

Education and Political Theory

Geraint Parry

University of Manchester

‘Political Liberalism and Education’

Acknowledgements

The author is grateful to the Economic and Social Research Council and to the Leverhulme Trust for support for the research of which the present paper forms part.

‘... Children belong more to the republic than to their parents ...’¹

Introduction

Liberal democracy brings together two very different kinds of political concern. Democracy is a theory about who should rule, liberalism about the limits of rule. That these two theories may be in some tension with one another is a commonplace reflection. Liberal democratic education can be torn between these two tendencies. The democratic tendency is to assert the right of the democratic state to ensure that its children will be brought up with a commitment to reproduce the values and procedures of democracy. The liberal thrust is to find a form of education which will inculcate a capacity to exercise choice or autonomy whilst not endorsing any particular conception of the good life. Within each camp there are differences of view as to the precise understanding of these objectives as well as over how these might be achieved or promoted. Recent writings on education and liberal democracy might be placed on a continuum from libertarians to strong democrats. Libertarians, best represented for present purposes by John Chubb and Terry Moe, attribute the failings of education to democracy in which schools policy reflects the outcome of the battle of interests rather than the educationally motivated choices of parents.² Strong democrats, of whom in this context Amy Gutmann is the foremost exponent, contend that the reproduction of democratic values may if necessary over-ride the educational preferences of parents if these result in the neglect of civic virtues.³ In between, in this schematic presentation, appear varieties of liberal democratic education which may be sub-divided into a mainstream which holds that schooling in liberalism requires a positive attempt

¹Philipon De La Madelaine, *Vues Patriotiques Sur L'Education Du Peuple*, Lyon, 1783, p.12.

²J.Chubb & T.Moe, ‘Politics, Markets and the Organization of Schools’, *American Political Science Review*, 82, 1988; *Politics, Markets and America's Schools*, Brookings Institution, 1990; ‘Should Market Forces Control Educational Decision Making? Reply to Tweedie and Riley’, *American Political Science Review*, 84, 1990; *A Lesson in School Reform from Great Britain*, Brookings Institution, 1992.

³A.Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, Princeton University Press, 1987; ‘Civic Education and Social Diversity’, *Ethics*, 105, 1995. See also D.Steiner, *Rethinking Democratic Education: The Politics of Reform*, Johns Hopkins Press, 1994; M.Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, Martin Robertson, 1983; B.Barber, *An Aristocracy of Everyone*, Oxford University Press, 1994.

to cultivate the autonomous individual and a more recent belief that a neutral liberal state is barred from promoting through its schools any particular vision of the good life. An education for autonomy is sometimes seen as a hegemonic position in post-Enlightenment theorising.⁴ For reasons of space the present paper will concentrate on the liberal neutralist position particularly as developed by John Rawls.⁵

Education, neutrality and political liberalism

For neutralist schools of liberalism both Gutmann's style of democratic education and a positive education for moral autonomy fall into the same illiberal trap. The core of liberalism should be that the state is neutral as between alternative conceptions of the good life where these do not undermine the survival of the institutions of liberal democracy itself. Thus Galston extended his critique of Gutmann's civic education by claiming that it involved a betrayal of true liberal principles through its state endorsement of a particular notion of virtue and its effective imposition by majority will.⁶ In the same way, to the extent that a state-supported education in moral autonomy reaches beyond the purely political sphere it gives a privileged position to a view of the moral life which is not necessarily endorsed by, and even opposed by, groups in society. The appropriate remedy is what Macedo has termed a 'strategy of avoidance'⁷. The liberal state is to uphold a purely civil order and its attendant values independently of any wider moral doctrine and at the same time is to avoid, so far as is possible, either favouring or disadvantaging any way of life which is compatible with liberal democracy. The implication for educationists is that the state may wish that its future citizens are brought up with a firm commitment to this understanding of its role. At the same time the state must permit children to be educated in any number of other moral religious beliefs, liberal or illiberal, so long as the children are not prevented from acquiring civic virtues.

