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A Cosmopolitan Spirit, or Life as Education: Octavio Paz and Rabindranath Tagore

Un espíritu cosmopolita, o la vida como educación: Octavio Paz y Rabindranath Tagore

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Abstract

In this article we approach cosmopolitanism as an educational orientation toward life. To be cosmopolitan-minded is to be receptive to new people, ideas, practices, and possibilities for conduct. This receptivity denotes more than tolerating others and their values, important as that accomplishment will always be. Rather, cosmopolitanism implies a willingness to learn from others —to approach their ways of life as possible sources of cultural, moral, and political guidance for one's own. We illustrate this cosmopolitan spirit, or what we call life as education, by attending to two of its many exemplars across human history. Octavio Paz (1914-1998) and Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) were and are well-known poets and writers both in their natal places Mexico and India, respectively— and internationally. Both figures received the Nobel Prize in Literature, and both became heavily involved in cultural politics and public affairs even while identifying themselves, first and last, as poets. They enacted a dynamic cosmopolitan fusion of reflective openness to new ideas, people, and values with reflective loyalty to particular norms, beliefs, and traditions. We indicate how their vibrant example points the way to cosmopolitan-minded curriculum and pedagogy in schools.

Keywords: cosmopolitanism, education, poetry

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Resumen

En este artículo se aborda el cosmopolitismo como una orientación educativa hacia la vida. Tener una mentalidad cosmopolita es ser receptivo a nuevas personas, ideas, prácticas y posibilidades de conducta. Esta receptividad denota más que tolerar a otros y sus valores, por importante que siempre sea ese logro. Más bien, el cosmopolitismo implica una disposición a aprender de los demás, es decir, a abordar sus formas de vida como fuentes posibles de orientación cultural, moral y política frente a la forma de vida propia. Este espíritu cosmopolita o, lo que llamamos la vida como educación, se ilustra fijando la atención en dos de sus muchos ejemplos a lo largo de la historia humana. Octavio Paz (1914-1998) y Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) fueron y son poetas y escritores de renombre, tanto en sus países natales, México e India, respectivamente, como a nivel internacional. Ambos personajes recibieron el Premio Nobel de Literatura, y ambos llegaron a involucrarse seriamente en la política y asuntos públicos culturales, aun cuando se identificaban a sí mismos, en primer y último lugar, como poetas. Ellos validaron una fusión dinámica y cosmopolita de apertura reflexiva a nuevas ideas, personas y valores, con una lealtad reflexiva a las normas, creencias y tradiciones particulares. Aquí se indica de qué manera su ejemplo enérgico señala el camino a un currículum y una pedagogía de mentalidad cosmopolita en las escuelas.

Palabras clave: cosmopolitismo, educación, poesía

As the title of this article suggests, we approach cosmopolitanism as an educational orientation toward life. To be cosmopolitan-spirited is to be receptive to new people, ideas, practices, and possibilities for conduct. This receptivity denotes more than tolerating others and their values, important as that accomplishment will always be. Rather, cosmopolitanism implies a willingness to learn from other's—to perceive their ways of life as possible sources of cultural, moral, and political guidance for one's own.

Cosmopolitanism does not entail turning one's back on local roots and cultural inheritances. On the contrary, cosmopolitanism as we understand it is inconceivable without a sense of home, of place, or of belonging. As a person I cannot be receptive to the new if I move in a cultural vacuum. To be hospitable to a new person, idea, or way of life, I must have a place in which to receive them. Otherwise I lack a basis for judgment. I become empty-minded rather than open-minded. My capacity to be receptive dissolves into incoherence.

My sense of home as a person may be geographical: this nation, that region, this city, that community. It may be cultural and social: I may feel most deeply at home in my work or profession (law, medicine, business, education, athletics, one of the arts, etc.), or I may derive my sense of place primarily from family and friends. Cosmopolitanism as we grasp it implies reflective loyalty to these various natal sources of being. It implies appreciating these sources as literally life-giving: they generate a sense of life as meaningful and purposive rather than as an aimless or capricious existence. But the loyalty is *reflective*. It is not blind, dogmatic, or fundamentalist. It acknowledges why home can be a conflicted terrain, racked by internal tensions, disagreements, and differences in value and aim.

In a cosmopolitan outlook, reflective loyalty to local commitments, values, and practices fuses with reflective openness to new ideas, people, and ways of being. Once more the watchword is *reflective*. Cosmopolitan openness does not mean hanging a sign on the door to one's mind reading "Come on in, whatever idea or belief you are!" Cosmopolitan receptivity implies critical awareness of substantive differences in ideas, values and practices. It constitutes a disposition to engage the challenge, and the invitation to grow, that difference extends to me or to my community.

In some circumstances a cosmopolitan-minded stance can be quite demanding, if not impossible, to take on. Consider the plight of communities whose traditions and ways of life have been shattered by war or the unfettered depredations of capitalism unleashed by today's economic globalization. Consider the refugee, the stateless, and the undocumented who lack political security and whose vulnerability to sudden change can be existentially, as well as practically, overwhelming. It could border on heartlessness to demand that people in these circumstances adopt a cosmopolitan viewpoint. But it is equally cruel not to notice the double injury people can suffer: on the one hand, the rupture or sundering of their sense of

home and, on the other hand, the stripping away of grounds for learning open-mindedly and willingly from others. To undermine a person's capacity to experience life educationally is an egregious form of injustice. Rabindranath Tagore highlights the issue as follows: "All men have poetry in their hearts, and it is necessary for them, as much as possible, to express their feelings" (Chakravarty, 1966, p. 82). Tagore refers to *necessity* to emphasize his view that our realization *as* human beings depends on our being able to express in our lives that we are creative rather than merely created beings. Justice necessitates ensuring that every human being has the opportunity and supportive conditions to express, as Tagore puts it, the poetry in their hearts.[1]

