

Failing to Cosmopolitanize Diogenes in Montréal: A Peripatetic Excursion

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To cosmopolitanize! What an ugly sounding word, coined by two authors who want to reenvision and redefine a future European society freed from the orthodoxy of Europeanization. Cosmopolitanism becomes the “horizon of possibility and reality,” a process of opening up and extending new forms of organizations and participation.¹ David Hansen’s project is similar for education, insofar as he reconceives cosmopolitanism for education, but he does so in a unique way. His strategy is to take us back to the roots of cosmopolitanism in ancient Athens by inviting us to join him on his walk with Diogenes, the first known person who declared himself to be a citizen of the cosmos. Hansen takes us back to beginnings, both of cosmopolitanism and of an educational journey, in order to illuminate through a cosmopolitan prism what he believes are characteristics of relations between teachers, students, and subject. By joining Hansen on his walk, we will end up at a crossroads: a “paradoxical transition” point where we are asked to dwell, if temporarily, in order to recognize “the permanence of change in the world...and the permanence of permeability and porosity to the world’s influence.” It is a space for us to reflect on, and find meaning in, the paradox of an attitude of both openness to the world *and* loyalty to the local, of “leaving *and* remaining at home, of engaging the strange *and* the familiar, of witnessing *and* participating” (emphasis in original). In Deweyan fashion, Professor Hansen challenges us to dissolve the paradox that he considers to be at the center of his interpretation of cosmopolitanism. Furthermore, he wants us, with Diogenes, the social critic, to illuminate the everyday world, and he wants us to cull from Diogenes’ way of life features that are deemed educationally significant. Here he names, among others, personal discipline, integrity, self-directedness, training in endurance and patience, and a sense of being at home in the cosmos.

The task before us, then, is to engage with Professor Hansen philosophically in this journey he sets out before us, to examine his version of cosmopolitanism, and to ascertain whether it holds the educational significance that he claims it has. We can already note that, unlike many contemporary authors, Hansen’s cosmopolitan reflections are not primarily motivated by current world affairs and the effects of globalization, or by an attempt to develop new theories within international ethics. Rather, in line with his earlier concerns for ethics in schools, Hansen wants to explore whether cosmopolitanism “can in fact characterize or orient everyday human relations on the ground”; thus, his turn to beginnings, to classrooms, and to the Athenian agora.

Let me state clearly that I disagree with Professor Hansen on his choice of walking companion. While Diogenes has inspired many thinkers through the ages, from the Stoics to the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment to contemporary human

rights activists, to challenge social norms and hypocrisies — and no doubt he was a man who lived by his words — as an educator, I prefer to take inspiration from the Socrates of the *Apology* any time. As Hansen points out, Diogenes was banned from his native city, and he scorned the citizens of Athens. Yet he did not choose to live as a hermit, removed from society and human contact. And he still was *from* somewhere, even as an outcast. As such, he was not entirely without roots, even as an exile. But rootlessness, exile, laughing stock, and social isolation, in aggregate — are these not the markers of human beings who alarm us as educators nowadays? I am reminded here, in particular, of descriptions of the young men who committed senseless murders of their fellow classmates and teachers. I am not implying that Diogenes presented a physical threat to his environment. But I question whether he or his life represents a suitable example for us educators, even as a starting or vantage point, from which to reflect on our cultural and social predicament, despite the virtues he supposedly embodied.

However, to continue in this line of thought would not do justice to what I believe Hansen is after by invoking Diogenes. I think that Hansen is after Diogenes' vantage point as an outsider, as well as the bearer of the famous lantern who casts a critical light on society. But Diogenes lantern would have thrown a rather narrow, and perhaps dogmatic, light onto our world; his lantern would not have sufficiently illuminated the “hurly-burly” of our culture. This is why Hansen offers a cosmopolitan prism. The prism refracts a perhaps colorless and narrow beam of light into the rainbow colors of our diverse and multifaceted society. Like looking through psychedelic glasses, the prism would indeed cause the world to appear in the “manifold ways of life before our eyes, . . . [including] its appalling narrow-mindedness and cruelty.” This, Hansen recognizes, Diogenes would not have been able to imagine, nor would he have wanted to look through the prism and see the full spectrum of human activities and endeavors, even if such a prism was available. Thus, Hansen's story of invoking a walk with Diogenes is one of failure to convince a declared cosmopolitan (in the original sense) of the worth of this journey. Perhaps Diogenes did not want to be taught to see the world differently? And he rejected the transformational opportunities that a walk to the crossroads might bring about. It is this transformational undertaking that Hansen wants to emphasize in his version of cosmopolitanism. “Like any serious view of education. . . , cosmopolitanism implies transformation in value, practice, or belief.” Diogenes, in Hansen's story, wants to stay the outcast — he does not want to change — and, thus, he refuses to be a cosmopolitan in Hansen's sense.

