

Paper Title: On the Idea of “University” in the Virtual Global University
Author: Weislogel, Eric
Institutional Affiliation: Director, Local Societies Initiative, Metanexus Institute

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Abstract:

For this year’s conference I have raised the question of the idea of a “Virtual Global University.” Every element of that title is open to question, and the whole concept rests on a wide variety of other notions: networks, disciplinarity, interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity, complexity, chaos, emergence, science and religion dialogue, distance learning, universal education, globalization, integral methodological pluralism, chaordic systems, deconstruction, convergence, infrastructure and information technology, unity of knowledge, sociologies of philosophies, religion, spirituality, elementary and secondary education, universal reason, analysis vs. synthesis (“dividing” and “collecting”), teaching, learning, developmental psychology, metaphysics, acceleration, purpose, meshworks, system theory, systems biology, integral wisdom, synoptic view. There may be others that will come to mind. In my contribution, I examine in a preliminary and provisional way the very idea of the university itself and raise for us questions that I think go to the heart of our pursuit of what we call a science and religion dialogue.

Biography:

Eric Weislogel, Ph.D., is the Director of the Local Societies Initiative, a \$7 million grant program designed to foster the science and religion dialogue by building dynamic associations of scholars, clergy, and interested laypeople around the globe. Prior to joining the Metanexus Institute, Weislogel was the manager of business process consulting for UEC Technologies, a unit of United States Steel. Before that, he was assistant professor of philosophy at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and he also taught at St. Francis College (PA) and the Pennsylvania State University. He has published a number of philosophical essays and reviews in such journals as *Philosophy Today*, *Idealistic Studies*, *Philosophy in Review*, *Science and Theology News*, and the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. Additionally, his articles have appeared in the online journals *Metapsychology* and the *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*, as well as in steel and technology industry trade journals. Weislogel's main philosophical interest consists in the interplay of postmodernism, religion, science, and politics. He and his wife, Kellie Given, who live in Reading, PA, have two children: Elisa, a senior at La Salle University, Philadelphia, and Lucas, a recent graduate of St. Vincent College, Latrobe, PA, who now teaches high school physics.

Paper Text:

I want to raise the question of the possibility of something like a virtual global university. Each term of this designation is worthy of analysis in its own right, as is the concept as a whole. In raising the question, further concepts will also have to be designated and

defined (in so far as that is possible). I raise this question in the context of the 4th anniversary of the Metanexus Institute's Local Societies Initiative, and so some background is in order.

The Metanexus Local Societies Initiative (LSI) is, now, an 8 year, \$7 million grant program made possible through the generosity of the John Templeton Foundation and designed to create and foster locally-acting membership societies dedicated to exploring issues at the intersection of science and religion. These diverse dynamic associations of researchers, scholars, teachers, students, clergy, religious practitioners, and engaged intellectuals meet regularly for book studies, to hear lectures, or to plan public events in their communities. They take interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches to foundational questions of consciousness, community, and cosmos, seeking in some sense to get the "whole story of the whole universe for the whole person." Each dialogue society has members from a variety of academic disciplines, and often a variety of religious backgrounds. Regularly meeting groups range in size from a few persons to a few hundred persons. There are 200 societies in 36 countries on six continents (with more on the way). Every major discipline in the natural sciences and many of the social and human sciences are represented in the membership. Adherents from all the world's major religions can be found throughout the global network of societies.

Each society must provide evidence of dollar-for-dollar matching support at a minimum of \$5000 per year. In most cases, the society's host institution provides the match, but some groups are supported by other grants, private donors, or contributions from society members. Thus, the Metanexus LSI program is driving over \$6.5 million in mutual support for the science and religion dialogue from a wide range of institutional forms: large state research universities, elite liberal arts colleges, for-profit education providers, independent graduate schools, civic organizations, seminaries, churches and other faith communities, networks of para-academic societies, etc.

The expected result of the efforts of the LSI program designers and administrators was that providing a three-year challenge grant to colleges and universities would incentivize these institutions to try their hand at this type of dialogue *at the local level*. The funding was expected to be used on buying books for group studies or for bringing in guest lecturers, etc. Funding at the level of LSI was not meant for conducting substantial research projects, but simply to bring academics together on campus who otherwise thought they had no incentive to do so.