In other circumstances —for example, in times of relative peace— it is remarkable how people often gravitate toward a cosmopolitan orientation. Recent historical research, allied with a mushrooming field-based body of anthropological and sociological research, demonstrates that cosmopolitanism "on the ground" can flourish when fueled by frequent contact and fluid, dynamic channels of communication (Hansen, in press; Jacobs, 2006; Kwok-bun, 2005; Lamont & Aksartova, 2002; Osler & Starkey, 2003; Vertovec & Cohen, 2002; for a review of this literature, see Hansen, 2011). These ways of life remain fragile, given the often shocking ways in which narrow-minded nationalism and ethnocentrism can rear their heads. And yet, the impulse toward cosmopolitanism remains robust, just as it has for millennia. Like the Rose of Jericho, a flower of the desert that shrivels up in periods of drought but springs back to life with the rain, cosmopolitan-mindedness has survived countless upheavals.

Our inquiry

We will illustrate a cosmopolitan spirit, or what we call life as education, by attending to two of its many exemplars across human history. Octavio Paz (1914-1998) and Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) were and are well-known poets and writers both in their natal places —Mexico and India, respectively— and internationally. Both figures received the Nobel Prize in Literature. Both became heavily involved in cultural politics and public affairs even while identifying themselves, first and last, as poets. Their essays and public speeches are, like their poems, contemplative and passionate, intelligent and plain-spoken, polemical and pedagogical. In what follows, we will see how they enacted a dynamic cosmopolitan fusion of reflective openness to new ideas, people, and values with reflective loyalty to particular norms, beliefs, and traditions.

Cosmopolitanism in the Americas and in South Asia has had a dynamic history that continues through the present. Both Paz and Tagore developed their cosmopolitan-mindedness in milieu marked by vibrant debate regarding notions of cultural roots and identity, on the one hand, and regarding nationalism and internationalism, on the other hand (Bose & Manjapra, 2010; Fojas, 2005; Salomon, 1979). These debates mirror current controversies in theoretical work on cosmopolitanism. Some commentators treat the concept as a synonym for Western ethnocentrism or universalism (for discussion see Mignolo, 2010). Others use the term interchangeably with globalization and neoliberalism (Popkewitz, 2008). In still other endeavors, such as in this article, cosmopolitanism marks out a space between person and world, or between community and world. It points to the space between what a person or community are in the present moment, and what they are in process of becoming through meaningful interaction with others who differ in values and practices.

Cosmopolitanism has always had a universalistic impulse. Its Greek root, *kosmopolites*, denotes "citizen of the world" rather than member of a local community. The long history of commentary on the idea has followed this particular road into the present, witnessed not only in some theoretical claims touched on above, but also in how cosmopolitanism appears in a variety of proposals for creating new international mechanisms and institutions for defending human well-being globally (Barry & Pogge, 2005; Brock & Brighouse, 2005). At the same time, however, the history of the idea *on the ground* as well as in philosophy as the art of living (Foucault, 2005; Hadot, 1995) lends it a much more contextualized meaning. As mentioned previously, there is a proliferating field-based body of research that demonstrates

[1] We should also stress that oppressed people sometimes respond to cruel forms of pressure in ways that powerfully illuminate the meaning and promise in a cosmopolitan outlook. Consider, for example, Jonathan Lear's (2006) brilliant account of how Plenty Coups, a chief of the Crow (a North American Indian tribe) led his people to take on, in the face of violent imperialism, new cultural customs even while retaining their continuity and integrity as a community.

cosmopolitanism's homely or domestic quality. This research shows that human beings in quite varied settings can not only co-exist with different others, but can learn from and actively cooperate with them. In so doing, people flesh out why cosmopolitanism points, once more, to reflective openness to the new fused with reflective loyalty to the known.

We focus here on Octavio Paz and Rabindranath Tagore because they illuminate cosmopolitanism's universal and particular dimensions. As we will show, Paz and Tagore travel with one foot in their local cultural traditions —which they criticize energetically precisely because they esteem them— and one foot in the cultures of the world – which they also criticize passionately because of their respect for them. In their distinctive ways, they bring to life what we take to be necessary if not sufficient constituents of cosmopolitan-mindedness: (a) a dynamic notion of what being "reflective" means, (b) a lived sense that cultural creations in the arts and sciences constitute a shared world inheritance rather than national or local "possessions," and (c) a capacity to work with, rather than against, the reality of incessant cultural change both locally and globally.

Cosmopolitan reflectivity

For Paz and Tagore, to be reflective constitutes more than a cognitive process of ratiocination. It is more than a matter of logic and the manipulation of concepts. It is also something other than mere problem-solving. Reflection in a cosmopolitan spirit does embody these familiar and time-honored aspects of thinking. However, it also functions arm in arm with a person's aesthetic and moral sensibility. To be reflective, from a cosmopolitan point of view, means being able to stand back, although not apart, from local situations. It means suspending judgment and action to allow space for multiple perspectives (Mansikka & Holm, 2011). It means approaching situations sensitive to the concerns and experiences of others. It means keeping in view the fact that other people have values, aims, and hopes that may differ from one's own but are not, because of that, any less human. Cosmopolitan reflectivity embodies attunement to gesture, tone of voice, body movement, and other emotional registers that can accompany interaction and communication. The poetic response Paz and Tagore evince toward experience sheds valuable light on this notion of embodied cosmopolitan reflection.

Approaching cultural creations as a world inheritance

An "approach" implies movement. It indicates a way of turning toward things, orienting oneself toward them. Cosmopolitanism spotlights how a person approaches cultural creativity across the arts, sciences, and related realms of human activity. The person regards this creativity and its issue as a shared world inheritance. They are not local possessions or things that you cannot learn from if you did not make them or do not have them, literally, in your local backyard. Cultural creations do not constitute fixed quantities of product and meaning that have to be parceled out once and for all.

