interpretation, and judgment sustained over time. It is this mediating labor that populist rhetoric seeks to bypass: instead of remaining answerable to the complexity of lived experience, it displaces frustration onto figures who appear to stand between grievance and resolution: teachers, researchers, physicians, economists—those whose task is not to validate anger, but to complicate it.

Once this displacement occurs, expertise itself becomes suspect. Knowledge that refuses to confirm preexisting convictions, or to serve the political or economic goals of a dominant group, is publicly reimagined as alien, elitist, or coercive. The expert is no longer understood as one who contributes to a shared world of understanding, but as one who withholds access to it; no longer a participant in democratic deliberation, but an obstacle to it. In this shift, a crucial ethical and political distinction collapses—one that Hannah Arendt carefully preserved: the difference between authority that commands obedience and authority that invites judgment. When counsel is misrecognized as domination, the very conditions for responsible collective judgment are undermined. The attack on expertise, therefore, does not restore democratic agency; it erodes the practices through which judgment can be formed without coercion.

Democratic societies live within a productive tension between popular judgment and specialized knowledge. When this tension is sustained with care, expertise serves democracy not by ruling in its place, but by informing deliberation within it—what Arendt would point out as the fragile space where judgment is exercised rather than enforced. When mishandled, however, expertise is recast as domination, and counsel is mistaken for command. In such moments, the figure of the expert becomes a convenient antagonist: unelected, brandishing a diploma, yet insulated, and allegedly unaccountable. What disappears is the very distinction that makes non-sovereign authority possible—the distinction between governing and advising, between ruling and helping others to see.

The philosophies of hospitality, again, offer useful vocabulary in this context. A scholar offering counsel *extends an invitation* rather than *issues an order*. The counsel presupposes the freedom of the one addressed to accept, reject, or revise what is offered. Kant's refusal of paternalism remains decisive: Enlightenment does not consist in being protected from judgment, but in being treated as capable of exercising it. Expertise that demands obedience betrays this principle, as does the expertise that retreats in fear of rejection. The hospitable

posture lies between these extremes, in the willingness to speak responsibly without claiming sovereignty over the listener.

Knowledge circulates across cultures without arriving as a neutral package; translanguistically, transculturally, it must be translated, contested, and adapted before it becomes integrated, thus changing the overall shape of the acceptor system of knowledge. It leaves little doubt that one of the central tenets of the mission of the university is to serve as a mediating space within these circulations, by way of training individuals not only to *acquire* knowledge, but also to subject it to critique, peer review, and public scrutiny. Public attempts to delegitimize such spaces certainly do not serve the goal of strengthening democracy; each such rhetorical gesture causes the impoverishment of the shared conditions under which judgment becomes possible.

If a hospitable democracy does not necessarily require deference to expertise, it indubitably does require openness *to being addressed* by those who *know differently*. Refusing counsel in advance—on the grounds that it might complicate preference or unsettle certainty—is not equal to the assertion of freedom. Rather, it is an act of withdrawal from the shared labor of judgment upon which democratic life depends. Universities, at their best, do not *replace* democratic decision-making. They prepare citizens to participate in it without demanding that complexity be simplified into loyalty.

## DIGITAL SPACES AND THE NEW FRONTIERS OF HOSPITALITY

Since the onset of the Digital Age, the conditions under which counsel is offered and received have changed profoundly. The erosion of trust in expertise no longer unfolds only in legislatures, classrooms, or public forums; it is increasingly mediated by technological environments that shape the formation of judgment itself. Democratic deliberation now takes place within infrastructures that privilege speed over reflection, visibility over responsibility, and reaction over relation. In such spaces, the ethical distinction between *advising* and *commanding* becomes harder to sustain—not because it has lost its normative force, but because the temporal and affective conditions that once supported it have been systematically reengineered. The question of hospitality, which has thus far concerned the issues of “who may speak,” “who is heard,” and “under what ethical constraints,” must therefore be extended to the, oftentimes rhizomatic, digital architectures through which contemporary knowledge now circulates.

