Moral and Political Aspects of Education

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We subject children to education in the hope of influencing not only what opportunities they will have, but also the people they will be. What kinds of people should we hope they will be? What opportunities should they have? And how should those opportunities be distributed among them?

It is convenient to think of the moral and political aspects of the educational system in three categories. I shall refer to the first as the "aims goals"; these goals describe the proper aims of education in the sense that they draw on ideals of what the educated person would be like and identify the values which underlie those ideals. When people disagree about whether children should be subject to character education, or religious education, deeper disagreements about aims goals often (but not always) underpin their arguments, which are fundamentally about what kinds of educational opportunities should be available. Second are what I refer to as distributive goals; these describe how educational opportunities should be distributed. Disagreements in the UK about whether children should be selected for an academic schooling at age 11 were often underlain by disagreements about distributional goals (broadly speaking, defenders of selection thought that educational opportunities should be distributed more generously to those with more talent, whereas opponents usually thought that they should be distributed equally); so are disagreements in the US about bussing and racial integration of schools. The final category is what I shall simply refer to as "constraints". Assume that there is complete agreement on the ideal aims and distribution of educational opportunities; still there could be disagreement about the extent to which it is permissible for the government to override the preferences of parents to achieve those goals, or the degree of coercion schools can use to get children to comply with discipline. These disagreements are often underpinned by commitment to the existence of certain moral constraints on what may be done to pursue ideals.

1. Aims goals

Theorists, obviously, disagree about aims goals. In this section I'm going to argue for five aims goals: personal autonomy; the ability to contribute to social and economic life broadly understood; personal flourishing; democratic competence; and the capacity for cooperation.

Autonomy: Children have a right to the opportunity to make and act on well-informed and well-thought out judgments about how to live their own lives. The animating idea behind the goal is that for human beings to enjoy a good life they have to find a way of life that is suited to their particular personalities. Think about religious choice. Some people may flourish brilliantly within the constraints laid down by Roman Catholicism, but other may find that those constraints make it impossible to live well. We make our choice about whether to be Roman Catholics based on a judgment of fit between the

chosen and ourselves; the better the fit the better we flourish. But it is important that we have knowledge about other religious views and non-religious views, because for some (those who cannot flourish within Catholicism) flourishing will depend on being able to adopt alternatives. Not only do we need knowledge of the alternatives, we also need the self-knowledge, habits of mind, and strength of character to make the appropriate alternative choice.

I've framed the choice as a religious choice because religion is the aspect of life around which debates about autonomy most usually revolve. But there are many other less obvious, but perhaps equally important, ways in which we ought to be able to rely on our own judgments in our lives. Think about the choice of occupation. Some children find themselves under very heavy parental pressure to pursue a particular occupational path. The non-autonomous person might reject the path out of spite or, alternatively, succumb to the parental pressure without enthusiasm. The autonomous person, by contrast, has sufficient knowledge of the relevant variables and sufficient fortitude to make the parental pressure a very small influence on her choice; whether, ultimately, she chooses for or against will depend on her own, independent, judgment of the fit between the occupation and her interests.

Think, finally, about sexual identity. Suppose (plausibly) that heterosexuality and homosexuality are morally equivalent; it is, in other words, exactly as possible to live well as a homosexual as it is as a heterosexual. Someone whose constitution is, for whatever reason, incompatible with flourishing as a heterosexual, needs to grow up with an awareness that there are other legitimate and morally innocent ways of living, and needs to be raised with enough ability and inclination to seek self-knowledge that she has a real chance of finding out who she is and the ways of being in which she, given who she is, can flourish. She needs, in other words, to be able to be autonomous.

The autonomous person is reflective, and responds to reasons, whether those reasons concern her own wellbeing or that of others; she is *not* calculating and rationally self-interested. She can see the force of other people's needs and interests, and respond appropriately to them, for example. But she does not do so slavishly, any more than she responds to her own interests slavishly. The autonomous person evaluates the demands of others, and responds to those that are legitimate, but rejects those which are tyrannous; she does exactly the same with respect to her own demands (the selfish person is not autonomous, but is both a tyrant and a slave).[1]

