

Cultural Cosmopolitanism and Civic Education

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In the last fifteen years, there has been a renewed interest among philosophers in exploring cosmopolitan ideals. In part, this is a response to theories that stress the value of a sense of belonging and the role of deep attachments to a national community as a source of moral and political obligations. Cosmopolitan views have a number of educational implications that are worth discussing, since they provide valuable insights relevant to the design of policy in an increasingly interconnected world. In general terms, cosmopolitanism can be described as a form of universalism that builds on the metaphor that all human beings are “citizens of the world.” As Pauline Kleingeld has pointed out, cosmopolitans agree that “all human beings share certain essential features that unite them or should unite them in a global order that transcends national borders.”¹ But beyond this very general description, there does not seem to be a precise set of normative claims that unify all cosmopolitan positions. Some cosmopolitans are concerned with defending the view that all human beings belong to the same moral community, which grounds obligations of justice that transcend national origins. Others are interested in supporting the creation and development of common political or juridical institutions that would unite all human beings in a single political or juridical order. Still others cherish the existence of a rich variety of cultural forms in the world, seeing them as a common heritage for all humanity.

As the previous remarks suggest, there are significant differences among the views that have been labeled “cosmopolitan.” It is useful to keep these differences in mind, because different cosmopolitan perspectives may lead to significantly different educational proposals. Moreover, authors who are committed to cosmopolitan claims of one sort do not necessarily endorse others. For instance, Martha Nussbaum has written primarily on the moral and cultural strands of cosmopolitanism;² David Held has defended a proposal of “cosmopolitan governance” that aims at the reform and democratization of political and legal structures;³ and Jeremy Waldron has developed a strand of cultural cosmopolitanism that incorporates reflections on the structure of norms regulating the relationships among different societies.⁴

Ignoring the differences among cosmopolitan claims can easily lead to misplaced criticisms of such views. The most common misplaced criticism against cosmopolitan positions is that they are not viable because there currently is no world-state or because there could not be one.⁵ This kind of criticism assumes that all cosmopolitans are committed to some sort of political proposal for world government. But the metaphor that we are all “citizens of the world” should not be taken so literally. Nor, of course, should it be discarded in advance without further consideration. The metaphor of world citizenship has proved to be quite fruitful and philosophers have been using it for hundreds of years.⁶

The present essay focuses on Jeremy Waldron's provocative account of cultural cosmopolitanism. Waldron's views are particularly interesting because they pose a significant challenge to the theoretical bases of a number of influential communitarian, liberal nationalist, and multicultural educational proposals.⁷ Building on Waldron's educational remarks, this essay explores two different interpretations of cultural cosmopolitanism and the corresponding ways of incorporating cultural cosmopolitanism into positive proposals for civic education. It also discusses whether a proposal for civic education with cosmopolitan aspirations can be defended as adequate for contemporary liberal-democratic societies.

COSMOPOLITANISM AND CULTURAL BELONGING

Jeremy Waldron's version of cultural cosmopolitanism begins with the claim that human beings have the capacity to absorb a wide variety of cultural materials in order to develop their own views regarding what is valuable to pursue in life. This implies, among other things, that it is possible to construct one's identity in a way that is not dependent on any specific bounded set of cultural resources. Cultural cosmopolitanism sees individuals as capable of having a coherent sense of self and a fulfilling life without relying exclusively on the framework provided by the culture of one single community. Here "community" is to be understood as "a particular people sharing a heritage of custom, ritual, and way of life that is in some real or imagined sense immemorial, being referred back to a shared history and shared provenance or homeland."⁸

Waldron illustrates the possibility of a successful cosmopolitan way of "being in the world" with Salman Rushdie's remarks in defense of his book, *The Satanic Verses*:

If *The Satanic Verses* is anything, it is a migrant's-eye view of the world. It is written from the very experience of uprooting, disjuncture and metamorphosis (slow or rapid, painful or pleasurable) that is the migrant condition, and from which, I believe, can be derived a metaphor for all humanity.