Rather, from a cosmopolitan perspective cultural creations are more like a gift bequeathed to all of humanity. This gift is being ever-transformed as each generation of human beings participates in cultural life. Each person develops, in response to this gift, her or his own evolving canon of meaningful words, images, objects, artifacts, etc. This posture differs from the consumerist mentality characteristic of our times, in which genuine learning from difference takes a back seat to possessing things and to comfortable self-containment. Paz and Tagore demonstrate vividly what it means to incorporate —i.e., *to learn from*— new cultural ideas while retaining a sense of continuity and integrity in one's own cultural life. They show that regarding poetry as a shared world inheritance can spur unanticipated forms of creativity in the practice. In so doing, they signal why local cultural creativity, in any genre or domain, can emerge in response to cultural creativity anywhere. Their work also makes plain that cultural creativity constitutes an *art* of living that involves more, for example, than simply throwing things together from the internet. This creativity implies engaging background beliefs and traditions that underlie particular practices.

Working with change

Observers of the human condition have, for millennia, remarked on the facts of cultural change, however slow the transformations may have been. Today the pace of change has accelerated under unbridled forms of globalization: economic, informational, technological, environmental, and more. Cosmopolitanism points to ways of life that incorporate stability-within-change. The orientation foregrounds creative responses to change that contrast with unthinking, often volatile reactions to it. A response differs from a reaction. The former accepts the need for new forms of action, in the face of ever-present external forces, that can provide cultural continuity (whether at the level of the community or individual). The latter refuses to consider realities on the ground and attempts to freeze things as they are, often with disastrous consequences. Paz and Tagore, in their thought and action, show how people can learn to respond to experience rather than merely react and thus suffer from it.

We have suggested that a cosmopolitan orientation encompasses (a) reflective openness to the new and reflective loyalty to the known, with "reflection" understood as a dynamic fusion of thinking allied with an aesthetic and moral sensibility; (b) an approach to cultural creations as a shared world inheritance; and (c) a disposition to work with realities of change rather than react blindly against them. These constituents of cosmopolitan-mindedness emerge over time and through life experience. They also take form together. For these reasons, in the accounts that follow we will not present them through separate sub-sections, but rather will show how interwoven they are in actual practice.

Readers will see that Paz and Tagore enjoyed an unusually rich, wide-ranging experience of diverse human beings and cultures. At first glance, their cultural privilege may rule them out as what we have called exemplars of a cosmopolitan spirit, namely because it is unrealistic to assume that the majority of human beings alive today can access the global range of encounters they have had. However, we hope to show that it is not so much *where* or *how much* they traveled that matters, but the spirit with which they moved in the world. Their lives differ markedly from today's globe-trotters who have traveled just as much (or more) but who treat the world as merely a smorgasbord of consumables, and who accumulate experiences like so many trophies. Paz and Tagore show that to become cosmopolitan-minded does necessitate travel, but not so much literally as in an aesthetic, ethical, and inquiry-oriented sense.

Octavio Paz

Octavio Paz believed that humans are beings who ask questions. As an accomplished writer, poet, philosopher and political activist, Paz represented his conception of humanity by reaching out to the world through deep, reflective questioning. Thanks to his fame as a poet and because of his cultural service to the Mexican Foreign Ministry, he had the opportunity to visit and live in many countries and experience many cultures, shaping his inquisitive disposition towards diversity in human cultural expressions.

Born in Mexico City in 1914, Paz had a great talent for writing poetry. By the time he was an adolescent he had already published a collection of his work. His first encounter with the world abroad was, in fact, a byproduct of his poetry. In the 1930s he attended a gathering of antifascist artists and writers in Europe. In Spain he traveled the country with fellow poets and friends while the country was suffering through a civil war. It was then that Paz's experiences transformed his view of what it means to be "other."

Paz's work, both artistic and political, lengthened his stint abroad for many years more. He resided in Spain, the United States, Japan, France and India, and was heavily involved in their cultural worlds. Unfortunately, his services to the Mexican Foreign Ministry ended abruptly when he publically left his post as Ambassador to India in protest of the Tlatelolco massacre, where hundreds of students where slain in Mexico City during president Gustavo Dìaz Ordaz's term in 1968. His resignation expressed his integrity and his unflinching critical attitude, even (and especially) when it was towards his own government. This event did not hinder his cosmopolitan spirit, but made it stronger as it spurred on his critical awareness and eagerness to question, examine, and challenge not just the government, but Mexico's cultural and political traditions. He claimed it was time to move toward a better understanding of the country's past and present. He elucidated this viewpoint in his political and social critique, *Posdata* (1969), which was a

continuation of his most famous prose work, *El Laberinto de la Soledad* [*The Labyrinth of Solitude*] (1950).

Paz' cosmopolitan reflectiveness allowed him to learn at a tender age that there were "others;" people who were different from him, who dwelt in different places, and who thought and lived in different ways. He developed an eye for shared as well as singular human qualities and values. Approaching and understanding "otherness" became a central focus in his poetry and prose. He recounts two pivotal moments during his youth when he realized both his individuality and his participation in humanity writ large. In his Nobel Lecture (1990), he describes an instance when at the age of six he come across a North American magazine depicting veterans returning from World War I, and realized with a start that people around the world were going through very different life experiences than he was. As a child living in an old house with a library full of books, he read omnivorously, often while sitting beneath a fig tree that became like a friend and spur to the imagination. He was so "at home" in this world of words and nature that it felt like an electric jolt to grasp the war-torn human reality being experienced by thousands just over the Mexican border to the North.