Contributory Effectiveness: Capitalist economic institutions place a heavy influence on economic self-reliance, at least for those who are not fortunate enough to be supported by wealthy parents. And, in capitalist economies, it is especially important for schools to equip students to be able to be economically self-reliant; in the absence of social institutions designed to guarantee that everyone can have a decent life it is a precondition of an individual's ability to flourish that she be able to work for an income, or be attached to a family unit in which others do. But even in a capitalist society income is not the only valuable reward that work brings. People also flourish at work, if they are lucky enough to have work that they find interesting and an environment in which they have some control over what they do and when. Fortunately, people vary in what they find interesting; Sid finds the sight of blood sickening, and has very little interest in people, so would find being a family doctor something akin to torture, but he is thrilled by the

challenge of flying an airliner; Ken has a fear of flying, but enjoys company and problem-solving with people. A good deal of research suggests that people flourish primarily through engagement with family and friends, but work can provide a diversity of challenges and rewards that can sometimes compete with, and sometimes enhance, the fulfillment of personal relationships. So the general principle that everyone should have a wide set of opportunities to flourish supports educating them so that they have the opportunity to find rewarding work, and can judge the relative importance of work and other activities in their lives.[2]

That said, no-one is *truly* self-reliant, and so there is therefore something artificial about anyone's *sense* of self-reliance. Even capitalist economies are essentially cooperative; nobody makes a contribution that would be worth the income they derive from it if others were not also contributing in other valuable ways. The efforts of others make our own efforts valuable. The incomes we derive from those efforts are only distantly related to the relative importance of our contribution. Nobody has a right to a sense of self-reliance; what they have a right to is that parents and teachers enable them to develop their talents so that they can make an effective and genuine contribution to the cooperative economy.

So there is a powerful interest in being able to be an effective contributor, and in being able to derive an income and some sense of self-reliance from making that contribution. It is worth noting, though, that we seem to have a self-serving tendency to think of ourselves as deserving our salary, whatever that salary is, and our sense of self-reliance rests on this thought. But, in fact, our salaries, and even the kinds of job available to us, are a consequence of a multiplicity of choices and decisions over which we had no control, and which could have been different. Tiger Woods enjoys a much higher income than he would have enjoyed, even in an advanced economy, if television had never been invented, or if it had been invented but had been regulated everywhere to prohibit advertising. Top soccer players now enjoy much higher incomes relative to the population than they did 40 years ago. This is partly because the rest of the population has much larger disposable incomes (which it chooses to spend on watching soccer), partly because of technological changes (television, and the use of satellite technology), but also because of major changes in labour market regulation over which they had no control (for example, the erosion of the ability of national sports leagues to limit employment of foreign players). It has very little, if anything at all, to do with the increased natural talents of players; but the players on the whole think of themselves as deserving their incomes. Successful lawyers in the American South in the 1950's had a strong sense of responsibility for their own success; but most of them would have been somewhat less wealthy and successful if Jim Crow laws had allowed their black peers to compete effectively with them, and if social norms had not excluded women from becoming lawyers. While it is clearly important for a sense of self-worth, the sense of self-reliance is, to a considerable extent, socially constructed.[3]

Equally important for their sense of self-worth, for many people in many societies, has been the sense that they are making a meaningful contribution to the life of the community. One problem in an economic system dominated by the formal economy and the cash nexus is that many meaningful contributions are not validated by society as a whole because they are not part of the cash economy, and so it is harder for those people who perform them to come to see them as contributions. Minding a neighbor's

child, raising one's own child, caring for an elderly invalid, tending a communal garden, coaching a kids' soccer team; these are among the numerous contributions to the flourishing of the community as a whole which garner little public recognition in a capitalist economy, but are no less important for that fact. An education system is obliged to equip children to contribute to society in these and other ways, not only because the activities are valuable for others, but also because those who engage in them derive a sense of self-worth from making such contributions.[4]

Flourishing: At the foundation of the arguments for preparing children to be autonomous and preparing them for the labour market is the idea that these are extremely valuable for them to be able to live flourishing lives. The school should see itself as having an obligation to facilitate the long-term flourishing of the children.

We have a good deal of evidence about what makes people happy, and what does not make them happy. We also know that children have certain tendencies that make it very difficult for their families, even if they are well-willed and good judges of their children's interests, fully to prepare them for a flourishing life. Finally, we know that in our society there are certain quite specific barriers to living a happy and flourishing life which many of our children will have to negotiate, and that we cannot anticipate accurately which children will encounter, or be particularly vulnerable to, which barriers.