This type of dialogue is, of course, happening. However, an unintended and unexpected result of our "seeding" the dialogue is that the existing groups began to network with each other such that we are seeing not only cross-disciplinary dialogue, but dialogue across other borders as well: institutional, national, economic, cultural, religious. Groups from various parts of the world found themselves engaged in similar explorations and began to collaborate to the extent they were able. Increasingly, we are getting requests for supplemental grants to fund international collaboration, either via information technology or for travel support. We are also getting requests for translations, both to and from English, to widen the dialogue further still.

At last year's conference of LSI leaders, I concluded my "state of the (dis-)union" address by raising the question of what LSI might become, this burgeoning global network of transdisciplinary thinkers and visionaries. One suggestion I made was that it might become the first global university.

For this year's conference, I want to take that concept further and ask about the very idea and possibility of a global university. I have added the modifier, "virtual," to, in a preliminary and provisional way, at least capture the idea that the university I have in mind is not necessarily a university as we know it, not necessarily an alternative to or competitor of any actually existing university, but rather (maybe) an emergent property of the networking of persons across disciplines, across institutional, cultural, or national borders, persons both inside and outside of the institutional university (but, if not inside, then "outside" as defined by the "inside" of the university itself). My idea was to develop a constellation of concepts that might be used to describe what a virtual global university might be and to help us think about what it might take to foster such a thing, if it were indeed possible and deemed to be "not a bad idea" (see Kant, Conflict of the Faculties). Then, I invited several potential collaborators, who have already given some thought to the concepts, to elaborate on them in the context of this potential virtual global university I find myself thinking about.

Here are the concepts (in no special order): university, networks, disciplinarity, interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity, complexity, chaos, emergence, science and religion dialogue, distance learning, universal education, globalization, integral methodological pluralism, chaordic systems, deconstruction, convergence, infrastructure and information technology, unity of knowledge, sociologies of philosophies, religion, spirituality, elementary and secondary education, universal reason, analysis vs. synthesis ("dividing" and "collecting"), teaching, learning, developmental psychology, metaphysics, acceleration, purpose, meshworks, system theory, systems biology, integral wisdom, synoptic view. There may be others that will come to mind.

What I hope to have happen in the discussions "Virtual Global University" session of the conference is to elaborate to varying degrees some of the concepts I've listed and to begin to see what role they play in thinking through the very idea of a "virtual global university." In this essay, I will just take up the very beginnings of a consideration of the idea of the university itself.

University

When I raise the question of a "virtual global university," what do I mean? Although this designation keeps coming to me as I ponder the trajectory of the Metanexus Local Societies Initiative and as I consider the various innovations and changes to the landscape both inside and outside of academia, I must confess to have only a fleeting glance in my mind's eye of what this thing (if it even is a "thing") might look like. But simply for starting a conversation, let me say that I do not envision (I am, though, not necessarily precluding) *another* institution added on to the current roster of institutions scattered

across the globe. I am not thinking of one big enterprise that has a central administration, a codified curriculum, its own trustees, its own exclusive faculty. And although the issue of “distance” will have to be addressed, I am not thinking of a grand “distance learning program” (however much the methodologies and techniques and technologies of distance learning may be employed).

As a proximate concern, I have pondered the “delivery” of a “science and religion degree program” that might take the form of a subscription service. That is, one could assemble a blue-chip faculty that is geographically dispersed, develop a curriculum for a degree program, and then market that curriculum to actually existing, brick-and-mortar educational institutions. Those institutions would then be able to offer their students (consumers) another “major” or “concentration” without having to assemble for themselves a competent faculty, house them, pay them benefits, make them a commitment of tenure. There could be both distance learning and cohort meetings, say in conjunction with a well-known science-and-religion conference, say in Philadelphia, once a year. Well, it is a possibility!

But I am really thinking more about emergence than artifice.¹ I am wondering if we are seeing the founding of a university that is not brick-and-mortar, not one additional institution, not even one super-institution, but an institution that is *not* an institution, in some sense. But if this is so, then what governs it? What are its responsibilities? What are its faculties? And if it is an institution which is not an institution, then who belongs to it? To whom does it belong?

