

Education Viewed Through a Cosmopolitan Prism

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The ancient idea of cosmopolitanism has taken on renewed significance. In part, this interest springs from concerns about cultural fracturing and violence around the globe. To many observers, the end of the Cold War two decades ago led not to hoped-for international harmonies but to an intensification of ethnic, national, religious, and other conflicts. The turn to cosmopolitanism also reflects worries about consumerist individualism juxtaposed with fears that political resources lag behind economic forces unleashed by global capitalism. At the same time, the reanimated focus expresses the energy people are finding in new modes of cooperation made possible by expanding means of mobility, powerful communication technologies, and proliferating nongovernmental organizations. Such changes are rendering the world's cultural resources more accessible to people everywhere.

The current flowering of research on cosmopolitanism is centered in many disciplines and interdisciplinary constellations. Scholars have responded to charges, some as old as cosmopolitanism itself, that the idea implies political aloofness, uncritical universalism, moral rootlessness, and elitist aestheticism. I believe contemporary scholarship has identified weaknesses, stereotypes, and caricatures in many of the attacks on the cosmopolitan even while acknowledging the perhaps necessarily inconclusive if not aporetic aspect of the debate. It also has clarified differences between cosmopolitanism and other global "isms" such as internationalism and multiculturalism, and it has made plain its critical distance from the phenomena known as globalization and neoliberalism.

With few exceptions, however, scholars across the disciplines who have examined cosmopolitanism have yet to come to grips with its educational significance.¹ Moreover, many studies of the cosmopolitan idea perceive it largely as a reaction to political, socioeconomic, environmental, and other crises, so that the idea becomes, in effect, parasitic upon perceived rupture, strife, and fragmentation.

I hope to avoid this trajectory with regard to education. I believe that a cosmopolitan-minded education can assist people to retain cultural and individual integrity while also supporting peace, social justice, and other globally lauded goods. However, in so doing this mode of education constitutes an end as much as it does a means. It generates ideas and ideals about the human prospect, which are ever changing in their moral, intellectual, and aesthetic contours. A cosmopolitan orientation spurs people to reimagine the creative possibilities in the local, the universal, and the unfathomable spaces between. It positions them to dwell meaningfully in the tension-laden, often paradoxical realm of being both destabilizers and preservers of culture. Individuals and communities destabilize culture every time they learn something genuinely new and different. But they can preserve the beating heart and the vibrant mind of culture by being self-conscious and critical in that very process.

To elucidate this perspective, I outline several core features of a cosmopolitan approach to education. The remainder of the essay pivots around a classroom episode that illuminates education when seen through a cosmopolitan prism.

A PERSPECTIVE ON EDUCATIONAL COSMOPOLITANISM

As scholars have noted, the concept of the cosmopolitan has a remarkably convoluted history.² It has been ascribed to singular notions of human nature and to uncontainable plural outlooks. Scholars and activists have emphasized political goals such as global citizenship and a world community;³ moral ideals such as a global culture of open-mindedness and mutual regard;⁴ and cultural goals such as supporting new, hybrid social configurations emblematic of the intensifying intermingling of people, ideas, and activities in many parts of the world.⁵ Pauline Kleingeld and Eric Brown usefully review these strands under the headings of political, moral, and cultural cosmopolitanism.⁶

What can be called educational cosmopolitanism (a term I have not come upon in the literature) has affinities with all these lines of concern. However, it draws on critical traditions of thought and practice in such a way that it is not merely an appendage to *a priori* political, moral, or cultural ideologies. Among these inheritances is the tradition of philosophy as “the art of living” or “the care of the self.” This tradition can be traced from Socrates, through commentators such as Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, writers such as Erasmus and Michel de Montaigne, and more recent thinkers such as Immanuel Kant, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Michel Foucault.⁷

Philosophy as the art of living can be understood first and last as an educational outlook, and in between as a critique of social institutions. Its focus has been on how a person can learn, through formal education and its fusion with experience, to draw as fully as possible upon prior human achievements and one’s life encounters to craft a humane, meaningful life, even or especially when extant conventions seem to reject, thwart, or cheapen this project. Such a life would seek to be responsive to the demands of justice toward others (morality) and of the desire for self-improvement (what the tradition characterizes as ethics). Epictetus (c. 50–130 CE) urges: “Set up right now a certain character and pattern for yourself which you will preserve when you are by yourself and when you are with people.”⁸ He articulates a fusion of ethics and the moral redolent of the classical ideal of fusing *logos* and *ergon*, word and deed. He draws upon notions of justice as well as his conviction in the vitality of personhood.

