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Human Development and
the Transformation of the Academy[1]

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ABSTRACT

The idea of human is glossed in terms of agency and in terms of humans as the animals whose ecological niche is culture. The concept of "humanization by enlargement" is used to promote bringing modernity's other (non-modern cultures) into the curriculum. The objective is not only to celebrate what humans have been, are, and can be, but also to solve the intractable problems of modernity by mobilizing non-modern cultural resources. It is claimed that many indigenous peoples know things many modern peoples do not know about how to achieve social cohesion and how to live in a sustainable relationship to the natural environment. "Modernity" is glossed in terms of typical characteristics of successor states of the Roman Empire (Britain, France, etc.) which formed the European World-system that later expanded to become the Modern World-system. The ancient word "metaphysics" is put to use to promote mutual respect among cultures who read the world through different categories.

"Human" is a word with many meanings. In this article, I will emphasize the adjective "human" in the phrase "human development" with a view to extracting from it guidelines for the transformation of the academy.

Insisting on acknowledging and enhancing human agency triggers methodological options. "Human" means "agent." It implies transforming disciplines by humanizing them – humanizing law, humanizing economics, humanizing science, and humanizing education. When all its faculties are humanized, the academy will be transformed.

I would like to thank Amartya Sen (Sen, 1999) and Margaret Archer (Archer, 2000) for their work. We needed such work to rescue us from Newtonian social sciences where the agents are variables (rather than subjects), and from post-structuralist anti-humanism.

But "human" means more than "agent." Humans are the animals whose ecological niche is culture. Humans are biologically programmed to be culturally programmed.[2] As Paulo Freire says, our human vocation is to be creators of culture.[3]

Here we reach another fork in the road at least as important as the fork that separates so-called academic rigor – that makes superficiality compulsory – from the realism about agency that makes the human sciences human. This second fork in the road, considered here in an African context, separates the modernizing university, whose function is to erase the cultures of its students, from the humanizing university, whose function is to affirm the cultures of its students. In a world context, this difference of function distinguishes the university stubbornly clinging to disciplines established in Europe during the nineteenth century from the university that welcomes the entire world as it is now.

The implicit purpose, and frequently the explicit purpose, of the curriculum of European universities transplanted to colonial and postcolonial soil has been to modernize the natives.[4] The result of modernization in Africa has been that Africa now has the same problems the rest of the modern world has,[5] such as unemployment, crime, destruction of nature, and disenchantment.

The response I am proposing, together with Professor Catherine Odora Hoppers of the University of South Africa, in our forthcoming co-authored book *Rethinking Thinking*, can be expressed in capsule form as humanizing modernity. Humanize by enlargement – exclude less, include more. Make the university a celebration of what humans are, have been, and will be. Bring modernity's "Other" into the curriculum, not to assimilate this "Other" into categories the existing disciplines already have but to transform the curriculum, transform research, and transform community engagement.

Among the many cultures humans have created, there are many that do not know unemployment. Julius Nyerere points out that before European contact there was no unemployment in Africa. Nyerere (1968) quotes a Swahili proverb, "Host your guest for two days, and on the third day give him a hoe."[6] This proverb lives and moves and has its being in a precolonial world, where civil law in the Roman Law tradition did not yet exist; it is a world where, to use Michel Foucault's terminology, the historical conditions for the possibility of unemployment did not yet exist.[7]

We need to learn things many indigenous peoples know that modernity does not know. Such as how to achieve social integration and social cohesion.[8] And how to live in sustainable harmony with the air, the water, the earth, the plants, the animals, and all the other life forms that share the planet with us.[9]

Reorganizing modernity in the light of cultural resources provided by modernity's "Other," as Professor Hoppers conceives it, is called the second level indigenization. In development education as Hoppers conceives it, we are all transforming the world together; we are all learners and we are all teachers. "Human" does not refer to the *vernunftige Wesen* (rational essence) of Immanuel Kant or to eternally imposing the categories of Newton and Ulpian on any possible experience. It refers to the flesh and the blood, the bodies and the souls, the music and the voices, of all *homo sapiens* physically existing on the planet. Many of our brothers and sisters will tell us that "human" also refers to the ancestors who are called upon to join us by the singing that invites them.