The most elaborate contemporary statement of this position is to be found in Rawls's *Political Liberalism*. In a tantalisingly brief passage Rawls refers to the need for children in a liberal polity to receive an education in civic rights which also prepares them to become 'fully co-operating members of society' and which encourages 'the political virtues' (*Political Liberalism*, p. 199). Although Rawls is not one of those many political philosophers who have written an educational treatise, he has always been aware that, for his conception of liberal society to function, citizens must acquire some commitment to its practices or principles.⁸ As so often, therefore educational issues can provide a clue both to the character of

⁴See R.Usher & R.Edwards, *Postmodernism and Education*, Routledge, 1994; major recent statements include J.White, *The Aims of Education Restated*, Routledge, 1982; P.White, *Beyond Domination: An Essay in the Political Philosophy of Education*, Routledge, 1994; M.Levinson, 'Children, Families and the Liberal State', Papers of the Conference of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain, Oxford, 1995.

⁵J.Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, Columbia University Press, 1993. A more extended version of this paper will discuss the libertarian, democratic, and liberal autonomy positions.

⁶W.Galston, *Liberal Purposes*, Cambridge University Press, 1991.

⁷S.Macedo, 'Liberal Civic Education and Religious Fundamentalism: The Case of God v. John Rawls', *Ethics*, 105, 1995, p.494.

⁸J.Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Harvard University Press, 1971, pp.453-512; for an interesting discussion see D.Paris, 'Moral Education and the Tie that Binds in Liberal Political Theory', *American Political Science Review*, 85, 1991.

the political theory and perhaps to some of its difficulties. What kind of education is needed to produce a political liberal?

Rawls's 'new' view of liberalism insists on its specifically political nature. It starts from the existence of plural societies in which people may be profoundly divided on philosophical and religious grounds, i.e. over what he terms 'comprehensive doctrines'. He then seeks to show that there can, nevertheless, be a political conception of justice which is congruent with the various comprehensive doctrines people hold and which permits free and equal persons to act as fully co-operating members of society. It is a position on which those committed to contrasting comprehensive doctrines can agree. At the same time it is not the result of a compromise between such doctrines but a view of the political realm and its conduct which can gain the support of what Rawls terms an 'overlapping consensus' of the moral, religious or philosophical doctrines found in a plural society (*Political Liberalism*, pp.9-10; Chapter IV, *passim*).

The political conception of justice is a moral conception which applies to the operations of the 'basic structure' of society which Rawls takes to include constitutional arrangements, the legal framework of transactions and economic regulations, such as taxation. It is not applied to the non-public sphere, such as the operation of churches, voluntary associations or families, which may have their own rules, except to the extent that these bodies engage with the sphere of politics. A public realm distinct from the private is therefore supposed. Accordingly, the political conception of justice is said to be 'free-standing' in that it is contained within the political sphere. It is not derived from, or associated with, any single comprehensive doctrine (*Political Liberalism*, pp.144-64). At the same time it will find moral support from all those who hold such doctrines. It is thus possible for persons both to affirm the truth of their comprehensive doctrines and to uphold a political conception of justice which excludes such considerations of truth from the public realm as irrelevant to the fair operation of the basic structure. Moreover, as political liberals, they will set to one side their comprehensive doctrines when they enter the public sphere and be guided in their deliberations and conduct by the distinctly political conception of justice.

The objective is to secure a society which is 'a fair system of co-operation over time, from one generation to the next' (*Political Liberalism*, p.15). Co-operation is guided by rules which the participants will acknowledge as legitimate and mutually and reciprocally advantageous. Rawls enunciates two principles of justice (which are revisions of those in *A Theory of Justice*):

'a. Each person has an equal claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic rights and liberties, which scheme is compatible with the same scheme for all; and in this scheme the equal political liberties, and only those liberties, are to be guaranteed their fair value.'

b. Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions: first they are to be attached to positions and offices open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity; and second, they are to be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society.' (*Political Liberalism*, p.5-6; 291)

From these principles follow the priority of the basic political rights and liberties of constitutional democracy and the provision of the means whereby all citizens

can utilise these rights. This is intended to be a substantively egalitarian conception of justice. It is intended to give due recognition to the needs of persons qua citizens. A just political system will be to the advantage of all citizens and, hence, be seen as supportable by all even whilst they hold differing comprehensive doctrines. This requires that all citizens 'affirm the same political conception of themselves as free and equal persons' and that their pursuit of their own ideas of the good require '... the same basic rights, liberties, and opportunities, and the same all-purpose means such as income and wealth ...'. (*Political Liberalism*, p.180) The state is to remain 'neutral' between any comprehensive doctrines in the restricted sense that it will neither favour nor disadvantage any doctrines that themselves respect the principles of justice. But the state is not neutral in the sense that it does not embody any substantive values, nor is it necessarily neutral in its effects (*Political Liberalism*, pp.190-5).