Here is how Jacques Derrida’s meditation on the university, “Mochlos, or The Conflict of the Faculties,”² given on the occasion of the anniversary of the founding of Columbia University’s graduate school, begins:

If we could say *we* (but have I not already said it?), we might perhaps ask ourselves: where are we? And who are we in the university where apparently we are? *What* do we represent? *Whom* do we represent? Are we responsible? For what and to whom? If there is a university responsibility, it at least begins the moment when a need to hear these questions, to take them upon oneself and respond to them, imposes itself. This imperative of the response is the initial form and minimal requirement of responsibility. One can always not respond and refuse the summons, the call to responsibility. One can even do so without necessarily keeping silent. But the structure of this call to responsibility is such—so anterior to any possible response, so independent, so dissymmetrical in its coming from the other within us—that even a nonresponse a priori assumes responsibility.

¹ See Jacques Derrida, *Eyes of the University: Right to Philosophy 2*, trans. Jan Plug, et. al., Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004, p. 85, (hereafter, *Mochlos*), on the artificiality of institutions.

² *Mochlos*, p. 83.

And so I proceed: what does university responsibility represent? This question presumes that one understands the meaning of “responsibility,” “university”—at least if these two concepts are still separable.

The university, what an idea!

Derrida takes for his text a portion of several essays of Kant published under the title *The Conflict of the Faculties* [*Der Streit der Fakultäten*] in 1798. As Mark Taylor writes, “If the modern university could be traced to a single source, it would, without a doubt, be Kant’s *Conflict of the Faculties*.”³ In the first part of Kant’s essays, he considers the “conflict of the philosophy faculty with the theology faculty,” and begins:

Whoever it was that first hit on the notion of a university and proposed a public institution of this kind be established, it was not a bad idea to handle the entire content of learning (really, the thinkers devoted to it) *like a factory*, so to speak—by a division of labor, so that for every branch of the sciences there would be a public teacher or *professor* appointed as its trustee, and all of these together would form a kind of learned community called a *university* (or higher school).⁴

So, Derrida remarks, Kant found it to be not a bad idea, the university as a factory of sorts, with its division of labor and its consumers and government contracts and so on. Derrida is raising the issue of the authority and legitimacy of this university. On the one hand, the university is *autonomous*, it is self-authorizing, or as Kant puts it in a parenthetical remark: “only scholars can pass judgment on scholars as such.” [*Conflict*, 247]. Yet on the other hand—as the occasion for Kant’s essays makes abundantly clear—the university gets its legitimacy from non-university forces. Kant is writing his essays because he had been called to account for his *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* of 1793⁵ by King Frederick William II, signaling a responsibility of the university scholar—and thus the university—to the public and to the state. This is the first issue in meditating upon the university and the idea of responsibility: that “university autonomy is in a situation of heteronomy.”

The autonomy of scientific evaluation may be absolute and unconditioned, but the political effects of its legitimation, even supposing that one could in all rigor distinguish them, are no less controlled, measured, and overseen by a power outside the university. Regarding this power, university autonomy is in a situation of heteronomy—in the double sense of a representation by delegation and a theatrical representation. In fact, the university as a whole is responsible to a nonuniversity agency.⁶

³ Mark C. Taylor, *The Moment of Complexity: Emerging Network Culture*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001, p. 240.

⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, trans. and eds., David Wood and George de Giovanni, Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 247. Hereafter, *Conflict*.

⁵ In Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology*, op. cit., pp. 39-215.

⁶ *Mochlos*, 86.

Derrida suggests that some of us might even feel nostalgia for just how clear this responsibility of the university was seen by Kant. The sovereign *told him* about his responsibilities to both the state and to the students and public.

One could at least pretend to know whom one was addressing, and where to situate power; a debate on the topics of teaching, knowledge, and philosophy could at least be posed in terms of responsibility. The instances invoked—the State, the sovereign, the people, knowledge, action, truth, the university—held a place in discourse that was guaranteed, decidable, and, in every sense of this work, “representable”: and a common code could guarantee, at least on faith, a minimum of translatability for any discourse in such a context.⁷

But perhaps the situation for us is different. Derrida asks:

Could we say as much today? Could we agree to debate together about the responsibility proper to the university? I am not asking myself whether we could produce or simply spell out a consensus on this subject. I am asking myself first of all if we could say “we” and debate together, in a common language, about the general forms of responsibility in this area.⁸

Is it the case that the university has become fully or purely *autonomous* in the so-called postmodern condition? Or, rather, have the powers to which the university is responsible become diffused and dispersed, subtle and pluriform, so that we no longer know to whom the university is responsible, so that *we* no longer know to whom or what we are to respond as the university, so that *we* may not even be able to say in good faith, “we.”