Put another way, Epictetus charts a path that heeds both local and universal values while recognizing the ever-challenging nature of the journey. In this outlook, persons trust not solely established custom but also their own capacities to perceive, discern, criticize, and appreciate — capacities triggered, in part, by encounters with differences from local norms. This always unfinished process requires what the tradition describes as exercises or practices of the self, which include deliberative ways of speaking, listening, interacting, reading, writing, and more, that are at all times arts in development whose aim is not serving the self instrumentally but rather

improving it. The focus on such practices constitutes one reason for regarding philosophy as the art of living as an ongoing educational encounter in the world.

Educational cosmopolitanism presumes a creative potential on the part of persons everywhere to craft lives of meaning and purpose. As such it incorporates the educational ethos of philosophy understood as the art of living. Moreover, in so doing it draws on certain forms of liberalism and humanism with their foci on autonomy and on the moral dignity of the human being. The pedagogical dispensation of educational cosmopolitanism would be to grant the young everywhere a genuine degree of freedom in articulating their response to experience, even if this is not couched in the preset terms of their elders.

However, while the idea of a cosmopolitan education foregrounds individuality, it also foregrounds the uniqueness and integrity of community. Cosmopolitanism presupposes individual and community diversity. It would disappear like smoke were homogeneity to triumph, an outcome some critics fear in unfettered globalization and to which cosmopolitanism constitutes a rigorous response. Thus scholars and activists of political, economic, and moral cosmopolitanism strive to elucidate mechanisms for defending community against corrosive pressure.

Educational cosmopolitanism presumes that communities as well as individuals can learn to inhabit the world educationally, as indeed many do today. This ideal has a conservationist and generative impulse. Cosmopolitanism takes as given a more or less permanent exposure to difference on the part of communities and individuals in the contemporary world. Permeability and porosity seem everywhere the rule rather than the exception. The cosmopolitan idea underscores the impossibility of inhabiting a pure identity untouched, unaffected, ungraced, or unsullied by outside contacts. From its perspective people would be well served to come to grips with the impact of these contacts rather than try to will them away. This claim implies education in the sense of examining, assessing, and responding creatively to the world's unceasing influence.

For example, Jonathan Lear shows how the Crow, an American Indian tribe, successfully rebounded from the threat of cultural annihilation.⁹ They did so not by hardening their identity and defending it in a zero-sum manner, but rather by reconstructing certain core customs in conjunction with learning new ideas and practices, and all of this in a manner that helped them sustain cultural integrity, tradition, and distinctiveness. I would not argue that in so doing the Crow "became" cosmopolitan; the term does not operate like an identity card. Moreover, it is important to recognize that the Crow had no choice but to act, having been assaulted and then defeated in battle by a more powerful, relentless entity. In no way do I wish to make light of the extremity they faced and in some respects still do. However, from a cosmopolitan perspective the Crow offer humanity a dynamic lesson. Communities and individuals everywhere today are in varying degrees vulnerable to cultural dissolution. In their artful response to this threat, the Crow illuminate how a cosmopolitan orientation weds a critical openness to the world with a critical loyalty toward the local. They illustrate what it means to dwell educationally in the world.

Learning from the Crow points to the generative aspect of educational cosmopolitanism. More than just a critical asset for dealing with events, the cosmopolitan idea highlights the very fact of worldwide cultural creativity understood in its anthropological, artistic, and individual senses. The anthropological points to how communities reconstruct practices, ideas, and ideals. The artistic highlights arts such as painting and sculpture that feature evolving techniques, styles, and underlying visions. The individual sense of culture mirrors how many persons endeavor to treat — or cultivate (culturate) — their lives as meaningfully and seriously as circumstances permit. The art of living can be realized by individuals and by traditional as well as hybrid constellations of people near and far. It does not result in the destruction of tradition but rather in its creative reconstruction. As difficult as this process may be for individuals and communities, it provides a productive alternative to nostalgia and to the kind of stasis that can only lead to frustration. This art does not imply merely reveling in cultural variability and difference, although the almost childlike joy many people seem to find in that experience merits a place on the scene. To revel is not synonymous with to exploit, although it could lead to that, just as the moral partiality in any way of life is not synonymous with exclusion even if it could morph into such. Cosmopolitan artfulness implies regarding other traditions as potential inheritances for lighting paths in the world. Put another way, educational cosmopolitanism as an embodiment of the art of living entails recognizing how the world constantly addresses people with questions about their forms of life and thereby encourages them toward cultural creation.