Ideally, such a just political system will be reinforced by a liberal political culture. Citizens will not merely take responsibility for their own lives but '... society, citizens as a collective body, accepts responsibility for maintaining the equal basic liberties and fair equality of opportunity' (*Political Liberalism*, p.189). This requires that they adjust their aspirations in the light of the capacities of the society and adapt their plans of life to render them compatible with the principles of justice. A liberal democratic culture will also conduct itself according to a specific form of discourse which Rawls terms 'public reason' (*Political Liberalism*, pp.212-54). This is a mode of thought and expression which limits itself to considerations of the principles of justice in the establishment or reform of political institutions. As Rawls acknowledges, this is comparable to Rousseau's insistence that public deliberations be guided by public and not private principles – by a concern for the general will. Rawls's discussion of the sphere of public reason is largely confined to the basic institutions such as the rights to vote, to legal opportunities or to property. However he recognises that some other matters, such as taxation, public facilities or protection of the environment, may raise fundamental issues of justice and become proper topics for public reasoning.

Whilst all persons have the capacity to play their appropriate parts in a liberal society, the practices and attitudes required have to be learned. This is one of those matters about which the state need not be neutral. A constitutional regime may act so as to strengthen virtues of toleration or discourage racial discrimination since such interventions reinforce those '... forms of thought and feeling that sustain fair social co-operation between its citizens ...'. (*Political Liberalism*, p.195). In a broad sense of education citizens may be taught such values through the very operation of political and social institutions and by public traditions (*Political Liberalism*, p.71). In a narrower and more conventional meaning children's education should include knowledge of civic rights and prepare them more generally for a co-operative life by instilling the political virtues (*Political Liberalism*, p.199).

Nothing here requires, however, that this education be provided by the state itself as distinct from private bodies which could include church schools. Indeed Rawls's insistence on pluralism might legitimately (though not necessarily) encourage the view that schooling be provided privately since it would help sustain the variety of comprehensive doctrines in a society. Certainly nothing should prohibit such provision. Within schools pupils may well be taught the tenets of the comprehensive moral doctrines to which their parents subscribe. These doctrines

may be liberal and secular or they may be Catholic, Islamic, Judaic etc.

There is, however, an implicit restriction on the independence of the schools. They must also teach the virtues of political liberalism, whatever their attachments to other virtues in the non-political sphere. In effect, a national curriculum requires the teaching of civics. The pupils must be taught their constitutional and civic rights. For example they must learn that '... liberty of conscience exists in their society and that apostasy is not a legal crime ...'. (*Political Liberalism*, p.199). Thus, however much the students learn of the truth of a comprehensive moral doctrine they must also learn that this truth does not entitle their private association to seek to impose it by means of public institutions. They must also learn that other comprehensive doctrines are to be tolerated.

Rawls denies that this is tantamount to requiring schools to foster the comprehensive liberal values of autonomy and individuality. The demands of political liberalism upon the schools are much more limited – merely to instruct their charges in political rights and public reason. Moreover, he presumably must believe that this is not an excessive requirement since he has argued that the principles of justice are the focus of an overlapping consensus. In a plural society the sundry doctrines can all agree upon such principles as applicable to the public sphere. Hence schools guided by such doctrines should not have difficulty in spreading both their own moral teachings and the values of political liberalism. Rawls's point is that the two should be congruent, not in tension. The end of education is not to produce a schizophrenic person who follows one comprehensive doctrine in the non-public sphere and a totally distinct political doctrine in the public realm. Political liberalism may, rather, be backed by the various comprehensive doctrines to which citizens adhere.