In a science and religion dialogue, we may find ourselves with a square circle. Those of us who are scientists may be deaf to the voice of the religious. Those of us who are religious may find the sciences inscrutable. As I wrote in an earlier essay, “It has come to seem easy to mock new-age-y sounding quests for ‘holistic knowledge’ or ‘integral wisdom,’ but the ease with which we dismiss such terms is a symptom of a greater though perhaps more subtle disease, a *dis*-ease, a difficulty in our being able to say what we know—now that we know so many specific, sophisticated, disciplinarily distinct things.”⁹ Or, as Derrida puts it,

...herein lies a being-ill [*mal-être*] no doubt more serious than a malaise or a crisis. We perhaps experience this to a more or less vivid degree, and through a pathos that can vary on the surface. But we lack the categories for analyzing this being-ill. [...] For if a code guaranteed a problematic,

⁷ Mochlos, 87.

⁸ Mochlos, 87.

⁹ Eric Weislogel, “The Religion/Science Interface: Contradictory or Complementary?” *Palma*. Forthcoming (2005).

whatever the discord of the positions taken or the contradictions of the forces present, then we would feel better in the university. But we feel bad, who would dare say otherwise? And those who feel good are perhaps hiding something, from others or from themselves.¹⁰

Another issue that faces us, then, concerns who we are, we who feel bad, we who are still, in some sense, homeless in the university—neither inside or outside completely or purely. Is there such a thing as the “science-and-religion-dialogue”? Have we created it in our malaise? Or, to state it more broadly, can there be a unity of knowledge, a grand synthesis (or even so much as a gesture towards synthesis), an integral wisdom, could such a thing be permitted or legitimated—within or without the university—that would make us feel less homeless, less ill at ease, less bad?

Vartan Gregorian, President of the Carnegie Corporation, in an important speech to the John W. Kluge Center of the Library of Congress,¹¹ writes:

The fundamental problem underlying the disjointed curriculum is the fragmentation of knowledge itself. Higher education has atomized knowledge by dividing it into disciplines, subdisciplines, and sub-subdisciplines—breaking it up into smaller and smaller unconnected fragments of academic specialization, even as the world looks to colleges for help in integrating and synthesizing the exponential increases in information brought about by technological advances. The trend has serious ramifications. Understanding the nature of knowledge, its unity, its varieties, its limitations, and its uses and abuses is necessary for the success of our democracy. [...] *We must reform higher education to reconstruct the unity and value of knowledge.* While that might sound esoteric, especially to some outside the academy, it is really just shorthand for saying that the complexity of the world requires us to have a better understanding of the relationships and connections between all fields that intersect and overlap—economics and sociology, law and psychology, business and history, physics and medicine, anthropology and political science. [emph. added]

Alas, no mention here of including religion, but Gregorian is calling, in fact, for a reconstitution of the university itself. In asking himself what should be done, he writes:

First, we must help teach the teachers. Colleges must develop strategies to enable their faculty members, who are steeped in different disciplines, to have opportunities for multidisciplinary work as they develop their own lifelong learning.

¹⁰ Mochlos, 87.

¹¹ Vartan Gregorian, “Colleges Must Reconstruct the Unity of Knowledge, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 4, 2004, available online at <http://chronicle.com/weekly/v50/i39/39b01201.htm>, accessed June 9, 2004.

He cites as an example might the internal fellowships or sabbaticals he instituted right here at the University of Pennsylvania, which brought professors together with colleagues in other departments for a year or a semester. The Metanexus LSI program is also providing incentive for this sort of cross-disciplinary dialogue.

But one reason—perhaps the major reason—for programs like Gregorian’s initiatives and the LSI program and, indeed, for all the funding that is the fuel of our “science-and-religion-dialogue” is that the whole notion of such cross-disciplinary dialogue still seems to lack legitimacy in the academy. Science (as if there were such a singular thing) worries over the potential encroachment of religion (seen solely as ideology) on its hard-won territory; religion (as if there were such a singular thing) fears a science that will dissolve its carefully crafted borders, reducing it to nothingness. Border wars, rather than dialogue, is the status quo in most educational institutions. These border wars are only emblemized by the-science-and-religion-dialogue: in fact, all the disciplines and sub-disciplines and sub-sub-disciplines exist only insofar as they are able to police their borders, certify their faculties, mobilize their forces as a unit.