Standing at the centre of the novel is a group of characters most of whom are British Muslims, or not particularly religious persons of Muslim background, struggling with just the sort of great problems that have arisen to surround the book, problems of hybridization and ghettoization, of reconciling the old and the new. Those who oppose the novel most vociferously today are of the opinion that intermingling with a different culture will weaken and ruin their own. I am of the opposite opinion. *The Satanic Verses* celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, and the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure. *Mélange*, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is *how newness enters the world*.⁹

According to Waldron, the lives of the migrants described by Rushdie could be as rich, satisfactory, creative, and happy as the lives of anybody else.¹⁰ Moreover, Waldron thinks that the cosmopolitan lifestyle is open not only to those who migrate or travel with frequency, but also to anybody who enjoys exploring the kaleidoscope of cultural materials present in modern societies. Thus, a cosmopolitan is someone who refuses to identify herself with her location, ancestry, citizenship, or mother tongue. A cosmopolitan is somebody who is aware of living in a mixed-up world and of having a mixed-up self.¹¹

If it is possible for people to find the cosmopolitan life-style satisfactory, then, according to Waldron, a central assumption of communitarianism, liberal nationalism, and versions of multiculturalism that aim at the recognition of cultural identities is called into question.¹² This is the assumption that the meaning, integrity, and coherence of an individual's life essentially depends on immersion in the shared way of life or culture of one single community to which he or she belongs. Thus, the existence of the cosmopolitan alternative challenges the assumption that there is a basic human need for a unified cultural framework. This insight undermines claims to a right to culture, and to cultural recognition, in so far as these claims are based on such a presumed need.¹³

However, Waldron's criticism runs deeper. He thinks that there is a false starting point in approaches that tie an individual's capacity for self-fulfillment to the culture of a particular community, because such approaches tend to work with a rather distorted, static, and purist picture of cultures in the first place. Waldron defines "culture" as a set of practices and traditions associated with a community at the level of an ethnos, a people, or a nation. He writes, "The culture of a community is a way of doing things, particularly the things that are done *together*, throughout the whole course of human life: language, governance, religious rituals, rites of passage, family structures, material production and decoration, economy, science, warfare, and the sharing of a sense of history."¹⁴ As living phenomena, Waldron argues, cultures are always changing. Generations pass and bring with them new ways of doing things. Moreover, human groups have many forms of contact with other groups, by means of such things as trade, conquests, or migrations, leading to mutual influence and transformation. According to this argument, there have never been pure cultures, but only a mingling and *mélange* of cultural artifacts since history began.¹⁵

Taking Waldron's claims one step further, one might even object to an account of cultures as constituted by sets of practices and rituals that reflect the shared way of life of a community, especially if the community is the size of a nation. Rather, cultures may well be seen as composed of a set of shared symbols that do not necessarily carry with them any shared, comprehensive meaning. Defining cultures as all-encompassing phenomena suggests that there is something like *the* culture of a community, the "official" or true version. But James Johnson has argued on the basis of the work of a number of anthropologists that philosophers should cut the scope of what is considered culture down to size, and that this allows for a more fruitful discussion of the problems posed by demands for cultural recognition and preservation. He proposes to understand cultures as consisting of symbols and practices that may be assigned quite different meanings by different individuals.¹⁶ One clear advantage of this approach is that there may be common symbols and practices among members of different groups, and these symbols and practices could be the subject of critical reflection in schools. Johnson's approach allows us to deal with this without tracing their origin to one particular community and without requiring that these symbols and practices have any univocal meaning for their users. In fact, not even the members of the same group can be expected to interpret their

traditional practices in the same way. This approach makes cultural phenomena more open to different understandings and allows them more easily to be the subject of political debate and criticism.¹⁷

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF
CULTURAL COSMOPOLITANISM FOR CIVIC EDUCATION?