TOWARD AN (ALWAYS UNFINISHED) PEDAGOGY OF COSMOPOLITAN EDUCATION

A central premise in what follows is that educational cosmopolitanism does not necessitate a radical reconstruction of elementary, secondary, or university education, although it would trigger some adjustment in curriculum and pedagogy. It does not depend upon or require a formal program such as those featuring civic, global, international, or moral education. A cosmopolitan education foregrounds perception understood as a method. This method constitutes an evolving way of seeing that, for the teacher, illuminates how subject matter is a response to the human quest for meaning, and that, for the student, issues in a deepening and at times unsettling connection with the dynamic spaces between the local and the universal.

To give color, texture, and tone to those spaces, consider a music classroom anywhere in the world in which students are studying composition.¹⁰ The students enjoy listening to music from around the globe. At one point several are so taken with some flamenco strains that they want to incorporate its sound in their own budding compositions. If asked why, they might simply reply “Because we like it!” The teacher endorses their decision but at the same time poses a range of questions they must engage, some technical, some philosophical. What is the history of this form of music and of the instruments it deploys? How are these instruments made? Who makes them? To what in human life and/or in nature might flamenco be a response? In what ways do traditions of flamenco respond to particular joys, sufferings, values, aspirations, and the like? How do those responses, in turn, help us think about how we express our own joys, sufferings, concerns, and hopes through music and perhaps

art in general? Might the responses embedded in flamenco tradition suggest ways of reconceiving or reconstituting our cares and desires?

Through questioning, coaching, suggesting resources, and the like, the teacher helps students move from what could become a consumerist or acquisitive sampling to a participatory inquiry in which meanings and outlooks are explicitly at play. The teacher speaks, listens, waits, and acts as if the musical traditions of flamenco are both emblematic of aspects of Spanish culture and also a world inheritance bequeathed to all, including those students far removed in space and time from flamenco's origins. Moreover, imagine a whole train of encounters like these that this teacher makes possible for students. This teacher's approach expresses an everyday, ongoing, visible conviction that her or his students dwell someplace other than only the local, or only the universal, and that they are more than only the persons they appear to be at the moment. Rather, this teacher's actions imply that the meanings of the local, the universal, and the very idea of individuality are always underway.

The students begin where they are: they have been intrigued by a piece of music. But they move someplace else: they have incorporated into their lives aspects of a human inheritance that has percolated through the world. However modest this transformation may be, it is noteworthy not only in its technical and musical senses, but in the accompanying philosophical, existential, indeed moral and ethical senses of their experience. The students still live *in* their local world but they are no longer merely *of* it. Their sensibilities are now different, again however modestly so. They have a deeper intimation of what it means to take the larger world seriously, to learn from the reality of its offerings, and to appreciate it. They dwell someplace between the local — that which they were and are — and the universal — that which they can in principle take in and become. If they could speak like veteran artists or physicists, perhaps they would say that they're no longer sure how to delimit the local and universal.

Moreover, what these students have learned will affect the local world in which they move because they will carry their evolving sensibilities with them. This claim reflects the fact that in engaging aspects of flamenco they did not abandon their own musical traditions and values even if these were subjected to influence. Their learning was not a matter of all or nothing but was a reconstructive transaction between the new and the familiar.¹¹ Thus their learning will also affect the changing shape and substance of the universal. The students have expanded, deepened, and enriched the human tapestry in ways that matter, however infinitesimal all this may seem. As they consolidate their experience through subsequent encounters, their ever-evolving achievement can itself contribute, in microcosm, to a potential inheritance for others.

These remarks illuminate why the foregoing example instantiates educational cosmopolitanism. To further clarify this viewpoint, let me briefly distinguish the cosmopolitan from other educational approaches while acknowledging considerable overlap between them. As the literature on global, multicultural, and other pluralist curricula has documented, countless moments emerge in every subject —

from biology to physical education — for discussing the diverse origins of ideas, problems, methods, and the like, all of which point to comparable human curiosity and practical interest the world over. However, from a cosmopolitan perspective the fact that poetry derives from communities and individuals everywhere is not the penultimate point of importance. Put another way, the teacher in the example is interested in more than comprehensive coverage of subject matter, cultural recognition, and holistic self-development for individual students. The teacher is not opposed to those important aims, but they do not capture a cosmopolitan outlook either singly or if summed into a composite.