Here's the relevant evidence about what makes people happy. We know, in particular, that people are made happy neither by materialism nor by the wealth that materialism brings. Poverty makes people unhappy, and restricts considerably their ability to flourish, even when poverty is conceived in relative rather than in absolute terms. The low status and stress that accompany relative poverty, and the lack of control over one's conditions of life, diminish people's ability to flourish. But once people have achieved a reasonable level of financial security, additional income and wealth do not make them happier, especially if they are premised on the need to spend more hours at work and away from family and friends. The income from remunerated labor helps people to have more control over their lives, and more security, up to a point, but it does not help much beyond a certain point. We also know that people are happier when they are connected in social networks. Close connections to, and successful relations with family and friends correlate closely with reports of subjective wellbeing. Being able to spend time with, and relate intimately to, other people is a tremendously important precondition of flourishing for most of us. Another important source of flourishing is the exercise of skills which are difficult to master.[5] Those people who are lucky enough to have interesting jobs which suit their personalities and talents well derive a great deal of flourishing from the exercise of those talents.[6] But it is also common for people to enjoy activities in which they do not, by any absolute criteria, excel, but which make the appropriate demands on them; frequently outside of their jobs. Someone may find writing doggerel a challenge and find great satisfaction in producing ditties that just make his children, or his friends, laugh; or might enjoy playing cricket as well as he can in a weekend team, not just for the companionship, but also for the sense of stretching his limited capacities. For many people it is in their leisure time that they will find the meaning in their life.

But we also know that children, as they grow into adults, will face significant challenges, built into the structure of our society, in engaging with the world in a way that

facilitates their flourishing. First, we know that family life is increasingly complicated by at least two factors. The first is that close to 50% of marriages end in divorce, and a very high proportion of those divorces occur while children are still in the home.[7] This means that most children who themselves marry will be in a relationship in which one partner has parents who are not married to one another. Furthermore, most people remarry, or re-enter a relevantly marriage-like relationship. So, as adults managing their own lives, they will have to engage with at least three, rather than the previously normal two, parental households. The time, energy, and emotional demands on a remarried parent are greater than those on an un-divorced parent; the child of a remarried parent is not only negotiating with more households, but is has more competition for the attention and interest of her parent. Second, the dramatically increased geographic mobility in our societies weakens the connections among adults within families. Parents, adult children, and adult siblings, are less ready courses of mutual support and care when they live at great geographic distances from one another, so that even intact families are frequently less connected to one another in adulthood than was an expectation even 30 years ago.[8]

Democratic Competence: Citizens need to be able both to use the democratic institutions to press their interests and to recognize the legitimate interests of others through them. The knowledge and skills needed for democratic competence are various, and may depend on context. A basic understanding of the history of a society's political institutions is usually valuable, as is a basic ability (and inclination) to scrutinize claims and arguments other people make in the light of evidence and reason. Many policy issues are hard for citizens to evaluate because they lack both a good understanding of the way the institutions work and of the possible side-effects on other institutions of any reform. This is made much harder in a political culture like ours, which provides incentives for obfuscation and in which the very wealthy have enormous power over the character of public debate; but even in a society in which political debate is well structured and carried out with good will citizens would need to be equipped with knowledge and skills that competitive political forces may not themselves be eager to supply.[9] Schools are a natural location for such education, and it is too much to expect institutions in civil society to provide the needed education to citizens without schools providing a sound grounding.

Cooperative Capacity: One of the first priorities for any kindergarten teacher is to establish order in the classroom. This involves teaching the children how to make space for one another, how to share and engage in give and take. In Anglophone education systems cooperation is usually taught in the first instance for the sake of creating order, but it is also valuable in itself; most children will have better lives if they are able to cooperate with others as equals, and most will have better lives if others are able to and inclined to cooperate with them as equals. As I've said, even capitalist economies are essentially cooperative, and so are successful intimate (and even distant) personal relationships. Cooperation is not something we learn simply from being in the world, especially because conflict and competition are also pervasive – think of the capitalist economy which depends on cooperation for its success, but within which competition is also a driving force. So, from a very early age, the cooperative capacities of children need

to be elicited, fostered, and practiced, so that as the children grow they can deploy those capacities both to their own advantage and for the decent treatment of others.

2. Distributive goals

Assume agreement about the aims goals. How should educational opportunities be distributed?

One popular view, and the one that is worth using as the baseline of comparison in this section, is educational equality – the view that in some sense of good, everyone should have an equally good education. Even politicians and theorists who would reject egalitarianism tout court often invoke some sort of educational egalitarianism in justification of policy initiatives. Recent legislation in the US aims at reducing the "achievement gap", where that is understood as the gap between proportions of children from higher and lower socio-economic classes, or of racial or of ethnic groups reaching some threshold of competence in various basic academic tasks. Some British policymakers have insisted on a goal of completely de-linking academic performance from social class background. In both cases the concern is that socioeconomic disadvantage leads to inequality of educational achievement. In most developed countries further efforts are taken to ensure that children with disabilities in general and learning-related disabilities in particular, have opportunities to learn in excess of those they would have if they were accorded only the same level of resources as other children.