The digital transformation of knowledge has altered not only the modes in which ideas circulate, but also ways in which hospital-

ity itself is practiced (or refused). Universities no longer host inquiry exclusively within classrooms, libraries, or campuses; they now operate across platforms that promise openness while accelerating exposure. Digital environments eliminate physical distance and amplify visibility, but they also reward immediacy and, frequently, intensify the potentiality for the misrecognition of subjects, objects, contexts, and messages alike. Especially in social media, context thins, disagreement hardens, and provisional claims (sometimes formulated as simplistic memes) rapidly transmogrify as final positions. Under these conditions, the ethical labor of hospitality becomes both more urgent and more difficult to sustain: welcoming another into discourse increasingly means exposing them to the anonymity of participants, no longer accountable for hostile acts or manipulation, misinformation, unverified claims, rhetorical attacks, or blatant verbal abuse. Of course, as we have already determined, welcoming another is never a neutral gesture; it always involves risk. As Jacques Derrida reminds us, hospitality carries within it the possibility of betrayal—of the guest becoming vulnerable to forces the host cannot fully control. In digital spaces, this risk is amplified by the obscured asymmetry between host and guest. Platforms present themselves as neutral conduits, while tacitly shaping attention, sometimes provoking outrage, and, of course, conditioning exclusion through algorithmic design. This is why universities participate in this ecology only ambivalently; they do depend on (both closed and open) digital infrastructures to build efficient networks of collaboration, to disseminate research results, and to offer teaching, yet, at the same time, they also confront the effects of the erosion of face-to-face relations, the reduction of deliberative time, and the dangers of the conversion of inquiry into performance.

Digital knowledge flows, depending on access and algorithmic control, reproduce familiar inequalities even as they promise democratization. Optimistic accounts of digital circulation—such as those analyzed by Piotr Gorliński-Kucik in his discussion of anarcho-transhumanist imaginaries—foreground the Internet's potential to support federated knowledge exchange, minority association, and open access to information. As Gorliński-Kucik notes, such visions often presuppose an educated society capable of making reflective use of these tools, and they assign a significant role to academia in cultivating this capacity. Yet his analysis is diagnostic rather than celebratory: it underscores how easily emancipatory aspirations are entangled with technological systems that remain structurally uneven and politically ambivalent (Gorliński-Kucik 97).

Access to platforms, linguistic dominance, algorithmic visibility, and infrastructural power remain radically uneven across regions and cultures. Digital openness does not abolish asymmetry; it often redistributes it in less visible forms. A hospitable digital university must therefore cultivate new forms of care: critical digital literacy, open access to research results, ethics of digital contact, or resistance to the tempting automation of AI supported research in the name of acceleration, demanded by the bodies evaluating research productivity on regular basis. Importantly, hospitality in digital knowledge environments does not mean unconditional welcome to unrestricted exposure. Rather, it takes the form of sustained attentiveness to how ideas travel, mutate, and how they are, or potentially may be, weaponized. The real danger is not that universities “control” digital truth, but that they struggle—often imperfectly—to preserve ethical relations in spaces structurally designed to reward speed, and thereby quietly inviting oversimplification, haste of judgment, and selective consumption of information, of which some pieces, not mediated by the “You” of a professional teacher, quite skillfully masquerading as academic studies, are manufactured “fake facts.”

#### CONCLUSION: THE PROFESSOR AS FRIEND, OR AUTHORITY WITHOUT SOVEREIGNTY

As this long essay demonstrates, in discussions concerning authority, friendship is an uneasy category. It appears to suggest intimacy where distance is expected, or sympathy where judgment is required. Yet this unease is exactly what makes friendship philosophically productive. From Aristotle onward, *philia* has named a relation that neither deconstructs difference nor abolishes asymmetry. Friendship is not sustained by sameness, but by a shared orientation toward common good—an orientation that presupposes disagreement, patience, and time. Understood in this way, friendship does not negate authority; it refines it ethically.

Our discussion of academic hospitality was designed to shed ample light on how such authority operates. The host does not dominate the guest, nor does the guest absolve the host of responsibility. Authority, in such a context, is exercised through care for the conditions of encounter: attentiveness, restraint, and the willingness to remain present even when agreement fails. Martin Buber’s powerful vocabulary supports this posture: a professor who addresses students as *interlocutors* rather than *objects of instruction* enacts an authority that is neither coercive nor sentimental. It is grounded in trust, sustained by credibility, and permanently exposed to challenge.