Educational cosmopolitanism reflects an orientation in its own right toward cultural creativity understood in its anthropological, artistic, and individual senses. The teacher does not regard flamenco as solely a local inheritance whose significance is *a priori* contained within a particular frame of meaning. The teacher does not presume that authentic learning from flamenco traditions is *ipso facto* reserved for those who inhabit its natal settings and embody a particular cultural gestalt. The teacher does not pretend that students can (or should) experience the same meaning as its creators and practitioners, much less come to inhabit their way of life. There remains a sacred quality to the cultural creativity reflected in flamenco tradition. But this sense of respect, itself a fundamental cosmopolitan value, does not convert creations into possessions that cannot be genuinely shared with others. A cosmopolitan education encourages a sense of hospitality.¹² People can participate in and welcome other traditions into their lives. They can understand how people far and wide have responded to the world's address. The teacher presumes that students will need time and space to engage new traditions, in part because of the scholastic challenge involved, and in part because the process will bring into the open their own sense of tradition and subject it to formative influence.

In the project of educational cosmopolitanism it is important to engage students with philosophical diversity such as that which may reside in different musical traditions. The teacher here is helping students to imagine flamenco as addressing them with questions about who they are and what they wish to become. The teacher is assisting them to come to grips with what it means to be human as well as how they themselves can help constitute their humanity. The teacher is encouraging students to perceive why all the possible constituents of curriculum form, in principle, their inheritance, to which in due course they can contribute even if it may prove hard to isolate and assess their eventual imprint.

THE COSMOPOLITAN INVITATION

I began this essay by stressing the fact that the cosmopolitan idea ought to be understood as more than reactive to or parasitic upon crisis. As the classroom example shows, cosmopolitanism highlights cultural creativity in its anthropological, artistic, and individual senses. The individual level echoes the notion of cultivating the art of living, and this significance ramifies radially into and from social life. Educational cosmopolitanism foregrounds the wondrous and always challenging nature of the process: wondrous because of how it enriches and deepens peoples' sense of the world, challenging because it requires movement rather than stasis.

The cosmopolitan idea acknowledges the unsettling aspect of education understood as an ongoing process of letting go of previous understandings of world, other, and self. This aspect mirrors the ongoing vulnerability of culture, which in its inability to freeze a pure state must also always let go of ways of doing, thinking, and living however modest the changes may be. The invitation in the cosmopolitan is to reconstruct this process, through education, into a form of critical inheritance and remembrance worldwide. In this outlook, people would come to see that an accomplishment such as that of the Crow cannot be sustained in isolation. If other cultures including larger national cultures do not also perceive themselves as permeable and porous — which they are, and increasingly so — and therefore in need of ongoing creative reconstruction, then it is not clear how long the Crow achievement, or any community's achievement, can endure.

In this regard the cosmopolitan idea points to a worldwide solidarity of transformative preservation, or conservationist transformation. Either paradoxical formulation will do if it broadcasts the fact that people cannot defend much less maintain the integrity of their individuality or that of their community if they ignore the fate of others. Ultimately, neither my community nor my own sense of personhood can survive unless others sustain their integrity as well. Thus I must develop a critical interest in others' efforts. One way to do so is to learn to see beyond my own cultural inheritances and traditions by recognizing the very meaning of inheritance and tradition. Through education, I can come to see their place and manifold value. I can come to see that while other people and I may have our own distinctive inheritances they are not exclusive possessions but are an expression of human hopes and needs from which all can learn. All artfulness — anthropological, artistic, and individual — can in principle help substantiate and sustain the integrity of people anywhere regardless of its origin.

It bears emphasizing that in the classroom example the students and their teacher are learning what it means to be a critical custodian of inheritances of meaning, of purposiveness, and of responsiveness to the world. They are experiencing the value and the wondrousness in acting as cosmopolitan creators. They are learning, constructing, and putting forward cultural resources for themselves and others. They see the value in recognizing flamenco tradition as more than “just another nice sound,” but as educational and edifying in its distinctive response to the experience of being human. This dynamic sensibility can help position them to appreciate that the fate of other people is their fate, too. It can propel them to participate that much more actively and constructively in the affairs of life. As John Dewey posed the matter, in one of his numerous cosmopolitan formulations, “Interest in learning from all the contacts of life is the essential moral interest.”¹³ This interest is moral because it substantiates concern, responsibility, and creative guardianship of creativity itself.

