Learning to Live Together: humanism and education after the postcolonial challenges

Stephen Eric Chatelier
ORCID: 0000-0003-4819-4214

Submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

December 2016

Melbourne Graduate School of Education
University of Melbourne
Abstract

The idea of humanism has a long history in philosophies of education. Within the Western philosophical traditions, humanism has assumed different forms, often in response to the shifting historical conditions. It has provided a basic template for envisioning educational goals, and for the kind of individuals and society education is expected to produce. In more recent decades, humanism as a philosophical construct has, however, been the subject of criticisms from a wide range of political and disciplinary perspectives. Such criticisms have arisen from a variety of sources, including structuralism, post-structuralism, feminist, environmental and animal studies. One of the more distinctive criticisms has emerged from postcolonial theorists. These theorists have suggested that while humanism was often portrayed as a liberating project, it in fact served as a driving force behind colonial oppression itself. In colonial education, it legitimized the construction of colonial relations. Postcolonial theories have challenged this role performed by humanism. A question emerges then as to whether this implies a rejection of humanism itself.

This thesis engages in a critical analysis of the challenges that three major postcolonial theorists – Frantz Fanon, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Edward Said – pose to the viability and desirability of humanism. After constructing an historical account of humanism and its connections to education within Western traditions, it briefly explores some of the contemporary debates about humanism as a construct. It then suggests that in different ways and to varying degrees, Fanon, Spivak and Said, in their prioritizing of the lived experience of the subaltern, keep open the possibility, and desirability, of humanism as a matter of justice. They do not thus entirely abandon humanism, but suggest the need to rearticulate its meaning and significance so that it is used as a moral resource with which to negotiate the shifting conditions of cultural difference and exchange.

The thesis contends therefore that the conditions of globalization have made the idea of humanism more relevant and urgent than ever. Rather than making grand claims or guarantees about its success, this thesis makes the more modest argument that a humanism emerging from the postcolonial challenges needs to be treated as a dynamic notion whose meaning is rearticulated through on-going dialogue and negotiations within and across communities. Education has a major role to play in this, in developing the conversational skills and moral dispositions that enable us to live together, despite our differences.
Declaration

This thesis comprises only my original work towards the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, and due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used. The thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, bibliography and appendices.

_________________________

Stephen Eric Chatelier
Acknowledgements

I have a great sense of the privilege it has been to enjoy such a wonderful education over many years. These past few years, in which I have been engaged in the PhD, are ones for which I will be forever grateful.

I would like to thank my supervisors, Professor Fazal Rizvi and Dr Dianne Mulcahy. I have been so privileged to enjoy the company of two people who not only exhibit intellects of the highest calibre, but a generosity of spirit, time and friendship. Di, I’ll cherish the hallway conversations about posthumanism and the ad-hoc lessons you provided me on the “new materialists”. Fazal, across the countless lunches we have had together, often talking about my project, but also about a vast array of matters, you have simultaneously embodied my critic, mentor, champion and friend. I thank the both of you for the time and energy you have given, and for the unwavering support you have shown for me as an emerging scholar.

To my fellow students and colleagues in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education who have offered me friendship and who have enriched and challenged my thinking along the way – in particular Dr Sophie Rudolph, Dr Jessica Gerrard, Ajita Mattoo, Dr Glen Savage, Rosie Barron, Professor Julie McLeod, Ranjit Nadarajah, Dr Peter Woelert and Professor Stephen Crump – I offer you my sincere thanks. To my fellow traveller and dear friend, Nima Sobhani: thanks for your words of encouragement, for challenging me, for sharing the journey with me.

Undertaking a PhD full-time with a young family assured that I would be reliant on the sacrifice of others to get the work done. For the many years of support, and for the recent unwavering willingness to assist with child care, I’d like to thank my parents Anita and David. I am also grateful that my father offered to undertake the painstaking task of proof-reading every single word! For making yourselves available to assist with the children for intensive periods while I engaged in self-imposed writing “boot-camps”, I thank my parents-in-law, Jillian and Howard. There are numerous other friends and family members to whom I am grateful, though I could not begin to name them here.

I am especially indebted to my long-suffering wife, Anouchka. Not only did you increase your involvement and responsibilities in managing “the Res” to allow me the time to complete this project, you did so while also assuming more than your fair share of responsibility for our children. Your love for, and belief in, me is not only deeply appreciated but reciprocated.

To my precious children – Malachi, Eloise and Jude: this thesis has been completed with you in mind. It is my hope that the world you contribute to, and leave behind, will be more just and more humane than the one you inherited.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

*How can we live together when our world is divided into at least two continents that are drifting further and further apart: a continent of communities that are defending themselves against individuals, ideas and customs that penetrate them from without, and a continent in which the corollary of globalization is a relaxation of controls on individual and collective behaviour?* (Touraine 2000, p.3)

At the turn of the century – before the economic turmoil that followed the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 and the more recent events of the Brexit vote and election of the populist Donald Trump as the President of the United States – the French sociologist Alain Touraine asked a simple question that has perhaps now acquired even greater salience: can we live together? The simplicity of the question is arresting. Living together, of course, is something that humans have always done – as families, communities and societies. So why ask the question again now? How does it now have additional significance? The question has, of course, always prompted serious reflection as it represents one of the most basic facts of human existence – our togetherness. But perhaps it has continuing and increasing relevance because of the kind of world in which we now live: increasingly diverse, with forms of transnational connectivities and interdependence that have not only opened new possibilities of cooperation and consensus, but also competition and conflict.

In this sense, Touraine's question is about whether we can live together in a world in which the conditions of globalization have made cultural contact and exchange across differences the norm, thereby giving rise to challenges that cut across national and cultural borders. While difference has always been a fact of social life, diverse ideas, beliefs and practices are in today's world converging and competing at various meeting points – from commerce, politics, popular culture, education, sport and community life – with greater intensity, and more frequently, than ever before. While humans have always needed to find ways of living together within their own geographically confined communities, the conditions of globalization present a significant change to the context in which this living together now takes place, thus broadening our moral universe. These conditions ensure that societies constituted by significant, and often radical cultural difference cannot be considered as an exception, but as the norm. In other
words, it is inevitable that living together in an era of globalization will mean encountering
difference. And it is how these encounters are interpreted and negotiated that is important.

In 2016, the vote for Britain to leave the European Union, and the election of Donald Trump as
president of the USA, while unexpected by many political commentators and in the media, could
also have been foreseen. Over the past two decades, it had become increasingly clear that
many sections of the British and American communities were ill-prepared for an interconnected
world. For many, the global mobility of capital, ideas and people was perceived as a threat to
settled norms, the diversity that global migration produced was considered a moral hazard, and
global institutions were regarded as too powerful, thus undermining national sovereignty and
traditions. These institutions, it was assumed, had only benefited the cosmopolitan elite,
resulting in increasingly levels of social inequalities and lives that had become highly
precarious. The encounters that people experienced of cultural difference were often viewed
with suspicion and became a catalyst for certain sections of British and American societies to
call for a reclamation of their older, better, less complex, and more powerful nations of
yesteryear.

Of course, these discontents of globalization have not disappeared with Brexit and Trump. Nor
are they unique to Britain and the USA. Given the inevitability of diversity and interdependence
on a global scale, the question remains: how should we live together with and across
difference? Should matters of cultural difference or human rights be left to “the market”? Or,
should they be determined by those who presumably know best, and are assumed to be the
most powerful? How should minorities be protected in the contexts of nativist populism? How
should differences be acknowledged, interpreted, negotiated and respected? These are just
some of the moral, cultural and political challenges that lie behind Touraine’s question: can we
live together?

Within the Western philosophical traditions, especially since the Enlightenment period, this
question has been approached with conceptual and moral resources drawn from humanism. It
has been assumed that humanism provides a set of moral resources with which we learn to be
human and to live together in social settings, in relation to each other. While this moral understanding may appear perfectly reasonable in traditional cultural and national settings, does it still make sense under the current global conditions, where a sense of morality has to be applied to the entire universe, which is now understood as being comprised of radical differences? Can humanism deal effectively with the issues of radical differences that are often located within the same community, and around which identity politics are played out? And can humanism not only meet the challenges of cultural diversity produced by migration but also overcome the legacies of colonialism that continue to define contemporary societies, as shown by a number of recent postcolonial theorists? To address the question posed by Touraine, this thesis seeks to examine some of the postcolonial challenges to humanism, as developed within the Western Enlightenment tradition, in order to determine if humanism can survive such challenges, and if it can then in which form? To what extent can humanist assumptions be revived after these postcolonial challenges, so that they remain useful in education, in helping students to learn to live together with and across the differences that now characterize the contemporary classrooms around the world?

The ideas surrounding the philosophical doctrine of humanism have a long history. Within the Western traditions, its historical significance cannot be overstated. However, to say that humanism has a long and somewhat consistent history is not quite the same as saying that it has a continuous history. Moreover, the history of humanism is not only inflected by various contextual and political contingencies and developments, but is also contested by those who represent differing disciplinary emphases or political leanings. For example, while it is common for proponents of humanism to trace its provenance back to the ancient Greeks, there are those who use the term with particular reference to the Renaissance. For these latter scholars, humanism represents something much more akin to the renewed flourishing of classical culture and a study of the values of the ancient world (Baldwin, 2007). In this sense, accounts of the connection between humanism and education become stark as humanism itself is defined by its connection to the study of the history, literature and philosophy of the classics.¹

¹ It is important to clarify at the outset that I am interested in this thesis with ideas, accounts, and perspectives regarding humanism, rather than humanism itself (or with providing a set definition of humanism). Of course, the two are not completely separate, but it is important to make a distinction
However, within the western traditions, if we were to situate the provenance of humanistic ideas amongst the work of Plato and Aristotle themselves (among others, of course), rather than in the era of the Renaissance, we might see humanism in a more political or civic light. Furthermore, we could delve into Islamic texts, for example, and find certain kinds of humanism here too (see, for example, Goodman, 2003). As evidenced in a recent special issue of Educational Philosophy and Theory on “The Confucian Concept of Learning”, other forms of humanism have been powerful in Eastern traditions also (Kwak, Duck-Joo, Kato, Morimichi, & Hung, Ruyu, 2016, pp.1-6). Indeed, to understand humanism according only to the ideas about it that have circulated in Western traditions is to dismiss hugely influential developments in political organization, morality and education in other parts of the world and at other times.² What this very brief comment on the historicization of humanism begins to illustrate is that its history is both temporally and spatially differentiated. As I will go on to elaborate later in the thesis, there is a certain spirit or set of orientations that various humanisms have tended to share throughout Western history, but their particular emphases have shifted with the vicissitudes and urgencies of the time. Western humanisms have, as I understand them, always been concerned with both the life of the individual and society. At different times and places in history, humanism’s emphasis on the individual may have taken precedence over that of society and vice versa.

This point about the different ways in which ideas about humanism have emerged from their historical conditions, or the different emphases of humanism which have manifested at different times, is also true for the ways in which it has been connected to education. At times, humanism has been understood and utilized in a way more closely aligned with the task of education, while at other times, the link between the two has been less pronounced. However, in my view, it could be the case that humanism has always had an almost necessary relation with education, between an investigation into humanism – as though a fixed object of inquiry – and an investigation into discourses and perspectives on humanism. Where possible, I try to make this clear through my use of language, but acknowledge that at times this may not be the case. In some instances, it might simply be too verbose and cumbersome to qualify that I am referring to “ideas about humanism” rather than just saying “humanism”.² Mormichi Kato writes, ‘The humanistic traditions of East Asia, however, have been largely neglected by scholars of humanism and historians of education’ (2016, p.23). I concur with Kato while also having to acknowledge that to include more about humanism as it developed in East Asia or the Islamic world in this thesis is simply outside of its scope.
broadly conceived. The more individualistic emphasis of humanism, often conceived as the betterment of the self or the coming to maturity – be it moral, psychological, rational or a combination – assumes growth, change and learning about self in relation to knowledge and the world “out there”. The kind of humanism with a more societal and civic emphasis, oriented to a kind of *telos* of human flourishing on a more macro register, also seems to consistently understand that the work towards this goal is mediated by education. In this sense, humanism is not just an enabler of education but is itself enabled by education.

While it might be important to see humanism’s relationship to education as mutually constitutive, and that the relationship extends beyond the borders of formalized education, this is not to diminish the way in which humanism has been a significant resource for formal education. In fact, it seems to me that it is quite reasonable to suggest that there is perhaps no other more important influence on education historically than that of humanism. Humanism, as a theory of the human person and its place within the world, has helped educational philosophers to develop curriculum and pedagogical strategies. For example, Rousseau’s perspective that the human was naturally good and that the task of the educator was to draw this out continues to be influential today.

Woodstock School in India, for example, founded during the colonial era in the 1850s,\(^3\) has in very recent years “branded” its mission as *eliciting greatness*. Rooted in a Rousseauian naturalistic-romantic humanism, its educational philosophy is based on drawing out what is already within the human as a matter of nature.\(^4\) While scholars today routinely comment on the neoliberalization of civics or citizenship education (Petrovic & Kuntz, 2014), Plato and Aristotle’s humanisms led them to see the making of the good citizen as central to the task of good education. The idea of living together, and doing so well, was fundamental to the kind of education imagined by the ancient Greeks. This moral and political aim of education was, these philosophers believed, intimately linked to the education of the mind and the development of knowledge. The primarily rationalist and knowledge-based curriculum that still characterizes

\(^3\) A brief history is available on the school’s website: http://www.woodstockschool.in/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/History-of-Woodstock-School.pdf

\(^4\) You can read the school’s educational philosophy based on the notion of “eliciting greatness” here: http://www.woodstockschool.in/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/elicitinggreatness.pdf
most curriculum developed from Western models of education is a reflection of this particular humanist understanding.

Despite its long and continuing influence within Western histories generally, and education more specifically, humanism has been a site of debate in more recent decades. This debate has meant that many of those who have wished to defend humanism have needed to, at a minimum, take seriously the potential problem of an a-historical, essentialized, humanism. Moreover, they have been given the burden to show why and how humanism might escape philosophical, ethical and political critiques. The distinguished philosopher, Martha Nussbaum, is one voice who has consistently defended humanism in her writings. In her *Cultivating Humanity* (1997), Nussbaum seeks to defend a humanism that prioritizes: critique; the acknowledgement of a common humanity that shares vulnerabilities, capabilities and problems; as well as the kind of imagination that allows us to enter into the stories and perspectives of those with whom we differ. This humanism, cultivated in the (American) university is conceived as necessary for students who will be able to engage the world without languishing in cultural conservatism on the one hand or moral relativism on the other.

In her more recent book, *Not For Profit* (2010), Nussbaum again takes up the problem of humanism within education but, this time, in response to the increasing marketization and commoditization of education. While the matter of humanism as a concept is not of primary concern for Nussbaum in this book, it nevertheless pervades the text as an underlying assumption for her overall argument. Focused more specifically on the role of the humanities for the nurturing of democratic citizenship, humanism for Nussbaum, especially as it is attached to education, represents an ethical and radical (political) approach to life. It is ethical because of its insistence that matters of human life remain central, and it is political because of the way in which it is integrally (if not necessarily) linked to democracy. Thus, prioritizing humanism as a powerful resource in articulating human rights agendas, responding to the needs of the Global South, and in the development of a critical democratic disposition in both individuals and societies continues to motivate certain scholars and practitioners today. The aims and
motivations of humanists such as Martha Nussbaum are hard to criticize, and while her position is, of course, contestable, it is also defensible.

Yet, despite these kinds of robust justifications for a humanist position, there are many others who have, especially since the 1960s and '70s, presented philosophical, ethical and political challenges to humanism. These critiques have come from within the discourses, amongst others, of structuralism, poststructuralism, feminist theory, critical race theory, animal studies, eco-philosophy, cultural studies and new materialism. The critiques offered by structuralism and poststructuralism share concerns regarding how humanism has been construed philosophically. That is, there are significant onto-epistemological questions that structuralists and poststructuralists bring to the notion of humanism. One of the more prominent structuralists, Claude Levi-Strauss, for example, questioned the metaphysical assumptions of humanism. Given the primacy which structuralism attached to underlying structures or systems, the unity and essence of “man” represented a very different view of reality, one in which humanity appeared to be somehow abstracted from the structures governing the rest of life. The poststructuralist perspectives tend to be more radical again insofar as they seek to undermine fixed ontologies more broadly, not least that of the human(ist) subject. For poststructuralists who built on the work of scholars such as Michel Foucault, the subject is formed discursively and, thus, humanism’s essentialist and universalist assumptions, they might say, become untenable.

Many feminists, including prominent voices such as that of Luce Irigaray, also take issue with the presumed universalism of humanism which keeps silent on the difference represented, and performed, by women. It is not hard to see the importance for feminists of the question as to how a gender and/or sex blind notion of the human could continue to function as a philosophical anthropology. Those within animal studies, such as Cary Wolfe, and from eco-philosophical perspectives, take this decentering of “man” even further in their attempt to challenge human exceptionalism. They argue that the supposed arrogance of humanism can be plainly seen in the kind of hierarchical domination performed theoretically and empirically, wherein humanity is positioned as both central and superior to the non-human. Such attitudes, they suggest, have
led to all kinds of violence and environmental degradation, with animals and the earth often being seen as existing for the sake of humans. The critics from this perspective look to articulate a new kind of relational ontology that decenters the human. It is both a deconstructed and a decentered human that marks the philosophy of those engaged in new materialist scholarship, such as Karen Barad and Rosi Braidotti. Again, while a diverse range of views are held amongst new materialists and posthumanists, they tend to share an anti-humanist lineage or position and an ontology that recognizes a blurring of the boundaries between human and non-human entities and agencies (Braidotti, 2013, p.63; Asberg, 2014, p.62).

In more recent years, this discourse has developed into a philosophical engagement with the consequences of what is known as the Anthropocene. Emerging in particular from concerns about climate change, critical scholarship on the Anthropocene manages to locate itself within the broader discourse on posthumanism while also making the human the center of the problems facing the environment. In basic terms, the Anthropocene refers to the transition ‘out of the Holocene and into the next geologic epoch in the earth’s history’ based on the view that human impact on the earth has been so profound as to be considered a ‘geological force’ (Rousell, 2016, p.139). While this scholarship does not entirely deny the importance of re-centering the human, it does so amidst an urgent call for posthumanist thinking and action in response to the immanent dangers associated with human impact on the environment. In this sense, scholars concerned about the effects of the Anthropocene mount a, sometimes implicit but nevertheless strong, critique of the kind of humanism that anticipates the “triumph of man” and tend be sensitive to the perceived failures of humanity.

While these criticisms of humanism remain powerful today, this thesis is particularly concerned with the challenge that postcolonial theories pose to humanism and, therefore, humanist

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5 In The Posthuman (2013), Braidotti states that her commitment to critical posthumanism comes from her ‘anti-humanist roots’ (pp.45-46).
6 Calvert-Minor (2014) in her critique of Barad’s epistemology suggests that, while Barad does not associate with the anti-humanism of structuralism and poststructuralism, she can be considered anti-humanist insofar as she is against any humanism that ‘makes the human the center of analysis’ (fn.4, p.127).
7 This is not to say that posthumanist scholars seek to defend the blurring of ontological categories, but that they recognize that their ethical and political work is done in a world in which ‘the opportunistic political economy of bio-genetic capitalism induces, if not the actual erasure, at least the blurring of the distinction between the human and other species’ (Braidotti, 2013, p.63).
education. This thesis’ interest in the postcolonial relates to at least the following: first, as the following points will illustrate, postcolonial theory involves exploring the challenge of humans living together; second, this focus on living together is reflected in postcolonialism’s shift in emphasis from abstract philosophy to situated theory; third, postcolonial criticism brings a necessary focus on humanism and its relation to colonization – especially as mediated through education; fourth, postcolonial theory obtains a particular concern for the tension between universalism and particularism, arising from its spatializing of dominant European history, and; fifth, the ways in which there is a complex temporal-spatial connection between the post-colonial\(^8\) and globalization means that postcolonial theory is imbricated in, and relevant to, some of the most significant challenges and opportunities facing the world today. In other words, postcolonialism’s articulation with globalization is one that has direct implications for humans living together. In this sense, it is the postcolonial challenge to humanism that is perhaps most relevant to the ways in which transnational connectivities and mobility have made cultural contact ubiquitous in this era of globalization.

In the context of thinking about how we as humans live together, the postcolonial challenge to humanism becomes significant. That is, postcolonial theorists tend to share much in common with the critics of humanism already mentioned. One point of difference between postcolonial concerns and those of posthumanists, perhaps, is that there is no necessary re-thinking of the ontological continuum between human and non-human entities for postcolonial theory. Moreover, while both posthumanist and postcolonial scholars represent a shift away from abstract philosophy, the historical fact of colonialism and its effects on lived human life is of primary concern for postcolonial theorists. Today, lived life increasingly involves, for many in the world, not only connection with, but certain forms of dependence on, people from other cultural backgrounds. Some early theorists of globalization, in particular, have feared the homogenization of “culture” through the spread of dominant Euro-American values, ideas and knowledge. What has become clear, though, is that cultural exchange – which assumes that the interlocutors are kept intact in some way at least – is often taking place in a way that resists, to

\(^8\) Here, I am using the hyphenated term quite specifically to denote post-colonialism as an historical moment arriving with the onset of colonization and, especially, the period of time after political decolonization. As such, historical post-colonialism is differentiated according to geography.
some extent, Euro-American cultural imperialism. This is not to say that the exchange is equal but that, as the term “exchange” necessitates, the relationship is not a one-way takeover. On the one hand, then, the fear of globalization as a reified force with agential intent might be assuaged to some extent. On the other hand, the fact that the world is structured in dominance (Radhakrishnan, 2003) with global inequalities increasing rather than decreasing, opens up a space for postcolonial criticism. As such, any engagement with the philosophical problems of humanism by postcolonial theorists should proceed with the concerns of the lived life of the subaltern foregrounded.

Various scholars have claimed that humanism has functioned as a tool of colonial oppression. As part of the program of cultural imperialism that took place with colonization, humanism functioned as the moral impetus of colonialism’s civilizing mission. In a variety of ways, not least the aims of colonial education, the civilizing mission sought to correct and improve the “native”, that they might modernize and develop a moral and rational relation to the world. Thus, whatever moral vision of the good society that humanism might have reflected and enacted in a local culture was to be radically undermined by its inextricable ties with colonial endeavors. In other words, what became clear with colonialism was the way in which humanism was able to be used to oppress the other, and to function as a boundary marker for judging the success of the civilizing agenda. Moreover, humanism-inspired colonial education legitimized colonial relations and their asymmetrical power structure. So it is that the postcolonial challenge to humanism becomes so problematic for a humanism that prioritizes the ideal of living together as core to its agenda.

It can be argued, then, that part of what the spatial movement of humanism instigated was the problem of universalism. Indeed, much postcolonial theorizing turns on the debate between universalism and particularism. For example, the critique of human essentialism is necessarily related to this debate. Were particular cultural differences not a reality, then it would be much easier to assume an essentialist philosophical anthropology. Postcolonial concerns regarding

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9 See, for example, Claudia Alvares (2006) *Humanism after colonialism*; Vivaldi Jean-Marie (2008) *Fanon: collective ethics and humanism*. Moreover, both Frantz Fanon and Edward Said, as this thesis will demonstrate, link humanism to colonialism/Orientalism.
epistemic violence and cultural violence – let alone territorial and physical violence – also revolve around an understanding of the particular as a challenge to universalist assumptions. Epistemic and cultural violence is violent because the imposition of European concepts and modes of knowledge, and of sensibilities and morality, takes place at the expense of indigenous or local ways of knowing, being and doing.¹⁰

What the more sophisticated examples of postcolonial theorizing (as opposed to the strictly anti-colonial work) do is to work through the tensions of affirming a certain need for universals while also foregrounding and prioritizing the particular. For example, Dipesh Chakrabarty reflects on the difficult tension when he writes that ‘we need universals to produce critical readings of social injustices. Yet the universal…[produces] forms of thought that ultimately evacuate the place of the local’ (2000, pp. 254-255). In a related but different vein, Radhakrishnan (2003) engages in an extended critical reflection on the place of universalism in the context of a globalized postcolonial world. His argument is for working towards a certain kind of perspectival universalism which seeks justice in the name of all humanity, while ensuring that this is both negotiated across cultural difference and cognizant of political and structural dominance. As such, universality, he argues, ‘should not be conceived of as the final and definitive resolution of perspectivism’ but should be constructed and practiced as ‘ongoing processes of multilateral accountability to Alterity’ (p.85). Radhakrishnan wants to ensure that the universal itself, along with universal notions such as justice or freedom, are not stripped of their historical provenance which often reveals that such concepts have been formed out of struggle or oppression. Indeed,

¹⁰Indeed, there has been a significant amount of work done in relation to indigenous matters as they relate to colonialism, postcolonialism, knowledge and humanism. Sandy Grande (2004), for example, notes the way in which the spirituality within indigenous epistemology, for example, is rejected by modern humanist assumptions (p.71). Linda T. Smith’s hugely influential Decolonizing Methodology (1999) focused on the problems of research conceptually and practically for indigenous people. This study made clear the wide-ranging issues associated with the colonizing processes of European powers and their enduring effects. This is to say that the matter of indigenous perspectives in relation to colonialism and its aftermath should not be understated. This thesis does not, however, explore indigenous perspectives and history in any kind of explicit way. It is my view that a focus on indigenous perspectives of humanism within the context of postcolonial theory is something that would be best achieved as a project on its own. This way, the more specific issues concerning indigenous scholars and history are able to be dealt with adequately. Nevertheless, given that matters of imperialism, settler colonialism, epistemic and cultural violence – to name but a few – are relevant to postcolonial theory more generally as well as indigenous perspectives more specifically, this thesis does address a number of conceptual and political matters of import to indigenous scholars. For example, sections of the thesis which discuss the matter of “nativism” and cultural essentialism, the tension between universalism and particularism – especially in relation to the subaltern, and Chakrabarty’s notion of History 2 as an interruption to the arrogance of universalizing logics – all deal with conceptual issues relevant to a more specifically focused discussion of postcoloniality from indigenous perspectives.
in *History, the Human, and the World Between* (2008) – Radhakrishnan writes that ‘The ontology of a universal humanism has to be perceived both as a promise and a possibility in itself and as that possibility that is being denied by the absurd rationale of the colonial world’ (p.86). Thus, it is an ethico-political imperative that the particularities of lived experiences, often reflecting and embodying asymmetrical relations of power, remain in tension with the aims and contradictions of the universal.

It can now be seen, perhaps, that this relationship between the universal and the particular in postcolonial theory reveals, as briefly mentioned above, that while it shares with other critical perspectives on humanism a shifting away from abstract philosophizing of the human, the nub of its critique revolves around the specific matter of colonialism and its effects on “the subaltern” subject. Thus, like posthumanist philosophies, postcolonial theories are, in part, politically interested philosophical or theoretical work. In other words, postcolonial theorists do not only take issue with Eurocentric notions such as the humanism that inspired and infused colonialism, but also with the kind of abstract rationalism of philosophical discourse that was dominant in Western modernity. The two, however, are not entirely distinct. That is, the rationalistic philosophy of the modern West is precisely one of the important ways in which a supposed universal humanism could be so Eurocentric. In being wed to a certain kind of abstract and transcendental epistemology, not only did it then make sense to imagine an essentialist, universal humanism, but also the problems of cultural difference were problems to be overcome rather than ones to be negotiated. Thus, as postcolonial theorists such as the Subaltern Studies group began to utilize and adapt the Gramscian notion of the subaltern in a political move to engage in a different historiography, the lived experiences of those previously excluded from, and without a voice in, history emerged as concrete challenges to abstract universalisms, including that of European Enlightenment humanism.

These kinds of postcolonial concerns and theorizing relate to the three main theorists under analysis in this thesis. By undertaking a close reading of certain relevant parts of the work of Frantz Fanon, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Edward Said, I consider the extent to which each of their respective works present as a problem for humanism. In what ways do they
challenge humanism, assume and rely on humanism, recover humanism and even present a call for humanism? In my reading of them, I try to ascertain the extent to which aspects of Western humanism are rejected, criticized, utilized, restored or rearticulated. This study is neither about trying to prove humanism ethnocentric and violent, nor is it trying to defend humanism against the indefensible. Rather, it is an exploration into its limits and possibilities with reference to a very specific (and therefore limited) set of work from within postcolonial theory.

The question emerging from this background to humanism, and from the analysis of the key theorists, is: can humanism emerge from the theory and lived reality of postcoloniality and, if so, in what form? The first part of the question takes seriously the possibility that humanism, even if it might be able to survive other critiques, is unable to withstand the challenges of postcolonial theorists. It should be stated at this point that I do not take this as a question that can be proven so much as substantiated. As such, one might conclude that humanism cannot survive the postcolonial challenge even if humanism is not shown to be necessarily linked to European colonialism. It could be that humanism was so severely implicated in, and damaged by, colonialism that it simply cannot be resuscitated once its colonial history is acknowledged. Indeed, even if it were to become clear that humanism could emerge from the ruins of colonialism, one might still put forward the argument on ethical grounds that it ought not to be resuscitated. On the other hand, not only might it be the case that humanism can survive the postcolonial challenge, it might also be a reasonable conclusion that it is indeed desirable for it to survive.

This is where I claim the significance of the research problem lies: the desirability or otherwise of humanism. The question of the thesis’s significance, as it relates to the desirability of humanism today and into the future, also corresponds to the decision to consider the postcolonial challenge. This is because the desirability question means nothing in purely abstract terms. It is the way in which humanism is mobilized and practiced in the world, especially in relation to education and, therefore, its effects on people, that makes this thesis’ focus on the question of humanism’s desirability significant. Humanism ultimately, in my view,
becomes of real interest when it is not the object only of metaphysical musings, but also of ethics and politics. It has already been shown that, even on ethical and political grounds, the case for humanism has not – and, I suggest, cannot – be settled once and for all. What this thesis is, then, is an intervention in the wider debate regarding the status of humanism. And, framed by some of the emphases within certain postcolonial theorizing, as well as challenges presented by the conditions of globalization, the thesis’ engagement with the debate on humanism is interested in the ongoing history of humanism’s relationship to education.

I am writing this introduction on the fifteenth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks on New York’s Twin Towers. Past events such as this, and similar moments of history in the present, may well serve to remind us of our interconnectedness across national, ethnic, cultural and class borders. For example, the issues raised by the huge numbers of refugees moving across state borders in recent times – highlighted by German Chancellor, Angela Merkel’s, widely reported comment in 2010 that multiculturalism has ‘utterly failed’ or the consistent debates around freedom and Islam, as well as recent terrorist attacks, in France have also, of course, been taken up by a range of scholars from various disciplines. Yet, even prior to these particular examples, French sociologist Alain Touraine (2000) was asking, in a context of a post-modern and globalizing world, can we live together? Touraine’s book is neither a lament for the good old days of modern social democracy nor an embrace of the postmodern fragmentation widely discussed at the time of his writing. Instead, his argument is that in an increasingly globalizing and yet fragmenting world, the challenge would be for the individual Subject – neither homo politicus nor homo oeconomicus – to act in the interests of both justice and diversity. This would require the political (social) to be articulated to the ethical (individual), not the other way around. While it is

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11 See a report on the German Chancellor’s comments here: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/oct/17/angela-merkel-german-multiculturalism-failed
12 Given France’s central place within the history of the development of liberal democracy in the West, it is no surprise that issues surrounding the wearing of Muslim headdress by recent refugees and immigrants has caused a stir. So too, the verbal and physical attacks by fundamentalist Muslims on “French society” should not be too surprising given the strong place that individual liberty and secularism holds in the French imaginary. Indeed, what is interesting is the ways in which the contradictions and tensions in French notions of liberty and secularism have emerged from the globality and pluralism that now constitutes its society. On the one hand, principles of freedom and secularism demand that Muslim immigrants are free to practice their beliefs, but when some fundamentalist and extremist Muslim adherents hold to values that are incommensurate with the particularly French notion of freedom, the inherent problems with its seeming inclusiveness become readily apparent. The following from The Economist is just one short piece of commentary on the banning of the burqa and its relationship to both “French principles” and contemporary terrorist attacks in France: http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2016/08/economist-explains-19
certainly not the explicit focus or intent of his book, we can see the concerns of Touraine as being ones intimately related to the place of humanism in this increasingly interconnected world. More than this, however, Touraine’s question, Merkel’s declaration and France’s predicament can all be understood as symptoms, in one way or another, of the condition of postcoloniality. So it is that this thesis seeks to revisit the question of humanism, in light of the postcolonial challenge, and in relation to today’s globalized world in which difference – not least in educational spaces – is being encountered and negotiated like never before.

In this sense, the thesis moves forward from a concern regarding how we might learn to live together to provide a more specific and more scholarly intervention into a space that is already of concern to UNESCO. In 2010, Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, gave a talk in which she began to articulate the challenges and possibilities for a new humanism for the 21st Century. Subsequent to this has been a number of UNESCO publications on the matter including, more recently, a booklet titled, Envisioning a New Humanism for the 21st Century: New Avenues for Reflection and Action. It is clear that UNESCO, a significant player within the global policy space, sees the question of humanism as absolutely critical to its own activities, including that of education. That is, there is a strong desire and commitment on the part of Bokova and UNESCO to keep the ideals of humanism, and the functions of humanistic practice, at the heart of their work. What they recognize is that the humanism which inspired the founding of UNESCO seventy years ago ‘must be adapted to the new demands of our time’ (Bokova, 2010, p.1).

The key conditions to which humanism must adapt, Bokova suggests, include the processes of globalization, the ubiquity and significance of ICTs and digital technology, and the growing awareness of climate change and its consequences. We might wish to add to this the enormous increase in human mobility, both in terms of refugees seeking asylum in safer places, but also through business and leisure. One significant aspect of this is the way in which business diasporic communities function with dual – or multiple – national loyalties, the imbrication of different cultural traditions, and the exchange of knowledge and ideas across cultural and

national boundaries (Rizvi et al., 2016). Children who grow up within such transnational communities and spaces find themselves confronted with very different realities to the children growing up in the middle of the twentieth century, for example.

The humanism that influenced the 1950s classroom in Melbourne, Australia was far less likely to be called upon to produce a response to the matter of cultural difference. Moreover, when it did, the almost unquestioned presumption was that its role was to support the civilizing mission to make the non-European more European; that is, more civilized and modern. The ensuing years have seen widespread decolonization in the political sense, with a lagging decolonization epistemologically and economically. However, postcolonial thinking has also noted that, not only is complete decolonization impossible, it is also not necessarily desirable. It remains that, where the asymmetrical structure of contemporary global relations functions to maintain the dominance of the Global North, critique of neocolonialism and its effects is indeed necessary. However, as Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) so eloquently put it, Europe is a gift to us all; one that should be accepted in a spirit of anticolonial gratitude (p.255). In this sense, the challenge for UNESCO and, indeed, for all of us implicated in formal education in particular, is to determine that which is a gift within the European humanism of our past, and that which is violent and exclusive.

It would seem that the view of UNESCO is that the contemporary challenge is to reformulate a humanism that speaks to the challenges and opportunities of the world before us, in the hope that we might learn to live together. This thesis seeks to first determine the viability of humanism in light of the postcolonial challenge, before making any presumptions about its place as a resource for education into the future. To be clear, this thesis is based on the assumption that the context in which we live and learn is one that requires us to come to terms with how to negotiate difference without falling into either the trap of universalism or relativism. As has been suggested already, it will also be argued that humanism has been a key resource for an education that has aimed towards a world in which people do live together well. So the question that remains now is whether this can still be the case. If not, why and what might be the
alternative? If so, why and how might this humanism connect with education in ways that enable us to live together, despite our difference?

In order to address the problems and questions set out in this introduction, this dissertation will proceed by way of an interdisciplinary, critical textual analysis. It is interdisciplinary in the sense that it engages in various modes of theoretical inquiry. It is not strictly philosophy, but nor is it critical discourse analysis, or a kind of literary or historical criticism. It partly resembles, by virtue of the subject matter, an analysis of the cultural politics of humanism in the tradition of Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall, but strictly speaking it is not this either. Nor is it a postcolonial analysis of humanism, as conceptualized by Spivak in terms of deconstruction, so much as it is a critical analysis of a small slice of postcolonial theory and its relation to humanism. Rather, the mode of inquiry involves all of the above. It leans towards the category of philosophy, especially given its concern with the investigation of ideas about humanism, but it is marked by a kind of textual analysis inflected by critical theory, historical analysis, postcolonial criticism and poststructuralism. Thus, as has been made clear already in this introduction, it is not an abstract kind of philosophy that drives this project.

So, while the thesis is not an empirical study, it nevertheless highlights the importance of understanding philosophical arguments as historically based. It is for this reason that the following chapter does not offer a history of humanism as such, but historicizes it as an idea and practice whose connection to education is mediated by a range of influences. The approach I take emphasizes the significance of social and political factors in the constitution of humanism. The lived experience that people have had of colonialism, for example, necessarily shapes the response to, and the possible rejection or reformulation of, the particular form of humanism that accompanied it. Thus, in considering the viability and desirability of humanism through the work of Frantz Fanon, Gayatri Spivak and Edward Said, I am concerned with the ways in which social, political and cultural matters affect the theorization of humanism.

Proceeding from here, in chapter two, I seek to provide a particular historicization of humanism and its relationship to education in the West. I argue that humanism as a construct assumes an
ethico-political character that sees it act as a moral resource for both the development of the individual and society more broadly. Humanism does not, however, exist in one essentialized form. Rather, throughout history, not only does it shape cultural context, various forms of humanism emerge out of the historical conditions in which they are located. As a result, the particular expression and deployment of humanism by Rousseau, for example, is quite different to that of Aristotle, and different again to that of more recent critical pedagogues. Yet, in all of these examples, humanism functions as a moral resource for humanity, and through education. Despite its long dis/continuous history, I show that the legacy of humanism continues to influence areas such as development studies, human rights thinking and the educational policy work of UNESCO.

Chapter three focuses on some of the more recent criticisms of humanism stemming from poststructuralism, feminism and animal and environmental studies. I acknowledge the relevance and power of these critiques of Enlightenment humanism, but also note that they tend to emanate from, and generally remain rooted in, Western theory. This leads me to consider the “spatial turn” and especially the way in which Edward Said explored the political significance of travel and geography for ideas and the politics of knowledge. I note that this turn to geography functions to reconceptualize history – and more specifically the history of humanism – on both the temporal and spatial planes. Moreover, I suggest that that this spatio-temporal lens is significant for the cultural politics of postcolonial analysis. I briefly conclude, then, that the postcolonial challenges to Enlightenment humanism extend the location of the critique from the center to the periphery, thereby highlighting the ethnocentric dimension of its universalist pretenses and destabilizing its apparent essentialism. Finally, having laid out the context and some of the theoretical background, I outline my approach to the analysis which is to follow. Here, I note that the thesis is a critical textual analysis that incorporates aspects from sources such as philosophy, critical theory and, of course, postcolonialism.

Chapter four, then, marks the beginning of the analysis of the three key postcolonial theorists under consideration. Focusing on Fanon, I consider the ways in which his work, influenced by his lived experience, destabilizes the abstract assumptions of colonialist humanism and reveals
the violence of its effects. I suggest that Eurocentric humanism becomes immanent for Fanon, in particularly painful and existentially challenging ways, as he experiences it as bodily phenomenon. Yet, as humanism is de-transcendentalized, I argue, its European and violent characteristics are shown to not be essential. The possibility thus emerges, for Fanon, of an alternative humanism that arises from the struggle of lived experience rather than being imposed from beyond. Fanon both troubles the transcendent/immanent, universal/particular binaries while also revealing the racialized and political experiences of colonial humanism.

In chapter five, I explore the critical tension between theory and practice in the work of Spivak. While critics such as Terry Eagleton have accused Spivak of turning the politics of subordination into a kind of textual abstraction, I argue that the foregrounding of the subaltern experience and political project in Spivak’s admittedly theoretically dense prose serves to interrupt the binary between theory and practice. Moreover, I argue that her deconstruction functions to open up possibilities rather than foreclose them. Thus, both as a result of her “theoretical” commitments and her concern for the lived experience of the subaltern, I argue that, despite her basic antihumanist position, the ghost of humanism continued to haunt her work. In simple terms, then, Spivak’s work is marked by the priority of the lived experience of the subaltern subject which, in turn, functions as an ethico-political imperative in her work to guard against “mere textualism”.

In chapter six, I consider the key criticisms made of Said as an inconsistent postcolonial humanist. Considering the immense importance of his *Orientalism* to the field of postcolonial studies, I explore what it is that critics find frustrating, mischievous or disingenuous in his work. I argue that Said is, perhaps, too often judged according to criteria which he is not himself applying to his work. Moreover, the problems of his theoretical inconsistencies could possibly be considered less as problems and more as political-theoretical interventions in scholarship. From here, I provide a critical reading of his defense of humanism, ultimately suggesting that he, like Fanon and Spivak, demonstrates an appeal to a reformulated humanism, not a recovery of the Enlightenment version.
Chapter seven, then, seeks to discuss the possibilities of a postcolonial humanism that emerges from the preceding analysis. It argues that the postcolonial focus on the subaltern functions as a constant challenge to any temptation there may be for humanism to assume a transcendent location. At the same time, this focus on the subaltern keeps the ethico-political element to humanism central and demands that the notion of the universal is kept alive, but that it is always modified and grounded by the insistence on particular lived experience. Thus, the relevance of normative inquiry to education – often dismissed after the post-turn – is affirmed, but modified by postcolonial and poststructuralist concerns. The struggle for a postcolonial humanism, I contend, is one that has a complex relationship with notions of utopia. On the one hand, the gesture towards a better world assumes a utopian vision, however, the postcolonial interest in destabilizing totalizing and transcendent visions acts to keep the experiences of injustice in the present as the grounds from which rearticulated humanisms emerge.

This then leads to the final chapter in which I return to the current conditions of globalization and suggest that they demand that we learn to live together in a world constituted by difference and structured in dominance. Utilizing Stuart Hall’s particular conception and use of the term “articulation”, and suggesting its commensurability with the characteristics of postcolonial humanism that have already emerged from the analysis, I suggest some possible ways in which this postcolonial humanism might be articulated with education. I do not make the claim that humanism is the answer, or the only answer. However, I do argue that humanism as a moral resource, when rearticulated in light of contemporary conditions, is not only viable but may well be desirable if we are to learn to live together.
Chapter 2: Humanism and education in the West

In this chapter, I will argue that even a cursory history of Western philosophy, stretching back to ancient Greece, suggests that humanism has been hugely influential and persistent. I contend that, while the ways in which humanism has been understood and deployed have varied, a certain humanistic spirit has nevertheless remained consistent. This spirit of humanism, as I seek to show in the final section of this chapter, is at the very least implicit in the policy and practice of development work and in organizations such as UNESCO. To the extent that much of the focus on development, of UNESCO’s goals for improving education access and quality in the Global South, is taking place in formerly colonized nations, it remains the case that humanism continues to profoundly influence the postcolonial world. To say that humanism has persisted after colonialism, however, is to say nothing of whether this ought to be the case. It is the questions of the viability and desirability of humanism that animate the analysis that ensues throughout this thesis. For now, though, the task is to historicize humanism as an idea within the histories of the West.

Any claim of historical importance is, inevitably, contestable. Nonetheless, it would appear to be an eminently reasonable argument to make that no other “idea” has been more influential for education in the West than that of humanism. But how might we understand this humanism? Crucially, the fact that humanism has also been central to educational thinking and practice in Islamic and Confucian societies in particular (Kwak, Kato & Hung, 2016; Kato, 2016) serves to highlight both that humanism is not only a Western phenomenon or concept and, as a corollary to this, that humanism manifests in different ways, at different times and in different places. Thus it has been particular notions, or forms, of humanism that have been dominant in Western traditions; notions that are necessarily tied to Western cultures, approaches to knowledge and socio-political contexts. It is for this reason that the current thesis focuses specifically on the Western lineage of humanism. But what I hope is also clear is that there are other histories of humanism that, among other things, function to interrupt a sometimes seemingly “universal” history of humanism as emerging from ancient Greece. In other words, while humanism may well be considered to constitute ‘the very essence of Buddhism’ (Ikeda, 2008, p.133), as philosopher Daisaku Ikeda has argued, we should acknowledge that particular Buddhist,
Confucian or Islamic humanisms (to name just some) have traditionally only had very minor influence on Western humanisms. This is simply to suggest that modern Western education systems were built on particularly Western notions of humanism rather than, say, Confucian ones.

The history of Western education has deep roots in humanistic thinking, beginning at least with the ancient Greeks and extending into the modern era. This history is important if one is to understand the problems faced by, and posed to, notions of humanism within education today. Furthermore, if a form of humanism remains possible, relevant and desirable for education into the future, the process of recognizing the historical journey of ideas about it is integral to imagining its future. Of course, an historical overview of humanism within education is an impossibly large task, even with the focus being centered solely on Western traditions. As such, the following history – provided in broad brush strokes – interprets the place of humanism within Western education in a particular way. It aims to show how humanism was thought and enacted differently in specific historical contexts. Therefore, while a certain amount of continuity is assumed in the very idea of writing a history of any particular idea or institution which remains in the present, this history also seeks to show the discontinuities in the journey of humanism as an educational resource. What will emerge from the brief analysis that follows is that humanistic education, historically speaking, has sought to develop the educated person’s rational faculties with an aim towards the “good life”. This good life, however, is not something to be considered in a contemporary sense of being individualized or primarily about personal feelings of happiness. I would contend that it is, rather, a socio-political notion and thus a notion carrying ethico-political significance. What the humanisms of Western history perhaps fail to do, however, is to give any careful consideration to how traditions outside of the West might espouse their own notions of humanism or how they might function to modify Western versions of humanism.

**From Ancient Greece to Modern Europe**

Humanism’s provenance tends to be traced back to ancient Greece. It has become commonplace to locate the early conception of human development and learning for the sake of
the greater good in this era, and to see it as a cornerstone of Western tradition. Of course, such a neat demarcation is undoubtedly, to some extent, wrong. Nevertheless, as far as the mythology that has been created around Western Culture is concerned, the work of the philosophers in ancient Greece is widely considered as the “beginning” of humanism. The early humanists, such as Plato (429-347 BCE), Aristotle (384 – 322 BCE) and Epicurus (341-271 BCE), believed that a humanistic kind of education had a civilizing function. Central to this was the way in which humanism was concerned with a particular way of approaching life.

For Aristotle, human pursuit was that of the good life – an ethical relation to others and the world resulting in human flourishing. Moseley and Bailey (2014) write that Aristotle’s view was that the end deemed proper for a child’s education was ‘to aim for the highest that man is capable of and which is appropriate for him qua rational man’ (p.156). Epicurus aimed for the contented life, one in which pure sensuous joy was displaced for a more sustaining enjoyment that involved the rational mind, not merely desire (Herrick, 2009: 10). These humanisms aimed for a more ethical set of relations between the individual, other people and the non-human world. However, before returning to this important theme within the history of humanism, it is important to note the focus on the rational self was also central to the humanism of these early Greek philosophers.

Indeed, humanistic education for Plato was seen to lead to a moral and happy life through the triumph of reason over appetite. While it might be tempting to portray Aristotle as focused on grounded practical wisdom and therefore opposed to Plato whose focus was on the abstracted rational, it is perhaps more accurate to see both as prioritizing reason over desire. For instance, Aristotle believed that the education of the child in the later years was one which occurred at a time when the mind divided ‘into a rational and non-rational element, the latter capable of listening to reason, though. The rational element is superior, so the inferior, non-rational element must serve the ends of the higher aspects of the mind’ (Moseley & Bailey, 2014, p. 155). It is when the educated person is able to govern their non-rational self via reason that the

14 Introductions to humanism so often construct this historical narrative. See, for example, Stephen Law (2011), Humanism: a very short introduction, in which he traces its history back to ancient Indian and Confucian thought – but nevertheless locates its Western beginnings in ancient Greece. This is also true in Jim Herrick, (2009), Humanism: an introduction (2nd ed.) and in Tony Davies, (2008), Humanism.
good life can be achieved. Aristotle envisioned the educated person as being an independent and critical thinker, cultivating practical wisdom and, at the pinnacle, becoming a philosopher (p. 157). Plato also saw that the cultivation of the mind was the key to the good life. Aloni (1997) claims that Plato believed that ‘knowledge is the highest human virtue, that liberal education is essentially intellectual education, and that the morally good and happy life is attained when reason reigns over our lower faculties of appetites, emotions, and imagination’ (p.90). The primacy given to reason over the ‘lower faculties of appetites, emotions, and imagination’ is evidenced in the following from Book VI of the Republic, in which Plato declares:

[You’ve] often heard it said that the form of the good is the most important thing to learn about and that it’s by their relation to it that just things and the others become useful and beneficial…Furthermore, you certainly know that the majority believe that pleasure is the good, while the more sophisticated believe that it is knowledge. Indeed I do. (cited in Curren, 2007, p.16).

For Plato, the ability to think and to know is fundamental to being human, to being “good”, and to the civilizing of social and political life.

Importantly, however, the classical humanists did not think that everyone would be civilized through humanistic education. Plato, for example, believed that education was ‘for the intellectual elite, not the average man’ (Dupuis & Gordon, 1997, p.31). Dupuis and Gordon argue that Plato did advocate for equal education for all children but that only those with the intellectual capacity should be educated further for leadership and government (1997, p.32). It may be easy to dismiss Plato (and Aristotle) as merely elitist and conservative, but this would be a failure to grasp their philosophical assumptions and would be an overly uncharitable and anachronistic reading.

To use Plato as an example, in keeping with humanistic education’s commitment to humanize people, his belief about the educated leader was that this person had a responsibility to limit their own pleasures in life and to instead work for the common good (Dupuis & Gordon, 1997, p. 34). Secondly, Plato did not differentiate between persons in the most crude of elitist ways – through status, or rank. Rather, he differentiated, based on ability, between those who should be educated at an advanced level and those who should not. Moreover, he did not believe that slaves or women, if they demonstrated the ability, should be excluded from the possibility of
education (Lawton & Gordon, 2002, pp.16-17). This focus on individual ability and good civic leadership finds its locus in the desire for a secure and harmonious city or, indeed, eudemonia (Rorty ed., 1998, p.3). Thus, the classical humanism of ancient Greece was one that sought to develop the rational capacities of the person for the sake of the flourishing of the polis. If we are to see the process of humanistic education, then, as emphasizing ‘self-governance, rational self-control, and freedom’ (Curren, 2007, p.9) as distinct characteristics of human-ness, then we can see some important links to some of the Enlightenment humanists, with their particular interest in human autonomy.

The great German philosopher, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), for example, believed that the age of Enlightenment was one of ‘man’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity’ (1784/1970, p.54). “Immaturity”, for Kant, is to be understood as one’s inability to understand properly ‘without the guidance of another’ (p.54). A person properly educated, however, would ‘have courage’ to use their own understanding. Amongst other emphases, the autonomy of the individual is a strong theme of Enlightenment humanism. Following in the humanistic lineage of Plato and Aristotle, Kant prioritizes the imperative to think critically, freely and rationally and his view that humanity’s goal should be ‘the highest good’ (Moran, 2009, p.482). Indeed, education’s role in bringing humans nearer to an ideal state of being – a view broadly shared by Plato and Aristotle – is also reflected in Kant’s thought. There is a linear, developmentalist logic that pervades the classical humanisms of both the ancients and Kant. As a result, it is not surprising that, on encountering those who have not progressed to the same level of being civilized, the humanist might see education as the vehicle through which to help make them “more human”.

This certainly seems to have been the case with Plato and Aristotle and, yet, in the Enlightenment context, the individual person seems to have become more even more prominent. With the increasing challenge to the role of God within European thinking, and the corresponding view that “man” was on a path destined for human “triumph”, Enlightenment humanism amplified the importance of self-cultivation in humanistic education. Indeed, Kant writes that it is through education that we ‘bring our nature one step nearer to perfection’ (Kant,
1960, p. 7). And while there is a strong focus on the individual here, this does not completely displace humanity more broadly as a focus of humanistic education. This focus on humanity may be understood in at least two distinct ways. In the first instance, a more critical interpretation might suggest that, in the context of Kant’s work, his understanding of the humanizing of humanity – of cosmopolitanism as the ideal of perpetual peace – was marred by a ‘Eurocentric white supremacy presented in his human geography’ which hierarchized humanity according to race (Kang, 2013, pp.78-79). However, Kant’s concern for humanity can also be understood as reflecting the kind of ethnocentrism of his time, place, and status, while nevertheless being oriented towards a better world imagined more broadly (if abstractly). In other words, even though Kant’s idealized future may have been imagined in a thoroughly Eurocentric way, the intention was nevertheless for the peaceful coexistence of all of humanity. It is this, I suggest, that formed the telos for much of Kant’s thinking about humanism and education. For example, Kant writes that the art of education is to assist man to ‘develop his tendency towards the good’ (1960, p.11). This statement should be seen as an example of the way in which education is focused on the development of the individual person, but with motivations towards not merely the “good” of the individual, but of society more broadly. This point is made by Gonzales (2011) when she writes:

While Kant is interested in the education of individual human beings, and holds that only human beings can educate human beings, he is also interested in advancing the progress of humanity as a whole; on his view, the progress of humanity has been prepared by nature, and should now be entrusted to moral reason. (p.450)

Indeed, Johnston (2013) argues that Kant views the ‘education of humanity’ as the ‘proper end of the species’ (p.24). Johnston claims that Kant’s real interest is the education of the species – or humanity – not the individual. And, if we think about the importance in Kant of the individual aiming to ascertain a universalizable moral principle and of acting according to principles rather than self-interest, this would indeed appear to be the case. Nevertheless, it is also the case that Kant was very concerned with the idea of individual autonomy within this process. His concern for humanity should not be mistaken for some kind of communitarian pedagogical imagination. Rather, education is the ‘means to inculcate in children the importance of, and respect for, the moral law, moral-maxim formation, the duties to self and others, as well as cultivate the powers
of understanding, judgement, and reason’ (Johnston, 2013, pp. 229-230). That is, education should produce an individual who is able to think without the guidance of another and this autonomous individual should contribute to the betterment of humanity through rigorous reflection on, and application of, moral law.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778 CE), on the other hand, is much more forthright in his focus on the human individual. In fact, Oelkers and Bailey (2014) assert that ‘nobody dealing with education theory before Rousseau had so precariously related “nature” and “society” to each other without giving priority to society or its institutions’ (pp.23-24). In the theologian John Milbank’s words, ‘Rousseau made the inverse modern move of rendering the individual transcendent over society,’ (2013, p. 353). Such religious language does, perhaps, illustrate nicely the extent to which Rousseau’s philosophy of education prioritizes the individual and helps to propel Western society towards a more subjective and individualistic relation to the world. Thus, what emerges in Rousseau is a philosophy of education that is starkly different to that of the ancient philosophers, yet could nevertheless still be described as humanistic.