The second moment when his experience with war led him to reflection, and thus helped sow the seeds that would constitute his cosmopolitan consciousness, was during his first visit to Spain. In a piercing way, Paz (1996) describes the moment he identified "others" as fellow participants in humanity. This moment occurred on a visit to the battle lines that cut across the University of Madrid:

> Led by an officer, we passed through buildings and rooms that had formerly served as libraries and lecture halls but were now used as trenches and military blockhouses. Reaching a huge enclosure, which was protected on all sides with sandbags, the officer signaled us to remain silent. On the other side of the wall we could clearly and distinctly hear human voices and laughter. In a low voice I asked, "Who's that?" "It's the others," the officer replied. At first his words simply stunned me; then my shock turned into immense pain. This was the instant that I realized – and it was a lesson I would never forget – that our enemies too have human voices (1996, p. 49).[2]

Through this and other experiences, Paz' cosmopolitan reflectiveness took form. He recognized the reality of others who are neither "me" nor "we," yet also recognized shared qualities such as voice, laughter, and the capacity to question.

Paz' subsequent travels and state duties allowed him to examine himself and his country from other cultural perspectives. When identifying others' ideas, values and practices, he never mindlessly absorbed them, but rather allowed them to inform his reflective criticism of his locally inherited traditions. Paz writes about many of these experiences in *El Laberinto de la Soledad* (1985), describing how he felt the need to juxtapose his life in foreign countries with life back in Mexico, and by so doing peering deeper into his self. "I remember," he wrote at one point, "that whenever I attempted to examine North American life, anxious to discover its meaning, I encountered my own questioning image" (p. 12). A man far away from his country, Paz found solace in experiencing his homeland through the imagery that the countries he visited provided. His work mirrors his intellectual and heart-felt desire to understand himself and his country by approaching them through the eyes of the others.

Paz continuously looked for ways to achieve self-knowledge. He approached himself by way of others, by getting to know those around him. In so doing he echoed an earlier cosmopolitan-minded precursor, Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), who is credited with inventing the modern form of what we call the "essay" —a form Paz developed to a high level— while also articulating a rich cosmopolitan sensibility. Throughout his essays, Montaigne urges his readers to seek out people from other walks of life because it is only through knowing them —as part of coming to grips with what he called "this great world of ours" (1991, p. 177)— that we can come to know ourselves. In his fine-grained self-descriptions, which merge with equally attentive accounts of other people and their ways of life, Montaigne demonstrated that the differences within any given culture can be as great as the differences between any two cultures, just as the differences within a given human being, he showed, can be as diverse as the differences between any two persons.

[2] Consider also Paz' account of the everyday men and women he witnessed fighting for the beleaguered Spanish Republic: "In those faces — obtuse and obstinate, gross and brutal, like those the great Spanish painters, without the least touch of complacency and with an almost flesh-and-blood realism, have left— there was something like a desperate hopefulness, something very concrete and at the same time universal. Since then I have never seen the same expression on any face… The memory will never leave me. Anyone who has looked Hope in the face will never forget it. He will search for it everywhere he goes" (Paz, 1985, p. 27).

This back and forth movement of considering other people and cultures, and examining the self, constitutes what Paz characterizes as a dynamic "dialectic of solitude." In *El Laberinto de la Soledad*, he dedicates the first seven chapters to painting a colorful yet critical picture of Mexican society as he has seen it both from afar and from within. In the last chapter, "*La Dialéctica de la Soledad*," he takes on the task of elucidating his philosophical view of what he dubs "the profoundest fact of the human condition" (1985, p. 95): solitude.

The dialectic of solitude, Paz argues, is best described as "the twofold motion of withdrawal-and-return" (1985, p. 204). The dialectic comprises two dynamic states that are, according to Paz, simultaneously opposite and complementary to each other: solitude and communion. Solitude is "the profoundest fact of the human condition (and) man is the only being who knows he is alone" (1985, p. 195). In solitude we suffer the pains of being torn away from our state as one with our mothers and our surroundings (1985, p. 196). Communion, on the other hand, is the original and desired state. In communion the individual does not dissolve into the masses, but rather becomes one with those around him by maintaining his sense of self and recognizing in others their own individuality. The dialectic of solitude proposes human beings sway between solitude and communion, where the joys of life spring from actualizing these states.

Most celebrations and creative processes (poetry would be his favorite example) are occasions when one experiences the feeling of remaining in and yet also transcending one's self, one's home. Paz proposes an intentional way to actualize this dual state. He describes an experience that will bring to the forefront of our minds the reality of this twofold situation, thereby translating the dialectic of solitude into conscious human action. Paz calls this experience "criticism."

Criticism brings together thought, feeling, perspective, background, and purpose. It is the point where self-examination and reflection on others, society, and the world come together. Persons can move actively into this "space" or "place" of reflection, inquiry, and decision. As in his construction of the dialectic of solitude, Paz' idea of criticism is two-sided. It constitutes a thinking process comprised of what he calls knowing and freeing (Paz, 1985, p. 216). To know involves deciphering one's reality. Paz urges people to conduct a conscious in-depth introspection to find what is hidden about themselves. This inquiry includes uncovering preconceived assumptions and values. The idea of criticism underscores the deliberate, conscious nature of this task. The second dynamic feature in criticism, for Paz, is in its capacity to set people free. Criticism, he writes, is "that activity which consists not only in knowing ourselves, but just as much or more, in freeing ourselves. Criticism unfolds the possibility of freedom" (Paz, 1985, p. 216). When people question presumed social and psychological truths, they simultaneously encounter reality and detach themselves from what they have been told they are.

There is no ideal moment or condition for criticism although Paz does claim that it happens mostly during a time of self-contemplation and in a place of distance from one's local habitat. The subject must find himself detached (if only figuratively) from his reality. Paz's own works, especially those that delivered the most poignant criticism of his own society, were written abroad. *El Laberinto de la Soledad* was written both in the United States and France, while *Olimpiada y Tlatelolco* was mostly written in India.

