

The Authority and Responsibility to Educate

Amy Gutmann

We are born weak, we need strength; helpless, we need aid; foolish, we need reason. All that we lack at birth, that we need when we come to man's estate, is the gift of education.

J.-J. Rousseau

So broadly understood as what we learn "from nature, from men, and from things," the gift of education may make us who we are, but is not ours to give (Rousseau, 1972, p. 6). Like Rousseau, we therefore direct our concern to that portion of education most amenable to our influence: the conscious efforts of men and women to inform the intellect and to shape the character of less educated people. We need to ask what the purposes of human education should be and where the authority to educate should lie.

We cannot determine the purposes of education by invoking an *a priori* theory of human nature. There are no doubt bounds of what is educationally possible at any given time, but these constraints leave societies a vast choice among competing educational purposes and authorities. Educational authorities may aim to *perfect* human nature by developing its potentialities, to *deflect* it into serving socially useful purposes, or to *defeat* it by repressing those inclinations that are socially destructive. We can choose among and give content to these aims only by developing a normative theory of what the educational purposes of a society should be.

We have inherited not one but several such normative theories. Three of the most distinct and distinguished of these theories can be drawn from interpretations of Plato, John Locke, and John Stuart Mill. In what follows I will not be concerned with the accuracy of these interpretations. My aim will be to use the theories of Plato, Locke and Mill, as they have been commonly understood, to illuminate the principles underlying three of the most common and compelling political understandings of education in our society. I call them (for reasons that will become apparent) theories of the *family state*, *state of families*, and *state of individuals*. Despite their differences, each treats questions of education (its purposes, distributions, and authorities) as part of a principled political theory. Building on the strengths and rejecting the weaknesses of each of these theories, I develop a theory of what I call *democratic education*, more fully supported

in my book *Democratic Education*, that supports multiple educational authorities, who together are responsible for educating children to become free and equal persons (Gutmann, 1999). When parental, political, and professional authorities honor the principles of democratic education, which protect children against repression of ideas and discrimination on the basis of ascriptive characteristics (such as gender, race, religion, and ethnicity), they act responsibly in furthering the most justifiable aim of education in a democratic society: the education of free and equal persons.

The Family State

Can we speak meaningfully about a good education without knowing what a just society and a virtuous person are? Socrates poses this challenge to the Sophists in the *Protagoras*. Like most of Socrates' questions, it has remained unanswered after twenty-five centuries, but it is still worth re-asking.

In his critique of the Sophists and in the *Republic*, Plato suggests that we cannot speak about a good education without knowing what justice and virtue really are. Justice, Socrates suggests, is the concurrent realization of individual and social good. Since the good life for individuals entails contributing to the social good, there is no necessary conflict between what is good for us and what is good for our society – provided our society is just. The defining feature of the family state is therefore its claim to exclusive educational authority as a means of establishing a harmony – a constitutive relation – between individual and social good based on knowledge.

Citizens of a family state learn that they cannot realize their own good except by contributing to the social good, and they are also educated to desire only what is good for themselves and their society. Plato's most cogent defense of this ideal is that a peaceful and prosperous society will be impossible unless children learn to associate their own good with the social good. Unless the social good that they are taught is worthy of pursuit, they will grow to be unfulfilled and dissatisfied with the society that miseducated them. All states that fail to fulfill this responsibility over the education of children will therefore degenerate out of internal disharmony.

It is important to emphasize that Plato's family state provides no support for any educational authority that teaches children a way of life that cannot be rationally defended as morally superior to other ways of life. The state may not argue simply: "Because we wish to achieve social harmony, we shall indoctrinate all children to believe that our way of life is best." A reasonable response then would surely be: "But why should you have the authority to impose your way of thinking on the next generation. Why shouldn't I have the authority to impose my way?" And, of course, there will be many other people whose responses will be the same, but whose conceptions of the good life will be at odds with both my own and that of the state's educational authorities. On the Platonic argument, it is essential to the justice of the state's educational claims that its conception of the good life for every person be *the right one*. States that assume a parental role to educate according to false opinion are no better than Sophists who assume a professorial role to teach children virtue without knowing what virtue is. Indeed, sophistical states are worse than individual sophists because they can wield far more power.

The Platonic family state, however, has its own problems. A major one is the difficulty of someone or some group actually determining (in practice as well as in principle) the correct conception of the good for every person (Popper, 1971, pp. 18–34, 157–68). It is not that we know that a single conception of justice and the good *cannot in principle* be discovered. It is that we have no good reason to expect any political authority to be so wise in principle and impartial in practice.