Of course, this transformational process in itself does not suffice as a characterization of cosmopolitanism. Many authors have talked of education as transformative, such as Jane Roland Martin in her recent book on educational metamorphoses.² One could argue that the prism metaphor that Hansen employs to illuminate his version of cosmopolitanism could hold equally well for a multicultural perspective: the prism perspective transforms the old, unifying, melting pot image into the rainbow colors of our diverse culture(s). So what makes the transformational process cosmopolitan, in Hansen's view? He conceives of it as a moral process of

social criticism, as an art of living or cultivating a way of life, and as a way of moving in the world open-mindedly. Crucial to his perspective is the “ability to dwell meaningfully in a space of often paradoxical transition” of openness to the world and loyalty to the local. He points out that neither such openness nor such loyalty can be a permanent feature of our lives. Rather, it is in figuring out how and when to “express openness to the new, and loyalty to the known,” that marks his particular brand of cosmopolitanism. For Hansen, this is primarily a disposition, an orientation, or a moral sensibility, and it is a practical and educationally meaningful process of relating to others.

Endowed with these dispositions and sensibilities, Hansen’s cosmopolitan dwellers meet at the crossroads. They bring with them traditions and inheritances to which they are loyal, but they are to be open, creative, and innovative in dealing with the unpredictable and ever changing, the familiar and the strange. The crossroads is thus an apt metaphor for the contemporary classroom or school in which individuals and groups with different backgrounds interact. Crossroads are temporary spaces in which we can look back at the familiar places from where we came, and these crossroads point toward uncertain and unknown paths. Such a place might prepare us for this journey into the future by supplying us with nourishment and equipment, such as maps, as well as good wishes and encouragement. We meet strangers there, and we are cautious and curious, vulnerable to the risks we are about to undertake. If this is indeed a correct description of what Hansen imagines to be the cosmopolitan classroom or school, then such a place prepares students not to remain at home, but to become adults that venture beyond. But does this prepare them to become cosmopolitan citizens?

Martha Nussbaum has dealt with this question by addressing her concerns about a simplistic patriotism and growing nationalism. She clearly sees a central role for education in preparing cosmopolitan citizens when she recommends that our primary commitment should be to humanity as a whole: students in U.S. classrooms should see themselves as “above all citizens of a world of human beings.”³ By making this commitment the cornerstone of her cosmopolitan education, Nussbaum stresses that abandoning affiliations with the local or familial is not entailed. Rather, she suggests an image of concentric circles that develop from a central one, encircling first the self, then the family, then the neighborhood, and so forth, progressing through our affiliations out to the largest circle, which encircles humanity. She states:

Our task as citizens of the world will be to “draw the circles somehow to the center”...making all human beings more like our fellow city-dwellers.... We may and should devote special attention to them in education. But we should also work to make all human beings part of our community of dialogue and concern, base our political deliberations on that interlocking commonality, and give the circle that defines our humanity special attention and respect.⁴

Nussbaum argues that we learn more about ourselves by drawing the stranger closer to us.

Here, then, is an example of cosmopolitan education that reveals a missing element in Hansen’s version. It is not that I think that Nussbaum’s vision is without

shortcomings. Indeed, the rest of her book contains criticisms of this vision by sixteen of the best-known political philosophers. Like Diogenes, Hansen's cosmopolitans do not put themselves into the place of the other, or the stranger. Rather, they are permanently peripatetic: they do not return to their roots or homes. And in the Hegelian dialectic fashion, they do not learn more about themselves.

What I think is missing, which reflects perhaps a Deweyan legacy in Hansen's account, is a stronger ethical backbone that shores up Hansen's position as cosmopolitan. Debates have ranged over the universality of value inherent in Nussbaum, and attempts have been made to develop a political theory of human rights and basic human goods that form the horizon against which a practical cosmopolitan education can be developed. Hansen does not want to endorse the universality of values that has marked one end of the debate about cosmopolitan theory. There is certainly the concern of imposing a Eurocentric value on the rest of the world in the declaration that they ought to become cosmopolitans. Kwame Anthony Appiah has elucidated the need to combine a commitment to humanity with a concern for difference that is missing in Nussbaum. His version of cosmopolitanism is "universality plus difference" and he, too, recognizes education as essential to achieving what he calls a "cosmopolitan spirit."⁵ Political theorists have stated that in order to be a cosmopolitan, you still need a nation-state or a polity to which you have a concrete allegiance. And you have to regard others both as equal and as different.

Such cosmopolitan thinking gets us away from either/or thinking to a both/and principle that, I think, Hansen could endorse. It implies that the foreign is not experienced as dangerous or disintegrating, but as enriching: as we learn about others, we learn about ourselves. David Hansen has introduced two metaphors, the prism and the crossroads, as ways of imagining a path of cosmopolitan education. I hope that he will use these two devices to expand our need for more theorizing, and to suggest practices in cosmopolitanizing our students. While I think that cosmopolitanism is an essential process in our world today, becoming a cosmopolitan citizen can only be realized fully as an adult. But this does not mean that we should not start as, and with, children.

1. Ulrich Beck and Edgar Grande, *Cosmopolitan Europe* (Malden, Mass.: Polity, 2007), 5.

2. Jane Roland Martin, *Educational Metamorphoses: Philosophical Reflections on Identity and Culture* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007).

3. Martha Nussbaum, "Cosmopolitanism and Patriotism," in *For Love of Country*, ed. Joshua Cohen (Boston: Beacon, 1996), 13.

4. *Ibid.*, 9.

5. Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Education for Global Citizenship," in *2008 Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, ed. Gary Fenstermacher (New York: Teachers College Press, 2008), 92.