The comprehensive adjective "human" also refers, of course, to the Quarrelsome Twerp. You have all met him and heard what he has to say. He appears on every campus. Sometimes she appears, if the campus happens to have a Quarrelsome Twerpette. Let me briefly refresh your memory on what they say. First, they say that modernity has brought us hot and cold running water, civil rights, smallpox vaccine, the emancipation of women, increasing life expectancy, the right to a fair trial when accused, flush toilets, Facebook, and Twitter. Second, they say that in traditional non-modern societies female infants are exposed to infanticide, disease is attributed to evil spirits and treated by magic, enemies defeated in war are given a choice between gruesome death and gruesome enslavement, whole settlements and sometimes whole tribes go extinct from starvation, and the majority of the population can neither read nor write, nor figure.

Professor Hoppers and I hold a twerp-proof position which can be misunderstood, but which cannot be refuted. It involves transformation by enlargement. It holds that a more rational choice is one that considers more options. It holds that a more scientific science is one that, as the historian of science Gaston Bachelard says, leaps into abstraction by broadening its categories.[10] It includes modernity, with all its ups and downs, as one among thousands of cultures with all their ups and downs that *homo sapiens* have created as they have evolved during their four million or so years on this planet.

What is modernity? Let me briefly suggest with all due openness to carrying on anytime, anywhere, the long nuanced discussions the topic requires, that what we call modernity and single out as a single distinctive culture, albeit an infinitely ramified one, is what Max Weber said it was,[11] which can be heroically simplified by saying: Weber said modernity is capitalism plus bureaucracy. Both capitalism and bureaucracy rely on instrumental science, Weber's *Zweckrationalität,* and on the legal framework derived mostly from Rome that organizes exchange and defines individual juridical subjects.

In important ways, all modern nation-states are successor states of the Roman Empire, starting with the states that formed when that Empire broke up: Britain, France, Germany, Spain, Portugal, and so on.[12] Those were the states that later became the colonial powers ruling the rest of the world. The global world-system, as Immanuel Wallerstein has shown, is an expanded version of the European world-system of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Wallerstein, 1974, 1980, 1989). Modernity is the resulting global system whose basic normative structure is Roman. Modernity's "Other" includes all the cultures Europe conquered. It can also be stretched to include all the future cultures that have not yet been invented. In practice, however, as Nestor Garcia Canclini and others have shown, today's really existing cultures are hybrids, partly modern, and partly non-modern (Canclini, 2005).

Immanuel Wallerstein has shown that the social science disciplines as they exist today were founded in Europe in the early 1800s, as part and parcel of the liberal world order that took form after the French Revolution, the rise of Napoleon's Empire, and Napoleon's defeat (Wallerstein, 1991). If today we are reframing the social sciences in the light of indigenous knowledge systems, we are not doing anything un-reasonable. We are simply asking them to be in fact what they always pretended to be in theory: worldwide human sciences. We are asking them to untie the apron strings that tie them to the particular culture that gave them birth.

So our position is impeccable. It is not romantic, just rational. It is more scientific than the narrow disciplines that pass for sciences in today's untransformed academies; because it includes all the science they include plus more. It includes more because it takes a wider view of nature and of social possibilities. Its wider view of nature is a critical realism that takes the object of natural science to be nature itself, as it really is.[13] No culture, much less any scientist or group of scientists, has the privilege

of authoritatively declaring what nature really is. It is more realistic, not less realistic, to acknowledge that different peoples conceive reality differently.

Let me say two things more before closing. Let me venture forth from the safety of impeccable claims that are true by definition. Let me say two things that might be false. First, indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) lead us back to metaphysics. Second, IKS can lead us toward solutions to the intractable problems of modernity.

