Civic Imagination and Cosmopolitanism

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Existential threats of the 21st century, from pandemics to climate change, call for a recognition of our global civic responsibilities. The conditions of modern society, including increased diversity, global interconnection such that issues resonate across nations, a need for cross-border cooperation to solve issues including climate change, and the importance of cultivating empathy for distant others, mean that "learning to think and act as citizens of the world is no longer a matter of choice; it is a necessity and a moral imperative."[1] Unfortunately, global or cosmopolitan citizenship is often described as ideologically captivating, but practically inconceivable. Scholars argue that the cosmopolitan disposition does not occur naturally, and that human beings tend to develop ties to smaller communities, instead of "an abstract global humanity."[2] However, our dispositions towards nationalism are arguably, equally abstract. As Benedict Anderson observed in his seminal work on nations as "imagined communities," "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them", yet, "the nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship."[3] Further, nations were not inevitable,[4] and as such patriotic kinship emerges from our current epistemological framework, rather than as a core characteristic of the human condition. If we acknowledge that "there are no essential characteristics of humanity, then no possibility of becoming could be blocked from the start."[5] This malleability presents an educational opportunity. In the words of Kwame Anthony Appiah, "The challenge, then, is to take minds and hearts formed over the long millennia of living in local troops and equip them with ideas and institutions that will allow us to live together as the global tribe we have become. And that means shaping hearts and minds for our life together on this planet, beginning, of course, with the education of the young."[6]

In this paper, I discuss civic imagination as a tool for meaning making, and as the ability to conceive of alternative possibilities. Radical imagination has

always been at the center of social justice activism, and yet there is a pervasive skepticism about the imagination. In an age of "the practical, the calculative, and the empirical," the imagination "conjures a sense of the impractical, the emotional and the ideational."[7] Yet, we must contend with the inadequacies of our world as it is; and the limits of solutions that operate within conventional systems. In this paper, I take seriously the idea that "the map toward a new world is in the imagination" and argue that cultivating cosmopolitan civic imagination is an important first step toward building an equitable, inclusive, and resilient global community.[8]

I start by discussing conceptualisations of the civic imagination, and how this literature illuminates its two facets—as a tool for meaning-making and as a resource for resource for world-building. I then introduce Amy Kind's framework of "imagining within constraints" and consider what this might mean for a pedagogy of civic imagination. From there, I argue that cosmopolitanism as a moral framework and a corrective virtue provides an effective set of such constraints, to guide and ground the civic imagination.

CIVIC IMAGINATION

Drawing on C. Wright Mills concept of the "sociological imagination," the authors of *The Civic Imagination* conceptualize the civic imagination as "people's *theories of civic life*" or "the cognitive roadmaps, moral compasses, and guides that shape participation and motivate action."[9] The term "civic" denotes interest in collective life, while "imagination" refers to a capacity for creative future-oriented thinking. Fusing together these concepts helps us think more clearly about the ways in which people understand their place in the world, diagnose social issues, envision aspirations for their communities, and act (or not) to realize these visions. Civic imagination(s) are "more than just diagnostic tools,"[10] and guide people's perceptions of, aspirations for, and actions within democratic societies. Understanding civic imaginations is important because "the capacity for people to act publicly in a democracy is predicated on their ability to imagine. As people engage with each other in purposive ways, they create and recreate worlds in words and with deeds that are, in part, imagined

… The act of imagining takes place at the nexus between what exists and what we desire to exist."[11]

"The Civic Imagination Project" at the University of Southern California is based on these principles. Imagination is seen as the fount of hope—a necessary antidote to the destruction and dejection that seems to characterize much of our world today. Their definition of the civic imagination focuses on its creative and normative elements: "(W)e define *civic imagination* as the capacity to imagine alternatives to current cultural, social, political, or economic conditions; one cannot change the world without imagining what a better world might look like."[12] While Baiocchi et al.'s conception of the civic imagination illuminates the role of the imagination in meaning-making; Jenkins et al. highlight the imagination's potential for world-building.

