

## Introduction

As a matter of fact, the pragmatic theory of intelligence means that the function of mind is to project new and more complex ends—to free experience from routine and from caprice. . . . [T]he doctrine that intelligence develops within the sphere of action for the sake of possibilities not yet given is the opposite of a doctrine of mechanical efficiency. . . . [A]ction directed to ends to which the agent has not previously been attached inevitably carries with it a quickened and enlarged spirit. A pragmatic intelligence is a creative intelligence, not a routine mechanic.

—John Dewey, “The Need for a Recovery of Philosophy”

In the modern world there has been an increasing expectation that individuals, in virtue of being persons, have a right to determine the course of their own lives. Indeed, one of the remarkable achievements of modernity is the widespread ideal that not only individuals but peoples, nations, and states have a “right” to self-determination. A pivotal figure here is Johann Gottfried von Herder, who managed to transfer Pietist beliefs regarding the sanctity of individuals to cultures.<sup>1</sup>

In all the civil establishments from China to Rome, in all the varieties of their political constitutions, in every one of their inventions, whether of peace or war, and even in all the faults and barbarities that nations have committed, we discern the grand law of nature: let man be man; let him mould his condition according as to himself shall seem best. . . . Thus we every where find mankind possessing and exercising the right of forming themselves to a kind of humanity, as soon as they have discerned it.<sup>2</sup>

*Transcendence: On Self-Determination and Cosmopolitanism* accepts the modern ideal that individuals and peoples are entitled to define and develop themselves.<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that modern Westerners were the first to treat peoples of other lands with a degree of acceptance and respect, for of course they were not.<sup>4</sup> It is to say that the combination of ideas expressed by Herder in his less parochial moments—that peoples are fundamentally equal and worthy of respect, as are individuals, and are entitled to define and develop themselves as they think best—is not a combination that has found systematic and enduring expression before the modern world. Of course, this set of “entitlements” has met with resistance (apartheid and Jim Crow are not that far behind us), and various forms of Western imperialism belie these sentiments. Further, there are those who would argue that the notion of a “people” is itself problematic, and becoming more so daily as globalization increases. For the goals of this book, however, it is sufficient to acknowledge that different cultures and peoples exist, even if their compass and exact “natures” are contested.<sup>5</sup>

For several years I have been writing on two topics that may not seem to be related: the self-determination of individuals, which entails a capacity for existential choice, and cosmopolitanism, which entails an openness to transcultural social interaction. Individual self-determination deals with subjects insofar as they make choices that help shape who they are and how they define themselves. Cosmopolitanism appears to deal with individuals who have developed a sense of being “world citizens.” However, as they stand, both of these delineations are inadequate. Subjects are not simply free to make any choices that they wish, and cosmopolitans are not necessarily rootless souls who have escaped their childhood cultures to dwell in the empyrean of a world community. A cosmopolitan may be someone who has developed a deep respect for the integrity and worth of different cultures while remaining attached to his or her own culture. Even as cosmopolitans we never entirely leave our “family” of origin as we find ways to accept, respect, and share the experiences of those with different roots.

In two earlier books, *The Mediating Self* and *The Cosmopolitan Self*, I developed a theory of *individual* self-determination and applied it to a form of cosmopolitanism that is primarily moral, psychological, and sociological, as opposed to economic.<sup>6</sup> Both of these works addressed the ideas of George Herbert Mead—in particular, his concepts of the social self, the significant symbol, the generalized other, spontaneity, emergence,

novelty, and “sociality”<sup>7</sup>—in order to explain how the capacity for individual self-determination emerges, both ontogenetically and phylogenetically. I argued for a concept of freedom that does not appeal to inveterate notions of free will but instead relies on anticipatory experience, pre-reflective consciousness, and deliberation. In this book I build on these earlier works by drawing on a variety of philosophical orientations, for example, Scottish theories of sentiment, pragmatism, and existentialism. I defend an approach to self and society that shows how transcendence and self-formation are possible in spite of the weight of circumstance. “Transcendence” in this work denotes a supersession of the given, the accepted, the familiar, or the weight of circumstance. I offer a cosmopolitanism that makes room for both tradition and transcendence and that is once again primarily moral, psychological, and sociological.

Although the self-determination of individuals involves transcendence, as does a cosmopolitan sensibility, a people, no doubt, may prefer not to view their identity in terms of transcendence. Their identity as a people may require that they resist forms of “internal” transcendence as well as “external” interventions in their culture. The cosmopolitanism addressed in this book is sensitive to self-determination in this cultural sense. It respects cultural pluralism and distinguishes between individual and cultural self-determination. However, the conviction that individual self-determination is irreconcilably at odds with cultural self-determination is challenged. A developed capacity for personal self-determination can, for example, help generate support for the self-determination of other individuals and peoples. This is not to say that those committed to resisting the intrusion of cultures they view as alien will be satisfied with the model developed here. People, individually and collectively, will differ regarding just how much “transcendence” and self-determination are acceptable.