It is worth noting here that, despite writing earlier than Kant, Rousseau's is the work that represents a greater discontinuity with classical humanism. This may be considered to be the case if, as Milbank suggests, the classical ideal of the balance between the political and the educational had basically been sustained, if transformed, through the Middle Ages. The balance between the political and the educational might be understood as the emphasis in Plato and Aristotle (and Kant) that the telos of education was something akin to human flourishing, not an hermetic individual moral development. However, through the Enlightenment – and especially, perhaps, Rousseau – individual freedom, Milbank argues, became the reference point for morality and, thus, 'all links to the ancient sense of the balance between the political and the educational' becomes lost (2013, p.351). While this may be overstating the case, the basic point that Rousseau's humanism is individualistic rather than (cosmo)political seems to be a most reasonable one to make.
And so, this has necessary implications not only for the kind of education (curriculum and pedagogy) Rousseau promotes, but also the purpose of education. For example, Gill (2013) writes that, in *Emile*, Rousseau ‘elaborates a philosophical-educational theory based on individual development, set in opposition to citizenship education’ (p.182). The purpose of education for Rousseau is not cosmic or, in the contemporary language of Gilroy (2000) and Spivak (2003), planetary. Rather, education should be working against the corruption of the child’s nature by the influences of society. Whatever role that child might play in society as an adult, the purpose of their education is not for society, but for the fulfilment of the distinctive constitution of the self. Such an education, then, is also predicated on a particular philosophy of the person. While the development of reason had been central to humanistic education since Plato, Rousseau locates the primary distinction between humans and other animals in freedom.

This key characteristic of the human person is not something that can be captured by a system of thought or scientific method; it is only something that makes sense from within the human itself. While physics might be able to explain the mechanism of sense experience, Rousseau argues, it is not able to reveal the ‘power of willing’ contained by humans. And Riley suggests that Rousseau’s position is that it is this ‘power of freely willing, rather than reason, that distinguishes men from beasts’ (2013, p. 122). This goes some way to explaining why education for Rousseau is one that focuses on drawing out the nature of the individual child and respecting their individual will, rather than imposing ideas from the outside. In other words, it is Rousseau’s deep humanism that ensures that he seeks as far as possible the (negative) liberty of the individual by trying to overcome the external barriers to individual autonomy.

**Humanisms and education in Western history: (dis)continuities**

Even as this brief historical snapshot makes clear, there is no one form of humanism. Rather, humanisms emerge from their historical contexts both contributing and responding to the philosophical debates and political imperatives of the day. Consequently, defining humanism too neatly is an almost impossible task as it is an always shifting and context-specific concept and practice. It is easier to talk of important characteristics of humanism that have animated its educational agenda through history in different ways. Yet, to historicize humanism does not
necessarily make the task of identifying its key characteristics easy or unproblematic. Though obvious, it must be said that what I want to submit as being some important continuities in the “life” of humanism are not the only possibilities and nor are they incontestable. Nevertheless, I think they are quite defensible and, even, relatively rudimentary. It is not my purpose here to suggest a radical re-interpretation of humanism’s history in the West.

It should have been reasonably clear from the brief discussion of Plato, Aristotle, Kant and Rousseau that humanism in the modern era took a turn away from traditional transcendentalism. While Kant could be seen as retaining a sense of the transcendent, to the extent that he also deemed that a reliance on something external results in dogmatism, he nevertheless sought to situate the burden of responsibility on the individual person rather than “the beyond”. What he continued to gesture towards, albeit in a different way to Plato, for example, was that education’s ultimate *telos* was the common good. Rousseau, as has just been argued, expressed a humanism that was far more focused on the fulfilment of the self through freedom. Yet both the aim of the common good and on individual freedom could be seen as continuities within the history of humanism. I would like to suggest that education in Western history was animated by a humanistic *ethical ideal* for which the goal (that is, the *common good* or *human flourishing*) is irreducibly conditional on the attainment of *freedom* (collective and personal). This dyad is both what allows for, and is simultaneously the result of, the practice of *critique*. I will, then, briefly describe the way in which these characteristics can be derived from a history of multiple humanisms in the West that, despite the continuity of the aim for the common good and individual freedom, is also marked by context-specific discontinuities.

It has already been made clear that a key concern for Plato, Aristotle and Kant was that education would result in human flourishing. That is, education was not to be seen as something to be undertaken for a sense of self-gain but because the development of the intellectual and moral character of the person would lead to better leadership in civil society and, consequently, a better world. Rousseau’s intervention in educational theorizing provided another, more individualistic, dimension to humanistic education, but did not extinguish the flame of the common good as a light to which educational theory would be directed. Indeed,
writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, John Dewey (1859-1952), continued
to hold together the political and the educational despite the continuing influence within
education of the more Romantic philosophical anthropology reminiscent of Rousseau. Dewey
was of the view that moral society was likely to occur through the practice of democracy.
Indeed, his interest in the classroom being a democracy in miniature has at its core a politico-
ethical dimension insofar as the classroom becomes “training” for democratic society. Ethics,
according to Dewey, is discovered and nurtured within the practice of democratic living
(Johnston, 2011).

Yet, like Rousseau, Deweyan ethics were founded on a naturalistic worldview. The implications
of this are evident when he writes, ‘the real moral question is what kind of a self is being
furthered and formed’ (Cited in Bergman, 2005, p.39). But as is often the case, to draw a hard
line separating the collective from Dewey’s clear proclivity for the self may be too simplistic.
Such binary ways of thinking inevitably result in clear distinctions that disallow nuance and even
contradiction within one’s thinking. When it comes to the holding together of natural education
and political life, Bergman (2005) argues that the fundamental purpose of education for Dewey,
‘would be to foster actions, habits, and a sense of moral self-worth characterized by a growing
willingness to choose the common good over the good of the self more narrowly conceived’
(p.52). Thus, this drive for an education with an ethical orientation towards the good finds a way
of being maintained despite the ever increasing shift towards the individualization of life. Even
today, parties on both the Left and the Right express concern about the broader effects of this
individualization. Despite the individualist turn, history would suggest that a basic commitment
to the other is a difficult moral principle to eradicate.

In fact, after the atrocities of the first and second world wars of the twentieth century, there was
a proliferation of humanistic philosophical work that took as its object of inquiry the relation of
the self to the other. If Rousseau signaled an irreversible shift to the self – perhaps the
secularized apex of the Reformers’ radical claim that each person should be able to interpret
the bible for his or her self – many Jewish (though not exclusively so) philosophers of the mid-
twentieth century made clear that man is ‘not an island’. Moreover, in the wake of the
Holocaust, the ethical urgency of articulating a relational ontology for humans was ever more apparent. Indeed, it could be argued that it was his experience of WWII that motivated Sartre to explore a philosophy that did not assume that the individual, essentialized, man (of Europe) was on a path towards human triumph. That is, the complete opposite of this – the destruction of man by man – led Sartre to begin with the existence of the individual and how this existence might be imbricated with the existence of the other. Thus, the turn to existentialism in the middle part of the twentieth century marks a turn from the natural self of Rousseau that is to be elicited through education, to that of the existing self that is to be (co)constructed from the basic fact of existence. As Kneller (1971) argues, ‘existence does not make him [man]. Existing, he makes himself’ (p.255). Implicit here is that any understanding of oneself involves the individual in an active process of becoming. Moreover, this process will necessarily involve others; it is not an endeavor that is done internally or in isolation. Thus, for existentialist educators, inquiry and the quest for knowledge takes place through reflection on the interaction between subjects and objects.

One of the more prominent existential philosophers to have developed such a relational ontology is Martin Buber. In his most famous work, *I and Thou* (1970), first published in 1923, Buber suggests that humans must seek to respect the dignity in each other. Whereas a person’s relationship to inanimate and abstract objects may be detached (what he refers to as an I-It relationship), when relating to another living – and especially human – being, acknowledgement and respect for that other person’s own reality should be paramount (a relationship Buber terms as I-Thou). This concern for the other is so significant for Buber that the self cannot be known apart from the other. And the ethical dimension in the equation is that a full realization and expression of self requires not merely an acknowledgement of the other, but a giving of oneself to the other. In Levinasian terms, this is more accurately understood as a demand that is made by the other. The significance here is that it is not so much the rational, autonomous self who chooses to recognize the other but it is the other who demands this recognition. This response to the call of the other creates a more truly mutually reciprocal relationship that actually provides the conditions which allow an existential recognition of self to emerge. Thus, the importance of dialogue – especially between the teacher and student – in
more recent educational thought and practice owes a great deal to existentialists such as Buber (see, for example, Jons, 2014). What is clear, furthermore, is that while existential philosophers understood the notion of the self quite differently to those previously mentioned, the focus on inter-subjectivity appears to still have a central concern for the way in which individual humans live and respond to the world, and that each individual human is reliant upon differing forms of relationality in order to obtain a sense of selfhood.

It would, however, appear that existential education may have even less concern with the more macro, societal element of education’s purpose. Indeed, given that existentialism developed out of and within an ever increasing culture of individualism this may not come as a great surprise. And yet it may be too simplistic to see the influence of existentialism as relating solely to the local relations between people and people and people and objects. However, I would argue that existentialism tends to see concern for the world-at-large emanating from an individual’s relation to it. In my view, within existentialism, the world begins as a reference for the individual in more "selfish" ways (though I do not attach negative connotations to “selfish” in this instance). That is, one’s existence is understood and negotiated in relation to the world, but the issue at hand is how the self is to become. However, within this process (and it is “within” rather than a more linear conception of “after”) the self becomes concerned for the world.

According to Mayes (2010), ‘The central idea in existentialist philosophy and psychology is that the most important thing that a person can do in life is to discover what is most important to him at the deepest level — and then to honor, explore, and extend that commitment or set of commitments as best he can in his unique lifeworld’ (p. 29). This pursuit of the meaning of life and living according to it is seen by existentialists as an ethical act. Some existential educators focus on working at helping students to become authentic, to become a “being-for-himself”. This kind of education reconfigures both the individualistic humanism of Rousseau and the more macro, society-oriented purpose of education one might see in Aristotle, into a humanism that seeks the proper realization of the self without capitulating to selfishness. Another way of putting this is to say that while the discovery and pursuit of the self might be primary, this does not necessarily make the individual more important ethically than other entities, both human and
non-human. The more important point, in relation to an historical understanding of humanism is that existentialist humanism represents both continuity and discontinuity with prior forms of humanism.\footnote{It would also be worthwhile to consider briefly the importance of "freedom" within existential philosophy and education. However, due to constraints of space, I have chosen to locate this discussion within the context of critical education.}

It is worth briefly considering one final dis/continuous emergence of humanism within educational thought and practice in the modern Western tradition. The highly influential work of critical pedagogues, especially in the middle to later part of the twentieth century, takes on many of the important philosophical bases of existentialism. These include: the constructivist approach to the self (a debt also owed to Dewey); the centrality of dialogue; the importance of authenticity and "being-for-himself" and; while there was not space to discuss it in the previous paragraphs, freedom. Thus, in this brief encounter with critical education, I want to suggest that these existential notions, combined with Marxism, lead to the central focus of transformation within the work of scholars such as Paulo Freire and Peter McLaren. As a movement, critical education can be seen as contemporaneous with other movements for social change in the twentieth century such as race-based civil rights, second-wave feminism, individual freedom from institutionalized norms, protests against Vietnam and growing American imperialism and the rise of capitalism as an ideology.

Therefore, the notions of freedom and authenticity that were so important in existentialism are appropriated by the political agenda and revolutionary mood of the early critical educators towards the aim for societal transformation. A clear example of this can be seen when Freire writes, ‘Even when you individually feel yourself most free, this feeling is not a social feeling, if you are not able to use your recent freedom to help others to be free by transforming the totality of society, then you are exercising only an individualist attitude towards empowerment of freedom’ (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 109). There is a sense of the dis/continuity of humanism in this quote from Freire. That is, there is the necessary dialogue with the tradition, but also a reconceptualizing of freedom according to the demands made by the historical context from which he is writing. His experience of working as an adult educator in the field of literacy
amongst the poor in his native Brazil (Roberts, 2010) before further working to develop the literacy of poor Chileans while living there in exile had, according to Holst (2006), a significant impact ‘on his intellectual, pedagogical, and ideological development’ (p.244). Confronted by poverty and injustice, freedom for Freire could never solely be about an individual’s own personal circumstances.

Thus, the sociopolitical conditions of the “Third World” from which Freire’s work emerged, were ones that demanded a reconsideration of freedom with the help of not only the theoretical traditions of existentialism and orthodox Marxism, but that of the Frankfurt School of critical theory. To put this simply, critique and praxis became central to critical educators’ notion of freedom. Key voices in the critical education movement, from Freire, to Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren, focus on the importance of education’s task in helping students to develop the capacity to offer critique of the structures that dominate. Indeed, Giroux (2007) states that, central to critical pedagogy ‘is the task of educating students to become critical agents who actively question and negotiate the relationships between theory and practice, critical analysis and common sense, and learning and social change’ (p.1). This kind of critical practice is central to opening students’ minds to the possibilities of an alternative to the way things are.

So there is a sense in which critical education is about giving the voiceless a voice, without which, they would not realize fully their own being. Freire states that, ‘in the culture of silence, the masses are mute, that is, they are prohibited from creatively taking part in the transformations of their society and therefore prohibited from being’ (cited in Nemiroff, 1992, p.57). So for the oppressed classes, according to Freire, critique, freedom and being are all inextricably linked. Glass (2001) characterizes this aspect of Freire’s thought in stating that, ‘in the everyday world, opportunities to embody freedom are realized through commitments to struggle for one way of life or another’ (p.16). The individual and society are bound together by structures of dominance and the resistance to these structures.

This humanism of the critical educator is undoubtedly inflected by a far more revolutionary spirit than that of, say, Aristotle. Nevertheless, it is possible to see how the traditions that come
before each historical iteration of humanism necessarily shape the humanism of the present. And yet, in the case of the humanism of critical education, the long march towards Western individualistic culture was disrupted by a politics of solidarity. Despite this, there continues to be an ethnocentric element to this solidarity. Even in the case of South America, where political mobilization was contemporaneous with the withdrawal of colonial powers in the latter half of the twentieth century, humanistic influences on political theory and activism were largely derived from Western knowledge centers such as the Frankfurt School. So while humanism took on different shapes in different historical moments, it has tended to remain wedded to Western culture and thought – as one might expect given that expressions of humanism in formerly colonized locations were inevitably and indelibly marked by its travel with colonialism.

**Humanism’s continuing legacy as an ethico-political resource**

Despite the apparent cultural blindness of Western humanism from ancient times to the modern era, it would seem that there has always remained some kind of commitment in Western education to humanistic notions that emphasize both individual and societal flourishing. It is in this sense that humanism might be seen to have been both hugely influential and also persistent. The legacy of this long history of humanism, one might argue, remains apparent today. One area, that is particularly relevant to this thesis, in which this legacy can be seen is that of development policy and practice. That is to say, the underlying philosophy and assumptions of development policy and practice tend to be either explicitly or implicitly humanistic. Moreover, different emphases within the long history of Western humanism emerge in development thinking, including the persistent ethico-political concern for the other, as well as the more peculiarly Enlightenment focus on progress.

Schech and Haggis (2000) provide a particularly useful analysis in their attempt to draw a connection between the terms “culture” and “development”. In doing so, they aim to demonstrate that the often presumed economic understanding of development fails to acknowledge just how significant is “development’s” influence of culture. Attending to the relation from a different angle, the economic view of development tends to diminish the cultural motivations of development theory and practice. That is, development, understood within the
broader agenda and theories of modernization, can actually be understood to be, in part, about the development of primitive cultures into modern ones. Indeed, colonialism’s trope of the civilizing mission is one that is closely tied to both Enlightenment thinking about the progress of man\textsuperscript{16} and later modern development theory. Through institutions and practices of education, for example, the savage would be civilized and become more fully humans, less animal. Thus, it could be argued that the logic is one which sees economic development as conditional on cultural development coming first.

But the significance of development in relation to humanism, education and culture is not actually about setting up culture against economics. Rather, as Schech and Haggis suggest, it is more about pulling ‘culture out of the shadows in development studies’, as a way of decentering rather than dismissing the economic, and showing that culture ‘is, and always has been, central to our understanding of development processes and their impacts on societies across the globe’ (2000, p.xi). Moreover, the integral connection between the economic and the cultural is made explicit by Colin Leys (1996) who locates the provenance of development theory most clearly in the late eighteenth century and the ‘advent of industrial capitalism’ (p.4). His historicization of development sees it located in the logic of Enlightenment humanism. Leys writes that the effects of industrial capitalism ‘forced the fact of human economic, social, political and cultural development on people’s attention. Various thinkers’, he contends, ‘from Condorcet to Kant, began to conceive of a “universal history” which would disclose the cumulative pattern and meaning of it all, and its ultimate destination’ (p.4). Thus, the kind of teleology implicit within the very term development is one that fits with the mythology of the humanist Enlightenment notion of man’s progress towards a triumphant end. What becomes even more interesting in Leys’ analysis is the way in which he then locates modern development theory, beginning in the 1950s, with the fact of colonialism.

The legacy of humanism becomes clear in the link between (post)colonialism and that of development as a cultural and economic force. According to Leys, development theory emerged in response to the need for dealing with ‘how the economies of the colonies of Britain, France,\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{16} In this instance, the gender-specific term “man” to denote all of humankind is used because of its usage in Enlightenment work. Throughout the thesis, gender-specific language is only used for this reason.
Portugal and other European powers, colonies comprising some 28% of the world’s population, might be transformed and made more productive as decolonization approached’ (1996, p.5). The irony, which is of course easier to see now than it might have been then, of this post-WWII development theory as a postcolonial phenomenon is that what lies at its heart is the very kind of Enlightenment humanist logic that one might have thought would be decolonized contemporaneously with political decolonization. That is, whether one wishes to refer to the proponents of modernization theories or their critics who lamented dependency theory, thinking about development has, I would claim, proceeded according to humanist assumptions. That is, modernization theories, which construe development as progress from pre-modern culture and economy to industrialized and capitalist society, rely on the basic teleological perspective of Enlightenment humanism.

And while dependency theorists ‘inverted many of the assumptions of modernization theory’ (Leys, 1996, p.12), they nevertheless seem to reveal traces of humanism in their own theorizing. For example, Haynes (2008), writes that ‘dependency theory started from the assumption that the world economy was increasingly capitalist from the sixteenth century…’ (p.25). While this quote might not seem to say much about the traces of humanistic thinking, it hints at the epistemological lineage for their thinking. That is, even those who were offering the critique of modernization theory as emanating from the center and as being blind to the realities of the periphery were still historicizing development according to a Western view of history. As Haynes goes on to note, some of the most influential and prominent dependency theorists, such as Andre Gunder Frank, ‘virtually ignored the interaction of culture and politics in his essentially class-based treatment of Latin America’s history of failure…to develop’ (p.25). The object of concern for Frank and the dependency theorists was ‘the international capitalist system’ which was to be studied according to a structuralist analytic. My point here is not to make a comment as to whether or not Frank’s analysis rings true or is based on reasonable assumptions, but to show that for both the modernization and dependency theorists the world was understood – in a sense controlled – according to a Western view of the modern world that places Enlightenment Europe at the center. Moreover, the logic attached to the humanistic legacy within development theories existed even in post-colonial nations.
This is also true in regards to the less economic and more ethical legacy of humanism within development studies. Again, often implicit, assumptions regarding development as a matter of human rights often motivate those within the field – particularly to the extent that, as an area of study, it has been undertaken by those with very practical (Leys, 1996, p.7), even activist, aims in mind. Indeed, Amartya Sen (1999) argues that not only has the rhetoric of human rights become prominent in “internationalist” discourse, ‘human rights have also become an important part of the literature on development’ (p.227). Rather than continue to focus on development theory, however, it is worth noting the way in which humanism and its associated (universal) rights have contributed to development at the level of policy discourse. One particularly pertinent example here is in relation to the work of the United Nations and its associated bodies such as UNESCO and UNICEF.

In recent research, Maren Elfert (2016) has explored UNESCO’s humanistic approach to education. While she suggests that UNESCO’s influence on global education policy, especially today, is minimal and often confined to well-intentioned “friends of UNESCO” already on-board, Elfert nevertheless argues for the importance of their work. She cites the importance of UNESCO’s work on education as being related to its ‘resistance against neoliberalism and the negative effects of globalization’ which is in contrast to more economically oriented global players, such as the OECD and the World Bank (2015, np). This resistance, Elfert contends, is directly related to ‘the humanistic ontology that UNESCO has constructed through the involvement of individuals who – while coming from different backgrounds and cultures – shared a certain humanistic ethos’ (2016, pp.3-4). This humanistic ethos, it would seem, was initially forged at a time when the discourse of human rights was particularly prominent. When UNESCO was being formed in the wake of World War II, the issue of acknowledging and protecting universal human rights was obviously pertinent. Right from the outset, Article 1.1 of the UNESCO Constitution sets out the purpose of the organization as including ‘to further…the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religions, by the Charter of the United Nations’ (1945/2014, p.6). As Elfert (2016) then argues in her research, subsequent major reports and initiatives of
UNESCO such as the *Faure report* (1972), the *Delors report* (1996), and the *Education for All* (1990) initiative, all refer back to the basic humanistic impulse animating the UNESCO Constitution.

To refer to a ‘certain humanistic ethos’ (Elfert, 2016, p.4) captures the notion that there is not one humanism and nor is it an unchanging object to be studied or utilized. What this has meant for UNESCO is that its policies have tended to reflect humanism in different ways. For example, Elfert (2016) claims that the *Faure report* exuded a rational-scientific worldview and situated itself in the UNESCO tradition of “scientific humanism” as a universalizing concept’ (p.129) while the *Delors report* represented a humanism that had shifted in emphasis from being individualist to collective (p.160). Interestingly, given the argument I have been putting forward thus far, Elfert also notes that one member of the *Delors* Commission, Karan Singh, expressed a commitment to a kind of universal humanism that was based in the Sanskrit texts of the *Rigveda*. She quotes Singh as saying that the *Rigveda* ‘asserted that “our goal in life is twofold – liberation of our souls, and also the welfare of the world”’ (p.183). She goes on to suggest that ‘these are two of the main principles underpinning UNESCO’s humanism – self-fulfilment and the betterment of the world’ (p.183). But the key difference in the humanism that was articulated in the *Delors report*, as opposed to prior UNESCO notions of humanism according to Elfert, was its ‘shift from the individual towards the politics of the multicultural society’ (p.207).

That the *Delors report* was produced in the midst of the rapid rise of globalization discourse is instructive in regards to the way UNESCO seems to formulate its humanism. There appears to be a basic commitment to a universal notion of humanism that is familiar to both the ancient Greek context and the Enlightenment one – not to mention non-Western traditions. But, as I have been arguing has happened for much of Western history, the emphases and specificities of humanism are negotiated according to the exigencies of the day. Thus, that the *Delors report*’s humanism was concerned with the politics of multicultural society should come as no surprise given its construction at the apex of multiculturalist discourse. Moreover, its publication in the years immediately following the end of the Cold War and the break-up of the Soviet Union locates it in the time when theories of globalization were becoming dominant and reshaping
notions of multiculturalism. Thus, by the time Irina Bokova called for a “new humanism” in 2011, the complexities of living in a genuinely globalized world were now a reality. And so it was that, as UNESCO has seemingly done right throughout its short history, Bokova took the basic universal notion of “common humanity” and suggested that it needed to be rethought and ‘adapted to the new demands of our time’ (Bokova, 2010, p.1). Amidst the enormous increase in contact between people – including their ideas and values – whose interaction involves reaching across distinct cultural boundaries, UNESCO’s call is to reconceptualize humanism for the twenty-first century globalized and postcolonial world.

Throughout the analysis presented in this chapter, humanism might be seen as something which animates rather than dictates. Seen in this way, development theory, policy and practice should not be seen as the application of humanism but as ideas, programs and actions inspired by humanism. But to say that humanism has functioned to animate or inspire development policy, schooling, or law for that matter, is not to say that it has necessarily been explicit. Rather, humanistic assumptions often lie beneath the surface. Barack Obama’s 2016 speech to the UN contained references to “our common humanity”, but “humanism” was never mentioned. The humanistic impulse to his speech was something needing to be recognized rather than something that was revealed. The fact that humanism can be implied is important because the effects of this might be a disposition towards the common good but also, and potentially at the same time, a continuation of an ethnocentric but presumed universalism. Put another way, even though humanism might be seen to have an ethico-political character, this does not mean it is always in service of the good. European humanism’s relationship to colonialism is a case in point. Either way, as I’ve argued in this section, humanism is persistent and its legacy has continued to influence areas such as development policy and that of global bodies interested in education such as UNESCO.

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate that the various humanisms that have been forged and formed from within their particular historical contexts are also, therefore, articulated with education in varying ways. At times, it appears appropriate to talk of a distinctly humanistic education. In the case of Rousseau, for example, his educational program can be thought of as
being humanistic in terms of its foundational philosophy and desired end. Often, however, it might be more accurate to talk of an education that has been powerfully shaped by humanism, such as that of the critical pedagogues. Further still, it is possible to talk of a humanism that has itself been shaped by education. If we are to think of the Renaissance emphasis on the study of classic culture and its values, we are able to see how the education agenda itself gives rise to a kind of recovery of humanism. In other words, the particular Renaissance form of humanism may not have flourished were it not for the role education played. And, finally, we have seen the way in which humanism’s persistence amidst historical change sees it emerge even today. The legacy of humanism can be seen in Barack Obama’s 2016 speech to the UN as well as UNESCO’s recent educational focus under Irina Bokova’s. Yet, Elfert suggests, ‘UNESCO’s role in educational global governance’ has not had significant influence within the global policy space ‘because the ontology UNESCO stands for, humanism, lost out in the “struggle of ideas”…between the humanistic and economic worldviews’ (2015, np).Thus, despite the traces of its legacy, since the latter part of the twentieth century, the viability of humanism has come into question. This is particularly true on theoretical or philosophical grounds, but also on historico-spatial grounds. It is this issue of humanism’s viability that will be the focus of the next chapter.
Chapter 3: Humanism: recent challenges

In the previous chapter, I proposed that humanism has taken various forms in response to different historical conditions within Western history. Furthermore, I have suggested that a humanistic legacy can be found in some contemporary development thinking and global education policy. Yet, while humanism continues to influence the way we think and act, it could also be argued that its influence has waned in more recent times. Towards the end of chapter two, I claimed that humanism’s influence these days is often implicit. In much that is written and spoken today, as in the case of the Barack Obama’s 2016 Address to the UN, the word “humanism” is often not even mentioned. It could be argued that this is, in part, a result of the various challenges that have been leveled at humanism since WWII. In this chapter, then, I provide a brief overview of some of these challenges to humanism – structuralism/poststructuralism, feminist, animal and environmental studies – as they have been enunciated in Western theory. I will finish the section, however, by positing that all of these critiques miss an important element that postcolonial theory brings to the suite of challenges to humanism: the significance of geographic and cultural difference within historical dynamics of power.

Providing an overview of intellectual positions critical of humanism is no simple task. If it is the case that humanism is unable to be understood as a monolithic concept or entity, then the same is true of its “other”. While the history of humanism I have provided above relates primarily to its construction within philosophy (especially as it relates to education), a more literary history of humanism, for example, could have been undertaken. Again, when it comes to anti-humanisms, part of what makes a description of them difficult is that they take different shapes according to disciplinary, historical, and personal specificities. This not only makes a brief overview of the critiques of humanism difficult to begin (where to start?), it also ensures that it will be incomplete and is at risk of generalization. Moreover, while in the previous section I have provided my particular historical rendering of humanism as it has emerged in the history of Western education, what I present in this section are some of the important challenges to humanism more generally. That is to say, I am not here trying to relate philosophical critiques of humanism
in a specific way to the account of humanism I have just provided, but to understand in a more basic way how humanism has been challenged in recent times.

It seems to me that critiques of humanism over the past four decades have tended to take aim at a particular version of Western Enlightenment humanism and its notion of (and way of conceiving) the human subject. Thus, despite the varying foci of anti-humanist thinkers, it can be argued that the humanist subject is at the heart of all critiques. Indeed, this is affirmed by Avtar Brah (1996) when she notes the different political and disciplinary concerns that inform critiques of the humanist conception of the subject. She writes that ‘In the post-World War II period the projects of post-structuralism, feminism, anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, and anti-racism have all, in one form or another, taken serious issue with the universalising truth claims of grand narratives of history which place the European “Man” at its centre’ (pp.119-120). Thus, while the human subject is a problem, the primary reasons for this problem vary for the feminist critic on the one hand and, for example, the literary theorist on the other.

Moreover, I actually prefer to use the language of “challenge” to indicate the focus of this section, rather than “critique”. Critiques of humanism are embedded within these challenges, but whereas critique suggests a direct engagement with a particular philosophical issue, challenges to a notion or historical construct such as humanism may take a more general form than critique. For the sake of brevity and clarity, but at the risk of crude generalizations, I have chosen to focus on just three illustrations of the challenges presented to humanism: poststructuralism, universalism and anthropocentrism. These have been chosen partly because each is important to the history of anti-humanistic scholarship and because, while they present different specific interests within this scholarship, there is overlap between them in regards to some of the core concerns about the humanist project. I will consider poststructuralism as a

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17 What I do not wish to do, however, is suggest by “challenge” an adversarial humanist v anti- or posthumanist kind of scenario. Rather, this section is about trying to “get at” some of the problems faced by humanism that may challenge its viability and/or desirability in today’s world, and into the future. I have already in the opening of this section suggested that the overview and analysis ensuing here is selective and cursory and, thus, at risk of over-generalization. I have, therefore, as far as possible, attempted to note the fact of plural perspectives while also seeking to focus on generally accepted criticisms, and particular problems, relevant to this thesis’ focus on humanism. I do not wish to tar all poststructuralists, feminists or posthumanists with the same brush. I do not wish to suggest complete consistency either across or within these groups. I also need to acknowledge that I cannot lay claim to being fully conversant with the wide-ranging perspectives within each of these discourses. Thus, the comment I make in this section is in relation to those with whom I am best acquainted.
demonstration of the significance of the onto-epistemological shift poststructuralism provides. The section on universalism will focus on the “case” of feminism while the problem of anthropocentrism will be considered through a discussion of critiques arising primarily from the disciplines of animal and environmental studies.

Poststructuralism and the critique of humanism

The “post-turn” within the humanities and social-sciences since the 1970s has without doubt been significant. This is certainly the case with respect to poststructuralism. While it is not possible to continually trace the antecedents to each intellectual movement or innovation, it is necessary to acknowledge the significance of structuralism as providing the backdrop to poststructuralism. This is particularly important given the focus on humanism and the challenges it has encountered since the 1960s. In this section, I will very briefly comment on the ways in which poststructuralism and its predecessor brought humanism into question and influenced critical theory more broadly. I have chosen to do this because it is the philosophical and methodological implications of poststructuralism, I suggest, which most clearly provide the resources for certain areas of scholarship such as feminism, animal and environmental studies to mount their challenge to the supposed hegemony of humanist assumptions in Western theory.

The understanding of the world according to structuralism precipitated a rejection of the humanist notion of “man” as a detached being existing in a manner abstracted from other social and material realities. For theorists such as Levi-Strauss, Crossley (2005) points out, it is the underlying structures that govern “man's” being in the world that should be the object of analysis in social-science, not “man” himself (pp.125-126). While structuralism does not reject the search for general laws or the originary linguistic or social infrastructure, it does reject the idea that one might refer to a center, a metaphysical origin, or a privileged subject (Choat, 2010, pp.11-14). It is in this way that the “man” of humanism in these critics' minds was dissolved or decentered. That is, “man” is considered as one part of a complex ensemble of relations, not as the privileged center which determines the rest. In this sense, history as the unfolding of human life towards a certain end is also left behind by the structuralists who prefer to focus their analytic
attention on the “system”. Thus, while poststructuralists maintained a certain kind of antihumanism as developed by the structuralists, they reject both “structure” and “system” as bearers of the “ultimate reality” behind the “apparent world”. Coupled to this, poststructuralists therefore deny the presumption that scientific, objective, analysis can be used to reveal the apparent “ultimate reality”. Given this fundamental disagreement on ontology, I would suggest that poststructuralism – more so than structuralism – represents a significant onto-epistemological shift within the humanities and social sciences.

The specific sites of contest within the struggle between humanism and poststructuralism are determined by the various concerns of individual critics and theorists. Nevertheless, in my view, it is not unreasonable to suggest that issues of metaphysics and knowledge lie behind many of the perceived problems with humanism. Goldblatt (2005) asks the question – provocatively or, perhaps, disingenuously – can humanists talk to poststructuralists? In clearing the definitional ground before making his case, Goldblatt suggests that a humanist is ‘a person who believes that human beings can formulate true or false opinions about a reality that exists independently of their thoughts and language’ (p.57). Thus, on this account, humanism requires a commitment to transcendentalism and empiricism. That is, it is transcendental insofar as truth exists in something outside of social reality and is empirical insofar as these a priori truths are discovered through their correspondence with “real life” evidence. This metaphysical and epistemological position is contrasted with that of the poststructuralist who, Goldblatt asserts, is ‘a person who believes that the perception of a reality existing independently of thought and language is illusory, that what the humanist perceives as reality is in fact a linguistic construct of the phenomena of subjective experience’ (p.57). While I am not convinced by his definition, Goldblatt nevertheless identifies something of the constructed, rather than “given”, nature of being according to poststructuralist thinkers. This is both an epistemological and ontological shift. Moreover, perhaps what this indicates is the central problem of the human subject that lies at the heart of this onto-epistemological shift.

If the human subject as construed by humanism is the central focus of critique and is, in a way, the representative of certain ontological and epistemological assumptions, then it is important to
know something of this object of critique. Peters and Marshall (1995) preface their critique of the
humanist subject by describing their understanding of the modern subject central to Western
philosophy. For them, the humanist conception of the subject is ‘pre-figured in Descartes’
Cogito – a fully conscious and transparent “I” immediately present to itself’. The Cartesian
subject, they suggest, acts as a foundation in Western philosophy. This placement of the
individual consciousness as central to the apprehension of the world assures that, ‘within the
Hegelian dialectic as it is promoted in critical education, the individual becomes the subject of
history – and agent of change – as she acts in line with a freely chosen destiny to overcome
oppression’ (emphasis original, p.208). But it is just this separateness from other beings, the
autonomy of the individual human and its assumed rationality that proves problematic ‘within the
context of poststructuralism and postmodernism’ according to Peters and Marshall (p.208).
However, the distinctly poststructuralist critique has wider implications than just the troubling of
the humanist conception of the subject.

Indeed, understood as a response to structuralism, Peters and Burbules (2004) write: ‘We shall
interpret poststructuralism...as a movement that...sought to decenter the “structures”, the
systematicity and scientific status of structuralism, to critique its underlying metaphysics and to
extend it in a number of different directions, while at the same time preserving central elements
of structuralism’s critique of the humanist subject’ (p.8). Thus it can be seen that there is a
broader critique of humanist epistemology and ontology – that is, of the humanist approach to
knowledge and assumptions regarding truth and reality that act as the foundation for the
human(ist) subject. It could be argued, then, that poststructuralism actually represents a
renewed concern in these philosophical matters of knowledge and being. For example, despite
the fact that it is difficult to make overly general claims about poststructuralism, as though it is
some kind of unified school of thought, Harrison (2006) nevertheless suggests, in the context of
poststructuralism’s relationship to continental philosophy, that its interest in ontology is part of
what makes it distinctive. He posits that ‘a revival of ontological questioning’ and radical anti-
essentialism are important distinctive features of poststructuralism. These elements, coupled
with the claim that ‘poststructuralism has a major ethical aspect’, distinguish it, he argues, from
other approaches within the tradition of continental philosophy (p.122). Writing as a geographer,
Harrison focuses less on the “textual turn” of which poststructuralism is a key player (or, in other words, linguistics and literary criticism), and more on the implications of its philosophical shifts for the discipline of geography. Within the context of this thesis’ focus on humanism and education, Harrison’s citation of ontology, essentialism and ethics as key markers of poststructuralism is most useful.

Indeed, as could be argued in respect to the Cartesian characterization of Peters and Marshall above, it would seem that many critiques take aim at a specific ontology of humanism; a (sometimes caricatured) humanism that is described in terms of the Enlightenment or modern rationality. What has tended to happen, perhaps ironically, is that some poststructuralists, despite their commitment to difference and ontologies of becoming have, nevertheless, set their particular versions of anti-humanism against a monolithic Enlightenment humanism. Their object of critique, then, one might argue, is a humanism that represents the reduction of any and all Enlightenment philosophy and theory to the basic idea that humanity is to be understood as white, European and on the triumphal path to absolute autonomy. On the one hand, I want to affirm both this characterization of Enlightenment humanism as basically accurate (if too generalized and simplistic) as well as the necessity of the critique of this humanism. On the other hand, I wish to emphasize the way in which ontology, as a set of philosophical foundational questions of being, should be treated by poststructuralists as something that is always historically contingent (Harrison, 2006, p.122). That is to say, the ontological question of humanism may actually become enlivened by the poststructuralist commitment to understanding terms not as fixed, but contingent.18

This point is related to Harrison’s second key characteristic of poststructuralism: anti-essentialism. He sums this up as seeing ‘meaning and identity’ as ‘effects rather than causes’ (p.122). Another way of understanding this is that there is no essential human identity but, rather, the way in which someone may understand their identity is the effect of a range of influences. This is what poststructuralism tends to refer to as the discursive formation of identity;

18 The problem and irony of poststructuralists committed to anti-essentialism assuming a basically fixed notion of humanism as the object of their critique becomes important towards the end of chapter six in relation to William Spanos’ critique of Edward Said.
that the identification with being a “woman”, for example, is not a given but the result of various discourses that have created this notion of what it means to be “woman”. Again, insofar as humanism is understood along the lines of Kant’s depiction of human Enlightenment requiring each person to execute their innate ability for mature thinking or reasoning, a critique of humanism as essentialist is warranted. Rationalism is often tied to this critique as it becomes that which marks the essential difference between humans and other animals. It also hierarchizes human capabilities thereby setting emotion, desire and intuition as less human. Moreover, though, the problem of essentialism is the way in which it both reduces and universalizes the human and, consequently, excludes those who are not rational (white) man.

It is for this reason that the importance of ethics as a ‘concern for radical otherness and difference’ (Harrison, p.122), in regards to poststructuralism, is of significance. Whatever the ethical claims of humanists might be, if humanism is necessarily tied to a universalism that excludes women, people with intellectual disabilities and the non-European to name a few, then it commits perpetual acts of violence. Thus, assuming the essentialized notion of humanism described in the above paragraph, the poststructuralist concern for radical otherness and difference can be seen to function as a very damaging critique of humanism. Linked to the perspective of anti-essentialism, this concern for difference acts to destabilize any fixed notions of humanity. Moreover, the ethical priority of radical otherness introduces an ontological relationality that troubles the individualistic approach to humanistic education such as that of Rousseau’s as described in *Emile*. This point is, perhaps, more extreme than merely being another version of the humanistic notion of intersubjectivity in, say, Buber’s I-Thou relationship (1970). Whereas Buber might consider the self to be fully realized through its co-constitution with the other, poststructuralism goes even further by questioning the very category of the self. Of course, such a radical deconstruction of the human subject cannot but challenge humanism as an onto-epistemological framework for thinking and acting in the world. Poststructuralism can now be seen as an enormously important historical intervention in critical theory with implications for feminism, critical race theory and postcolonial studies to name a few. It is to the first of these that I now turn.
Feminism and the critique of humanist universalism

To the extent that the core of the Enlightenment humanist project could be seen to be the flourishing of humankind, its problem for women might not be immediately apparent. However, as has already been mentioned, the more distinctively Enlightenment inflection of the humanist project is often articulated as the “triumph of man”. In this phrasing, we may begin to see why feminists began to question humanism as an epistemological and political foundation for their own emancipation. Indeed, humanism, one might argue, represents that which women are seeking emancipation from. That is, some feminists might say, the presuppositions of modern Western humanism are invariably masculine. It must be acknowledged, though, that feminist responses to the maleness of humanism vary for a variety of reasons. There is no way that a complete survey of these different responses can be provided here. Thus, I will primarily focus on discussions surrounding French feminism(s) before highlighting the specific contribution made by poststructuralism.

The French Revolution can be considered an integral starting point for understanding how Western critiques of humanist universalism have developed. This is because the Revolution provides both the conceptual understanding of universalism as located within a political frame and also because the specifically feminist project for recognition and emancipation, while referring to the consequences of the Revolution, is hindered by the masculinist terms in which the Revolution was conceived. Naomi Schor (1995) interprets, through Bourdieu, the French Revolution as central to notions of universalism. Within French intellectual life, the universalism linked to the rights of citizen and man is seen as both key to its national identity and originary for other notions of universalism. C.F. Scott (2006) writes that France’s ‘national particularity is to embody the universal’ (p.208) and from this particular sense of the universal, other models may emerge such as a North American one. Locating it in the Revolution of 1789, French universalism is marked in a decidedly political manner with individual citizenship of the nation being central to what constitutes the universal human. Indeed, J.W. Scott (1988) writes, ‘The abstractions of individual and nation were the key to a distinctively French concept of universalism’ (p.34). When one considers what the assumed implications of political citizenship
might be for individuals, the importance to feminism of this particular way of historicizing universalism becomes immediately clear.

The problem for early feminists is, of course, that something as basic as voting rights was not extended to women and, therefore, by extension, woman was necessarily excluded from attaining the status as (fully) human. Thus, we are confronted by the paradox of just how dehumanizing this universal notion of humanism was for women. Indeed, once certain characteristics such as rationality and sex are constitutive of what it means to be human in a universal sense, the oppressive nature of universalism becomes abundantly apparent. So then, the feminist critique uncovers the extent to which the humanist notion of the person is determined by patriarchal hegemony. Within the context of post-revolutionary France, as Nayar (2014) points out, ‘the “universal” human, the French feminist philosophers complain, is invariably coded as male’ (p.16). This coding makes the entrance of the woman into the sphere of the human impossible according to Schor (1995) who argues, ‘It is not because of some deficiency remediable by education that women shy away from a tête-à-tête with the “given” but because men have preempted this cozy dialogue’ (p.7). In other words, women have faced a lack of access to the universal by virtue of their not being men. Indeed, the existence of the universal human is reliant on the male gaze that confines women according to how this gaze fixes woman as domestic, non-rational and “other” to men.

It should be apparent that there is a need for abstraction within the kind of liberal, Enlightenment humanism critiqued by feminists. Indeed, Ahmed (1996) argues that ‘Liberal humanism has a definite and important link with a universalist epistemology and ethics, insofar as it presupposes that universal rights have their foundation in the subject as a self-identity that is prior to the contingent realms of history and culture’ (pp.73-74). To construct a notion of the human subject prior to history and culture is, for Ahmed, part of the way in which the universalizing of the human functions as an ideological legitimation of power. For many feminists, then, the “project” of humanism itself, seemingly inextricably tied to an androcentric universal notion of the human, is to be rejected. In fact, C.F. Scott goes so far as to suggest that ‘the abandonment of humanism’ is ‘explicit in the feminist critique of the universal…’ (p.207). Insofar as the ontology
of humanism is deemed to exclude woman, the call for its abandonment appears most understandable and possibly even necessary as a matter of justice.

Another way in which feminists have undertaken their critique of the universalism of humanism is through the use of the tools of poststructuralism. Indeed, Hekman (2013) argues that a major theme for French feminists such as Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and Helene Cixous is ‘the rejection of modernist dualisms’ (p.103). Thus, if feminism prior to the textual turn risked its own universalization of woman as the binary opposition to man, feminists working from within poststructuralism since the late twentieth century have mounted an even more significant critique of universalism. Affirming this narrative, Dean (2009) argues that one aspect of poststructuralism’s influence on feminism was its move ‘from a universalizing, parochial second wave to an internationalist, open and diverse “third wave”’ (p.337). From this perspective, it was not the category of the universal itself that was criticized by second wave feminists, but the exclusion of women from the category of the universal. So, for some, it is not until poststructuralism’s undoing of metaphysical fixities that feminist scholarship presents a genuine critique of universalism and, consequently, humanism.

When Nash (2002) writes that ‘...the mistrust of universalism is generally associated with feminist readings of postmodernism and poststructuralism’ (p.415), I read her as referring to exactly this kind of critique of not just Enlightenment humanism, but also the initial feminist critique of it. Poststructuralist feminism is particularly concerned with exclusions that occur when internal differences are not properly acknowledged. For example, perhaps the most influential feminist in the Anglo-American tradition, Judith Butler writes that her ‘task is, I think, significantly different from that which would articulate a comprehensive universality. In the first place, such a totalizing notion could only be achieved at the cost of producing new and further exclusions’ (2013, p.40). Thus, an attempt to develop a universal feminist program would, it seems, come at the cost of excluding something or someone else. One of the key concerns for Butler in regards to this is the exclusion of non-heterosexual women, and another is the exclusion of non-Western women. A major element of Butler’s theory is to denaturalize all identity categorizations through arguing for the discursive formation of subjects, rather than seeing the categories of
man and woman as pre-given. Once it is accepted that subjects are formed discursively, it becomes easier to see the effects of difference in breaking down the binary logic of modernist feminist discourse.

Joan Scott explains that, in her attempt to find a theory that most adequately responds to the problems faced by feminists, poststructuralism provided ‘a new way of analyzing constructions of meaning and relationships of power that called unitary, universal categories into question’ (1988, p.33). Scott argues that poststructuralism’s interest in “difference” functions to trouble the assumed binaries of structuralist epistemology such as, man/woman. Yet, she makes clear, ‘the alternative to the binary construction of sexual difference is not sameness, identity, or androgyny. By subsuming women into a general “human” identity’, she argues, ‘we lose the specificity of female diversity and women’s experiences’ (p.45). Such a situation, for Scott, would be to return to universal notions that always prioritize man. She thus relies on poststructuralist commitments, both to the questioning received norms (deconstruction) and to difference\(^{19}\) as a way to avoid the perpetual return to fixed, unitary notions of man and woman. The significance of undoing the equality/difference binary for Scott relates to the fact that the binary perpetuates the notion that ‘women cannot be identical to men in all respects’ and, therefore, ‘we cannot expect to be equal to them’ (p.46). This is why poststructuralist feminists insist on difference, not just between but also within sexes, as the ‘refusal’ of the assumed “truth” of universalized and reified categories of difference. In refusing the equality/difference discourse, feminists seek ‘an equality that rests on differences – differences that confound, disrupt, and render ambiguous the meaning of any fixed binary opposition (p.48). When difference as heterogeneity (that which deals with the unassimilable) becomes the norm rather than homogeneity, as well as an ontological perspective that prioritizes the irreducibility of categories, universalist notions appear to become untenable. In the context of humanism, then, the question emerges as to whether feminists are able to remain humanist after the critique of universalism.

\(^{19}\) There are varying notions of “difference” within poststructuralism. Poststructuralist scholars will emphasize particular notions of difference in their work to varying degrees. Here, I mean to include both the idea of identities being the result of discursive formations and, therefore, not fixed as well as the notion of difference being a “difference within”. As I will briefly discuss in the following discussion in the main text, this notion refers to the idea that the subject is constituted by difference, as are categories such as “woman” etc.
Anthropocentrism, animals, antihumanism and the Anthropocene

While feminists have taken issue with what they perceived as the male coding of universalistic claims regarding the human subject within Enlightenment humanism, other critics were concerned not only with the gendered mark of humanism but the ways in which humans have been positioned as superior in relation to other (forms of) life. The problem of humanity’s sense of superiority has ancient roots. It is not particularly contentious to claim that God’s designation of humanity as rulers over animals in the Hebrew Bible’s book of Genesis has significantly contributed to humans’ poor treatment of non-human animal (and plant) life.20 The hierarchical setup of “man over beast” has functioned to place humans just below God, with all other life existing for the needs and desires of humanity. This basic idea, some would argue, is core to humanism. Scholars concerned with animal-human relations have, over the last thirty or more years, sought to establish an ontology that, if not erases, at least makes almost illegible the boundaries between humans and other animals. Pressures from both an ethical interest in animal life as well as philosophical antifoundationalism have contributed to this destabilizing of humanist assumptions about constitutional differences between humans and non-human animals.

Central to the concerns of these theorists are what they consider to be hard lines drawn between the human species and other animal species. What the example of scholars with an interest in animal studies provides, then, is an illustration of the critique of anthropocentrism. Braidotti (2013) writes that the ‘posthuman dimension of post-anthropocentrism…[deconstructs] species supremacy, but it also inflicts a blow to any lingering notion of human nature, anthropos and bios, as categorically distinct from the life of animals and non-humans’ (p.65). Like many others indebted to Deleuze, her ontological stance affirms the ‘nature-culture continuum’ which amounts to ‘a colossal hybridization of the species’ (p.65). This commitment to post-

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20 This is not to say that biblical scholars are agreed on the kind of philosophical anthropology that can be derived from the text. It is also not to say that this “human superiority” trend in history is one that has been advocated by many biblical and theological scholars. Rather, the point is that there is not a lot of dispute that a popular notion of human superiority derived from the Book of Genesis has been a historical reality. A number of the issues surrounding this matter are given critical consideration here: Mosher, Annette. (2016). Christianity, Covenant, and Nature. Baptistic Theologies, 8(1), 62-72.
anthropocentrism is about the displacement of ‘the notion of species hierarchy and of a single, common standard for “Man” as the measure of all things’ (p.67). Indeed, Wolfe (2009) argues that animal studies, in its intersection with posthumanism, returns us to ‘the thickness and finitude of human embodiment and to human evolution as itself a specific form of animality, one that is unique and different from other forms but no more different, perhaps, than an orangutan is from a starfish’ (p.572). What this amounts to is a critique of what Haraway (2008) terms ‘human exceptionalism’. This exceptionalism, she writes, ‘is the premise that humanity alone is not a spatial and temporal web of interspecies dependencies’ (p.11). Thus, the decentering of the human here is one that seeks to note its similarity to, and interdependency with, other animal forms.

This decentering of ‘Man’, many critics would agree, is both necessary (empirically) and desirable (ethically). Indeed, the arrogance of anthropocentrism can be seen as a key contributor to environmental destruction and maltreatment of animals. Nevertheless, there is decidedly less agreement as to the extent to which the lines demarcating human from non-human animals should be erased. That is, it is one thing to “humiliate” Man, it is another thing to destroy him altogether. Some within animal studies, identifying with the antihumanist tradition, nevertheless seek to maintain ontological distinctions between human and non-human animals while others, as is evidenced from the quote from Wolfe above, acknowledge the distinct forms of animality. It is not clear, however, as to the difference that this distinction makes. That is to say, those seeking to set the human alongside other entities (a kind of ontological relationality) not only aim to extinguish an ethical hierarchy prioritizing humans over other life, but also attempt to make a significant epistemological shift away from anthropocentric assumptions and representation. Wolfe (2010) writes, ‘Just because we direct our attention to the study of nonhuman animals, and even if we do so with the aim of exposing how they have been misunderstood and exploited, that does not mean that we are not continuing to be humanist – and therefore, by definition, anthropocentric’ (p.99). Indeed, elsewhere Wolfe (2009) writes that the philosophy of someone like Peter Singer ‘tacitly extends a model of human subjectivity to animals, who possess our kind of personhood in diminished form’ (p.572). Thus, while someone such as Singer is clearly seeking to expose the exploitation of animals, his commitment to
representing the nonhuman in human terms fails to sufficiently erase the boundaries between species for scholars such as Wolfe and Braidotti. There is a sense, then, that in the attempt to affirm *zoe* over *bios* – which, as Agamben (1998) puts it, is to affirm ‘the simple fact of living common to all living beings’ over ‘the form or way of living proper to an individual or a group’ – the result can too easily become a myopic concern with ‘simple natural life’ (p.9). In other words, rather than not just acknowledging but also affirming the notion of ‘a particular way of life’, those seeking to situate the human in an horizontal relation to nonhuman life could be said to view life reductively, thereby essentially ameliorating any acknowledged species distinctiveness to the cause of the triumph of *zoe* over *bios*.

The extent of the significance of this kind of posthumanist posthumanism (Wolfe, 2010, pp.124-126) is related to the degree to which ontological, epistemological and methodological commitments based on humanist assumptions are critiqued and to which an attempt is made to leave them behind. Insofar as this brief overview of the critique of humanism within animal studies takes as its focus the problem of anthropocentrism, we are able to see how scholars such as Haraway, Braidotti and Wolfe – in their own particular ways – seek to leave behind the human(ist) subject altogether. Braidotti (2013), for example, focuses instead on the critical posthuman subject whom she defines ‘within an eco-philosophy of multiple belongings, as a relational subject constituted in and by multiplicity, that is to say a subject that works across differences and is also internally differentiated’ (p.49). Based on an ‘ethics of becoming’, Braidotti’s posthuman subject is not unitary but nomadic. She views this kind of articulation as a repudiation of humanism that is invested in a unitary understanding of the individual, rational and secular subject. It is an ontology that is relational, promoting ‘an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human or ‘earth’ others by removing the obstacle of self-centered individualism’ (pp.49-50). So too, Donna Haraway’s attempt to overcome human exceptionalism by showing that the ‘Great Divides of animal/human, nature/culture, organic/technical, and wild/domestic flatten into mundane differences’ (2008, p.15), is based on her particular critique of humanism as something which sees ‘the colonized, the enslaved, the noncitizen, and the animal’ as ‘Others to rational man’ (p.18). Thus, in showing the inter-connectivity and essential relatedness of human and non-human animals
within zoe, posthumanist and animal studies scholars have presented a significant challenge to humanist assumptions of the centrality of the individual self.