As for metaphysics, one would have thought that after Bertrand Russell and the logical positivists thoroughly destroyed metaphysics in the first half of the twentieth century, there would be no metaphysics left to destroy in any department of any respectable university (Reichenbach, 1951). But no, in the second half of the twentieth century, Jacques Derrida and the deconstructionists destroyed all over again what the positivists had already expunged from the books of knowledge (Sallis, 1986).

But now indigenous knowledge systems are leading us back to meta-physics. The path back to metaphysics begins when "knowledge" in the contexts of most human cultures turns out not to be the same as the so-called factual knowledge that modern Western universities mainly produce and disseminate, or at least pretend to produce and dis-seminate. IKS are embedded in worldviews, in social structure, personal relationships, spirituality, respect for plants and animals and all beings, art and music, religion, cosmology, and ways of life.[14]

Indigenous knowledge systems include cultural cosmology. A cultural cosmology organizes several things at once. It organizes livelihoods and social cohesion, which keep violent conflict to a tolerable level. It meets the deep emotional needs of human bodies that have evolved for four million years under the stars; close to plants and animals; close to the soil and the waters; close to sisters and brothers; under the moon; under the sun. It is magic. One thing we learn from the comparative study of cultures is that magicians have played a greater role in most cultures than they do in modernity (Mauss & Hubert, 1902–03). But magic refuses to disappear into the dustbin of history. God and Harry Potter are my wit-nesses. Magic is still fun. People like it.

Cosmology helps to organize the interchange of human labor with the environment. It helps to meet the basic needs for food and security. It can keep every one singing and dancing. It helps to organize a sustainable and harmonious relationship with nature, and gives divine meaning to birth, rites of passage, and death.

The cosmologies that organize cultures and lead us back to meta-physics, also lead us back to where this essay began: to humanization and to what it means to be human. From the very beginning of the process of human development in the academy, from the moment that we started using African ideas like *ubuntu*, "I am because you are," and from the moment we start talking about humanizing, we are already re-enchanting a disenchanted world with cosmology.[15] In this view, the very idea of a human being is a magical idea. The idea of "human" is a divine idea.

For example, in the Setswana language and in several related languages, to talk about respect for a human being or the dignity of a human being, one uses the word *seriti. Seriti* literally means the shadow each human being casts. If one goes back now to the Bible and to Greek philosophy, to the ancient days of Western culture before modernity, one finds that respect is expressed by thinking of the human being as a living soul. The Greek word for this is *psuche*, which in Greek also means butterfly. The related word translated as "spirit" is *pneuma* in Greek and *ruach* in Hebrew. *Ruach* and *pneuma* literally refer to the breath of life. The Hindus have their famous saying of *namaste* when they salute each other by joining the palms and bowing to the divine essence within each of them.

What do these examples tell us? They tell us that when we treat human beings with respect, what we respect is not just their physical body. It is something magical associated within that body, something that blurs the boundary between the material and immaterial: a shadow, a butterfly, a breath, the divine within; or, to use still other examples from other cultures, one respects a totemic identification such as a bird, a leopard, a cloud; the representative of the mythical beings of origin, or of the ancestors of a clan.

If we look at modern Western culture, we will find that its knowledge system is not separate from the rest of its culture either. Its institutional assumptions are imbedded in a cultural cosmology. What is true of indigenous knowledge systems is true of the knowledge systems of the modern West, and its world-conquering extension – the global economy.

In the civil laws stemming from the Roman tradition, respect for human beings is defined as respect for "persons." *Persona* is a Latin word that means "mask." Respect for persons as the juridical subjects who own property and exchange commodities in markets is an idea that began in heaven and later descended to earth. The Latin word for "mask" was first used by theologians to explain the holy trinity, God in three persons,

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – God in three masks (Koterski, 2004; von Balthasar, 1986). Later the jurists employed that theological term to define the human being worthy of respect – the person. With the protestant reformation, the increasing adoption of democratic ideals, and modern civil codes came the principle of equal respect for all persons (Carrithers, Collins, & Lukes, 1986)