Samuel Scheffler has pointed out that there are two very different kinds of conclusions Waldron seems to suggest from the existence of cosmopolitan life-styles of cultural experimentation and mingling as an alternative to traditionalist life-styles.¹⁸ On the one hand, in a moderate vein, Waldron seems to defend the cosmopolitan life-style as one valid alternative among others that competes with other more traditional and less adventurous ways of life. On the other hand, Waldron sometimes suggests the much stronger claim that the cosmopolitan life-style, free from deep ties to one single community and culture, and oriented toward cultural experimentation, is the only authentic response to the modern world in which we live.¹⁹ This last suggestion is naturally understood in a normative way, but it can also be understood as involving the claim that the cosmopolitan life-style is the only life-style that has any long-term viability, because personal efforts to maintain a culture in its traditional form are doomed to failure.

If one considers the two interpretations as primarily factual statements about the existence and viability of cosmopolitan and traditionalist ways of life, the moderate version is much more plausible. Without being trivial, moderate cosmopolitanism reminds us of the existence of viable cosmopolitan life-styles. In contrast, the strong version seems clearly false, because in the actual world there are many ways of living and constructing one's identity, and some of them are highly dependent on one particular set of fairly stable cultural practices and traditions. For example, the existence of Orthodox Jewish communities in the midst of cities like New York testifies to the viability of traditionalist alternatives, even when preserving this way of life requires a considerable effort to transmit values to new generations and to keep the community in a state of relative isolation from the rest of society.²⁰ However, the moderate and strong versions of cultural cosmopolitanism do not involve only factual claims. Rather, they involve an evaluation of the attitudes, preferences, and ways of life of different people in the context of a world in which cultural phenomena are constantly being produced, exchanged, and modified. While the moderate claim holds that a cosmopolitan life-style may be valuable and satisfactory, the strong claim says that it is the only adequate option for the modern world. Again, while the moderate claim is very plausible, the strong claim is quite controversial. The strong claim does not seem to be justifiable without appeal to a comprehensive view of what makes a life good that some reasonable people could reject.²¹ A significant number of reasonable people find a life with a traditionalist orientation fulfilling: they think it contains everything that makes a life valuable, and they make an effort to transmit these values to their children. This life-style deserves to be respected as much — and to be considered as authentic when it is lived “from the inside” — as the one devoted to cultural experimentation. Because strong cultural cosmopolitanism denies the value of traditional life-styles, it does not offer

a promising strategy in arguing for educational programs with a cosmopolitan flavor.²²

One might try to argue in support of the strong version of cultural cosmopolitanism by pointing out that notions like “cultural integrity” or “preservation of a national culture” are misleading because they lead us to ignore the fact that cultures have always been mixed up and changeable. The cosmopolitan attitude of openness to change is, therefore, the only authentic or adequate attitude, because it is the only one consciously aware of the inevitability of hybridization and transformation and does not rely on myths of cultural purity and integrity. However, this argument is not sufficient to demonstrate the superiority of cosmopolitan ways of life. After all, those who try to perpetuate the culture and traditions of a particular community might be willing to admit the inevitability of change, and might still explain their own attitudes as an effort to preserve the values and practices that they consider central to the tradition they identify with. If some degree of change seems unavoidable, they might try to reinterpret and modify their practices to adapt them to new circumstances while keeping what they take to be the core of their tradition.²³ My point is that mere awareness of change and cultural mixture need not necessarily lead one to the adoption of cosmopolitan attitudes that celebrate them, nor does it provide sufficient justification by itself for assigning schools the task of cultivating in students the disposition to engage in cultural exploration.