Furthermore, particularly in traditions that understand teaching as vocation rather than domination, authority is not understood as *sovereignty* but as *service*—it is oriented toward the flourishing of others rather than the selfish consolidation of power. To describe the professor as a friend is not to deny hierarchy or expertise; it is to insist that expertise remain answerable and hierarchy remain porous. Such friendship does not flatter, indoctrinate, or demand allegiance. It invites students into the difficult labor of thinking together, accepting that friendship, like learning itself, is sustained not by certainty, but by fidelity to a shared pursuit of understanding.

Perceived in the hemispheric and transoceanic perspectives, this model of authority acquires additional dimensions. Universities operate across cultural, linguistic, and historical differences that are not (and cannot be) governed by uniform doctrine. Friendship offers a way of inhabiting these differences without erasing them—of sustaining relation without demanding assimilation. In a political climate increasingly tempted to recast authority as enmity, the figure of the professor-as-friend stands as a quiet alternative: an authority that does not teach by command, but by means of remaining in conversation long enough for understanding to emerge.

This dialogical authority does not end at the classroom door. The figure of the professor-as-friend presupposes an institutional ecology capable of sustaining such relations over time. A thus conceived friendship requires circulation of voices, texts, methods, and perspectives that no single tradition can generate on its own. Once authority is understood as *relational* rather than *sovereign*, the university itself can no longer be imagined as a closed or self-sufficient space. It appears instead as an infrastructure of encounter—one whose ethical task is not to police origins of thought or enforce uniformity, but to host movement without foreclosing judgment.

Universities are therefore often falsely, and misleadingly, projected as enclosed territories—bounded by campus gates, national traditions, or ideological loyalties. Yet, demonstrably, historically and structurally, the university functions less as a fortress than as a port: a site of arrival and departure where people, texts, methods, and questions circulate across physical and metaphorical borders. Ideas enter bearing the marks of the other—other languages, other histories, other urgencies—and they circulate further, transformed in the course of the encounter. Therefore, to demand that such an institution must speak with a single “national” voice, especially in a traditionally multiethnic, multilingual, and multiracial country, is to gravely misunderstand its *raison d’être*. In the framework of Hemispheric and Transoceanic

American Studies, thus insight is not an afterthought within the field, but a foundational methodological assumption. As Shelley Fisher Fishkin argued in her presidential address to the American Studies Association, American culture has always been constituted through “crossroads of cultures,” shaped by multilingual, transnational, and diasporic exchanges that cannot be reduced to a single national narrative (Fishkin 20). American culture, as has been asserted in several contexts above, has never been self-contained; it has been constituted through contact zones, and continues to be shaped by migration, trade, the discourse of the empire, resistance, and translation. Atlantic and Pacific worlds, Indigenous hemispheric networks, and contemporary global circuits have all left their imprint on what counts as “American” knowledge. Therefore, unavoidably, universities function as ports within these circulations: like seaports, they do not aim to harmonize difference into consensus, but to foster progress by allowing divergent trajectories to meet without a priori foreclosure. And beyond doubt, however inconvenient this observation may be to the hegemonies of political discourse, the task of the academia is not to certify loyalty, but to sustain intelligibility across distance.

Philosophies of hospitality remind us that such openness is never neutral. To host is to risk disruption—to accept that what arrives may unsettle inherited arrangements. Kant’s notion of world citizenship does not abolish borders, but it insists that the right to appear before others without hostility is a minimal ethical condition of shared life on the earth’s surface. In a world marked by displacement, migration, and uneven mobility, this insistence becomes all the more urgent. Universities, transnational in practice if not always in rhetoric, enact this principle daily—often awkwardly, often imperfectly, but persistently.

The anxiety provoked by the role of university as a port is understandable. Throughout history of human movement, ports have unsettled fantasies of “purity” and “control”; they always expose societies to what they may not always be able to fully manage. Yet a university sealed against circulation would cease to function as a university at all, because knowledge stagnates where movement is blocked. A hospitable university does not ask whether “ideas are loyal” before admitting them; it asks whether they can be engaged responsibly once they arrive. Hospitality, in this sense, is not generosity. It is the condition of intellectual survival in a world where long-term isolation is neither possible nor desirable.