The goals of *Transcendence* are threefold: (1) to demonstrate the relevance of the concept of transcendence to credible notions of individual self-determination and cosmopolitanism; (2) to articulate a cosmopolitan sensibility that is attuned to cultural diversity and individual self-determination; and (3) to address conceptual affinities between philosophers from both sides of the Atlantic by examining the idea of transcendence.

Charles Taylor has contributed to our understanding of how cultural self-determination can be related to individual self-determination through his work on expressivism, which helps to bridge the apparent divide between a cosmopolitanism that is sensitive to cultural self-determination

and the self-determination of individuals. For Taylor, expressivism supports the notion that individuals and cultures possess natures that are realized and defined only through their expression. Both cultures and individuals are seen as having a need and a “right” to express themselves. They can be treated as homologous by the expressivist because of the relationship between the viability of a culture and the capability of its members to have meaningful personal narratives.<sup>8</sup> They also bear comparison because a denial of “expression” limits self and cultural development. In terms of individual expression, which can be, *mutatis mutandis*, transferred to cultures, Taylor asserts,

My claim is that the idea of nature as an intrinsic source goes along with an expressive view of human life. Fulfilling my nature means espousing the inner élan, the voice or impulse. And this makes what was hidden manifest for both myself and others. But this manifestation also helps to define what is to be realized. The direction of this élan wasn't and couldn't be clear prior to this manifestation. In realizing my nature, I have to define it in the sense of giving it some formulation; but this is also a definition in a stronger sense: I am realizing this formulation and thus giving my life a definitive shape. *A human life is seen as manifesting a potential which is also being shaped by this manifestation*; it is not just a matter of copying an external model or carrying out an already determinate formulation.<sup>9</sup>

Taylor's comments contain two important implications that are often conflated: we have inner natures that require expression; and in order to become ourselves, we must express ourselves. It is possible to subscribe to the latter statement without acceding to the former, and this is precisely the option that existentialists have been known to take, although it is not the one that Taylor selects in this passage. For the existentialist, we become who we are through our actions and choices, not because we have an inner nature that requires defining.<sup>10</sup> In other words, it is possible to be an expressivist without being an essentialist.

For Herder, on the other hand, the accent is placed on a people's unique nature or essence, which is realized as it expresses itself. A people, a *Volk*, should be allowed to develop at its own pace and in its own territory. Outside influences should not be allowed to taint a culture.<sup>11</sup> Herder's “cosmopolitan” would support the segregation of cultures, not their transcendence, in order to respect their unique identities. If one accepts Herder's assumption that self-determination is a matter of singular poten-

tialities (personal or cultural) that are simply in need of expression, then a cosmopolitanism that entails transcendence will appear misguided.<sup>12</sup> I do not accept this assumption. The challenge in our times is to pursue a cosmopolitanism that is neither exclusionary (in respecting identity) nor crudely universal. If this challenge is met, although it may seem paradoxical, cosmopolitans will respect local cultures, the transcultural, and the “universal”; that is to say, they will recognize the importance of place and of transcendence.

However, the story presented in this book does not dismiss the notion of inherent potentialities. For example, it recognizes that differences in physiology, which may influence temperament, play a significant role in determining who we are and who we might become as individuals. We do not simply “transcend” such factors as if by magic. But what we have the capacity to do, which is woven into the “nature” of the self, is to transcend our given circumstances in various ways and thereby transform ourselves. One of the most obvious ways that we can accomplish this is related to our capacity to anticipate and deliberate about alternative courses of action and then to select a course. In so doing we not only transcend our circumstances but engage in a process of self-determination. I argue that the capacity for deliberation and choice are not mysterious. They are in fact features of the social development of the self.

One of the underlying assumptions of *Transcendence* is that Hegel’s ur-text on recognition, the master-slave dialectic in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, sets the stage for demonstrating the extent to which selves are social and how they depend on others and social arrangements for their development. But Hegel’s account is embedded in a set of claims about Spirit’s self-development, and the pre-Darwinian framework of his system limits the extent to which social-psychological insights generated by pragmatism and later schools of thought can be brought to bear on questions of transcendence. So in spite of the fact that Hegel’s dialectic can be read as a mode of thought that capitalizes on the mind’s capacity for transcendence, and that Taylor reads him as perhaps the most influential expressivist, Hegel’s dialectic of recognition will need considerable updating if it is going to be of assistance in linking individual self-determination with cultural or group self-determination. George Herbert Mead’s thought—specifically, his account of the social development of the self—provides just such an updating. Mead should be read as a neo-Hegelian, and if he is read in this light, the relationship between individual self-determination, cultural

self-determination, and cosmopolitanism becomes reasonably transparent. Mead demonstrates how individuals develop cognitive selves through learned behaviors and through action—first and foremost, through communicative action. It is through communication, especially through the development of language, that cognitive selves first arise, and they continue to change through ongoing interaction.