And, to this mentality, nothing can be more “dangerous” than popularity, which can actually come about in a transdisciplinary dialogue because the participants cannot remain within their own disciplinary languages. Mark Taylor, in recounting the post-World War II story of higher education, writes:

Among the many significant developments, two are particularly important for our purposes: the accelerated professionalization of the faculty characterized by new departures in academic practice, and the growing corporatization and bureaucratization of the university.

Taylor notes that the line between teaching colleges and research universities blurred more than ever before, and in the wake of the collapse in the academic job market, publishing and original research took on an exaggerated importance. And as the emphasis on publication increased, the professional importance of teaching (which must be addressed to the people, the populace, i.e., must be popular) decreased.

The value of publication...followed the inverse economic logic we have discovered in art: the more popular and profitable the work, the less its academic value. Translated into the world of education, this means that one rarely gets tenure at a respected college or university for writing a textbook or popular work; nor does one get tenure primarily on the basis of teaching. These developments eventually created educational institutions with more and more faculty members whose work interests fewer and fewer people beyond the walls of the academy.¹²

This reminds me of that gem of academic satire by F. M. Cornford, *Microcosmographia Academica: Being A Guide For The Young Academic Politician*, published in 1908. His advice then is even more important now:

¹² Taylor, pp. 249-250.

The Principle of Sound Learning is that the noise of vulgar fame should never trouble the cloistered calm of academic existence. Hence, learning is called sound when no one has ever heard of it; and 'sound scholar' is a term of praise applied to one another by learned men who have no reputation outside the University, and a rather queer one inside it. If you should write a book (you had better not), be sure that it is unreadable; otherwise you will be called 'brilliant' and forfeit all respect.

I wonder if we are sometimes headed in the same direction in our promotion of *the-science-and-religion-dialogue*. Are we not carving out a space—and paying a hefty rent in terms of funding—in the academy to become our “own” discipline, with our own publications and our own learned societies and our own grass-roots organizations? So we who feel bad because we have trouble saying “we” are becoming a we by sheer force of institutional strategics. We are, to take a page from (I think) Chuck Harper of John Templeton Foundation, a “guild of guild transcendents.” But how long does guild-transcending last once it becomes a guild, once it become “responsible,” and therefore respectable? Will our publications become more and more obscure in the pursuit of institutional respectability? And will we become more and more careful about who we allow into our guild? I have heard Sir John Templeton say on more than one occasion that his interest is in the “independent genius,” but we academics believe that insofar as the genius is “independent,” the genius is no genius. The genius is not legitimately a genius, not allowed as or to be a genius. This independent genius would be autonomous, and autonomy not within the “situation of heteronomy” is ruled out. How will we walk this narrow path?

A third issue, then, as we can see is that of boundaries or borders, the “inside” and the “outside” of the university, even the inside and outside of departments and disciplines. Kant, in *The Conflict of the Faculties*, is laying down the law, drawing the lines, the boundaries between the various faculties and their respective responsibilities. The “higher” faculties of theology, medicine, and law—in the persons of clerics, physicians, and lawyers—are committed to be responsible to the sovereign and the public they serve. The “lower” faculty of philosophy has a different responsibility. It is responsible to truth, alone. But it exercises its rights to the truth completely in private. The conflicts Kant is considering include those internal to the university and those between the university and its “outside,” and he is discerning which of these conflicts are legitimate.

Kant encounters a prior, if not a pre-prior, difficulty, one that we today would sense even more keenly than he. As one might expect, this difficulty derives from the definition of a certain outside that maintains with its inside a relation of resemblance, participation, and parasitism that can give rise to an abuse of power, an excess that is strictly political. An exteriority, therefore, within the resemblance.¹³

¹³ Mochlos, 93.