In more recent times, increasing concerns about the state of the environment – particularly as it is affected by climate change – have led scholars to call for a posthumanist future. The seeming paradox or tension, if not contradiction, in much of this thinking is that the critique of humanism takes place within the discourse on the Age of the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene refers to the transition ‘out of the Holocene and into the next geologic epoch in the earth’s history’ based on the view that human impact on the earth has been so profound as to be considered a ‘geological force’ (Rousell, 2016, p.139). The tension, then, might be seen in the way in which the centrality of the human – even if as a point of departure or reference – appears to be necessary to the critique of the dominant human. In one sense, of course, there is no serious problem here. Humanity’s dominance has been the cause of environmental disaster so, the logic goes, we should leave humanist notions behind and reposition the human according to a different relationship to the planet. In doing so, we might avoid the continuation of the deleterious effects that humans are causing, such as climate change. In a sense, scholars concerned about the effects of the Anthropocene presuppose a critique of the kind of humanism that anticipates the “triumph of man”. Indeed, these critics are likely to highlight the failures of humanity.

The decentering of the human, in another sense, however, appears to be impossible within the critical discourse focused on the Anthropocene. The fact seems to always remain that the very ones asking questions about the effects of climate change, or theorizing such notions as the Anthropocene, or seeking different ontologies of the human-non-human-more-than-human are, in fact, humans. In other words, the extent to which a properly decentered human is possible epistemologically and ontologically could be viewed as somewhat doubtful. It is not difficult to imagine thinking about the human as always and already interdependent with her surrounds. It is also not so difficult to imagine thinking about the human as intimately connected to the non-human in an ontologically important way. But it may not be so easy, it seems to me, to imagine the human as no longer a viable construct in its own right. That is, even in thinking about
ontologies of relation, it tends to be that we are thinking of distinct entities in relation. It is the blurring of these distinctions that posthumanist theorizing is often attempting to manufacture as I have argued above in regards to Braidotti et al. But, as I have just suggested, the fact that a distinct entity known as the human is doing the thinking and acting in response to the “problem of the human” renders the dissolving of the human-non-human boundaries – into some kind of assemblage perhaps – at the very least problematic.

Moreover, as Jason W. Moore (2014) has argued, the dominant story regarding the emergence of the Anthropocene is one that ‘tells us that the origins of the modern world are to be found in England, right around the dawn of the nineteenth century’ (p.2). This is the time of coal and steam and it is the human production and use of these energy sources that has precipitated the state of the world that gives life to the notion of the Anthropocene. Such a story, Moore implies, is both Eurocentric and anthropocentric. Further still, it is a story which understands the driving force behind steam and coal not to be class, capital, imperialism or even culture but ‘Anthropos: humanity as an undifferentiated whole’ (p.2). According to this argument, there is a certain cultural-blindness and class-based or political indifference that informs the dominant conceptualization of the Anthropocene. In other words, geographical differences and the dominance and problems of empire since the 1450s are ignored for a more all-encompassing narrative of humanity-at-large being the cause of the current environmental crisis. Of course, such a view risks both the kind of universalization and essentialization that we have seen has been at the heart of the critique of Enlightenment humanism.

What makes such a formulation of the Anthropocene even more peculiar, perhaps, is when the posthumanist blurring of ontological boundaries is invoked at the same time as the declaration that we are in the Age of the Anthropocene. Tamar Sharon (2013), for example, writes that ‘radical posthumanism sees the blurring of boundaries that emerging bio- and enhancement technologies involve, between the human and the non-human, the natural and the technological, as potentially liberating’ (p.29). The blurring of boundaries liberates us, Sharon contends, from ‘the liberal humanist project, in which the claim for an ontological difference between humans and the rest was a discursive practice that functioned to…”absolutize
difference between the human and the non-human” (p.29). But is it possible to be both a posthumanist in this sense and advocate for the identification of this moment in history as that of the Anthropocene? Is there not a logical contradiction at play? Perhaps the answer is “well, it depends”. It depends on what is meant ontologically by posthumanism.

In trying to delineate the various forms of posthumanism that have emerged out of the ontological turn, Wolfe (2010) suggests that one can be a posthumanist historian, for example, by ‘taking seriously the existence of nonhuman subjects and the consequent compulsion to make the discipline [of history] respond to the question of nonhuman animals’ (p.123) but still remain humanist insofar as the ontological distinction between the human and nonhuman remains. Thus, Wolfe suggests that it is possible to engage in intellectual work that might be considered ‘humanist humanism’, ‘humanist posthumanism’, a ‘posthumanist humanism’ or ‘posthumanist posthumanism’ (p.125). Based on this schema, one might well be posthumanist to the extent that a kind of ‘human exceptionalism’ is decentered to allow for greater complementarity between species, and the recognition of interdependence. However, this same person might understand this relationality between the human and the non-human according to a hard line distinction between the two. Braidotti (2013) makes a complex and somewhat audacious attempt to maintain a distinction between the human and the nonhuman while simultaneously merging them. She writes:

in my view, the point about posthuman relations, however, is to see the inter-relation human/animal as constitutive of the identity of each. It is a transformative or symbiotic relation that hybridizes and alters the “nature” of each one and foregrounds the middle grounds of their interaction. This is the “milieu” of the human/non-human continuum… (pp.79-80)

The language of continuum seems to me to be used as a way to make it possible to maintain a sense of the distinctions between human and non-human that are apparent to all of us, while making clear that the distinctions are about a difference within, not between. It is a monistic ontology that represents a challenge to the divide between nature and culture. On all these fronts, I am largely sympathetic to Braidotti’s position. However, there remains for me the question of who is involved in making (rational) choices about what to do with our posthuman predicament in the Anthropocene. If the human is thought of as on a nature-culture continuum
that includes the non-human, one might still insist that it is the human, who is constitutively different from the non-human at another point on the continuum, who makes decisions. In this sense, then, it is not clear how seeing human and non-human entities as interrelated and interdependent does more than displace the human from a position of arrogance. If the flat ontology of proponents of Actor Network Theory (ANT), for example, were to question the essential difference of human and non-human entities, this might be a different matter. But it would appear that even in a flat ontology, the distinctions remain.21 Nevertheless, while the human subject remains in some form, it is clear that the scholarship emanating from posthumanists and those concerned about the Anthropocene challenge the specifically Enlightenment notion of the humanist subject. The question is, to what extent?

Summing up the challenges faced by humanism

This section has been an attempt to show how some of the theoretical work (largely within the humanities) that has gained prominence since the 1960s has begun to bring the entire notion of Western humanism and its assumptions into question. Many poststructuralists, such as those who have received selective attention in this chapter, journeyed with structuralists in going further than existentialists by denying the very idea of human essence, not just identifying existence as prior to essence. Their critique of a structuralist rendering of the world in favor of a more contingent notion of reality and truth creates a significant problem for a humanism that has been understood on the basis of the human being fixed, essentialized and universal. However, even as the short version of the history of humanistic education in the West I provided earlier suggests, a degree of malleability to contextual changes seems to be characteristic of humanism. Undoubtedly, modern humanism assumed a basically unitary conception of the self and poststructuralism’s fragmenting of this should be cause to question humanism at its core. Yet, one of the chief problems for critics of humanism who are also poststructuralist lies in the way the object of criticism is often represented by them. To the extent that Enlightenment

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21 In Actor Network Theory (ANT), this flat ontology that places human and non-human entities on a continuum challenges the human exceptionalism of Enlightenment humanism, perhaps, but does not challenge human distinctiveness. Pellizzoni (2015), writes: ‘ANT’s case for a flat ontology looks also less radical than it may seem when one reflects on how it pivots on a neat distinction between human and nonhuman entities. The latter, as we have seen, are assumed to need appropriate human spokespersons to deploy their agency in full’ (p.96).
humanism is often assumed as the humanism, not merely one form of humanism, it becomes a notion that is fixed by the critics themselves. The poststructuralist commitment to contingency and ongoing discursive formations, however, should function to de-essentialize this humanism. Such a move allows poststructuralist critics to challenge humanism for its pretense of fixity without rejecting it outright because of this pretense. This is not to say that the poststructuralist critique cannot find other objections, but that the critique of essentialism may not be able to be maintained if humanism is rearticulated as a changing idea and practice.

This point is also important in regards to the feminist challenge to humanism. It must be acknowledged that the universal idea of man lying at the heart of Enlightenment humanism was sheer hubris. It must also be understood that the problem for feminists is not one of mere sex – of anatomical difference – but of cultural politics. That is, it is the gendered way in which core, universal characteristics of the ideal human were portrayed in Enlightenment humanism that create the problem. To prioritize man is also to prioritize rationality. The logic is, then, that in order to become fully human, to progress beyond the state of immaturity, one must become more rational, reasonable, cognitive. And to do this, a woman needs to be more like a man. Given that this is conceptualized in the modern era abstractly, it functions as a form of legitimating power, ensuring that woman's task will always be to become more like man or be subordinate to him. If this is what lies at the heart of humanism, a rejection of it by women is most understandable and should be welcomed. However, if it is true that there are other important and ethical characteristics of humanism, including the very practice of critique in which feminists were engaged, the question becomes one of how permanently tied humanism might be to its androcentrism. Is it really the case that humanism cannot be itself without the dominance of man over woman? This remains an open question. However, as discussed above, it is the coupling of feminist criticism of androcentrism with poststructuralist critique of essentialism that presents a greater challenge to humanism as a viable notion today. Indeed, this is a challenge that humanists need to take seriously as a matter of justice.

I have discussed this already and merely want to make the point here that it might be argued that once Western feminists began to question their ethnocentric blindness, their critique of
humanism’s universalism gained greater impact. The problem, perhaps, was the extent to which many feminists “became” so “poststructuralist” that critique itself became problematic. That is, once categories such as woman became so ambivalent and ethereal to the point of being almost entirely evacuated of meaning, there was the risk that any moral and political critique was not only dubious, but more simply lacking a clear object. What I am referring to is the notion – and I would say problem – that some scholars have identified as “nothing being outside the text”. So, then, it is when the political particularities of, for example, race, are brought together with feminism that both the poststructuralist sensitivity and commitment to difference, and the political imperative for change, present a greater challenge to humanism. This is part of the reason why I will be arguing that the postcolonial challenge to humanism is so important.

The feminist critique of humanism continues, nevertheless, to privilege the human over other beings. Scholars engaged in environmental and animal rights issues locate anthropocentrism as central to the problem of humanism. Early antihumanists in this area sought to show how the arrogance of “man” had done huge harm to the environment and other animal species. With time, the decentering of the human within this work has been more concerned with positioning the human in relation to the non-human. The critique of anthropocentrism has moved from an antihumanism to a posthumanism which seems to be increasingly blurring the line between human animals and non-human animals. There is no doubt that this ontological position, where the existence of a distinct animal known as the human is less certain, presents an immense challenge to humanism. However, the challenge does rely on the affirmation of this very radical view. While this kind of posthumanism is gaining in prominence, the radical provincialization of the human is fraught with potential contradictions. To what extent is the arrogance of human exceptionalism in traditional humanism taken to the extreme by a posthumanism that reconstructs “reality” as an assemblage, making claims about the position

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22 Here, I am not referring to what Derrida meant by this, but how the phrase has been (mis)appropriated to mean that “reality” is purely discursive. My own reading of Derrida in relation to this phrase is more sympathetic to its political potential and worldly meaning. My view is that Derrida was alluding to the relationship between text and context. That is, context (the outside of the text) is implicated in the text and, therefore, cannot be considered outside of it.

23 It should be clarified that antihumanism and posthumanism are not coextensive. It is not necessary for a posthumanist to be antihumanist though, as Braidotti notes in regards to her own journey, many who now consider themselves posthumanist once considered themselves antihumanists. So, while some posthumanists may still be committed to an antihumanist position, it is a matter of choice rather than determination.
and agency of non-human others in this ontology? Whatever inclusive language may be used, and however much posthumanist scholars may seek to declare the ways in which non-human entities are given greater agency in a flat ontology, it seems to me that what remains is that it is the human subject making these pronouncements and representations. So while the privileging of humans morally and as agents of change certainly needs to be challenged, it remains very unclear to me whether or not the trajectory which this critique has taken is actually able to displace the human in the way intended.

It might be worth briefly considering this in relation to the problem of categorical distinctions. Indeed, the different ways in which categorical distinctions can be made will become important to the argument of this thesis. At the level of ontology, one might wish to make a categorical distinction between the human and non-human. However, I have suggested that posthumanist ontologies might be seen as, at a minimum, complicating this distinction through a commitment to a flat, relational ontology that is inclusive of human and non-human entities as an assemblage. In this scenario, where the categorical distinction between the human and non-human is in some way denied, it might seem reasonable to assume that humanism as a category is no longer viable. However, it is possible to deny the ontological distinction between humans and non-humans and to still make a distinction at an ethico-political or moral level. Here, a conceptual (rather than “real”) distinction between the human and the non-human might be made for pragmatic reasons. This pragmatism might be rather ordinary, such as a case in which one speaks of a distinct entity known as “the human” purely for the sake of sense when having everyday conversations. But the pragmatic distinction may also be made for more deliberate and consequential reasons. To make an ethical distinction allows one to consider different ways of relating to the human and the non-human. This need not, though, equate to difference on a vertical, hierarchical scale. Rather, these distinctions that might be made between the human and the non-human could be thought of in terms of horizontality. Thus, ethical or moral decisions are not determined by a hierarchy but, for example, according to functional or political differences and contexts.
It is, perhaps, helpful to conceptualize this by considering differences within the category of the human. Here, one might acknowledge the ontological “sameness” of all human beings. This ontological sameness, however, need not result in the equal treatment of all human beings, in all situations and at all times. Such an abstract notion of human relationality simply does not correspond to the empirical facts. A baby might be considered to be equal to an adult in a moral sense (that is, on the vertical scale), but the distinction that is made between the baby and the adult has significant consequences for how that baby is treated, cared for and nurtured. Moreover, the nature of this relationship changes over time and in different contexts. Thus, even within a supposedly stable category in which fundamental dignity and worth is undifferentiated, other distinctions may be made. In regards to humanism, then, it is possible that there are contextual, pragmatic and ethical reasons for it to continue to function as a moral resource, even if the ontological distinction between the human and non-human has been denied.

Nevertheless, despite being diverse even within the limits of their own discourse, the various challenges to humanism to which I have referred in this chapter remain salient. Furthermore, they have grown, changed and given way to new sets of critical discourse such as the posthumanism to which I have given some attention. And, of course, there are still other methodological and theoretical challenges to humanism that have not even been mentioned. One of these, I suggest, has the potential to undo humanism on both empirical and philosophical grounds: postcolonialism. One claim I wish to make is that challenges faced by humanism, such as the ones discussed in this section, for the most part take place within, and continue, the Western theoretical tradition. For this reason alone, these critiques of humanism are limited insofar as their theoretical resources tend to remain trapped within a Western epistemology. The travel of Western thinking, ideas, institutions, manners and more, through colonialism, opens up a very different historical and conceptual terrain. Thus, before briefly outlining the key challenges that postcolonial theorizing has presented to Western humanism, I want to make a brief detour in order to explore this a little further.
Colonial Travel of Humanism: an excursus into the spatial turn

The brief historical positioning of Western humanism within education provided in the previous chapter charts the various manifestations of humanism in a somewhat more traditional sense. That is, while acknowledging the importance of discontinuity, the historicization is, nevertheless, presented according to a temporal register. However, a significant moment in this history is the advent of European colonialism. Importantly, what happens with colonialism does not only relate to the temporal, but also the spatial; humanism’s travel takes place not just chronologically, but geographically. To understand the implications of this geographical conceptualization of Western humanism’s history, it is worthwhile to offer a brief overview of the “spatial turn”, particularly as it relates to the humanities and social sciences. Following this, I will attempt to provide some insight into how a spatial conceptualization of theories, ideas and “moments” (such as colonialism) impacts on the way we might historicize, and continue to think about, humanism. Moreover, this focus on the spatial turn provides an important entry into the specific concern that this thesis has with the postcolonial challenge to humanism.

At the dawn of the final decade of the twentieth century, Edward J. Soja (1989) wrote that ‘an essentially historical epistemology continues to pervade the critical consciousness of modern social theory’ and that its hegemonic status ‘has tended to occlude a comparable critical sensibility to the spatiality of social life’ (pp. 10-11). However, as he notes, the 1980s was a time when the ‘interpretive significance of space in the historically privileged confines of contemporary critical thought’ came to assert itself (p.11). This instance, we might now say, came to constitute the “spatial turn” in critical scholarship. Whether or not historical epistemology – and by this I mean the centrality of temporality – still dominates social theory is a matter for contestation. However, there is little doubt that the significance of geography – place and space – has been playing an important role for some time now. Indeed, Tally (2015) writes that ‘the spatial turn in recent critical theory has highlighted the significance of spatiality in comparative and world literature, among other areas, as the relations between geographical knowledge and cultural productions have been subject to greater scrutiny by scholars in various disciplinary fields’ (p.1). However, as tends to be the case with these things, the so called “spatial turn” has become manifest in varying ways amongst different authors and within distinct
disciplines. Nevertheless, as a minimum, it can at least be posited that matters of location, borders, spatial relationship and movement are important to the spatial turn. For some, spatiality – or geography – assumes a materiality that can become lost in more abstract historical and universalizing accounts of humans’ lived experience. For others, spatial concepts assist when mapping changes in ideas and theories. Moreover, some scholars wish to emphasize the role that place has in identity formation, both individually and collectively. Perhaps an important starting point in understanding the importance of spatiality is evidenced in the following from Frank (2009), reflecting on the significance of Foucault's claim in 1967 that the historical epoch was giving way to that of space: ‘whereas before 1900 things were primarily perceived in terms of a temporal relationship, we tend to focus nowadays more on their relationship in space; the concept of continuity has become increasingly superseded by that of contiguity’ (p.68). I suggest this as a starting point because of the way in which, as a minimum, it signals the significance of relationality, meeting, interaction and engagement.

While not ordinarily recognized in any formal sense as a spatial theorist, Edward Said represents exactly the kind of scholarship that prioritizes place, space, meeting, borders, relationality etc. Indeed, Tally (2015), cites Said as representing 'an important figure' among the most influential scholars 'in the development of spatially oriented cultural criticism' (p.1). Key to Said’s influence, according to Tally, was the way in which he ensured that due attention was given to ‘the geographical and historical registers of both narrative and lived experience’. In this regard, argues Tally, ‘Said was an early trailblazer for critics now working in spatial literary studies’ and is an exemplar of socially situated and politically engaged scholarship’ (p.1). There are two related aspects of Said’s spatially-oriented work that I wish to briefly elaborate here. First, there is his focus on land, place, colonialism and imperialism as markers of an unevenly structured world. This part of Said’s thinking is particularly concerned with the material realities of lived experience. Second, there is the decidedly more text-based (yet still “worldly”) spatiality exemplified by essays such as Traveling Theory (1983). Both of these uses of geographical concepts in Said’s work assist in understanding the political implications of Western humanism’s travel with colonialism. Indeed, given the focus of this thesis, it would be remiss of me if I were to fail to acknowledge the importance of geography to postcolonial criticism. As Teverson &
Upstone (2011) argue in an essay on the spatial turn and postcoloniality, while the increased interest in spatiality within the humanities generally has resulted in greater recognition of ‘the importance of place and location...space has always been central’ in postcolonial studies (emphasis original, p.1). This importance is, to a large degree, attributable to the centrality of Edward Said’s scholarship.24

In an essay whose title nicely captures the key disciplinary markers of much of his work, History, Literature, and Geography, Said elaborates on his use of Gramsci to insert geography into the study of history and literature. That is, Said reads Auerbach’s philology as a task which ‘sees history and literature as somehow informing each other’ (2003, p.457). What this amounts to, methodologically speaking, according to Said, is a ‘system of correspondences between history and literature’ which, he avers, ‘is the cornerstone of a whole tradition of regarding temporality as both the repository of human experience...as well as the mode of understanding by which historical reality can be comprehended’ (p.457). In response to this, the kind of criticism that Said argues is required in the present is one that is better suited to an era in which ‘disjunctive formations and experiences such as women’s history, popular culture, post-colonial and subaltern material’ constitute the content of critique (p.458). It is with these kinds of considerations in mind (that is, considerations of disruptions to what would otherwise be the dominant representations of a temporal project) that Said invokes the work of Gramsci who, he argues, represents ‘a perspective on the relationship between history and culture [that] is mediated and intervened in by a very powerful geographical sense’ (emphasis original, p.458). Part of what this geographical sense does is to ‘complicate’ and render ‘far less effective’ the kind of congruence and continuity assumed in the dominant temporal scheme of correspondence within history and literature.

What Said then proceeds to do, in his reading of Gramsci, is to demonstrate the way in which the geographical intervention is one that is explicitly political, opening textual criticism to the real life experiences of oppression, dispossession etc. This means, in part, that the reading and

24 Of course, places, location and space have also been important to postcolonial studies for the more basic reason that historical colonialism involved travel, territorial conquest and its accompanying displacement of indigenous inhabitants etc. It is, then, of course, out of this lived historical experience of colonialism that colonial discourse studies and postcolonial theory emerge.
writing of texts must be understood in terms of the places and times in which they were received and written. There is, then, an immanence – a “groundedness” – to the text. Said argues that Gramsci presumes ‘that politics and power and collectivity are involved when culture, ideas, and texts are to be studied and/or analyzed. More important, this also applies to the writing of texts – such as his own, which are always situated’ (emphasis original, pp.465 – 466). Of course, the same could be said for Said. There is a powerful imaginative geography that facilitates, and perhaps limits, Said’s work. The politics of Palestine, the birthplace of Said, is an obvious territorial issue that shapes his criticism.

But insofar as geography may act as a limit, I am not seeking to suggest that this limit is a problem. Rather, the limits – the boundaries – imposed by geography actually ensure that the specific matters under analysis are not too easily subsumed under some other, universal, representation of the world. Furthermore, it is the existence of boundaries which allows Said to promote the importance of the critic working from a place of exile. While there is the sense that Said is “out of place” by virtue of his being exiled from his birthplace, he applies the literal, physical sense of exile to the positionality of the critic more generally. As Siassi (2005) notes, ‘the exilic perspective depends more on a degree of intellectual ex-centricity acquired through historical knowledge and humanistic learning’ (p.9). In being ex-centric, the critic is not situated outside the sphere of inquiry but is, rather, located at the periphery, the border. She is, then, both an insider with important knowledge, and an outsider who enjoys a necessary distance to be able to disaffiliate with the dominant culture.

Spatial concepts also influenced the way in which Said thought about the way in which ideas or theories traveled within, and beyond, academic discourse. In his 1983 essay, Traveling Theory, Said defends the argument that ‘like people and schools of criticism, ideas and theories travel – from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another’ (p.226). Utilizing this notion of travel, Said describes four moments in the movement of a theory: 1) that which appears to be the point of origin, or the circumstances in which the theory arose; 2) a distance journeyed through which the theory comes to a different time (history) and place (geography); 3) the theory then passes through ‘conditions of acceptance’ set out by the recipients and/or
resistors of the idea and; 4) the theory arrives in a new time and place, transformed in some way through its travel. What is important here, in regards to this particular thesis, is not only the ensuing argument that Said makes, but the geographical metaphors that facilitate the argument.

After tracing the travel of Lukács’ theory of reification through Lucien Goldmann and Raymond Williams, Said proceeds from the notion of intellectual borrowing and travel to argue that theory ‘can never be complete’ (p.241). What is required, in part, to ensure that theory does not pretend to be ‘unlimited in its strength’, Said argues, is a critical consciousness understood as a ‘spatial sense...for locating or situating theory [so that it] has to be grasped in the place and the time out of which it emerges’ (p.241). This kind of critical consciousness should guard against the totalization of theory. And, as can be evidenced from the following, the language Said uses to describe the work of the critic is often geographical: 'To measure the distance between then and now...such things as the humanities or the great classics ought to be seen as provinces...to map the territory covered…' (p.247). The political implications of this, particularly in regard to colonialism, are given greater treatment in Said’s 2000 essay, Traveling Theory Reconsidered.

In this essay, Said begins by noting that, in his original piece from 1983, part of what he was suggesting was that there was a correlation between the travel of a theory and the lessening of its originary power. That is, the conditions in which Lukács formulated his theory of reification provided it a certain power born of its immediacy and its call to action in regards to a particular political situation (pp.436-437). What Said suggests in this later essay is the way in which a theory can travel to places that allow it a new, perhaps equally politically powerful, context. Specifically in regards to Lukács’ theory of reification, Said argues that his dialectical treatment of subject-object relations results in a reconciliatory move from ‘present misery to future healing’ (p.438). In this essay, Said wants to explore whether or not readers basically sympathetic to Lukács’ theory might yet reject the reconciliatory element to his theory and, in fact, ‘deliberately, programmatically, intransigently’ refuse it’ (p.438). He asks: ‘Would this not be an alternative mode of traveling theory, one that actually developed away from its original formulation, but instead of becoming domesticated...reaffirms its own inherent tensions by moving to another site?’ (emphasis original, p.438). Furthermore, when later in the essay – after an elaboration on
Adorno’s ‘transgression’ of Lukács’ theory – Said writes that ‘between Lukács and Adorno there is first of all a common European culture and...Hegelian tradition to which they both belong’ (p.444), we begin to get a stronger sense of just how important lateral movement might be for Said. That is to say, it is one thing for a theory to be challenged, transgressed and deployed with great power after its travel to a different site within the same cultural tradition, it is another thing again when the geographical movement sees a theory moved, and articulated according to, a completely different cultural site.

In Said’s reckoning, the work of Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*, is an example of what can happen to a theory when it travels into a space that is decidedly different to its point of origin. Writing from within the rawness of political revolution in colonial Algeria, Fanon, Said avers, is primarily concerned with ‘geography in history, and then the primacy of history over consciousness and subjectivity’. For Lukács, though, the issue concerning him ‘was the primacy of consciousness in history’ (p.446). Now the point is, in terms of Said’s argument, that the colonial situation facing Fanon sees him articulate the dialectic of colonizer and colonized, but stop at the point of reconciliation between the two. He quotes Fanon’s words that the colonizer and the “native” are opposed “but not in the service of a higher unity...they both follow the principle of reciprocal exclusivity. No conciliation is possible, for of the two terms, one is superfluous” (as cited in Said, p.447). Thus what occurs in Fanon, according to Said, is the obliteration of one part (the colonized) of the dialectic by the other (the colonizer).

The geographical component of this is essential because, Said argues, Fanon views the antinomy inherent in the dialectical opposition ‘as imported from Europe, a foreign intrusion that has completely distorted the native presence’ (p.448). There is a sense here that the travel of a theory may involve both an imposition of its logic, its cultural assumptions and epistemology and, concomitantly, a resistance to this. But what seems to be happening in the case of Fanon is the use of an element of Lukács’ European theoretical formulation while at the same time presenting a critique of its formulation insofar as it is unable to be transported to a different cultural and political context without itself having been transformed. In this way, however, the original theory is given a new power in its new context. This kind of movement – from one
geographical sphere to another – concludes Said, ‘suggests the possibility of actively different locales, sites, situations for theory, without facile universalism or over-general totalizing’ (p.452).

The spatial turn, (post)colonialism and humanism

The spatial turn, then, as it relates specifically to the instances of post/colonialism can be seen as opening up both the potential for a fatal critique of humanism as well as new possibilities for it. That is, if we are to substitute “humanism” for “theory”, we can begin to think about the implications of humanism’s travel with colonialism. To what extent is humanism a European imposition on the colonies that can do nothing other than determine and fix its Other according to its own culturally-blind and universalist assumptions? Or, on the other hand, to what extent does the travel of humanism to the colonies precipitate an otherwise impossible engagement with generative consequences? How important is the unequal power relationship between the colonizer and the colonized when it comes to the possibility of working through something such as humanism? Does Said’s reading of Fanon say less about the restraining of the totalizing effects of a theory and more about the irreconcilability of it? All these questions become pertinent when travel is understood as movement into completely different cultural spheres. Metaphorically speaking, it is the difference between international travel and intra-national travel. It is the difference between an idea changing over time, within the same tradition (temporal dominance in history) and an idea changing in a different location at the same time as it remains the same in its originary site. It is this particular problem relating to place and culture that distinguishes the postcolonial challenge to humanism from other critiques and, I suggest, could be argued as providing the greatest problem for a Western humanism based on universalist assumptions.

I have taken this excursus as it demonstrates an important aspect of why I wish to consider the postcolonial challenge to humanism. It might be argued that postcolonial theory and poststructuralism are mutually imbricated and that some of the issues poststructuralist feminists have with humanism are shared by postcolonial critics. It could also be contended, as I’ve previously mentioned, that contemporary feminism has recognized the need to engage with other critical discourses such as race and postcolonial theory in order to avoid some of its own
universalizing tendencies. But the claim I wish to make is that it is postcolonialism that opens up geographical – and therefore cultural and geopolitical – issues in a way that antihumanist structuralists and poststructuralists generally have not been able to do. Another way of putting this would be to say that Western hegemony is not adequately challenged by theory that is both historically and geographically Western-centric. This is not to say, as the section on colonial travel and the spatial turn should have made clear, that postcolonial scholarship is necessarily anti-Western. And certainly, nor is it the case that postcolonial scholarship is immune from Western philosophical and cultural assumption. But postcolonial scholarship does not just offer a critique of certain elements within Western theory, such as patriarchy, but actually questions Western theory’s Eurocentric core. This questioning is more complex than a mere comparison of geographical difference and more sophisticated than the substituting Northern theory for its opposite Southern theory (Connell, 2007). Rather, As Mazawi & Sultana (2010) note, the challenge to Eurocentrism involves a spatial analytic that emphasizes the ‘cultural politics of space’ and the ‘geometries of power’ (p.12). In other words, in seeking to understand humanism through such a spatial analytic, the geo-political implications of its mobilization are recognized. Here, I am suggesting that the contexts out of which postcolonial theories have emerged position these theories to take seriously the cultural politics of space and the implications of this for concepts such as humanism. Thus, there is a possibility that postcolonial theory might be used to not only deconstruct, but also dismantle, the Western episteme that is both the producer and product of humanism.

**Approach to analysis**

This research does not fit neatly into disciplinary boundaries, nor into common methodological approaches within the field of education. It is an *interdisciplinary inquiry utilizing the tools of philosophical, historical and cultural criticism*. In setting this out, it is important to first acknowledge that criticism is central to the task at hand. The kind of criticism, however, is not so text-based that the issues emerging from the text are abstracted from their socio-political provenance and contemporary implications. So too, in regards to the place of philosophy in this research, it is not seen as an abstract discipline taking place outside of history. I will briefly
elaborate on each of the key constructs within my above articulation of the inquiry, before commenting further on, and providing a justification for, the research approach.\textsuperscript{25}

The first element to consider within the above statement is that this project is \textit{interdisciplinary}. I use this term with some hesitation. It seems to me that the implication of the “inter” is so often actually enacted as “multi”. That is to say, to have multiple disciplinary methods or tools of inquiry separately being used to address a particular problem is not quite the same as using these various approaches together. On the other hand, one might take their interpretation of the “inter” to the other extreme and assume some kind of synthesis and newly created mode of analysis. In terms of how I approach the problem of humanism and its place within educational thinking and practice, my attempt is to do something different to both of these possibilities. Perhaps the best way to conceptualize interdisciplinarity is to think of it relationally.\textsuperscript{26} Whereas with multidisciplinarity, the “voices” of, say, history and literature may address the topic of memory, this object of inquiry is the only point of commonality and, thus, the limit point at which any relation between the two disciplines begins and ends. That is, their voices run in parallel towards the object of inquiry, never intersecting. When I use the word “interdisciplinary” and apply it to the work of this thesis, it is my intention that a conversation about humanism will take place amongst philosophy, history, and cultural politics. Such a conversation, where each voice intersects with the other, ensures that each discipline retains its integrity and distinctiveness, but also assumes a disposition of openness to the other. Just as with any ordinary human conversation, the voice of the self does not always influence the other with any sense of intentionality. Nevertheless, there is always something productive that happens in the context of conversation, even – perhaps especially – in the moments of silence that punctuate each new engagement with the problem.

Secondly, this thesis is an \textit{inquiry}. That is, I seek to inquire as to the place of humanism within education in the present and future. To inquire requires a commitment to being open to what the

\textsuperscript{25} I am very aware that the complexity of the debates surrounding methodological issues concerning areas such as interdisciplinarity, history and cultural politics deserve a much more in-depth analysis. However, all I am able to offer below is how I understand/utilize the key constructs/disciplines influencing my research approach. I acknowledge the inevitability that others would choose different understanding/approaches than I have.

\textsuperscript{26} There is here, I suggest, a sense of the notion of \textit{contiguity} within spatial theory as discussed above.
conclusion might be. This is not to be mistaken as failing to present an argument. On the contrary, it is hoped that I am able to establish a very clear and compelling argument. However, the argument has emerged from careful and close analysis of the broader debates and, specifically, the key texts under consideration in this thesis. Furthermore, and as a brief excursus, while the argument results from the inquiry, this is not to say that I entered this process as a neutral participant. The fact of the matter is that, many years ago, while I was still teaching high school humanities, I was troubled by the prevalence of neoliberal logic in government education policy in Australia. I wondered, does humanism have any place within education any more, or has it been economized into human capital? It was only later that, on beginning my graduate research, the postcolonial dimension came into the picture for me. But the point is, my interest in humanism was not, and is not, primarily one to do with its ontology, but with politics (though of course a presupposition regarding humanism’s ontology, whether conscious or not, is inevitable). Thus, coming to the question of humanism for me was, in the first instance, a political – or, perhaps one could say an onto-political27 – matter. The point I am trying to make is that even with the acknowledgement of my pre-existing political convictions regarding humanism, I hope it will be clear to the reader that the argument I put forward here results from, and is enriched by, the process of inquiry. The other point to make about inquiry is that it requires a rigor of textual reading and interpreting that understands the importance of that which animates, and gives content to, the text. This is a rather obvious thing to say, but I think it is important nevertheless. As Edward Said pointed out in his 1983 essay, Secular Criticism, literary theory can become nothing but ‘wall-to-wall discourse’ (p.26), completely severed from the problems of everyday life. In Said’s words, the response to this is to understand the worldliness of the text. That is to say that a text should always be in relationship with the world from which it comes and the world to which it goes.

Thirdly, the inquiry concerns itself with philosophy both in regards to content and method. Humanism has been treated philosophically through history. Subsequently, debates about humanism make up part of the content of the discipline of philosophy. Indeed, this is evidenced

27 I use “onto-political” here in the sense of understanding the “being” or the “reality” of humanism as political. That is to say, perhaps unwittingly, my conception of humanism as an intervention in neoliberal education policy assumed it to be political.
in the brief historicization of humanism within education that I have provided in the previous chapter. Thus, the traces of these philosophical perspectives on humanism are unavoidably part of this inquiry, whether I am always conscious of this or not. But the role of philosophy is more important than being a provider of content. Philosophical method places a priority on argumentation, analysis and clarity. The work here can also be thought of as philosophical to the extent that it is concerned with ideas about humanism. And, finally, to the extent that this thesis is discursive, it relies on philosophical thinking, if not a piece of philosophy itself.  

Fourthly, as should now be apparent, this thesis seeks to understand humanism historically. The intersection of philosophy and history holds enormous importance. The risk of a pure philosophical treatment of humanism, as an object endowed with some kind of transcendental truth or as a concept determined and fixed by rational argument, is that the way in which humanism has been shaped according to historical moments and out of certain historical conditions is disavowed. In this sense, history here need not be much more than an assurance that philosophy or theory does not extricate itself from that which has shaped, and been shaped by, it. History becomes a reminder that human and non-human lives are necessarily implicated in the consequences of philosophical thinking. So it is that, on one level, I assume history to be somewhat uncomplicated. Such an assumption, though, if it is to remain an assumption for any decent length of time, can only be held if it is done so in tension with a decidedly more complicated set of questions. I follow Radhakrishnan (2008) when he writes, ‘Well, who does not know what history is? We are history, part of it, as we make it, receive it, seek it, revile it, feel sometimes enabled and at other times blighted by it’ (p.3), before he adds questions such as: ‘which approaches to history affirm life and the history of the present, and which attitudes haunt and paralyze life? What is a usable past and how does the human subject choose and construct it from the debris of dead moments? Will history cease to be if the human subject opts not to look back?’ (p.3). These questions take the history that we “simply know” and demonstrate the necessary and ambivalent relation that humans have to it. Foregrounding his later engagement with subaltern historian Ranajit Guha, Radhakrishnan poses questions that gesture towards the problem of historiography as having created history according to dominant

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28 We might wish to make a distinction here between Philosophy as a category and knowledge discipline, and the practice of philosophizing.
Western approaches to knowledge. While this is not the place to engage the various debates around the discipline of history, it is worth noting that what Radhakrishnan’s comments do is to demonstrate the inevitability of intersecting discourses, or disciplinary concerns, when it comes to a matter such as humanism. Moreover, methodological orthodoxies within a discipline – whether it is history or literature – are always open to contestation and are, thus, always already political.

Fifthly, the field of cultural politics is brought to bear on the treatment of humanism. Such a move prioritizes humanism as a contestable product of, and practice within, culture. As mentioned in the introduction, and elaborated in the next chapter, the issue of humanism’s travel across cultures and the concomitant issue of cultural difference makes a significant intervention into humanism’s ontological configuration. By bringing cultural politics into the conversation, Eurocentric history and epistemology is disrupted. In an essay titled The New Cultural Politics of Difference, Cornel West (1990) writes of three challenges to the new cultural politics of difference – intellectual, existential and political. He describes the intellectual challenge as being about ‘how to think about representational practices in terms of history, culture, and society’ as part of ‘a methodological debate...in which academicist forms of expression have a monopoly on intellectual life’ (p.94). While it is certainly not the case that dominant forms of knowledge production have ceased to be located in the global North, an awareness of analytical blindness to cultural difference serves to invite consideration of other conceptual configurations and historical narratives.

Given the focus of the specifically postcolonial critique of humanism, it is hardly possible to ignore cultural politics. That is, if one aspect of colonialism involved an encounter between distinct cultures – that of the colonizer and of the colonized – then we must acknowledge the politics of cultural engagement. So too, the postcolonial stance on particular cultures themselves being always already heterogeneous suggests a politics within cultures. Leonardo (2010) provides a genealogy in which he suggests that Marxism and social theory ‘slowly gave way to cultural theory’ (p.3). But this shift, he adds, is not ‘evidence of a move away from politics and towards culture, but more precisely as the turn to culture as a form of politics’ (emphasis
original, p.3). It is the necessary question of power, domination and resistance within cultural studies that marks the particularity of the nomenclature of cultural politics. In humanism’s travel with colonialism, perhaps especially as it relates to education, a certain kind of politics inextricably tied with culture attaches itself to both the meaning and function of humanism. This is, in a basic sense, the argument of Said (1978/2003) in *Orientalism* that Western cultural representations of the East produced an Oriental discourse which stereotyped the Orient as, inevitably, inferior to the Occident. If cultural production had ever enjoyed the status of being apolitical, *Orientalism* showed this to be disingenuous. So then, to engage with the past, present and future of humanism, there must also be an engagement with its cultural politics.

Finally, *criticism* can mean many different things to different people and along different disciplinary trajectories. Thus, it is important that I am absolutely clear about what it is that I mean by criticism. Gayatri Spivak, I think, gives a wonderfully succinct and precise explanation of what she means by “critical philosophy” when she states that it is ‘a philosophy that is aware of the limits of knowing’ (1996, p.142). This is important to state, not only in relation to the method of analysis, but as a reminder to myself that whatever argument I put forward is limited and remains open to review, correction, and further elaboration. Building on the idea of limits, and taking it some way further, W.J.T. Mitchell, editor of *Critical Inquiry*, writing just weeks after the September 11 attacks in New York, recalls a comment made by Kenneth Burke that the goal of the journal is ‘to return criticism to its proper home, namely, a perpetual state of crisis’ (2002, p.570). Here, I take “criticism” to refer to a practice that only makes sense – or perhaps functions as it should – when responding to, interrogating and making a judgment about something that is located at a point of risk, danger or uncertainty. That is, criticism happens at a critical juncture. In this sense, one might see the place of humanism within education as being at risk as a result, in part, of postcoloniality. This definition also hints at the worldly importance of criticism. Of course, a commitment to the worldliness of the text requires an acknowledgement of Edward Said. As mentioned earlier, in his essay on secular criticism, Said takes aim at what he then believed was a new form of literary criticism that ignored “the world” in its taking up of ‘wall-to-wall discourse’ (1983, p.26). In other words, according to Said, new literary theory had become so enamored with “textuality” that the implications of “real world
politics” was irrelevant at best. So Saidian criticism takes seriously that the text is socially, historically and culturally embedded.

Moreover, Said’s notion of criticism reflects the emphasis on being at home in crisis, rather ironically, through his commitment to the critic’s location in exile. That is, Said sees it as the task of the critic to assume a posture of minority, or of exile, because ‘the experience of being at home can only be produced by rendering some other homeless’ (Mufti, 1998, p.107). There is, then, a certain ethical and political commitment that lies behind the very work of the critic. Undoubtedly, part of the work of the critic according to Edward Said will be to identify problems, indeed, to criticize. But I think to stop at this does not provide a full account of what criticism does or aims for. In Bruno Latour’s important essay, *Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern*, he looks to move past the ways in which critique functions as a tool for those engaged in wars – culture wars, science wars, wars against poverty and wars against terrorism (2004, p.225). What he argues for is a more creative and generative task: ‘The critic is not the one who debunks, but the one who assembles. The critic is not the one who lifts the rugs from under the feet of the naïve believers, but the one who offers the participants arenas in which to gather’ (p.246). In shifting the task of the critic towards this, Latour acknowledges that ‘the practical problem we face, if we try to go that new route, is to associate the word criticism with a whole set of new positive metaphors, gestures, attitudes, knee-jerk reactions, habits of thoughts’ (p.247). While I am not entirely convinced by the premise of his argument (the assumption that criticism has only been about debunking, is generally negative, and therefore lacking affirmative action, seems to be lacking nuance at best), I do think that criticism, even in its desire to resist domination, should always be seeking creative alternatives and generating new ideas. Thus, when considering the possibilities of humanistic education in light of postcolonial theory, both my analysis of others’ criticism and my own is concerned with productive possibilities as much as it is with speaking truth to power.

These matters concerning the disciplinary tools, and the ways in which they intersect, provide part of the rationale for the focus of this research. The historical background to humanism in education and the implications of humanism’s travel with colonialism that has already been
provided, partly justifies, I suggest, the choice to focus specifically on the postcolonial critique of humanism. But this is further strengthened by my foregrounding of the importance of history and cultural politics to any treatment of humanism. If humanism was to be merely understood as an abstract philosophical concept, or if its historicization was located solely within the Western tradition, then a focus on antihumanism indebted to figures such as Althusser and Foucault, or a more contemporary posthumanism arising almost exclusively out of Western poststructuralist theory, might be justified. However, if one is to consider the issue of “culture” in trying to understand the nature and “work” of humanism, the specifically postcolonial critique comes to the fore. Indeed, it seems to me a reasonable argument to make that a blind-spot of various posthumanisms relates to the issue of cultural difference. Put another way, it could be argued that posthumanisms remain within the theoretical and, therefore, political confines of the West/Global North. Given that transnational spaces of education in which people from the North and South come together to learn are becoming more common, the question of humanism within education is perhaps more threatened by a postcolonial critique prioritizing culture than a Eurocentric philosophical critique. This is not to say, though, that postcolonial theory is without its own problems. It is, in fact, a hugely contested and contentious field of scholarship. Thus, it is important to make clear that this thesis is not a piece of postcolonial criticism as such, despite an inevitable relationship to it.

I previously referred to the three postcolonial theorists under consideration in this thesis as being Frantz Fanon, Gayatri Spivak and Edward Said. These three have been chosen for a number of reasons, which I will briefly explain by way of justifying their inclusion. All three of the theorists are considered central to postcolonial studies, albeit in different ways. Frantz Fanon, a member of the Algerian Revolution in the 1950s, is foundational for those concerned with issues of colonial violence and race-based issues of identity and oppression. His work and life is aimed at decolonization and its aftermath. Gayatri Spivak spent a short time as a member of the

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29 Obviously, “culture” is a term that assumes very different meanings from biology, to anthropology and the arts. Given my focus on colonialism, I am using “culture” here primarily in two different ways. Firstly, I use “culture” in the more anthropological sense of a group of people often, but not always, united through a sense of nationalism. I hesitate to add the comment about nationalism, as it has been a significant point of contention in its own right. It is fair to say, however, that issues of nationalism have been very important within the field of postcolonial studies. Secondly, I consider “culture” to also be about the ‘cultural means through which “colonialism” has been pursued’ (Fitzmaurice, 2003, p. 171). This is related to Said’s argument in *Orientalism* that cultural productions were not apolitical, but aided the colonizing mission of Europe in its othering of the “Orient”.

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Subaltern Studies group which, primarily in the discipline of history, sought to bring a non-Western intervention into the production of historical knowledge. She also authored the very important *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. Edward Said is commonly referred to as the founder of colonial discourse studies, or postcolonial studies, through the publication of his most famous work, *Orientalism*.

These three theorists represent different locations in their engagement with colonialism. Fanon is a product of French colonialism and, after growing up in the Caribbean, spent his later life in a North African French colony fighting for independence. Spivak is one of many South Asian (and Bengali) postcolonial scholars. Despite being a diasporic intellectual in the USA, she has continued to work in Bengal throughout her career. Said is from the Middle East and, like Spivak, worked as an elite intellectual in the USA though remained heavily involved in the problems facing Israel-Palestine. In terms of their intellectual work, each theorist has distinctive disciplinary backgrounds and emphases. Fanon trained as a psychiatrist and, therefore, brings a psychoanalytic frame to his analysis of the colonial condition. In less explicit ways, perhaps, his work suggests a commitment to existentialism and a debt to Marxism. Spivak was trained in literature and became a very prominent deconstructionist after her translation of, and commentary on, Derrida's *On Grammatology*. She also assumes what might be called an ambivalent relationship to feminism and Marxism. Said was a philologist and specialized, to the chagrin of his many detractors, in the Western literary tradition. His *Orientalism* owes a methodological debt to Foucault's archaeology and discourse analysis, despite his criticism of Foucault's methodology on political grounds.

While there is a great deal of overlap between the concerns of each of the theorists, there are also important distinctions in their objects or mode of critique. For example, for the sake of this thesis, Fanon's emphasis on identity, Spivak's on essentialism and Said's on worldliness provide different lenses through which to analyze the question of humanism. Exploring these different emphases allows me to make a judgment about humanism from different points of concern. When it comes to the actual question of humanism, both Fanon and Said directly address the issue; Fanon more vaguely, Said more directly. Yet, just how to respond to their
respective treatments of humanism remains an open question. Indeed, Fanon has been cited as both for and against humanism by various critics (see Alessandri, 2014, p.53). Moreover, very little has been written on the postcolonial intervention in humanism within the context of education. Given humanism’s central place within the history of Western education, this is an area that needs more exploration. Spivak’s relation to humanism is less overt and thus provides an important balance insofar as it forces me to try to “get at” humanism and education even when they are not the primary topic of consideration.

Of course, the choice of these theorists does not ensure that all possible bases are covered. Immediately noticeable omissions are postcolonial scholars who focus on indigeneity and those from South America. So too, other very notable postcolonial scholars such as Homi Bhabha and Dipesh Chakrabarty could have been chosen. Yet, for Bhabha to have been included, for example, Fanon would likely be the scholar left out as Bhabha engages so closely with Fanon’s work through a psychoanalytic frame. The inclusion of Fanon, then, relates to his political involvement and writing within the context of anticolonial revolution. Had I included Chakrabarty, I would have left out Spivak as the two of them are both Bengali and both were involved (though Spivak to a far lesser extent) with the Subaltern Studies group of historians. To leave out Spivak, however, I would have wanted to replace her with another woman, not yet another man. Needless to say, debating who to include and who to leave out could proceed indefinitely. Whatever and whoever the exclusions, I felt it justified to settle on Fanon, Spivak and Said as some of the most defining contributors to the field of postcolonial studies and, especially in the case of Fanon and Said, scholars who have sought to address directly the question of humanism.
Chapter 4: Frantz Fanon

The historical account which I have presented in the opening sections of this thesis suggests continuities and discontinuities in what has constituted humanism. I have made the contention that Western humanisms have been characterized by an ethico-political imperative for the flourishing of individuals and societies. Acknowledging, however, the problem of this historicization being limited by a linearity and temporality, I have argued that the travel of humanism with colonialism disrupts a Western historical conceptualization of humanism by adding a spatial and geographical element to the theorizing of it. What colonialism presents, then, is a disruption of the Western narrative of humanism and a destabilizing of its Eurocentric assumptions. Humanism's relationship to colonialism also raises the question of whether it is still viable to maintain it as a moral resource for learning to live together.

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which Frantz Fanon destabilizes humanism as a Eurocentric construction and, thereby, at the level of ethics and politics, creates a problem for any humanism that is understood as a foundation, an achievement, or a utopia. Instead, humanism becomes not just something to be struggled over, but can itself be conceived as being constituted by struggle. If it inheres in “struggle”, though, what exactly is humanism a struggle over or a struggle for? What is at stake in and for humanism? In arriving at this argument and set of questions, I suggest that the theme of travel is particularly important in reading Fanon. It is through travel that Fanon becomes acutely aware of difference and of European violence. Thus, his anti-colonial theorizing is influenced by the opening up of problems and possibilities facilitated by contact with colonizers and the colonized. His experience within the Algerian revolution, as a French colonially educated Martinican (eventually as a psychiatrist), significantly shapes his relationship to both humanism specifically and colonialism more generally as one of struggle. Relatedly, the key theoretical and philosophical influences of existentialism, phenomenology, psychoanalysis and Marxism which shape Fanon’s work are all constituted in part by “struggle” either as experience, a concept, or something to which one is called. What all of this leads to, I would suggest, is a damning critique in Fanon of the dominant Western Enlightenment humanism of colonialism. Moreover, I contend that this Enlightenment humanism, conceived in a transcendent form, is toppled by this Fanonian
critique. However, I make the claim that emerging from the ruins is a decidedly more immanent humanism marked by struggle.

Biographical sketch: a journey from colonial formation to colonial recognition

In a famous philosophical thought experiment by Frank Jackson (1982), Mary exists in a black-and-white room and observes the world through a black-and-white television. Thus, she has only ever seen and experienced the world as black-and-white. She also happens to be an expert in the neurophysiology of vision and knows all there is to know about what happens physically when one encounters, for example, a ripe, red tomato. She can explain everything there is to explain about the impact of wave-length combinations being received and processed by the central nervous system and how this is described through language as the phenomenon of “red” (1982, p.130). What Jackson is interested in is what happens when Mary is exposed to color for the first time. What kind of experience does she have? Does she learn something new and does this create a problem for physicalists? Of course, we could also imagine this situation occurring with Mary knowing nothing of color. I have often wondered how, after years of existence with only the experience and theoretical knowledge of black and white, one might respond to the sudden introduction of color. Without even theoretical knowledge of – and, thus, language to describe – color, what kind of knowledge is produced? What kind of fear, anxiety or excitement might accompany the new experience?

There’s a well-worn saying that the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree. The phrase is often used as a light-hearted way of letting a parent know that their child’s quirky or poor behavior is a reflection of the parent. For young people, there often comes a time when there is a clear recognition of their having been shaped in such a significant way by parents who they now, in so many ways, have come to resemble. That is, while it was no secret that the parent was influencing the child, the extent to which this influence amounted to the formation of a (now adult) child who reflects their parent often comes as a surprise. Of course, though, if we stop to think about it, it is not really surprising for one who has, for perhaps eighteen years, been immersed in the daily routines and conversations of a family to be influenced by these things. Nevertheless, depending on the nature of the revelation of this familial influence and
resemblance, a person may respond in different ways ranging from pride, relief or comfort to shame, despair and anxiety.

In this section, I argue that Fanon’s travel to France and then to Algeria facilitated experiences and moments of recognition that disturbed and changed him. Fanon’s arrival in France precipitated an experience similar to Mary’s, except that in his case a world of color, one might say, had been reduced to black and white. With time, his thinking becomes akin to the child who, unhappily it must be said, discovers just how similar they are to their parents. His formation and, in Althusserian language, interpellation by French colonial epistemology and culture becomes something with which he struggles both internally and externally. Whatever notion of humanism Fanon might come to, it is shaped by recognitions precipitated by experiences facilitated by travel.