Another, more telling criticism is one of principle: it proceeds by accepting the possibility that someone sufficiently wise and conscientious might discover the good. She would then try to convince the rest of us that she had discovered *the* good, not just another contestable theory of the good, and the good for us, not just the good appropriate to some other people. Were she to succeed in convincing us, there would be no need to rule over us. Were she to fail, she would need (as Plato recognized) to wipe the social slate clean by exiling “all those in the city who happen to be older than ten; and taking over their children, . . . rear them – far away from those dispositions they now have from their parents” (Plato, 1968, p. 220, 541a). That is not only an exorbitantly high price to pay for realizing a just society, it is a price that just authorities will be unwilling to pay. Socrates recoils from the idea on behalf of the philosopher king, suggesting that he would be unwilling to assume political power unless forced to do so. The people who are willing to exert such power are precisely those we ought to fear will wield it tyrannically and to bad ends (ibid., p. 274, 592a).

This objection to the family state is both practical and moral. A life that is good for a free person consists in part in a life that the person recognizes as good and therefore wants to live. Otherwise the life, however “objectively” good, will not be lived as such, and will be a misfortune for the person forced to live it. “That may be the best life to which someone – educated from birth in the proper manner – can aspire,” I might admit, “but it’s not the good life for me. And don’t I have a claim to living a life that is good for me (provided I do not harm others by so doing)?” The objectively good life, defined as the life that is best for a person who is properly educated from birth, need not be the good life, or even the closest approximation of the good life, for people who are not so educated.

What about a state that insists on exclusive authority over children so they will not create the same problem for the next generation? The claim to *exclusive* authority over children is too great to entrust to a state, or to any authority (including parents, as we shall see when we consider the state of families). The freedom to raise children entails discretionary authority over the education of our children within the family, although that discretion is far from limitless and also must leave room for public education – for free and equal citizenship. Children are future citizens, but that does not make them mere creatures of the state.

As future citizens, children need to be educated to share authority over the collective decisions in their society. Placing exclusive educational authority in the hands of an unaccountable elite is an unpromising way of achieving free and equal citizenship. If citizens have a claim to free and equal citizenship, then part of that freedom will involve holding state educators accountable. The family state does not make room for such political accountability to the people who are governed. It rejects reciprocity, or mutual justification of mutually binding laws, which democracy defends.

The Platonic perspective refuses to recognize the force of the claims of reciprocity. Yet these claims constitute the most forceful challenge to anyone's exclusive authority over education. To be justified, the family state would need to recognize a realm of parental authority and it would also need to be democratically accountable. But then it would cease to be a family state.

The family state attempts to constrain our choices among ways of life and educational purposes in a way that is incompatible with the legitimate claims of parents and citizens. In its unsuccessful attempt to do so, it successfully presents the strongest case that educational knowledge should be translated into political power. But that case, as we have seen, is not strong enough to render illegitimate the claims of parents and citizens to share in educational authority.

The State of Families

States that aspire to the moral unity of families underestimate the strength and deny the legitimacy of any substantial parental authority over children. It is no coincidence that Plato's *Republic* required the wresting of children away from parents for the sake of educating them correctly. Radically opposed to the family state is the state of families, which places all educational authority ultimately in the hands of parents.

Theorists of the state of families offer two different justifications of parental educational authority, one based on consequences and the other based on rights. John Locke primarily maintained that parents are the best protectors of their children's future interests, while Thomas Aquinas claimed that parents have a natural right to educational authority. Some contemporary defenders of the state of families make both of these arguments, and they often add another weaker argument, based on the individual freedom of parents, without noting that individual freedom of choice ends where power over others begins. (For the first justification, see Friedman, 1962, pp. 85–107; Coons and Sugarman, 1978. For the second justification, see Schrag, 1971, p. 363.) Charles Fried argues that “the right to form one's child's values, one's child's life plan and the right to lavish *attention* on the child are extensions of the basic right not to be interfered with in doing these things for oneself” (Fried, 1978, p. 152). Fried bases parental rights over children on “the facts of reproduction” and the absence of a societal right to make choices for children.