Kant recognizes three such exteriorities. The first he labels “academies” or “scientific societies” or “workshops” which are groups of researchers working together to further knowledge, and the second consists of “scholars *at large*,” so to speak in a “state of nature” who simply are working alone and independently. These he deems “amateurs” who are “without public precepts or rules.” The third group consist of the “intelligentsia,” the university’s products, its graduates who become part of the civil service or, today, the private sector as well. Kant calls them the “*businesspeople* or technicians of learning,” and as an arm of the governance of society “are not free to make public use of their learning as they see fit, but are...under strict control.” Each of these is outside of the university proper but repeats or is conceived in terms of the university and its productions.

Derrida, of course, questions this notion of inside/outside, and not simply on a theoretical basis. “In Kant’s day, this ‘outside’ could be confined to a margin of the university. This is not longer so certain or simple. Today, in any case, the university is what has become its margin.”¹⁴ Derrida points out that the State no longer trusts the university to conduct certain forms of research, and this is complicated by the fact that the university and the private sector (the “businesspeople of learning”) are very intimately connected, with significant and problematic consequences.¹⁵

And since the university, either for reasons of structure or from its attachment to old representations, can no longer open itself to certain kinds of research, participate in them, or transmit them, it feels threatened in certain places of its own body; threatened by the development of the sciences, or, a fortiori, by the questions *of* science or *on* science; threatened by what it sees as an invasive margin. A singular and unjust threat, it being the constitutive faith of the university that the idea of science is at the very basis of the university.... The university is a (finished) product. I would almost call it the child of the inseparable couple metaphysics and technics. At the least, the university furnished a space or topological configuration for such an offspring. The paradox is that at the moment this offspring exceeds the places assigned it and the university becomes small and old, its “idea” reigns everywhere, more and better than ever. Threatened, as I said a moment ago, by an invasive margin, since non-university research societies, public, official, or otherwise, can also form pockets with the university campus. Certain

¹⁴ Mochlos, 94.

¹⁵ See William J. Broad and James Glanz, “Is Public Doubt Trumping ‘Primacy of Reason?’” *International Herald Tribune*, December 12, 2003, page 1, 6. Available online at <http://www.iht.com/articles/117326.html>, accessed January 21, 2005. Also, Jennifer Washburn, “The Kept University,” *The Atlantic Monthly*, March 1, 2000. Available online at the New America Foundation, <http://www.newamerica.net/index.cfm?pg=article&DocID=134>, accessed January 20, 2005. Also, Jennifer Washburn, “Studied Interest,” *The American Prospect Online*, January 7, 2005. <http://www.prospect.org/web/page.wv?section=root&name=ViewWeb&articleId=8994>, accessed January 20, 2005.

members of the university can play a part there, irritating the insides of the teaching body like parasites.¹⁶

In a passage that could serve as a short course on Derrida's thought in general, he writes in this context

...the concept of the scientific community and the university that ought to be legible in every sentence of a course or seminar, in every act of writing, reading, or interpretation. For example—but one could vary examples infinitely—the interpretation of a theorem, poem, philosopheme, or theologeme is only produced by simultaneously proposing an institutional model, either by consolidating an existing one that enables the interpretation, or by constituting a new one in accordance with this interpretation. Declared or clandestine, this proposal calls for the politics of a community of interpreters gathered around this text, and at the same time of a global society, a civil society with or without a State, a veritable regime enabling the inscription of a community. I will go further: every text, every element of a corpus reproduces or bequeathes, in a prescriptive or normative model, one or several injunctions: come together according to this or that rule, this or that scenography, this or that topography of minds and bodies, form this or that type of institution so as to read me and write about me, organize this or that type of exchange and hierarchy to interpret me, evaluate me, preserve me, translate me, inherit from me, make me live on. [...] Or inversely: if you interpret me (in the sense of deciphering or of performative transformation), you will have to assume one or another institutional form. But it holds for every text that such an injunction gives rise to undecidability and the double bind, both opens and closes, that is, upon an overdetermination that cannot be mastered. *This is the law of the text in general*—which is not confined to what one calls written works in libraries or computer programs.... Consequently, the interpreter is never subjected passively to this injunction, and his own performance will in its turn construct one or several models of community.¹⁷

Recognizing this, knowing this, an obligation arises (maybe):

But today the minimal responsibility and in any case the most interesting one, the most novel and strongest responsibility, for someone belonging to a research or teaching institution, is perhaps to make such a political implication, its system and its aporias, as clear and thematic as possible. [...] By the clearest possible thematization I mean the following: that with students and the research community, in every operation we pursue together (a reading, an interpretation, the construction of a theoretical model, the rhetoric of an argumentation, the treatment of historical

¹⁶ Mochlos, 94-95.