Paz enacted the value of learning from other cultures by intermixing elements of a world inheritance in his poetry. This outcome emerged from his incessant reflections on various traditions in art and arts of living. Though his intellectual background focused on Western traditions, he incorporated various indigenous Mexican elements and eventually, because of his exposure to cultures around the world through his travels, Asian motifs and philosophy. He was always eager to study different ways of creating poetry and expressed a genuine interest in learning from others. Not content with only acquiring such knowledge, he was able to transform it and make it his own, to internalize and integrate, never forgetting to give credit to the culture or person who inspired him. In the preface to his book, *One Word to Another*, Paz affirmed that he "follow[ed] the examples of Wordsworth, Mallarmé, Yeats, Jimenez and Borges" (1992, p. 9) —poets whose roots are, respectively, in England, France, Ireland, Spain, and Argentina.

Paz's magisterial poem "Blanco" —which can be translated as *white* or as *blank*, as in blank slate— integrates not only multicultural influences in its poetic themes, but in its very design and aesthetic execution. Paz notes that the poem, written in New Delhi in 1966, was heavily shaped by his encounter with Asian poetic arts. "The particularity [of the poem]," he wrote from New Delhi to his confrere Joaquin

Diez-Cañedo, is "that it can be read in many different ways, like baroque poems or kavya poems… At first, I thought of printing it on one large scroll like the antique Chinese cylinder books… bounded by a cover similar to those that bound Japanese stamp books" (Santi, 1995, p. 85). According to Richard J. Callan, the unusual physical layout of the poem suggests Paz "intentionally and in great detail translated into his own metaphoric language the ancient practice of yoga" (2005, p. 1).

The Mexican poet acknowledged the ever changing dynamic of life. Like many people today, he felt the pressure of expectancy to move, to be in constant flux and the anxiety brought on by the accelerating changes in our time. He experienced the longing felt when one wishes to inhabit a permanent state, and expresses this in the last part of his poem "Hurry":

> All that sustains me and that I sustain sustaining [*sostengo sosteniéndome*] myself is a screen, a wall. My hurry leaps all. This body offers me its body, the sea pulls from its belly seven waves, seven nudes, seven whitecaps, seven smiles. I thank them and hurry off. Yes, the walk has been amusing, the conversation instructive, it's still early, the function isn't over, and in no way do I pretend to know the end. I'm sorry: I'm in a hurry. I'm anxious to get rid of my hurry. I'm in a hurry to go to bed and get up without saying: goodbye I'm in a hurry (Paz, 1984, p.15).

Paz's poetry becomes a window to his world and to our own. The reader can resonate with his fear of and resistance toward flux. However, the poem itself reiterates his belief in the ever-dynamic human reality that movement need not imply dissolution. His poetry opens a reflective space, which is at one and the same time aesthetic and intellectual, moral and ethical, from where to ponder the movement, accept the movement, and in turn influence the movement. He not only realized that life is change, but more importantly, recognized that we as human beings are agents of change. Just as the sun and river and trees change, so do we. But like many of his philosophically minded precursors, Paz believed we humans have the capacity to transform our surroundings and ourselves. He saw poetry as a prime vehicle for this endeavor.

Paz recognized he was a member of a world community —or, as he might put it, a member of the family of humanity. Hailed as cosmopolitan both by his contemporaries and inheritors, it was more than his extensive stints abroad that made him earn this qualifier. Though he did live in many countries and visited countless others, his cosmopolitan quality derives from his eager openness to the new cultures in which he immersed himself, the inquiring spirit that led him to learn from them, and the need to integrate the foreign elements he felt were valuable in his own evolving poetry, political works and personal life. In *Aproximaciones a Octavio Paz*, Angel Flores remarked that the poet was at once "Son of Mexico, brother of Latin America, stepson of Spain, adoptive child of France, Great Britain and Italy, affectionate guest of Japan and India, and bastard child of the United States. Paz was open to all civilizations" (Flores, 1974, p. 38, our translation).

Rabindranath Tagore

Cosmopolitanism implies roots even if they are flexible rather than set in concrete. For both Paz and Rabindranath Tagore, tradition differs from traditionalism. The latter denotes the attempt to freeze culture and to thwart the inevitable, indeterminate impact of encountering difference. Eyes are turned full-square toward the past, which is treated as having all the necessary answers to all conceivable conundrums. A traditionalistic culture tends to become brittle and harsh toward both insiders and outsiders alike. In contrast, tradition is dynamic and vibrant. When treated as a living tradition, a culture can adapt and evolve, and sometimes even thrive in unanticipated ways, and all this while retaining an authentic continuity with the past (for further discussion, see Hansen, 2001, pp. 114-157).

Tagore (1861-1941) realized these truths at an early age. Born into a highly cultured, influential Bengali family, his informal education and poetic bent opened him to a larger world. He became "the most widely travelled Indian of his generation" (Guha, 2011, p. 171). He traveled widely in India —an unusual experience for his compatriots at the time— and, even more striking for his era, also traveled numerous times to Britain, the European continent, the United States, Japan, China, and the Soviet Union. He gained international fame through his poetry, novels, essays, and plays. His fecund pen seemed to be always in motion; his collected works run to 18,000 printed pages in Bengali (Guha, 2011, p. 170). His ethical, aesthetic, and spiritual book of poetry, *Gitanjali*, earned him the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913 (the first Asian to be so honored).

The poem's lines reveal a mode of reflecting on experience that marks a cosmopolitan disposition. Consider, for example, poem #69 in *Gitanjali*:

> The same stream of life
> that runs through my veins night and day
> runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures.
> It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth
> in numberless blades of grass
> and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers.
>
> It is the same life
> that is rocked in the ocean-cradle of birth and of death,
> in ebb and in flow.
>
> I feel my limbs are made glorious
> by the touch of this world of life.
> And my pride is from the life-throb of ages
> dancing in my blood this moment (Tagore, 1977, p. 87).