It is this refusal of isolation that makes universities recurring targets of political suspicion. Where knowledge circulates, loyalties appear diluted; where encounter persists, enemies are harder to name.

In such climates, the language of hospitality is easily recoded as weakness, betrayal, or naïveté. Yet this hostility does not arise *despite* the university's transnational character—it arises *because* of it. What is feared is not error, but relation itself: the possibility that sustained exposure to others might interrupt the fantasy of moral or national self-sufficiency, or that it could expose the selfish intentions of those seeking ultimate control, power, which renders authority impossible.

Hospitality, like peace, is never guaranteed. It must be practiced repeatedly, often under conditions that reward its opposite. In moments of social strain, the temptation to name enemies rather than interlocutors grows strong, offering the comfort of clarity at the expense of understanding. This essay, debarring and dismantling the fundaments of this temptation, approaches hospitality *not as sentiment*, but *as discipline*: a commitment to remain open to what arrives, even when it unsettles inherited certainties and complicates comfortable alignments encroaching upon comfort zones of those who would defend the less and less sustainable status quo.

Hospitality can exclude as well as welcome; it can mask power even as it offers care. To study hospitality critically is therefore not to celebrate it unconditionally, but to examine the conditions under which it becomes possible, meaningful, or distorted. Universities, like societies, are not judged by the *absence of conflict*, but by how they sustain spaces in which *conflict does not harden into enmity*. The recurrence of this hostility is not accidental. When Richard Nixon described universities as enemies, he did so in the name of order threatened by critique. When J.D. Vance repeats this charge decades later, he does so in the language of betrayal, capture, and moral emergency. Despite their differences in context and style, both rely on the same conceptual mistake: the belief that authority must eliminate uncertainty, that disagreement signals disloyalty, and that institutions devoted to judgment are dangerous *precisely because they cannot be fully controlled*. What is then named as *corruption* is in fact *the refusal of sovereignty*; what is denounced as *indoctrination* is *the persistence of unbiased inquiry*. Under these terms, the error is not strategic but philosophical—and it is this error that the essay has sought to make visible. And, notably, if this error is committed on purpose, if the proponents of this rhetoric are aware of all of the ramifications of their claims—conclusions concerning the morality of speakers relying on “ordinary people’s” inability to decipher their manipulations masked as care impose themselves automatically.

*The professor is your friend*, because knowledge is, and has always been, a shared undertaking—it is politicians who would transform

it into a battlefield to their own, unethical, goals. Properly cultivated, academic friendship, rooted in hospitality, names a fragile relation—one sustained only through patience, accountability, and the willingness to listen across difference. Where “authority” is reduced to “command” and “disagreement” is marketed as “enmity,” friendship is mockingly dismissed as naïveté, and dialogue ultimately freezes into a manipulative monologue of partisan indoctrination. Our well-being in the shared world vitally relies upon our ability to reject all forms of politics fostering enmity, and to openly recognize that education—if it is to matter at all—must begin with hospitality based on a welcome extended to “a friend across the pond.”

*Abstract:* This essay responds to contemporary political rhetoric proposed by J.D. Vance, who follows Richard Nixon in recasting universities as hostile institutions and intellectuals as enemies of democratic life in his keynote speech delivered before the audiences of the Second National Conservatism Conference in November 2021. Rather than defending higher education as an idealized or flawless system, the essay proposes a different ethical framework: hospitality understood as an institutional, epistemic, and civic practice. Drawing on philosophical traditions of hospitality and friendship—from Kant’s cosmopolitan right and Lévinas’s ethics of responsibility to Derrida’s reflections on conditional and unconditional welcome, as well as dialogical accounts of relational authority—the text reframes the university as a space of encounter rather than control. Situated within hemispheric and transoceanic American Studies, the essay emphasizes that American knowledge has never been self-contained, but has emerged through circulation, translation, and conflict across borders. Universities are approached as fragile architectures of exposure: institutions that do not manufacture consensus or loyalty, but sustain the conditions under which disagreement can occur without collapsing into enmity. Addressing debates over expertise, education, history, labor, environment, and digital knowledge, the text resists the conversion of critique into “siege rhetoric.” By proposing the figure of *the professor as friend* and *the university as host*, this essay invites readers to reconsider intellectual life as a shared undertaking grounded in responsibility, listening, and ethical risk. Hospitality, it argues, is not sentiment but discipline—and a necessary condition for democratic and transnational inquiry in the twenty-first century.