David Macey writes that, ‘by the time Fanon was born, Martinique’s institutions – schools, courts and the civil service – were all modelled on their French equivalents’ (2000, p.49). If the educational, legal and political institutions of Martinique were transplantations from France, the administration of the island was largely in the hands of the colored middle-class. This kind of arrangement, not a unique colonial strategy, functioned to normalize French influence to the point that it would appear almost indigenous. This was, of course, more likely to be the case for someone like Fanon who, in 1925, was born into a reasonably wealthy middle-class family that would have benefited from their connection to French culture. In the isolation of everyday Martinican life for a family like Fanon’s, French influence was basically good. Macey writes:

A “good France” abolished slavery and introduced education and health systems that were, by the standards of the eastern Caribbean, very good. A “good” France had allowed and even encouraged the growth of the black and mulatto middle class to which the young Fanon belonged. Many were proud to be citizens of France and not “subjects” of a colonial power such as Great Britain. (2004, p.214)

And so it was the case that the young Fanon wanted to fight in the French Army during WWII. For him, to be Martinican was not in any real sense to be something other than French. His desire to fight for France should not be surprising. Aimé Césaire wrote that colonial education ‘associated in our minds the word France and the word liberty, and that bound us to France by
every fiber of our hearts and every power of our minds’ (cited in Ahluwalia, 2010, p.55). There appears to be no reason for Fanon, then, to not fight for freedom with the French. As long as he has been in Martinique as a middle-class and educated young man, Fanon’s commitment to France is completely understandable. This is an important point because, I contend, his travel from outside the colony and into other spaces of the colonizer (both the metropole and other colonies such as Algeria) is what functions as a pedagogical disruption to this young man’s understanding of France, colonialism and himself.

In a sense, Fanon was a little like Mary in Jackson’s thought experiment. Well educated, he knew a lot (in his case, not everything!) about the world, France and her territories. But this educational encounter was mediated by textbooks and local institutions that had been thoroughly colonized. Fanon had not experienced, so to speak, qualia. That is, Jackson argues that while we can know in-depth information about the physical processes at work in our bodies, there is something about the ‘hurtfulness of pains’ and other elements of ‘bodily experiences’ that simply cannot be explained according to a purely physicalist epistemology (p.127). That is to say, it is the subjective, conscious – indeed, bodily – experience of colonialism and of France that Fanon does not really experience until he leaves Martinique. But, of course, one could argue that his life in Martinique still involved lived experiences of French political and legal institutions and so, surely, there is a subjective consciousness of these experiences. But here, I refer back to the “apple doesn’t fall far from the tree” analogy. Fanon had been so deeply formed by his surroundings, that the possibility of “experiencing color” for the first time was limited. To paraphrase another popular aphorism, the fish is unaware of water until it finds itself outside it. Inside the fishbowl of Martinique, Fanon wrote that ‘it is rare to find hardened racial positions...when it is remarked that this person or that person is in fact very black, this is said without contempt, without hatred’ (1967, p.18).

Ahluwalia notes that on joining the Free French Army in 1944 in North Africa and Europe, Fanon ‘experienced a great deal of racism not only in the French Army but also from the French

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30 Marshall McLuhan wrote, ‘One thing about which fish know exactly nothing is water, since they have no anti-environment which would enable them to perceive the element they live in’. See, M. Federman, (2003), Enterprise Awareness: McLuhan Thinking, p.4.
population’ (2010, p.55). As the essay, “The Problem of the Colonized”, in *Towards an African Revolution*, reveals, Fanon was indeed aware of racial difference. But the racial difference of the West Indian, in the eyes of Fanon, prior to 1939 was more starkly a difference between the barbarian and savage African negro, and the civilized, European Martinican (1967, pp.19-21). That is to say, any sense of inferiority to the white European was deftly evaded by the sense of superiority over the African. Put another way, one might imagine that the perceived cultural affiliation between the middle-class Fanon and the French administrators discolored, if not erased, the differences between them. Indeed, he writes plainly that ‘the African was a Negro and the West Indian a European’ (p.20). I can say from my own experience of growing up as an Australian of part-Indian descent in relatively homogeneous (ie. white) parts of Melbourne, that the consciousness of my own difference was mitigated by the fact that there did exist first generation migrants with different accents, cultural norms and physical features (slanted eyes or darker skin than mine). The fantasy or pretense of “absolute equality” that I ordinarily lived by was every so often punctuated by an explicit (ie. derogatory) pronunciation of my difference by a white person. Not always, but often enough, there was an image, a stereotype and a reference to a real or imagined other – who was more “other” than myself – to save me from complete social exclusion.

So the point I am making here is that Fanon’s particular experience is one in which the issue of race was not significant for him until he joined the Free French Army. And, while I can relate to his reflections on racial difference in Martinique prior to 1939, it is also important to make the point that despite the generalized language that Fanon uses to describe the West Indian’s self-perception, there is, in fact, a very distinctly subjective element to his writing. It is in his own personal experience of living in Martinique and then leaving for North Africa and France (which of course was by no means the first such experience for a Martinican) – fuelled by a certain patriotism and the desire to defend freedom (the two being inseparable) – that his recognition of difference, of racism and the problem of the colonized is initiated.

Fanon writes of the post-1939 period in the West Indies as being a time when everything changed. This change within the Martinican himself, Fanon writes, ‘amounted to nothing less
than requiring the West Indian totally to recast his world, to undergo a metamorphosis of his body. It meant demanding of him an axiological activity in reverse, a valorization of what he had rejected’ (1967, p.24). But these early war years did not, in actual fact, see a complete transformation of Fanon’s worldview. Rather, by the time he first left Martinique in 1943, Macey notes, he did so because he ‘still believed that the cause of France was his cause’ (2000, p.86). This is despite the fact that Fanon later writes of the ‘authentic racism’ apparent in the French who took control of Martinique in the early 1940s after they were blockaded by the British and Americans (Fanon, 1967, p.22). For four years, approximately 5000 new Frenchmen lived in, and took control of, Martinique while waiting for the blockades to end (Macey, 2000, p.80). The authentic racism referred to by Fanon involved removing elected officials from office and replacing them with white men, and the sexual abuse of local women.

It is interesting, then, that this situation did not seem to affect the young Fanon more. But perhaps it was, in part, his youthful naivety that prevented him from being more affected. Nevertheless, the impact of travel is still apparent even in this aspect of Fanon’s biography. The seeds of recognition of colonial violence may not have germinated, but they appear to have been sown into the fifteen year old Fanon. Had France essentially remained the “good Mother” in a distant land, while simultaneously existing in Fanon’s imaginary as Martinique herself, his perceptions of race, colonialism and inferiority/superiority would have remained a problem only for the African, not the West Indian. But the arrival of colonialism in bodily form changed all this and yet, as has been pointed out, it wasn’t until the slightly older eighteen year-old Fanon left to join the French Army that he began to truly grasp the centrality of racism to colonialism. Nayar writes that his trip to North Africa and then France with the army ‘would be a historic journey, for at the end of it Fanon would understand more about race and colonialism than he had ever had from all of his reading and more or less provincial life’ (2012, pp.16-17).

Indeed, the importance of Fanon leaving – literally, geographically – his basically comfortable and provincial life should not be under-estimated. After all, he had been taught by Aimé Césaire and was aware of negritude before leaving Martinique. Thus, it can certainly be argued that it
was through his travel that Fanon was truly struck by the recognition of his blackness – which is to say, his African-ness, his inferiority:

“Dirty nigger!” or simply “Look! A Negro!”...Locked into this suffocating reification, I appealed to the Other so that his liberating gaze, gliding over my body suddenly smoothed of rough edges, would give me back the lightness of being I thought I had lost, and taking me out of the world put me back in the world. But just as I get to the other slope I stumble, and the Other fixes me with his gaze, his gestures and attitude, the same way you fix a preparation with dye. (Fanon, 1952/2008, p.89)

The Fanonian enunciation of the lived, bodily experience of racism in Black Skin, White Masks is palpable. As he puts it later on, the white man’s gaze fixes the black man. It makes him who he is: not white. He is reified – dehumanized – as nothing more than a “dirty nigger”; any singularity is dismissed by virtue of his essentialized Otherness. These words, the gaze, the fixing of Fanon as simply – sadly – the black man can only be recognized through being experienced. And this is why Fanon’s recognition of his otherness to the Man of Europe was contingent upon his travel to the metropole. He could not know his blackness except through his lived experience of not-being-white. Fanon writes:

As long as the black man remains on his home territory, except for petty internal quarrels, he will not have to experience his being for others. There is in fact a “being for other”, as described by Hegel, but any ontology is made impossible in a colonized and acculturated society...ontology does not allow us to understand the being of the black man, since it ignores the lived experience. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man. (2008, pp.89-90)

In this rich and evocative passage, Fanon describes the way in which his “becoming black” would not have been possible had he remained at home. The experience of leaving home produces the conditions of possibility for becoming Other. It is interesting to note, then, that until this point, any dehumanization of Fanon through his experience of colonialism may have been real and yet not realized. It is his movement from the periphery to the center that precipitates the experience of colonial violence, not the other way around. This is not to say that there was no problem of ethnocentrism in the humanism into which Fanon has been enculturated during his time as a schoolboy. Rather, in my estimation, the point is that the moment of realization of humanism’s cultural and epistemological violence occurs when the possibility of pretending to be European is exposed by the encounter with ‘Europe’ itself. As Fanon writes:
As long as he remains among his own people, the little black follows very nearly the same course as the little white. But if he goes to Europe, he will have to reappraise his lot. For the Negro in France, which is his country, will feel different from other people. One can hear the glib remark: The Negro makes himself inferior. But the truth is that he is made inferior. (2008, pp.115)

It is the encounter, first, with this feeling of difference and, secondly, with the ensuing imposition of inferiority on the black man in Europe, that leads to the revelation of colonial violence. That is to say, if the Martinican-at-home continues to imagine the “good” France and to position himself as more civilized (and therefore more European, more white) than the African, this is not so possible for the Martinican-abroad. Whatever feelings of superiority he may have had at home are squashed by the recognition that his difference to the Frenchman and his inferiority are inextricably linked.

Even after experiencing colonial racism while serving in the French Army in North Africa, it took an experience in Lyon some years later, while a medical student, to really drive home to Fanon the redundancy of the term “inferiority” once someone had already been identified as “black”. This came with hearing a child exclaim upon seeing him: “Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!” Frightened! Frightened!’ (Fanon, 2008, p.84). Fanon continues to narrate the experience with language infused with geographical and bodily importance: ‘On that day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object’ (p.85). This response of Fanon’s is significant in the way in which it signals the importance of location, self and subjectivity. Fanon’s dislocation was both geographical and psychological in a way in which each was necessary to his sense of alienation. His sense of self had been so destabilized that he saw the only course of action was to remove himself from his own presence, to objectify himself. There is an agency here to be sure; he had not been subjectified by the gaze and terror of the white man to the point of being unable to resist this fixing through the (un)making of himself as an object. Though there is an ambivalence to this agency, as the making of himself an object is an act for which there appears to be no alternative.
Certainly, this question of himself as a human is of utmost importance for Fanon. He continues to describe his removal from his self: ‘What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a hemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood?’ (p.85). The self from which he has been cut-off is the white, European self. The boy’s enunciation of Fanon’s blackness, and the manifestation of the accompanying fear, led to Fanon’s recognition of the blackness of his blood, only revealed through the break-up of his imagined self. So what does Fanon now become? Does he recognize his true self, and is this something for which he is grateful? He writes: ‘But I did not want this revision, this thematization. All I wanted was to be a man among other men’ (p.85). The very question of what it means – what is required – to be a man presents itself through the trauma of Fanon’s recognition of his blackness, mediated through the terror of a white child. What might this mean, then, for humanism?

**Colonial humanism**

It is not surprising that humanism is a key concern in the writings of Fanon. As has just been discussed, his experience of racism is one that brings him to declare his desire to simply be considered a man among other men. What such a desire assumes, of course, is that a man is something other to what he is. The existential angst contained within Fanon’s words reflects the deep engagement he had with existentialism, especially through Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Moreover, even prior to his reading of existentialism while a student in France, Fanon was committed to the idea of universal man. Hudis (2015) notes that, despite Césaire’s assertion that the War had nothing to do with the black man, Fanon countered that “whenever human dignity and freedom are at stake, it involves us, whether we be black, white or yellow” (p.18). While there is a certain sense of shock in the way Fanon narrates the scene in *BSWM* concerning the young boy, one can only assume that, at least from the time of the mass settlement of the French in Martinique in 1939, it is the consistency with which he encounters racism (and, seemingly, with increasing force) that eventually brings Fanon to the point of confronting the fact that his moral stance regarding the dignity of humans is not shared by European colonialists. In fact, Fanon comes to see humanism as colonialism’s *raison d’être.*
It is Fanon’s analysis and sharp criticism of humanism’s function within colonialism that leads some scholars to see him as rejecting it. However, it is not really possible to separate “Europe” and its colonial endeavors from the kind of humanism that is the object of critique in Fanon. Indeed, Robert Young (2004) argues that Fanon suggests that the effect of colonialism ‘is to dehumanize the native, a process which, paradoxically, finds its justification in the values of Western humanism. This humanism Fanon consistently attacks and ridicules’ (p.159). Fanon’s unmasking of humanism’s dark side, Young argues, leads Sartre to acknowledge that ‘humanism itself, often validated amongst the highest values of European civilization, was deeply complicit with the violent negativity of colonialism, and played a crucial part in its ideology’ (p.160). The significance of this should not be lost amongst the ensuing theoretical choreographies of antihumanism that have become more prominent since the 1970s. That is to say, the critique of humanism from within the historical reality of colonialism as opposed to, say, linguistics or literary theory, is delivered with the ethico-political weight of the damage it has done to real people.

The trauma described by Fanon, noted earlier, is not abstract. Rather, it was his abstracted notions of freedom, Europe and the African that were destabilized by the jarring effect of witnessing the fear of a child who had identified him as a Negro. So too does the encounter with the colonial violence which accompanies humanism function to confront us in a way that post-Heideggerian critiques of the subject cannot. As Sartre in his preface to *The Wretched of the Earth (TWOTE)* writes, ‘first we must face the unexpected revelation, the striptease of our humanism. There you can see it, quite naked, and it’s not a pretty sight. It was nothing but an ideology of lies, a perfect justification for pillage; its honeyed words, its affectation of sensibility were only alibis for our aggressions’ (2001, p.21). As I have argued, there is a moral imperative within the various historical forms of Western humanism – honeyed words and an affectation of sensibility in Sartre’s poetic description – to see the flourishing of the individual and of society. The Eurocentrism of this moral imperative, however, is revealed by colonialism as the wolf that hides within the sheep’s clothing that is humanism.
In order to be able to begin to understand the problem of Eurocentric humanism for Fanon, we must understand how he understands humanism. In short, I would argue, the humanism that Fanon wishes to leave behind is one that could be understood as a project for the triumph of man. His primary concern regarding this is not the utopian *telos* assumed by such a project, but the lie of its universalism. What Fanon seeks to show in his writings is the way in which humanism is deployed according to thoroughly European epistemologies, sensibilities and desire. It is, he suggests, both the cause and effect of an ‘obscene narcissism’ (Fanon, 2001, p.253). Indeed, the colonial imputation of this humanism onto the colonized was seen by Fanon as an attempt to ensure Western knowledge, culture and institutions would take hold, even after decolonization. The values – or qualities – of the West are those that are at the core of humanism and what Fanon refers to as ‘the spirit of Europe’ (p.252). This humanism, as the spirit of Europe, was to take hold, Fanon argues, through the intellectual class. He writes:

> The colonialist bourgeoisie, in its narcissistic dialogue, expounded by the members of its universities, had in fact deeply implanted in the minds of the colonized intellectual that the essential qualities remain eternal in spite of all the blunders men may make: the essential qualities of the West, of course. The native intellectual accepted the cogency of these ideas, and deep down in his brain you could always find a vigilant sentinel ready to defend the Graeco-Latin pedestal. (2001, p.36)

Fanon’s analysis of the native intellectual class in this section of *TWOTE* takes place within a broader discussion of decolonization or national liberation. Here, he argues that a genuine decolonization requires the worker to produce the new nation and, ultimately, a new consciousness. Otherwise, because of the affiliation that the intellectual class has with Europe, as described in the above quote, decolonization would amount to little more than neocolonialism. Further tied to this analysis is the economic predicament facing newly decolonized nations. Fanon notes that, while developing nations struggle in ‘a world inhuman in its poverty’, they are, through colonial endeavors, confronted by a European opulence that ‘is literally scandalous, for it has been founded on slavery, it has been nourished with the blood of slaves and it comes directly from the soil and from the subsoil of that underdeveloped world’ (2001, p.76). Then, Fanon asserts, when ‘claims for independence’ are made by a colony, the colonizers proclaim: “if you wish for independence, take it, and go back to the middle ages” (p.76). Of course, the lack of compassion and the perpetuation of economic inequality are
offensive. But more than this, it is an example of the way in which European humanism is positioned as progressive and civilized, whereas the “natives” are backward and primitive. Thus, there is both an arrogance in the claims of humanism’s civilizing mission but also a sinister coercion inherent to the economic dependency it creates through its pretense to beneficence.

Thus, what I am arguing is that Fanon uncovers the way in which a specifically European notion of humanism functions, through colonial domination, as the exemplar of (universal) norms for the way things should be. Yet the grandeur – the success – of Europe has been built on the back of the oppression of the Third World. As Fanon puts it, ‘Europe is literally the creation of the Third World’ (2001, p.81). Moreover, the exploitation of the colonies was to continue during the period of decolonization, Fanon suggests, through the native intellectual elites’ complicity with the ways of the former colonizers. Indeed, in the section on The Pitfalls of National Consciousness, as part of his critique of the native intellectual class, Fanon writes: ‘Bourgeois ideology, however, which is the proclamation of an essential equality between men, manages to appear logical in its own eyes by inviting the sub-men to become human, and to take as their prototype Western humanity as incarnated in the Western bourgeoisie’ (2001, p.131). Such a situation in which the prototype of Western humanity remains as the norm amounts to nothing more than an era of neo-colonialism or pseudo-decolonization for Fanon. If this pseudo-decolonization founded on European humanist values ensues, the genuinely oppressed (the workers, the peasants etc.) will remain so. Thus, in arguing for humanism as an organizing core from which colonialism works itself out, I am highlighting that a critique of colonialism in Fanon is a critique of (European) humanism.

What should also be becoming clear is not only that humanism and colonialism are inextricably tied, but also the extent to which Fanon sees colonialism as affecting the colonized. According to Said’s reading of Fanon, colonialism is represented as a ‘totalizing system’. In describing this, Said sees the insurrectionary native in Fanon as one who has grown ‘tired of the logic that reduces him, the geography that segregates him, the ontology that dehumanizes him, the epistemology that strips him down to an unregenerate essence’ (1994, p.323). We can see, then, that the problem of colonialism for Fanon is complex; it is metaphysical, epistemological
and sociological. It is also, of course, political. Indeed, in comparing Fanon and Foucault’s respective critiques of the disciplinary function of Western knowledge, Said emphasizes Fanon’s decidedly political usage of his theoretical resources (Hegel, Marx, Freud, Nietzsche etc.) in contrast to Foucault’s utilization of these same thinkers in a way that ‘swerves away from politics entirely’ (p.336). So what I am presenting, then, is an analysis of Fanon that sees humanism and colonialism so tied together that the critique of colonialism actually assumes a critique of humanism at the same time. Secondly, the effects of, and response to, colonialism are both deep and wide as one might expect of a totalizing system. However, central to Fanon’s realization of colonial violence and his struggle with humanism (that is, his simultaneous critique of, and grasping for, it) is, I contend, lived bodily experience. By first analyzing his existential phenomenology of colonial violence, we can then begin to understand Fanon’s enduring belief in the possibility of a new humanism.

**Existential phenomenology, humanism and lived experience**

If part of the colonizing power of European humanism has been its ahistoricization – its abstraction into a fixed universal given – then the particular way in which Fanon’s existential phenomenology functions is to destabilize this naturalized humanism through his racialized encounter with it. Indeed, whatever general theories and claims may be made with respect to colonialism and its fixing of the black man, the beginning point is Fanon’s own experience. In this section, I aim to show that the primacy of lived experience in Fanon’s analysis functions to destabilize the (falsely) de-racialized and eternal notions of the human being. A focus on the lived experience both reveals the role of the transcendent in fixing ontologies while at the same time critiquing this transcendence through the primacy of immanence. Furthermore, the lived experience also gives greater attention to embodiment, revealing ways in which “knowledge”, prejudice and resistance is carried in the body. Finally, I argue that particular lived experiences – immanent and bodily – assume a contingency in the construction of the notion of the human. Thus, the question of the human for Fanon is one that is always open.
These themes such as embodiment, immanence, lived experience, and openness, and the way in which they coalesce in a moral struggle within the space between the universal and the particular, are captured in Vince Gilligan’s recent hit TV series *Breaking Bad*. This series considers the complex and shifting morality of a “good” citizen and family man. It is rare in popular culture to locate the “good” American in the great cities of New York, Los Angeles or Chicago. While there is more than one mythology regarding the way of life of the “good” American, this archetype will very often be represented in small-town America. The white, bible-believing, aspirational, vanilla-but-good citizen living in a small – possibly mid-western – city represents the simplicity and purity that is the antithesis of the hedonist urban-dweller. Walter White, the (anti) hero in *Breaking Bad*, basically fits the image of the good American. While not evangelical, he is, nevertheless, a decent, hard-working, law-abiding citizen and family man. He hasn’t reached his intellectual potential, but burdened by a mortgage on a modest suburban home, he has long resigned himself to this fate, that of being a high school chemistry teacher.

When his body becomes affected by cancer, Walter changes. His coming face-to-face with death eventuates in the Everyman of popular American folklore to morph into something other. As he sheds hair and weight as a result of chemotherapy, he also sheds (slowly but with great intensity) his middle-American morality. His body understands his existence differently to his mind. Or, perhaps more accurately, his body and mind come closer together. Part of the success of *Breaking Bad* lies in the way in which culturally normalized images of the “good person” are challenged in their abstraction by lived experience. In other words, universalized notions of what constitutes “good” or “moral” behavior are destabilized. This is not to say that “universal” notions of the good are repudiated outright, but that the certainty on which they are assumed is brought into question. As a good husband and father, with a sense of responsibility to provide for his family, Walter is anxious about what his probable death will mean for his family’s livelihood. His unlikely solution is to “cook” the drug colloquially known as ice. What ensues for Walter White, the other characters implicated in his story, and the audience itself, is a struggle with morality as a universal that is mediated by lived, bodily experience.
As I have been arguing, the lived experience of colonial racism troubles the detached, intellectual, notion of racism that Fanon had previously held. Fanon’s bodily awakening from an idealized notion of the human not only subjects him to the White man, but also marks the occasion for the critique of this ontologization. As Weate (2001) writes, ‘it is only in the encounter with whiteness and more specifically the white imagination that an analysis of the experience of skin difference, of being the black other, can be undertaken’ (in Robert Bernasconi (ed.), p.171). Prior to such an experience, when it came to the “problem” of race, it was easy and seemed satisfactory to Fanon to ‘intellectualize these differences’ (2008, p.90). As I’ve already argued, until he left Martinique, racism was, for Fanon, separated from the body. What Fanon produces in The Lived Experience of the Black Man (BSWM) amounts to a critique, and subsequent extension, of the kind of existential phenomenology that enabled the European construction of humanity. Fanon both draws on, but also critiques, the ontological assumptions of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology. Beginning with Merleau-Ponty’s bodily schema, Fanon suggests that, for the black man, there is an historical and epidermal schema that lies below, fashioning the black man into the white man’s other; a sub-human at best. What emerges, then, is not so much a wholesale rejection of Western phenomenology on the one hand, nor a naive commitment to utopia on the other but, rather, a struggle for humanism.

What is pertinent here is the way in which Fanon’s lived experience functions as a catalyst for his re-theorization of ontology. In the opening of his chapter on the lived experience of the black man, Fanon references Merleau-Ponty’s corporeal schema. In describing the moves he makes to reach for his cigarettes and matches in order to have a smoke, Fanon reflects:

> And I make all these moves, not out of habit, but by implicit knowledge. A slow construction of my self as a body in a spatial and temporal world – such seems to be the schema. It is not imposed on me; it is rather a definitive structuring of my self and the world – definitive because it creates a genuine dialectic between my body and the world. (2008, p.91)

The corporeal schema of Merleau-Ponty that underlies this quote is an ontology that, by prioritizing the body over thinking, seeks to undo the Cartesian dualism dominant in modern Western metaphysics. The body perceives and knows phenomena on a pre-reflective and, indeed, a pre-cognitive register. What this means is that the body is prior not only to reflection,
but also to experience and, therefore, representation. The structuring of self, according to Fanon’s use of Merleau-Ponty, is a slow construction not imposed from the outside, but one that is internal to the body’s relation to the world. In this sense, then, experience can be considered as a necessarily bodily experience of the spatial and temporal world in which it is situated. The body is not imposed from the outside, but is a “given”. It is not something represented by the mind but, as Fanon writes, functions according to an implicit knowledge; its own knowledge. In short, the bodily schema which provides the starting point to Fanon’s chapter on the lived experience of the black man amounts to an ontology which places the body as central — and anterior — to the perception of the phenomenological world. Insofar as Merleau-Ponty is concerned with the body’s situatedness in the world, he offers an existential phenomenology. And, in reading the passage quoted above, it is apparent that on one level, Fanon adopts this. Indeed, as should now be clear, the fact of his blackness is something revealed to him via his body, within lived experience. However, the problem for Fanon with the corporeal schema of Merleau-Ponty is that its ontology does not adequately account for racial difference.

This is why Fanon quickly moves from the corporeal schema to describe his own additions of the historical-racial and epidermal-racial schemas. In trying to understand the particularity of his own being as one who was ‘given the occasion to confront the white gaze’, Fanon writes that ‘in the white world, the man of color encounters difficulties in elaborating his body schema. The image of one’s body is solely negating. It’s an image in the third person. All around the body reigns an atmosphere of certain uncertainty’ (2008, p.90). Here, he describes his alienation from his own body as it now exists, not in- or for-itself, but for others. And so it is that he continues:

beneath the body schema I had created a historical-racial schema. The data I used were provided not by “remnants of feelings and notions of the tactile, vestibular, kinesthetic, or visual nature” but by the Other, the white man, who had woven me out of a thousand details, anecdotes, and stories. (2008, p.91)

The argument Fanon is developing here is that the black man’s body does not enjoy a relation to the world in the same way as the white man. Whereas the white man may have some notion of freedom in how he is situated in the world, the black man is trapped by the conditions of his possibility as determined by his place within white man’s history. The black man was not simply a ‘construction of my self as a body in a spatial and temporal world’ because lying beneath this
event are the ‘thousand details, anecdotes, and stories’ from which the white man had already produced the black man. When Fanon writes that ‘I already knew there were legends, stories, history’ surrounding the black man, he is perhaps describing what Charles Taylor later coins the ‘social imaginary’ (2004). That is, the black man’s being is one that is determined by the commonly shared beliefs, images, stories and myths of “Europe”.

Indeed, it seems that it is this mythology of the black man that Fanon is compelled to recognize when casting his ‘objective gaze’ over his body. After asserting that the bodily schema of Merleau-Ponty collapses under the pressure of the historical-racial schema, Fanon claims that this gives way ‘to an epidermal racial schema’. He explains: ‘In the train it was a question of being aware of my body, no longer in the third person but in triple’ (2008, p.92). And the awareness of his body led Fanon to discover, he writes, ‘my blackness, my ethnic features; deafened by cannibalism, backwardness, fetishism, racial stigmas, slave traders, and above all, yes, above all, the grinning Y a bon Banania’ (2008, p.92). These are all references to historical and cultural myths dominant in the European, colonial imaginary. Lewis Gordon explains the last reference, to the Y a bon Banania, as a reference to the grinning, simple-looking Senegalese (a particularly savage example of the black man) that fronts a French cereal which had been on the market since 1917. He writes that ‘Fanon has much to say on the use of smiling blacks for the promotion of products; the smile is the “gift” of the happy slave’ (2015, p.50). Further still, Gordon states that, ‘over the years, Bonhomme Banania’s human features gave way to simian ones, to the point of a recent logo that resembles a smiling monkey wearing a fez’ (p.50). That is to say, Y’a bon banania exemplifies the alienation – and, indeed, the dehumanization – of the black man. Importantly, this sense of connectedness that Fanon now has to the grinning Senegalese is one that has been prompted by the lived experience of being a man with black skin. If he had already been aware of Y’a bon banania, its racializing effect, we might guess, was minimal for Fanon. As we have already seen from reading Fanon in Towards the African Revolution (1967), the Senegalese functioned as a symbol of the Martinican’s European-ness. Thus, the power of the historical-racial is made manifest through the epidermal racial schema in the physicality it brings to the imaginary.
In other words, the fact of skin is important in Fanon’s argument. While the corporeal schema of Merleau-Ponty is inadequate, so too is an intellectualist determination of being. Merleau-Ponty seeks to set his (bodily) existential phenomenology apart from an intellectualist account on the one hand, and an empiricist account on the other. My earlier references to Fanon’s notions of racism in Martinique are examples of racial difference being understood in an intellectualist sense, according to the historical-racial schema. Yet, ‘the mistake of intellectualism’, according to Merleau-Ponty, ‘is to make it self-subsistent, to remove it from the stuff in which it is realized’ (2005, p.143). This notion is affirmed when, Fanon asserts, ‘Subjectively and intellectually the Antillean behaves like a white man. But in fact he is a black man. He’ll realize that once he gets to Europe…’ (2008, p.126).

Thus, divorced from real life encounter, the myths and stories that comprise the European imaginary of the black man assume a transcendental status; that is, the image of the black man is abstracted from lived life and functions as something that is imposed from the beyond. When Fanon finds himself situated in France, it is not an abstract racism that he is confronted with – at least it is not all he is confronted with. This is because the racism of the European imaginary becomes real in the fact of his blackness. His being fixed by the white gaze, the cry of ‘Look! A negro!’, is experienced as a bodily phenomenon. Thus, Fanon’s epidermal racial schema describes his experience of being ‘overdetermined from the outside’. He writes, ‘I am a slave not to the “idea” others have of me, but to my appearance’ (2008, p.95). There is, then, I suggest, an immanentization that accompanies Fanon’s existential phenomenology that functions to reveal the politics of the transcendent gaze of the white man. That is, any perceived neutrality or mere givenness of a transcendental European humanism is exposed by lived, immanent, experience of its racialized other.

While the black man’s carrying of European racial prejudice in his bodily, lived, experience of the Other’s gaze presents a critique to the essentialism of an abstracted transcendentalism, the question may arise as to whether Fanon’s focus on skin itself essentializes the black man. But to read Fanon in this way could well be, in my view, mistakenly simplistic. In fact, on my reading, it is the risk of this essentialization that is precisely why one cannot separate the epidermal
racial schema from the historical-racial schema; they exist together. Fanon expresses this enmeshing of the intellectualist and bodily elements of colonial racism when he writes that ‘the black man has to confront a myth – a deep-rooted myth. The black man is unaware of it as long as he lives among his own people; but at the first white gaze, he feels the weight of his melanin’ (2008, p.128). The fact of Fanon’s blackness becomes a fact of his less-than-human status because of the deeply embedded cultural politics of blackness that was produced and reproduced in the processes of colonization.

The struggle for an emergent humanism

Indeed, Fanon argues forcefully in *The Wretched of the Earth* that the violence of colonial racism was total insofar as it affected the native territorially, bodily, psychologically and culturally. We might remember Said’s contention that, as a totalizing system, colonialism wore Fanon down from all sides as he grew ‘tired of the logic that reduces him, the geography that segregates him, the ontology that dehumanizes him, the epistemology that strips him down to an unregenerate essence’ (1994, p.323). In arguing for full decolonization, Fanon clearly assumes that this includes European humanism. In fact, this humanism paradoxically functions to dehumanize that which does not fit its (false) universal notion of humanity. That is, unless the black man can be white, he cannot be a man.

However, I want to argue that it is the case that Fanon’s withering critique of European colonialism and its accompanying humanism, is simultaneously a struggle with and for humanism – a new humanism. Moreover, it could even be posited that Fanon’s critique of humanism is a struggle of humanism. In the previous section, I contended that the importance of Fanon’s particular existential phenomenology is, in part, that it demonstrates a lived critique of a fixed, transcendent humanism. What I wish to argue here is that it is from the primacy of an immanent, lived experience that a Fanonian humanism might emerge. While Fanon wishes to leave behind the version of Europe and its humanism that commits murder in every corner of the globe (Fanon, 2001, p.251), his writings nevertheless reflect the struggle to “rediscover man” and a new humanism from within the ruins of colonialism. Indeed, right at the outset of his first work, *Black Skins, White Masks*, Fanon writes: ‘Striving for a New Humanism. Understanding
Mankind. Our Black Brothers. I believe in you, Man’ (2008, p.xi). Then, in the very last sentence of his final work, The Wretched of the Earth, Fanon writes: ‘For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man’ (2001, p.255). The assumption and the desire of Fanon is a humanism freed from the violence of European colonialism and the tribalism of nativism. So the questions emerge, how does Fanon understand this new humanism and is it something that is possible and desirable today? But before getting to some kind of provisional answer to these questions, I want to begin where we left off. I want to begin to understand Fanon’s resistance to colonial oppression and his struggle for a new humanism in the context of his lived experience.

While the fact of Fanon’s blackness was something imposed on him and then internalized through the experience of the White gaze, Fanon is very quick to narrate his resistance to this fixing of his black self. And this resistance, something lived rather than thought, is necessarily contingent and open. That is, if the critique of fixed essentialism (transcendence) is performed by lived experience (immanence), then contingency becomes that through which essentialism is critiqued. In the story he narrates about being identified, with fear, as a Negro, he quickly moves on to discuss his decision to move away from himself and to reconsider himself. Eventually, though becoming even more aware of the White man’s power to make him, Fanon takes the image of himself as an unreasoned savage and replies to the frightened boy’s mother’s declaration of “Look how handsome that Negro is” with: “Fuck you, madame.” He continues, ‘Her face colored with shame. At last I was freed from my rumination. I realized two things at once: I had identified the enemy and created a scandal. Overjoyed. We could now have some fun’ (2008, p.94). A linear narrative does not ensue. Fanon continues to move between his reflections on being fixed by the white gaze, the self-dissection he performs, and the recovery of a self in the face of being othered. What his critique of Merleau-Ponty’s corporeal schema gives way to is a contingency that sees the black man, but also the human, made and re-made through the imagination and the lived life.

This active, lived resistance, rooted in an ontology affirming of contingency, is what leads Fanon to write in the final chapter of Black Skin, White Masks:
I find myself one day in the world, and I acknowledge one right for myself: the right to demand human behavior from the other. And one duty: the duty never to let my decisions renounce my freedom. I do not want to be the victim of the Ruse of a black world...I am not a prisoner of History...In the world I am heading for, I am endlessly creating myself. (2008, p.204)

In this short passage, there is an affirmation by Fanon that rights and duties are things that make sense within the context of a lived life with others. To the extent that he presents an abstract principle – to demand human behavior from the other – it is nevertheless a principle that has to be lived and will, therefore, manifest in different ways in different situations. Next, there is an affirmation of his freedom – he is not simply a product and, therefore, victim of a white mythology, but has the freedom to endlessly create himself. That each of these affirmations is an affirmation of contingency – especially in regards to one’s place in the world – is reflected in the present continuous tense in which the creation of the self takes place. The endless remaking of the self connotes a never-ending struggle to become. It is this kind of humanism, I suggest, that Fanon has in mind. That is, Fanon’s humanism is not one that is fixed as a foundation or a telos, but a humanism in which the past and future are encountered in the present struggle to live together across difference. Any charge of idealism – for there is undoubtedly a utopian spirit that animates the call to humanism – is counteracted by the reality of life lived in a world structured unevenly (Radhakrishnan, 2003). His humanism is a complex dialectic in which the transcendent is critiqued by, but also moderates in turn, the immanent. Fanon’s humanism is not presented as a thing, it is engaged as a struggle. It is simultaneously absent and present, possible and impossible.

To suggest that humanism is characterized by seeming contradictions cannot be easily dismissed. Anthony Alessandrini argues that ‘Fanon calls on the decolonization movements to carry out this struggle both against European humanism and simultaneously in the name of humanism’ (original emphasis, 2014, p.53). To do so assumes that humanism is not Humanism; it is not an ahistorical entity with a fixed ontology. This much is clear, but it still leaves us to make a decision as to whether or not Fanon’s assumptions regarding humanism are sound. I have been arguing that Fanon’s prioritization of the lived experience of the present functions as a critique of imposed ontologies from beyond. Thus, it is his theorization from immanence that demands a contingent humanism and, therefore, keeps open humanism as a possibility. But to
what extent might we be able to make sense of a humanism that is deemed possible and impossible?

Alessandrini critiques readings of Fanon which see the ‘splits, discontinuities, and contradictions in Fanon’s work as signs of theoretical inconsistencies’ as a missed opportunity to understand them as ‘signs of Fanon’s particular political and intellectual struggles’ (2014, p.52). That is, rather than being concerned about fidelity to a theory or an idea’s original purity (an impossibility in itself), the urgency and imperative of decolonization leads Fanon to engage theory in its immanence. But what this commitment to contingency also means is that Fanon’s critique of ontology does not merely amount to highlighting the need to extend a racially-blind universal notion of man to include its black other, but is, in fact, a critique of the very attempt to ontologize. And yet, it has already been made clear that the issue of the human is central to Fanon’s analysis of colonialism and decolonization. But this is just the point – Fanon remains intent on exploring what kind of humanism might be possible and desirable from within the ruins of Europe’s destruction of man while maintaining that ‘there should be no attempt to fixate man, since his destiny is to be unleashed’ (2008, p.205). What Alessandrini suggests is that Fanon moves towards a critical ontology of the self that he suspects to be impossible while at the same time necessary (2014, p.85). My contention is that the condition of impossibility and of necessity is the same: lived experience. By this I mean that ontology for Fanon is made impossible by the lived experience of the black man and this very same lived experience is what makes necessary the production of a critical ontology of the self.

An important point to make here is the way in which the call of the human both from within and from without the structures of dominance – the structures that dehumanize – ensures that Fanon’s prioritization of immanence does not function as a disavowal of either past or future. Instead, Fanon understands that the present is a condition of the past. This is part of the point he is making with his historical-racial schema; the bestiality of the black man in the present is only possible because of the imaginary that has been formed in the past. However, without the call of the human from the future, the present becomes trapped, the black man fixed. The figure of the human in the future is the voice of possibility that would otherwise, in the context of
colonial violence in which Fanon is writing, be nothing more than meaningless babble. Indeed, as Radhakrishnan so aptly puts it, ‘The ontology of a universal humanism has to be perceived both as a promise and a possibility in itself and as that possibility that is being denied by the absurd rationale of the colonial world’ (2008, p.86). This is what guards Fanon against some kind of utopian image of the global human that transcends history. Whatever the future possibility may be, it is one that will have to be worked out in a history that is being lived in the present, complete with traces from the past.

Again, Radhakrishnan explains the relationship between past, present and future for Fanon:

> There is the factual reality of a colonialist history and its sedimentation as a particular kind of present; and Fanon’s obligation to this history and this present can only take the form of a violent divestment. And then there is the history yet to be born that in its transformative and revolutionary emergence will reread the present and make visible a different temporal and historical possibility that has nothing to do with the ravages and horrors of colonialism. But being a dialectician of experience, Fanon will not allow the new humanism to be born in immaculate transcendence of the colonialist situation. (2008, pp.84-85)

In this quote, Radhakrishnan manages to brilliantly capture not only the tensions that give rise to Fanon’s humanism, but alludes to the fact that this humanism means nothing if it is not forged through lived experience. We might also be able to offer a reading of the above quote in terms of the politics of spatiality as it relates to history and ontology. That is, the imagined history that is yet to be born is one that is de-territorialized.31 This spatio-historical reading has political significance in that it brings to the fore the problem of Europe and its territories for a new humanism. How can a new humanism be possible in a spatial configuration of domination? And so, with Fanon’s grounding in experience as a refusal for his new humanism to ‘be born in immaculate transcendence of the colonialist situation’, a future history that is actually able to reread the present and make visible a different temporal and historical possibility, is one that must inhabit new spaces. It is not a future that can exist in transcendence from the land. As Radhakrishnan writes in the above quote, it is a ‘history yet to be born’. So, then, the new

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31 Though this de-territorialization is a suspension with political purposes in bringing about a re-territorialized history.
humanism is one that must emerge in the new postcolonial spaces that carry the traces of Western epistemology and culture, but exist as new territories of imagination.

But still, even if we are to grant that something new can emerge from the processes of decolonization, the question nevertheless remains as to why humanism? Again, the primacy of Fanon’s lived experience of the violence of colonialism provides a reason, if not an answer. In fact, this is a question that Alessandrini himself poses: ‘why bother to hold on to humanism at all?’ (2009, p.78). His response is that ‘the production of the humanism effect can help postcolonial studies respond to the dehumanization that has occurred in the name of humanism’ (p.78). While he acknowledges that it is very difficult to find anyone who would wish to defend humanism in its traditional form, Alessandrini remains skeptical as to whether we are really ready to do away with a resource that ‘allows us’ to speak of human rights. I would take this a little further and suggest that, certainly in the case of a reading of Fanon, there may be no reason to abandon a new form of humanism. Alessandrini is more cautious. In wondering if we need a new form of humanism to have human rights, he responds plainly, ‘perhaps not’ (p.78). But as Fanon wrote, he wanted to be considered a man amongst men – anything less was a necessary dehumanization.

Lest I be interpreted here as suggesting a return to an abstract philosophical ontology, let me be clear that being considered a man amongst men for Fanon is, in many ways, more simple and more tangible than this. It is fundamentally relational; less abstract, more lived. Fanon ends Black Skin, White Masks by stating: ‘I, a man of color, want but one thing: May man never be instrumentalized. May the subjugation of man by man – that is to say, of me by another – cease. May I be allowed to discover and desire man wherever he may be’ (2008, p.206). What he desires is I-Thou relationships (Buber, 1970). And the only way in which this kind of relational humanism can be realized is through the living of it; it has to be created by man. In another example of the immanent humanism he proposes, Fanon continues by stating that it is man who ‘can create the ideal conditions of existence for a human world. Superiority? Inferiority? Why not simply try to touch the other, feel the other, discover each other? Was my freedom not given me to build the world of you, man?’ (p.206). The language of creation and of
relation is a reminder that Fanon is not looking to recover a violent, Eurocentric humanism.\textsuperscript{32} He is not looking to discover the pure, eternal and essential humanism; he is struggling for a lived humanism in which people, despite their differences, are able to live together.

\textsuperscript{32} It is of interest to note here that, while Fanon is not looking to recover a violent Eurocentric humanism, he does address, in \textit{The Wretched of the Earth}, the place of violence within the anticolonial struggle in quite some detail. Given his Manichean diagnosis of the colonial struggle, Fanon’s analysis of the violence of colonialism is followed by his explication of the violence that organizes anticolonial resistance. There exists debate amongst Fanonian scholars as to the extent to which Fanon advocates for violence as a desirable element to the anticolonial struggle. Moreover, the use and effects of violence in Fanon corresponds not only to the physical sense of the word, but also its symbolic, psychological and epistemic usages. For example, Nayar (2012), using the language of violence, argues that Fanon wants to see the destruction of the colonial mind and, until this is achieved, self-realization and self-determination are impossible (p.93). Moreover, Nayar argues for a reading of Fanon’s revolutionary vision as one where violence ‘is the route to (i) self-retrieval and (ii) cultural retrieval’ (p.93). In this sense, the new humanism of Fanon is one that is achieved through the violence of anticolonial struggle. Indeed, Jean-Marie (2008) argues that violence and the new humanism in Fanon are to be seen as working together (p.56). All of this raises significant questions about the ethics of violence, the inevitability of violence, the definition of violence, the use of violence and the ends of violence. These questions require significant attention, and this is beyond the scope of this thesis. In this chapter, I have argued that Fanon calls for a new humanism, but I do not try and suggest with any specificity what this new humanism looks like or how it is achieved. I make the more modest claim that, in my reading of Fanon, humanism emerges out of the lived struggle with the effects of colonialism. As will be argued later, whatever this humanism might be, it’s emergence from lived experience will ensure that it is provisional rather than fixed. While violence on a physical and psychic level was significant for Fanon, the conceptual point I am making here is far more concerned with the way in which humanism emerges from lived experience in a more general sense.
Chapter 5: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

As I have noted in the previous chapter, Fanon not only explicitly engages with the question of humanism but his critique of colonialism functions at the existential, psychoanalytic and political level. The analysis in the previous chapter focused predominantly on the primacy of lived experience as a critique of transcendence. What should also have been clear was that the psychic dimension of Fanon’s thought is implied in so much of his writing. Indeed, it is not really possible to separate Fanon’s existentialism from his psychological analysis. These theoretical commitments, wedded as they are to lived experience, are also increasingly developed from within the context of anti-colonial revolution. The political urgency of Fanon’s situation, and the fact that his training was as a psychiatrist, not a philosopher or humanities scholar, meant that he did not engage in any significant critique of Western epistemology or theory from the position of being a dedicated theoretician or scholar.

So while I’ve argued that Fanon’s existential phenomenology keeps opens the possibility for the struggle for/of a renewed humanism, further questions remain. Just what kind of humanism might be possible? Even if, at the level of lived experience and political change, humanism seems desirable, can it withstand more careful theoretical interrogation? Indeed, what might be the relationship between theory, humanism and postcolonialism? This chapter on Spivak seeks to engage the question of humanism through an analysis of her deconstructive theorizing within the context of postcolonial scholarship. In doing so, I argue that the foregrounding and emphasis on the subaltern as central to postcolonial scholarship functions to ensure that the densely theoretical work of Spivak remains political. The complexity of Spivak’s methodological resources, her theorizing, and her political will, I suggest, combine to deeply trouble notions of a theory-praxis binary. Associated with this, I make the argument that, despite her antihumanist proclivities, Spivak’s work is “haunted” by a specter of humanism. This specter breathes an ethico-political imperative regarding human life into her critical, postcolonial scholarship.
The politics of postcolonial theory

While Gayatri Spivak is commonly included – along with Edward Said and Homi Bhabha – as one of the leading postcolonial theorists, the reality is that this designation is not exactly straightforward (Moore-Gilbert, 1997). Spivak herself is reticent to position herself as a postcolonial theorist. But even if we are to place her in this category – whatever her own thoughts on the topic may be – identifying any one area of her criticisms as specifically “postcolonial” is problematic. As Young (2004) notes,

instead of staking out a single recognizable position, gradually refined and developed over the years, she has produced a series of essays that move restlessly across the spectrum of contemporary theoretical and political concerns, rejecting none of them according to the protocols of an oppositional mode, but rather questioning, reworking and reinflecting them in a particularly productive and disturbing way. (p.199)

As Young and many others have also noted, Spivak’s critical apparatus includes seemingly incommensurable positions and methods including Marxism, feminism, deconstruction and psychoanalysis. Moreover, while Spivak has produced work across various theoretical and political concerns, she remains a literary critic and teacher of the humanities. Whatever her postcolonial position may be, I am of the view that her “postcolonial position” is, in some way, complicated and enriched by these various attitudes, disciplinary locations and critical methods. However, I also raise this to acknowledge that when Spivak writes something that presents a challenge to Western humanism, it is not necessarily the case that it is specifically a postcolonial critique. To say this is the not the same thing as suggesting that it is absent of a postcolonial critique, just that it is more than this and possibly, at times, more clearly motivated by feminism or deconstruction, for example. In laboring the point, part of what I’m trying to say is that separating out the postcolonial from gender, for example, is both necessary and impossible for Spivak.

Thus, to be able to proceed with an analysis of Spivak and the challenge her work presents to humanism from the perspective of the postcolonial will not always be so clear as it is with Fanon and Said. What I plan to do in this chapter, then, is to consider particular ways in which Spivak questions the humanist legacy. In the chapter on Fanon, I argued that his engagement with humanism represented a struggle. Moreover, I focused on the primacy of lived experience and
how this related to Fanon’s particular existential phenomenology. In this chapter, I will argue that Spivak’s postcolonial critique of humanism can only be understood in relation to her work as a deconstructionist and her concern with gender as a marker of subalternity. The (un)representability of the subaltern woman is an implicit critique of a humanism that assumes a white, rational, man as the norm. However, even in her critique of this apparent humanist arrogance, Spivak’s commitment to the deconstructive method necessitates that the impossible subject of humanism is indeed critiqued but, in the process, an opening up ensues that provides the possibility for further theorizing of the human. Thus, through a discussion of her engagement with Derrida, in the context of her critique of postcolonial reason, I will suggest that a specter of humanism haunts her work. Linked to this, I will attempt to argue that Spivak’s insistence on the political interest inherent in deconstruction – against the criticisms of its evacuation of worldly concerns in favor of the text – results in her affirmation, however contradictorily or ambivalent, of the concern for the human. So while Spivak herself might not spend much time (relative to other foci in her oeuvre) specifically engaged with the question of humanism after colonialism, her work at least provides the space for reconsiderations of postcolonial notions of humanism.

Before analyzing Spivak’s deconstructive critique of representation through the discursive formation of the subaltern woman, I want to spend some time addressing the scholarly interest in the matter of theory and its relation to politics. This is particularly important because I am moving from Fanon, whose position as theorist is secondary to his political position, to Spivak whose position as a theoretician is, arguably, primary. Moreover, after the chapter on Spivak, I’ll be considering the work of Edward Said who has a troubled relationship to theory to say the least. So what I want to do here is to foreground the rest of my analysis of Spivak by trying to suggest some critical and constructive ways in which theory and politics, history and ethics, come together in a perpetual state of tension in her work.

About fifty years ago (or forty years for the English translation), the now infamous words of Derrida that “there is nothing outside the text” were published in his *Of Grammatology* (1976, p.158). Some years later, Edward Said lamented the state of literary theory with his suggestion that it amounted to little more than ‘wall-to-wall discourse’ (1983, p.26). For Said, theory had
become so textual that the real-life experiences of those suffering the effects of colonialism or imperialism were elided. In reflection on what he aimed to do in writing *Culture and Imperialism*, Said writes that he was trying to present something of ‘a historical experience without system or the armature of theory in order to provoke discussion, not about theory but about the actual experience of peoples undergoing the amazing, globalized phenomenon I call imperialism’ (Robbins et al., 1994, p.22). His problem with theory, he goes on to say, is that in the context of a ‘modernizing Third World’ country such as Egypt ‘intellectuals are doing one of two things: they are either talking about Islam...or going on about postmodernism’. For Said, ‘It's incomprehensible’ that this is what people are talking about amidst serious issues of increasing population and dwindling resources affecting people’s lived lives (p.22). In other words, Said is asking the question “what hath Paris to do with Dhaka?”. Put plainly, what has theorization of the navel-gazing variety to do with injustice in the world? It is fair to say that Said tends to draw a hard line between theory and politics, with his reason for doing so being fairly clear. But the question remains, is he right to do so? Does he unfairly tar all theory with the same brush? Must theory and politics pass like ships in the night?

According to the Marxist literary critic, Terry Eagleton, in his somewhat infamous review (or, more accurately perhaps, beration) of Spivak’s *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason*, the theory of Spivak does indeed elide the political. While agreeing with her that simplistic calls for revolution by those on the left is poor political strategy, Eagleton nevertheless argues that Spivak fails to properly ‘recognize the seed of truth in their point of view: that radical theory tends to grow unpleasantly narcissistic when deprived of a political outlet’ (1999, np.). Rather than justifying the ‘lack of political outlet’, Eagleton continues by taking aim at her difficult prose: ‘If colonial societies endure what Spivak calls “a series of interruptions, a repeated tearing of time that cannot be sutured”, much the same is true of her own overstuffed, excessively elliptical prose’. Aware of the argument and justification of such writing as an iconoclastic critique of the Eurocentric masculinist scholarly norms, Eagleton counters that ‘the ellipses, the heavy-handed jargon, the cavalier assumption that you know what she means, or that if you don’t she doesn’t

33 The old saying, ascribed to the early church father Tertullian, is: *what hath Athens to do with Jerusalem?* meaning: what does philosophy have to do with theology? With this phrase, then, I mean: what has theory to do with poverty/global inequality?
much care, are as much the overcodings of an academic coterie as a smack in the face for conventional scholarship.

To be fair, Eagleton makes many positive remarks about Spivak whom he sees as probably having ‘done more long-term political good, in pioneering feminist and post-colonial studies within global academia, than almost any of her theoretical colleagues’. Importantly for Eagleton, in contrast to her postcolonial peers, Spivak ‘has kept faith, however ambiguously, with the socialist tradition’. But despite his acknowledgment that she has not vacated the space of the material and the political, he continues to argue that her theorizing does little to support or enable political engagement. After taking aim at the way in which postcolonial scholarship’s ‘flamboyant theoretical avant-gardism conceals a rather modest political agenda’, Eagleton asserts that, ‘Gayatri Spivak’s own politics are as elusive as her thought-processes; but there are signs in this study that she, too, is rather more audacious about epistemology than she is about social reconstruction’. What has become clear, then, is that for Eagleton, politics is really only about social transformation and that this is somehow only loosely or spuriously linked to the matter of epistemology. And it is perhaps on this point where the fundamental disconnect between the assumptions and projects of Eagleton and Spivak become apparent. It seems to me that Spivak’s politics might be of a different order, one where theory and politics simultaneously tame and enlarge the other. Indeed, it is possible that Eagleton’s presumed opposition between theory and politics (praxis) is perhaps a key part of the problem for him as he attempts to understand Spivak’s work.

This is why Michael Syrotinski’s *Deconstruction and the Postcolonial: at the limits of theory* might provide a more fruitful way of getting at the theory-politics nexus within postcolonial studies. Syrotinski interrogates a different opposition, one in which the distinction is made between theory as deconstruction and theory as the postcolonial. The way in which he sets up these two theories sees postcolonialism as being more concerned about lived experience and deconstruction as being more concerned with epistemology. In undertaking this study into deconstruction and the postcolonial, he declares that his intention is ‘to dwell within the spaces between deconstruction and the postcolonial’ (p.4). This space between the two is one in which
'each [theory] effectively questions the presumed autonomy of the other as a field of theory as such’. He continues,

for postcolonial theory, the challenge comes at those points where it is prepared (or not) to leave its grounding in socio-historical reference, or at least to supplement it, by taking seriously the epistemological uncertainties that deconstruction has so rigorously articulated; for deconstruction, conversely, the challenge entails providing convincing responses to claims about its lack of relevance to, and effectiveness within, the so-called ‘real’ world’. (2007, p.4)

Thus, even within an articulation of theory vs. theory, the point of difference remains that between “the world” and “the text”. The reason for this affiliation of the postcolonial with history, politics and the material and of deconstruction with theory, ethics and text is, perhaps, rather simple to understand. As a qualifier to theory, “postcolonial” marks a clear reference to the historical fact of colonization and, thus, seems to situate the theory as a necessary relation to consequences of this history for lives actually lived. On the other hand, “poststructuralist” or “deconstructive” as the qualifier to theory marks a clear reference to textuality. After all, the common view of the history of poststructuralism is one that is often phrased as being about the “linguistic turn”.