The poem in fact was intended to be sung, and the English translation misses much of the Bengali nuance and poetic structure. All the same, a reader can discern Tagore's sense of being at home in the world rather than just in Bengal, his cultural and geographic origin. Moreover, the poem and *Gitanjali* as a whole express a cosmopolitan orientation through Tagore's simultaneous embrace of local Bengali poetic tradition and motifs from English Romantic and other poetic traditions (one thinks especially of William Wordsworth). Tagore responds both to his immediate, particular experience, and to what he intuits to be a universal experience of wonder and yearning brought on by the sheer fact of being both alive and yet also mortal.

Tagore referred often to his sense that "harmony" could be the order of the day between human beings and between people and nature (S. Tagore, 2003, p. 81; also see S. Tagore 2008, 2010). By that term he did not mean homogeneity in ideas, practices, and purposes. He had in mind sameness within difference, and difference within sameness. He had in mind a deep sense of the singularity of each person and of each culture, and yet did not believe this uniqueness precluded authentic communication and mutual learning. People can move closer and closer *apart*, through an emerging, reflective recognition of their differences, and further and further *together*, through a reflective grasp of shared aspirations and hopes (Hansen, 2011, pp. 3-5).

We mentioned above that Tagore developed this outlook quite early. In his autobiography, *My Life*, he offers the following anecdote from his childhood:

> It was good for me that my consciousness was never dulled to the surrounding world. That the cloud was the cloud, that a flower was a flower, was enough, because they spoke directly to me, and I could not be indifferent to them. I still remember the moment, one afternoon, when coming home from school I jumped from the carriage and suddenly saw in the sky, behind the upper terrace of our house, deep dark rain-clouds lavishing cool shadows on the atmosphere. The marvel of it, *the generosity of its presence*, gave me a joy which was freedom, the kind of freedom we feel in the love of a dear friend (Tagore, 1966, pp. 87-88, our italics).

For Tagore, a sense of gratitude —"the generosity of its presence" —becomes an element of reflectivity on experience: a mode of sympathy with life itself that, elsewhere, he shows can be embodied in reflecting on human situations and decisions.

Tagore advocated cosmopolitan ideals from the start of his career and sought to bring them to life not only in his art but in his public endeavors. For example, in 1901 he founded a primary school, Santiniketan (Abode of Peace), which flourishes to this day. Its graduates include the former prime minister of India, Indira Gandhi, the widely appreciated film-maker Satrajit Ray, and the oft-cited economist and philosopher Amartya Sen. The school features considerable outdoor activities fused with a unified curriculum designed to cultivate aesthetic, ethical, and communicative capabilities (Naravane, 1977; O'Connell, 2007). Its pedagogy mirrors Tagore's life-long writings about education, in which he argues that the school needs to foster cultural creativity by combining work in the arts and sciences with direct experience. He viewed young people as capable of adding to the cultural richness of the world in endlessly diverse ways so long as they receive strong preparation fused with opportunities to show initiative.

Tagore objected to how societies sometime corrupt the promise of school by fostering a competitive ethos where individuals learn to strategize for personal gain and influence over others, rather than learn to cultivate the joy of being alive and being in community with other people as well as nature (Naravane, p. 157). "We have come to this world to accept it," he wrote in describing his philosophy of education, "not merely to know it. We may become powerful by knowledge, but we attain fullness by sympathy. The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence (Tagore, 1917, pp. 116-117). Tagore perceives an essential place for sympathy *in* thought, *in* inquiry, and *in* analysis. Sympathy does not imply bias or an a priori slant toward one "answer" or "position." Rather, it suggests an open-minded and open-hearted disposition, that is to say a cosmopolitan-minded disposition. The poetics of reflection, in cosmopolitan perspective, encompass the person's full being. Perhaps it comes as no surprise that Tagore described the school he founded as "my tangible poem" (Naravane, 1977, p. 150).[3]

Tagore conducted a decades-long debate with Mohandas Gandhi about how India should strive for independence and how it should picture its role on the global stage. As in his art and educational work, Tagore's cosmopolitan-mindedness came to the fore. Their celebrated letters illuminate how passionately Tagore felt that the West and East needed one another for cultural and spiritual flourishing. In some respects, Gandhi shared this belief. "I hope I am as great a believer in free air as the great poet," Gandhi wrote at one point. "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my land as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any" (Bhattacharya, 1999, p. 64). Tagore often articulated a comparable idea, and what he said of his esteemed compatriot Rammohan Roy —well-known for his cultural leadership in what has been dubbed the 19th Century Bengali Renaissance— could be said of himself: "[He] was able to assimilate the ideals of Europe so completely because he was not overwhelmed by them; there was no poverty or weakness on his side. He had ground of his own on which he could take his stand" (Guha, 2011, p. 174).

However, Tagore criticized what he regarded as Gandhi's often inward-looking, nationalistic posture, arguing as an alternative that the India-to-come must be cosmopolitan through and through. While Gandhi was urging economic and other forms of non-cooperation with the colonial government, Tagore was calling for cultural cooperation on the grandest scale possible so that "West" and "East" are not ruptured by future events. India's cultural traditions, for Tagore, constitute a genuine gift to the world —"India belongs to humanity," he declared at one point, just as do other cultures and civilizations (Guha, 2011, p. 173). The "idea" of India constituted, for him, something other than a physical location on the globe. Tagore spotlights the country's multiple languages, its diverse and long-standing religions, and its geographical diversity which mirrors that of the entire world. In this light, Tagore writes, "the idea of India is against the intense consciousness of the separateness of one's own people from others, which inevitably leads to ceaseless conflicts. Therefore my own prayer is, let India stand for the co-operation of all peoples of the world" (Guha, 2011, p. 186).