In *Transcendence* I offer an alternative to the ways that Herder and Hegel think about self-determination. Herder's expressivism involves an essentializing of social roles and peoples in an uncritical fashion. And neither Hegel nor Herder supplies a sufficiently genetic account of how symbolic expression helps to develop the self in a manner that makes individual and cultural self-determination possible. I address these deficiencies not only by engaging Mead but by examining thinkers from both Europe and the United States for whom there is a set of concerns that revolves around notions of transcendence. I draw primarily, but by no means exclusively, on two traditions, pragmatism and existentialism. These traditions are uniquely positioned to help demonstrate how transcendence is a feature of individual and cultural self-determination, as well as cosmopolitanism. However, given that I am drawing on a range of thinkers, the term "transcendence" does not have a univocal meaning in this book, although there is a family resemblance among its uses. In light of this variety, a few words are called for about avenues for addressing transcendence.

When we think of transcendence in a philosophical context, one notion that readily comes to mind was made famous by Jean-Paul Sartre in the middle of the last century. "Transcendence" is a term that he uses to describe the way in which human beings are not confined to the given, to the *en-soi* (in-itself), to facticity. As a matter of fact, Sartre at times refers to the *pour-soi* (for-itself), the human being, simply as a "transcendence." We are not confined to the past, to what we have been, because of the spontaneity of consciousness and the manner in which our projects are directed toward future activity. In an early work, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, Sartre tells us,

Transcendental consciousness is an impersonal spontaneity. It determines its existence at each moment, without anything *before* it being conceivable. Thus each moment of our conscious life reveals to us a creation *ex nihilo*. Not a new *arrangement*, but a new existence. There is something anguishing for each of us, to experience directly this tireless creation of an existence of which *we* are not the creators. At this level man has the impression of ceaselessly escaping

from himself, of overflowing himself, of an abundance always unexpected taking him by surprise. And he saddles the unconscious with the task of accounting for this transcending of the Me by consciousness. The Me cannot in fact cope with this spontaneity, for *the will is an object which itself is constituted for and by this spontaneity*.<sup>13</sup>

This level of existential freedom proves to be indefensible, as Sartre himself acknowledges in later works (although he never abandons the notion of the project and a commitment to forms of transcendence). The fact is that as members of social groups and cultures we do seem to be “confined” in various ways to the given, to cultural assumptions and roles that we inherit, which appear to determine how we behave and think. These roles not only define who we are within a culture but also are the spectacles through which we observe and comment on cultures that are not our own.

In *Radical Hope*, Jonathan Lear addresses the power of socialization and succinctly summarizes the ways in which we define ourselves in terms of roles and cultural ideals when we live in a flourishing culture. The backdrop for Lear’s comments is the devastation experienced by the Crow when activities central to their culture, for example, the use of the coup-stick in battle to mark territory, were no longer possible.

If we consider a vibrant culture, it is possible to distinguish:

1. *Established social roles*. These will include socially sanctioned forms of marriage, sexual reproduction, family, and clan; standard social positions such as warrior, squaw, medicine man, and chief; ceremonial rituals; and so on.
2. *Standards of excellence associated with these roles*. These give us a sense of a culture’s own ideals: what it would be, say, to be really outstanding *as a chief, as a squaw, as a warrior, as a medicine man*.
3. *The possibility of constituting oneself as a certain sort of person—namely, one who embodies those ideals*. I shall call such a person a *Crow Subject*. This is what young Plenty Coups aspired to: to be a chief, to be outstanding as chief, and thus to be a living embodiment of what it was to be a Crow.<sup>14</sup>

Lear’s categorization of social roles in Crow culture helps raise a question that is central to this book, namely, if the axial nature of roles and ideals in societies is provisionally accepted, then how are we to understand possibilities for transcendence?<sup>15</sup> More specifically, in what ways

have a variety of modern, primarily twentieth-century, philosophers—in spite of the obvious plausibility of Lear’s portrayal of roles and standards that are important in flourishing cultures—sought to address the transcendence of roles within a culture and the boundaries between cultures? How do these thinkers understand possibilities for transcendence that undermine the central importance of Lear’s third point regarding specific cultural ideals, which appear to be parochial? One of the goals of this book is to show how it is possible to respect the reality of acculturation and processes of socialization *and* maintain a commitment to existential choice, which involves a form of transcendence.<sup>16</sup>