Unlike demands to equalize overall condition, educational egalitarianism is closely associated with meritocracy: the idea that inequality of outcomes is justified as long as the competition for those outcomes is fair, and rewards some combination of talent and effort. The principle of educational equality does the work of ensuring that, despite unequal social starting points, children have equal opportunities to develop the talents that the competitions are structured to reward. So, whereas there is nothing wrong, according to the educational egalitarian, in having a wide wage gap, there is something wrong if some children have much better chances of getting the jobs to which high wages are attached because they got superior chances to develop their talents.

Educational equality.

But what, exactly, is the principle of educational equality?[10] From the preceding discussion it is easy to see that there must be several versions. The dominant version is meritocratic educational equality which states, consistently with the motivation set out in the previous paragraph, that:

> An individual's prospects for educational achievement should be a function only of that individual's effort and talent, not of his or her social class background.

This principle, or something like it, lies behind a good deal of contemporary rhetoric. But, as stated, it faces several challenges, of which three bear closer investigation.

The first is that it is unstable. In singling out social background as an unacceptable source of influence on outcomes the principle arbitrarily favors the talented, who merit no more credit for their natural advantages than the well-born do for their

social advantages. Why should the naturally talented get special access to unequally distributed rewards?

A second challenge objects that the means that would be needed to realize the principle are unacceptable because they would undermine other values. For example, some people think that prohibiting, or imposing punitive taxes on, elite private schooling would violate parental liberty. Perfectly realizing the principle would probably require even more intrusive measures; interfering with the ordinary child-rearing practices of middle class parents that prepare their children to take good advantage of the opportunities presented in school (like teaching them to read at home, reading them bedtime stories, and teaching the middle-class manners).

In fact, observing a conflict between two values in particular circumstances does not establish that either principle is wrong. Even radical educational egalitarians tend to agree that when the principle comes into conflict with ordinary child-rearing practices that lie at the heart of family life, it should give way to the value of the family. But this does not render it inert. Those radicals will usually maintain that although parental liberty is important, it is not so important that it requires us to permit parents to purchase elite private schooling for their children. And, even if a successful argument could be given for why that was so important, the principle of educational equality might still require governments to take other measures, like improving state schools so that they were effectively competing with elite private schools, or limiting inequality of wealth, or reducing child poverty, concentrations of which are a major barrier to providing good educational opportunities for less advantaged children.

The third objection appeals to efficiency. It is, or at least can be, socially inefficient to do what would be required to produce meritocratic educational equality, because it would result in a leveling down of educational provision and, consequently, reduced investment in the total stock of human capital and, ultimately, social wealth. At least in some circumstances this seems likely, and egalitarians are unlikely to dispute it. But social wealth is only one value; fairness in the competitions to access it, and how it is distributed, also matter. Educational egalitarianism describes a principle of fairness concerning access to the stock of social wealth, and egalitarians accept that justice will sometimes conflict with growth. Depending how much weight is placed on the principle, different judgments will be made concerning the likely trade offs.

A corollary of the motivation for the meritocratic principle is the idea that as inequalities of outcome narrow, educational equality becomes less important, because education has a less important role in allocating people to advantages in the labor force. But education is not only valuable because it helps its recipients in social competitions; it is also intrinsically valuable, contributing as it does to personal growth and flourishing. So most egalitarians have a residual concern about the unfairness of some getting more of the benefits intrinsic to education than others through no effort or merit of their own. This concern has force even if non-educational outcomes are equalized.

The objection that rewarding natural talent but not social class is arbitrary suggests a much more radical principle of educational equality, one which attempts to compensate for inequality of talent, as well as for inequality of social class background:

> An individual's prospects for educational achievement should be a function only of that individual's effort, not of his or her social class background or natural talent.

This principle reflects the correct observation that natural talent is just as arbitrary from the moral point of view as social class. But it has two obvious problems. One is that, taken alone, it seems to justify concentrating massive resources on children with cognitive disabilities; the other is that it seems to justify leveling down educational achievement to the highest level that the lowest achiever reaches. Both consequences are unappealing.[11]

Benefiting the least advantaged.