Tagore regarded Britain's and Europe's cultural traditions —in poetry, painting, literature, and more— as equally generative gifts to the world. He pictured them, too, as a universal inheritance. However, Tagore was no apologist for colonialism. On the contrary, while he praised Britain's cultural riches, he strongly condemned its political and economic foreign policy, charging that its colonial ventures undermined not only indigenous cultures but corrupted its own soul (Tagore, 1973). He distinguished between what he called the "spirit" of Britain and the West —which he saw as deeply beneficial for humanity— and the Nation of Britain, which pursues a cruel policy of economic exploitation combined with an administrative policy designed to squelch educational, cultural, and political opportunity (Guha, 2011, p. 182).

Tagore's critique of the British Nation evokes his fundamental antipathy to the very idea of nationalism as the spur for Indian independence. For one thing, he regarded the concept as Western in origin rather than being rooted in India's history. For another, in his view the idea continually presupposes that the

[3] Tagore also founded an international adult learning center in 1921, called Visva-Bharati ("India in the World"), which continues to feature a global-minded course of study across the sciences and humanities. The primary school, Santiniketan, and the adult learning center, Visva-Bharati, share the same grounds as a rural reconstruction center Tagore instituted in 1922.

so-called nation is already constituted and fully formed, and therefore merely requires being unleashed politically and economically. Tagore believed that India, and every other country on the planet, remained "underway" from a cultural, which is to say artistic and spiritual point of view. Rather than reifying nation as the engine of independence, Tagore sought to put cultural creativity and renewal at the head of the process (Tagore, 1973, pp. 144-145). He was not oblivious to the necessity of economic and political development, but focused on what the deeper aims were behind this development.

Throughout his long and productive life, Tagore remained rooted and unrooted in a paradoxical, which is to say cosmopolitan, manner. As a young, emergent poet and public figure in the latter part of the 19th century, he found himself at a contentious cultural crossroads. In his view and that of many of his art-minded compatriots, who all worked for a cultural renaissance, Bengali traditions in poetry, painting, dance, and other domains had ossified. "Our literature had allowed its creative life to vanish," he wrote. "It lacked movement, and was fettered by a rhetoric as rigid as death" (Chakravarty, 1966, p. 81). He criticized traditionalists "who suspected every living idea that was dynamic" (Chakravarty, 1966, p. 80). "People who cling to an ancient past," he argued,

> have their pride in the antiquity of their accumulations, and in the sublimity of their high-walled surroundings. They grow nervous and angry when some lover of truth breaks open their enclosure and floods it with the sunshine of thought and life. Ideas cause movement, but they consider all forward movements to be a menace against their warehouse security (Chakravarty, 1966, p. 81).

While criticizing the traditionalism of his local artistic community, Tagore advocates not a divorce from it but rather a reconstruction. He suggests that attempting a radical break from the past implies not finding one's natal voice, but rather becoming mute. A would-be poet, whatever her or his ambition, has always already inherited the very possibility of poetry from humanity and should be eternally grateful for it. But poetic tradition differs from traditionalism. As Martha Nussbaum argues, "any living tradition is already a plurality and contains within itself aspects of resistance, criticism, and contestation" (1997, p. 63). Participants in a living tradition are at one and the same time destabilizers yet also preservers of culture. If not in so many words, they enact a serious moral concern for sustaining ways of life that bring meaning and continuity to people across space and time.

Thus, Tagore criticizes colonialism for implanting in some of his fellow artists contempt for their local tradition, a "distrust of all things that had come to them as an inheritance from their past" (Chakravarty, 1966, p. 81). In his own poetic oeuvre, which as mentioned became widely known in his era and is still appreciated today, Tagore remained deeply embedded in Bengali artistic tradition even while allowing himself to be substantively influenced by traditions from elsewhere. He experienced what the literary critic Lionel Trilling calls "one of the significant mysteries of man's life in culture: how it is that other people's creations can be so utterly their own and so deeply part of us" (Geertz, 1983, p. 54).

In sum, Tagore was critical of both traditionalists, who embrace local values and methods so tightly that they squeeze the life out of them, and aesthetes who look down their noses at local practices as backward and ready to be buried. A reader can discern across his poetry a sense of genuine awe, pleasure, and tension in realizing the consequences of reflective openness to the new fused with reflective loyalty to the known. Tagore was clearly at home in the universe of poems, no matter where they originated on the planet. His love of poetry opened doors to interact with other poets from both near and far —most famously, perhaps, with W. B. Yeats (Williams, 2007)— and he seems to have derived a powerful sense of fulfillment and contentment from dwelling in this realm of words, ideas, and emotions. As we have seen, Tagore had other "homes," too, such as his pioneering work as a founder of a well-known school and learning center. As poet, educator, novelist, public speaker, and more, Tagore was able to cultivate a large horizon of hospitality to other people.

Discussion

Cultivating the cosmopolitan spirit

In their works and lives, Octavio Paz and Rabindranath Tagore enact the three elements in a cosmopolitan orientation that we identified at the start of this inquiry. Both figures illuminate through their poetry and public activities the meaning of being open reflectively to new people, ideas, and values while remaining loyal reflectively to local traditions, ideals, and practices. They show us why reflection in a cosmopolitan spirit embodies aesthetic and moral attunement as well as analysis and deliberation. Paz and Tagore exemplify what it means to approach the world's cultural creations as a shared cosmopolitan inheritance. They dramatize the universal reality that humans can be creative culturally, rather than merely culturally created. Finally, the two poets demonstrate that it is possible to work responsively *with* change rather than merely react against it. They show that people do not face an either/or anthropological dictum that says they either have a frozen, inert identity, or they have nothing upon which to build a meaningful cultural life. The cosmopolitan-mindedness of Paz and Tagore spotlights cultural continuity, across space and time, of individual and community integrity. Integrity implies a coherent, rooted, if also ever-evolving sense of identity and place. Continuity denotes sustaining individual or community integrity through the vicissitudes of unpredictable change. Paz and Tagore never abandoned their roots or natal identities. But they transformed and enriched them in the ways they metabolized into their outlooks the lessons of their encounters with difference.