These two views of imagination get to the heart of a core philosophical tension—on the one hand, the imagination may be *instructive (*that is, we can use it to learn more about reality); on the other, it may be *transcendent (*that is, we can release it from reality to explore alternatives).[13] While these could be considered a logical contradiction, I believe that it is precisely this duality that makes the imagination such a valuable cognitive resource. Balancing these two is delicate—but when possible, enables a deeper understanding of the world and a richer appreciation of its possibilities. As Ronald Barnett writes in his work on re-imagining the university, exercising the imagination "is tantamount to a plea to see the world … in this more interesting and fulfilling way rather than that other way with its deficiencies; to see in this radical way rather than the immediately limiting way."[14]

To this end, philosopher Amy Kind advocates for a framework of *imagining within constraints.* Kind invokes exemplars of imagination—Nikola Tesla and Temple Grandin—arguing that their breakthroughs in electrical engineering and animal science were driven by acts of imagination. However, the most significant feature of their imaginings was not "their extraordinary ability to let their imagination run wild, but rather their extraordinary ability to keep their imagination under control."[15] While not all imaginings should be considered

epistemically valuable, when constrained in specific ways, Kind believes that the imagination represents "an epistemic procedure that is much more akin to scientific experimentation than it is to mere flights of fancy."[16] As such, the imagination, like any other cognitive capability can be honed. Building on this view of imagination, Kind and Badura argue that "imagination is best thought of within a framework that treats it as a skill. Constraint-setting and obeying constraints are activities that one can be better or worse at, and imagining is correspondingly an activity that one can be better or worse at."[17]

How does "imagining within constraints" translate to a pedagogy of civic imagination? First, educators must be willing to actively cultivate imaginations, even when these border on the fantastic. The imagination is commonly dismissed as entirely aesthetic or affective, and removed from reason—"a liability rather than a resource to be cultivated."[18] But an exclusive focus on what exists can result in what Stephen Duncombe terms "the tyranny of the possible,"[19] or a tendency to restrict ourselves to the status quo out of fear that an alternative is impossible. Instead, drawing on principles of utopianism, students should be invited to eschew realism and actively engage with fantasy. Imagining futures is seen as an active process, and as the first step toward building more inclusive societies. These utopias are "provocations" and not "blueprints."[20] The aim is not to chart a new society that mirrors these fantasies, but to reflect on shared values, and incite conversations about future possibilities.

Imagining futures is as an active process, and as the first step toward building more inclusive societies. However, cultivating the imagination is not a panacea, especially as the power of the imagination can just as easily be corrupted. Jenkins et al. remind us that "(P)ropaganda for the Third Reich—a nostalgic yet transformative vision of the "perfect" racialized society—embodies this dark size of the civic imagination."[21] To serve moral ends, imagination must be grounded in value norms.[22] Further, drawing from Paulo Freire's insight that we must understand current systems to transcend them; imagination as a tool for social justice requires intertwining escapism with critique. In the next section of the paper, I will argue that cosmopolitanism—as a moral framework and a

corrective disposition provides an important grounding for developing ethical and productive civic imaginations. By intertwining these two concepts—cosmopolitanism and civic imagination, educators can support students in challenging existing social structures and engaging with the possibilities of still unknown futures.

COSMOPOLITANISM

COSMOPOLITANISM (AS A MORAL FRAMEWORK)

As a moral framework, cosmopolitanism centers universal humanity over national, racial, ethnic, or other affiliations. The intention is not to erase differences or particularities, but to uphold a more fundamental commonality. As Appiah writes: "(T)o insist on universality is only to say that every human being has certain minimum entitlements—many of them expressed in the vocabulary of human rights; and that it is also the obligation of every human being to do his or her fair share in making sure that everybody gets what they are entitled to."[23]

Cosmopolitanism civic education can have several important educational outcomes. Firstly, cosmopolitanism enables a deeper understanding of humanity by forcing students to consider a diversity of ways of living. For example, students are afforded a deeper understanding of Western practices of child rearing, by understanding that family structures in other countries diverge wildly, and the values that influence this diversity. In addition, learning about multiple contexts enables greater self-reflection of one's own context. Secondly, modern problems like environmental sustainability have global impact and require global cooperation. Third, it is essential to recognize each being's moral obligation toward other living beings.[24] Our shared humanity requires a commitment to universal rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. These values should undergird any creative acts of world-building.