Yet, Robert Young argues that deconstruction needs to be understood as developing from a position of much greater connection to the problems of colonialism. In White Mythologies he argues that ‘in its largest and perhaps most significant perspective, deconstruction involves not just a critique of the grounds of knowledge in general, but specifically of the grounds of Occidental knowledge’ (2004, p.49). In fact, Young proceeds to suggest that Derrida, in Of Grammatology, seeks to focus his attention on the way in which logocentrism is “nothing but the most original and powerful ethnocentrism, in the process of imposing itself upon the world” (Derrida, cited in Young, p.50). Deconstruction is, then, concerned with the challenge to, and the decentering of, the West. Understood in this way, deconstruction obtains a particularly ethico-political motivation and function.

While this may be the case, the decentering of the West does not necessitate that deconstruction’s ethico-political concerns move beyond the categories of epistemology and textualism. Nevertheless, Young and Syrotinski offer useful discussions for thinking the theory-
politics nexus differently. Indeed, they argue for a deconstruction of this nexus. What this brief discussion about the theory-politics nexus aims to do, is to provide the context for asking the question about how deconstruction, as a key tool for analysis and critique, functions in the work of Spivak. To what extent does her critical scholarship deconstruct the theory-politics nexus in such a way as to make the theoretical more political and vice-versa? More specifically, can the argument be made that Spivak’s deconstruction functions to critique Eurocentric humanism while simultaneously opening it up for possibilities of new rearticulations in the postcolonial? I will consider these questions in the next section through an analysis of her deconstruction of representation, particularly in relation to the constructs of woman and the subaltern. Moreover, my own analysis is done through a careful reading of both Spivak’s *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (CSS, 2015)\(^{34}\) and Radhakrishnan’s *Theory in an Uneven World* (2003).

**Gender, subalternity and the unrepresentability of woman**

In responding to Spivak’s idea in *CSS* that the subaltern woman assumes the contradictory subject-positions of patriarchy and imperialism, Young writes: ‘Rather than speak for a lost consciousness that cannot be recovered, a paternalistic activity at best, the critic can point to the place of a woman’s disappearance as an *aporia*, a blind-spot where understanding and knowledge is blocked’ (2004, p.207). The assumptions of the European humanist project are revealed in this aporia as a ruse. In identifying the heterogeneous subject-positions of the subaltern woman, Spivak reveals the violence of humanism from both sides (ie. patriarchy and imperialism). The uncovering of this violence itself becomes a violent act. But in this instance, the violence is directed at the hubris of the homogenous essentialism of the human subject that Spivak, through her account of *Sati*, reveals as ignoring difference along gender and racial-cultural lines. In the subaltern woman, these distinct lines of difference coalesce to reveal the necessarily unrepresentable other who exists outside of discourse. And yet, the point of *CSS* is not to do away with representation, but to uncover its limits.

Indeed, according to Young, the postcolonial interest in representation is not a project ‘to retrieve the lost subaltern subject as a recovered authentic voice who can be made to speak

\(^{34}\) This essay’s original version was published in 1985. I am working from a later and slightly altered version.
once more out of the imposed silence of history, because that subject is only constituted as a
subject through the positions that have been permitted’ (2004, p.207). That is to say that, as
Spivak makes clear in her critique of Deleuze and Foucault in the essay, any assumption of
transparency in regards to the subaltern and her ability to speak for herself is a disavowal of the
imperialism that determines the “rules” for speaking. In fact, this is precisely, as Spivak herself
later reflects, what her most famous essay is about. She writes: ‘Indeed “Can the Subaltern
Speak?” is not really about colonialism at all. It is about agency: institutionally validated action’,
without which, she continues, ‘resistance could not be recognized (“heard”) as such’ (Spivak,
2000, p.xx). An analysis of CSS, then, is best to proceed by keeping central this point about
agency being the primary concern of the text. Moreover, a concern with agency amounts to a
concern for the interests of the subject.

Spivak opens the essay with the bold claim that the “radical” criticism within Western theory that
she associates with the work of Deleuze and Foucault ‘is the result of an interested desire to
conserve the subject of the West, or the West as Subject’ (2015, p.66). The rest of the essay
amounts to a critique, and revelation, of this (unwitting) conservation of Western dominance
mediated by an engagement with the subaltern (colonial) woman. In other words, what unfolds
is a critique of poststructuralist theory from both within (Spivak’s prominence as a
deconstructionist is without question) and without (Spivak as a postcolonial woman). CSS is,
then, an apt site of analysis to explore the theory-praxis nexus within the context of
postcolonialism. Radhakrishnan sums it up well when he writes that, ‘Spivak invokes the macro-
political realities of colonialism and the international division of labor to remind the
poststructuralist theorist that it is altogether callous and unprincipled to declare that
representation no longer exists on the assumption that reality speaks for itself, as do the people’
(2003, p.156). It is the ‘transparency’ – the lack of acknowledgment of their own complicity with
the dominant, imperialist system – of the leftist intellectuals (Deleuze and Foucault), and the
accompanying failure to address the problem of ideology within theories of representation that
Spivak wishes to address.
By not properly attending to the fact of a world structured by dominance, Spivak postulates, I suggest, that the Western subject is able to remain central to history and theory. What I hope becomes clear is that the question of the human is an unannounced assumption within the broader deconstruction of representation, subalternity and “woman” within the essay. Indeed, Spivak’s claim that the Western subject is conserved by the pretense that ‘it has “no geopolitical determinations”’ points to a critique of Eurocentric humanism (2015, p.66). According to Spivak, Foucault and Deleuze resurrect the Subject of humanism through their insistence on the subaltern’s self-representation. Spivak’s counter-argument, that the subaltern cannot speak, functions as a critique of the assumptions of European humanism in regards to the geo-politics of representation. In advancing her argument, Spivak appears to acknowledge or assume that, on the one hand, the subject of the West can be conserved and, on the other hand, can be undermined through the critique of its ethnocentrism. In presenting a subject that can both be preserved and undermined, I wonder if Spivak theorizes a subject (of Western humanism) that can, perhaps, also be reconfigured.

To suggest that humanism can be reconfigured provokes the question as to the extent to which this can take place before it is no longer humanism. What becomes clear through Spivak’s interrogation of the representation of the subaltern woman is that her position is one of anti-essentialism. That is to say that Spivak is not interested in a seemingly positivist quest to discover or ascertain the true essence of woman-ness or subaltern-ness. Later in this section, I will discuss how her analysis gestures towards an affirmation of a “subaltern perspective” (epistemological/political) remaining even if the subaltern itself (ontological) was to no longer exist (as the Other of the dominant). Here, though, I simply wish to foreground something of the interesting consequences that anti-essentialism has for the question of humanism. On the one hand, any humanism based on rigid essentialism is radically critiqued insofar as the very roots – the metaphysics – of the humanist project are pulled out. However, while the metaphor of roots suggests the imminent death of humanism, starved as it would be of its life-source, I wish to suggest that just as Spivak’s anti-essentialism does not do away with the category of woman or subaltern altogether, so too might the possibility for humanisms formed at the limits of discourse begin to emerge. In other words, the attempt to recover the true or pure humanism is akin, for
example, to the nativist response to colonialism (an act of bad faith that would maintain the binary and therefore produce a neocolonial space rather than a postcolonial one). However, humanisms contingent on their historical circumstances – on the boundaries which mark the limit of their possibility – remain as a production that can be interrogated and critiqued, as well as affirmed.

While Spivak makes no explicit (or, perhaps more accurately, consistent and elaborated) comment on the death or otherwise of humanism, we might see her focus on subject-positions providing an important qualification for the kind of humanism that can possibly avoid the pitfalls of that which accompanied European colonialism. That is, a strategic rendering of a humanism from the perspective of the subaltern woman is going to produce a humanism with different effects. While anti-humanist critics would tend to counter that such an attempt is futile because humanism has been shown to be necessarily imperialistic – for example, we might think of Spivak’s own comment that ‘there is an affinity between the imperialist subject and the subject of humanism’ (1996, 210-211) – this criticism itself could be seen to rely on an essentialist ontology of humanism. This is why Spivak’s own relation to humanism remains more ambivalent. When she speaks the language of anti-humanism, it is within the context of European colonialism and patriarchy, rather than assuming a-historical declarations of eternal truth. This is evident in the quote just cited in which Spivak is careful to suggest an *affinity* between the imperialist subject and the subject of humanism, not a necessary, inextricable tie. Such a distinction is reminiscent of Edward Said’s suggestion that an affiliation is something that involves choice, will and active engagement, whereas a filiation is something received “by birth” (Said, 1983, pp.15-24). The former assumes openness to change, the latter suggests implication (or complicity, to use one of Spivak’s favorite terms) “by default”. For Spivak, it is her commitment to deconstruction and to a basic anti-essentialist onto-epistemology that actually requires her, I argue, to leave the question of humanism open.

This very matter of the deconstruction of a concept as an opening up of the concept can be seen in Spivak’s analysis of the word “representation”. This analysis is a key pillar on which the rest of the argument is built in *CSS*. Radhakrishnan notes that ‘Spivak points out that in their
theoretical haste they [Foucault and Deleuze] conflate the two meanings of representation, one
cognitive and the other political, they dismantle the distinction between “who is saying it” and
“what is being said” (2003, p.156). This call for keeping distinct the two meanings is important
for at least two different reasons. Firstly, Spivak’s identification of a political meaning of
representation has potentially significant implications for the way in which humanism itself is
represented. Rather than representation being about what “is”, representation is conceived as
something that is always related to matters of power. Indeed, I have intentionally used the word
“matters” rather than something like “issues” here as the materiality of power and the politics of
representation seems to me to be of particular importance to Spivak. Not only are there bodies
who are doing the “saying”, the “what” of representation and its effects relate to lives actually
lived. The recognition of the lived effects of representation is what Spivak articulates as the
macro-political insertion into the micro-politics of poststructuralist forms of representation. Thus,
if the humanism that accompanied colonialism was one that ignored the matter of who is saying
it, and therefore carried a representation (in terms of the “what is being said”) that was blind to
cultural difference and the politics of onto-epistemology, Spivak’s concern with Foucault and
Deleuze is, then, the risk that their theorizing presents for a continuing disavowal of the onto-
epistemological violence of colonialism in the postcolonial context.

The second way in which Spivak’s distinction between the two different understandings of
representation is of interest to the argument being presented here relates to the problem of
fixing the meaning of any given term. In CSS, Spivak manages to show how keeping open more
than one possible way of understanding a concept can be productive in allowing both critique
and affirmation at the same time. While she might conclude that the subaltern cannot speak, the
critique is not so much a repudiation of representation as it is of the conditions that allow for
representation. The political point of Spivak’s work, it seems to me, is to demonstrate that the
subaltern’s “emancipation” is contingent on her access to Western epistemological tools but that
in the gaining of such access, the subaltern ceases to be; she is erased through liberation.
Thus, we have an ambivalent conclusion. On the one hand, Spivak’s conclusion suggests the
transmogrification of the subaltern into (something akin to) a Westerner, thereby rendering the
subaltern as necessarily “extinct”. On the other hand, the subaltern’s access to the tools of
representation signals a success in terms of liberation from oppression. What the illustration of the historical practice of *sati* in the essay demonstrates is that both the paternalism that accompanies certain local cultural practices and the hegemony of colonial governance ensure that the woman remains subaltern. The impossible double-bind – a favorite phrase of Spivak’s – is that for the third-world woman as subaltern to “speak” (and thereby lose her subalternity), she must accept and become complicit with patriarchy and colonialism.

The way out of this double-bind (of course, there is no way out as such) is, according to Radhakrishnan, in the coming together of subalternity and poststructuralism (2003, p.157). My reading of this is that he is suggesting the articulation of a particular ontology with a particular epistemology. It is a coupling, as far as I can tell, that aims to open up possibilities for the subaltern through poststructuralism. The problem for me, though, is that there seems to be something much more active – more political – that is still lacking in the connection between subalternity (as an ontological category) and poststructuralism. As such, I am more sanguine about Radhakrishnan’s proposal when he makes clear the logical affiliation between poststructuralism and deconstruction for the postcolonial concerns of Spivak. He writes, ‘in Spivak’s case it only makes sense to befriend poststructuralism and deconstruction, since what they are all about is the interrogation of Eurocentrism and the Enlightenment from “within”’ (p.157). Deconstruction specifically, rather than poststructuralism more broadly, is the aspect of Spivak’s work that interests me because it is more properly a critical practice. It represents, then, a somewhat specific mode of reading that can be used by the subaltern (and critical scholarship) to think representation differently, and therefore maintain its relevance while also uncovering its violences.

While some critics will not be content with the use of Western theory or epistemology in the subaltern cause, such a critique continues to function by giving primacy to fixed ontological questions which demarcate that which is “West” and that which is not. Radhakrishnan is, in my view, justified in his reading of Spivak to state that ‘the important question is not about ontological purity, but about strategies of using the West against itself in conjunction with finding one’s own “voice”’ (2003, p.157). Such a statement does not do away with the fact of ontological
commitments and difference, but it nevertheless implies that ontological fixity is something to be claimed strategically rather than something that is. Radhakrishnan elaborates by arguing that ‘Spivak’s position is that “we are both where we are and where we think” and if, in a sense, as a result of colonialism, “where we think” is the West as well, it is quixotic to deny it’ (p.157). Such a view is reminiscent of Dipesh Chakrabarty’s beautiful and arresting lines which so powerfully conclude *Provincializing Europe*: ‘For at the end of European imperialism, European thought is a gift to us all. We can talk of provincializing it only in an anticolonial spirit of gratitude’ (2008, p.255). Here, Chakrabarty not only recognizes the postcolonial fact of European thought, but also makes a plea for an ethically and politically interested critique of it, while simultaneously accepting it as a gift.

So the deconstruction of representation through the trace of the subaltern woman in Spivak keeps representation open as a matter of ethicopolitical interest. That is, writing both within and against poststructuralism (the micropolitics of Deleuze and Foucault) on the one hand and Marxism (or more accurately in regards to CSS, Gramsci) on the other, Spivak’s method brings poststructuralism and subalternity together. Spivak’s commitment to deconstruction ensures that neither is valorized nor forgotten. Key to the distinctiveness of Spivak in relation to other Western theorists is the way in which her postcolonial positionality functions as a constant reminder of the subaltern. What this does, I contend, is prioritize the ethicopolitical imperative that can be too easily dismissed. Indeed, this is one way of characterizing Spivak’s critique of Deleuze and Foucault in CSS. Instead of seeing the third-world as transparent and naively believing that the subaltern can represent herself, Spivak brings together poststructuralism and the postcolonial subaltern in a way that refuses to ignore the politics of the relation. That is, there remains an asymmetry of power within the relationship between poststructuralism and the subaltern which must always be foregrounded and deconstructed as a matter of ethicopolitical necessity. Radhakrishnan argues that this coupling by Spivak ‘enables a different articulation between theory and history than the usual’ (2003, p.159). By this, he means to say that Spivak’s work is an intervention that problematizes the assumption that theory is ahistorical and history atheoretical. His description of how an articulation of poststructuralism (theory) and subalternity (politics) is mediated according to the asymmetry that constitutes the link is worth quoting at length:
A poststructuralized subalternity would attempt to address the political as in the here and now and address the ethical understood as a perennial preoccupation that is always in excess (and not in negation) of the political. As a politically motivated subalternity and an epistemologically oriented poststructuralism begin to negotiate with each other, a different and challenging role opens up for theory: not just the good old theory-praxis nexus, and not the formulaic opposition between the good folk who always historicize and the bad and self-indulgent ones who only theorize. (p.159)

What a poststructuralized subalternity amounts to, in regards to representation as it is interrogated in CSS, is a refusal to recover the subaltern voice through a re-writing of history while nevertheless seeing the impossibility of representation as a political problem that requires a strategic use of Western theory (that is, deconstruction). But the profundity of this can easily be lost within a mere and dismissive invocation of the term deconstruction. More than this, Spivak’s deconstruction of subaltern representation is marked by a double consciousness in two distinct but related ways. Firstly, there is the double consciousness of the need to represent the subaltern for the sake of political interest, while at the same time, also for political reasons, bringing into question the very notion of representation. Secondly, and perhaps less popularly discussed, is the double consciousness which sees the subaltern as a category of identity (one is subaltern) but also sees the subaltern as a particular kind of perspective. In the words of Veena Das, subalterns are not ‘morphological categories, but represent a perspective in the sense in which Nietzsche used this word’ (1989, p.324). It seems to me that Spivak does not necessarily want to deny either of the renderings of subaltern and nor does she wish to valorize either of them. Instead, what she is able to show is that the “overcoming” of subalternity through hegemonization must be held together with the idea of “subalternity as perspective”. It is this subaltern perspective which keeps under question the dominant epistemology, culture and politics that is the very condition for the liberation from subalternity in a world structured asymmetrically.

So, then, my argument is that Spivak’s ethico-political use of deconstruction in her analysis of representation as it relates to the subaltern woman carries important implications for the place of humanism within contemporary discourse and educational practice. Firstly, despite her own general – though not entirely consistent – commitment to antihumanism, Spivak’s approach to critical work is one that refuses the temptation for outright repudiation of humanism on the one
hand, and an uncritical embrace of it on the other. It seems to me that this is, in part, a result of
the inherent political interest in Spivak’s deconstruction. Such a political deconstruction both
criticizes the Subject of humanism while also taking care to work in the interests of the subject of
humanism. In other words, her deconstructive method functions to always keep open
possibilities for strategic uses of imperialistic concepts and practices in the name of social
justice. Secondly, just as Spivak distinguishes between two different notions of representation in
her critique of Deleuze and Foucault, she also distinguishes between two different notions of
subaltern. It seems to me that this can be done also for humanism. This is not simply about
acknowledging different humanisms geographically and culturally (Eastern humanism/Western
humanism, Islamic humanism/secular humanism etc.), but about distinguishing between
humanism as a concept, as a practice, and as perspective. Mere geographical or cultural
difference amounts to a difference between (ie. Comparativism), however deconstruction should
be concerned with how humanism has been constituted by a difference within. Finally, just as I
argued at the outset of this thesis that varying iterations of Western humanism maintained a
basic continuity in regards to its ethico-political impulse, this is precisely what I see as a
possibility emerging from Spivak’s deconstructive treatment of representation and subalternity. It
is humanism as an ethico-political imperative or humanism as a perspective (or moral resource)
that should be maintained despite the problems of its Eurocentric rendering and justification for
colonialism’s civilizing mission.

It is this notion of humanism as an ethico-political impulse that, in the following section, I wish to
suggest animates the work of Spivak. In developing this argument, I will suggest that the specter
of humanism looms large over her intellectual project. Whatever else Spivak aims to do, she
never diverts from a path towards the (im)possibility of social justice and decolonization. A
humanistic concern for the fate of the subaltern and, indeed, the betterment of the planet, just
might be the animating spirit of her criticism and her teaching.

**Marx, Spivak and deconstruction**

I have argued in the previous section that Spivak’s critique of humanism amounts to an
interrogation and a deconstruction, rather than a repudiation, of it. I have made the claim that
deconstruction necessarily leaves open, even if it does not support, the possibility of a certain kind of humanism. I have also been attempting to make clear that I am less interested in a humanism that is conceived too strongly in ontological terms, and more interested in a humanism conceived as an onto-epistemology. That is to say, I will argue here that the humanism haunting Spivak’s work is one that emerges as a relation to knowledge, not as a transcendent and immutable category, but as it is produced and disseminated within history. Moreover, seen in this way, humanism as an onto-epistemology carries consequences in regards to the politics of practice.

In her *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (*PCR*, 1999), Spivak works through the postcolonial critic’s complicity with Western reason and ways of knowing. Her project is an acknowledgment of the impossibility of transcending this historical element of knowledge production and its effects. The travel of Western epistemology – traditions of knowledge that are produced by, while also functioning to produce, humanism – with colonialism has seen the postcolonial necessarily imbricated in its logic and its project. Thus, an undoing of European humanism as an epistemological “reality” is something that can only be achieved, in part, from the inside. In regards to Spivak’s own critical work, then, I am suggesting that her filiation to, and affiliation with, Western theory positions her ideally to critique it. But I am also going to argue here that there is a spirit of humanism that haunts her work. Furthermore, I would suggest it is not only an epistemological haunting, but also an ethico-political one. Whatever its violence, the ethico-political imperative of humanism’s concern for the wellbeing of the individual and society is something that continues to animate Spivak’s own work. Put differently, as I attempted to argue in the previous section, her work never evacuates the condition of human experience from theory. What I argue, therefore, is that the spirit of humanism is one which emerges from the space created at the limits of deconstruction and the postcolonial.

So far, I have been making the argument that humanism remains a site of contestation and possibility on account of Spivak’s deconstructive work. Moreover, I have suggested that this deconstruction within the context of the postcolonial represents a complicated ethico-political formation. However, just as Spivak does not consider herself a humanist, she has also been
critical of deconstruction for the very reasons other Marxists such as her critic, Terry Eagleton, might articulate. On more than one occasion, Spivak can be found making clear that she should not be seen as a deconstructionist. It seems to me that she makes this claim for two related reasons: firstly, because she does not want to be fixed methodologically or seen as someone who adopts deconstruction in its entirety; secondly, because she does not consider herself a particularly good or ‘pure’ practitioner of deconstruction. For example, in response to a question from postcolonial theologian, Kwok Pui-lan, Spivak says, ‘I can’t make all the moves that Derrida made. I can go up to a point, but after that I can’t make those moves’ (Moore et al., 2011, p.64).

Spivak claims that she has, indeed, been touched by deconstruction – that it exists as a starting point for her, but that she has consistently been a poor deconstructionist, a stain on the field (Spivak, 2005). Importantly, in my view both these reasons relate in large part to her Marxism, her materialism, her politics.

Spivak begins her essay Ghostwriting – a critical review of Derrida’s Specters of Marx – by declaring: ‘I have always had a problem with Derrida on Marx’ (1995, p.65). Part of her problem is that ‘Derrida’s use of “Marxist” language is sometimes adduced as “evidence” for the radicalism of Derrida’s thought’ (Spivak, 2012, p.107). It is clear that when Spivak writes of “Derrida’s thought”, she could just as easily write “Derrida’s deconstruction” and mean by this “deconstruction as I understand it”, given her intimacy with, and reliance on, Derrida’s work. So her concern with Derrida on Marx provides a hint as to where Spivak herself sees the point from which she digresses from Derrida, the point after which she ‘can’t make those moves’. And this distinction between hers and Derrida’s deconstruction is especially important because Spivak declares that she has ‘fallen into a habit of deconstruction’ (2012, p.107). And so, when Spivak’s questioning of the radicalism of Derrida’s “Marxist language” is coupled with her assertion that ‘claims to the built-in radicalism of deconstruction’ are ill-advised, we might begin to see that it is, indeed, something to do with Marx and Derrida that leaves Spivak as unable to claim deconstruction more happily and intentionally than as ‘a habit’ (2012, p.107). In other words, perhaps, it is something to do with Marx and the politics of postcolonial, subaltern women that sees Spivak unable to follow Derrida any further than she already does.
What I will seek to argue here, then, is that Spivak’s commitment to Marxist, feminist and postcolonial concerns marks her methodological distinction from Derridean deconstruction. I will do this by engaging with her critique of Derrida on Marx. The significance of this reading is, for the sake of the argument being presented here, two-fold. Firstly, it functions to demonstrate the way in which a particular kind of deconstruction, coupled with the concerns of postcolonialism, and the normative projects of feminism and Marxism, provides for the possibility of an ethico-political humanism. Secondly, the reading of Spivak on Derrida in relation to the Specters of Marx opens out to a consideration of the notion of “Specter” and how, indeed, it might be understood in relation to humanism and Spivak’s work. That is, if it can be established that Spivak’s appropriation – or, as she puts it, her standing as a ‘stain’ in the field (2005, p.95) – of deconstruction is ethico-political, and if the argument I am making for humanism as ethico-political practice and moral resource can be assumed for the moment, then we might be able to see humanism as the Specter that hangs over her work.

**Spivak on Derrida on Marx**

To say that Spivak, as a deconstructionist, is indebted to Derrida is about as far from contentious as one could be. Of course, she was schooled by Paul de Man but, in her own words, when commenting on her translation and introduction to De la grammatologie, Spivak recalls: ‘I was forever touched by something that I call deconstruction, with no guarantees that I am ever right on the mark. No one has taught me deconstruction’ (2005, p.95). So it is that her debt is not to a teacher in the common notion of the term, but to one whose text she so painstakingly and intimately became acquainted with, to the point where she realized her habituation to this thing called deconstruction. Given the nature of Spivak’s acquaintance with deconstruction through Derrida, one may initially be surprised that their respective relationships to deconstruction differ.

Morton (2003) writes that for Spivak, ‘the popular understanding of deconstruction as apolitical and relativist is both reductive and simplistic. From the outset, Spivak has persistently and persuasively demonstrated that deconstruction is a powerful political and theoretical tool’ (p.4). At this point, it is not clear how this description of Spivak’s understanding of deconstruction
would differ to Derrida’s. Indeed, understood as a practice or a way of thinking that always decenters the center, or looks to the aporias and blind spots of discourse, such “political” use of deconstruction in Spivak would be scarcely different to that of Derrida. Rather, it seems that her focus on global economics, the international division of labor, and the exploitation of the (woman) Third-World worker situates her in a more “worldly” political space. But even here, Derrida makes his own moves in this direction in *Specters of Marx* (2012). In fact, Spivak applauds him for doing so, writing: ‘it was good that Derrida wrote *Specters*. Deconstruction has been so long associated with political irresponsibility by those who practice criticism by hearsay that it was significant for its inventor to have given his imprimatur to rereading Marx’ (1995, p.66). Syrotinski even wonders if *Specters of Marx* might be ‘the crossing point where Spivak and Derrida meet while heading almost in opposite directions’ (2007, p.41). That is to argue that Derrida’s tackling of ‘the “politics of deconstruction” head on, in order to demonstrate that deconstruction has in fact always been a fundamentally ethico-political reading practice’, brings him to a similar place as Spivak in her affirmation of deconstruction in service of a postcolonial politics in *PCR* (p.41).

But while Spivak herself might share in Syrotinski’s sentiment, she is less sanguine about the notion of meeting. In *Ghostwriting* she critiques Derrida for his failure to grasp Marx properly and, in failing to do so, for not going far enough (politically speaking) in his deconstruction of Marx. And while Derrida’s focus is on Marx, his motivations are not Marxist. Spivak’s position as not only a deconstructionist and Marxist, but also a feminist and postcolonial scholar, on the other hand, clearly motivates her critique. For example, early on, Spivak takes issue with the fact that woman ‘is nowhere in *Specters of Marx*’ (1995, p.66) despite the fact that ‘in the current global conjuncture woman is the dubiously felicitous out-of-joint subject of the strictly Marxian vision, in a number of ways’ (p.67). Spivak then goes on to suggest numerous ways in which Marx’s analysis has proved prescient in relation to the way in which, in the post-Soviet new international economic order, ‘it is the labor of the patriarchally defined subaltern woman that has been most effectively socialized’ (p.67). She continues to draw links between Marx, imperialism and the exploitation of women before abruptly declaring: ‘Since *Specters of Marx* cannot bring in women, I will not pursue this further here’ (p.68). The use of the word “cannot” in
this brief sentence, I think, is telling. While Spivak could have written “does not”, she uses language connoting authorization or preclusion, not choice. Perhaps this idea of what is “authorized” or “allowed” is an allusion to the limits that Derrida and Spivak each place on themselves through the subject-position each inhabits, a position that deconstruction can only insist on decentering.

What Spivak does pursue further is the section of Specters which she deems to be ‘the most unimpeachable in the liberality of its sentiments’ – that which focused on the New International (p.68). She briskly offers her reading of this section with perfunctory compliment followed by a pointed accusation of misunderstanding:

No fault can be found with the black-on-black list of ten to show what’s out-of-joint with the world and “our” present present. But Derrida can’t see the systemic connections between the ten plagues of the New World Order [SM 81] because he cannot know the connection between industrial capitalism, colonialism, so-called postindustrial capitalism, neocolonialism, electronified capitalism, and the current financialization of the globe, with the attendant phenomena of migrancy and ecological disaster. (p.68)

The ‘black-on-black list of ten’ refers to the “plagues” of the new world order as identified by Derrida. He includes such things as unemployment, economic war between nations and its implications for international law, the aggravation of foreign debt and the spread of nuclear weapons. Spivak’s attendant claim that Derrida can’t see the systemic connection between these plagues because of his failure to see the connection between various forms of capitalism, colonialism and financialization, is ostensibly based on her persistent argument that ‘Derrida seems not to know Marx’s main argument. He confuses industrial with commercial capital, even usury; and surplus-value with interest produced by speculation’ (Spivak, 2012, p.107). Other commentators, such as Leonard (2005), also consider the question of value as central to Spivak’s critique. He writes, ‘Spivak claims that Derrida’s careless reading of value metonymically points to his inability to understand postcoloniality, capitalism’s global hegemony, and transnational resistance movements’ (emphasis mine, np). This has led some to suggest that Spivak’s lambasting of Derrida amounts to a proprietorial claim on Marx that, perhaps, amounts to a stain on her deconstruction. Indeed, not only does Derrida make such a claim about her misreading of his Specters being ‘exacerbated here by the wounded resentment of

While Derrida may have misread Marx, and while Spivak may be proprietorial about Marx, the point I wish to make is that the motivation behind Spivak’s critique seems to be more than either of these options/problems. I want to argue that Spivak’s flippant response to the suggestion of her proprietoriality – ‘Who knows?’ – is an indication that there is something more urgent. Perhaps a key motivation for her critique of Derrida on Marx is that, in defending a particular Marx, the predicament of the postcolonial subaltern is able to be taken seriously. Here again we see that the concern that Spivak has for women (who, we must remember, she also considers to be subaltern) and the postcolonial subject of imperialism qualify her work as a deconstructionist. In *Ghostwriting*, she writes that the struggles of the subaltern ‘reflect a continuity of insurgency which can only too easily be appropriated by the discourse of a come-lately New internationality in the most extravagantly publicized theoretical arenas of the world. Subalternity remains silenced there’ (emphasis mine, p.71). I have already quoted Spivak’s critique of the ‘lack of place’ for women in *Specters*. The point is that it seems to be that Spivak would rather be an impure deconstructionist and keep the “subaltern perspective” central to her work as a political act. In this way, she enunciates a theory that occupies – however contradictorily and controversially – the space, the aporia, at the limits of deconstruction and the postcolonial. It is a theory-praxis that remains rooted in the work of a humanities scholar who refuses to give up on the subaltern by giving up on politics, the universal and, I claim, the human. All of these categories are, indeed, deconstructed, but never destroyed.

**The Specter of Humanism**

Just as it comes as a surprise to some readers of Derrida that he would claim ‘Now, even in this last hypothesis, fidelity to the inheritance of a certain Marxist spirit would remain a duty’ (2012, p.108), it might well be a surprise for Spivak to hear me claim that she maintains a fidelity to a certain humanist spirit. But to remain faithful to a certain spirit of Marxism or humanism is a very particular way of understanding one’s relationship to these heritages. Derrida, in anticipating ‘people saying: “You picked a good time to salute Marx!”, also says, ‘if one interprets the gesture
we are risking here as a belated-rallying-to-Marxism, then one would have to have misunderstood quite badly...[w]hat is certain is that I am not a Marxist’ (2012, pp.109-110). Similarly, my argument that a spirit of humanism haunts Spivak’s work is not the same thing as claiming on her behalf a belated-rallying-to-Humanism. I wouldn’t dare. I have already argued that her peculiar form of postcolonial-inflected, or subaltern-conscious, deconstruction functions to at least keep the question of humanism open. In this final section, I will make the argument that, in claiming a ghost of humanism as haunting Spivak’s work, I am claiming an ambivalent humanistic spirit. Or, perhaps, I am claiming a deconstructive/ed spirit of humanism that, in taking form, emerges as something like the humanism effect suggested by Alessandrini (2009; 2014). Moreover, as spirit, this humanism remains immanent, responsive to the future anterior but never transcendentalized and ontologically fixed.

But what does it mean to say that Spivak’s work is “haunted”? Indeed, the notions of “specter” and “haunting” clearly require clarification. Of course, the idea of a haunted house in popular culture is one that carries negative connotations associated with the horror genre within film or fiction writing. In everyday life, when one talks of being “haunted” by something, they tend to mean that an incident from the past – often one in which they did something wrong or experienced something traumatic – continues to consume them psychologically. To stay with just these two examples for a moment, we see how temporality and psychology are related to the notion of haunting. Indeed, haunting seems to suggest a confounding of linear notions of time as the ghost of the past, shuttled into the future, appears in the present. The present, then, can only be understood as existing simultaneously with the past and present, complicating in the process the idea of past as past and future as future and as temporalities disconnected from the phenomenology of the present. It seems to me, no matter what conceptualization of haunting is chosen, linear notions of temporality are necessarily challenged and complicated. It is, as Derrida states, ‘untimely’ (2012, p.3). Yet, as I will argue, the political appropriation of the specter requires a coming back to the present in its relation to the past and future.

While the notion of time is necessarily problematized by the notion of spectrality and haunting, the same cannot be said for the psychological element. Indeed, it is at this episto-ontological
level that haunting may take on different guises. In thinking about haunting and specters, materiality is ambiguous. It is true that there is an inescapable immaterial aspect to the invocation of ghost. A ghost is something that undoes the spatio-temporal boundaries determined by a modern, rationalist and physicalist account of the world. The ghost floats and is unable to be grasped. Yet, insofar as a ghost interacts with – perhaps even causes the materialization of – history, there is a sense of presence that is carefully linked to the material and not merely the psychic. As Van Wagenen (2004), in her review essay of Gordon’s *Ghostly Matters* (1997), writes: ‘Haunting is not a psychological phenomenon to be explained in the exploration of the inner workers [sic] of the haunted subject’s psyche’ (p.289). This is the kind of haunting that is not only common to popular culture, but also a haunting that is pathologized. Such a notion of haunting treats the haunted subject’s experiences as an unwanted interruption of reality. Gordon, a sociologist, in her important book *Ghostly Matters*, prefers to articulate a ‘sense of the ghostly and its social and political effects’ (1997, p.18). I wish to follow Gordon’s lead insofar as she deems that ‘haunting is a constitutive feature of social life’ (1997, p.22) that therefore requires us to be more interested in that which animates social life.

Gordon’s specific use of the concept assumes a violent historical past and an urgency to transform the present for the sake of the future. The phenomenon of haunting – the moment when “ghosts” appear – is, Gordon argues, ‘one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with (such as with transatlantic slavery, for instance) or when their oppressive nature is continuously denied (such as with free labor or national security)’ (p.2). It is clear, then, that in her use of the term, haunting involves violence/abuse, its instantiation in the social, and the moments of this recognition. That it must involve violence is something that is both useful for understanding the spectrality of humanism, but also unnecessary. In my intentionally ambivalent use of the notion of haunting, I suggest that the violences of humanism do indeed haunt the work of Spivak. It is the violence of humanism as articulated by Fanon that produces a certain anti-humanist positionality in Spivak’s writing. However, I also wish to argue that, in using the language of “animate” to describe the function of humanism’s specter, the non-violent ethico-political impulse of humanism’s past can be detected in the thrust of Spivak’s scholarship.
Gordon does, indeed, develop a constructive politics out of her theory of haunting. But for her, this is only driven by the problems associated with social life in the past and present. She writes:

> Haunting always registers the harm inflicted or the loss sustained by a social violence done in the past or being done in the present and is for this reason quite frightening. But haunting, unlike trauma by contrast, is distinctive for producing a something-to-be-done...Haunting refers to this socio-political-psychological state when something else, or something different from before, feels like it must be done, and prompts a something-to-be-done...For better or worse, the emphasis on the something-to-be-done was a way of focusing on the cultural requirements or dimensions of individual, social, or political movement and change. (2011, pp.2-3)

To the extent that this ‘particular approach to or definition of haunting—again limited in many important ways—had then at its core a contest over the future, over what’s to come next or later’ (Gordon, 2011, p.3), as a way of producing a critical moment demanding change, of acting for alternatives to social violence and repression, I join Gordon in her project. But I think there is also a possibility for us to see the violence of the future presciently, the political and moral resources of the past critically, and the present as a juncture at which the ghosts of the past and future demand a political and ethical response. The inhumanism of the future may be met with an impoverished but nevertheless fertile and regenerative humanism of the past. In fact, it seems to me that this is one way of seeing the work of Spivak. It is certainly one way of interpreting her seemingly out-of-place and often “by the way” comments. For example, when commenting on the matter of theory as “critique of humanism”, she writes: ‘It is because I am confident of the practical possibilities of the critique of humanism that I am cautious about using it too soon as more than a pedagogic method, or as a pervasive and foregrounded structural topic of discussion’ (1990, p.788). That is, the critique of humanism historically is necessary, but critique is not the same as repudiation for Spivak whose commitment to ethico-political consequences mediates her use of, and response to, theoretical critique.

Derrida’s own understanding of haunting – or hauntology – is different to that of Gordon who cites her revision of the discipline of sociology as emerging within the context of ‘poststructuralism, postcolonialism, post-Marxism, postindustrialism, postmodernism [and] postfeminism’ (1997, p.9). While both Derrida’s Specters of Marx and Gordon’s Ghostly Matters
are concerned with the political, and Gordon’s focus is primarily with the social, it is Derrida’s commitment to deconstruction that determines the style and argument of his text. While the earlier discussion of Spivak’s engagement with Derrida’s *Specters of Marx* demonstrated that he does, indeed, wish to ask questions about the current social and political order, it does seem nevertheless that Gordon prioritizes the social in a very different way to Derrida. This, perhaps, can be seen when one considers how each of the authors explores their particular conception of haunting. Derrida’s introduction to the concept involves constant deferrals, questioning of meanings and a long meditation on Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. In attempting to articulate how he understands “Marxist spirits”, Derrida continually comes back, as one would expect, to deconstruction – to undecidability, and responsibility. The following example I will quote at length:

> The spirit, the specter are not the same thing, and we will have to sharpen this difference; but as for what they have in common, one does not know what it is, what it is presently. It is something that one does not know, precisely, and one does not know if precisely it is, if it exists, if it responds to a name and corresponds to an essence. One does not know: not out of ignorance, but because this non-object, this non-present present, this being-there of an absent or departed one no longer belongs to knowledge. At least no longer to that which one thinks one knows by the name of knowledge. One does not know if it is living or if it is dead. Here is—or rather there is, over there, an unnameable or almost unnameable thing: something, between something and someone, anyone or anything, some thing, “this thing,” but this thing and not any other, this thing that looks at us, that concerns us [qui nous regarde], comes to defy semantics as much as ontology, psychoanalysis as much as philosophy…(2012, p.5)

In contrast, Gordon is, as to be expected, more straightforward in declaring a more humanistic (that is, in this instance, anthropocentric) interest in ‘what Michel Foucault called subjugated knowledge and to the person and their being. Persons are not merely mortal (finite beings) but living breathing complex people who cannot be approached or treated justly if there is an absolute necessity to affirm their otherness. Quite the opposite is needed by them and by us’ (2011, p.7).

At the risk of presenting a reductionist account of the differences between them, we can see that Gordon prioritizes haunting as the social violence of the past and the way in which it has led to the subjectification of people, while Derrida considers spectrality as a surviving. He relates this “surviving” to his reading of Marx’s exchange value as representing an abstraction (the excess
after the calculation of labor-value and use-value) as ‘what is left over, what remains’ (Syrotinski, 2007, p.49). This rendering of the specter brings us back, then, to its implications for temporality. Syrotinski writes that, within the logic of spectral apparition, ‘it is impossible to determine whether it is a sign of a past time coming back, or a signal in some way of a future time to come’ (p.50). Thus, the specter in Marx is both/neither the promise of the future on the one hand, and the relics and determinations of the past on the other.

Derrida’s specter, then, is something irreducible to ontology; it is, perhaps, an event. Gordon’s specter is a phenomenon. Her rendering is, in my estimation, onto-epistemological in that reality and knowledge are intertwined in the phenomenon of haunting. Indeed, Gordon clarifies her particular use of the term in a later essay by stating that, ‘what’s distinctive about haunting as I used the term (and this is not its only way, of course) is that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely’ (2011, p.2). In this sense, reality (ontology) comes into being for the knower (the subject of knowledge) at the point of knowing. To get back to Spivak and humanism: my argument is that between the urgency of social life that motivates both Gordon and Spivak’s scholarship on the one hand, and the politics of deconstruction that questions the being of any concept or politics which marks the shared project of Derrida and Spivak on the other hand, emerges something Alessandrini calls “the humanism effect”.

The humanism effect

In Alessandrini’s reading of Spivak’s Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography (1996), he considers her call for a strategic essentialism in maintaining the problematic designation “subaltern” for political purposes within the work of the Subaltern Historians. His view is that Spivak’s “strategic essentialism” is to be understood as ‘a strategic metalepsis, an intentional positing of an effect as a cause. “Subaltern” names the effect produced by certain processes; and yet these historians, because they have no choice, will begin from this effect as though it

35 See Derrida, 2007, “A Certain Impossible Possibility of Saying the Event”, Critical Inquiry 33, pp.441-461. In this exceedingly dense meditation on the event, Derrida sees it as the impossible arrival of the arrivant. It is unforeseen and never fully arrives as such. It is not something ushered in or “invited”, but something which ‘vertically befalls’ (p.452). In regards to the point I am making, the specter as event suggests an “un-timeliness”, an ambivalent temporality, and something that cannot be grasped as with the phenomenal.
provides a starting point for their work’ (2014, p. 86). He then notes a second element of this strategy in which he posits that the intention for Spivak and the Subaltern Studies group is not to locate or produce an authentic subaltern consciousness. Herein lies the paradox that has often proved a problem to interpreters of CSS: the term subaltern – understood as Das’ “subaltern perspective” – is a necessary analytic despite its aim to eliminate what the notion of subaltern represents. Alessandrini goes on to suggest that what he is “proposing to call “the humanism effect” has these same two qualities: the strategy of intentionally substituting an effect for a cause, and of founding itself around a moment of origin that it sets out to destroy’ (p. 86). While Alessandrini makes his argument for a “humanism effect” based on his reading of Fanon and Foucault, it is my contention that such a concept is also relevant to Spivak.

Alessandrini writes that “humanism” here does not mark the names of a discourse that underwrites the ethical relationship between two already-existing subjects. Rather...something like an effect of “humanization” is the key’ (p. 86). He wants to make clear that the humanism effect is something that emerges in a non-linear temporality. I have suggested through my analysis that Spivak shares with Foucault – and the broader movement known as poststructuralism – the critique of essentialism and a commitment to deconstruction. They also share, I would contend, the related critique of origins and of a historicism that assumes linear progression (humanism). For Alessandrini, this ‘provides a way of opening up an investigation, not just of the present as more than simply the product of an original and continuous past, but also of the future that has not yet (and may not) come’ (p. 86). I see great potential in this argument insofar as it seeks to avoid the charges of both foundationalism and essentialism on the one hand, and a naïve utopian telos and transcendentalism on the other hand. Instead, if Spivak can be said to promote, or at least enact, a humanism effect, it is a kind of humanism that is produced at the limits of a universal, transcendent project and a local, immanent one. It seems to me that this is precisely what her impure deconstruction in the name of feminist, subaltern and Marxist projects performs: the emergence of a humanism effect. Again, while Alessandrini is concerned with Foucault and Fanon, he writes, ‘if the production of the subaltern subject effect is part of the process of responding to the degradations that have resulted from the process of subalternization, then perhaps the production of the humanism effect can help a
postcolonial cultural politics respond to the dehumanization that has occurred in the name of humanism’ (p.86). Seeing the relevance of this statement to the work of Spivak as it has been discussed in this chapter is not difficult. We have noted that Spivak has postulated that ‘there is an affinity between the imperialist subject and the subject of humanism’ (1996, pp.210-211) but also that she remains ‘more committed to the risks of a persistently critiqued humanism’ (2000, p.xviii) or, in other words, a deconstructive humanism.

To suggest that Spivak, or postcolonial theory more generally, seeks a repudiation of humanism outright is, I believe, a mistake. This is because, in part, Spivak’s commitment to the critique of essence and, therefore, ontologization, should disallow such a move. Instead, Spivak is bound, in a sense, to the logic of her methodological and onto-epistemological commitments which necessitate that a concept such as humanism is historicized and considered in its multiplicities. To speak of its multiplicities is to acknowledge both the existence and practice of different humanisms historically and geographically, but also that all humanisms are constituted by multiplicity. This is Spivak’s commitment to anti-essentialism. And this commitment sees her acknowledge that ‘the critique of humanism in France was related to the perceived failure of the European ethical subject after the war’ (emphasis mine, Spivak, 1990, p.788). What Spivak makes clear here, is that the object of critique for postcolonial scholars (amongst others) is a particular European humanism whose assumptions and promises have been shown to have failed.

It is not, then, in this instance, a critique of something more than this very particular notion of humanism. This is seen again when Spivak comments, ‘I do not feel authorized to establish my critique of the imperialist field as a general theory... The analysis belongs to an extremely specific situation of the use of Western humanism and the establishment of Western democracy as alibis and explanations for the development and preparation of the field of operation for industrial capitalism’ (Sipiora & Atwell, 1990, p.299). This quote is suggestive of the argument I am putting forward in regards to Spivak’s work and how it relates to the question of humanism. Even if, for whatever reason, Spivak herself does not identify with humanism as such, when pushed, she seems to qualify and particularize her use of “Western humanism” as a concept or,
more accurately, historical event. By privileging a particular understanding of Western humanism as it relates to a particular field, she leaves open not just the inevitability of complicity with humanism but, in actual fact, she also leaves open the possibility for humanism to be rearticulated and utilized in the pursuit of justice.

This humanism to be utilized in the pursuit of justice is perhaps best understood as a strategic production of a humanism effect. The humanism effect is that which emerges from a position in which it is understood that ‘persistently to critique a structure that one cannot not (wish to) inhabit is the deconstructive stance’ (Spivak, 1990, p.795). Thus the humanism effect is produced through the critique of a humanism that one cannot not wish to inhabit, despite its violences. When one acknowledges with Chakrabarty that, ‘we need universals to produce critical readings of social injustices. Yet the universal...[produces] forms of thought that ultimately evacuate the place of the local’ (2008, pp. 254-255), the responsibility is to work the tensions of the universal and the particular so that they can produce something of critical and ethico-political importance. Radhakrishnan writes that ‘the “nameless” dignity of all humanity...whose value is enshrined in all human beings as the Other, has to be spoken for and produced as a contingent principle in different historical conjunctures by determinate, named human groups’ (2003, p.50). Without the universal, relativism makes a mockery of justice. Without particularity and contingency, imperialism makes a mockery of justice. Thus, Radhakrishnan continues, ‘as we consider the ethico-political authority of any human “value” that we consider universal...we cannot afford to forget that the burden of producing that value, as the telos of their cause, was borne in history by a particular group of people and it was through their experiences of pain and struggle that the cause attained its universality’ (pp.50-51). There is a postcolonial resonance in such a call. It is a call that takes seriously history and theory, the material and the textual.

Spivak’s refusal of essentialist, transcendentalized universality on the one hand and mere textualism or a deconstruction unmoved by the political projects of women, the subaltern and Marxism on the other hand, produces an oeuvre that strategically emphasizes that which needs to be emphasized in the name of social justice. At times, this looks like a defense of textual
obscurantism (as in her response to Eagleton’s review of *PCR*), other times it presents as proprietoriality in regards to Marx, against deconstruction. But perhaps the best example of the kind of postcolonial humanism effect that marks Spivak’s scholarship is the strategic essentialism she commandeers in the name of the subaltern in texts such as *CSS* and *Deconstructing Historiography*. The ethico-political imperative that pervades Spivak’s critical work might be thought of as the spirit of humanism, simultaneously haunting and animating, and being worked over through the dialectic of the universal and the particular to produce a humanism effect.
Chapter 6: Edward W. Said

In the previous chapter on Spivak, I considered how the theory-politics nexus represents an important debate within the space of postcolonial studies. I noted that, on the one hand, postcolonial studies has political concerns at the forefront of its work and, on the other hand, has tended to associate itself with the kind of theory that has sometimes been criticized for its apparent over-emphasis of the textual. In other words, postcolonial theorists such as Spivak have proceeded according to a largely poststructuralist set of methodologies which have functioned to question the stability of European assumptions, of which humanism might be considered chief. While Spivak is an avowed deconstructionist and theorist who engages quite directly with problems of and within theory, the work of Edward Said is quite different. As was made clear in the early part of the previous chapter, Said can be seen as a strong voice in opposition to what he calls “textualism”. His commitment to the worldliness of the text, secular criticism, and humanism, has opened him to critique from scholars right across the spectra of left-right, Marxist-poststructuralist, activist-theorist.

In this chapter, I begin by arguing that the critique of his *Orientalism* (2003) as being theoretically and methodologically inconsistent fails to treat his work as one that stands itself as a critique of the kind of disciplinary boundaries and intellectual commitments that drive such criticism. In *Orientalism*, a book that has become foundational to the field of postcolonial scholarship, Said not only provides an example of politically interested scholarship within literary studies, but also points to the kind of historically and geographically specific, and therefore provisional, perspectives that unify the disparate field of postcolonial theory. Building on this, I show how Said’s consistent commitments to worldliness and secular criticism, coupled with his regard for context and the subsequent foregrounding of provisionality, leads him to practice a humanism that is necessarily committed to its own critique and malleability. Thus, not only does Said’s critique of the ethnocentrism and essentialism of Enlightenment and classical versions of humanism leave open the possibility for other forms of humanism, his enduring legacy may well be his strident call for, and practice of, a rearticulated humanism.
Orientalism, the problem of Europe and postcolonial theory

The problem of Eurocentrism as it relates to colonialism and humanism is a problem to which this thesis consistently returns; indeed, the focus on postcolonial criticism demands this. Thus, in coming to Edward Said, while I do not want to unnecessarily labor the point, it will be worth spending at least some time to explore his critique of European dominance. It is especially important to see how he does this through Orientalism, as this is the text which is most often cited as the “origin” of the field of postcolonial studies. In the context of this thesis, then, the inclusion of Fanon at the beginning requires a reading back to Fanon as a postcolonial scholar before postcolonial studies existed. Such a move is justified by acknowledging the shared concerns, mode of critique, themes and theorizing between Fanon and the Postcolonial Scholars. But it is important to note too that the inclusion of Said is based on his importance to the disciplinary field, not his “membership” of it. Indeed, he did not consider himself a postcolonial theorist. As such, this section is more concerned to show how Orientalism can be seen as the ‘source-book’ for postcolonial theory and the way in which Said considered “Europe” to be a problem. I will do this, in part, however, through an engagement with the criticism of Orientalism which functions to illustrate its significance for postcolonialism.

The publication of Orientalism proved to be momentous. As McLeod notes, ‘although Said was not the first intellectual interested in what came to be called colonial discourses, his definition of Orientalism was important in theorising them and shaping postcolonial studies as we have seen, and his book remains highly influential (and, for some, controversial) today’ (2010, pp.46-47). Indeed, it has been generative of the entire field of postcolonial studies, across disciplinary boundaries and intellectual foci. Core to its argument is that there is a connection between (cultural) knowledge production and imperialism. That is, the Orient was produced through the cultural representations of it by the Occident. Building on the work of Foucault, Orientalism showed how, when understood as a discourse, Orientalist knowledge functioned as a handmaiden for colonial practices. Said’s critique, then, was of the ways in which the Orient became essentialized and effectively silenced according to Euro-American dominance. But Said’s reliance on Foucault, and the perceived totalization of his notion of Orientalism as
evidenced in his claim regarding its essentialization of the Orient, have generated criticism of his project. Much of this relates to the seemingly contradictory use of concepts and theorists or, as Varisco (2012) puts it, Said is ‘frequently inconsistent, both in theory and execution’ (p.15). But as I will seek to argue, the kind of ambivalence in, and tension between, the anti-essentialist though nevertheless possibly essentializing nature of his Orientalism has been significantly generative for the field of postcolonial theory.

In the opening pages of the book, Said seeks to explain how he understands the idea of Orientalism. He describes three different notions of Orientalism which might be broadly described as academic (the scholarly work, whether historical, anthropological or literary), imaginative, wherein the ontological and epistemological distinction between East and West determines the writings of novelists, philosophers and political theorists alike, and institutional, by which he means an Orientalism that is best understood as ‘a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient’ (2003, pp.2-3). I see it as significant that Said prefaces his description of the three key understandings of Orientalism stating that, ‘by Orientalism I mean several things, all of them, in my opinion, interdependent’ (p.2). That is, the three different understandings he proposes are distinct, but related. In their distinctiveness, they may relate to a different field, and therefore, mode of inquiry. The academic notion of Orientalism may lend itself to analysis within the field of history or literature, seeking to identify and describe Orientalist thematics. The third notion of Orientalism, however, relating as it does to colonialism and imperialism – that is, of the will to dominate and have ‘authority over the Orient’ (p.3) – may well involve a different kind of analysis, utilizing Gramsci’s cultural hegemony, for example. As Said is at pains to point out, this does not mean that the more properly humanistic approach should be necessarily considered as apolitical in contrast to the more obviously political approach indebted to Gramsci.