The efficiency objection to educational equality is sometimes posed specifically in terms of benefit to the least advantaged. In this version, the objection suggests an alternative principle to either version of educational equality which places a principled limit on the resources devoted to students with disabilities, and a reason not to level down achievement, viz:

> Education should be distributed in the way that maximizes the prospects for overall wellbeing of those whose prospects are poorest.

This principle has not been well explored in the literature. [12] Adopting it effectively abandons the idea, tacit in the other previous principles, that there is a special principle of justice for education. Instead, it directly subordinates educational policy to an overarching principle of justice that demands maximizing the prospects of the least advantaged. It is nevertheless a genuine and viable alternative to the versions of educational equality above. It has the nice feature, compared with the radical version of educational equality, that it does not demand the leveling down of educational outcomes; but it also has the nice feature, compared with the meritocratic version, that it does not arbitrarily favour the talented; the talented get better educated, if they do, because that will benefit other less fortunate people. It is also worth noting that other values can be pressed against this principle; and it might be plausible that trade offs need to be made between it and values such as educational excellence or parental liberty.

Adequacy

A second alternative to educational equality is the principle of educational adequacy. There are several versions, all of which have the following form, but which specify X differently.

> Everyone should receive an education adequate for them to X

At the most austere end of adequacy theorists is James Tooley, who demands education adequate to functioning in the economy; at the most demanding end are theorists like Debra Satz, Elizabeth Anderson and Amy Gutmann, who tie adequacy to the developed capacity to participate as an equal in political (Gutmann) and social (both Satz and Anderson) life.[13] Adoption of a principle of educational adequacy seems in most cases to be motivated by a more fundamental connection to the idea that adequacy, rather than equality or maximizing the position of the least advantaged, is what justice demands regarding the distribution of resources all-told.[14] Tooley explicitly grounds his support for

educational adequacy in the sufficientarian critique of a principle of equality of resources, rather than directly criticizing the case for educational equality. Anderson and Satz are both more direct in the criticism of various versions of the principle of educational equality, but Anderson at least has also endorsed a general principle of sufficiency as the core commitment of a theory of social justice, which is in turn grounded in a very extensive critique of equality as a general principle of justice. Educational egalitarians, furthermore, generally accept that achieving an adequate education for all is very urgent; much more so than achieving equality. However, no principle of adequacy seems adequate, as the following scenario suggests. Imagine that everyone is adequately well educated (understanding adequacy however you might plausibly understand that). Now imagine that new resources enter the educational system, and that whomever they are spent on, it will remain the case that everyone is adequately well educated. If adequacy were the sole distributive principle then there would no reason of justice at all to spend those resources on the least advantaged students. But this seems implausible; there is such a reason, which is that they, through no fault of their own, will have a worse education than others, and by spending the money on them we can alleviate that condition. That reason may not outweigh reasons to spend the money elsewhere; for example, if spending the money on more advantaged students would predictably secure better overall prospects for the less advantaged, which might well constitute another reason of justice. But the principle of educational adequacy, offered as the sole principle of educational justice, cannot recognize any reason of justice to spend it one way or another.

Maximising excellence.

A final alternative to educational equality focuses on the value of educational achievement itself. John Wilson makes the following proposal:

> Educational resources should be distributed to those who can make the most use of them.[15]

The principle gets its appeal from some sort of principle of efficiency with regard to the production of educational excellence; to maximize excellence we would have to invest optimally, so it would be most urgent to invest in those whose capacity for achievement is high, and can be developed inexpensively. This principle would benefit some of the most able children enormously; but only some of the most able. For example, if an enormously able child is sufficiently socially difficult, the cost of developing her talent might be so great that it would be more efficient to invest in a more docile, but less able, child; and children who speak an unusual foreign language might be expensive to invest in, even though highly able. But the central problems with this criterion are that it fails to recognize that if academic achievement is valuable then we <u>all</u> have a powerful interest in being able to achieve, academically, and that we cannot detach educational achievement from the distribution of other rewards.

Hybrid views

One might take the view that each of the starkly stated principles above captures a rational kernel, which has a place and needs to be weighed against the rational kernel in

the other views. There is a reason to reduce the effect of social class, and of natural talent, on outcomes, but there are also reasons to seek higher levels of excellence, among them the reason provided by the desirability of producing higher levels of human capital that can be harnessed to the overall benefit of the least advantaged; and there is a reason to seek an adequate education for all. Or one might take the view that there is a rational kernel to some, but not all, the principles. The task then, of constructing a theory of distributive justice for education is the task of identifying these reasons and showing how much weight they should have relative to one another.