COSMOPOLITANISM (AS A CORRECTIVE VIRTUE)

Secondly, drawing on M. Victoria Costa's position—that "cosmopolitanism is usefully understood as a corrective disposition that combats certain

attitudes towards entities such as one's country or culture,"[25] I argue that integrating cosmopolitanism into civic education can serve as a corrective virtue to the deficiencies of predominant models of civic education, that focus on inculcating patriotic attachment as the basis for formal national membership. It is important to note that for cosmopolitanism to function as a corrective virtue, it is only necessary "that the relevant attitudes *often* facilitate injustice and other forms of morally disrespectful behavior."[26] Thus, the following analysis of the shortcomings and deficiencies of patriotic education need not be—and likely will not—be applicable in all cases. The possibility of patriotic civic education functioning to facilitate injustice in some cases is enough for cosmopolitanism to serve as a useful and relevant corrective.

As a corrective value, a cosmopolitan civic education may avoid the pitfalls of "sentimental civic education" that over-emphasises a positive view of national history, in order to cultivate patriotic loyalty and emotional attachment.[27] Obscuring the more shameful elements that do not with align with this narrative has manifold consequences. Students who are not from a dominant majority and have been the objects of oppression may experience "curricular erasure" when "(t)extbooks, pedagogies, and learning standards" are "distant from or at odds with students' racial and cultural identities and experiences."[28] When this is compounded by a lack of attention to addressing the root causes of the systemic oppression and violence that they face daily, students may experience further alienation and distrust in social institutions, leading to a disengagement in civic life.

Attempts to challenge entrenched but white-washed narratives are often met with high levels of resistance and even violence, further marginalizing the voices of those who do not see themselves represented in historic narratives. This coheres with a paradigm of patriotic civic education: "in sentimental citizenship education, any attempt to raise such issues is condemned as unpatriotic, and is responded by anger against those who 'shame the nation,' as if 'the maintenance of a guilt-free national story' (Fortier 2005, p.506) will foreclose any responsibility for the past."[29]

Further, the entanglement of self-understanding with a specific view

of the nation can increase resistance to accepting alternative narratives of the past—especially when this fundamentally challenges what one has come to believe both about their history and ancestry, and its influence on their own positions in modern society. In an interview with Ezra Klein, Nikole Hannah-Jones and Ta-Nehisi Coates[30] reflect on the backlash to "the 1619 project" – a multimedia educational project that "illuminates the legacy of slavery in the contemporary United States, and highlights the contribution of Black Americans to every aspect of American society."[31] Responding to Klein's question about why the 1619 project has inspired such backlash, Hannah-Jones reflects on the persistent and pervasive commitment across white America to a "mythology of American exceptionalism and greatness."[32] The 1619 project fundamentally challenged that, by re-orienting American history around the creation and maintenance of slavery by white people; and around Black resistance, rather than white heroism, as the foundation of modern democracy. The stories Hannah-Jones tells threaten the very roots of how a vast majority of Americans have come to understand their own identities.

Relatedly, framing national histories as self-contained obscures the far-reaching consequences of colonialism, white supremacy, and slavery—and the ways in which these have shaped many of our modern realities—including immigration, climate change, global economic systems, terrorism, and pandemics. Lowe explores "the often obscure connections between the emergence of European liberalism, settler colonialism in the Americas, the transatlantic slave trade, and the East Indies and China trades in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century"[33] to argue that the social inequalities of our time are a legacy of these processes through which "the human" is freed by liberal forms, while other subjects, practices and geographies are placed at a distance from "the human."[34] Developing a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the conditions of modern society requires reading across, and searching for the relationships between these often-distinct narratives, "precisely implicating one set of preoccupations in and with another."[35] A cosmopolitanism lens calls for and justifies such an inter-related approach to studying the past.