Humanizing the academy, humanizing law, humanizing economics, humanizing science, humanizing education, involves, therefore, re-enchantment. It requires divine magic. It leads back to the ancient idea Aristotle expressed in his first philosophy. Aristotle used the idea of meta-physics; and Islamic, Judaic, and Christian civilizations were founded on this idea. It is the idea that there are basic categories that tend to run through everything people think and do. I have said a bit about categories naming subjects, but there are also categories naming objects, times, places, and so on. Nowadays we can not only say that such categories exist, but that there are different sets of such categories in different cultures. Cultures have patterns. I have been using the word "cosmology" to refer to organizing patterns than run through whatever the members of a culture think, say, or do. We can also use the word "metaphysics" to refer to a culture's categories of thought.

Now that we have a vocabulary that includes the word "metaphysics," we can say something we could not say before: Metaphysical differences make it both difficult and rewarding to engage in intercultural dialogue. The "Other," the one whose culture is different from ours, not only has different opinions, different interests, different values, but a different vocabulary. The "Other" may have a whole different way of organizing experience; a different cosmology, different categories. Thinking of intercultural dialogue as the encounter of one metaphysics with another metaphysics makes the dialogue in the beginning more respectful and in the end more authentic.

Metaphysics typically frames knowledge and magic simultaneously. The number one item in the magic category is the soul, the person, the human being.

At this point I am engaged in a love–hate relationship with what is called post-modernism or post-structuralism. I refer to Friedrich Nietzsche, a nineteenth-century thinker ahead of his time who anticipated and inspired post-modern ideas, to Michel Foucault and his friend Gilles Deleuze, to Jacques Derrida, and to their many followers.

It is a love relationship because they have deconstructed the Enlightenment. When Africa, Asia, and Latin America were conquered and colonized, when their traditional institutions were to a large extent destroyed and replaced by property rights and commercial exchange organized by Roman Law principles, Europeans were able to appeal to the ideals of the Enlightenment to rationalize what they called a civilizing mission. In their view, Europe had civilization, but Africa only had culture. Europe had a rational legal system. Africa only had customs. Europe had science. Africa had superstition. Europe had universal human rights. Africans had local traditions.

Now the leading lights of European thought have deconstructed the Enlightenment. It is no longer possible to say that the modern European culture imposed by force on the rest of the world is authorized by universal and eternal rational principles. It is merely one set of socially constructed institutions among the many sets of socially constructed institutions humans have created, and will continue to create unless we destroy our species by high-tech warfare or by destroying our habitat, the biosphere. For this, we have the post-modernists to thank. They have leveled the playing field.

The hate part is about their anti-humanism. In deconstructing metaphysics, they have sought to deconstruct in particular one central metaphysical concept: man, the human being, and humanity. Michel Foucault, for example, in his book *The Order of Things* attacks the idea of "man" (*l'homme*).[16] Humanity is, according to Foucault, a bogus idea invented by Immanuel Kant and other early modern philosophers to supply a bogus moral authority to replace the declining moral authority of the church and the declining moral authority of kings and queens. Foucault echoes Nietzsche's concept that the death of God implies the death of man. If there is no divine authority, then there can only be sham and perverse reasons for regarding human beings as somehow divine and therefore, worthy of sacred respect.

Here we do not agree. Our response is intellectual, strategic, and pragmatic. Intellectually, it is a fact about the human species that we are active agents who create cultures. Notable among our cultural inventions are ideas that make a physical human body a social object worthy of sacred respect, including among others the ideas of *seriti, ubuntu, psuche, pneuma, ruach*, soul, spirit, person, and human rights. Strategically, the idea of human development offers a promising path toward transforming the academy. Pragmatically, magic works.

The intractable problem is that it appears to be impossible to change the system. When I say just these nine words, "It appears to be impossible to change the system," I find that most people have an immediate sense that they understand what I have in mind.

I have in mind that the intractable problems, among them unemployment, crime, destruction of the biosphere, and disenchantment are part and parcel of the modern world-system. If the system cannot be changed, then these problems cannot be solved.

In several of my books, I make this point crystal clear at great length (Richards, 1995, 2000; Richards & Swanger, 2006; Hoppers & Richards, in press). I will now approach the topic briefly from six different angles.