Although the appeal of the state of families is apparent once we recognize the defects of a family state, *none* of these theoretical arguments justifies resting all educational authority ultimately in the hands of parents. It is one thing to recognize the right of parents to educate their children as members of a family, quite another to claim that this right of familial education extends to an exclusive and ultimate right of parents to insulate their children from exposure to ways of thinking and living that conflict with their own. The consequentialist argument is also weak: parents cannot simply be counted upon to equip their children with the education necessary to exercising freedom for themselves and becoming equal citizens of a democratic society. Some parents are unable (often through no fault of their own) and others are unwilling to accept such educational responsibility (see *Wisconsin v. Yoder*, 406 US 205, 1972). The widespread teaching of intolerance, which the state of families

would support as long as parents choose such teaching, would undermine the ability of a democracy to ensure all individuals the conditions of free and equal citizenship.

The strongest argument against the state of families is not that parents will teach intolerance – some will and others will not – but rather that neither parents nor states have a right to ultimate and exclusive authority over the education of children. Because the future freedom of children to live their own lives as they see fit is at stake – and implicit in the very claim that parents and other adults make to being treated as free and equal beings – the educational authority of parents has to be partial to be justified. Having already emphasized the danger of permitting a centralized state to monopolize education, it is now appropriate to recognize the danger of placing ultimate and exclusive authority in the hands of parents. (Locke himself, it should be noted, rejected the argument that children are the property of their parents.)

The same Lockean perspective that requires a state to grant adults a set of basic personal and political liberties also commits it to assuring children an education that makes those freedoms both possible and meaningful in the future. Dividing authority between parents and state is far less threatening to the future freedom of children than resting educational authority in parents or state alone. But a divided authority is not all that an education for freedom requires. It requires helping children to develop their faculties of reasoning and their capacities of discernment. Nevertheless, the aim of education that Locke recommends in his *Conduct of the Understanding*, moral freedom, is hard to reconcile with the means, namely exclusive parental authority, which Locke defends in the *Second Treatise*. Since schooling was overwhelmingly the province of the church in Locke's time, and Locke was an early defender of separation of church and state, it is not surprising that he looked to parents rather than the state to support schooling.

The fundamental oversight of the state of families is its assumption that the welfare of children will be safeguarded simply by securing the freedom of parents. Its fundamental insight is recognizing that parental freedom within the family can be consistent with the interests of children in becoming free and equal citizens of a democratic society, so long as the basic interests of children are safeguarded. What we have learned so far from the strengths and weaknesses of the family state and the state of families is that there is no simple way of resolving the tension between parental and political authority over the education of children, since both are necessary, yet neither is sufficient to secure the future of children as free and equal persons. The state may not grant parents absolute authority over their children's education in the name of individual freedom, nor may it claim exclusive educational authority in the name of communal solidarity. That there is no simple resolution to the tension between educational authorities should not deter us from searching for a better resolution than that offered by either the family state or the state of families.

The State of Individuals

John Stuart Mill argued that

It is in the case of children that misapplied notions of liberty are a real obstacle to the fulfillment by the State of its duties. One would almost think that a man's children were supposed to be

literally, and not metaphorically, a part of himself, so jealous is opinion of the smallest interference of law with his absolute and exclusive control over them. (Mill, 1977, p. 302)

Having exposed a central flaw in the state of families, Mill defended a more liberal conception of education. "All attempts by the State to bias the conclusions of its citizens on disputed subjects are evil," Mill argued, hence the government should "leave to parents to obtain the education where and how they pleased, and content itself with helping to pay the school fees of the poorer classes of children" and limiting the educational authority of parents through (among other things) a system of "public examinations, extending to all children and beginning at an early age." If a child fails the examination, Mill recommends that "the father, unless he has some sufficient ground of excuse, might be subjected to a moderate fine, to be worked out, if necessary, by his labor." To insure neutrality, the knowledge tested by the examinations should "be confined to facts and positive science exclusively" (Mill, 1977, pp. 302-3).

Some contemporary liberals extend the logic of Mill's argument to defend a state of individuals. They criticize all educational authorities that threaten to bias the choices of children toward some disputed or controversial ways of life and away from others. Their ideal educational authority is one that maximizes future choice without prejudicing children toward any controversial conception of the good life.

The state of individuals champions the dual goals of *opportunity* for choice and *neutrality* among disputed or controversial conceptions of the good life. A just educational authority must not bias children's choices among good lives, but it must provide every child with an opportunity to choose freely and rationally among the widest range of lives.