Finally, civic education that aims to cultivate pride in the nation, does

not create opportunities to critique the formation of modern nation states as sources of oppression in themselves. The current nation-state model has become so ubiquitous as to seem inevitable, but this conceals the relative modernity of the national citizen, and the ways in which this frame interrupts and obscures other forms of governance and community. Rensink writes:

> Weighing the short tenure of Euro-Americans on the continent with that of Native peoples, it is clear that these geopolitical constructs were not inevitable. Blindly accepting this model overlooks Native resistance, historical and contemporary, against the imposition of a nation-state's identity upon them. Maps matter. Comparing them over time we can discover empire-building, identity formation, and identity imposition. We must interrogate, or at least acknowledge, suppositions about national identity and borders.[36]

The creation of modern states and accompanying rights to citizenship formalized structural inclusion; yet dominant paradigms of civic education, at least in the US fail to interrogate the ways in which "race, class, and gender have operated as citizenship boundaries" mediating access to the nation state.[37] No discussion of the rights and responsibilities of citizens can be complete without recognizing "how others have been systematically marginalized and recognized as 'stranger than other others, as border objects that have been incorporated and then expelled from the ideal of the community."[38] De-centering national citizenship within a cosmopolitan paradigm can challenge students to question, de-construct, and re-imagine the status quo, in ways that uphold the fundamentality of universal human rights.

This paper begins with the claim that the crises we face require developing globally oriented civic imaginations. However, recognizing that entirely unfettered imaginations can be both dangerous and unproductive, I suggest that constraining the imagination in the moral frameworks of cosmopolitanism provide a critical ethical grounding. As a corrective virtue, the integration of a cosmopolitan lens into civic education can combat certain harmful tendencies of patriotic education, including a tendency to over-emphasize a positive view

of national history, resist alternative narratives, and frame national histories as isolated from global structures and forces. Instead, a cosmopolitan paradigm urges students to reckon with global and historical inequities of power and understand modern systems in light of these ongoing oppressions. In this vein, I find Andreotti's reminder that we must integrate critical literacy into global citizenship education, to support learners in understanding how "power, voice and difference" shape the relationship between the Global North and South, insightful and important. [39] In the final section of my paper, I address concerns about encouraging the development of cosmopolitan civic responsibility and clarify the kind of cosmopolitanism I am advocating.

CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

Defenders of patriotism argue that strong feelings of identification with a national political community motivate civic action, and "create shared bonds of affection and solidarity that aid in the implementation of policies of distributive justice."[40] The absence of civic education that fosters emotional attachment and patriotic loyalty, they argue, may lead to civic disengagement, disinvestment in collective benefits, and increased social discord. Further, one may argue that patriotic civic education does not require a close-minded sentimentality and can include both a celebration of national past and opportunities for clear sighted evaluation and critique. A love for country may motivate justice-minded patriots to redress past offenses, for the sake of a stronger and more equitable nation in the future.

In response to the first critique, that patriotism drives collective welfare, Costa points out that a range of identifications drive civic action, and it isn't clear that national identification, rather than for example, racial, gendered, or ideological identification, is the strongest or most salient motivator. Additionally, there is there is no strong empirical evidence that countries with widespread patriotism are high functioning welfare states; let alone that it is patriotism results in these conditions.

With regards to education, Costa notes that "a loyalty oriented by a concern for justice presupposes that the object of loyalty has morally valuable

features. As a result, there is a significant tension between loving one's country deeply and appreciating that it has serious moral flaws."[41] While patriotism may allow for a degree of criticality, I agree with Costa that the two values, patriotic devotion and objective critique, are in tension, such that attempts to reach a balance will always be tenuous and run the risk of veering in one direction. It is possible that the discovery of past injustices will serve as motivation in the way described above, yet it seems equally likely that these discoveries may lead to disillusion with patriotic affiliation.