Paz and Tagore's exceptionally transparent accounts of their experiences as children with nature and the world highlight why cosmopolitan spirit often takes form in the young —if educators know how to recognize and support it. Just as Tagore's work, *My Life*, expresses the role his natural surroundings played in shaping his reflective disposition, so too, Paz recounts his childhood encounters with his environment in many poems. "The Fig Tree," a poem that celebrates his closeness to the arboreal being that stood in his childhood home's unkempt garden, contributes to our understanding of how intimately, and enduringly, nature as cosmos can impress its reality upon the child:

> In Mixcoac, village of burning lips, only the fig tree signaled the year's changes. The fig tree, six months dressed in a sonorous green, and the other six a charred ruin of the summer sun… On calm days the fig tree was a petrified caravel of jade, imperceptibly balancing itself, tied to the black wall, splashed with green from the tide of spring. But if the March wind whistled, a path would open between the light and the clouds, swelling the green sails. I would climb to the top, my head sticking out from the big leaves, pecked by birds, crowned with divination (Paz, 1970, p. 103).

The fig tree became for Paz one of many connections to nature. By living alongside it, even within it, he encountered the seasons, the sun, and the fauna. His blissful days spent getting to know this staple of his garden generated reflective thought on the way his environment flowed with time.

As Tagore's educational work shows, schools whose curricula provoke student inquiry and observation encourage children to attend closely to the natural and social world around them. Schools and classrooms can serve as places of contact with immediate surroundings and at the same time as portals into the broader world. As we acknowledged at the start, it is not possible for the vast majority of the young to travel the world as Paz and Tagore did. But it is possible for them to "travel" aesthetically, morally, and reflectively, as both poets also show us. Consider again Paz's formative experience as recounted, in this case, in his Nobel Lecture:

> Like every child I built emotional bridges in the imagination to link me to the world and to other people. I lived in a town on the outskirts of Mexico City, in an old dilapidated house that had a jungle-like garden and a great room full of books. First games and first lessons. The garden soon became the centre of my world; the library, an enchanted cave. I used to read and play with my cousins and schoolmates. There was a fig tree, temple of vegetation, four pine trees, three ash trees, a nightshade, a pomegranate tree, wild grass and prickly plants that produced purple grazes. Adobe walls. Time was elastic; space was a spinning wheel. All time, past or future, real or imaginary, was pure presence. Space transformed itself ceaselessly. The beyond was here, all was here: a valley, a mountain, a distant country, the neighbors' patio. Books with pictures, especially history books, eagerly leafed through, supplied images of deserts and jungles, palaces and hovels, warriors and princesses, beggars and kings. We were shipwrecked with Sinbad and with Robinson, we fought with d'Artagnan, we took Valencia with the Cid. How I would have liked to stay forever on the Isle of Calypso! In summer the green branches of the fig tree would sway like the sails of a caravel or a pirate ship. High up on the mast, swept by the wind, I could make out islands and continents, lands that vanished as soon as they became tangible. The world was limitless yet it was always within reach (Paz, 1993, p. 157).

We suggest two ways of orienting children's education toward the cosmopolitan: (a) emphasizing a reflective character by way of observation of the natural and social world that surrounds the student, at the same time enhancing as well as opening up his or her sense of home; and (b) introducing the students to others' ways of life and being in the world through a carefully crafted curriculum that takes a long-term view of human growth and flourishing. These pedagogical approaches prepare the student to encounter sameness within difference and difference within sameness. In the cosmopolitan spirit of Paz and Tagore, they support them in cultivating reflective openness to the new and reflective loyalty to the known.

Schools can also actualize the cosmopolitan spirit by opening a space where students, as Tagore would put it, encounter the joy of freedom. It is freedom *from* traditionalism. It is freedom *to* create culture, to be a participant in the flow of cultural life, and to acknowledge oneself as a creative agent. By conceiving the curriculum —mathematics, science, history, literature, languages, the arts— as a dynamic, shared human inheritance, students come to see the diverse ways humans actualize their potentialities and their possibilities for self-expression. This experience also illuminates the genuine challenge in being a cultural agent. As Paz and Tagore would be the first to say, crafting serious poetry is hard, strenuous work. Thus schooling in a cosmopolitan spirit would become *more* challenging than it is at present —and yet it would be a challenge that draws students *in* as cultural participants, rather than conceiving them solely as empty, passive vessels in which to pour inert material. Through this approach, as Tagore's school demonstrates, students learn to take responsibility for their acts and for their relation with others and the world.

As teachers and heads of school know, there are countless pressures in the contemporary world that militate against a cosmopolitan-minded approach to education. Many powerful political and economic entities today conceive the school as merely a site for job preparation, and ignore its historic potential as a site of aesthetic, moral, intellectual, and civic development. Many equally powerful social forces, including the relentless commercialization of life, work against genuine educational experience by scattering and dispersing our aesthetic, moral, and reflective focus and concern. Nonetheless we also know that countless teachers, heads of schools, and parents use their relative degrees of freedom to cultivate a humane, empowering approach to educating. They grasp the necessity of socialization into language and society, but also the equal necessity of an education for participating creatively in culture and in the world writ large. In our view a cosmopolitan orientation strongly supports their enduring impulse.

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