Said acknowledges the widely-held assumption that to be a humanist scholar ‘indicates the humanities’ as the field of study ‘and therefore the unlikely eventuality that there might be anything political’ in what has to be said (2003, p.9). This further relates to the common view regarding ‘the determining impingement on most knowledge produced in the contemporary
West...is that it be nonpolitical, that is, scholarly, academic, impartial, above partisan or small-minded doctrinal belief' (pp.9-10). What Said wishes to show in his study of Orientalism, even insofar as his work is concerned with apparently nonpolitical literary texts (among others), is the ‘highly if obscurely organized political circumstances obtaining when knowledge is produced’ (p.10). This means, for Said, ‘being aware, however dimly, that one belongs to a power with definite interests in the Orient, and more important, that one belongs to a part of the earth with a definite history of involvement with the Orient’ (p.11). So there are two points from this that I think need to be made explicit when considering Said’s understandings of Orientalism. The first is that Orientalism is construed, from the outset, in multiple, distinct but nevertheless related ways. Second, while distinguishing between different notions of Orientalism allows for – perhaps even demands – different theoretical and methodological considerations in the study of Orientalism, all knowledge is political and this itself has implications for the way in which one undertakes scholarly work and for the level of their commitment to received disciplinary rules. In acknowledging these claims, it may be the case that scholarship becomes, at times, less clear, but the supposed inconsistencies and contradictions might also come to be seen as productive of new and more politically-inflected ways of engaging knowledge production. This has not, however, been the way a number of Said’s respondents have viewed Orientalism.

Valerie Kennedy (2000), in her critical introduction to Said, writes that ‘Said’s approach in Orientalism is radical in several ways, and it was even more radical in 1978 than it is today’ (p.20). However, she also identifies notions of class and gender as gaps in his analysis, along with the fact that he ‘gives scant acknowledgement of the work of non-Western postcolonial writers’ (p.20). Kennedy, though, gives special attention to ‘problems arising from the multiple definitions of Orientalism (my emphasis)’ to which I have referred above, before noting the other problems that ‘arise from Said’s attempts to reconcile Foucault, Gramsci and certain features of Western humanism’ which she deems to imply methodological contradictions (p.20). I will respond here to these key criticisms from Kennedy.

I will elaborate on the response I have already provided above to the issue of the multiple definitions of Orientalism. Kennedy asserts that ‘there is a vacillation in the book between
historical and ahistorical perspectives which is disabling’ (2000, p.21). This criticism captures nicely the kind of problem that I associate with much of the criticism of Said: it wishes for neat boundaries and “consistency” whereas Said himself, I suggest, was more interested to open up the complexity of the arrangement that is Orientalism and its effects, even if this meant transgressing boundaries. Kennedy proceeds to explain in some detail the ways in which Said invokes and works his various definitions of Orientalism throughout the book, before concluding with a fairly short summary of her critique. She writes, ‘there is hesitation as to whether the Orient can be truly represented by Western writers or not’ and ‘the book seems to suggest at times that scholarly Orientalism paved the way for imperialism and was then superseded by it, but at other moments imperialism is seen as coming to determine the development of scholarly Orientalism as a field’ (p.24). But while this vacillation might be messy, I am of the view that Said does account for it and, whatever the case, I am not so sure this messiness needs to be construed as a problem.36

The best response to the issue Kennedy raises – of Orientalism appearing to have paved the way for imperialism, but at other times imperialism as appearing to have determined the development of academic Orientalism – might be given with reference to two different matters raised by Said. First, there is the kind of logic that underlies Orientalism. This can be seen in the comment Said makes about his three definitions of Orientalism at the outset; that is, that they are interdependent. There is an interplay between them. Academic Orientalism, with its presumed objectivity and authoritative knowledge about the Orient, no doubt contributes to “Europe’s” imperialist relation to it. However, institutional Orientalism ‘as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient’ (Said, 2003, p.3) can be thought of as being both produced by, but also a producer of, this academic Orientalism. The key point being that both academic and institutional Orientalisms can work on each other without one having to be primary and the other derivative. This example – and indeed its logic – can be seen as another way of writing the relationship between academic Orientalism and imperialism. For the sake of argument, though more simplistic than Said intended, one could take “imperialism” to correspond to, or be synonymous with, institutional Orientalism. In doing so, it

36 Arguments to support both of these claims are presented throughout the chapter.
could be argued that imperialism (as institutional Orientalism) and academic Orientalism work on each other simultaneously. This logic, it seems to me, is actually rather unremarkable.

Second, it is worth considering Said’s comments regarding “the general” and “the specific” and how this relates to Kennedy’s concern about the determinism of academic Orientalism by imperialism. In acknowledging a difference between a general notion of Orientalism that is conceived as an unchanging abstraction which represents such things as the idea of European superiority or various kinds of imperialism on the one hand, and the reality that there are many specific works which may well reveal a more nuanced Orientalism (perhaps even a resistance to it?) on the other, Said writes: ‘Isn’t there an obvious danger of distortion (of precisely the kind that academic Orientalism has always been prone to) if either too general or too specific a level of description is maintained systematically?’ (2003, p.8). Here, Said is setting up a dialectic of sorts that seeks to keep the general and the specific in a productive tension, disallowing one to dominate the other.

More than this, he goes on to explain the significance this has in relation to Kennedy’s concern regarding determinism. When Said writes that ‘The trouble is that there is too great a distance between the big dominating fact, as I have described it, and the details of everyday life that govern the minute discipline of a novel or a scholarly text as each is being written’, he is warning against the danger of applying the “political” idea of imperial domination ‘deterministically to such complex matters as culture and ideas’ (2003, pp.11-12). In many ways, Said preempts the criticism he later receives that his notion of Orientalism is totalizing in its construction as a dominating force. This criticism is often part of the broader criticism of his theoretical inconsistency given his use of Foucault. But what Kennedy and others may, perhaps, fail to acknowledge is Said’s plea for a more complex rendering of the relationship that acknowledges imperialistic domination as key to Orientalism without positioning the Orient as having been unilaterally determined (p.3). While I have only touched on it here, I would suggest that Said actually spends significant space in his *Introduction* to *Orientalism* outlining the complexity of his methodology and argument. He makes clear that he holds to what might be considered contradictory positions, but that in coming to see the culture itself as a complex
political-intellectual construction, one might see not just the validity of, but also the need for, politically interested and complex analysis.

So it is with this in mind that I now address the concern Kennedy has with Said’s inconsistency in utilizing Foucault, Gramsci and Western humanism. As I will be again addressing this charge of inconsistency and theoretical “impurity” later, in response to criticism from the Marxist scholar, Aijaz Ahmad, I will keep my engagement with Kennedy here brief. Before embarking on this, it is worth citing her at some length:

Other problems arise from Said’s attempts to reconcile Foucault, Gramsci and certain features of Western humanism. Foucault’s ideas on discourse and power are evoked in conjunction with Gramsci’s argument that culture is an important factor in establishing hegemony, that is the dominance of one people or group over another. But these perspectives occur alongside appeals to notions such as “human reality” or “human experience”, which emerge from the philosophical tradition which both Foucault and Gramsci challenge. (2000, p.20)

In my view, part of what makes Orientalism so interesting – and, indeed, contentious – is Said’s simultaneous use and critique of Foucault. That is, while Said is willing to affirm Foucault’s capillary model of power – insofar as power operates through many different institutions and discourses – his focus on colonialism and imperialism sees him also affirm Europe, the West, or the metropolitan center as being the position from which power is disseminated. Yet, Kennedy demands, Foucault’s ‘insistence that power is everywhere denies the possibility of identifying some of the specific sources of the type of power coming “from above”’ (2000, p.26). I contend that this could be viewed as evidence of Kennedy’s haste in noting Said’s methodological contradictions, his invocation of two things that cannot go together. Such claims are made, one could say, on the basis of the necessary fixing of theoretical boundaries. Kennedy’s critique requires the assumption that power must function in the same way, every time and everywhere. Yet it does not seem unreasonable, in the historical as opposed to the philosophical world, to suggest that imperialist power might proceed from the center to the periphery, even though the center cannot be thought of as the origin of this power, given the diffuse nature of power. That is, there is the question of origin but also the question of “collection” and “distribution” and these are different matters. In other words, it seems to me that it just might be possible to ignore the
“origins” of power but still be able to talk of power being distributed from Western geo-political sites, through Western modes of cultural and economic production.

The key to my argument, though, is in relation to another assumption of Kennedy’s that Foucault must be invoked in all his “purity”. I am in agreement with Varisco when he writes, ‘My own reading of the extensive reviews and critiques of Orientalism suggests that more energy has been spent on discussing whether Said properly understands Foucault than on whether or not his argument is sound on its own terms’ (2012, p.259). And again, as Varisco goes on to argue, ‘Said does not claim to adopt Foucault’s archaeological methodology in situ; at bottom, why must Said or anyone copy Foucault lock, stock, and over a philosophical barrel?’ (p.259).

Furthermore, I would add: why must Said ensure the seamless unity between Foucault, Gramsci and Western humanism? It would be one thing if he claimed to do so at the outset of Orientalism and was deemed to fail, but he does no such thing.

This concern with Said’s scholarly choices, and the apparent irreconcilability between, for example, the commitment to both Western humanism and Foucauldian analysis, is also an issue for Aijaz Ahmad. In his comprehensive indictment of Said in his book, In Theory (1992), Ahmad takes issue with Said’s investment with Auerbach while at the same time criticizing Western dominance. But my argument here, as Spivak’s CPR shows, is that Said’s Orientalism foreshadows the way in which postcolonial theory functions within the problematic space of its necessary imbrication with colonial epistemologies. Nevertheless, Ahmad begins his critique by stating that ‘the particular texture of Orientalism...derives from the ambition to write a counter-history that could be posed against Mimesis’ (p.163). In making this case, he writes: ‘If Auerbach began with Homer, Said too must begin with Greek tragedy; and a special venom must be reserved for Dante because Dante, after all, is the hero of Auerbach’s account. But ghosts are not so easily laid to rest, provided that you are sufficiently possessed by them’ (p.163). One difficulty with Ahmad’s analysis here is that what he deems to be a problem with Said’s apparent desire to offer a counter to Auerbach while at the same time admiring and relying on him, is not considered to be a “problem” for Said himself. Indeed, in my view, this is with good cause.
It is not that it is completely unwarranted to question one’s commitment to a past figure on the basis of their affiliations or agenda. Indeed, Heidegger’s Nazi affiliation has caused debate as to how his politics may have influenced his philosophy and what the implications of this might be for the contemporary utilization of his work (Peters, 2009). But to dismiss Auerbach, for example, based on his Eurocentrism and Western humanism, while understandable, does not seem to be the most particularly engaged approach to scholarly work. Moreover, to point out Said’s possession by the ghost of Auerbach is to do nothing more than reveal a particular imbrication Said has with a figure central in his academic field. But, as I have suggested, the acknowledgment of being, in a sense, necessarily connected to an epistemological tradition, with its concomitant violences or degradations, is actually something that has become rather important within the space of postcolonial theory. Seeing “Europe” as “a gift” within the context of simultaneously destabilizing and displacing this very Europe, as Chakrabarty (2008) did, might be considered as akin to viewing Auerbach as “a gift” within the context of destabilizing the claims and representations of the Western literary tradition.

Part of what postcolonial theory learned from Said in Orientalism and his subsequent work, I suggest, is to use the tools associated with colonialism both strategically and provisionally. Gayatri Spivak’s earlier calls for the use of strategic essentialism as part of the cause for subaltern representation is one such example. Critics of postcolonial theory have often questioned the apparent contradictions of using, in the case of Bhabha or Spivak, for example, Western theory at the same time as being critical of the epistemic violence of Western knowledge. But the strength of postcolonial theory, one might argue, is in its commitment to work through – not merely with or against – problems associated with colonialism and Eurocentrism. This complex, simultaneous critique and utilization of Western knowledge and culture can also be seen, perhaps, as itself representing a critique of the rules and boundaries of Western epistemology. That is, the critique proffered by Ahmad and others in relation to Said’s inconsistencies may themselves represent a greater perpetuation of Western dominance within academia than the postcolonial choices of “strategic essentialism” and the provisional use of a concept.
But let us move from the specific issue, as Ahmad puts it, of the ‘impossible reconciliation which Said tries to achieve between that humanism and Foucault’s Discourse Theory’ (1992, p.164) to the problem of irreconcilability more broadly. Ahmad’s desire to fit Said into a box becomes clear when, after making a similar claim to Kennedy by citing Said’s commitment to humanistic literary scholarship as a problem because it sees him duplicate its ‘procedures even as he debunks the very tradition from which he has borrowed them’ (p.167), he writes:

for Said’s work is self-divided not only between Auerbachian High Humanism and Nietzschean anti-humanism...but also between a host of irreconcilable positions in cultural theory generally, from the most radical to the most reactionary, ranging all the way from Gramsci to Julien Benda, with Lukács, Croce and Matthew Arnold in between.’ (pp.168-169)

It seems to me that this criticism is yet another example of the way in which Said’s critics seek to impose a certain requirement for cohesion rather than allow for eclecticism. What Ahmad claims as ‘irreconcilable’ could actually be seen as complex and contingent. The notion of contingency assumes conditionality, and it could be argued that Said’s invocation of Gramsci, for example, is contingent on his intention to acknowledge cultural hegemony, while his invocation of Foucault is only done in the context of seeking to explain the constitution of Orientalism as discourse. Rather than seeing the use of the two theorists as irreconcilable, it might be the case that critics need to be more willing to consider quite specific aims. To do so, however, requires the centrality of theoretical purity to be displaced by worldly criticism. It is not my aim to pit one against the other as such, but to simply argue for making the distinction between the two approaches and the validity of both. In other words, one’s preference for “X” does not necessitate that “Y” be dismissed outright. Moreover, it seems to me that, for Ahmad, it is actually his mission to defend Marxism that leads him to impose theoretical purity on Said more so than a concern for this purity as such.

Indeed, earlier in the critique, it is Said’s transgression of boundaries that garners the small praise afforded him by Ahmad. That his writing on Palestine is done ‘by stepping outside the boundaries of his academic discipline and original intellectual formation, under no compulsion of profession or fame, in no pursuit of personal gain – in fact, at frightening risk to himself’ (1992,
p.160) is something for which Said should be lauded, according to Ahmad. So it is interesting that for both Ahmad and Kennedy, among others, it is this ‘stepping outside’ that seems to so often be at the heart of the critique Said faces. Where he views stepping outside – otherwise known as politically engaged, “amateur”, intellectual, criticism – as the call of the intellectual, his critics seem to be more concerned with his lack of fidelity to theory, methodology and disciplinary fields. As a result, I contend, the critique of Said is so often ironic and problematic.

In his *Representation of the Intellectual* (1996), Said is as strident in his call to amateurism as he was in his chiding of the disengaged theorist in *The World, the Text and the Critic* (1983). Yet, it would be taking things a step too far, in my view, to suggest that Said’s work is so politically interested that his somewhat cavalier attitude towards the “rules” of academic scholarship might be interpreted as lazy, disingenuous or motivated solely by the political. Said is too aware of the virtues of good scholarship to abandon the idea of intellectual quality. But it nevertheless remains the case that a form of critical reading which links the text with the world is an apt way to describe the method that motivates Said. That is, he takes a dim view of the professionalism – the evasions of critique through the invocation of expertise or membership of a guild – of those whose concerns tend to be disciplinary boundaries rather than worldly criticism (Said, 1996). What then makes the critique of Said problematic is that, on the one hand, criticism of his theoretical or methodological inconsistencies are legitimate, yet on the other hand, his critics are too often concerned with matters that don’t concern him. In this sense, Said and his critics can sometimes seem to be “playing different games”.

While critics of Said take umbrage with his apparent transgression of disciplinary rules or boundaries, for postcolonial theorists who have relied on his work – beginning with *Orientalism* – his “inconsistencies”, transgressions and political interest have been generative for their own work. Very few scholars, if any, utilize Said’s work uncritically, but there are perhaps even fewer who would come to share with Ahmad in declaring that they disagree ‘so fundamentally on issues both of theory and of history that our respective understandings of the world – the world as it now is, and as it has been at many points over the past two thousand years or so – are simply irreconcilable’ (1992, p.159). But this leads us to investigate more closely the kind of
humanism that Said argues for, and to consider how, when understood in relation not only to his critics but also the possibilities left open by Fanon and Spivak, this humanism might still be relevant for education today.

**Worldliness and secular criticism**

Before moving to his most explicit treatment of humanism in *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (2004), it is worth briefly exploring Said’s commitments to two ideas that were central to, if not always fully explained in, the work of *Orientalism*: worldliness and secular criticism. These notions for Said reflect that which was eminently consistent in his work from the time of *Orientalism* until his death. They are notions that, I will argue, importantly modify his understanding of humanism and help to position it as related to, yet distinct from, Western Enlightenment humanism.

The significance of the context in which Said developed these ideas of worldliness and secular criticism cannot be overstated. On the one hand, Said found himself within a disciplinary field undergoing significant change. After studying at Princeton and then completing his PhD in literature at Harvard, he was a professor of Comparative Literature at Columbia University from 1963 (Said, 1999). The beginning of his career, then, was contemporaneous with what came to be known as the “textual turn”. As *Orientalism* demonstrated, Said was familiar with important figures associated with this turn, such as Foucault, but also with the structuralist, Roland Barthes. In the early years of his career at Columbia, an event took place that profoundly contributed to Said’s lifelong critique of the staid form of literary criticism in which he had been trained and, especially, what he deemed to be the noninterference of the new literary theory of the 1960s and ’70s: the Arab-Israeli War in 1967. Ashcroft & Ahluwalia (2008) discuss the impact of the Six-Day War on Edward Said personally and professionally. They note that the anti-Arab sentiment that spilled over in the USA made Said acutely aware, perhaps more than ever, of his Palestinian identity. In his work at Columbia University, he was moved to examine the politics within cultural production. As Ashcroft & Ahluwalia note, his politicization ‘had a profound effect on his work, for he saw that even literary theory could not be separated from the

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37 This was made clear in Said’s first book, (1975), *Beginnings: Intention and method.*
political realities of the world in which it was written’ (p.4). Indeed, it is this notion that he came to express as the worldliness of the text.

In his chapter of the same title as his book, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (1983), Said writes that ‘texts...are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place and society – in short, they are in the world, and hence worldly’ (p.35). This affirmation of a text's embeddedness in the world has hermeneutical implications for Said. That a text is located within, and is produced from, a set of circumstances of historical, political and cultural significance demands certain boundaries for the text’s interpretation. As Said goes on to say, ‘worldliness, circumstantiality, the text’s status as an event having sensuous particularity as well as historical contingency, are incorporated in the text, an infrangible part of its capacity for conveying and producing meaning’ (p.39). That is to say that the text cannot be received as if it was somehow neutral or ideal and transcendent of time and space. So, in regards to what this means for interpretation, Said writes that, ‘this means that a text has a specific situation, placing restraints upon the interpreter and his interpretation not because the situation is hidden within the text as mystery, but rather because the situation exists at the same level of surface particularity as the textual object itself’ (p.39). At the time of writing, this might be understood as being out of line with the ‘realists’ on one hand, who see the text as merely corresponding to the world, and the ‘structuralist-inspired position’ on the other, that ‘sees the world as having no absolute existence at all but as being entirely constructed by the text' (Ashcroft & Ahluwalia, 2008, p.22).

Said’s understanding of the text and of criticism takes a different approach. Writing more specifically in response to ‘recent critical theory [that] has placed undue emphasis on the limitlessness of interpretation’, his proposal is that texts are objects ‘whose interpretation – by virtue of the exactness of their situation in the world – has already commenced and are objects already constrained by, and constraining, their interpretation’ (1983, p.39). But what is implicit here, and more explicit elsewhere, is that Said understands the world itself as something produced by humans and, therefore, something that itself cannot be fixed and essentialized. Indeed, in this sense, Said’s notions of worldliness and secular criticism go hand-in-hand. His notion of “secular” is almost synonymous with the “human world” of social, political, economic
and cultural relations and production. As is often noted, Said consistently refers back to Vico’s ‘great observation that men make their own history’ (2003, pp.4-5) in making the point about the secular, or human rather than divine, production of history.

So his understanding of the text’s worldliness and the world’s secularity combine to inform his approach to criticism. The argument Said formulates in his essay “Secular Criticism” in *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, proceeds from claims he makes about the discipline of literary criticism. He identifies four varieties of literary critical practice: 1) practical criticism, such as book reviews; 2) academic literary history, found in areas such as philology; 3) literary appreciation and interpretation, the stuff of high school and university literature classrooms, and; 4) literary theory, which Said identifies as a mode that really only came into being in America during the 1970s. He then suggests that what he terms ‘criticism or critical consciousness’ contributes to literary critical practice in its ‘attempt to go beyond the four forms’ he’s already described (1983, p.2). Before extrapolating on what he means by criticism, he takes aim at the four practices of literary criticism suggesting they are marked by a professional expertise ‘whose effect in general is pernicious’ (p.2). Said explains:

> For the intellectual class, expertise has usually been a service rendered, and sold, to the central authority of society...Expertise in foreign affairs, for example, has usually meant legitimization of the conduct of foreign policy and, what is more to the point, a sustained investment in revalidating the role of experts in foreign affairs. The same sort of thing is true of literary critics and professional humanists, except that their expertise is based upon noninterference in what Vico grandly calls the world of nations but which prosaically might just as well be called “the world”. (p.2)

The key problem to which Said is working towards is that literary criticism fails to properly engage the real life problems of the world; the literary critic, according to Said, is immersed in a specialized culture that allows her to happily read and interpret an important piece of literature dealing with the complexities and injustices of human existence and, at best, remain silent on the real-life issues of injustice. He states: ‘it is not too much to say American or even European literary theory now explicitly accepts the principle of noninterference...“textuality” is the somewhat mystical and disinfected subject matter of literary theory’ (p.3). Of course, if the text itself is stripped of the worldliness to which I have just referred, this specialized approach is unsurprising.
And so it is that Said continues to state that his position – a position which he is suggesting partly constitutes this fifth form of literary practice he is calling criticism or critical consciousness – ‘is that texts are worldly…a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted’ (1983, p.4). But this is precisely, in Said’s estimation, what literary theory (the fourth of his types of literary criticism) is not. And, ‘it is no accident’, he claims, that this culture of specialization and quietism ‘has coincided with the ascendancy of Reaganism…and a massive turn to the right’ (p.4). The failure of literary theorists, resulting from their commitment to textuality, to engage with history or the social world is what Said cannot abide. ‘It is not practicing criticism’ he asserts, ‘either to validate the status quo or to join up with the priestly cast of acolytes and dogmatic metaphysicians’ (p.5). And so, if criticism is going to take place, it ‘can only be practiced outside and beyond the consensus ruling’ the field of literary practice (p.5). This idea is one that he speaks of as “amateurism” in *Representations of an Intellectual* (1996). To suggest that the critic needs to be situated outside the status quo invokes the classically spatial language that is so important to Said. Here, he is taking up the argument that not only is the text situated in the world, but the critic is also situated. Moreover, when it comes to the critic, he or she exists in a complicated relationship with culture.

To illustrate the implications of the critic’s location, Said claims that part of the power of Auerbach’s *Mimesis* is related to the value it gains from its having been written by Auerbach in exile. That is, Auerbach, a German Jew, wrote his mammoth history of Western literature while in Istanbul. Said recalls that Auerbach perceived this exilic context as both a blessing and a curse. On one hand, being positioned at a distance from many of the details regarding the great works of Western literature meant that Auerbach felt the precision and comprehensiveness of his project had been compromised. On the other hand, this distance from archival material not only allowed Auerbach to actually get the project finished, but also afforded him the chance to think about the significance of Western literature while not enmeshed in its cultural home (Said, 1983). Indeed, what this story illustrates more conceptually for Said is the ways in which humans are related to culture. That is, while Auerbach was removed from the culture of Europe,
European culture nevertheless affected the work he was doing through the rules, norms, ideas and standards constitutive of it. In this sense, says Said, culture has an ‘elevated or superior position to authorize, to dominate, to legitimate, demote, interdict, and to validate’ (p.9). But his exile also allowed for a critical consciousness that otherwise would not have been possible. Said relates this necessary imbrication with culture, but distance from it, with the notion of filiation and affiliation. He writes, ‘we have in Auerbach an instance both of filiation with his natal culture and, because of exile, affiliation with it through critical consciousness and scholarly work’ (p.16). While literal physical dislocation is, of course, not necessary, the idea of standing outside culture – whether broadly construed as national culture or narrowly as professional culture – is deemed by Said to be necessary for critical consciousness.

This notion of exile, or the interplay between filiation and affiliation, is important to Said’s notion of secular criticism insofar as it locates the critic in a space that allows for the interrogation of that which might otherwise become normalized, naturalized or “sacred”. As Gourgouris (2013) puts it, ‘secular criticism cannot be defined. It is not a philosophical concept that bears the weight of an arche...[it] is not a theory but a practice – an experimental, often interrogative practice, alert to contingencies and skeptical toward whatever pretends to escape the worldly’ (pp.12-13). It is a practice that Said relates to the critic’s role of speaking truth to power (Said, 1996), a power which does not necessarily have a discernible location but is, instead, part of culture. And the criticism of the intellectual can be considered “secular” when it questions received (filiative) “truths” as though they are sacred. But secular criticism also requires the questioning of movements or ideologies or disciplines with which we may have formed solidarities (that is, being affiliated with, for example, Marxism), for these too become “sacred”.

Gourgouris puts it well when he suggests that ‘secular criticism is the practice of elucidating the ruse of those tacit processes that create, control, and sustain conditions of heteronomy, that is, conditions where the power of real men and women is configured to reside in some unassailable elsewhere’ (p.xiv).

These notions, then, of worldliness and secular criticism, co-imbricated and also related to notions of exile and critical consciousness, are central to the kind of humanism that Said
defends in his posthumously published *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (2004). Related as these notions are to Said’s critique of Orientalism’s Eurocentrism and the practices of colonialism, the kind of humanism Said espouses as a philologist might be considered postcolonial in regards to both its complicity with, and opposition to, dominant Western epistemology.

**Humanism and Democratic Criticism**

Perhaps humanism is the issue that most separates Edward Said from many of the other postcolonial theorists. Indeed, his colleague at Columbia, Gayatri Spivak, recently wrote of Said: ‘My relationship with him was somewhat divided on the grounds of the status of humanism’ (2016, p.49). While she does not elaborate the point, her issue seems to relate to the relationship between Said’s humanism and his cantankerousness regarding the kind of poststructuralism/deconstructivism within which Spivak is embedded, and his relative lack of explicit concern for matters of gender. Indeed, given the affiliation between poststructuralism and postcolonial theory, specifically – and despite his influence in its development – Said can certainly be considered an outsider from the dominant group. Nevertheless, as the first part of this section will demonstrate, Said’s own critique of humanism is firmly based within the broad concerns of postcolonial scholarship, and takes issue with its Eurocentric, universalist and apolitical pretensions. After presenting what I see as Said’s own characterization of humanism, I will consider some of the critiques of his humanism from both postcolonial and poststructuralist scholars.

In what is a reasonably small book, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (2004) has an extraordinary amount to say about humanism, its history, problems, and possibilities for the present and future. For fetishists who demand a neat definition of humanism and then a slavish commitment to this definition, the book – characteristically Saidian – will be an object of frustration. This is not to say that it lacks consistency or systematicity as such, but that the notion of humanism presented is, perhaps, fuller and more dynamic – less easy to “pin down” – than had it been presented by a more reductively-oriented scholar. But early in the book, Said
hints at what is to come when he writes that it is an ‘inquiry into the relevance and future of humanism in contemporary life’ (p. 5), not, in other words, a reductionistic account of its “being”.

Said’s background to the critique of humanism
The inquiry into humanism’s relevance leads Said to address what he deems to be the most common critiques, and the biggest failings, of humanism. When it comes to others’ critiques of humanism, Said appears to be in a hurry to deal with them before moving on to his own critique. What he sets up as the prevailing challenge to humanism (in the United States at least, as it is American humanism with which his book is chiefly concerned), is the kind of antihumanism that arose around the 1970s. The reasons for the critique of humanism included interrelated matters of theory, political agitation and the state (or status) of academic humanism itself. Beginning with theoretical – epistemological and ontological – problems, Said goes back to issues raised in relation to his *Orientalism*. In doing so, he refers to James Clifford’s 1980 review of the book, in which Clifford claimed there was ‘a serious inconsistency’ in the form, Said writes, of ‘the conflict between my avowed and unmistakable humanistic bias and the antihumanism of my subject and my approach toward it’ (p.8). To the extent that Western humanism has tended towards totalizing and essentializing epistemology, Said understands very well how this could seem ‘fundamentally discordant with advanced theory of the kind I particularly stressed and drew on, Michel Foucault’s notion of discourse (p.9). What Said acknowledges in this critique is the extent to which, in the 1960s and ‘70s, ‘the advent of French theory in the humanistic departments of American and English universities had brought about a severe if not crippling defeat of what was considered traditional humanism by the forces of structuralism and post-structuralism, both of which professed the death of man-the-author’ (p.9). This antihumanist turn dismissed the idea of the sovereign human subject, aiming to show instead that ‘systems of thinking and perceiving transcended the powers of individual subjects’ who were “subject” to those very systems and, thus, could not be thought to have ‘power over them’ (p.9).

Linked to, or emerging from, this structuralist antihumanism, Said also comments on the more properly “postmodern” critique of humanism. He notes the power of Jean-Francois Lyotard’s repudiation of the ‘grand narratives of enlightenment and emancipation’ within postmodern thinking; a repudiation that will carry some concern in regards to humanism’s political claims.
That is, while structuralist and poststructuralist arguments were initially based in linguistics, the postmodern critique, if understood culturally, was skeptical of emancipatory projects and the progress towards enlightenment in the face of major world problems. Said notes that ‘antihumanism took hold on the United States intellectual scene partly because of the widespread revulsion with the Vietnam War’ which, on the back of the second World War of the twentieth century, seemed to suggest that something other than humanity’s triumphal progress was playing out (2004, pp.12-13). And if humanism was understood to fit most comfortably within the academic field of the humanities, the field’s reputation as being ‘dry-as-dust’ and representing ‘an unpolitical, unworldly, and oblivious (sometimes even manipulative) attitude to the present, all the while adamantly extolling the virtues of the past, the untouchability of the canon, and the superiority of “how we used to do it”’ led to a serious questioning of its relevance within academia (p.13). Indeed, Said’s own criticism of humanism is largely concerned with this kind of conservative, “classical” humanism.

**Said’s critique of humanism**

When Said writes that he ‘can see a small handful of crucial problems located at the very heart of what humanism today is or might be’ (2004, p.15), he has in mind a humanism that obtains a special relationship with literature. The first problem he identifies is the frequent ‘connection between humanism as an attitude or practice that is often associated with very selective elites’ (p.16). Up until the 1960s, he argues, humanism basically amounted to – or perhaps was “dispatched” as – a “conservative humanism” that was ‘very restricted and difficult, like a rather austere club with rules that keep most people out’ (p.16). This is the canonical version that demands erudite and particular readings of “Western classics”. Said deems this as not only ‘elite’, but also as ‘unsmiling’, void of ‘pleasure’ and ‘relevance to worldly circumstances’ (p.16). This ‘reductive and didactic humanism’ (p.17) can be associated with the “boundary markers” of the culture warriors who wanted to protect humanism from unwanted influence outside of its narrow Western canon. In Said’s estimation, what these culture warriors (amongst whom he names Allan Bloom and Saul Bellow as two particularly shining examples) were really interested in was exclusion rather than extolling the best that the great Western literary texts had to offer. They were far more concerned that ‘too many undesirable non-Europeans had suddenly
appeared at “our” gates’ (p.18) and that such multiculturalism would invoke a ‘decline in humanistic and aesthetic, not to say ethical, standards’ (p.20).

The vacuity of the argument was particularly concerning for Said given that he was writing *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* amidst the fallout of the September 11 terrorist attacks. The conservative, “cultural” humanism was, in this context, oxygen for the revival of Samuel Huntington’s clash of civilizations thesis that created an “us” and a “them” in such a provocative manner (Huntington, 1996). One problem of identifying “good” Western literary humanism with “us”, according to Said, was that America as an immigrant society was (and is) composed ‘less of Northern Europeans than of Latinos, Africans, and Asians’ (2004, p.20). And the rhetorical question with which he follows is, ‘why should this fact not be reflected in “our” traditional values and heritage?’ (p.20). Thus, Said is concerned to critique the presumption of the American humanist elites that ‘a belief in humanism as an educational and cultural ideal must be accompanied by reams of laundry-list exclusions’ (p.21). Rather, argues Said,

to understand humanism at all, for us as citizens of this particular republic [United States of America], is to understand it as democratic, open to all classes and backgrounds, and as a process of unending disclosure, discovery, self-criticism, and liberation. I would go so far as to say that humanism is critique, critique that is directed at the state of affairs in, as well as out of, the university...and that gathers its force and relevance by its democratic, secular, and open character. (pp.21-22)

So, despite the fact that he has ‘never taught anything but the Western humanities at Columbia, literature and music in particular’ (Said, 2004, p.5), Said is not interested in defending a Eurocentric humanism that exists to extol its own virtues to the exclusion of others. His humanism is not elitist, but democratic. Whereas elitism connotes imposition from on high – a kind of transcendentalism – democracy assumes a level of negotiation and co-construction that takes place between the past, present and future simultaneously. And, as he has already alluded to, humanism in America is not representative if it is exclusively Northern European. Said’s version is a decidedly more open one that sees ‘no contradiction at all between the practice of humanism and the practice of participatory citizenship’ (p.22). Rather than being about withdrawal and exclusion, humanism’s ‘purpose is to make more things available to critical scrutiny as the product of human labor, human energies for emancipation and
enlightenment, and, just as importantly, human misreadings and misinterpretations of the collective past and present’ (p.22). That is to say, there is nothing that is beyond the scope of critique and nothing that, in any necessary sense, is any less open to critique due to its cultural provenance.

This point is relevant to the next problem Said identifies within the discourse of humanism. Elitist humanism that privileges the West at the exclusion of others is also the kind of humanism that privileges that which has been fixed over that which is, or might be, emerging. Said had earlier noted that new fields of study in the later decades of the twentieth century such as ‘postcolonialism, ethnic studies, [and] cultural studies’ (2004, p.14) perhaps risked being identitarian. Thus, it is not the inclusion of these “studies” in (and, according to the conservative humanists, sullying of) humanism that is the issue for Said but, rather, that of their identitarianism. For others, though, it is the way in which these new fields of study distort humanism that is most troubling. In these instances, humanism is too often represented as something that is fixed, ensuring that the old (eg. Literature and History) is necessarily better (more humanistic) than the new (eg. Postcolonial and Queer Studies). So it is against the presumed opposition between canonical humanism and new intellectual movements, that Said contends, ‘you will find that no great humanistic achievement was ever without an important component, relationship, or acceptance of the new’ (p.23). Thus, between the dual enclosures of “new” identity-politics on the one hand and “old” ethnocentrism on the other – two sides of the same coin – Said argues for a humanism that is covalent with cultural difference as the “new norm”.

This is a worldly, rather than idealist, position for Said who argues that ‘because the world has become far more integrated and demographically mixed than ever before, the whole concept of national identity has to be revised’ (2004, p.24). Whereas in the nineteenth century national boundaries may have often been constructed according to cultural, ethnic and linguistic sameness, nation-states are now composed of groups of people from many different backgrounds. Of course, this has actually been the case for quite some time in many parts of the world including Malaysia, India and Palestine. ‘The point is’, writes Said, ‘that of all the
baggage inherited from nineteenth-century political thought, it is the notion of a unified, coherent, homogenous national identity that is now undergoing the most rethinking, and this change is being felt in every sphere of society and politics’ (p.24). Said proposes a musical meaning of “canon” as a form ‘expressing motion, playfulness, discovery, and, in the rhetorical sense, invention’ (p.25). To think of the humanities, and therefore humanism itself, in this way is to see them as ‘far from being a rigid tablet of fixed rules and monuments bullying us from the past’ but, rather, always ‘open to changing combinations of sense and signification’ (p.25). What concerns Said is that humanism, history, the canon are not settled once and for all, but are revised and reformulated as new readings of the canon are performed, and as new voices join the chorus.

If the previous problem identified by Said was largely to do with cultural, geographical or spatial fixity, the last major problem within the dominant discourse regarding American humanism is related to history. In responding to both of these problems, Said is intent on opening the Euro-American "mind" to the reality that humanism is not fixed, and therefore, should not be engaged on the presumption of its fixity – especially in regards to exclusive identity-markers. This requires that one comes to view history not as ‘essentially complete’ but as ‘still unresolved, still being made, still open to the presence and challenge of the emergent, the insurgent, the unrequited, and the unexplored’ (2004, p.26). It is clear, then, that his previous argument about being open to the new in regards to cultural or geographic change is integrated with his argument regarding history.

Indeed, Said relates the notion of open and changing history both to humanism and to the fact of other, non-European, cultures and learned traditions in the world. He claims, ‘Not to see that the essence of humanism is to understand human history as a continuous process of self-understanding and self-realization, not just for us, as white, male, European, and American, but for everyone, is to see nothing at all’ (2004, p.26). While the conservative, cultural humanists will consider change a threat to humanistic values, what seems to me to be significant here, is that the acknowledgement of difference in temporal, spatial and cultural terms actually reveals something that is universal. In other words, Said’s humanism is one constituted by difference
and contingency, while simultaneously drawing attention to the struggle towards the universal. As I suggested earlier, I do not think that his universalism is reductionistic but, rather, holds in tension the differences and the similarities that confront humanity as a whole. In one sense, the fact of difference is part of what unites humans as “cultural beings” who make their own history. Said seems to be making this point when he writes that what makes cultures interesting is ‘not their essence or purity, but their combinations and diversity, their countercurrents, the way that they have had of conducting a compelling dialogue with other civilizations’ (p.28). Indeed, Said seems to be suggesting that cultural difference is necessary to humanism when he claims that ‘there can be no true humanism whose scope is limited to extolling patriotically the virtues of our culture, our language, our monuments’ (p.28).

To return to the aim of his book – an ‘inquiry into the relevance and future of humanism in contemporary life’ (2004, p.5) – Said declares that ‘in my understanding of its relevance today, humanism is...a means of questioning, upsetting, and reformulating so much of what is presented to us as commodified, packaged, uncontroversial, and uncritically codified certainties, including those contained in the masterpieces herded under the rubric of “the classics”’ (p.28). Critique is at the heart of humanism and, as Said has just performed, this includes the critique of humanism itself. And if uncritically codified certainties are subject to criticism and the ensuing reformulation of them, then change is inevitable. What this also means, though, is that the challenge to a contemporary certainty does not only have implications for its future, but suggests that its past may also have been different than readily assumed.

I have just noted that Said identifies one problem of American humanism as its presumption that ‘literature exists within an assumed national context’ and another that it exists in ‘some sort of stable or at least consistently identifiable form’ (2004, pp.40-41). However, ‘both of these assumptions’, Said says, ‘are now profoundly unsettled’ (p.41). This is an important point, perhaps for different reasons than one might first assume. It is important because of what it means for the critique of humanism today. Said’s point is that the kind of humanism based on these assumptions has been profoundly unsettled, and it is this humanism that tends to be the object of critique (inasmuch as it represents an ethnocentric and essentialist humanism) for
postcolonial scholars. While this kind of humanism had not been unsettled at the time Fanon was writing, it is well-and-truly unsettled now. Indeed, the postcolonial critique has contributed significantly to this unsettling. But, the issue now is whether or not it is still viable to critique humanism based on the ethnocentric and essentialist version? If such a version has been deeply unsettled, surely it is not viable. When humanism continues to be critiqued according to a view of it that only the most conservative scholars and culture warriors hold onto, humanism may well act as more of an alibi for post- and anti-humanist arguments than anything else. Perhaps a key point to make here is that a critique of humanism today needs to be a critique of present notions of humanism that have emerged from the ruins of previously critiqued notions of humanism. In this specific instance, our attention might turn to the critique of Said’s humanism.

**Said’s humanism**

Before I consider some of the critical engagement other scholars have had with Said’s humanism, I will briefly elaborate on the kind of humanism he proposes throughout the rest of *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*. Said begins to elaborate on his notion of humanism once he has cleared the ground via his own critique of the cultural-conservative form of humanism that he deems to be dominant in much American humanistic discourse. Building on his critique of the culturally protective, Eurocentric and historically-fixed notion of humanism that had dominated American humanist discourse up until recently, Said suggests that since World War II, ‘humanism in the United States has indeed undergone not just a lingering crisis but a major transformation’ (2004, pp.32-33). The ensuing pages of the text suggest that core to this transformation is a recognition of difference, which has thus functioned as a critique of humanism’s triumphalist, European and masculine pretensions. Focused as he is on the case of America, Said notes that humanism, through the development of areas like African-American studies, ‘was revealed to have been undergirded by a working notion of national identity that was, to say the least, highly edited and abridged, indeed restricted to a small group that was thought to be representative of the whole society but was in fact missing large segments of it’ (p.46).

As a result, part of the major change affecting humanism is that ‘it is being required to take account of what, in its high Protestant mode, it had either repressed or deliberately ignored’
(p.46). But if this is taken to simply mean that humanists should now be willing to read “diverse texts” (as tends to be the “solution” according to school curricula), Said makes clear that this shift within humanism is one that is more intentionally worldly and political, in contrast to the apparent apoliticism of modern literary humanism. While I don’t want to reduce Said’s humanism to a set of dot-points, it does appear that central aspects of his discussion of humanism relate to its: worldliness and political interest; commitment to critique; democratic and secular nature; and its cosmopolitan possibilities, taking into account both the universal and the particular. Each of these aspects are so interrelated, that it seems to me that trying to discuss them separately, while easier to digest, atomizes his explication of a much more integrated notion of humanism. As such, I will discuss his presentation with the above four points in mind, but will not force this into a neat schema.

His reformulation of humanism is one that positions it, in contrast to the “quietism” of classical humanism, as politically interested and necessarily implicated in the affairs of the world. This is not to say, however, that the humanities ‘must address or somehow solve the problems of the contemporary world’ (p.53). Rather, Said’s intent is that humanistic practice be understood as ‘an integral aspect and functioning part’ of the world (p.53). His Orientalism is a good example of both the disavowal of the worldly in humanistic work and his own conscious practice of worldly humanistic critique. Said writes that his ‘critique [in Orientalism] was premised on the flawed nature of all representations and how they are intimately tied up with worldliness, that is, with power, position, and interests’ (p.48). That is, his own humanistic scholarship sets out to “reveal” the worldliness of Orientalist discourse – its provenance in the world – through critiquing Orientalism’s arrogant assumptions, its “eternal” and essentialist representations.

Against Orientalism’s apparently “pure” representations of the Orient, Said was ‘quite specific in suggesting that no process of converting experience into expression could be free of contamination. It was already and necessarily contaminated by its involvement with power, position, and interests, whether it was a victim of them or not’ (2004, pp.48-49). In other words, representations are always worldly as ‘in all cases the history and presence of various other groups and individuals made it impossible for anyone to be free of the conditions of material
existence’ (p.49). If it seems that Said belabors the point, it is because, despite the simplicity of the premise, humanism has too often seen itself as somehow bound by ideas and ahistorical assumptions. And even if it could be granted that this was not always a problem, the fact of global interdependence requires that humanists become exceedingly aware of its embeddedness in such a world. The risk, if humanism does not take the interdependence of the world seriously, is that it will (continue to) contribute to inhumane thinking and practices which will contribute to the structuring of the world unequally.

Here, Said proposes a humanism that eschews its Eurocentric past in favor of a more open and integrated model. This requires the humanist to avoid affirming one tradition over the other and to instead ‘open them all, or as many as possible, to each other, to question each of them for what it has done with the others’ (2004, p.49). This kind of work prioritizes the humanistic prospects for ‘coexistence (as opposed to partition)’ (p.49). Initially, Said does not elaborate at any great length on what this kind of humanistic work would look like, but instead elaborates on what it is that it needs to be distinguished from. That is, negative models of partition as evinced by ‘nationalism, religious enthusiasm, and...identitarian thought’ (p.50). Nationalism, argues Said, produces the kind of views regarding national sovereignty that give rise to the idea of the clash of civilizations and the superiority of “us” over them. It seeks to dismiss pluralism in favor of a manufactured, ahistorical essentialization of national identity.

The great problem with religious enthusiasms, on the other hand, is that they are ‘patently antisecular and antidemocratic in nature’ (2004, p.51) and are all as intolerant as each other, leading, of course, to conflict. Thus, both nationalism and religious enthusiasm are examples of the exclusivism of identitarian thought. Said writes, ‘By “exclusivism” I mean that avoidable narrowing of vision that sees in the past only self-flattering narratives that deliberately filter out not just the achievements of other groups but in a sense even their fructifying presence’ (p.51). Constructs such as ‘Palestine, Europe, the West, Islam’, among others, are, Said avers, ‘composite, partly constructed and partly invented but heavily invested entities’ (p.52). In other words, they have no essence as such and, as “cultures”, are always co-imbricated with other cultures. The separation and flattening of cultures into discrete entities requires a surgical
intervention and is done in the service of establishing – that is, fashioning – the apparent essential identity of the one culture. Each of these – nationalism, religious enthusiasm and identity thinking – are ‘the worst sort of us-versus-them structures, whose net result is always to impoverish and narrow vision, only very rarely to enlighten and further understanding’ (p.52). Thus, worldly consciousness on its own is not considered to be enough but needs to be extended to a commitment to a critical embrace of the interconnected nature of cultures that seeks coexistence, rather than partition.

It is in this sense that Said’s humanism might be thought of as cosmopolitan. While I will discuss cosmopolitanism further in the final chapter, here it will suffice to understand it simply as an alternative to both nationalism, at a local level – which, as has been shown above, is closely related to identity thinking – and a kind of culturalism at a broader level, one version of which might be Eurocentrism. Both constitute a kind of identitarianism. Indeed, Said suggests that Eurocentrism is very often ‘the nub’ of the negative models of partition described above. According to him, the problem with Eurocentrism is ‘the parochiality of its universalism, its unexamined assumptions about Western civilization, its Orientalism, and its attempts to impose a uniformly directed theory of progress’ which all end up ‘reducing, rather than expanding, the possibility of catholic inclusiveness, of genuinely cosmopolitan or internationalist perspective, of intellectual curiosity’ (2004, p.53). The effects of Eurocentrism are, he deems, ‘about as inappropriate to humanistic practice in the United States as it is possible to be’ (p.52). However, if humanistic practice is to be marked by catholic inclusiveness and a cosmopolitan perspective, is it anything more than a trite affirmation of some kind of utopian “love-in”? Said anticipates this criticism and makes clear that he does not see cosmopolitan humanism as one that simply amounts to ‘a lazy or laissez-faire feel-good multiculturalism’ which, he states, ‘means absolutely nothing to me as it is usually discussed’ (2004, p.50). He is interested, rather, in a ‘rigorous intellectual and rational approach that...draws on a rather exact notion of what it means to read philologically in a worldly and integrative, as distinct from separating or partitioning, mode and, at the same time, to offer resistance to the great reductive and vulgarizing us-versus-them thought patterns of our time’ (p.50). To guard against ‘feel-good
multiculturalism’, this worldly, cosmopolitan, democratic humanism that Said describes has critique at its heart. If humanists are to stand for something, that is, to be politically engaged rather than cordoned off in their scholastic cloisters, then their practice must involve a worldly, not merely textual, critique. In the early 2000s, Said saw the time to be right for humanists to do this kind of work. He writes that ‘the new generation of humanist scholars is more attuned than any before it to the non-European, genderized, decolonized, and decentered energies and currents of our time’ (p.47). To be aware of such things, Said continues, ‘means situating critique at the very heart of humanism, critique as a form of democratic freedom and as a continuous practice of questioning and accumulating knowledge that is open to, rather than in denial of, the constituent historical realities of the post-Cold War world, its early colonial formations, and the frighteningly global reach of the last remaining superpower of today’ (p.47). In other words, humanism is the practice of democratic critique that openly engages the raft of (geo)political, cultural and socioeconomic issues that are manifest in the world.

So, then, Said’s view is that ‘it is possible to be critical of humanism in the name of humanism’ and that, the contemporary challenge is to acknowledge humanism’s complicity with the ‘experience of Eurocentrism and empire’ so that it might now be possible that ‘one could fashion a different kind of humanism that was cosmopolitan and text-and-language bound in ways that absorbed the great lessons of the past...and still remain attuned to the emergent voices and currents of the present’ (2004, pp.10-11). Implied here is that humanism is immanent, secular, democratic and worldly. Such humanistic practice, Said contends, is exemplified by philology. And while “philology” is likely to conjure up images of a ‘sterile, ineffectual’ and irrelevant scholasticism (p.57), ‘a true philological reading’, claims Said, is the kind of reading that might produce “radical” interpretations, not merely conservative and reactionary ones. This proper philological reading ‘is active; it involves getting inside the process of language already going on in words and making it disclose what may be hidden or incomplete or masked or distorted in any text we may have before us’ (p.59). Thus, ‘a detailed, patient scrutiny of and a lifelong attentiveness to the words and rhetorics by which language is used by human beings who exist in history’ is the ‘abiding basis for all humanistic practice’ (p.61). That language is used by human beings who exist in history is Said’s way of making clear the secular and worldly nature
of philology. What the emphasis on humans and history does is to necessarily reject ‘eternally stable or supernaturally informed values’ and instead calls us to take account ‘of the changing bases for humanistic praxis regarding values and human life’ (p.61). Thus, humanism as a practice must be seen as contingent, as a struggle with human values, and as democratic or negotiated. These characteristics of humanism are, for Said, necessary for humanism to perform its function of critique of injustice. It is his belief, as he writes in the 2003 preface to Orientalism, that ‘humanism is the only, and, I would go as far as saying, the final, resistance we have against the inhuman practices and injustices that disfigure human history’ (2003, p.xxii).

Critique of Said’s humanism: Radhakrishnan and Spanos

Of course, despite this very strong affirmation, Said’s humanism has not been without critique. In fact, quite the opposite; his humanism has received criticism from various sides. While Ahmad’s Marxist critique of Said was based on his Orientalism and, in particular, the problems associated with his use of Foucault, his “liberal humanism” was also castigated (1992, p.164). But, perhaps not unexpectedly, the majority of the criticism seems to have come from poststructuralists working within the field of literature and literary theory, as well as postcolonial studies. Here, I will consider just two critics – R. Radhakrishnan and William Spanos – whose criticism can best be described as appreciative and sympathetic. Their critiques (especially Radhakrishnan’s), like those of Alessandrini, Gourgouris, Robbins and others, tend to stop short of completely abandoning humanism, though they do not accept humanism as willingly, or in the same way, as Said.

Ultimately, I would suggest, the criticism of Said’s humanism tends to come back most often to the problem of theory. Similar to the criticisms of his Orientalism, his critics question the inconsistencies and contradictions in the presentation of his humanism and wonder how he got there after such early and fruitful engagement with poststructuralism (Radhakrishnan, 2010, p.433). And, indeed, this is part of what makes the critique of Said’s humanism difficult. As Spanos writes, ‘I think that in Said’s practice – when, that is, he interprets worldly literary texts or events of the contemporary historical occasion – he comes as close as has any intellectual in
the past half-century’ to escaping the ‘blindnesses of classical humanism’ (2009, p.177). And it is not just the exemplary practice of Said the critical humanist, but also the intent of Said’s humanism that is to be lauded. At one point, in an essay on the literary nature of Said’s humanism, Radhakrishnan, after an extensive quote from Said, writes, ‘This is terrific stuff: intense, passionate, hortatory, and critically utopian in the best sense of the term’ (2007, p.22). Thus, these critics, who share Said’s basic political sentiments, informed by a critique of colonialism, Eurocentrism, and contemporary imperialism, cannot find fault with his intentions or skill as a (humanist) reader of texts. It seems to me, then, that when his critics continually return to his theoretical inconsistency, or cavalier attitude towards theory, it can appear – though of course this is too simplistic – that the problem with Said’s humanism is its humanism; that is, the judgment on humanism has already been made. And this judgment has been determined by a prior commitment to a poststructuralist antimetaphysics that is necessarily at odds with a humanism assumed to be essentialist.

In pursuing this, I will start with Radhakrishnan’s claim that what Said failed to do ‘was provide a theoretical justification for breaking the impasse of aporias and dilemmas by the exercise of a political and worldly will’ (2010, p.439). What this suggests is that the critique of Said’s humanism consistently comes, not from the perspective of the postcolonial subject or scholar concerned about humanism’s complicity with colonialism but, rather, from certain scholars of a poststructuralist persuasion whose concerns with matters of metaphysics and epistemological foundations surface as an obstacle to embracing Said’s humanism as a ‘useable praxis’. And, when one considers the following, such concerns are not exactly unwarranted. For example, Radhakrishnan wonders about Said’s view that ‘it has been the abuse of humanism that discredits some of humanism’s practitioners without discrediting humanism itself’ (Said, 2004, p.13). Part of the apparent problem with this quote from Said is the suggestion that humanism can be abused, but that this is not the same as humanism itself being discredited. Is Said’s humanism, then, fixed, sacred or essentialized? In other words, one might ask, what exactly is it that has been abused? Moreover, who decides that it is an abuse, as opposed to a justifiable use, of humanism that has occurred?
In one sense, there is no easy way around this seeming problem of essentialism, especially given that Said makes clear that he is not an essentialist. However, in another sense, perhaps it is rather easier to respond to the charge of essentialism by stating that, it is not humanism as a fixed entity that has been abused, but humanism as a practice of democratic criticism in the name of ‘freedom and justice’ (Radhakrishnan, 2010, p.435). That is to say that one knows humanism has been abused when the powerful are left to oppress the less-powerful. Thus, even when humanism is presumed to have authorized colonialism and thereby should be rendered as anti-human or internally corrupt, it might be argued that, in actual fact, what has been practiced in the name of humanism has been colonialism, not humanism. Perhaps Said would have been better off speaking of the misuse of humanism, a notion that more clearly implies practice. But one can only assume that this is something that Said himself would have thought of, and chosen to do, had this been what he actually meant. Thus, it does seem that his defense of humanism is as a practice, primarily, but also as something more. In my view, Said also saw humanism as a possible moral resource that, in order to be so, must be put to use. This kind of humanism can be both misused and abused, and it is also a humanism that could appear to have an essence.