The question must, however, arise as to whether the democrat can rely on the ready compatibility of political liberalism and the moral doctrines of private associations and their educational institutions. As Rawls insists, the principles of justice, even as a purely political doctrine, entail more than a recognition of political rights such as may be incorporated into a civics lesson. The second principle refers to positions and offices being '... open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity'. It is not necessary to delve into the problems surrounding this formulation to appreciate that a comprehensive doctrine which denied to a certain sector of the community, say women, an equal status in society would fall foul of the standards of justice. A school curriculum which either taught such a discriminatory view or which denied to girls the opportunity to pursue certain subjects would not be enabling them to be fully co-operating members of society. The conclusion that Rawls is prepared to draw from political liberalism could have startling consequences for a religious school seeking also to prepare its students for civil co-operation. Rawls infers the right to abort pregnancy in the first trimester from, among other political considerations, the equality of women as citizens (*Political Liberalism*, pp.243-4). Denial of such a right on the basis of a comprehensive moral doctrine would be contrary to the ideal of public reason. Hence the demanding duty upon a school might be to teach both that under its own comprehensive doctrine abortion was morally wrong and that, as a 'reasonable' comprehensive doctrine which is concurrent with political liberalism, its pupils must accept that political justice requires abortion in the first trimester to be permissible. This is not an inconsistent position. It might, indeed, be seen as a test

case of the tolerance and 'reasonableness' of the doctrine. It certainly, however, puts severe strain on such a school's instruction. Accordingly, the national curriculum might, consistent with political liberalism, require schools to conform as a condition of operating. Yet in a case such as this the states' requirements appear to pervade the school's own ethos. It causes very considerable tension between its guiding doctrine and its role as a teacher of public reason.

The full potentiality of such problems is, to a degree, masked and mitigated in Rawls's formulation because he insists that he is dealing not with an extreme pluralist society but with 'reasonable pluralism'. This has the consequence that it permits Rawls to surmount many of the greatest tensions in pluralism by confining his argument to a world not characterised by fundamentalist conflict but by groups who are ready to work together. The problems over the precise meaning to be attached to 'reasonable pluralism' are of some significance to interpreting the implications for education of Rawls's political liberalism. The condition of reasonable pluralism is one in which groups hold 'reasonable' comprehensive doctrines which can be mutually incompatible. It is, however, not entirely clear as to what is entailed by the 'reasonableness' of a doctrine and there appears to be some conflation between the reasonableness of people and of the beliefs they hold.⁹

At the most minimal level a doctrine seems to be reasonable if it is coherent and draws upon a tradition of thought (*Political Liberalism*, p.59). This is relatively undemanding and would be met by belief systems which many would regard as implausible. However, there also appears to be a 'thicker' version of a reasonable doctrine according to which, as part of the doctrine itself, it acknowledges the reasonableness of other doctrines. Consequently the view that outside the church there is no salvation is an unreasonable doctrine (*Political Liberalism*, p. 138). Reasonable doctrines are, hence, those which accord a certain legitimacy (though not truth) to rival positions. This is what permits an 'overlapping consensus' to be generated.

More generally, Rawls writes of persons rather than doctrines as being reasonable by virtue of their acceptance of the 'burdens of judgement'. These burdens include a recognition that evidence may be complex and may conflict, that persons may interpret situations and weigh factors differently. As Peter Jones has pointed out, there is no necessary connection between the reasonableness of doctrines in the first, more minimal, sense and the reasonableness of persons.¹⁰ It is the reasonableness of persons which could be more pertinent to political liberalism. If, as Jones goes on to say, unreasonable doctrines were held by reasonable persons this would be consistent with their upholding a politically liberal order since they would accept that their unreasonable views should not be imposed with the force of government. For related reasons Brian Barry has argued that Rawls does not require the notion of an overlapping doctrinal consensus so long as persons acknowledge the unreasonableness of pursuing their comprehensive moral doctrines by political means.¹¹

It may, of course, be more likely that a society in which comprehensive moral doctrines are congruent with the principles of political liberalism will be more sta-

⁹See B.Barry, 'John Rawls and the Search for Stability', *Ethics*, 105, 1995; S.Caney, 'Anti-perfectionism and Rawlsian Liberalism', *Political Studies*, 43, 1995; P.Jones, 'Two Conceptions of Liberalism, Two Conceptions of Justice', *British Journal of Political Science*, 25, 1995.

¹⁰P.Jones, 'Two Conceptions etc', pp.526-7.

¹¹B.Barry, 'John Rawls etc', pp.896-915.

ble than one in which persons are brought up both to affirm the truth of intolerant beliefs and the unreasonableness of intolerance. Either way the implications for a potentially liberal education are considerable. In one form or another its task is to bring about 'reasonableness'.