3. Constraints and Trade Offs.

Assume that we can get agreement concerning what the aims of education should be, and how educational opportunities should be distributed. Are there constraints on what may done in pursuit of those goals? Of course, there may be pragmatic constraints – it may be impossible to get political support for all of the goals. My question is not about that; it is about whether there are moral constraints; constraints of principle, which one would be morally bound not to exceed even if one could get political support for doing so.

The philosophical literature has elaborated, in great detail, one such constraint, which concerns the interests, or rights, of parents. Much less attention has been paid to a second constraint, concerning the interests of the children being educated even though, increasingly, public attention is, indeed, being paid to the latter. In this section I shall briefly elaborate both, giving them equal billing.

Parent-centered constraints

Children are raised, normally, in families, by parents who invest a great deal of time, energy, and emotion, in the wellbeing of their children. Suppose that there was a readily available way of effectively promoting the aims and distributive goals above, but it required removing all children from their parents for 12 hours a day, 6 days a week, 50 weeks of the year, from the age of 24 months. Would it be morally acceptable to do so? Most readers will be inclined to demur; parents have a strong interest in being able to have ample time to spend with their children, in being the people primarily in charge of their wellbeing, and the time left over by the described policy would be insufficient for them to realize that interest, even if it did no harm to the children. Allowing parents to establish and maintain intimate relationships with their children is a constraint on the pursuit of the goals I've elaborated above.[16]

This much is easy to accept. But the debates about parent-centered constraints become harder to decide when more is claimed. Some theorists, in line with the dominant strain of human rights declarations, argue that parents have an absolute right to direct the education of their children in line with their own values. If that were so, the constraint would be very strong indeed; it would prevent the government, for example, from facilitating children's autonomy against the wishes of their parents, or facilitating their flourishing by providing them with basic sex education against parental wishes, or for facilitating educational opportunity by prohibiting, or taxing, elite private education. Nathan Glazer suggests the motivation for the very strong understanding of the constraint as follows:

> To be sure, the case for both [racial] integration and equality of expenditure is powerful. But the chief obstacle to achieving these goals does not seem to be the indifference of whites and the non-poor to the education of white and the poor…. Rather, other values, which are not simply shields for racism, stand in the way: the value of the neighborhood school; the value of local control of education and, above all, the value of freedom from state imposition when it affects matters so personal as the future of one's children.[17]

Glazer hints at a very strong reading of the constraint; one that actually has a good deal of resonance with, for example, the provision of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that parents have a "prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be granted to their children". If we understand this right as absolute it acts as a very strong constraint on attempts to achieve the goals in the previous sections. Assume for a moment that some measure of racial integration is needed to achieve democratic competence, and that a child's peers constitute part of her education. On the strong reading parents have a right to demand that their children be educated only with peers of the same race, or in ideologies that are fundamentally undemocratic.

Such a strong understanding of the constraints set by parents' rights is not necessary. Suppose, instead, that parents merely have a moral right to have a close relationship with their children; this would give them little latitude over what went on in school as long as the school day and school year were short enough for them to have plenty of time with their children outside school, and as long as the ethos of the school does not undermine their relationship. But it takes philosophical work on the precise content of the moral rights parents have concerning their children to establish how severe the constraint is; this I take to be one of the central tasks of the philosophy of education and the philosophy of the family.[18]

Child-centered constraints.

A good deal of work on the aims of education is forward-looking; all the aims goals I described above are about how the child is supposed to turn out as an adult. But children are not just adults-in-formation; childhood is itself a significant part of a person's life, and the quality of a childhood is intrinsically important, independently of its consequences for the quality of an adulthood. Recent work in the sociology of childhood has emphasized this, and it is implicit, too, in practitioners' concerns about matters like bullying, and testing. It is worth remembering, too, that schooling is compulsory. Children have no choice but to spend a significant number of their waking hours in the classrooms where their parents and teachers have placed them, and among other children whom they have not chosen, and many of whom they would not choose, as their companions. This places a special burden of justification on us when it comes to the quality of the time the children spend there, even though there are good enough reasons to require them to be in school. Philosophers, while none of them denies the independent importance of childhood as a stage of our lives, have not done much work figuring out how it constrains the delivery of education, or even what constitutes a good childhood other than the goods in childhood that prepare us well for adulthood. It is easy to imagine, though, that some of the means that would most improve a child's prospects for academic

achievement might diminish the quality of her school days. It is plausible, for example, that in some circumstances frequent and rigorous testing would be involved in the most effective method for improving low-end achievement, but would make some low-end achievers excessively anxious at the time. Even if we were confident that a rigorous testing regime was crucial for the best strategy for improving a child's performance, we might feel justified in sacrificing some of that achievement for the sake of not making their school days miserable.