Neither parents nor states are likely to fulfill the ideal of neutrality. Parents are unlikely to resist passing some of their particular values and cultural prejudices on to their children. States are equally likely to subvert the neutrality principle: they will try to teach children to appreciate the particular values and cultural prejudices that hold their society together. Recognizing the power of these parental and political impulses, liberals dedicated to neutrality look for an educational authority more impartial than parents or public officials. They defend the authority of professional educators who are motivated by the interests of children in learning and unconstrained by parental or political authority.

Contemporary liberals often invoke the spirit of Kant or Mill to defend the ideal of neutrality, overlooking its moral limitations and the way both Kant and Mill diverged from defending neutrality in its pure principled form, which is unrealizable. In its pure principled form, neutrality is also undesirable. There is moral value in the desire of educators to cultivate basic virtues in children before they are capable of impartially considering all of the pros and cons of cultivating the basic virtues. By the time they learn to critically assess the virtues they have developed and the values to which they have been predisposed, the predispositions are already there. This does not mean that children who are taught certain virtuous habits (such as non-violence and honesty) before their critical capacities are fully developed are incapable of assessing those virtues. But it does mean that their education has not been neutral between virtues and vices. Nor should it be.

Nor can an education be culturally neutral, which is what the state of individuals in its pure principled form requires. When children learn to speak English rather than French, or Dutch rather than German, or when they are taught to be bilingual, they learn not by choice, but by cultural predisposition. And this cultural predisposition skews their future choices, even if it does not uniquely determine who they will be, or how they will decide to live their lives. Cultural predisposition of children through education (and socialization) can be justified by the need for cultural coherence, which is another name for a non-neutral education (Ackerman, 1980, p. 141).

What liberals rightly discern as a problem in using education to bias children toward some cultures and conceptions of the good life is not non-neutrality *per se* but the pretense on the part of those educators who claim, or teach as if they knew, that their culture is morally superior to others. Children are therefore biased into thinking, without actually subjecting their thinking to critical evaluation, that their language and culture are morally superior to all others. The antidote to this problem – and it is a problem that can accompany the necessarily selective nature of any education – is not to aspire to an impossible neutrality but rather to teach in a way that does not close children's minds to other cultures and ways of life. To teach open-mindedness, however, is not to teach in a morally neutral way. It is to teach an important democratic and liberal virtue. The virtue is democratically important because all democracies are culturally and morally pluralistic. The virtue is a virtue because it entails some moral commitments: the commitment to educate children in a way that encourages them to be open-minded at the same time as they are morally committed. Open-mindedness goes together with moral commitment once one recognizes that moral commitments can be subject to reasonable questioning, and through such questioning to affirmation (or rejection).

Liberals who say that freedom is the *correct* end of education cannot mean to defend a limitless freedom without moral limits. An education for equal freedom is not morally neutral. Freedom is a social good – indeed an individual right in a liberal democracy – when it is equal freedom of all individuals as free and equal persons. Equal freedom is also an individual good, but one whose limits are set by our social being and context. My freedom must be compatible with your equal freedom, and vice versa. My child's education for freedom must be compatible with your child's education for freedom, and vice versa. It follows that the state of individuals can only realize its defensible aim of educating for freedom if it recognizes the social context and constraints of educating for freedom. Among those constraints are the need to provide some kind of cultural coherence in education and the need to educate children to equal freedom, not the kind of freedom for some that effectively subordinates others.

The strength of the state of individuals is the high value it places on educating children so that they can live a free life and the life of a free people. The weakness of the state of individuals is its benign neglect of the fact that educating children for individual freedom entails also educating them in a social context that is conducive to such freedom. That context must also provide for political freedoms: the equal freedom of individuals to choose not only a good life for themselves but also to collectively decide as political equals on the shape of their society, which includes its culture. Cultures change partly as a consequence of political choices, such as what language and history curricula to teach children in schools.

An educated, self-reflective people must have both personal and political liberties. Political liberties distinguish democratic societies from undemocratic ones. Citizens of a democratic society are free only if the democracy also secures their personal liberties along with their political ones. Many personal freedoms, such as free speech, are also political freedoms. Taking individual freedom in all its dimensions seriously therefore means taking democracy seriously. And taking democracy seriously means taking democratic education seriously. We therefore need to move beyond the state of individuals to a democratic state of education that is committed to supporting a plurality of conceptions of the good life and a corresponding plurality of educational authorities. Without this, tyranny is more likely than not to prevail in education as in politics.