It’s worth noting that the culture Lear is describing would be viewed by Max Weber as a traditional one, that is, a culture *not* characterized by bureaucratic, technological, and goal-based rationality but one in which timeless values and long-standing customs are fundamental. Yet even members of such traditional societies have traveled and experienced cultural differences. If exposure to different cultures, and an appreciation for the horizons of one’s own, is all that is meant by cosmopolitanism, it would be safe to say that forms of cosmopolitanism have existed throughout recorded history.<sup>17</sup> But the specific form of cosmopolitanism that I explore in this work entails a basic respect for peoples and cultures that are not one’s own and a receptivity to the experiences of different peoples. In other words, this form of cosmopolitanism involves transcendence of the familiar. Again, I take this constellation of attitudes to be a relatively recent historical phenomenon, not more than a few centuries old at best.<sup>18</sup> However, I do not discuss the *historical* development and impact of expressivism and cosmopolitanism. The same is true regarding notions of existential choice and self-determination. My goal is to clarify how individual self-determination is possible through articulating the role(s) of transcendence in this process. To say this is not to deny the weight of habit, custom, temperament, and circumstance. It is to claim that individuals are capable of helping to define their own narratives and select courses of action that are dependent on their deliberations and choices.

The book is organized into three main sections. Part 1 offers an approach to individual self-determination that weighs the influence of community and habit, setting the stage for a discussion of cultural self-determination and cosmopolitanism in Part 2, which in turn lays the groundwork for challenges to notions of self-determination and cosmopolitanism in Part 3. Although the earlier chapters prepare the way for



later ones, *Transcendence* does not offer a seamless argument that moves from self-determination to cosmopolitanism and then to constructive criticism. Rather, the central themes of the book are interwoven within and among the chapters, with each part offering a series of perspectives on aspects of self and society.

Chapter 1 sketches two approaches to existential freedom and transcendence, one emphasizing consciousness (Sartre) and the other, language (Rorty). This is the most unalloyed statement of the existentialist position on freedom and transcendence in the book. The limitations of equating “existential freedom” with individual self-determination are addressed in Chapter 2 by delving into how “freedom” should be understood if habit, reflection, and deliberation are given their due. This chapter complements Sartre’s existentialism with Dewey’s pragmatism. Chapter 3 continues to address pragmatism’s contribution to our understanding of individual self-determination—this time with the assistance of Mead—through demonstrating the dangers of conceding too much to the sociological. This chapter also discusses concepts—for example, novelty, role-taking, the generalized other, and sociality—that play an important role in the model of cosmopolitanism developed in Part 2.

Part 2 addresses the relationship between individual and cultural self-determination. Specifically, Chapter 4 develops a model of cosmopolitanism that respects sympathetic attachments to kin and countrymen while sustaining the possibility of being a world citizen. The ideas articulated in this chapter draw on insights regarding self-development and self-determination that were addressed in Part 1 and augments them with insights from Mead’s later work. Chapter 5 extends the discussion of cosmopolitanism by using Du Bois’s reflections on culture, race, and double-consciousness to support and to raise difficulties for the model developed in Chapter 4, in part by drawing on the Scottish Enlightenment and Hegel. These difficulties are by no means insuperable but must be addressed, and they are highlighted by the trials of the “Color Line.”

Part 3 further explores cosmopolitan sensibilities and self-determination through insights and challenges stemming from (1) the sociology of ideas and sociological determinism, (2) the relationship of the instinctual to psychological development, and (3) the psychology and sociology of gender. Chapter 6 discusses the strengths and weakness of Neil Gross’s new sociology of ideas and his approach to strategic action and the concept of self. In developing his sociology of ideas, Gross uses Richard Rorty

as a case study to support his theory, and this brings Rorty back into the discussion both as an object of study and as a potential critic of an overly socialized conception of human beings. In the last two chapters, Hegel—whose account of recognition stands behind many of the insights of *Transcendence* but who has thus far remained mostly offstage—comes explicitly to the fore. Chapter 7 addresses Herbert Marcuse’s struggle not to let the instinctual undermine possibilities for self-determination and a “free civilization.” It clarifies and augments Marcuse’s argument by appealing to Hegel’s dialectic of limit, the concept of determinate choice, as well as to a version of Sartre’s notion of “the project.” Chapter 8 turns to Hegel’s urtext on the master and slave. It discusses gender inequities and their impact on self-determination, differences between Hegel’s dialectic of recognition and Mead’s concept of the social self, and how the “biological,” in certain circumstances, can serve as a mode of transcendence. A discussion of self-determination and cosmopolitanism in the context of recent American politics, focusing on Barack Obama as a philosophical pragmatist, can be found in an Afterword to *Transcendence* on the Stanford University Press website, [www.sup.org](http://www.sup.org).