If the reasonableness of doctrines is to be understood in its 'thicker' or, as Barry terms it, 'content-based' meaning the politically liberal state may wish to ensure that as far as possible the plural comprehensive doctrines that abound in society are taught in their most 'reasonable' form. Religious schools would be free to instruct pupils in their own comprehensive doctrines but would be expected, even required, to teach the congruence of their positions with the values of political liberalism and the legitimacy of alternative standpoints. This might entail more than merely pointing out the existence of alternatives and the necessity of tolerating them but some deeper comprehension of the arguments in order for their reasonableness to be appreciated. Religious schools might be constrained to teach courses in comparative religion. Pupils will be made aware of the indeterminacy of moral values. Whether they will continue to engage with their traditional beliefs in the way they did previously may be questionable. A more self-conscious, detached, even critical, response to the religion of their upbringing may ensue. The school may come to feel that there is a point at which political liberalism is no longer congruent with its mode of instruction and that it is being required to make concessions to what is in reality a comprehensive doctrine of liberalism which the state is not entitled to promote. Even the more modest requirement of making pupils aware of the views of others is too much for some fundamentalist religions as the US legal case of *Mozert v. Hawkins* reveals.¹² On a 'thicker', 'content-based' understanding of reasonableness this response would be sufficient to reveal the 'unreasonableness' of this position – but it could not be accused of incoherence and inconsistency. Indeed, dogmatic or fanatic doctrines often appear to satisfy Rawls's minimal specifications for a reasonable doctrine of comprehensiveness, being 'more or less consistent', distinctive and drawing on a tradition of thought (*Political Liberalism*, p.59).

It may be, therefore, that educationally Rawls would do better to concentrate (as he usually does) on the reasonableness of persons rather than of doctrines.¹³ The project for an education endorsed by a politically liberal state would be to promote reasonable people even when they adhered to unreasonable doctrines. In certain respects, admittedly, the consequences for schools founded on non-liberal comprehensive doctrines might not be so different. They would still be required to prepare their pupils to be full co-operating members of society. This would again entail introducing students to other understandings of the world. However, there would be less pressure to ensure that their own doctrines were themselves congruent with political liberalism. Nevertheless, a curriculum designed to cultivate reasonable persons would assist pupils to assess the strength of the claims of others against their own claims and against society and its institutions. Crucially it will persuade students that divergent interpretations of the world and differing normative positions are to be expected and accepted (*Political Liberalism*, pp.56-7).

¹²For discussions of this case see S.Macedo, 'Liberal Civic Education' and A. Gutmann, 'Civic Education' and references they cite.

¹³See also P.Jones, 'Two Conceptions etc', pp.526-7.

All this is to be understood within a political context. Future citizens are to recognise that this is how politically reasonable persons conduct themselves in a pluralist world. They are to learn that, however they may think and behave in the private sphere, in the public they act in their citizen capacity guided by public reason. It may be thought that this reasonableness will more easily be acquired by some pupils than others, dependent on their upbringing. It is therefore striking that it is in this context of education that Rawls most explicitly admits that the effect, if not the intention, of political liberalism is to encourage the spread of a comprehensive moral doctrine of liberalism. There is a resemblance to the comprehensive liberalisms of Kant and Mill, albeit limited to the political realm. With a sort of philosophical shrug of the shoulders Rawls acknowledges that the 'unavoidable consequences of reasonable requirements for children's education may have to be accepted, often with regret' (*Political Liberalism*, p.200). This is one of the cases where neutrality of aim does not guarantee neutrality of effect. In his defence of Rawlsian political liberalism Macedo is still less restrained. He makes no bones about declaring: 'Liberal civic education is bound to have the effect of favouring some ways of life or religious convictions over others. So be it.'¹⁴ At the same time Macedo insists that political liberalism remains distinct from comprehensive liberalism. Not itself resting on a 'comprehensive account of the truth' it is able to avoid a confrontation between values in the political realm which could be damaging to stability.