¹⁷ Mochlos, 100-101.

material, and even a mathematical formalization), we posit or acknowledge that an institutional concept is at play, a type of contract signed, an image of the ideal seminar constructed, a *socius* implied, repeated, or displaced, invented, transformed, threatened, or destroyed. *An institution is not merely a few walls or some outer structures surrounding, protecting, guaranteeing, or restricting the freedom of our work; it is also and already the structure of our interpretation.*¹⁸ [Emph. added]

This insight drives my questioning of the Science-and-Religion-Dialogue, the position it takes in the university, the transformation it will cause in the university depending upon whether it be pursued this way or that, and the certainty that it will give rise to new institutional forms in any case. A recent article in the *Guardian* on the growing field of systems biology brings this point home:

Systems biology courses are infiltrating curricula in campuses across the globe and systems biology centres are popping up in cities from London to Seattle. The British biological research funding body, the BBSRC, has just announced the creation of three systems biology centres in the UK. These centres are very different from traditional biology departments as they tend to be staffed by physicists, mathematicians and engineers, alongside biologists. Rather like the systems they study, systems biology centres are designed to promote interactivity and networking.¹⁹

The framing of the questions and the nature of the research transforms the institutional structures required for carrying out that work.

Kant's determining of the law of the faculties, the law regarding the legitimacy of conflicts, the law of the university, is, in effect, an attempt to found the university on principle, a principle of reason. Such a principle is determined solely by philosophy,

¹⁸ Mochlos, 102. Derrida continues this passage with the most straightforward positioning of deconstruction (the capitalizing of the initial instance of the term connotes the *received* and *misleading* understanding of deconstruction): "what is hastily called Deconstruction is never a technical set of discursive procedures, still less a new hermeneutic method working on archives or utterances in the shelter of a given and stable institution; it is also, and at the least, the taking of a position, in the work itself, toward the politico-institutional structures that constitute and regulate our practice, our competences, and our performances. Precisely because deconstruction has never been concerned with the contents alone of meaning, it must not be separable from this politico-institutional problematic, and has to require a new questioning of responsibility, a questioning that no longer necessarily relies on codes inherited from politics or ethics. Which is why, though too political in the eyes of some, deconstruction can seem demobilizing in the eyes of those who recognize the political only with the help of prewar road signs. Deconstruction is limited neither to a methodological reform that would reassure the given organization nor, inversely, to a parade of irresponsible or irresponsibilizing destruction, whose surest effect would be to leave everything as is, consolidating the most immobile forces of the university." 102-103.

¹⁹ John Joe McFadden, "The Unselfish Gene," *The Guardian*, Friday, May 6, 2005, available online at <http://education.guardian.co.uk/print/0,3858,5187263-110865,00.html>, accessed May 26, 2005.

which raises the question of philosophy's place within the university. In Kant's view, the essence of the university is philosophical. And "without a philosophy department in a university, there is no university."²⁰ Yet, as Schelling objected to Kant, "Something which is everything cannot, for that very reason, be anything in particular."²¹ Philosophy lays down the law of the foundation of the institution of the university, and yet philosophy is supposed to be subject to that very law and founded and legitimated by that very institution. Derrida elaborates:

The question of the law of law, of the founding or foundation of law, is not a juridical question. And the response cannot be either simply legal or simply illegal, simply theoretical or constative, simply practical or performative. It cannot take place either inside or outside of the university bequeathed to us by the tradition. This response and responsibility in regard to such a founding can only take place in terms of foundation. Now the foundation of a law is no more juridical or legitimate than is the foundation of a university is a university or intra-university event. If there can be no pure concept of the university, if, within the university, there can be no pure and purely rational concept of the university, this...is very simply because the university is *founded*. An event of foundation can never be comprehended merely within the logic that it founds. The foundation of a law is not a juridical event. The origin of the principle of reason, which is also implicated in the origin of the university, is not rational. The foundation of a university institution is not a university event. [...] Though such a foundation is not merely illegal, it also does not arise from the internal legality it institutes. And while nothing seems more philosophical than the foundation of a philosophical institution, whether a university, a school, or a department of philosophy, the foundation of the philosophical institution cannot be *already strictly* philosophical.²²