Trade offs

Just as we are sometimes required to trade off important educational goals against the parent-centered and child-centered constraints, there are sometimes trade-offs among those goals themselves. Consider the meritocratic version of educational equality. That principle requires that social origin have no influence over educational outcomes and therefore, in a highly unequal society, that talented children from lower socio-economic classes have excellent educational prospects. But whereas children from higher socio-economic classes may expect that their parents will celebrate and understand their educational success, and that it will lead them to have lives recognizably like those of their parents, educational success for many working class children would exact the high price of alienating them culturally from their parents, siblings, and communities. If commonalities with one's family members are needed for relationships to remain close, and close familial relationships play an important role in underpinning a flourishing life, the social mobility generated by meritocratic educational equality may conflict with the flourishing of the socially mobile child. A full theory of the moral and political aspects of education would give guidance in managing these trade-offs when they arise.

4. Concluding comment: Institutions.

I have paid little direct attention to public political debates about the structure and reform of educational institutions; in a volume devoted to philosophy of education it seems appropriate to discuss the distinctively philosophical questions. But throughout it will be clear that disagreements at this philosophical level will influence disagreements about reform and even pedagogy. The interest in autonomy, for example, suggests that it is important for all children to be exposed to a range of moral and political perspectives, and to be educated to become critical thinkers; many theorists who reject the aim of autonomy believe that pursuing it involves excessive interference in the ability of parents to control their children's environment. If you reject the demanding conception of democratic citizenship I have proposed you are much less likely than if you support it to favour civic education. What will not be so clear is that reforms can sometimes find support across fundamental normative disagreements. For example, there are strong anti-egalitarian, and strong egalitarian, supporters of school choice reforms. Anti-egalitarians frequently support school choice because they see it as giving power to parents to decide how their children will be educated.[19] Some egalitarians support it because it distributes parental power more equitably than neighbourhood schooling, which effectively gives power to wealthy, but not to poorer, parents.[20] Similarly, public support for religious schools is sometimes supported on the ground that parents have the right to educate their children in their religious faith, and sometimes on the ground that such a policy will

support integration of religious and non-religious children in ways that promote autonomy in particular circumstances.[21] Simply knowing what values are at stake does not suffice to evaluate current arrangements or proposed reforms; but an understanding of what values are at stake, and how to weigh them against each other, is essential for evaluation.

Endnotes

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[1] Joseph Raz, The Morality of Freedom (Oxford University Press, 1987) provides a nice account of the value of autonomy. Amy Gutmann, Democratic Education (Princeton University Press 1989) and Eamonn Callan, Creating Citizens (Oxford University Press, 1997, see especially chapter 6) provide accounts of how its value is important in education and childrearing. For more skeptical approaches see Shelley Burtt, "Religious Parents; Secular Schools", Review of Politics 56 (1994): 51-70 and William Galston, "Two Concepts of Liberalism", Ethics 105 (1995): 516-34.

[2] For a powerful recent statement of this interest see Paul Gomberg, How to Make Opportunity Equal (Blackwell, 2007).

[3] An article in the New York Times includes the following quotes from two of the wealthiest people in the history of humanity. "I think there are people, including myself at certain times in my career, who because of their uniqueness warrant whatever the market will bear" (Leo J Hindery Jr.). "In the current world there will be people who will move from one tax area to another. I am proud to be an American. But if tax became too high, as a matter of principle I would not be working this hard" (Kenneth Griffin). While most of the wealth these people have accumulated is the result of their good luck in being

born with certain traits in an environment which accords great rewards to people with those traits and a good deal of luck, they are not at all untypical in believing that the root cause of their wealth accumulation lies in themselves (their "uniqueness" and "hard work"). See Louis Uchitelle, "The Richest of the Rich, Proud of a New Gilded Age", New York Times, July 15, 2007.

[4] See Amy Gutmann, Democratic Education chapter 2 and Elizabeth Anderson, "Fair Opportunity in Education: A Democratic Equality Perspective", Ethics vol. 117, 4 (2007): 595-622.

[5] For recent surveys of the literature on what makes people happy see Richard Layard, Happiness (Penguin, 2002) and Tim Kasser, The High Price of Materialism (MIT Press, 1998).

[6] See Paul Gomberg, How to Make Opportunity Equal (Blackwell, 2007) for a powerful statement of this, and an argument concerning its implications for the organization of work..