Nevertheless those who wish to preserve their own non-liberal belief systems may fear that teaching political liberalism is the thin end of the wedge of moral liberalism. Rawls's own affinity with liberal theories of education for autonomy may be seen in the treatment in *A Theory of Justice*, which Rawls now regards as a wider comprehensive theory. In that work the discussion of an education directed to ensuring a well-ordered society is influenced by an approach to human development associated with Kantian comprehensive liberalism. He proposes an account of moral learning in three stages – a view which has affinities with ideas of moral development propounded by Piaget and Kohlberg, whom he cites.¹⁵ The three stages are the moralities of 'authority', 'association' and 'principles'. The morality of authority is typically that of children who are not yet able to assess the validity of moral precepts delivered to them but who accept the authoritative injunctions of elders (Rawls assumes parents) whom they love and trust. Children see that certain virtues are prized and others not. Much moral teaching comes through good example.

This stage is followed by the morality of association when individuals – from older children to young adults – derive their precepts from the various associations to which they belong. Such associations may range from the family, to schools, neighbourhoods, clubs or the national community itself. The members learn what is expected from their roles in these associations which is reinforced as they participate in them and as mutual trust is built up between new and established associates. The new entrants are governed by what Locke and the eighteenth century would have called the law of opinion and reputation.

The morality of principles occurs when individuals become attached to the principles of justice themselves. Such persons are not moved by a desire for approval

¹⁴S.Macedo, 'Liberal Civic Education', p.485.

¹⁵*A Theory of Justice*, pp.458-96.

but by a conception of right. They have reached a condition of full moral autonomy. In Rawls's scheme, as in Kohlberg's six stage process, the level of principle is a higher form of morality.¹⁶ The Kantian, or Rousseauian, heritage of such a theory is clear and in Kohlberg's case it has been argued that it owes more to these philosophical sources than to any well-founded account of moral psychology.¹⁷

If an education for political liberalism involves the same processes of moral development as Rawls outlines in *A Theory of Justice* then defenders of the comprehensive moral doctrines may properly fear the insidious incubation of moral liberalism. Teaching would be geared to the evolution of the child's moral capacity from authority to principle. However, it is possible that political liberalism in Rawls's formulation may require less of schools and be more within the capacities of schools to teach than is a strong morality of principle. Amy Gutmann has suggested that a morality of association is the most that can reasonably be expected of school education.¹⁸ Neither teaching 'critical thinking' nor learning through participatory school experiences can ensure the kind of autonomous moral agency a morality of principle supposes. There are also questions about the stage of child development at which such learning is possible.¹⁹ What schools can manage, Gutmann contends, is teaching the morality of association. They are able to communicate the values of the school, the wider society and the nation. Loyalty to peers, to school and society are qualities which schools typically inculcate directly and indirectly through team sports, clubs etc. Schools can teach national history as lessons in the practice of political virtue. They can relay those values which gain respect amongst fellow democratic citizens.

Such a morality of association might be sufficient for Rawls's political liberalism. At first glance it might seem that private schools, of all persuasions, could be encouraged to teach about those political practices and rights on which there was an overlapping consensus. Where there might appear some sign of strain or even contradiction between the school's own reasonable comprehensive doctrine and the public values of political liberalism a teacher might be able to explain that these were the accepted practices of the liberal society to which the pupils belonged and which will earn respect from the wider society. In *A Theory of Justice* Rawls explained the morality of association in terms which resemble those in which he later describes the values of political liberalism.

'Thus we may suppose that there is a morality of association in which the members of society view one another as equals, as friends and associates, joined together in a system of co-operation known to be for the advantage of all and governed by a common conception of justice' (*A Theory of Justice*, p.472).

The virtues of such a morality are 'justice and fairness, fidelity and trust, integrity and impartiality'; the corresponding vices are 'graspingness and unfairness, dishonesty and deceit, prejudice and bias'. It may be thought that teaching such a morality of association presents few difficulties. Paris suggests that there is a substantial, if complex, pattern of consensus along these lines in liberal societies which

¹⁶L.Kohlberg, 'Stages of Moral Development as a Basis for Moral Education', in C.M.Beck et al, *Moral Education: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, University of Toronto Press, 1971.

¹⁷D.Carr, *Educating the Virtues*, Routledge, 1991, pp.150-69.

¹⁸A.Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, pp.59-64; also D.Paris, 'Moral Education'.