Derrida goes on, then, to lay down a challenge, a challenge for us:

We live in a world where the foundation of a new law—in particular a new university law—is necessary. To call it *necessary* is to say in this case *at one and the same time* that one has to take responsibility for it, a new kind of responsibility, and that this foundation is already well on the way, and irresistibly so, beyond any representation, any consciousness, any acts of individual subjects or corporate, beyond any interfaculty or interdepartmental limits, beyond the limits between the institution and the political places of its inscription. Such a foundation cannot simply break with the tradition of inherited law, or submit to the legality it authorizes,

²⁰ "The concept of *universitas* is more than the philosophical concept of a research and teaching institution; it is the concept of philosophy itself, and is Reason, or rather the principle of reason as *institution*." Mochlos, 105.

²¹ From Friedrich Schelling's *On University Studies*, cited in Mochlos, 106.

²² Mochlos, 109-110.

including those conflicts and forms of violence that always prepare for the establishing of a new law, or a new epoch of the law. Only within an epoch of the law is it possible to distinguish legal from illegal conflicts, and above all, as Kant would wish, conflicts from war.²³

How do we position ourselves (if there is yet a “we”?) to found this new university, or as Derrida puts it, “How do we orient ourselves toward the foundation of a new law? This new foundation will negotiate a compromise with traditional law. Traditional law should therefore provide, on its own foundational soil, a support for a leap toward another foundational place.”²⁴

So our task is to negotiate between the traditional law of the university with its canons of rationality, scholarly rigor, certifications, peer review, disciplinarity, etc., and a new law, a law not yet constituted or constitutional for us, a law allowing new areas of research and legitimating new perspectives, methodologies, and approaches, new ways for framing questions, but also for integral appropriations, grand syntheses, holistic metaphysics, and the opening for the unity of knowledge and, indeed, wisdom.

The change is already coming. And, as Taylor notes,

These changes in the production and delivery of education are having a significant impact on the structure of knowledge. The walls separating academic departments and disciplines are becoming as permeable as every other division in network culture. Creative work usually emerges between fields in areas that are far from equilibrium and often seem to hover at the edge of chaos. Separate disciplines as currently constituted can no more be justified than the departments whose interests they serve. To be effective in today’s world, knowledge and the curriculum must assume the form of complex adaptive systems, which are in a process of constant formation and reformation. New technologies of production and reproduction not only facilitate but actually necessitate these changes. As these developments continue to unfold, the organizational structure of colleges and universities will have to become much more flexible and adaptable to accommodate the ongoing transformation of the substance and organization of knowledge. For faculty members, the most important consequence of curricular change will be the continuing erosion of tenure.²⁵

I kept that last bit from Taylor in my citation to remind us that we (if we can say “we”) are not just waging a conflict against the “them” of the administration. We will have to

²³ *Mochlos*, 110.

²⁴ Derrida continues, “or, if you prefer another metaphor to that of the jumper planting a foot before leaping [...]; the difficulty will consist, as always, in determining the best lever, what the Greeks would call the best *mochlos*. The *mochlos* could be a wooden beam, a lever for displacing a boat, a sort of wedge for opening or closing a door, something, in short, to lean on for forcing and displacing.” *Mochlos*, 110.

²⁵ Taylor, p. 265.

change, too, as we pursue the sort of transdisciplinary dialogue that we are promoting. Do we have the courage of our convictions?

There is so much to explore on this question of the university, of disciplinarity, and the unity of knowledge. There is an ocean of material that should be explored, but I need to end here. I will close this too brief introduction to the philosophical problem of the university in our time by noting that the call by Gregorian to take up anew the quest for the unity of knowledge is in tension with Taylor's call to chaordic networks of learning and knowledge generation—but they are not contradictories. It is true that the paths described by Taylor may lead to new and innovative fields that, as Derrida reminded us, will develop their own laws, practices, disciplines. But they will have come to be in the breakdown of other disciplinary boundaries, and that ethos will, one hopes, be instituted in the institutions these new fields generate, thus inoculating them against becoming sedimented or professionalized. Well, one can hope, anyway! But if the deconstructive, chaordic ethos is kept close to the heart, then paradoxically the way will be paved for taking up an integral or synthetic or holistic approach to getting at the unity of knowledge, of getting to the whole story of the whole cosmos for the whole person.