Angle One involves the school of thought known as educational pessimism. Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron have argued that education necessarily reproduces the basic structure of society as it is. Education, therefore, cannot possibly change the system (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

Angle Two involves the abandonment of the Freedom Charter by the African National Congress in 1992. As Nelson Mandela said in 1992, "Chaps we have to choose. We either keep nationalization and get no investment, or we modify our own attitude and get investment."[17]

Angle Three is described in Jeffrey Winters' excellent book, *Power in Motion: Capital Mobility and the Indonesian State*. Using data from Indonesia and other places, Winters describes what he calls a Locational Revolution that is still in its early stages and whose full consequences are yet to be felt. Others have called it a race to the bottom. As employers move from one location to another in search of better labor at lower costs, their employees and their children can expect for the foreseeable future lower wages, fewer benefits, and more precarious employment. There appears to be no way to avoid this result (Winters, 1996).

Angle Four involves the regulationist school of economists, centred at the University of Grenoble, which expresses a thought that goes back at least to Adam Smith: Whatever else governments do, they must guarantee the conditions that make the accumulation of profits possible. Profits are the mainspring that starts production. Therefore, it is imperative to do whatever must be done to keep them flowing. But the Grenoble concept of "regime of accumulation" refers not just to politics and governments but also to every dimension of culture. Everything must be compatible with the accumulation of profits (Aglietta, 1980, 1998; Boyer, 2000). Therefore,

the system cannot be changed, because system change tends to undermine accumulation. When it is challenged, the regime of accumulation fights back with weapons like capital flight, unemployment, and inflation. The penalty for not surrendering to this reality, as Nelson Mandela did in 1992, is chaos.

Angle Five concerns John Maynard Keynes who said approximately the same thing in the eloquent Chapter Twelve of his *General Theory*. Keynes uses the term "confidence." It follows from the overriding need for confidence that the system does not change. Efforts to change it frequently tend to undermine confidence. The need for confidence wins, while change loses.

Angle Six involves Chile, where in the early 1970s we had a government that sought social justice by strengthening labor unions, reducing inequalities, raising wages, and increasing the size of the public sector. The economy collapsed. After a coup d'état, a military government took power, which broke the unions, increased inequality, lowered wages, and privatized the public sector (de Vyder, 1976). And the economy recovered. Chile is not the only example that could be cited.

Perhaps the glimpses available from these six angles will make it easier to see why in spite of a knowledge explosion that has produced more books and scholarly studies on any given human problem than anybody has time to read, humanity's principal problems remain intractable. We are in the presence of what Thomas Kuhn calls an anomaly. There are more universities than ever before, more PhDs, more students, more research, more data, more publications, but at the same time there is more unemployment, more crime, more environmental destruction, more disenchantment, and so on. In Kuhn's terminology, we need to change paradigms. Normal science does not resolve the anomaly. Perhaps we can change paradigms, and perhaps IKS can help us to do so.

The intractable problems may be inherent in the institutional assumptions of the scholars who are studying how to solve them. They may be inherent in their epistemologies and in their methodologies.

Perhaps, after all, the system can be changed, because perhaps, modern institutions can be reconsidered and revised. Indigenous knowledge systems might perhaps show us the way.

Humanizing the university, we are claiming, leads to reframing knowledge production in ways that focus on modernity as Amartya Sen advocates focusing on markets.[18] A transformed academy would treat

modern institutions as one path among others, and not always the best path. Modern culture is available to be chosen and followed (or partially chosen and partially followed) for the purpose of enhancing human capacities. The end governs the choice of means. It is the commitment to the service of humanity that should define the university, not a preconceived idea of what knowledge is supposed to be.

In conclusion, I would like to suggest two theses for further discussion:

Thesis One: The intractable problems of modernity cannot be solved within the paradigms of modernity.

Thesis Two: A humanized academy, transformed by the integration of indigenous knowledge systems and the consequent resignifying of modern institutions, can contribute to solving modernity's intractable problems.