When Waldron discusses the educational recommendations that follow from his cosmopolitan account, he does not go so far as to propose teaching attitudes of cultural experimentation or a tendency towards the creative mixing of cultural fragments in Rushdie’s style.²⁴ Given the difficulties I have pointed out regarding the justification of strong cultural cosmopolitanism, no active endorsement or cultivation of the attitudes characteristic of the cosmopolitan life-style in schools will be a legitimate element of civic education for pluralistic, multicultural, and democratic societies. This is because strong cultural cosmopolitanism fails to acknowledge and respect the value of ways of life that can be freely endorsed by some reasonable citizens. Instead, it declares them “inauthentic.”

Waldron’s own educational suggestions are moderate, but still critical of those communitarians, nationalists, and multiculturalists who adopt a simplified view of cultural identity. Waldron begins by contrasting two models for conceptualizing individuals’ cultural identities in multicultural societies. According to the first model, the “one-person-one-culture” model, each person builds her own identity by relying on the unique and relatively homogeneous culture of the group to which she belongs. According to the second model, the “one-person-many-fragments” model, each person builds her identity by using materials from the wider society in which she lives. This second model implies that each person’s sense of identity inevitably includes a multiplicity of heterogeneous cultural fragments that superpose and overlap, even when there may be one culture that has a predominant influence.

It is the first model of “one-person-one-culture” that is implicitly endorsed in several programs of multicultural education. The problem with this model, according

to Waldron, is that it leads us to interpret our obligation to respect students in terms of the requirement of adopting an attitude of (acritical) reverence for the culture that is supposed to be the basis of their identities. This approach is too simplistic because it assigns cultural identity on the basis of national or ethnic belonging, and does not consider the possibility of multiple cultural identifications. It also involves the risk of serious misrecognition of students' identities and also of oppressing them by assigning them an identity as if they were mere "products" of their culture.²⁵ Although the model aims at developing positive attitudes towards people who are perceived as having different cultural identities, it risks falling into the trap of stereotyping the members of minority groups.

Rob Reich's examination of mainstream multicultural education literature suggests important similarities between the ideal model of "one-person-one-culture" and the so-called "culturally congruent" pedagogy. This pedagogical approach is motivated by an interest in developing more effective teaching methods. Proponents of culturally responsive teaching claim that cultural differences affect students' cognition, leading to distinct ethnoracial learning styles. Because of this, they recommend that teachers adjust their instructional strategies to the cultural learning styles of students. But, as Reich notes, the idea that students have ethnoracial learning styles, and that they need cultural congruity in order to learn more effectively, assumes that students have some sort of fixed cultural identity. Because this approach overlooks the possibility of multiple cultural identifications, it poses the risk of leading to a rigid understanding of students' cultural identities, which might fail to respect the students' own sense of cultural affiliation or to serve their educational needs.²⁶

In contrast, the model of "one-person-many-fragments" recommends that we pay attention to the wider framework of social and cultural conditions in which each student builds his or her own identity. This model provides a richer and more adequate interpretation of what it means to respect students. It is not opposed to the idea that we should teach about cultural-based attitudes and values. But, in my view, it does require that teachers point out the existence of disagreements over the meanings of traditional practices and norms, as well as the existence of a range of degrees of personal identification with them. Because this model accepts that heterogeneous cultural influences may become meaningful elements in a student's sense of identity, it is more open to the project of finding or building a common set of norms that can be widely shared by people with (predominantly) different cultural backgrounds. It also makes room for the defense of norms that can be shared by members of different societies, since the possibility of communicating, understanding, and coming to share norms does not end at the borders of nation-states.