Similarly, Brighouse accepts Callan's distinction between "idolatrous and morally apt patriotism"; but argues that even the morally apt variant of patriotism may restrict both domestic and international achievement.[42] In relation to domestic justice, his concerns regard the feasibility of constructing a morally apt patriotism without it becoming idolatrous. Globally, he sees the kind of partiality to national compatriots that is created by patriotism as a barrier to cosmopolitan justice, especially among citizens of rich nations. Placing the burden of proof on advocates of patriotism, Brighouse concludes: "The challenge for the patriot is to give a theory of legitimate patriotic partiality, and to show that whatever barriers such an account is likely to present to the achievement of global justice independently conceived constitute a cost worth bearing, and could be made acceptable in some sense to those who will be worse off as a result of the exercise of the obligations and prerogatives generated by the theory."[43] Brighouse's conclusion suggests that patriotism is justifiable only as a net positive—both for one's compatriots and those who fall outside the bounds of that obligation. Given the uneven distribution of resources and life prospects across the globe, it seems highly unlikely that patriotic partiality, especially as Brighouse notes, within the most advantaged states, can effectively serve global justice.

Regardless, advocating for cosmopolitanism does not require entirely abandoning the patriotic position. Though Nussbaum's theory of the cosmopolitan argues for a global community whose "allegiance is to the worldwide community of human beings," she pictures citizenship as a series of concentric circles.[44] The first, tightest circle inscribes the self, the next circles contain

one's family and immediate community, and then one's fellow city-dwellers, and countrymen. With the self at the center, these concentric rings spread outwards, gradually expanding the groups included within them. The final circle inscribes the whole of humanity. Nussbaum is not suggesting that cosmopolitan citizens renounce their obligations to the circles closest to them, however she is arguing that the final circle receive greater attention and respect than is traditionally accorded. Similarly, Hansen's "ground up" cosmopolitanism inextricably ties together the local and the global: "cosmopolitanism on the ground does not contrast with the local but can only find expression there … In this outlook, it is impossible to be cosmopolitan without a sense of the local. At the same time, it is impossible to be "local" as contrasted with being parochial or close-minded, without a cosmopolitan orientation."[45] Likewise, I want to suggest an under-standing of cosmopolitanism that is grounded in moral universalism, but allows for particular partialities, including towards one's compatriots, when these are in service of universal humanity. Patriotic responsibilities are understood as one piece of a larger whole.

Though discussions of cosmopolitanism usually focus on the feasibility and implications of its most extensive form—a global community that includes all human beings, cosmopolitanism is equally relevant at a micro level. The fundamental tenets of cosmopolitanism as a virtue—the emphasis on shared humanity—"means that one's allegiance to any type of institution (local, na-tional, or global) will be contingent on its being considered beneficial overall."[46] This is especially relevant in the face of contemporary popularist movements across the world that fracture national unity and may lead critics to a renewed skepticism of the undesirability and impossibility of attempting to forge bonds of kinship on a larger scale. Like Costa, Nussbaum believes that particularism arises from the same instincts as nationalism—both are essentially a politics of difference. Cosmopolitanism instead, "asks us to give our first allegiance to that which is morally good—and that which, being good, I can commend as such to all human beings."[47]

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I discussed the civic imagination as an important resource

for generating solutions to problems that transcend traditional and parochial solutions. Guided by philosophical and empirical research into the nature of imagination that suggests that it is most effective when it is constrained, I propose that cosmopolitanism can provide an important ethical framework to motivate and structure the civic imagination. Cosmopolitanism can constrain the imagination in two ways: (1) within an ethical framework that upholds universal humanity; and (2) as a reckoning with world history and the evolution of the systems and structures that we know today. In the other direction, returning to the feasibility concern that I started with, developing civic imagination may help us embrace new possibilities for globally oriented citizenship, and envision ways to integrate cosmopolitanism into our daily lives. Grounded in these empirical and normative constraints, the imagination can "open up a gap, a gulf or even a chasm between what is and what might be."[48] and create opportunities to envision alternative possibilities –"feasible utopias"[49] for civic kinship, community and accountability.

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