Democratic Education

The ideal of democratic education is what I call *conscious social reproduction*. "Conscious" means that education aims to cultivate the capacity in all children to reasonably reflect on their own lives and the society and world within which they live. "Social" means that such a capacity aims not only for personal but also for political freedom, since choices at the social level profoundly affect choices at the individual level. Without political freedom, individuals are not fully free. Reproduction does not mean replication, but is the aim of education to empower individuals to make choices within the contexts in which they find themselves. We cannot choose our personal or political lives *de novo*. Our choices are contextual, and therefore conscious social reproduction recognizes the need to empower individuals to think contextually about how they want to re-produce their society, rather than merely mindlessly replicate it.

Conscious social reproduction, like any educational ideal, is not self-evidently correct or uncontroversial. It is a morally defensible ideal because it leaves maximum room for citizens both to live their own lives as they see fit and to shape their society together as free and equal persons. A society committed to conscious social reproduction has a moral response to those adults who object to a way of education on grounds that it conflicts with their moral values. "The virtues of freedom, honesty, non-violence, critical thinking, and so on that democratic education teaches," educational authorities can reply in the first instance, "are necessary to give children the chance to live a free life as both individuals and citizens. The kind of character you are asking us to cultivate would deprive children of that chance, the very chance that justifies your own claim to living a good life and sharing as equals in educational authority."

Democratic education accepts the partial insight of the family state: education must have a social component and authorities that are not only parental. Democratic education accepts the partial insight of the state of families: parents must also share educational authority. The life of a free person includes the choice of being a parent, and being a parent entails having some educational authority over one's children. Parental authority must not be considered exclusive and ultimate authority, which would deprive children of the education they need in preparation for the freedom to

live their own lives as adults as they see fit, and also deprive a democracy of the ability to educate children in preparation for exercising the political freedoms of free and equal citizens. Democratic education accepts two important partial insights of the state of individuals. One is that living the life of a free person is a basic aim of education. Another is that professional educators need to be well equipped and motivated to teach the deliberative skills that are essential to living such a life.

Why is democratic education committed to teaching skills for choosing among good lives rather than the single best way of life for each person? It would be an illegitimate pretension to educational authority on anyone's part to deprive any child of the capacities necessary for choice among good lives. Even if I know that my way of life is best, this does not entail a right to impose my way of life on anyone else, even on my own child, at the cost of depriving her of the ability to choose a good life for herself. Second, the same skills that are necessary to choosing among good lives are also necessary for the political freedom to share as free and equal citizens in a representative democracy. It would also be an illegitimate pretension on educators' part to think that they know precisely what political decisions citizens should make, and make those decisions for them, rather than educate them to be capable of holding their representatives accountable for political decisions, according to their own best lights.

Educating children to live the lives of free and equal persons, which includes being free and equal citizens, does not entail an education that itself values only freedom. Educational authorities must teach children those virtues that are conditions of the lives of free people, which include tolerance, justice, and reciprocity, without which democratic societies, and therefore freedom, cannot flourish. Teaching these virtues also entails educating children to develop their capacities to assess these virtues, and therefore to accept, reject, or revise their understanding of them through the use of their reason.

Cultivating moral character is therefore part of a democratic education. Who, it might be challenged, should decide what kind of character to cultivate? We have examined and rejected three philosophically forceful answers to this question. Theorists of the family state rest educational authority exclusively in the hands of a centralized state in an attempt to wed knowledge of the good life with political power. Theorists of the state of families place educational authority exclusively in the hands of parents, on the assumption that they have a natural right to such authority or that they alone are the educational authorities who can safeguard the welfare of their children. Theorists of the state of individuals refuse to rest educational authority in any hands without the assurance that the choices of children will not be prejudiced in favor of some ways of life and against others — an assurance that no educator can provide.

None of these conceptions of educational authority provides an adequate foundation for educating children to become free and equal persons and citizens. Yet each contains a partial truth. States, parents, and professional educators all have important roles to play in educating free and equal persons. A democratic state of education recognizes that educational authority must be shared among parents, citizens, and professional educators, even though such sharing does not guarantee that power will be wedded to knowledge, that parents can successfully pass their prejudices on to their children, or that education will be neutral among competing conceptions of the good life.