I mean to suggest for discussion not only whether these two theses can be sustained as true but also how they might be interpreted, qualified, and suitably amended.

NOTES

1. This brief essay is based on a speech Dr Richards delivered at the University of South Africa on July 20, 2010.

2. See, for example, the review of findings regarding human origins by Nancy Tanner (1981). She shows that the human body evolved to be the body of a cultural animal. Capacities for cooperation and other features of culture gave our ancestors a competitive edge from our species' earliest beginnings.

3. See Freire (1993). At the very beginning of the book, Freire identifies "humanization" as the key problem of our times.

4. See, for example, Thomas Jesse Jones, "The White Man's Burden in Africa" (1925); L. Gray Cowan, "British and French education in Africa: A critical appraisal" (1964); Otonti Nduka, *Education and the Nigerian Cultural Background* (1964).

5. There is an immense literature, starting with the founding classics of sociology by Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, and Karl Marx which shows or tends to show that the chronic problems of modernity are inherent in its basic structures. Here I cite only Walter Rodney's (1972) work contrasting Africa before and after European contact, and one of my own works which

argues that modernity's chronic problems cannot be solved within its basic legal and normative structure (Richards & Swanger, 2006).

6. Julius Nyerere, "Ujamaa, the Basis of African Socialism," speech given in April of 1962 included in his *Freedom and Socialism*. Dar es Salaam: Oxford University Press, 1968.

7. Immanuel Kant invented the idea that there are conditions of any possible experience in his *Critique of Pure Reason* (first published in German as *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* in 1781). Michel Foucault in several of his works gives this Kantian idea the twist that the conditions of a possible experience are historical. In his doctoral dissertation, published as *Histoire de la folie à l´age classique* in 1961 (*Madness and Civilization*, 1965), he argued that insanity as we experience it was not a possible experience in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe.

8. See generally the works of Marcel Mauss, who reviewed the studies available at the time he wrote, for example, Marcel Mauss, *La cohesion sociale dans les societés polysegmentaires* (1931). For more recent appreciations of the social achievements of indigenous peoples, see the works of Marshall Sahlins.

9. See for example, Arden and Wall (1997).

10. See Bachelard (1947) and other works by the same author.

11. In *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist der Kapitalismus* (1920), Weber attributes the modern capitalist spirit to an asceticism moved to accumulate capital rather than to spend. However, it becomes clear in his larger work *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (1922) that modernity is about rationalization in general, including that of governmental bureaucracies, and that what makes it possible is a stable legal framework permitting the making of economic calculations.

12. The importance of the Roman-type legal framework of the modern world for understanding its chronic problems is brought out in Richards and Swanger (2006). For a classic study of its crucial significance, see Renner (1904, reprinted in 1949).

13. See Bhaskar (1975) and other works by the same author.

14. That IKS is embedded in wider cultural cosmologies that organize social life is not so much proven as taken for granted in works such as Warren et al., 1995; Verran, 2001; Wideru, 1996; and Appiah, 1992. Social scientists who in other respects differ greatly from one another find that practical knowledge is integrated into worldviews that also organize society. For instance, see Benedict, 1934; Harris, 1975; and Malinowski, 1926. Although it may be less obvious to some, science and social structure are also inextricably embedded in each other in Europe; for a good example, see Gideon Freudenthal, 2010.

15. The idea that the modern world is inherently "disenchanted" translates Max Weber's *Entzauberung,* which more literally translated means "the magic has been taken away." Marshall Berman has enthusiastically advocated "re-enchantment" but unfortunately in doing so has fallen into more nonsense than we care to share (see Berman, 1984).

16. See Foucault, 1970 (original French: *Les mots et les choses*, 1966. Paris: Gallimard). The attack on humanism is at the very end of the book.

17. Nelson Mandela, quoted in Sampson (1999, p. 429). See also "Power and Principle in South Africa" (Richards & Swanger, 2006, chap. 10).

18. For Sen the market is "…among the instruments that can help to promote human capabilities" (Sen & Dreze, 1995, p. 202).

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