The Cynic philosopher Diogenes (fourth century BCE) is credited with first rendering the cosmopolitan idea when he publicly declared himself a citizen of the world (*kosmopolites*). I think there is something obscure, misleading, and out of

kilter in that proclamation, although I do not mean to imply Diogenes should have said he was only or merely a citizen of a particular polity. Another constituent of a cosmopolitan outlook is a recognition, however inchoate or inarticulate, that there is something amiss, awkward, and untrue to experience for a person to claim, “I am a cosmopolitan,” or to say about his or her community, “We are cosmopolitan.” A cosmopolitan sensibility is not a possession, badge, or settled accomplishment. It is an orientation that depends fundamentally upon the ongoing quality of one’s interactions with others, with the world, and with one’s own self. Like education it is ever incomplete, ever emergent. While the students and their teacher in the music class may never describe themselves as cosmopolitan they point the way to its vitality.

1. Among those who address education are Konrad Gunesch, “Education for Cosmopolitanism? Cosmopolitanism as a Personal Cultural Identity Model For and Within International Education,” *Journal of Research in International Education* 3, no. 3 (2004): 251–75; Derek Heater, *World Citizenship: Cosmopolitan Thinking and its Opponents* (London: Continuum, 2002); and Martha C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997).

2. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, eds., *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); and Catherine Lu, “The One and Many Faces of Cosmopolitanism,” *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (2000): 244–53.

3. Gillian Brock and Harry Brighouse, eds., *The Political Philosophy of Cosmopolitanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and April Carter, *The Political Theory of Global Citizenship* (London: Routledge, 2001).

4. Kevin McDonough, “Cultural Recognition, Cosmopolitanism and Multicultural Education,” in *Philosophy of Education 1997*, ed. Susan Laird (Urbana, Ill.: Philosophy of Education Society, 1997); Kevin McDonough and Walter Feinberg, eds., *Education and Citizenship in Liberal-Democratic Societies: Teaching for Cosmopolitan Values and Collective Identities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); and Marianna Papastephanou, “Globalisation, Globalism, and Cosmopolitanism as an Educational Ideal,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 37, no. 4 (2005): 533–51.

5. M. Victoria Costa, “Cultural Cosmopolitanism and Civic Education,” in *Philosophy of Education 2005*, ed. Ken Howe (Urbana, Ill.: Philosophy of Education Society, 2005).

6. Pauline Kleingeld and Eric Brown, “Cosmopolitanism,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford, Calif.: The Metaphysics Research Lab, 2006), <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/cosmopolitanism/>.

7. Charles W. Bingham, “Who Are the Philosophers of Education?” *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 24 (2005): 1–18; Darryl M. De Marzio, “The Care of the Self: *Alcibiades I*, Socratic Teaching and Ethics Education,” *The Journal of Education* 187, no. 3 (2007): 103–27; Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, ed. Frederic Gros, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Picador, 2005); and Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

8. Epictetus, *Handbook of Epictetus*, trans. Nicholas White (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1983), 33.

9. Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006).

10. For a fuller treatment, see my article “Curriculum and the Idea of a Cosmopolitan Inheritance,” *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 40 (2008), forthcoming.

11. John Dewey, “Knowing and the Known,” in *John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925–1953*, vol. 16, ed. Jo Ann Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991); and Louise M. Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978).

12. Hospitality perceived through a lens of moral and political cosmopolitanism has a long tradition. See Zelia Gregoriou, "Resisting the Pedagogical Domestication of Cosmopolitanism: From Nussbaum's Concentric Circles of Humanity to Derrida's *Aporetic* Ethics of Hospitality," in *Philosophy of Education 2003*, ed. Kal Alston (Urbana, Ill.: Philosophy of Education Society, 2004); and Sharon Todd, "Ambiguities of Cosmopolitanism: Difference, Gender and the Right to Education," in *Education in the Era of Globalization*, eds. Klas Roth and Ilan Gur-Ze'ev (New York: Springer, 2007).

13. John Dewey, "Democracy and Education" (1916), in *John Dewey: The Middle Works, 1899–1924*, vol. 9, ed. Boydston (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), 370.