If a democratic education does not guarantee virtue based on knowledge, or the autonomy of families, or neutrality among ways of life, what is the value of its premise of shared educational authority? The broad distribution of educational authority among citizens, parents, and professional educators supports the core aim of democratic education: educating free and equal persons who are capable of engaging in conscious social reproduction. Unlike a family state, a democratic state recognizes the value of parental education in perpetuating particular conceptions of the good life, consistent with the future freedom of children to choose their own way of life for themselves and to share as free and equal citizens in the political life of their society. Unlike a state of families, a democratic state recognizes the value of professional authority in enabling children to appreciate and to evaluate ways of life other than those favored by their families. Unlike a state of individuals, a democratic state recognizes the value of political education in acculturating children in ways that are consistent with living the life of free persons and sharing the rights and responsibilities of democratic citizenship.

Democratic education is committed to the sharing of educational authority so as to provide all children with an education adequate to their becoming free and equal persons and citizens. They should be educated in a way that they can choose (or not) to participate as equals in democratic politics, choose among good lives (which include raising children, if they so choose), and join (or not) the many associations that partly shape the identities of free people.

Democratic education also acknowledges two reasons for permitting communities to use education to predispose children toward some ways of life and away from others. One reason is grounded on the value of moral freedom. All societies of self-reflective beings must admit the moral value of enabling their members to discern the difference between good and bad ways of life. Children do not learn to discern this difference on the basis of an education that strives for neutrality among ways of life. Children are not taught that bigotry is bad, for example, by offering it as one among many competing conceptions of the good life, and then subjecting it to criticism on grounds that bigots do not admit that other people's conceptions of the good are "equally" good. Children first become the kind of people who are repelled by bigotry, and then they feel the force of the reasons for their repulsion. Reasons to reject bigotry are quite impotent in the absence of such sensibilities: they offer no compelling argument to people who feel no need to treat other people as equals and are willing to live with the consequences of their disrespect of others. To cultivate in children the character that feels the force of reason is a justifiable aim of education.

Education for free choice cannot be the only justifiable aim of education in a democratic society, since part of free political choice is the freedom to pass on particular, non-neutral cultural understandings to children through education. Consistent with our being educated as free persons, we are also educated as people with particular cultural identities, which we have the capacity to affirm, revise, and reject. To focus exclusively on the value of freedom, or even on the value of moral freedom, neglects the value that people may legitimately place on educating children as members of families, communities, and the world today. Education is not timeless, and its time-bound quality orients us toward the world in ways that we value.

Children can be educated as free people who are also predisposed to particular ways of life, but those predispositions should not be taught (or held) as unquestionable prejudices. When children are taught particular languages, they should not be taught that those languages, or the cultures attached to them, are superior. Identifying strongly with language and culture should not be confused with moral superiority. To avoid teaching culture as prejudice, a democratic state should teach children in ways that help them develop their capacity to understand and to evaluate competing conceptions of the good life and the good society. A commitment to developing the capacity for critical deliberation among good lives and societies requires principled limits on all educational authorities, parents, public officials, and professionals.

One principled limit on all educational authorities is *non-repression* of reason. The principle of non-repression prevents the state, and any group within it, from using education to restrict the development of children's capacity for reasoning. Non-repression is completely compatible with also using education to cultivate those character traits that serve as foundations for developing the capacity for reasoning. Cultivation of a democratic character develops rather than represses the use of reason to assess the character traits that are cultivated.

Teaching the skills of reasoned deliberation remains the educational aim most distinctively critical to a democratic society of free and equal citizens. Although non-repression constitutes a constraint on educational authority, it is best conceived as a self-constraint in defense of democratic citizenship. The principle of non-repression derives from the primary value of democratic education, to educate individuals as free and equal persons who are able to hold their representatives accountable. Democratic education is not based on the view that individuals must participate in politics. This would choose a conception of the good life for people. Rather, it is based on the view that they must be educated as children to be capable of choosing a good life for themselves and sharing as free and equal citizens in democratic politics. Free and equal citizens participate in politics as they so choose (to participate) and are chosen (as representatives) by their fellow citizens. To repress the capacity for reasoned deliberation in children is to prevent them from having the opportunity to be free and equal citizens. Because *conscious* social reproduction is the ideal of democratic education, democratic educators constrain themselves from using education to stifle reasoned deliberation of competing conceptions of the good life and the good society.

A second principled limit on legitimate democratic authority, which also follows from the ideal of education for free and equal citizenship, is *non-discrimination*. For democratic education to support conscious *social* reproduction, rather than elite reproduction, all educable children must be adequately educated. Non-discrimination extends the logic of non-repression, since states and families can be selectively repressive by excluding entire groups of children from schooling or by denying them an education conducive to deliberation. Historically, repression in education has commonly taken the more passive form of discrimination in schooling against ethnic and racial minorities, girls, physically disabled, and other socially disfavored groups of children. The effect of discrimination is often to repress, at least temporarily, the ability of members of these groups to share as free and equal citizens in enjoying the social goods that democracy has to offer other more advantaged citizens. Non-discrimination can thus be viewed as the distributional complement to non-repression.