An honest examination of the changing nature of cultural phenomena and of the flexible relationship between cultural phenomena and personal identity may well undermine the attractions of traditional ways of life. Given this potential effect on students, moderate cultural cosmopolitanism may seem, at first sight, to be as objectionable as strong cultural cosmopolitanism. Their educational implications will share certain features. For instance, both will favor teaching students about the

variety of cultural phenomena present in their local communities and about the historical events that led different groups to immigrate, bringing with them new religious views, architectural styles, foods, and other sorts of cultural artifacts and customs.²⁷ Exploring the sources of cultural diversity and the relationships that exist between people living in different communities will tend to undermine a belief in the myth of pure cultures. So too will an exploration of the ways in which societies in the past have had to deal with unavoidable cultural diversity. This may indirectly promote students' critical reflection on cultural practices and lead some students to challenge their families' cultured-based values and attitudes. But moderate cosmopolitanism does not aim to defend the cosmopolitan life-style as the most valuable, or to question students' adherence to traditionally-oriented ways of life (as long as they are consistent with mutual respect). The main reason in favor of introducing moderate cultural cosmopolitanism into civic education is that it serves the educational goals of promoting better knowledge of cultural phenomena and supporting tolerance, respect, and understanding among students.

Even if there is some overlap in educational recommendations, moderate and strong cultural cosmopolitanism are significantly different in the justifications that can be offered in their defense. Moderate cultural cosmopolitanism can be defended on the basis of public reasons, such as the need to eliminate prejudices and to promote cooperation and mutual respect. In contrast, strong cultural cosmopolitanism is supported by the view that certain life-styles that involve active exploration of the rich variety of cultural materials available in the world are more valuable than other, less adventurous, and more traditionally-oriented life-styles. Strong cultural cosmopolitanism is not compatible with teaching mutual respect for reasonable people and their ways of life. Although some reasonable citizens may find the cosmopolitan life-style highly appealing (the author of this essay certainly does), others may not. As a matter of public policy, the attractiveness of the cosmopolitan life-style does not provide any compelling reason to give it priority over others.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This essay has focused on the main aspects of Waldron's cultural cosmopolitanism, which represents a significant challenge to some important assumptions about cultural phenomena that are shared by influential versions of nationalism, communitarianism, and multiculturalism. After distinguishing between a moderate and a strong interpretation of Waldron's account, this essay briefly explores their educational implications. Without denying that moderate and strong cultural cosmopolitanism may overlap in some of their educational recommendations, I have argued that only the moderate version of cultural cosmopolitanism provides an attractive foundation for a cosmopolitan oriented civic education in democratic societies. For only such a version can be justified in terms of the public goals of promoting a deeper understanding of the nature of cultural phenomena and of cultivating mutual respect among students. Moreover, teaching moderate cultural cosmopolitanism may help students gain a better perspective on the cultural practices of citizens of foreign countries. This version of cosmopolitanism suggests that we should not focus so much on the differences between "cultures" but rather

on the similarities, interconnections, and exchanges that take place between cultural phenomena all over the world.

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1. Pauline Kleingeld, "Six Varieties of Cosmopolitanism in Late Eighteenth-Century Germany," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60, no. 3 (1999): 505.
 2. Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997); and Martha Nussbaum, "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism," in *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*, ed. Joshua Cohen (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 2–17.
 3. David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance* (London: Polity Press, 1995).
 4. Jeremy Waldron, "Minority Cultures and the Cosmopolitan Alternative," *University of Michigan Journal of Law Reform* 25, no. 3 (1992): 751–793; Jeremy Waldron, "Multiculturalism and M \acute{e} lange," in *Public Education in a Multicultural Society: Policy, Theory, Critique*, ed. Robert Fullinwider (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 90–118; Jeremy Waldron, "What Is Cosmopolitanism?" *Journal of Political Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (2000): 227–243; and Jeremy Waldron, "Teaching Cosmopolitan Right," in *Education and Citizenship in Liberal-Democratic Societies: Teaching for Cosmopolitan Values and Collective Identities*, ed. Kevin McDonough and Walter Feinberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 23–55.
 5. See the following essays in *For Love of Country*, ed. Cohen: Amy Gutmann, "Democratic Citizenship," 68; Gertrude Himmelfarb, "The Illusions of Cosmopolitanism," 74; and Michael McConnell, "Don't Neglect the Little Platoons," 81.
 6. For a response to criticisms of the notion of "world citizenship," see Waldron, "Teaching Cosmopolitan Right," 40–44.
 7. There is a wide divergence between the moral ideals, political agendas, and educational proposals that these theorists propose. It is worth noting that Waldron's cultural cosmopolitanism represents a challenge *only* to those educational proposals that assume that students have monocultural identities.
 8. Waldron, "Minority Cultures and the Cosmopolitan Alternative," 756.
 9. Salman Rushdie, "In Good Faith," in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta Books, 1991), 393–394, quoted in Waldron, "Minority Cultures and the Cosmopolitan Alternative," 752.
 10. Waldron, "Minority Cultures and the Cosmopolitan Alternative," 762.
 11. *Ibid.*, 754.
 12. See Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); and Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25–73.
 13. For a response to this criticism, see Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 86.
 14. Waldron, "Multiculturalism and M \acute{e} lange," 96.
 15. *Ibid.*, 107.
 16. James Johnson, "Why Respect Culture?" *American Journal of Political Science* 44, no. 3 (2000): 408–410.
 17. Amelie Oksenberg Rorty, "The Hidden Politics of Cultural Identification," *Political Theory* 22, no. 1 (1994): 152–166. Rorty provides an interesting example concerning internal differences in the