[7] According to the US Census Bureau's snapshot figures for 2006, 67% of all children under the age of 18 lived with both their original parents. If that figure sounds surprisingly high, remember that the proportion of 1 year olds living with their original parents is likely to be much higher than the proportion of 15 year olds. Most children will not be living with both their original parents by age 18.

[8] My thoughts about flourishing in education have been influenced by conversations with Christine Sypnowich about her in progress book manuscript, Equality Renewed. For more thoughts specifically about education see John White, The Curriculum and the Child (Routledge, 2003). See also Martha Nussbaum, Cultivating Humanity (Harvard University Press, 1997) for an account of the humanistic purposes of higher education.

[9] See Amy Gutmann, Democratic Education; Eamonn Callan, Creating Citizens and Stephen Macedo, Diversity and Distrust (Harvard University Press, 2000) for a sample of different arguments for the conclusion that promoting democratic competence is an important aim of education.

[10] See Christopher Jencks, "Whom Must We Treat Equally for Educational Opportunity to be Equal?", Ethics, 98 (1988); 518-33 for an exploration of the difficulties of specifying the content of the principle of educational equality, and Adam Swift, How Not to be a Hypocrite (RoutledgeFalmer, 2004) for an example of the meritocratic version of the principle. See also Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift, "Putting Educational Equality in its Place", Educational Policy and Finance (forthcoming) for a hedged defence of the meritcratic version of the principle.

[11] See further exploration of these problems in my School Choice and Social Justice (Oxford, 2000) chapter 7.

[12] See John Rawls, A Theory of Justice (Harvard University Press, 1971); Matthew Clayton, "Rawls and Natural Aristocracy", Croatian Journal of Philosophy 1 (2001): 239-59; Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift, "Equality, Priority and Positional Goods", Ethics

116 (2006): 471–497 for arguments in favour of prioritizing the interests of the less advantaged in social policy generally.

[13] For variants of this view see Amy Gutmann, Democratic Education pp. 128-139; Randall R Curren, “Justice and the Threshold of Educational Equality”, Philosophy of Education, 50 (1995); 239-248; John White, “The Dishwasher's Child: Education and the End of Egalitarianism”, Journal of Philosophy of Education 28 (1994); James Tooley, Disestablishing the School (Institute of Economic Affairs, 1996); Elizabeth Anderson, “Fair Opportunity in Education: A Democratic Equality Perspective”, Ethics 117, 4 (2007): 595-622; Debra Satz, “Equality, Adequacy, and Education for Citizenship”, Ethics 117, 4 (2007): 623-648.

[14] See Harry Frankfurt, “Equality as a Moral Ideal”, Ethics (1987): 98, 1: 21-43 and Joseph Raz, The Morality of Freedom chapter 5 for statements of this view.

[15] John Wilson, “Does Equality (of Opportunity) Make Sense in Education?”, Journal of Philosophy of Education, 25 (1991): 27-31 at 29. See also David Cooper, Illusions of Equality (RKP, 1980) for a trenchant statement of the principle that educational excellence is more important than concerns about the distribution of educational resources or achievement.

[16] See Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift, “Parents Rights and the Value of the Family”, Ethics 117 (2006): 80–108.

[17] Nathan Glazer, "Separate and Unequal", New York Times Book Review, Sept 25th 2005, pp. 12-13 at 13.

[18] See Francis Schrag, "Justice and the Family", Inquiry 1976; William Galston, Liberal Pluralism; Callen, Creating Citizens; Matthew Clayton, Justice and Legitimacy in Upbringing (Oxford 2006) and Brighouse and Swift, "Parents Rights.." for various accounts of the content and limits on parents' rights.

[19] See for example Milton Friedman, Capitalism and Freedom (University of Chicago Press, 1962) chapter 6, see also James Tooley, Reclaiming Education (Continuum, 2000).

[20] For example, Herbert Gintis, "The Political Economy of School Choice", Teachers College Record, 96 (1995): 462-511; Harry Brighouse, Choosing Equality (Social Market Foundation, 2002)

[21] See Eamonn Callan, "Discrimination and Religious Schooling" in Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman, Citizenship in Diverse Societies, (Oxford University Press, 2000) and Harry Brighouse, "Faith Schools in the UK: an unenthusiastic defence of a slightly reformed status quo", in Roy Gardner et. al., (eds.) Faith Schools: Consensus or Conflict? (London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2005) for secularist arguments for permitting, and even supporting, religious schools.