In its most general application to education, non-discrimination prevents the state, and all groups within it, from denying anyone an educational good on grounds irrelevant to the justifiable social purpose of that good. Applied to all aspects of education that are necessary to prepare children for future free and equal citizenship, non-discrimination entails non-exclusion. No educable children may be excluded from an education adequate to develop their capacities for free and equal citizenship.

Non-repression and non-discrimination are principled constraints on parental, popular, and professional sovereignty over education. Why consider such constraints democratic? Democracy is a moral and political ideal, and as such democracy cannot mean merely majority (or plurality) rule. Democracy entails the idea that mutually binding laws and policies should be mutually justified to free and equal persons. Free and equal personhood is therefore basic to democracy, as is the idea of sharing as equals in holding accountable those who make laws and policies in one's name. Free and equal persons must therefore be able to deliberate about their collective lives in order to hold their representatives accountable. The same skills of reasoned deliberation also enable individuals to choose among good lives for themselves, if they so choose. There is no force to be applied here; individuals are free not to participate in politics and not to deliberate about their own lives. But this freedom as adults makes it all the more important that children are educated to have the choice. Educational authorities cannot be allowed to make the choice for them, blocking their choice for the future and violating their democratic birthright.

The principles of non-repression and non-discrimination support deliberative freedom at both the personal and political levels. All citizens should be educated so as to have a chance to choose a good life for themselves and to share in self-consciously shaping the structure of their society. Democratic education leaves open a vast array of lives that may be chosen, but it is not therefore neutral among conceptions of the good life. No conception of education can be. A defense of democratic education does not depend on a claim to neutrality. It depends on the ideal of educating all children to be capable of free and equal personhood and citizenship.

Like the family state, a democratic state of education tries to teach virtues that can be reasonably affirmed, but it does not claim absolute educational authority. One democratic virtue is open-mindedness, and the corresponding capacity to question what one has been taught. Virtues that embrace open-mindedness might best be called *democratic* virtues. To educate all children to be able to reflect reasonably on their society supports their free and equal citizenship and its constitutive role in conscious social reproduction.

Like the state of families, a democratic state upholds a degree of parental authority over education, resisting the view that children are creatures of the state, but also resisting the view that children are the creatures of their parents (which was long taken to mean their fathers, despite the fact that mothers did most of the child-rearing). In recognizing that children should be treated not merely as creatures of a family state or a family, democratic education educates children as future free and equal persons. In this way, democratic education accepts the insight of the state of individuals, that no group can claim to assimilate the identity of children to its own whether that group be public, parental, or professional.

Like the state of individuals, a democratic state defends a degree of professional authority over education, not on grounds of their neutrality or their exclusive or ultimate authority over children, but rather to the extent that professional educators can help teach children the skills and virtues necessary for free and equal personhood and citizenship. Democratic education therefore is committed to a combination of public, parental, and professional authority, as needed, to educate children as future persons and citizens.

Conclusion: Civic Minimalism and Multiculturalism

Two issues in democratic education have gained prominence in the past decade. The first is whether civic education that is publicly mandated must be minimal so that parental choice is maximal. The second concerns the way in which publicly subsidized schools should respond to the increasingly multicultural character of societies.

How extensive are the civic purposes of schooling? A view called "civic minimalism" defends teaching the minimal requirements that are necessary to permit a democracy to function, but requiring no more. For a democracy to require more than the civic minimum, on this view, constitutes an illegitimate exercise of political authority on the part of citizens over parents. A common corollary of civic minimalism is a voucher system, by which parents have the authority to decide how public monies are spent for their own children in schooling. Civic minimalism weds the "state of families" to a minimal defense of civic education.

By minimizing the civic component of schooling, civic minimalists suggest they can avoid the problem of achieving consensus about civic education. Civic minimalism seeks not to contribute to democratic deliberation but rather to offer an alternative to it. Even if democratic majorities support educational standards that are more than minimal, civic minimalists oppose their authority to implement those standards even in publicly supported schools. Civic minimalists would need to turn to judges to overrule state legislatures, school districts, and boards of education that impose higher standards than their minimalist conception.