*Keywords:* hospitality, university, friendship, American Studies, transnational knowledge, expertise and democracy

*Bio:* Paweł Jędrzejko, PhD, D.Litt., is an Associate Professor at the University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland, and a Faculty Member in the PhD Programme in Studies in English Literatures, Language, and Translation at Sapienza University of Rome. He served as President of the International American Studies Association (2021–2023) and is the Co-Founder and Co-Editor-in-Chief of the *Review of International American Studies*. He is also an Associate Editor of *Er(r)go. Theory–Literature–Culture* and a former Director of the University of Silesia Press. In 2015–2016, by ministerial appointment, he served on the Advisory Committee for the Implementation of the Strategy of Open

Access to Academic Contents at the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education and represented the President of the Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland (CRASP) in an international contact group at the European University Association in Brussels. His research interests include literary and cultural theory, comparative cultural studies, translation theory and philosophy, and nineteenth-century American literature, with particular emphasis on the American Renaissance and the work of Herman Melville. Departing from the assumption of the aporetic (ontic/discursive) character of reality, his work explores the shared grounds of human cognition and creative activity, focusing on the interdependencies between language, worldmaking, and interpersonal and intercultural relations. His areas of particular interest include the philosophy of friendship, ethics of hospitality, phenomenology of experience, and transoceanic perspectives in American studies.

## WORKS CITED

- Arendt, Hannah. *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought*. 2nd ed., Viking Press, 1968.
- . *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New edition with added prefaces, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973.
- . *On Violence*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970.
- Balibar, Étienne. *Equaliberty: Political Essays*. Translated by James Ingram, Duke UP, 2014.
- . *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*. Translated by James Swenson, Princeton UP, 2004.
- Buber, Martin. *I and Thou*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Hospitality*. Vol. 1, edited by Pascale-Anne Brault and Peggy Kamuf, translated by E. S. Burt, U of Chicago P, 2023.
- . *Of Hospitality: Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*. Translated by Rachel Bowlby, Stanford UP, 2000.
- Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. "Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies: Presidential Address to the American Studies Association, November 12, 2004." *American Quarterly*, vol. 57, no. 1, 2005, pp. 17–57. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2005.0004>. Accessed 8 Jan. 2026.
- Gorliński-Kucik, Piotr. "On Liberatory Strategies of Digital Nomads." *Er(r)go. Theory–Literature–Culture*, vol. 1, no. 42, 2021, pp. 87–110. <https://doi.org/10.31261/errgo.9155>. Translated by Paweł Jędrzejko.
- Kant, Immanuel. *An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?* Translated by Ted Humphrey, New York Public Library, 1784, [https://www.nypl.org/sites/default/files/kant\\_whatisenlightenment.pdf](https://www.nypl.org/sites/default/files/kant_whatisenlightenment.pdf). Accessed 17 Jan. 2026.
- . *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*.

Edited and with an introduction by Pauline Kleingeld, translated by David L. Colclasure, Yale UP, 2006. *Rethinking the Western Tradition* series.

Lévinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis, Martinus Nijhoff, 1979.

Sławek, Tadeusz. *Antygona w świecie korporacji: Rozważania o uniwersytecie i czasach obecnych*. 2nd expanded ed., Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2002.

---. *U-bywać: Człowiek, świat, przyjaźń w twórczości Williama Blake'a*. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2001.

St. John de Crèvecoeur, J. Hector. "Letter III: What Is an American." *Letters from an American Farmer*, 1782. The Avalon Project, Yale Law School, [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/letter\\_03.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/letter_03.asp). Accessed 16 Jan. 2026.

Still, Judith. *Derrida and Hospitality: Theory and Practice*. Edinburgh UP, 2010.

Vance, J. D. *The Universities Are the Enemy*. National Conservatism Conference II, 2 Nov. 2021. *YouTube*, uploaded by National Conservatism, 10 Nov. 2021, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FR65Cifnhw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FR65Cifnhw).