interpretation of cultural practices within a group: Inuit women are less keen on preserving their traditional customs than are men of the tribe.

18. Samuel Scheffler, "Conceptions of Cosmopolitanism," in *Boundaries and Allegiances: Problems of Justice and Responsibility in Liberal Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 116–117.

19. Waldron, "Minority Cultures and the Cosmopolitan Alternative," 763.

20. One might argue that even the identities of members of this group are cosmopolitan because their traditional culture has incorporated different fragments of materials from a variety of sources. But then cultural cosmopolitanism would start to be trivial, amounting only to the claim that in all stages of human history there has been cultural exchange.

21. The notion of reasonability is taken from John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). Also see Eamonn Callan, *Creating Citizens: Political Education and Liberal Democracy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 24–28.

22. Amy Gutmann has criticized cosmopolitan education, claiming that it prescribes the cultivation of sentiments of identification with many places, cultures, or societies. However, her criticisms are based on a simplified account of cosmopolitanism. As regards Waldron's account of cultural cosmopolitanism, her charge is true only of the strong interpretation, but it does not apply to the moderate one. Moderate cultural cosmopolitanism does not recommend that any particular kind of identification be promoted by schools. See Amy Gutmann, "Civic Minimalism, Cosmopolitanism, and Patriotism: Where Does Democratic Education Stand in Relation to Each?" *Moral and Political Education, NOMOS* 43, ed. Stephen Macedo and Yael Tamir (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 23–57.

23. These remarks are based on points made in Scheffler, "Conceptions of Cosmopolitanism," 129.

24. Kevin McDonough interprets the educational implications of Waldron's cultural cosmopolitanism in a strong vein. See Kevin McDonough, "Cultural Recognition, Cosmopolitanism and Multicultural Education," *Philosophy of Education 1996*, ed. Susan Laird (Urbana: Philosophy of Education Society, 1997), 127–135; and Kevin McDonough, "Can the Liberal State Support Cultural Identity Schools?" *American Journal of Education* 106, no. 4 (1998): 477–483.

25. Waldron, "Multiculturalism and M \acute{e} lange," 113. For excellent discussions of pedagogical failures involving misrecognition, see Lawrence Blum, "Recognition and Multiculturalism in Education," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 35, no. 4 (2001): 541–543; and McDonough, "Cultural Recognition," 129–130.

26. I am here following criticisms made by Rob Reich in his *Bridging Liberalism and Multiculturalism in American Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 173–184.

27. See Melissa Williams, "Citizenship as Identity, Citizenship as Shared Fate, and the Functions of Multicultural Education," in *Education and Citizenship in Liberal-Democratic Societies*, ed. McDonough and Feinberg, 235–241.