Paradoxically, civic minimalists must still rely on democratic justifications: any legitimate law or constitutional amendment that defined and enforced the civic minimum would require democratic support. This creates a serious problem for civic minimalists, since there are so many competing conceptions of the civic minimum, some defending no more than literacy and numeracy, others teaching civic virtues such as toleration, racial and gender non-discrimination, and mutual respect. Who has the legitimate authority to impose a contestable conception of a civic minimum as a ceiling as well as a floor on democratic authority in the face of democratic disagreement?

For civic minimalism to work, its advocates would need to defend a specific, substantive conception of the civic minimum, and convince enough other people of its unique correctness that no other set of public requirements on schools would be justifiable. The problem is that all such substantive conceptions are subject to the

same sort of reasonable disagreement that minimalists claim is grounds for rejecting democratic education in favor of civic minimalism. Because many people reasonably reject civic minimalism, its self-defense as a means of avoiding democratic disagreement is self-defeating.

The increasing multiculturalism of modern societies raises another important set of questions for democratic education. In the United States, students were once taught histories that systematically excluded the voices of minority groups, and were commonly expected, regardless of their religion, to participate in Protestant prayers and Christian hymns. I mention these practices here, rather than more positive ones, to illustrate two troubling features of a public schooling that does not appropriately recognize multiculturalism. The history books illustrate the first feature: disrespect of experiences of groups that have suffered discrimination. The second feature is reflected in the practices that pressure students to conform to Protestant religious practices: intolerance of dissenting beliefs and practices.

These two features of public schooling are indefensible from any moral and political perspective that would treat individuals as civic equals. They are impermissible in light of the principles of non-repression and non-discrimination. Public institutions should manifest and cultivate mutual respect among individuals as free and equal citizens. This aim is basic to every democratic ideal that defends free and equal citizenship. A democratic education that is consistent with these conceptions calls for two different responses to multiculturalism, responses that are united by a single principled aim of treating individuals as civic equals, free to live their own lives as they see fit – as long as they do not harm others – and empowered to share as equals in the collective decisions of their society.

The first response, in reaction to exclusions of the experiences of entire groups from the curriculum, is to publicly recognize the experiences of oppressed groups, rather than neglecting or denigrating those experiences and thereby exalting those of more dominant groups. The second response is similarly inspired by a commitment to mutual respect among citizens. This response is agreeing to disagree about beliefs and practices, such as sexual orientation, that are a matter of basic liberty. This is the response of toleration. Toleration substitutes for imposing any single substantive system of beliefs and practices on all students, regardless of their religious or other spiritual convictions. Multicultural democracies cannot afford to take for granted either of these two responses, for they are not the inevitable product of a democratic process. Instead, democratic education should work actively to support respect for individuals and their equal rights as citizens, rather than support the survival rights of traditional cultures or defend the dictates of any single authority – whether it be the state, parents, or professionals – simply because they possess decision-making authority (for a defense of survival rights of cultures, see Taylor, 1994).

See also 1 THE SOCRATIC TRADITION; 6 ENLIGHTENMENT LIBERALISM; 7 ROUSSEAU, DEWEY, AND DEMOCRACY; 29 CHURCH, STATE, AND EDUCATION; 30 COMMON SCHOOLING AND EDUCATIONAL CHOICE; 31 CHILDREN'S RIGHTS; 33 EDUCATIONAL EQUALITY AND JUSTICE

References

- Ackerman, B. (1980) *Social Justice in the Liberal State*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Coons, J. E. and Sugarman, S. (1978) *Education by Choice: The Case for Family Control*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Fried, C. (1978) *Right and Wrong*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Friedman, M. (1962) *Capitalism and Freedom*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gutmann, A. (1999) *Democratic Education*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Mill, J. S. (1977) *On Liberty*. In *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, volume 18, ed. J. M. Robinson. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 213–310.
- Murphy, W. F. (1980) An ordering of constitutional values. *Southern California Law Review*, 53(2), 703–60.
- Plato (1968) *The Republic*, trans. A. Bloom. New York: Basic Books.
- Popper, K. (1971) *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, volume 1. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Rousseau, J. J. (1972) *Émile, or On education*, trans. B. Foxley. New York: Everyman (original work published 1762).
- Schrag, F. (1971) The right to educate. *School Review*, 79(3), 359–78.
- Taylor, C. (1994) The politics of recognition. In A. Gutmann (ed.), *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 25–74.