This issue of essence, I think, is dealt with by Said – however successfully – through his commitment to secularism, provisionality and geography. Instead of these terms, I could have used worldliness, democracy and cosmopolitanism. Or, I could have referred to his views regarding the critical usefulness of exile, filiation and affiliation, and contrapuntal reading. The point being that Said’s humanism is one marked by a dialectical oppositionality, deconstructionism, and relational politics. It is not, in other words, easy to pin down. And while critics have wanted to domesticate it, and make it amenable to varying theoretical perspectives, it seems to be that Said’s commitment to multiplicity makes this very difficult. In many ways, what makes Said difficult might be that he is, rather precisely, committed to multiplicity and the “play of multiplicity” rather than relativism. Despite its own seeming slipperiness, relativism is an easier object of criticism as it functions within a binary structure at the other end of absolutism. Said’s position and mode of thinking is not on the register of “Truth” so much as it is on the plane of spatiality and movement. This means that he is able to speak of and for universal
notions such as justice, freedom and truth, while remaining committed to the interplay between multiple voices in the process of striving for them.

From here, the question might be asked as to whether or not Said’s commitment to multiplicity and theoretical eclecticism has any bearing on his understanding of the relationship between theory and practice? Put differently, one could ask if Said would be willing to treat theory with the kind of generosity that he might wish his theoretician critics would treat his praxis? Certainly, at times, it would appear that this is not the case. In reference to Said’s declarations that he is not interested in providing ‘a thoroughgoing examination of [humanism’s] metaphysical relationship to a prior Being’ but, rather, ‘humanism as a useable praxis for intellectuals and academics’ (2004, p.6), Spanos suspends his critique, but does note a problem he sees with ‘Said’s typical overdetermination of praxis at the apparent expense of theory (which could easily be interpreted as putting them in a binary opposition that privileges the former over the latter)’ (2009, p.153). I have already shown that this is not an uncommon criticism, nor an entirely unfair one. Said’s secular criticism – his humanism – is certainly set up in opposition to a kind of textualism that he pejoratively names ‘wall-to-wall discourse’ (Said, 1983, p.26). And while Spanos’ concern regarding Said’s ‘dismissal of the history of the poststructuralist critique of humanism’ (2009, p.152) is of some merit, in relation to the apparent binary between praxis and theory, it is no longer poststructuralism that presents the primary issue for Said.

Rather, as his own critique of humanism in Humanism and Democratic Criticism demonstrated, he is more concerned with the way in which conservative, cultural humanists (that is, not poststructuralists) perform a clumsy sidestepping of praxis. I have already argued in my chapter on Spivak that deconstruction, in particular, is best seen as a political praxis and not just mere theory. Said’s greatest issue with Derrida (the deconstructionist) and Foucault (the genealogist) is that their approaches ‘defer for too long a declaration that the actuality of reading is, fundamentally, an act of perhaps modest human emancipation and enlightenment’ (2004, p.66). So while Said does emphasize the need for the humanist to take a stand and make a political choice, this is always mitigated by both his commitment to provisionality and critique – the commitment to always view as secular that which might assume the status of the sacred.
More importantly, though, while Spanos wishes for Said to take more notice of the poststructuralist criticism of humanism, in doing so, he refuses, on one level, to engage with the particular notion (however slippery) of humanism with which Said himself is interested. While I have no desire to use this analogy as to suggest it as a direct parallel, what Spanos is doing with Said’s humanism might be considered to be not too dissimilar to the scientist taking the poet to task for conceptualizing love as romantic feeling rather than a neurochemical process. The difference in this instance, of course, is that both Spanos and Said are dealing with ideas as they exist within the humanities. In this sense, then, it is perhaps worth considering in a little more detail Spanos’ criticism of Said’s cavalier attitude to the genealogy of poststructuralist antihumanism; especially the occasion of Heidegger’s *Letter on Humanism*.

Spanos appears to be perturbed by the kind of exculpation of responsibility that Said allows the Western Humanist by way of his neglect of its less than desirable past. He is eager to recollect from Heidegger the ‘indissoluble relationship between the modern allotrope of the Western metaphysical interpretation of being (the anthropological) and modern imperialism, which, unlike the rapacious non-European or nonhumanist forms, colonizes and administers its “Others” in the name of universal peace’ (2009, p.155). A little later, Spanos writes that Heidegger ‘discloses the means by which traditional humanism has been able to transcend the limitations of imperial power’s overt use (its vulnerability to insurrection) by internalizing the systematics of coercion through knowledge production (the truth that is incumbent on ostensibly disinterested inquiry)’ (p.156). The point Spanos makes, via Heidegger, about the complicity between Western humanism (based on a Western metaphysics) and imperialism is, of course, hugely important – especially within the context of postcolonial criticism. Moreover, such a relationship can hardly be denied and my analysis of Fanon, Spivak and Said suggests they would all concur. So why is it that Said is able to return to humanism and Spanos isn’t? The answer, it seems to me, relates to Spanos’s need to remain faithful to the genealogy of humanism and its poststructuralist consequences. After all, Said does not deny the complicity between humanism and imperialism historically speaking, but he denies its necessity philosophically speaking. In this sense, Said again seems to me to be more faithful to the lesson of poststructuralism that
truth and reality are never fixed. While he is clearly not awash in moral relativism, Said is, nevertheless, wary of being tied too tightly to poststructuralist epistemology.\footnote{Given that I have already suggested in the chapter on Spivak that poststructuralist epistemology is in no way necessarily divorced from political and ethical concerns, I need to make clear that I am focused here on the kind of poststructuralism that Said and others have criticized for opening up the space for moral relativism. While I have made the attempt to not essentialize positions and ideas in this thesis, and hope that the context of my particular analysis (in this case the concerns of Said) at various stages of the argument acts to situate the meaning attached to a term, I am aware that this reference to poststructuralism (and perhaps others), if not qualified by this footnote, could be interpreted as essentializing its effects.}

But to come back to Spanos, one might ask what it is exactly that he finds difficult with Said’s humanism. If it is not his practice as such, or his intentions, what is it that makes Said’s humanism suspect? Why should a lack of interest in the poststructuralist critique of Western metaphysics be a problem if Said still presents a non-essentialist and anti-imperial notion of humanism? Spanos suggests that the problem is, in the end, one to do with clarity – both in regards to form and function. He writes that Said’s ‘cavalier indifference’ to the history of the poststructuralist critique of humanism has ‘obfuscated the meaning of the very term Said wanted to redeem’ and has ‘blurred the symptomatic directives’ for how his humanism might function to critique American-style democracy (2009, p.152). If the proof of clarity is the ability to define a concept, then it is true that Said’s humanism lacks clarity; it is certainly not something that can be defined neatly and definitively. This is in large part due to Said’s insistence on worldliness; humanism is both a product of, and a critical voice to, the world in which it is located. As such, its particular form varies and its response to the issues of the world is contingent. In this sense, both its form and function are understandably difficult to “pin down”. The way to “pin down” Said’s humanism is, I suppose, through the determining of its ontological status. Indeed, it seems to me that it is this – his own proclivity for the preeminence of ontology – that is the primary problem for Spanos regarding Said’s humanism.

Radhakrishnan (2015) notes that Spanos has always been a Heidegerrian and ontological thinker. It is not surprising, then, that Spanos’s critique of Said’s humanism comes back to the question of ontology and the Heideggerian critique of metaphysics. After discussing various aspects of Said’s humanism, Spanos declares that ‘in defining humanism in Humanism and Democratic Criticism, Said deals inadequately with the ‘role that ontological interpretation –
metaphysical inquiry/thinking – has always and increasingly played in the Western imperial project’ (2009, p.189). He continues by suggesting that it is this failure on Said’s part that ‘renders his last book, however suggestive, finally inadequate to the imperatives for thought and action precipitated by the terrain that 9/11 changed’ (p.190). In other words, the ambiguity surrounding his understanding of humanism, resulting from his lack of interest in ontological thinking, actually serves to make Said’s humanism (as practice) impotent. Spanos’s justification of this position relates to an argument he makes about the ontological nature of American exceptionalism as it manifests within the sphere of US public and foreign policy. Because the conservative cultural humanism of Allan Bloom and others is called upon in the name of American exceptionalism, not least in the post 9/11 so called War on Terror, as a contribution to America’s ontology (the very ontology that allows for the “us” and “them” presumed by George Bush), Spanos claims that a humanism inattentive to ontology is unable to counter the ontological commitments of American imperialism. Indeed, after describing contemporary America’s ‘paranoid vision’ of the future according to Huntington’s clash of civilizations thesis, Spanos avers,

if this paranoid American vision is...informed not simply by an economic or a political or cultural economy but also by an ontological and epistemological economy – an economy that determines the meaning of what a human being is and how he or she ought to comport his or her self toward being at large – then a humanism that does not examine its genealogy in the way the early poststructuralists (Heidegger, Derrida, Lyotard, Foucault) did will remain inadequate.’ (pp.195-196)

It is a passionate and compelling argument and, in my view, there is certainly a place for debates that prioritize ontological matters and thinking in regards to humanism and imperialism. But I’m not entirely convinced that Said’s humanism as practice merely ‘troubles but ultimately does not challenge the ontologically grounded meaning of humanism’ (Spanos, p.196). I agree that Said does not challenge humanism ontologically if this requires an engagement with humanism within the sphere of ontological discourse. However, I also think that the challenge Said presents to the ontologically grounded humanism of the Enlightenment is his consistent rejection of its universalist and essentialist assumptions by way of advocating for a humanism that is an open, democratic, secular, critical and cosmopolitan practice.
In bringing this discussion of the critique of Said’s humanism to a close, a point I wish to make is that, while Said is guided by a basic antimeetaphysical and antiessentialist onto-epistemology, he is not, in contrast to avowed poststructuralists, bound to it. If this is taken to be the case, it makes the following all the more interesting. On quoting the passage from *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* in which Said declares that it is possible to be critical of humanism in the name of humanism, Radhakrishnan admits to being ‘troubled and disappointed by a certain shorthandedness in the mode of argumentation’ (2007, p.17). More specifically, he is unimpressed by the lack of theoretical density or empirical evidence Said uses to support his defense of humanism. Radhakrishnan’s critique suggests a sense in which Said, perhaps paradoxically, has pre-determined that to which he is committed – humanism – and then simply takes it as a given, much like any other status quo or sacred concept. But while Said might be taken to task for making an under-theorized commitment to humanism and then proceeding as if this is of no concern, is it not also the case that others (such as Spanos, for example) risk proceeding from a commitment to poststructuralist epistemology as essential? Put another way, I can’t help but wonder if the poststructuralist critic, given that their criticism of Said’s humanism so often comes back to the matter of its retrograde movement from the poststructuralist moment in theory, is actually more closely bound to a kind of foundationalist position than Said is himself.

After all, both in regards to *Orientalism* and his humanism, Said’s critics are uncomfortable with the ease with which he moves between theoretical and methodological positions. This is not to say, though, that Radhakrishnan is incorrect. Perhaps the point is, rather, that Said has already articulated his defense against the charges of under-theorization, theoretical inconsistency and of representing a “residual” humanism. He writes, ‘*Orientalism*, and indeed all of my other work, has come in for disapproving attacks because of its “residual” humanism, its theoretical inconsistencies, its insufficient, perhaps even sentimental, treatment of agency. I am glad that it has! *Orientalism* is a partisan book, not a theoretical machine’ (2003, p.340). Both critical and affirming of humanism, Said positions himself paradoxically as a non-humanist humanist. One may still disagree with Said on the matter of humanism, but insofar as the critique focuses on either its theoretical limitations or its traces of European humanism, they are critiques that I am
arguing miss the point. In my view, Said’s critique of humanism in the name of humanism is illustrative of the kind of new humanism which Fanon, as Gilroy points out, believed was ‘not only possible but desirable for Europe as well as for the continuing struggles against epidermalization, racial-corporeal schemata and various structures of colonial domination’ (2016, p.101). Today, I would add that the kind of humanism for which Said advocates is one whose location in, and whose speaking to, the world is a struggle for peace and justice. Moreover, this struggle ensues in a world increasingly marked by movements which either erase difference (aspects of consumer globalization), violently resist difference (such as the Islamic State), or pacify difference (well-meaning but superficial programs of the Left). In such a world, a rearticulated humanism that is negotiated across difference and functions within education as a moral resource for learning to live together might well be of great import. Before returning to this, I will elaborate on the kind of postcolonial humanism that I see as having emerged from this thesis’ analysis.
Chapter 7: Towards a postcolonial humanism

At the beginning of this thesis, in providing the context to my analysis of the postcolonial challenges to humanism, I identified key interconnected problems with humanism from a postcolonial perspective as being ethnocentrism, universalism, essentialism, and how these intersect with colonialism. The interconnected nature of these problems is significant. The ethnocentrism of Enlightenment humanism becomes particularly problematic in light of its attempted universalization which, of course, was engineered in part by the colonial projects. The work of postcolonial scholars, I have shown, makes clear that the dominance of European knowledge in structuring the world thus ignored the kinds of cultural differences that destabilize the assumed universalism of concepts such as humanism. Moreover, through the process of colonization, this ethnocentric humanism assumes an essentialized nature. This is exacerbated by the ways in which humanism is expressed through educational materials such as textbooks as a fixed concept. These problems, as can be seen, are variously ontological, epistemological, and political. Thus, the concerns that postcolonial scholars have with humanism are both theoretical and historical/empirical.

In the previous chapters, I have considered the ways in which Frantz Fanon, Gayatri Spivak and Edward Said deal with issues of ethnocentrism, essentialism, colonialism, theory and politics and the impact that this has for humanism. In each case, I have argued that in different ways, rather than leading to its rejection, their various critiques open up the possibilities for a rearticulated humanism. In this chapter, I will argue that humanism does not emerge unscathed but as an enduring moral imperative (or resource) and practice that needs to be reshaped within the present, in light of its history, and with a view to the future. In making this argument, I will return to some of the key findings of my analysis thus far and elaborate on what I see as the possibilities for a rearticulated postcolonial humanism in an era of globalization.

The Struggle for humanism

Philosopher, Lewis Gordon, writes that ‘Fanon regarded the situation of each man to be a constant struggle against the degradation of Man’ (1995, p.33). For Fanon the Algerian
revolutionary, the language of struggle made immediate sense. A fight for independence from a colonial power cannot but be immersed in the thinking, language, and activity of struggle. And as he makes so clear in The Wretched of the Earth (2001), Fanon’s struggle was not merely nationalistic. His struggle was against the degradation of humanity, for the sake of humanity. Colonial violence – territorial, cultural, physical, epistemological – masked by European humanism was, for Fanon, the paradoxical epitome of the ‘degradation of Man’. Yet, if the struggle against colonialist dehumanization is also a struggle for humanity, might it be possible to understand humanism as being constituted by the struggle? That is, might humanism be able to be defined not so much by a set of fixed normative foundations but, rather, by the normative appeal to a concept of humanity that will inevitably take the form of struggle? But why must humanism take the form of struggle? What are the conditions for this humanism as struggle? It seems to me that a postcolonial humanism is one that, as Nayar (2012) suggests, ‘draws on the experience of the anti-colonial struggle, that seeks inspiration from Europe’s history of humanism but abandons both European exclusionary humanism and postcolonial xenophobic nationalism’ (p.11). Moreover, as is perhaps only implicit in the above quote, the new humanism called for by Fanon is one that reflects, as it emerges from, the struggle between the universal and the particular, between philosophy and history. Any notion of humanism after colonialism cannot simply “be”. Indeed, in a postcolonial and global era, any humanism that might be able to be considered in any way universal cannot simply be; it must be struggled over in a perpetual negotiation.

In a sense, the kind of literary analysis that Spivak undertakes is one particular form of this kind of negotiation. One of the terms she has used to describe her professional self is as a comparativist (Spivak, 2003, p.11). Initially, this may seem odd for a postcolonial, feminist scholar. Indeed, Pollock (2010) writes that ‘were an historical ontology of comparison ever to be written’ (p.194), one of the two key components, he argues, would be colonialism. In rather strong language, he asserts that colonialism ‘has a relationship with comparativism that may signal causality no less than concomitance’ (p.195). To support this view, he claims that:

nineteenth-century Europe is the high-water mark of historical comparative studies across virtually all the disciplines – ethnology, history, law, literature, mythology, religion. It is not news, but it is also not inconsequential, that such
Spivak basically agrees with Pollock on this point. She herself suggests that, historically speaking, Comparative Literature has ‘referred to the standards of the French eighteenth century’ and engages in ‘comparison in favor of the European tradition’ (2009, p.609). But the kind of comparativism in which she is engaged is, one could say, of a postcolonial variety that seeks to challenge European supremacy through its decentering. As should now be clear, the alternative for Spivak is not an anti-colonial nativist reading of texts. Rather, her attempt is to maintain the differences of writing, languages, their cultural provenance, and global distribution while also advocating for an ‘equivalence of language’. Her revised comparativism is one that seeks to remove itself from the assumption of a level playing field given that such a reality is never actually the case (2009, p.609). Thus, when she writes of “equivalence” she is not looking to erase difference or to simply ignore it as might be the case for a cultural relativist.

Rather, Spivak defines ‘equivalence of language’ as ‘learning to acknowledge that other things can occupy the unique place of the example of my first language’ (2014, p.39). That is, the kind of comfort gained by one’s connection to language, place and nation is accessed via the intimacy of a first language. This connection between a mother tongue, place and personal-national identity is something that exists in similar but different ways for another person who possesses a different first language. By focusing on the equivalence of all languages, she universalizes this pre-rational capacity of humans without erasing the continuing reality of the subaltern’s existence outside of hegemony. Thus, ‘equivalence’, she writes, ‘is not equalization; it is not a removal of difference; it is not cutting the unfamiliar down to the familiar’ (p.39). And key to the reason why Spivak argues for the undertaking of a ‘comparativism based on equivalence’ is that what such an approach ‘attempts to undermine is the possessiveness, the exclusiveness, the isolationist expansionism of mere nationalism’ (p.39). It is in this sense that Spivak utilizes a methodology of negotiation through comparitivism.

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39 The cutting down of the unfamiliar to the familiar is, perhaps, the most common approach of dominant nineteenth-century inspired comparative literary studies.
I would wish to emphasize here that what I am referring to is an approach, rather than a literal, commonplace, act of negotiation. Spivak strives to make the point that the humanities provide an opportunity for one’s imagination to be trained in the play of languages and that, as the reader develops a sense of the equivalence of another’s first language with their own, such training may contribute (though not in any necessary sense) to the ‘de-transcendentalization of nationalism’ (Spivak, 2014, p.36). It is this logic that allows one, I am attempting to argue, to also imagine a kind of human equivalence that de-transcendentalizes culture (whether imperialist or nativist). Spivak presents her comparativism as an alternative to the old Comparative Literature (and we could include the social science disciplines such as anthropology and history here) that undertook comparison as ‘a matter of judging and choosing’ (2009, p.609). In other words, her comparativism-based-on-equivalence opens up the possibility for recognizing a (universal) humanity constituted by difference as an alternative to thinking humanity according to the logic of essential sameness on the one hand, or identitarianism on the other. Moreover, her theorizing presents a logic and way of seeing the (human) world that in its refusal to homogenize and flatten humanity through the recognition of difference, also refuses to see the subaltern as “less than” in any ontological sense. So where Fanon’s vision of a new humanism emerges in a historical context where the negotiation is with colonial humanism, the kind of negotiation emerging from Spivak is one between private desires or comforts (that is, one’s internalized feelings of national identity and sense of “home”) and a public or “universal” call to ‘a re-imagined world’ (2014, p.44). Thus, both Fanon and Spivak, in decidedly different ways, represent a call to the struggle for a better future world. For Spivak, the impossibility and yet (ethico-political) necessity of this struggle represents what I am suggesting might be thought of as the practice (and conceptualization) of humanism as struggle.

**From an abstract to an emergent humanism**

What I have also argued in this thesis is that this struggle is not merely intellectual. While Philosophy might engage in abstract debates about the particular form of humanism, the postcolonial challenge is one that makes the lived effects of humanism central to any “debate”. Writing his analysis of a passage from *Black Skin, White Masks*, Gordon writes, ‘Between
reason and history, theory and practice, there is *experience*, which in this case is the realization of a situation that stimulates an existential struggle against sedimented, dehumanized constructions’ (2015, p.50). For Gordon, it is experience that fills the space between the assumed binaries. That he defines Fanon’s particular instance of experience as a “realization” suggests the coming together of reason and history, of mind and body. It is also suggestive of the way in which experience is not so much a given, objective reality as it is ‘the process in which objects acquire the status as such for-consciousness’ (Judy, A.T., cited in Gordon, 2015, p.47). That is, experience is neither fact nor fiction, it is a particular lived reality that one has.

And as I argued in my chapter on Fanon, it is the emphasis in his work on lived experience that both acts as a critique of a transcendental humanism and as the ground from which a new humanism might emerge. Part of what makes Fanon so compelling in this is the way in which his writing on colonialism and humanism reflects the ‘singularity and historical specificity’ of his experience, but also the universal motivations and consequences of this (Nayar, 2012, pp.4-5). What I hope has become clear is that one kind of humanism that might survive the postcolonial challenge is a humanism that is rooted in lived experience. This form of humanism, I have tried to suggest, functions in a way that deeply troubles a neat dichotomy between the universal and the particular. While Fanon’s humanism is immanent in the sense that it emerges from the particular, it doesn’t completely leave behind the notion of the transcendent as a moral vision for common humanity. It is in this sense that Chakrabarty writes that ‘postcolonial scholarship is committed, almost by definition, to engaging the universal – such as the abstract figure of the human or that of Reason’ (2008, p.5). Indeed, as he continues to argue, ‘Fanon’s struggle to hold on to the Enlightenment idea of the human – even when he knew that European imperialism had reduced that idea to the figure of the settler-colonial white man – is now itself a part of the global heritage of all postcolonial thinkers’ (p.5). This is precisely the kind of point Spivak so masterfully makes in her *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*; that is, that postcolonial reason will always be complicit with the reason of the colonizer. As I have argued, the postcolonial imperative, then, is to struggle with the violence of the transcendent and the

40 Precisely what the abstract universal figure of the human or of Reason might look like, however, is not elaborated by Chakrabarty. Indeed, to do so would risk essentializing this abstract figure rather than allowing it to assume a form contingent on the circumstances from which it emerges.
universal assumptions of European thought through an engagement with the lived experience of the subaltern. The paradox, of course, being that the subaltern’s very humanity depends on human distinctiveness – a common humanity – continuing to be a viable category. While some antihumanists in Western theory have preferred to simply reject humanism, postcolonial scholarship recognizes the further violence inflicted on the subaltern when this is deemed to be the solution to the arrogance and (false) pretenses of European humanism. Thus the idea of humanism remains, but the forms that it takes must change.

**Productive tensions between the universal and the particular**

This is why Said is so strident, if perhaps too harsh, in his critique of 1970s literary theory for evacuating the issues facing people in the world. His commitment to the worldliness of the text is one motivated by the lived experience of people suffering the effects of imperialism. This ethico-political consideration undoubtedly leads Said to promote a humanism that negotiates and struggles with the orienting power of the universal, mediated by the interruptions of the particular into the universal. What remains, then, for Said is a commitment, not to universal norms (fixed and essentialized – Justice, Freedom, Truth) so much, but rather, to universal concepts (justice, freedom, truth) that need to be shaped and re-shaped within the crucible of history and across geographical boundaries. This takes us back to Chakrabarty’s astute observation in *Provincializing Europe* that ‘postcolonial scholarship is committed, almost by definition, to engaging the universal – such as the abstract figure of the human or that of Reason’ (2008, p.5). Moreover, in this book, he demonstrates the complex engagement between the universal and the particular lived experiences of the subaltern, and the modifications of the universal that ensue from this.

Indeed, the work of the Subaltern Studies group sought to produce a new theory of modernity and capital through a consideration of subaltern histories in South Asia. In this sense, as I have argued in relation to postcolonial theory throughout the thesis, it is the lived experience of the subaltern that performs, and lives as, the embodied critique of Eurocentric assumptions. And Chakrabarty’s book presents one of the better explications and demonstrations of this. In this important text, he distinguishes between History 1 as a unifying, generalizing history of Europe
which is the reference point for all histories (think back to the earlier discussion on Comparative Studies). It is because of the hegemonic role that this (Eurocentric) history plays that the question can be asked: ‘why do Indians (and other Third World historians) conceive and write their history in theoretical terms generated by Europeans?’ (Bullard, 2002, p. 777). History 2, on the other hand, is a ‘category charged with the function of constantly interrupting the totalizing thrusts of History 1’ (Chakrabarty, 2008, p.66). Hardiman (2002) suggests that History 2 comprises the ‘multiplicity of other, alternative histories…which have their own integrity and independence’ (p. 64). While there is a sense of multiplicity and alternatives in the notion of History 2, this should not be interpreted as meaning that History 2s ‘constitute the dialectical Other of the necessary logic of History 1’ (Chakrabarty, 2008, p.66). Such a dialectical understanding would, according to Chakrabarty, mistakenly ‘subsume History 2 to History 1’ (p.66). Thus, what Chakrabarty proceeds to do is to provide local South Asian examples of life being lived in a way that interrupts the assumptions of Europe as it traveled to the colonies.

In Provincializing Europe, an example of the interplay of History 2 interrupting the totalizing thrusts of History 1 can be seen in the study of (subaltern) histories involving spirits or deities. In this example, History – that is, the discipline of history as determined by Europe – will seek to explain or ‘translate’ such stories through a disenchanted, secular worldview. Such a translation, however, betrays a gross misunderstanding of the life-world of the people for whom these stories make sense and give meaning. It is, in other words, a mistranslation. When this mistranslation is recognized, and History 2 is affirmed, by the historian, it amounts to the disruption – or provincialization – of History 1. What these lived experiences of subaltern people in the context of colonialism demonstrate and enact is a kind of complication of “Europe” that keeps open the possibility for ongoing negotiated reformulations of universals such as humanism.

What I am trying to do is to suggest that we consider the way in which a concept such as humanism might be de-transcendentalized in the context of its reception, rejection and rearticulation through the lived experience of the non-European other. I have also been suggesting that any humanism that emerges from the necessarily violent context of colonialism
is one that is marked by struggle. And if these two premises hold, we might also begin to see that an immanent postcolonial humanism that engages in a struggle with the universal is necessarily contingent and given to characteristics of openness, criticality, and hopefulness. To put it another way, I wish to argue that a humanism that emerges from lived experience rather than being imposed unilaterally from “on high” must be contingent and therefore open to being re-interpreted, re-constructed and appropriated. This humanism is not merely an ethical injunction, but also obtains a political orientation towards an alternative, more just, future.

Postcolonial humanism as an ethico-political imperative

Indeed, a specifically postcolonial humanism is one that is necessarily political and therefore, I contend, shaped as a critical practice in the Saidian sense. That is, a postcolonial humanism is not merely a recovery of classical culture or the imposition of unquestioned Enlightenment ideals. It is a practice that aims at human freedom and justice through prioritizing critique of the status quo and the apolitical pretension of certain scholarship or policy. A postcolonial humanism will also be open in the sense of Said’s cosmopolitanism, as a rational but inclusive and integrating perspective. And humanism is also – as I think Fanon, Spivak and Said all demonstrate in different ways and to varying degrees – a resource for hopefulness regarding the future. Fanon gestures towards this in calling for a new humanism. Said boldly declares that ‘humanism is the only, and, I would go as far as saying, the final, resistance we have against the inhuman practices and injustices that disfigure human history’ (2003, p.xxii). While for Spivak, any commitment to humanism amounts to a double-bind. Humanism represents hope for the future and an ethico-political resource while also being tainted by its ethical duplicity as evidenced in European colonialism.

What has perhaps been left bubbling beneath the surface in this discussion so far, however, is that the prioritization of lived experience in postcolonial theory is not simply about troubling the universal/particular or transcendent/immanent binaries. Of course, were this to be the case, the postcolonial intervention would amount to little more than mere theory, making its self-serving use of lived experience ethically dubious. It seems to me that both through more general engagement with postcolonial scholarship and through the specific analysis of Fanon, Spivak
and Said, this thesis has shown that other universal notions (often linked to humanism) such as freedom and justice and their achievement for those suffering oppression is an indispensable element of postcolonial theory. Fanon’s writings were thoroughly concerned with the impact of racism and colonialism on the lives of the non-European and the colonized. Said’s commitment to the worldliness of the text and secular criticism have been put forward as responses to apolitical and ahistorical (literary) theory. His complex lifelong engagement in the cause of Palestinian independence is one example of the situatedness and political urgency of his scholarship. Spivak’s strategic essentialism in relation to representation is a “compromise” for the sake of justice on behalf of the subaltern woman. Her writing on teaching, transnational literacy, comparative literature and a whole host of other topics is regularly linked to her voluntary work to improve the literacy of subaltern women in Bangladesh. Particular in this thesis’ chapter on Spivak (and to some degree, Said), I have argued that these matters of human concern are primary to postcolonial criticism and that this, in part, is what distinguishes it from the Philosophical Tradition.

The ethico-politics of humanism as secular, contingent and provisional

I have made the case that this focus on the lived experience of the subaltern leads to a postcolonial critique of transcendence that amounts to a critique of fixity, essentialism, heteronomy or, in other words, the “sacred”. What this critique means for humanism, as I’ve argued particularly through the analysis of Said, is that rather than seeking to dismiss it tout court, there is space in postcolonial theory for a notion of humanism that is non-essentialist, democratic and secular. To say that Edward Said’s humanism is secular is, at base, to say that it refuses to consider anything sacred (or, beyond critique). In this sense, it is not only religion that concerns Said. In fact, his writing is more concerned with nationalism as a (sacred) fanaticism. It is important to understand the notion of secular Said wishes to use. This is so

41 For decades, Spivak has made an annual trip to Bangladesh to teach indigenous women literacy.
42 I use this phrase with caution. It is not intended to essentialize Philosophy or the implied Western version of Philosophy. Indeed, if we venture back to the humanist philosophy of the ancient Greeks, it is apparent that much philosophy – perhaps philosophy at its best – was focused on the lived life. I am referring to the Western Analytic Philosophical Tradition in particular, while acknowledging that this also cannot be essentialized. However, I have also been pursuing my argument in a way that continues to critique Western theory and Continental Philosophy as, too often, epistemologically blind to human (cultural) difference. Again, it would be unfair to make this claim too strongly and so I have tried to offer a fairer and more tentative argument. However, I do stand by my claim that the social – as a lived experience, not merely a theoretical construct – as a necessary component to postcolonial theory provides both a challenge to Western humanism but may also be what “saves” it from theory itself.
because it is a notion that acts to hold humans accountable for the (in)justice in the world, no matter what kind of political, moral or religious beliefs they might hold. Humans are accountable, for Said, because the (secular) world is one that is made by them. His humanism is, therefore, one that gives agency, and therefore moral responsibility, to humans for both the good and bad that is done.\(^\text{43}\) To say that humans make the world and are accountable for this world entails that the world is necessarily dynamic, not fixed. Indeed, to say that humans constantly participate in cultural (re)production means that it is decidedly problematic to understand culture, or humans, in essentialist terms. The kind of humanism that emerges from the postcolonial challenge, then, is not one that acts heteronomously. Instead, we are brought back again to the idea of struggle, negotiation, openness and provisionality.

There is no humanism as such that can simply be pulled out of one’s back pocket and put to work on the masses. Humanism is not something that a government or a god wields. Humanism, it increasingly seems to me, is a practice that is in the perpetual state of making and remaking itself. It is not, though, an autonomous practice but one entered into by individuals and collectives. To the extent that humanism functions to act against essentialisms, identitarian ways of thinking, and imperialism, it must proceed as a simultaneously hopeless and hopeful struggle for the common good. It is the orientation towards the common good that sees it take on an ethico-political formation and the categorical marking of the universal. This is also, as discussed in the chapter on Said, what allows humanism to be abused (as in its complicity with colonialism and ethnocentrism) without it having to conform to an essentialized ontology. The notion of humanism that emerges from the analysis I have presented in the preceding chapters, I am arguing here, is forged temporally (past traces/resources, present exigencies, future hopes) and spatially (mitigating ethnocentrism); it is a negotiation between times/histories and spaces/cultures as to how universal moral norms might manifest in different but, as Spivak might have it, equivalent, ways.

\(^{43}\text{It is important to remember that Said’s consistent claims that humans “make the world” is within the context of cultural discourse. That is, “the world” is for Said a cultural production. Thus, to assign agency to humans is not to deny in any necessary sense other non-human agencies in relation to geological, biological changes etc. It is true, though, that Said identifies the human as occupying a distinct and “privileged” place when it comes to the cultural production of the world.}\)
Here, we might wish to be reminded again of Edward Said’s *Traveling Theory* (1983) and *Traveling Theory Reconsidered* (2000). The central idea Said puts forward is that a theory is received and taken up in different ways as it travels to new contexts. The first essay considers the ways in which Lukács’ notion of reification is appropriated by Lucien Goldmann and Raymond Williams. Moreover, Said argues, the initial power that Lukács’ theory had as it was forged within a revolutionary context is dampened as the idea travels further away from its origin. One aspect of this analysis that Said reconsiders in his later essay relates to the ‘common European culture’ (2000, p.444) that links the different understandings and uses of reification by Lukács, Goldmann and Williams. In acknowledging this filiation, we might begin to see Said’s initial *Traveling Theory* as utilizing geographical language to describe temporal movement. Or, perhaps more precisely, the travel of reification in Said’s 1983 essay is one that takes place in somewhat culturally similar (if not homogenous as such) contexts. By rethinking his argument in the context of a more decidedly geo-political adaptation of the originary theory, through an analysis of Fanon, Said comes to the conclusion that in the instance of a theory being received and resisted by an antithetical cultural and epistemological context, the original theory is itself transformed. The political significance, according to Said, is that while the “power” of reification dwindled as it moved intra-culturally from Lukács to Goldmann to Williams, Fanon’s transformation of the idea also gave it a new power. The transformation of, and new power given to, a theory through “cultural” and “geographical” translation, acts itself as a resistance to the potential of imperialism. As I pointed out in chapter 3 of the thesis, the movement from one geographical sphere to another suggests, according to Said, ‘the possibility of actively different locales, sites, situations for theory, without facile universalism or over-general totalizing’ (p.452). In terms of my argument, I am suggesting that a humanism that is received, resisted and re-negotiated through its colonial travel may actually re-emerge in its newly articulated form with a renewed power.

**Neither assimilation nor relativism: humanism, morality and the subaltern perspective**

In drawing to a close this discussion of the kind of humanism that has emerged from this thesis’ analysis, I want to elaborate a little more on the avoidance of both assimilation and relativism that I have been arguing results from the negotiation of “the universal”. To do this, I want to
suggest that the priority of the ‘subaltern as perspective’ (Das, 1989) presents as an ethico-political intervention within postcolonial theory that is aimed at troubling both assimilation and relativism as viable options. That is, a distaste for both is not merely a matter of logic but a matter affecting real lives. That the world is structured asymmetrically establishes both limits, and need, for humanism. That is, even while humanism will suffer from forms of ethnocentrism, imperialism etc., its place as a critical practice in the name of humanity also acts in different times and places to resist these inevitabilities. This is what I’ve argued, through Spivak, is the humanism effect that emerges from the need to persistently ‘critique a structure that one cannot not (wish to) inhabit’ (Spivak, 1990, p.795). Indeed, it is the impossible possibilities of a more just future for the subaltern that sees Spivak remain ‘more committed to the risks of a persistently critiqued humanism’ (my emphasis, Spivak, 2000, p.xviii).

While Said explicitly affirms an approach in which it is possible to be ‘critical of humanism in the name of humanism (Said, 2004, p.10), Spivak’s language is far more tentative. She is not committed to humanism as such, but to the risks of a humanism that is persistently critiqued. In putting it this way, Spivak situates herself in relation to humanism as one who cannot be either for or against it. It has been my suggestion that Spivak’s concern for the subaltern prevents her from completely dismissing the humanism effect. But another important aspect of both her and Said’s insistence on a form of humanism that itself is in a perpetual state of critique is that such a humanism is necessarily provisional and, therefore, open. A postcolonial humanism, then, is grounded in the experience and “call” of the subaltern, acts as a “correction” to an essentialist universalism, and also orients itself to the world in a way that opens itself to critique and subsequent reconfiguration. While humanisms have always been shaped by the contexts in which they have been formulated and re-formulated, a postcolonial humanism is more conscious of the cultural politics at play in the world.

To pluralize humanism – to de-essentialize and de-transcendentalize it – functions to make defining humanism more difficult. Indeed, this is the criticism that has often been levelled at Edward Said. In fact, even after dedicating an entire work (Humanism and Democratic Criticism) to the place of humanism in America, readers of Said were still to be found wondering exactly
what it is that he means by humanism (see, for example, Varisco, 2012, p.16). It seems to me that a certain lack of clarity is a price that Said is willing to pay in his attempt to avoid the imperialism of a fixed concept of humanism that, rather than being a site of struggle, is something which is simply either accepted or rejected. The intervention of postcolonial theory into the history of humanism is one that has not, I have argued, shown humanism as it actually is\textsuperscript{44} – stripped of its historically fabricated clothing. Rather, postcolonial theorists have represented an epistemological challenge to the kind of reductionist philosophy that is founded on \textit{a priori} and the need for categorical certainty. They have challenged a specifically European and Enlightenment notion of humanism. It is true that the intervention of postcolonial theorists has taken place at the level of academic scholarship, most commonly funded, distributed and engaged with through Western institutions. Yet, despite this, the intervention is one that has originated from matters embedded in the world, history and culture – and especially that of the colonized and subaltern – rather than the realm of the abstract. What the theorists of concern in this thesis have shown, I suggest, is that humanism continues to exist as a moral resource aimed at a vision of the world that prioritizes the embrace of cultural difference, of universal-but-locally-formulated notions of justice and freedom, and of a world in which any idea or practice – including humanism – always remains subject to critique.

\textbf{The problem of humanism and normativity}

Before moving into a discussion of how humanism might function as a moral resource in education, and as an interruption to the morally dubious logic of the market that defines our times, it seems to me that I first need to address the issue of normativity. Specifically, I want to consider the possible contradiction in affirming the postcolonial critique of fixed, transcendent metaphysical and epistemological assumptions at the same time as affirming humanism as a moral resource. As Braidotti and Pisters (2012) posit, ‘normativity is traditionally expected to be structured around and to implement a number of axioms which are drawn either from a canonical set of universal rules – postulated in the Kantian tradition – or by coercive reference to a master signifier’ (p.1). Normativity understood in either of these ways confronts the

\textsuperscript{44} It should have been made clear by now that there is no such thing as the essentialized notion of “humanism as it actually is”.

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problem, amongst other interrelated problems, of power. Dhawan et. al. (2016) write, ‘Normativity, which refers to the regulatory function of norms, is therefore deeply linked to the operation of power. Norms do not only simply describe how the subject, society or the world is; rather they prescribe how they should be’ (p.2). Yet, to identify and accept a set of norms does not in any necessary sense require these norms to be fixed. In fact, norms are contingent and can be different across times, cultures and places. Yet, despite this, norms still function in a way that includes some and excludes others. That is, those who conform to norms are “in” and those who do not are “out”. This point should not be confused, however, with meaning that norms are “bad”. Rather, some norms can of course lead to horrible effects due to their exclusionary demands (we might think of Nazi Germany) but it is also true that norms offer us the guidance required for harmonious living in the name of social justice (perhaps we can think of human rights).

The problem still remains, it seems, that dominant normative systems function in a way that is practically transcendental even if, in theory, the norms are mutable. Perhaps the most fundamental problem contemporary scholars are likely to have with normativity relates to its connection with Kantian philosophy. Or more generally, the issue that critics of normativity might likely have is with the need for morality to have an objective foundation (Korsgaard, 1992, p.21). For morality to have an objective foundation, it would seem, cultural difference and particular lived experiences are inconsequential to the eternal norms of moral behavior. We return to the problem of transcendence. Narve Strand’s PhD dissertation (2007) is an attempt to keep alive the possibility of normativity without transcendence. Strand’s concern to engage the problem of normative inquiry is driven by a similar characterization of the moral landscape which frames this thesis. That is, he is looking to determine whether there is a “middle way” between a Kantian transcendent and “legalist” notion of norms and a cultural relativist position in which there is the constant attempt to avoid the normative.

In this thesis, I have tried not to use the language of “middle way” in an attempt to address a world and set of problematics that I do not think can be or should be resolved through a
Hegelian synthesis. This is not to say that I haven't utilized the binary structure. Indeed, in often referring to transcendence/immanence, the colonizer/colonized etc., I have split categories into the hard lines common to traditional philosophy. Yet, where I depart from Strand is in seeing in postcolonial theory (Strand is a Western analytic philosopher, not a postcolonial theorist) a commitment to acknowledging binary tensions without necessarily resolving them. Nevertheless, I suggested at the outset that the question of humanism in this thesis gains some of its significance from the kind of problem with globalization that Touraine (2000) and others have identified. That is, that the “shrinking” of the globe has created a set of conditions that make urgent the question of how, in a pluralistic world, we might live together. As the subtitle to his book so succinctly puts it, the problematic with which globalization has forced us to struggle over is the relationship between equality and difference. Indeed, as cultures have collided through business, the media, education and international movement, globalization theorists have debated whether or not the likely effect (or what the implications might be) will be an increase in cultural relativism at the expense of universal norms or the homogenization of the “weak” by those who are globally dominant. It is in relation to these questions, posed as a choice between two mutually exclusive choices, that the investigation I have undertaken is involved in the discussion about moral norms and if and how they might function in a postmodern, culturally pluralistic and globalized world. Strand’s consideration of normative inquiry, then, is of great relevance to my own project.

In essence, his argument is premised on the view that all of us make normative judgments and claims all the time, even the so-called relativists. To deny this, he argues, is indefensible (p.120). However, he also proceeds from the premise that the Kantian notion of the normative assumes a transcendental metaphysic, and that this does not take seriously enough specific situations. Kant’s ‘transcendental realism’, Strand argues, ensures that he is not quite able to escape the ‘representationalism’ of the cognitive subject (pp.269-270). Utilizing the work of Hilary Putnam, Strand aims to put forward a case for what he calls normative evaluation. This position, built on a philosophical tradition traced from Kant to Wittgenstein via Kierkegaard, seeks to pluralize – and therefore de-transcendentalize – normative possibilities (ie. evaluations) and thus avoid both transcendentalism/universalism and cultural relativism.
Disarming fixed norms and moral relativism via evaluation

The lesson from the later Wittgenstein, Strand argues, is that ‘both rules [transcendentalism] and attitudes [relativism] are seen as integral to human interaction as a whole, enabling and requiring evaluation while still being capable of the proper normative force and scope. We do not therefore have to choose between the one-sidedly legalistic (or rule-based) and perfectionist (or attitudinal) account of normative inquiry’ (pp.273-274). What Strand wishes to argue for, and I am in agreement with him at least in terms of the outcome of his argument, is a situated notion of normative inquiry in which different normative evaluations are not only allowed but welcomed (p.116). What safeguards this from the charge of relativism, however, is the commitment to evaluation or judgment that is assumed by this perspective. That is, there is an openness to the other’s view, but not without the critical process of evaluating it. Strand is strident in making clear that ‘seeing other “evaluational” casts of mind as informed or uninformed, coherent or incoherent, obtuse or abstruse, misguided or right on the mark, cruel or kind, bestial or humane – and everything between – is part of what it is to be human. It is just what we do’ (p.116). But if it is beginning to appear as though Strand is actually a closet Kantian universalist, he has this to say:

Relativism is not a cohesive choice, but neither is universalism. If we cannot effect an a priori separation between facts, values and norms, then how can we afford to dismiss actual disagreements out of hand like the universalist does? Not even institutionalizing norms will furnish us with the metaphysical guarantee that a sufficient resolution of conflicts might be found. This is also because it might very well be possible to derive immoral entailments from following these norms. The relativist, it seems, is not alone in being a little simplistic. (p.120)

So where does this leave us? For Strand, it leaves us to find a middle way between Kantian universalism and the relativist position in which distinctions (between values and norms, between values and values) cannot be made. This middle path, he suggests, is one ‘where the distinctions that we arguably do draw in ordinary life are admitted to be too humble to support the Kantian’s transcendental claims yet still … strong and reasonable enough to fund a workable, relative distinction between values and norms’ (emphasis original, pp.265-266). In a sense, the logic is similar to Spivak’s thinking regarding comparativism as equivalence. Just as she looks to affirm a universal equivalence that allows for language/cultural distinction, so too
does Strand wish to see an approach to normativity that allows for evaluative judgments regarding moral norms. Building on the later Wittgenstein, Strand contends that ‘both rules and attitudes are seen as integral to human interaction as a whole, enabling and requiring evaluation while still being capable of the proper normative force and scope’ (pp.273-274). Perhaps it would not be too great a leap to suggest that Strand is advocating for the “provincialization” of normativity.

A normative postcolonial humanism

It is not only necessary to explore the question of the normative because of its relationship to the theoretical tendencies of postcolonial theory, but also because of what it means for the possibilities of humanism. To what extent can we speak of a common humanity? And, how might humanism function normatively without falling into imperialism? In relation to the first question, I have suggested that one answer to this is in Spivak’s notion of “equivalence”. The pre-rational obtaining of a first language is something that is universal. It is not reliant on literacy levels, or a certain cultural tradition. Spivak’s claim is that one’s recognition of the other’s first language as the medium through which deeply embedded (cultural) self-identity is formed, and that this is “equivalent” to how one’s own self-identity has been formed, becomes the moment of recognition of our common humanity. In relation to the second question about humanism’s function as a moral resource, I have tried to suggest that even within Western philosophy there is the possibility to relativize and pluralize normativity. More pertinently, this thesis has presented an ongoing argument about the postcolonial insertion of the ethico-political concern regarding the colonized and subaltern that takes a normative stance against colonial domination/imperialism, but also represents an undoing of (ethnocentric) transcendent normative assumptions. Moreover, this ethico-political insertion of the subaltern perspective, I wish to argue, functions to make the retention of a reformulated humanism desirable.

Not only have I argued that certain forms of humanism remain possible after the postcolonial challenge, I also wish to argue that humanism is desirable. But how might we understand the nature of this humanism? This is not an easy question to answer. There is, I believe, an ethical

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45 It is important to note that the recognition of common humanity through the equivalence of language is not the same thing as language determining humanity.
urgency to provide an answer, but such urgency tends to lead to too rigid definitions. I do not want to add another definition of humanism that fixes its meaning. This struggle to define – or, better, describe – humanism is a reflection of the kind of humanism I have suggested emerges from the realization, and subsequent critique, of “European arrogance”. That is, the postcolonial destabilization of humanism as a concept, as a metaphysics, is not resolved through a reconceived transcendentalism, but is actualized as a lived struggle. Beginning with Fanon, I have suggested that postcoloniality has functioned to render humanism immanent. However, the call of the universal future does stand as a complication to this. To claim an immanent humanism in its most extreme sense risks the kind of relativism that would see difference in today’s world disengaged through a form of avoidance. The hyper-situational ethical disposition of a humanism that has rejected transcendence tout court is at too great a risk of the unethical.

I am stressing the issues with immanence because I think the problems with transcendence are better known to humanism and need not be rehearsed at any great length here. However, it is worth noting the obvious; that is, that a transcendental humanism based on fixed universal principles or a god risks the unethical through its ultimate negation of difference and of the particular. A transcendental humanism is, necessarily, imperialistic. All this is to say that the kind of humanism required for education in today’s world is neither a transcendent nor an immanent one, but a constant negotiation between both. A humanism that is situated in the irresolvable tension between both immanence and transcendence is, by necessity, a struggle. In this sense, immanence might be seen as primary and anterior insofar as struggle is something that is lived. To the extent that a situational, as opposed to a deontological, ethical approach is prioritized, this might be seen to be true. However, it is of course not so simple to determine the priority of immanence or transcendence. Moreover, I argue, it is not necessary or desirable.

Philosophy (including the continental and analytic traditions in the Western tradition, albeit in different ways both within each tradition itself and in relation to the other) possesses a proclivity towards demanding such an ordering. In theorizing a humanism in the context of
postcoloniality, education and globalization, I have little interest in such questions of the *a priori* beyond that of the intellectual challenge. The ethico-political demand of living together – an imperative inherent to the condition of postcoloniality, education and globalization as sociological realities – requires the tension between the universal and particular to be maintained as a site of struggle. The universal acts to bring principles and Reason to the site of struggle. Subsequently, in this struggle, these universals may be applied, appropriated, reformulated and denied by the lived context. The particular, on the other hand, brings lived experience and relationality to the site of struggle and, in the struggle, these social realities may test, appropriate, refine, render unethical, affirm, or declare imperative the universal principles. So while immanence may have been the corrective to Enlightenment arrogance, it is not the answer – at least not in the form of a substitute.

Briefly remaining with the issue of ethics, it might seem that what I am proposing is humanism as a virtue ethics. In one sense, I am quite okay with this. If educators (and others) were to see humanism as a practice that contributes to the common good, then I would basically be happy with this. Perhaps the greatest concern I have with this characterization of humanism, though, is that in casting it as a virtue within this particular ethical system, the significance of humanism may become lost within the system. Perhaps a better way of putting it is that I don’t think that humanism should be tied to any one ethical system and be contained by it. Throughout this thesis, I use the term “ethico-political” because humanism as struggle is predicated on both an ethics (which I take to be basically transcendent) and a politics (which I take to be immanent). In relation to a specifically postcolonial humanism, perhaps what is most important here is that virtue ethics could be seen as concerned with what is right action, without any regard for issues concerning the nation, (including transnationalism), culture and, indeed, revolution. Linked to this, while ethics can be thought of in terms of the social, it does not have a necessary relation to political order. Politics, on the other hand, assumes not just relationality between the Self and the Other, but is the realm in which solidarity is garnered and mobilized. Colonialism and imperialism demand not just an ethical response, but a political response. In this sense, a humanism that emerges from postcolonialism must include the political, not only the ethical.
Postcolonial humanism to what end?

That a postcolonial humanism is to be conceived as an ethico-political construct raises further questions. To what is it oriented? What kind of political vision for the future does it have, or is having such a vision even necessary? Tracing this ethico-political imperative back to the history of Western humanism as presented in chapter two of this thesis, to what extent is a utopian vision of the good life part of this postcolonial humanism and is this really a defensible position? To the extent that the Enlightenment project’s belief in the progress towards man’s triumph can be considered utopian, the entire notion of utopia becomes fraught. Moreover, if we are to agree with Starkey (2012) that utopian visions are also what led to such human travesty’s as the Holocaust, it becomes clear that utopia in and of itself cannot be considered a good as such (p.6). Furthermore, when understood as an intellectual task of imagining a better world it can seem that utopia is little more than ‘an elaborate thought experiment’ (Gordin et al., 2010, p.8). In simple terms, utopia can be traced to an ambiguous rendering in Greek as ‘no place, good place: imaginary yet positive’ (p.8). While I don’t have space to engage the arguments in any depth, for the sake of moving forward I am going to suggest that postcolonial scholarship should see the common notion of utopia problematic in its idealism and transcendentalism. Yet, I want to also argue that, despite this, a postcolonial politics nevertheless requires an alternative vision of a better future.

I will base this discussion on the idea that a utopia is a planned society, whether that comes from religion, socialism or somewhere else. We will also acknowledge the transcendent quality that this kind of future vision obtains. What I wish to argue here, drawing on the work of Gordin et al., is that a notion of utopia that is rooted in everyday experience ensures that the present acts as a reminder that dystopia is the ever-present accompaniment to utopia. Moreover, my argument is that this kind of a notion of utopia/dystopia is the logical outcome for postcolonial theory. Despite the shift away from grandiose and idealistic future-oriented visions with no reality in the present, the notion of utopia/dystopia remains as a goal for a better human world. The interplay between the everyday struggles of the subaltern and the political struggle for a more
just existence represents a postcolonial humanism as struggle, fuelled and tempered by a notion of utopia/dystopia.

According to Gordin et.al, ‘despite the name, dystopia is not simply the opposite of utopia’ (p.8). If this were the case, a dystopia would represent the vision of an unplanned society. However, a dystopia is more accurately a utopia that has gone wrong or ‘a utopia that functions only for a particular segment of society’ (p.9). Moreover, the authors argue that ‘every utopia comes with its implied dystopia’ (p.10). Utopia and dystopia are, thus, inextricably linked concepts held in tension. The dystopia of our everyday lived experience – that is, the somehow distorted, unfulfilled or non-universal phenomenon connected to utopia – may leave us in despair of its dominance over utopian possibilities but, nevertheless, is still imagined according to a picture of, and desire for, a better future. Gordin et al. suggest that ‘opposite of dystopia seems to be utopia’ but that the ‘converse does not hold’ (p.9). They conceptualize utopia/dystopia as a triangulated nexus ‘between the perfectly planned and beneficial, the perfectly planned and unjust, and the perfectly unplanned’ (p.9).