¹⁹C.McCall, *Stevenson Lectures in Citizenship for 1991*, University of Glasgow.

schools already reflect and embody in their practices and which they can build upon.²⁰

It might seem, therefore that one answer to what is required for political liberalism is an education in the morality of association and that to reach beyond to the morality of principle is to enter the realm of a comprehensive liberalism and should not be a requirement of a national curriculum. There are, however, problems with this solution even though it might serve as the basis of a Rawlsian response to communitarians. First it can be argued that the morality of a democratic association could result in confrontations not only with dogmatic comprehensive moral doctrines but with quite moderate versions. For example Gutmann infers from the egalitarianism of a democratic association that schools must be co-educational and open to all religions. Many private religious schools, and not merely the fundamentalists, would find this an intolerable invasion of their independence in the name of political liberalism.²¹

Secondly, amongst the features one would expect of a morality of a democratic association is that it would encourage not merely loyalty but the critical capacity which Rawls expects of reasonable persons. However this capacity comes close to the comprehensive liberal morality of autonomy. Although confined to the public realm this critical spirit is, as Rawls and still more Macedo acknowledge, likely to spill over into the non-public sphere.²² Educating people to be politically reasonable whilst not touching on their attitudes to the non-political appears an exercise in pedagogic self-denial which the critics of liberalism may consider too difficult to be sustainable.

The third problem arises from the political liberal response to the second problem. As Macedo has said political liberalism is a strategy of avoidance which consists in limiting the political realm.²³ Those professing the various comprehensive doctrines (liberal or illiberal) can find reassurance of their own integrity if the political sphere in which the morality of political liberalism applies is restricted, as Rawls insists it is, to the basic structure of society. The more narrowly politics is conceived, the more that matters can be taken off the political agenda, the less far-reaching will civic education need to be and the less disturbing to the curriculum. If, however, in a democracy almost any aspect of life might at some point take on a political dimension it will be less feasible to draw the distinction between educating for political liberalism and for liberalism as citizens will need to learn to switch to and fro between public reason and other modes of thought and expression.²⁴ Rawls states that 'the liberal view removes from the political agenda the most divisive issues, serious contention about which must undermine the bases of social co-operation' (*Political Liberalism*, p.157). If so, one can readily see that political tolerance, thus narrowly defined, may be forthcoming and that teaching it may be a less onerous task. However this may merely remove these contentious matters – normally what politics is all about – to some other sphere (however it is

²⁰D.Paris, 'Moral Education', pp.890-8.

²¹A.Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, p.63.

²²S.Macedo, 'Liberal Civic Education', p.477; see criticisms by Gutmann, 'Civic Education', pp.573-9.

²³For a similar treatment of constitutionalism see S.Holmes, 'Gag Rules or the Politics of Omission' in J.Elster & R.Slagstad (eds), *Constitutional Democracy*, Cambridge University Press, 1987; an article cited by Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, p.151.

²⁴For examples of lack of clarity concerning the boundaries of politics see Elizabeth Frazer & Nicola Lacey, 'Politics and the Public in Rawls' Liberalism', *Political Studies*, 43, 1995.

described) in which, there will still be need for virtues of compromise and tolerance which have to be taught and learnt.

From the standpoint of democracy the strategy of avoidance seeks to avoid democracy itself. Education which is congruent with this political liberalism faces a dilemma of encouraging critical capacity and a participatory spirit within a deliberately restricted sphere whilst permitting more authoritarian modes of education outside the public realm. A more robust democratic theory would wish its schools to promote the ability of future citizens to deliberate freely upon the full range of issues which might appear directly or indirectly upon a less impoverished political agenda. This would suggest something closer to the traditional liberal education for autonomy and to a readiness to constrain the independence of schools which deny to the child the acquisition of democratic skills. Democracies are as entitled as any other regime to use measures to ensure their survival. Education is one of the measures.²⁵ At the same time one must assume that a democracy should aspire to procedural fairness and follow this in its educational policy as elsewhere. Whether education genuinely exercises a profound political effect is a moot point. However liberals and democrats (like conservatives and radicals, autocrats and anarchists, communitarians and libertarians) have believed that it does. The education of future citizens seems to be too important for any polity to leave entirely alone. If liberals and democrats do not educate the future masters, someone less liberal and less democratic might.

²⁵But see H. Van Gunsteren 'Neo-Republican Citizenship in the Practice of Education', *Government and Opposition*, 31,1996, for a discussion of the dangers of educating children to remedy the failings of parents.