But they do not see it as merely important to make clear that utopia and dystopia are not simple opposites, but that it is ‘radical change’ that links the three dimensions of the utopia/dystopia nexus. They write, ‘after all, utopias and dystopias by definition seek to alter the social order on a fundamental, systemic level. They address root causes and offer revolutionary solutions’ (p.9). Significantly, what this identification with radical change means is that utopia/dystopia is extracted from the realm of ideology or abstraction, and materialized as practice. The authors continue, ‘historical attention to utopia and dystopia has been strikingly one-sided and consists of dominant leitmotifs without a thorough explanation of the conceptual space opened up by these categories’ (pp.9-10). But rather than utopias or dystopias being objects of study, the authors suggest that they can be treated ‘as historically grounded analytic categories with which to understand how individuals and groups around the world have interpreted their present tense with an eye to the future’ (emphasis original, p.10). In this sense, temporality remains important to the purpose of utopia and dystopia as analytic categories, but it is the centrality of space and time in the conceptualization of these categories that is questioned by Gordin et al.
In imagining a utopia, for example, the authors note that a particular space (often a city, or island) is conjured as existing in the future (time). The authors write that, ‘in our effort to reclaim utopia and dystopia as analytic categories of historical inquiry, we place space and time in the background and think instead of these phenomena as markers for conditions of possibility, understood in Michel Foucault’s sense’ (emphasis original, p.11). By doing this, the examination of utopias and dystopias is done to consider what they might ‘reveal about a set of abiding concerns and cultural formations that generated both the desire for utopian transcendence and the specific form that the utopia/dystopia took’ (p.11). In this sense, utopia as an analytical category is less about the imagined future and more about the conditions which gave rise to its imagined state and the impact of this utopian vision on the lived life in the present. To use utopia as an analytic category, then, is to focus on ‘utopia as a practice, as a technique used by historical actors for understanding their particular contemporary circumstances – and thus a valuable lens for the historian’ (emphasis original, p.11). In other words, what is it that the historian might discover about historical actors through using utopian visions as the analytic? What might it suggest about the particularities of their contemporary situation?

The question of “utopia” and its place in the argument of this particular thesis is one that has followed me for the journey. Aware of the criticism of utopia as a category and tool used by those vying for social transformation, the concept has troubled me. Utopian visions do, of course, risk naïveté in the extreme and can be so optimistic as to fail to acknowledge the necessary exclusions and dystopias – or dystopian effects – that inhere in them. Moreover, the extent to which they can function as totalizing ideologies, transcendentally imposing their vision onto the present state of affairs, should lead us to always view utopias critically. However, I think there is something to be said for using utopia/dystopia as an analytic. Even in this contemporary piece of research, what is it that gives rise to whatever might be utopian/dystopian within the writing? When utopian visions or alternatives are suggested, is there a sense of urgency, imminent doom? What role does the utopian vision play, especially in an era presumed to have been “post-utopian” after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the many atrocities of the
twentieth century? In other words, if naive utopianism is no longer an option – at least within academia – what kind of role might it play in politically engaged scholarship?

**Humanism and the struggle for a more just world**

Like utopia, many of the various categories central to this thesis – universal, transcendent, “the good life”/human flourishing etc. – are very difficult to work with. And yet, they remain part of much intellectual discourse and, even more so, popular discourse. All of the terms mentioned here are illustrative of the importance of alternative imaginaries, ideas, political projects, futures.

The end of teleology seems to me to be necessarily ambiguous and contested. As the argument that has been developed so far in this thesis should make clear, it is my view that teleologies that prescribe, that are fixed and constructed unproblematically, should not be taken up with any seriousness. But the concerns, hopes and practices that emerge from future-oriented, utopian, visions remain politically important in resisting the status quo that is always determined by the powerful. In this sense, we may see, with Gordin et al., utopia as a practice, as part of the political assemblage that is a response to the present as much as it is to an imagined future.

But as I have already indicated, a postcolonial response to the notion of utopia is one that demands a greater sense of reality than an idealized utopia. This is because a postcolonial utopia should emerge from the present reality of lived experience, thereby establishing the struggles of the present as the ground from which the better vision for the future emerges. Moreover, as Gordin et al. suggest, this also reconstructs utopia/dystopia as a practice ‘used by historical actors’ (p.11) to engage with the particular political circumstances. In this sense, the formulation of an alternative vision of the present for the future is enacted by collectives as the humanistic struggle for justice. Not only does this correlate with Said’s rendering of humanism as a practice, it also represents the kind of work that Fanon produced in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Embedded in the revolutionary struggle, Fanon’s call for a new humanism – and what we can only imagine might have been a more detailed “planned society” had he lived longer – illustrates the notion of utopia/dystopia that sees the present (dystopia) create the conditions of possibility for a utopian future to be imagined, and worked towards. As I have argued in my analysis of each of Fanon, Spivak and Said, the persistence of humanism as moral resource
and practice for humanity is evidenced in the lived struggles for a better world. For Spivak, the political work of deconstruction, in its constant questioning of philosophical and linguistic constructs and their relation to power, is utilized in the service of the subaltern woman in particular. The kind of humanism that one might imagine living on after Spivak is one whose function is to humanize those who have been dehumanized materially and discursively. Such a humanism, in Said’s words, will be critical of itself in the name of humanism. But it will also be worldly, engaged with matters affecting the lives of people. A postcolonial humanism will be cosmopolitan and inclusive, shaped by plural perspectives from differing geographies. But as the above comment regarding Spivak’s deconstruction implies, neither she nor Said would settle for an easy, lazy inclusiveness. A humanism that reflects their respective thinking and work will “read” the world carefully and critically. Moreover, if one is to consider Fanon’s major concerns, an inclusive postcolonial humanism cannot simply ignore difference – whether based on race, sex, culture or nation. Indeed, all three theorists have explored in varying ways how the dehumanization linked to colonial practices is operationalized by such categories. The solution, then, if there were such a thing, is not to formulate humanism as another fixed category, but to see it is a moral resource which prioritizes the intellectual and material struggle to negotiate the various structures and processes that function to dehumanize. In this sense, it is dynamic, contingent, provisional, ethical and political. In the final chapter, I will discuss some of the ways in which such a humanism might be understood and practiced in the contexts of education and globalization.
Chapter 8: Learning to live together

This thesis has argued that humanism remains viable after the various postcolonial challenges. This is not to say that humanism is the necessary or only possible outcome from the analysis undertaken. What I have tried to show is that a rearticulated humanism can survive. I also began this project by not only asking about humanism’s viability but also its desirability. In formulating a response to this question of humanism’s desirability, it has become clear through the analysis of Fanon, Spivak and Said, that a focus on the postcolonial challenge to humanism lends itself to keeping central the lived experience of those who have been dehumanized. In this sense, the desirability of humanism is ambiguous. To the extent that a particular ethnocentric humanism bears some responsibility for dehumanizing colonial violence, humanism may well be something worth abandoning. If, however, humanism is able to provide a moral framework in which the humanity of those who have been dehumanized can be recovered, affirmed and protected, then its future perhaps remains desirable. Indeed, Fanon was clear in his desire for a new humanism to be the answer to the Eurocentric one that amounted to an abuse of humanism itself through its ethnocentric pretensions and colonizing violence. In this conclusion, I will argue that the world in which we now live requires us to reconsider the human and her relationships with others. I will argue that the challenge for educational theorists and policy actors is to suggest approaches to pedagogy that, based on a postcolonial humanism, will act as a moral guide in shaping education as something more than a technology for national or business interests. These approaches to pedagogy will, rather, act to (re)position education as an important space in which people learn to live together despite the challenges of cultural difference.  

Postcolonialism, globalization and humanism

This thesis has sought to explore the viability of humanism after the postcolonial challenge. The context in which this question has been posed is that of an interconnected and interdependent globalized world. To return to the question of humanism through the postcolonial is important for

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46 While I touched on it briefly early in the thesis, it is worth stating here (and again far too briefly) that humanism’s moral concern extends to the earth/non-human/more-than-human. The focus on this thesis, though, is on humans learning to live together.
at least three key reasons. Firstly, there is an argument to be made that the globalization that we now take as “normal” was precipitated by colonialism. That is, colonialism enacted a certain kind of contact between what we now call the Global North and the Global South. Linked to theories of modernization and development, this colonial history produced an interdependent world that is structured in dominance. Thus, while the colonizer and colonized are mutually imbricated, and while the colonizer is dependent on the colonized, the power dynamics are decidedly uneven. Indeed, this notion is captured crisply through Fanon’s famous declaration that, “Europe is literally the creation of the Third World” (2001, p.81). The postcolonial world is one in which there are inevitable ongoing relations between former colonial powers and their now postcolonial “others”. Moreover, with time, the dominant discourse of national interest has given way to transnational partnerships. The “opening” of the world that we call globalization is, in a sense, the ongoing history of colonialism.

Secondly, addressing humanism today through postcolonial theory is important insofar as it interrupts the dominant Western discourse. The history and recent work of UNESCO is a good example here. As an international organization formed after the end of World War II, UNESCO’s various articulations of its position in regards to humanism has been largely Eurocentric and, more specifically, Franco-centric. Given that UNESCO has made a concerted effort under current Director-General, Irina Bokova, to re-imagine humanism for a globalized world, the postcolonial challenge to Western dominance is an important consideration. While the postcolonial challenge has, for some theorists and activists, represented a rejection of the viability of humanism, I have argued against this conclusion. Just as Dipesh Chakrabarty’s History 2 does not so much represent History 1’s dialectical other but, rather, acts as an interruption to its totalizing tendency, so too might postcolonial epistemology interrupt the totalizing thrust of European humanism. Thus, what becomes important is how to engage and negotiate a universal humanism that is understood differently in different places and for different people.

Finally, the postcolonial intervention into the history of humanism is one that has subsequently effected a shift in how we might understand humanity. That is, to the extent that all humanisms
necessarily assume a particular notion of the human, a postcolonial rendering of humanism entails a postcolonial rendering of humanity. This has been a major focus of the current thesis. As the previous chapter argued, the kind of humanism that emerges from the postcolonial challenge is one characterized by struggle as a condition of its imbrication with an ethico-political focus on the subaltern and the phenomenon of lived experience. In this sense, the transcendent and fixed notion of the human is interrupted by the imminent experience of human existence. The notion of humanity that emerges from the very struggle for humanity is one that is necessarily contingent, but nevertheless shaped by a universal thrust. As I have previously pointed out, this is central to Said’s writing on humanism and is evidenced in the project with which Fanon was engaged. As universals tend towards totalization, the postcolonial intervention is a constant reminder of the dynamic nature of human life. Put simply, humanity is constituted by difference. Paradoxically perhaps, that all humans are constituted by difference is a mark of our common humanity. Spivak’s theorizing of comparativism according to “equivalence in language” is an example of the “sameness” of humanity understood through “difference” (and vice-versa).

It seems that the actual events of terrorism – such as those that occurred in Paris in November 2015\textsuperscript{47} – events more ambiguously linked to Islamic extremism – such as the Lindt café siege in Sydney in 2014\textsuperscript{48} – and the politics of fear utilized by hard right groups and by populist politicians – such as the United Patriots Front in Australia (UPF)\textsuperscript{49} and Donald Trump\textsuperscript{50} respectively – have all contributed to a “clash of civilizations” perspective on Islam in the popular “Western” imaginary. The Pew Research Center in the United States conducted a survey in early 2016 which showed that 50% of respondents believed Muslims were in some way anti-American.\textsuperscript{51} Moreover, research from a longitudinal study in Queensland, Australia showed that while young people were likely to support accepting asylum seekers who arrive by boat into the country, there remained concern that these same asylum seekers might be a

\textsuperscript{47} Of course, there are other attacks that could have been cited. The November 2015 attacks can be read about here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/November_2015_Paris_attacks
\textsuperscript{50} See, for example, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2016/08/01/donald-trump-is-bringing-anti-muslim-prejudice-into-the-mainstream/
\textsuperscript{51} The survey results can be seen here, http://www.pewforum.org/2016/02/03/republicans-prefer-blunt-talk-about-islamic-extremism-democrats-favor-caution/pf_2016-02-02_views-islam-politics-06/
threat to the “Australian way of life” or even terrorists (Laughland-Booý et al., 2014). All of this might suggest that Samuel Huntington’s clash of civilization thesis is alive and well, at least within the popular imagination.

The world in which we now live is one facing challenges and opportunities of a global nature such as climate change, large-scale involuntary migration, cyber security, diasporic workers, international collaboration, to name just a few. These phenomena have a significant impact on how people from the various different parts of the world respond to each other. That cultural norms, beliefs and ideologies are of inevitable and profound importance to how these matters are dealt with should come as no surprise. The World Economic Forum’s 2016 “Global Risks of High Concern” report lists “large-scale involuntary migration” as being seen by survey respondents as the most likely of risks to occur and one of the most serious in terms of impact (WEF, 2016). Sociologists of globalization have been describing the shifting conditions of this world for more than two decades. It seems to me that we are required to acknowledge that our togetherness, mediated in various ways by the conditions of globalization, is a basic empirical fact of life that will continue into the future. For example, it is hard to argue against the likelihood of technology continuing to facilitate the economic, cultural and political intertwining of humanity. In this sense, the kind of “togetherness” rendered by our global condition is not only about intersubjective dialogue, nor about physical proximity (though both of these might also be true), but about our enmeshment. This enmeshment tends to become clearer when things go awry, as in the case of the 2008 global financial crisis.

While global challenges, as the rhetoric of Donald Trump’s presidential campaign suggests (as well as the subsequent commentary on his election), might result in rising nationalist sentiment, it is nevertheless the case that the communities in which we are living are increasingly constituted by diversity (Kalantzis & Cope, 2016). These conditions – in which we are increasingly seeing different ethnic, cultural and national groups interacting within a context which sees processes of globalization negotiated through frameworks of national interests and filiations – demand of us to make moral responses to both the challenges and opportunities that arise. This requires re-thinking and reformulating traditional approaches to moral and ethical
decision making. Indeed, moral philosophies based on broadly Christian principles, for example, are more likely to be accepted and make sense to a group of people for whom Christianity is a shared tradition. However, when transnational spaces constituted by difference are becoming the norm, we require some way of taking a moral stance on the challenges which arise. This is the issue that Touraine (2000) identified as avoiding cultural relativism on the one hand and cultural imperialism on the other.

Rearticulating humanism

Avoiding both relativism and imperialism will require making some claims, even if tentative, about how education can act as a moral agent in a world dominated by market logics and a suspicion of the normative. At the end of the last chapter, I provided a defense, albeit a rather brief one, of normativity and the normative function of humanism. At various points in the thesis, I have shown how scholars such as R. Radhakrishnan and Dipesh Chakrabarty have made the claim that the universal maintains an important ethico-political function. But, they argue, the historical fact of colonialism and imperialism has shown us that the universal must be provincialized, and that this is not the same thing as dismissed or destroyed. And so, it is on the basis of this kind of postcolonial thinking that we might begin to imagine the humanist challenge of living together. In their book, Globalizing Education Policy, Rizvi & Lingard (2010) make a strong case for understanding policy as necessarily ‘value-laden’. They argue that while the values inherent in policy have traditionally ‘articulated national interests’, in more recent times ‘global considerations now enter the articulation of values as never before’ (p.16). Moreover, as they argue in chapter four, education itself ‘is a deliberate, purposive activity directed at the achievement of a range of ends’ (p.71). Education thus has ‘normative implications: it suggests that something worthwhile is being intentionally transmitted, and that something valuable is being attempted’ (p.71). Whereas philosophical propositions and arguments from a particular cultural tradition have tended to be presented as the value basis for educational thinking, policy and practice, globalizing processes have functioned to ensure that the norms of education are negotiated across cultural difference.
Rizvi & Lingard demonstrate the way in which the globalization of education policy has seen various values from different national and state imperatives become subsumed under a broad neoliberal social imaginary. In this sense, they argue, ‘there is an unmistakable global trend towards a convergence in thinking about educational values’ (p.72). This convergence, they suggest, is ‘towards a neoliberal values orientation’ (p.72) in which, as Wendy Brown (2015) puts it, \textit{homo politicus} is transformed into \textit{homo oeconomicus}. The point that Rizvi & Lingard wish to make is that the result of this globalizing of education policy is that ‘policymaking is a fundamentally political process’ of negotiation (p.72). As such, policies do not represent a simple, direct-line outcome of a philosophical moral principle. Rather than policies representing a particular value, then, they ‘order, organize and enact’ a range of values into a particular configuration (p.73). What this analysis suggests, therefore, is that the ways in which globalizing processes bring “differences” into contact with each other requires the universal and the particular to work on each other in mutually transformative ways. Such a notion is reminiscent of Ania Loomba’s observation that both the colonizer and the colonized are affected by the processes of colonization and decolonization (2005, p.22). Moreover, Loomba notes the way in which postcolonial theory tends to bring in to focus the fact that this mutual-effect of colonization takes place according to an uneven power relationship – a key point I have made throughout my analysis. While Rizvi & Lingard note the market-based logic that influences the process of contemporary policy formation, by demonstrating the necessary place of values within policy formation and enactment, they highlight the political and transnational stakes in policy negotiation.

This dominant articulation of globalization with the logics and norms of neoliberalism is one for which it is difficult to imagine an alternative. However, the fact that it is an articulation means that the relationship between globalization and neoliberalism is not a necessary one. I am suggesting that we are highly unlikely to leave the conditions of globalization behind and retreat to a world comprised of disconnected nation-states. I would also concur with Rizvi & Lingard that a market-based logic pervades much globalization policy. But, if globalization is to persist as a condition of our existence, but it is not in any necessary sense wedded to neoliberalism, the possibility for articulating globalization to another set of logics remains. If there is a desire to
attempt this, for the sake of social justice, the question becomes to what might globalization be articulated and how? Here, I am making the argument that a provisional, contingent and cosmopolitan humanism similar to that espoused by Said, can act as a moral resource within the context of globalization. The kind of humanism that I have argued emerges from Fanon, Spivak and Said occupies the complex space in which the Eurocentric universalism and the provincializing power of the particular, colonial and postcolonial histories, the powerful and the subaltern, the human and the non-human, all come into contact. Kalantzis and Cope (2016) argue that metacategories (such as ethnicity and class), closely related to identitarianism as discussed in this thesis, are problematic when the ‘dynamics of difference’ in schools and wider society become ‘more insistent’ (p.105). What is required, I suggest, is that diversity is not “managed” according to metacategories or left to market logics, but is embraced within a humanistic frame that seeks to bring moral reflection and action to the task of living together.

However, just as the processes, tensions and configurations discussed in relation to policy by Rizvi & Lingard emerge through their negotiation according to political and economic interests, so too is humanism a negotiation across difference. Indeed, in this thesis I have argued that a postcolonial humanism emerges as a negotiated construct. It assumes values, but these values cannot be considered to always be fixed. Education in a globalized context is required to be cognizant of the dominant logics ordering and shaping its agenda. Moreover, any normative pronouncements regarding its aims and aspirations are ones that must take into consideration not only the negotiated nature of the very pronouncements but the “negotiated” nature of their implementation. That is to say, statements of values are debated and negotiated at the philosophical level but also experience a “negotiation” through the way in which they are interpreted and implemented in different local contexts. It is the same kind of idea Said forwards in his Traveling Theory/Traveling Theory Reconsidered essays (1983/2000). Thus, as specifically humanist values travel from policy to education sites, the values themselves may be reshaped as they are articulated to each particular context. Indeed, the telos of this kind of postcolonial, negotiated humanism is the process of negotiation itself. Thus the end of humanism is not fixed but dynamic.
Given the empirical fact of global interconnectivity and interdependence, in socially material ways, the question becomes how we will handle the inevitable challenges (and opportunities) that emerge. As educators, it will not be enough to expect our students to imagine people ‘sharing all the world’ or the idea of ‘living life as one’. When the Beatles’ singer/songwriter, John Lennon, wrote those words, the kind of global social imaginary that has become so powerful today was vastly overshadowed by strongly nation-centric structures and policies. Today, we are indeed sharing all the world, though not in such a way that it is shared fairly. Moreover, at the more local level, where the imagined community of the nation-state still maintains great power, some people do not wish to share their piece of the world with those from other places. This is not new, but with rising levels of fear in respect to global terrorism and the constant threat of financial crisis, we are witnessing a closing-in and shutting-out. In Australia, the UPF has emerged as a minor but loud voice against the integration of Muslims into society. Understanding culture as a bounded sociological phenomenon, these “patriots” trade in terms of who is “in” and who is “out”. While the irrationality of the UPF’s concern is evidenced by the fact that the vast majority of Muslims in Australia are what might be termed “moderate”, the more concerning matter is that a large number of recent Muslim arrivals in Australia are refugees (Reilly, 2016). Thus, UPF members, and even many moderate Australians, would prefer that some of the most vulnerable people on the planet not be allowed to live alongside them based on an essentializing religiously-based fear. It seems to me to be eminently clear, then, that education has a hugely profound role to play in militating against this kind of clash of civilizations imaginary.

Given that education suggests ‘something worthwhile is being intentionally transmitted, and that something valuable is being attempted’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p.71), and given the significant place that education occupies throughout the world, I would contend that it is uniquely placed to counter xenophobia, imperialistic dispositions and superficial relativism. Indeed, this is precisely what I deem UNESCO to be attempting to do. Effert, in her history of UNESCO’s humanistic approach to education, reaffirms the humanist impulse to acknowledge a common humanity.

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despite the clear cultural diversity that also defines humanity. She acknowledges, though, that this concept of, and aim for, unity and diversity risks two problems: one problem being its manifestation as a well-intentioned but ultimately meaningless ideal, the other problem is the risk of imposing universal norms rather than negotiating these norms and leaving them open (2016, pp.249-250). Yet, the struggle to achieve this sense of common humanity in a world of difference is seen by many to be worth the risks. Elfert argues in rather strong terms that ‘turning away from the focus on the dignity of the human being is fundamentally dangerous, because it can lead to totalitarianism and indoctrination’ (2016, p.251). For others, it is the particular challenges we face in an era of globalization that necessitate a re-turn to the human and for education to be at the center of this.

Irina Bokova’s entire agenda as Director-General of UNESCO is based on her vision of a New Humanism in response to the challenges of a world in which contact between cultural difference is increasingly the norm and the potential impact of the challenges unprecedented. As Bokova said in an address, ‘Different peoples are increasingly in contact with one another, cultures entwine, and identities intermingle’ (2010, p.6) and yet, as one UNESCO publication puts it, the challenges facing the planet such as climate change and financial crises are problems which ‘stem from the very success of globalization; a process that has connected all parts of the planet in a complex web of economic, social and cultural relations’ (2014, p.1). Globalization, then, has presented both new challenges and opportunities for humanity. But, of course, it is not just the newness of the challenges that are the problem but their reach and the potential severity of their impact. The 2008 global financial crisis was evidence that nation-states were no longer self-contained with perhaps just a few economic partners. The world is now linked together as a complex network, and financial markets are global. It is clear that the use of non-renewable energy does not have mere local impact, but planetary impact. To consider that a country such as Bangladesh, with a population of approximately 160 million people and responsible for only ‘0.3 percent of emissions driving climate change’, could have significant

parts of its land under water over coming decades is representative of the global solidarity required to avoid global disaster.

Under Bokova’s leadership, UNESCO is looking for ways to work towards a ‘new, universal vision, open to the entire human community and embracing each and every continent’ for which there is an ‘aspiration to peace, democracy, justice and human rights; it is an aspiration to tolerance, knowledge and the diversity of cultures’ (2014, p.8). It is a lofty ideal, but as the case of Bangladesh or the growing xenophobia in Australia suggest, it is a necessary one. In the era of the modern nation-state and internationalism, the disciplines of philosophy (ethics) and political science (ideology, policy) were viewed as having the capacity to direct the world towards a peaceful and just future. However, it could now be reasonably suggested that ‘no political or ethical doctrine has had the capacity to fully prepare today’s decision-makers and individuals for the complexities, intricacies and changeability of the present world’ (2014, p.1). Instead, it is the view of UNESCO that it is a renewed humanism that is required to garner a sense of solidarity in a world that is interconnected and interdependent.

The fact of the world’s interconnectedness represents a challenge in the sense that ‘our societies are more diverse than ever’ and yet ‘intolerance is on the rise’ (Bokova, 2013, p.2). In such an environment, determining a foundation from which a new sense of common humanity can be realized is also more problematic. Nevertheless, Bokova suggests that ‘cooperation has always formed the starting point of humanism, understood as a philosophy of education both for individuals and humanity as such’ (2014, p.2). The fact is that the world is connected across difference. The universal value that is required is the recognition of a common humanity as a moral foundation as we negotiate these connections. In other words, while it is one thing to invoke humanism or a common humanity, it is another thing to begin to describe some principles regarding what it means to be a humanist. Moreover, no longer can it be assumed that these principles can be decided by a male Greek philosopher or a group of French elites and simply imposed on the rest of the world. As Bokova makes clear, ‘no matter how universally recognized the objectives of peace and prosperity may be, they must be constantly reviewed, renewed and adapted to the requirements of the present and the future’ (2014, p.2). Thus, her
call is not for a previous Eurocentric or classical humanism. Such humanisms were culturally violent and represented an education only for the elites.

Rather, the provisional and contingent rendering of universal objectives such as peace and prosperity – ‘this principle of constant “attuning”’ – as Bokova puts it, ‘is central to the New Humanism. Peace and shared welfare are two sides of the same coin. And humanism is that coin’ (2014, p.2). I would argue that, given the historical analysis I constructed of Western humanism, Bokova’s new humanism is about the manifestation of the ideals of traditional humanisms, enabled by the fact of globalization, as genuinely universal and cosmopolitan. That is, the various European humanisms (and those from other cultural traditions) that existed as an ethico-political imperative for both the betterment of the individual and of society are now able to realize their universalizability, not through colonial imposition, but global negotiation. However, it is at this point that the postcolonial challenge to humanism acts as an important interruption and reminder. The negotiation of humanism is one that takes place in a world structured asymmetrically and, therefore, a genuinely universal rendering of humanism is highly unlikely. Nevertheless, the imperative of critique from Said, or Bokova’s insistence on constantly reviewing and adapting universal notions, go some way to de-transcendentalizing and, therefore, reducing the violence of a newly constructed humanism.

Yet, it remains unclear as to exactly what UNESCO might be able to reasonably expect of this new humanism. Elfert (2016) argues that UNESCO, with its humanist ideals and agenda, has actually had very little impact over the past 70 years. With her specific focus being on the concept of “lifelong learning”, she notes that, despite UNESCO’s clear humanistic understanding of the term, “lifelong learning” has become a notion that is routinely seen as being operationalized in neoliberal terms (pp.248-249). This is merely to say that humanistic intent will not necessarily manifest in humanistic ways. But more than this, UNESCO exemplifies the opportunities and limitations of being an international organization in a globalized world constituted by nation-states that remain powerful. That is, while it has a global platform from which to influence policy, the fact remains that policy is still negotiated and implemented at the level of the nation-state and according to its interests. Thus, UNESCO’s
task is not so much to formulate ready-to-go policy, but to act as an intellectual and moral agent with a global agenda. Indeed, Bokova herself claims that UNESCO ‘as an intellectual organization…must take the lead in humanist thinking in the international community’ (2014, p.8). It is this same kind of task that I see my particular thesis as contributing to in some small way. That is, I am not here trying to present a formula of postcolonial humanist pedagogy, but to provide an intellectual intervention in, and provocation for, how humanism might continue to inform the kind of education that ‘culminates in learning to live together’ (Bokova, 2014, p.13).

In order to do this, I will now suggest some possible approaches to pedagogy that arise from the kind of postcolonial humanism I have outlined in the previous chapters. Of course, these approaches are not eternally fixed, nor do they represent an exhaustive list. Furthermore, they do not exist as pre-packaged “things” to simply be implemented. In the spirit of the work that has preceded this chapter, these approaches to pedagogy reflect the tension between universal and particular values. To the extent that they are presented in universal terms, the assumption is that they nevertheless require interpretation, revision and adaptation in relation to local contexts. These approaches to pedagogy should act as a moral resource and provocation in rethinking education as a process and task that has humanity learning to live together in a postcolonial and globalized world as its aim. In what follows, I briefly elaborate on these possible approaches to pedagogy that arise from the preceding analysis as examples of the kind of articulation between postcolonial humanism and education that I propose is necessary for the world today, and into the future. I want to begin this section by considering the significance of a concept that has become central to my argument: (re)articulation.

**Approaches to pedagogy**

It should be more than clear by now that this thesis is in no way arguing for the recuperation of the Enlightenment humanism that was dominant in colonialism. Instead, I have been suggesting that postcolonial scholarship invites the struggle for a rearticulated humanism. The concept of articulation is often associated with political theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe and their utilization of it to develop their particular notion of discourse (1985). Indeed, the work of Mouffe in *The Return of the Political* (1993), I have come to see, is also interested in seeing that
‘universalism is not rejected but particularized’. Thus, in ‘giving up the abstract Enlightenment universalism of an undifferentiated human nature’, she argues, ‘what is needed is a new kind of articulation between the universal and the particular’ (p.13). Given the postcolonial focus of this thesis, I am going to briefly focus on the concept of articulation through the work of the cultural theorist Stuart Hall whose work on areas such as race, identity, class and culture was done (in part) consciously within the context of postcoloniality.

Hall’s understanding and usage of articulation has an important relationship to notions that are central to postcolonial theory as suggested in this thesis. The kind of postcolonial epistemological and ontological commitments to anti-foundationalism, anti-essentialism, contingency and provisionality, while also holding to certain ethical and political commitments in the name of justice, are also integral to Hall’s analyses of culture utilizing the concept of articulation. His notion of articulation refused the urge of some politically-committed theories to dismiss old ideas as integral to a dominating structure and therefore in need of total rejection. Instead, articulation for him was an idea which described the complex ways ‘in which things are related, as much through their differences as through their similarities’ (1980, p.325). This relationship, then, means that an ideology, a structure or an identity is constituted by, and irreducible to, these relations between sameness and difference. Thus, postcolonial theory, as Spivak suggested in her *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, is not only complicit with, but also constituted by and, in part, derived from, the epistemologies of colonialism. Postcolonial theory is, then, an articulation between colonial vestiges and the (im)possible future of full decolonization. But it is more than this, postcolonial theory is also an acknowledgement that not all of colonialism is necessarily bad.

This acknowledgement is important in that it is also the recognition that relational constructs and concepts – articulations – are never complete or fixed; an articulation may represent a unity, but it is always in negotiation and provisional. The important point for a theorist such as Hall, though, is not merely ontological but, more properly, political. Thus, when Hall describes his concept of articulation as ‘the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions’ and as a ‘linkage which is not necessary, determined,
absolute and essential for all time’ (Grossberg, 1986, p.53), his interest is in the “non-
necessary” articulation, between, say, colonialism and humanism (this is not his example, but
mine), allows for this particular formation of humanism to be rearticulated with other political,
economic or ideological structures. A rearticulated humanism, then, is not about ultimately or
properly defining humanism but seeing it in relation to its conditions of possibility and
impossibility. A rearticulated humanism is, moreover, a political negotiation without guarantees
about its future results (Hall, 1986).

Humanism, then, does not have an essential form; as this thesis has suggested there are,
rather, multiple forms of humanism. Whatever form humanism might take in a particular place
and time, then, can only be seen as provisional. Whatever its form, it exists as an articulation, a
connection between elements, and is therefore contingent on the context in which it is located.
To think of humanism as an articulation – and as being able to be rearticulated – then, is to see
it as a site of political contestation. Yet, if we are to remember that an articulation is a coupling,
we are best not to see this political contest in binary terms. This is not to say that there cannot
or should not be an uncoupling. The example of colonialism’s coupling with humanism is an
example where a basic uncoupling is desirable. However, the ideals of Enlightenment
humanism need to be rearticulated with the postcolonial and global world, as well as the history
and legacies of colonial violence to which such a humanism have given rise. Thus, the kind of
political work that emerges from this notion of articulation is engaged and committed, while
nevertheless steadfastly refusing to make claims that assume determinism, absolutism or an
eternal essentialism.

Reflecting on the prominence of the concept of articulation in Hall’s work, John Clarke makes
the interesting argument that articulation was an embodied practice for Hall (2015, pp.280-285).
By considering Hall’s pedagogy through a variety of modes, Clarke argues that in Hall’s
educative interactions with others, he was always engaged in the kind of dialogue and
engagement that constituted articulation as a practice ‘to build connections that lead towards a
set of new configurations and possibilities’ (p.281). There is, in this mode of teaching, an ever-
present emphasis on the process as the “end”, in the sense that thinking, writing and teaching

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through engagement with others is what produces articulations. Thus, to engage in the practice of articulation as a teacher and a student is to “achieve” the goal at the very same time, acknowledging the paradox that as soon as the goal is gained it has been lost. Such an approach to pedagogy, Clarke suggests, means that what one hears from Hall is ‘the process of thinking, rather than just the conclusions’. His “lessons” ‘are, then, also invitations to think with (and against) both Hall and the people with whom he is engaged’ (p.283). There is a sense of struggle in this representation of Hall’s pedagogy; that is, a struggle to articulate complex cultural formations into something intelligible, but also a political struggle to rearticulate the relations of domination and subordination within these cultural formations.

Thus, to suggest that a postcolonial humanism is one that must be rearticulated from colonial and Enlightenment norms and coupled with the conditions of the contemporary global era reflects a debt to Hall. Moreover, while humanism itself is seen as a resource for living together, its articulation and rearticulation should be seen as a practice. Clarke posits that the practice of articulation is ‘to think in ways that are committed but open, that recognise the unfinished nature of the moment, that try to borrow and bend productive intellectual resources and that take seriously the collective and collaborative nature of social (and political) life’ (2015, p.285). In this sense, his understanding of Hall’s concept of articulation is decidedly similar to Said’s notion of humanism in its articulation to democratic criticism. And as I now turn to briefly discuss some of the pedagogic approaches that might reflect the articulation between humanism, postcolonial theory and the contemporary conditions of globalization, it is worth finishing with Clarke’s concluding thoughts on Hall when he writes, ‘For me, that is the greatest legacy: that articulation is not just a theory or an analytic orientation but that – as embodied by Stuart Hall – it was also a pedagogic and political practice’ (p.285).

**Cosmopolitan epistemic virtues**

Philosopher, Kwame Anthony Appiah, advocates for one of the more contested terms in recent debates about globalization and cultural difference: cosmopolitanism. This represents a particularly provocative example of a way in which there has been an attempt to articulate Enlightenment humanism to postcolonial thinking and the conditions of globalization. Critics of
cosmopolitanism tend to cite its history as Eurocentric and possibilities as elitist. While these debates are important, I do not have the space here to address the various positions taken, and conceptualizations of, cosmopolitanism by scholars. I will, instead, respond to Appiah’s cosmopolitanism on its own terms. Moreover, ultimately, it is some of the practices suggested by Appiah that I wish to explore as useful for understanding the kind of education needed today. Appiah’s argument is founded on the basic conviction that ‘in the human community, as in national communities, we need to develop habits of coexistence: conversation in its older meaning, of living together, association’ (2007, p.xvii). What, however, forms the basis for these habits of coexistence? Two important components for Appiah are affirming that ‘we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of a shared citizenship’, and ‘the other is that we take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance’ (Appiah 2007, xiii). There is already here a sense in which the kind of ethics required for a globalized world is one that involves a necessary tension between the universal (obligation to others) and the particular (the value of particular human lives). Moreover, it is implied that value and values are integral to living together.

What is interesting about Appiah’s position here is his claim that ‘we can live together without agreeing on what the values are that make it good to live together’ (p.71). Initially, this may...
appear as a defense of relativism. But it is the sense of living together that troubles this interpretation. Instead, Appiah’s position represents both the refusal of relativism (which denies our togetherness) and also a universal commonality of values which, he would claim, is not only impossible but unnecessary. Given his concern for conversation as a key to cosmopolitan ethics, Appiah is skeptical of relativism’s ethical and moral force. He suggests that moral conversations based on relativism require humans to acknowledge that two different positions can be “right”, the issue merely being that each person is coming at moral question from a different perspective. In some cases, of course, this is not a problem. However, when it comes to matters of moral and ethical significance, Appiah contends: ‘from our different perspectives, we would be living effectively in different worlds. And without a shared world, what is there to discuss?’ (p.31). That relativism tends to be defended based on its aim for tolerance is of little consolation to Appiah for, he claims, such relativism ‘isn’t a way to encourage conversation; it’s just a reason to fall silent’ (p.31). Yet, he has also suggested that we can live together without agreeing on values.

Whereas some wish to persuade all others to agree with their particular set of values, Appiah would consider this as an affront to cosmopolitanism. This is because his conceptualization of cosmopolitanism is, in short, ‘universality plus difference’ (p.151). Thus, the kind of approach to moral discourse that seeks to eradicate difference is ultimately one that is arrogant and violent. We must accept, Appiah argues, that ‘we enter every conversation…without the promise of final agreement’ (p.44). Appiah’s view is that values are important precisely because they are integral to our sociality, our sense of a shared humanity, and to our ability to develop habits of coexistence. Seen in this way, the goal of moral conversation is not to agree on the reasons why we value something over something else. Indeed, as Appiah points out, using the case of Jerusalem, a shared value of something can also lead to conflict (p.78). The point, then, for Appiah is that moral conversation is about humans becoming used to each other (p.85). His view is that humans share a language of value, and the political reality of life together is always accompanied by value judgments and, therefore, to open ourselves to conversation with each other about values – across our differences – is necessary for us to live together in a shared world. What this means, then, is that the issue of values becomes less about philosophy and
more about sociality. As Appiah notes, ‘practices and not principles are what enable us to live together in peace’ (p.85). Thus, if there is a universal ethical principle for Appiah, it is that of cosmopolitanism not as a fixed declaration of truth, but as a way of life.

I have argued that the postcolonial challenge to humanism that I have assessed in this thesis suggests that approaching the universal through the particular is an important ethico-political strategy in ensuring that the life of the subaltern is not sacrificed at the altar of theory. To “provincialize” the universal through the particular is to demand the intervention of immanence into the realm of the transcendent and of practice in relation to theory. This is, in part at least, why Said was so intent to elaborate his humanism as a political practice. Hall’s use of the concept of articulation performs a similar function in his cultural politics. What Appiah’s perspective on cosmopolitanism offers is another example of the intervention of politics into ethics. In suggesting that values do not exist as principles so much but, rather, as a kind of language with which we evaluate lived life, Appiah prioritizes cosmopolitanism as a mode of practice and judgment. Values, rendered in this way, represent the universal always tempered by the particularities of the social. By ensuring that the social is a key element to ethical consideration, abstract dilemmas involving “strangers” that are common in traditional moral philosophy are transformed into real people. This is significant for, as Appiah asserts, ‘when the stranger is no longer imaginary, but real and present, sharing a human social life, you may like or dislike him, you may agree or disagree; but, if it is what you both want, you can make sense of each other in the end’ (p.99).

It is this kind of approach to pedagogy that is necessary for the world of education in the present and future. I have already established that different cultures are coming into contact like never before. As Bokova puts it, ‘in the twenty-first century, globalization is no longer about “contacts” but “sharing”’ (2014, p.10). Thus, education needs to prioritize human interaction in the present. Knowledge of past traditions – as in a kind of classical Renaissance humanism – is not enough. Such knowledge is abstract and easily essentialized. But even “knowledge about” cultural others in the present risks this kind of essentialization. Just last week I had a conversation with a second-year university student about the upcoming 2016 American presidential campaign.
This young man kept talking to me about the problems of Islam because of its “teachings”. What he meant by “teachings” was not a particular way of interpreting the Koran over other ways, but that fundamentally all “real” Muslims were bound to a teaching requiring them to commit acts of violence against non-Muslims. While there are clearly problems in his thinking that go beyond the problems of abstract knowledge, I couldn’t help but think that the kind of cosmopolitanism suggested by Appiah would at least put this young man in a position where he would encounter an interruption to his “fixed theory” and construction of “reality”.

Of course, the educational agenda needs to be more than mere human interaction but something more formalized. Yet, as Appiah acknowledges, cosmopolitanism comes with no guarantees and cannot present a fixed telos of education. But allowing education to just “be” without some kind of direction cannot be the alternative. A cosmopolitan approach to pedagogy needs to move beyond the more superficial idea of conversation into a richer, more deliberate cosmopolitan disposition. In this sense, it is difficult. Appiah’s position is one that requires, at some point in the process, for interlocutors to agree on a basic cosmopolitanism to form the foundation of their interaction. One might argue at this point that his project is a normative one and its logic potentially somewhat circular. But this is where education, understood as a normative practice itself, has a role to play in developing this cosmopolitan attitude in students. The work of Rizvi (2008; 2009) on cosmopolitanism and education explores how cosmopolitan attitudes or ethical disposition might be nurtured through education. He argues that it is necessary for students to see themselves as situated in changing and hybridized political and social networks if they are going to be able to develop cosmopolitan ways of thinking and relating to others (2009, p.264). In this sense, those who are educating for cosmopolitan attitudes are undertaking complex identity work, assisting young people to understand the ways in which the world they inhabit affects their identity-formation in transnational ways, even if they continue to primarily understand themselves in relation to the nation-state. This is so even for the increasing numbers of students who will feel a sense of national loyalty to more than one nation-state. That is, developing a sense of oneself as located in a complex set of transnational networks troubles the binary, linear or contained thinking of national identities, even in the plural.
Furthermore, for Rizvi the educational task is one of developing ‘in students a set of epistemic virtues with which to both understand current discourses and practices of global connectivity and to develop alternatives to them’ (emphasis original, 2009, p.264). While Appiah prioritizes conversation as a practice, he continues to use the language of values. Rizvi, on the other hand, uses the term epistemic virtues deliberately (as opposed to values) to highlight those habitual practices of learning that regard knowing as always tentative involving critical exploration and imagination, an open-ended exercise in cross-cultural deliberation’ (p.264).

Rizvi and Appiah’s projects are very similar, but whereas Appiah the philosopher is perhaps more aligned to the Kantian tradition, Rizvi’s approach references more grounded notions of ethics in the Aristotelian tradition. The way in which Rizvi considers epistemic virtues to include not only the notion of “habitual practices” but also as viewing knowledge as “tentative” and the process of learning as “open-ended” is, perhaps, evidence of the influence of postcolonial theory, and especially Edward Said, on his own thinking. What he puts forward as the task of educators is, then, not to teach knowledge so much as to teach for critical reflection on one’s knowledge, assumptions and location in an attempt to creatively imagine the future.

Moreover, to suggest that a cosmopolitan approach to pedagogy is involved in developing epistemic virtues Rizvi seeks to ensure that there is a rigor associated with intercultural learning. Well-intentioned multi-culturalist approaches to learning can too often aim to have students appreciate the fact of cultural difference. Not only is this kind of educational approach one that continues to assume the existence of discrete cultures, it is also one that risks not presenting to students the task of identifying problems and imagining alternatives. The critical aspect of cosmopolitanism comes back to Appiah’s concern for moral discourse centered around values. In relation to this, Rizvi notes the values inherent in cosmopolitanism itself when he argues that a cosmopolitan approach to pedagogy is ‘implicitly directed towards the goal of global relations that are more just, democratic and humane’ (2009, p.265). There is a clear link here between Rizvi’s notion of cosmopolitan learning and Said’s humanism as a form of democratic criticism.

56 I would not want to overplay this distinction, however, as it seems clear to me that, while much of his writing on cosmopolitanism refers back to Kant, the “evaluative language” aspect of Appiah’s notion of values certainly suggests an Aristotelian “phronesis” approach to ethics. In fact, Both Appiah and Rizvi draw on diverse philosophical sources rather than representing one particular tradition.
In other words, the kind of postcolonial humanism that conforms to Said’s idea of democratic, worldly, criticism is one that might articulate to education by way of a shift in pedagogical approach towards issues of global interconnectivity, intercultural understanding and the vision of a cosmopolitan world.

The criticality component to a cosmopolitan approach to education also aims to guard against a cosmopolitanism that is merely universalism in disguise. The critical component needs to be understood in a commensurate way to Said’s position that humanism is to be self-critical. When humanism (or cosmopolitanism) is reconceptualized as a practice with criticality as a key component, it diminishes the chances of it becoming an oppressive ideology. It is important, then, that a notion such as cosmopolitanism or postcolonial humanism is not seen by educators as a fixed notion that marks the boundaries of who is in and who is out. Rather, the postcolonial and cosmopolitan emphases on cultural difference and criticality serve to suggest an educational approach that is always open and contingent. It is these kinds of attitudes and practices that produce democratic and humane relations, which is much different to demanding an unquestioning affirmation of, say, democracy. But if criticality works against universalism, what might it mean for the notion of difference which is perhaps considered more positively in most postcolonial and globalization discourses? One response is that criticality does not take sides. That is, the normative intervenes to offer a critique of relativism in the same way that the particular also critiques the universal.

However, I would suggest that the kind of learning that emerges from postcolonial humanism and cosmopolitanism is one that brings together the universal and the particular in the experience of, and engagement with, the human person. That is to say, the human represents universality through her “common humanity” and represents difference through her particular way of being human in the world. This point is important if educators are going to avoid the kind of well-intentioned pedagogy mentioned earlier that risks focusing on abstract concepts/values of sameness and difference. The notions of “universalism”, “difference”, and “relativism” can all too easily be theorized in the abstract and, therefore, need to be grounded in lived experience. Indeed, Appiah claims that ‘a tenable cosmopolitanism tempers respect for difference with a
respect for actual human beings’ (2007, p.113). If this is an important component for the kind of humanism that emerges from lived experience, and the kind of cosmopolitanism that prioritizes habits of coexistence, then an education for humanistic and cosmopolitan learning must necessarily involve engagement with actual people as an ethical priority. But it should also be remembered that a cosmopolitan approach to pedagogy brings with it no guarantees. More than this, the situating of humanism as emerging from the lived experience of individuals is part of what ensures that any humanism – or, indeed, humanistic education – cosmopolitan or otherwise, remains contingent and provisional.

The importance of this for the future of the world, and of education, should not be considered too lightly. The conditions of globalization as they have been discussed in this chapter indicate the importance of human beings learning to live together. Perhaps the most important aspect of the kind of humanism that might best act as a resource for learning to live together well is the complex arrangement of its being constituted by contingency and provisionality while nevertheless being politically engaged in practices aimed at a more just and humane world. In thinking and practicing education as a site necessarily “worldly”, any humanistic pedagogy is bound to be contingent rather than transcendent. But it is not simply that the pedagogy responds to the context, but that the pedagogical approach is one that seeks to help the students themselves become comfortable with contingency rather than the kind of certainty that is fixed. Yet this “comfort” is not about easy acceptance of the status quo, but is about enabling students to develop critical attitudes towards contemporary global cultural norms and practices.

When epistemology, culture and personal identity are deemed to be fixed, criticality in thought and practice risks being parochial in a way that attempts to make everything conform to a particular way of knowing the world and/or must serve the interests of an essentialized cultural standard or national imperative. Contingency on the other hand, it seems to me, prioritizes the situatedness. Situatedness, in the way I am using it, is concerned with temporality and spatiality; it is concerned with knowledge and politics.

Thus, an approach to pedagogy that highlights contingency seeks to ‘help students come to terms with their situatedness in the world – situatedness of their knowledge and of their cultural
practices, as well as their positionality in relation to social networks, political institutions’ and the situatedness of others (Rizvi, 2008, p.111). Bob Lingard has utilized Appadurai’s call to deparochialize education research to try and reconsider approaches to education policy and pedagogy in relation to globalization (2006; 2007). For Lingard (2007), the deparochialization of education takes into consideration the fact that ‘we live and work in globalized spaces and places’. This means, he continues, that ‘we need to challenge any taken-for-granted and easy assumption of a society/nation homology in research and theorizing’ (p.233). In other words, societies – the places and spaces we inhabit – are now constituted by cultural, ethnic and religious difference like never before. This should challenge the Western dominant assumptions regarding research (its epistemological orthodoxies etc.) and lead to academic thinking and practice that emerges from “below”. To my mind, there is a confluence in the thinking of Lingard (borrowed from Appadurai), Rizvi (on situatedness and cosmopolitan learning) and Chakrabarty’s idea of provincializing Europe. All these scholars take the postcolonial and globalized structure of the world and see it as an empirical critique of European dominance. Yet, all would agree with Radhakrishnan that the world remains structured in dominance and that there therefore needs to be intentional acknowledgement of, and educational work to make more effective, the empirical critique that today’s world offers to the dominant assumptions of the Global North. Thus, to engage in a pedagogical approach of the kind suggested by Rizvi is an ethico-political intervention that seeks to develop in students the ability to keep a critical distance or “objectivity” in their analysis while also restoring the ‘energy of earlier [than modernist] visions of scholarship in which moral and political concerns were central’ (Appadurai, 2000, p.14).

It is not too difficult to see how the kind of intervention into educational practice advocated by Rizvi and Lingard among others represents what I am calling in this thesis a postcolonial humanism. More specifically, it is a humanism that emerges from the particular postcolonial theorists I have analyzed. The spatial language used by Rizvi and Lingard resonates with the chapter on Fanon which brought into focus the power of travel – of a kind of transnational movement – in pluralizing Fanon’s thinking, but also in crystallizing his politics. When Rizvi writes of a pedagogy that takes situatedness seriously and utilizes it critically, he suggests the
kind of re-constituted identity and subsequent critical reflection and action reminiscent of Fanon. The critique of Western epistemological dominance in Lingard’s deparochializing of education research and practice reflects a debt to Said’s critique of Orientalist knowledge production and a politics reminiscent of Spivak’s concern for the “double bind” of political work (and representation) in regards to the subaltern. A postcolonial, humanist pedagogy today is one that takes seriously the life of those who are part of the “minor culture”, the subaltern and the marginalized in the interconnected world of globalization. One of the lessons that the postcolonial theorists under consideration in this dissertation provide is that such work is not easy and never comes with any guarantees and, yet, the struggle remains necessary as a matter of justice.

For education to engage in the moral task of working towards the impossible attainment of (universal) justice, and to do so in a way that recognizes and prioritizes contingency, embracing the provisionality of concepts and political action is key. In terms of approaches to pedagogy, then, students will be required to understand the political necessity of taking a moral stand while also acknowledging that such a position must always be seen as open to change. The need for students to come to terms with provisionality comes from both the empirical and the theoretical/educational. Given the constancy of change in a world connected through globalizing networks and processes, it is simply not sustainable for older models to continue whereby fixed understandings of the world dominate. This is not the world that we live in. However, a commitment to education as something more than the acquiring of uncomplicated content knowledge and more than indoctrination or Freire’s notion of the banking approach (1972), requires a commitment to provisionality as an affirmation of the always opening future of knowledge. It is this kind of openness that functions as the condition for one being willing to accept other ways of thinking and being. To provincialize or deparochialize Western epistemology and education, there must be some kind of prior commitment to alternative approaches. Thus, there is a clear political aspect to seeing humanism, knowledge, educational approaches and even postcolonial thinking as provisional. Developing a provisional outlook on the world is crucial, Said would argue, to the task of the critic (1996; 2004) and, I would add, the task of the educator.
Education and the challenge for humans of living together

Appiah’s affirmation of cosmopolitanism is an ethical one. That is, he sees cosmopolitanism as a necessary ethical practice in a world that has been transformed by processes of globalization, bringing people (and their ideas, beliefs and cultural norms) closer together. Lingard's call for a deparochialization of the study of education is construed as a political project seeking to destabilize Western hegemony but also to interrupt the dominant neoliberal logic in much globalization discourse (2007). Rizvi, too, suggests his epistemic virtues in order to ‘develop ways of ethically steering the direction of global–local relations, instead of allowing them to be shaped simply by the dictates of global corporate capitalism’ (2009, p.254). I have argued in this thesis that humanisms carry with them an ethico-political imperative to construct the world in a more just manner; in a way that makes the world more humane rather than less. I have also argued that, even for postcolonial critics of humanism (and its effects), this imperative serves to keep humanism alive in their work; at least for the theorists who have been the focus of my study here.

The central focus on postcoloniality repositions the question of humanism and its relationship to education within the frame of cultural politics. If, in an era of global interconnectivity and interdependence, we are to continue to talk of humanism or cosmopolitanism, it is necessary, I think, to utilize these terms with the ongoing histories of postcolonialism and subalternity as central to their reconfiguration. No terms, whether neoliberalism, globalization or humanism should be reified and de-historicized. Postcolonial theory demands historicization as a matter of political necessity and this is the case for a humanism that might act as a moral resource in a world of difference. As Touraine neatly summated, ‘The dream of making all individuals obey the same universal laws of reason, religion or history has always turned into a nightmare and an instrument of domination; but the rejection of all principles of unity and the unqualified acceptance of differences leads to segregation or civil war’ (2000, p.15). To avoid these two extremes, then, another way is needed. The postcolonial thinking I have explored deconstructs

the kind of binary logic of universalism or difference. But this is not enough. The era of globalization also functions according to a non-binary logic, but this sociological phenomenon – especially as it has been articulated to neoliberal logics that prioritize “the market” even in areas of morality – has raised the need for something more. Touraine’s own view was that ‘we can live together, or in other words reconcile the unity of society and a diversity of personalities and cultures, only if we make the idea of a personal Subject central to our thought and action’ (2000, p.15).

Neither the discussion above surrounding approaches to pedagogy, nor the notion of a renewed humanism with which these pedagogies are articulated, will guarantee to solve the problems of this world. The task I have set myself in this thesis is a far more modest one. Moreover, as Appiah writes, ‘you can’t have respect for human diversity and expect everyone to become cosmopolitan’ (2007, p.xviii). In any case, the entire thesis would have to be re-written if the conclusion were to be that the world should be homogenized. That is not at all what my argument is. Rather, in respecting diversity and in keeping the lived experience of the subaltern central, it is the struggle for humanism as a recognition of our common humanity despite our differences that is the imperative in today’s world. It is, as Touraine put it, a return to the Subject. The challenge for those involved in education at the level of theory, policy and pedagogy is to imagine and work towards an education with a vision for, and capacity to work towards, a world in which the unity and diversity of humanity is embraced and negotiated without ending in violence – be it epistemological, cultural or physical. This is not about dreaming the impossible utopia of the future, but is about imagining and struggling – as a matter of ethico-political humanistic practice – in response to the world we currently inhabit. Such a struggle inevitably draws the past and future into the multiple presents of people right across the globe. The humanism that emerges from this – one that is grounded, negotiated and struggled over, but also in the name of our common humanity – just might be the best, even if flawed, resource we have for an education that enables us to live together.
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Learning to live together: humanism and education after the postcolonial challenges

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2016

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