Democratic Pluralism in Education

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The Dutch theologian and statesman Abraham Kuyper articulated a concept of "sphere sovereignty" that translates, in policy terms, into principled structural pluralism. The Dutch experience is highly relevant for the present situation in the United States: deep political and social as well as cultural divides between a liberal elite and the values and interests of many of their fellow-citizens. Popular schooling is often a primary focal-point for attempts to make effective the hegemony of the sovereign state over every aspect of society. Employed in a monopolistic manner, it poses the profoundest threat to freedom. Educational pluralism, of the sort that emerged spontaneously in the United States but has been under growing threat in recent decades, is the best protection against this profoundly undemocratic abuse.

Introduction

During the seven-decade political struggle in the Netherlands to allow parents to select schools corresponding to their religious convictions, Abraham Kuyper articulated a concept of "sphere sovereignty" that translates, in policy terms, into principled structural pluralism. That Dutch experience, and its resolution in the "Pacification" of 1917, is highly relevant for the present situation in the United States: popular revulsion against the condescension and intolerance of a liberal elite toward the values and interests of many of their fellow-citizens, leading to deep political and social as well as cultural divides.

A primary locus of this conflict in nineteenth-century Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe was public schooling, the sphere in which, more than any other, government reaches into the lives and confronts the intimate convictions of

parents. While claims of state sovereignty over all aspects of society had been made at least since Jean Bodin (ca. 1530–1596), the development of a central government role in promoting popular schooling was essentially a nineteenth-century phenomenon, though with earlier anticipations in Prussia and other German states.[1]

Popular schooling is often a primary focal-point for attempts to make effective the hegemony of the sovereign state over every aspect of society, to achieve not only obedience to laws and policies but also an inner disposition immune to alternative or partial loyalties. Employed in a monopolistic manner as under totalitarian regimes, it poses the profoundest threat to freedom. Educational pluralism, of the sort that emerged spontaneously as the American nation developed[2] but (as we will see) has been under growing threat in recent decades, is the best protection against this profoundly undemocratic abuse.

The School Struggle in Western Europe

While town support for schooling as early as the Late Middle Ages had been motivated by economic motives, such as the advantages of literacy and numeracy in commercial enterprises, the more recent adoption of central-government measures was almost always intended to promote among the common people a shared loyalty to a national project, to turn "peasants into Frenchmen."[3] Thus it was as Prussia absorbed territories in other parts of Central Europe that Prussian leaders made popular schooling a matter of state policy, an example followed with more or less success by centralizing governments in France, Spain, Italy, and other countries a century later.

"Now that Italy has been created," the successful leaders of the *Risorgimento* insisted, "it is necessary to create Italians,"[4] and this would be the mission of the state, carried out through popular schooling. The governing (and anticlerical) elite insisted that "the modern State directs a people toward civilization, not limiting itself to distributing justice and defending society but wishing to direct it in a way which will lead to the highest goals of humanity."[5] To this end, the provision of education at all levels, from primary schools to universities, should be under the direct supervision of the central government. The same process—and resulting conflicts with Catholic and other religious provisions for schooling—could be illustrated from a dozen other countries emerging into modernity and struggling to overcome linguistic and regional diversity.

A primary concern in elite circles throughout the nineteenth century was thus to use schooling and other instruments of socialization to remake the common

people, to achieve what François Guizot called "a certain governance of minds."[6] As Terry Eagleton has written,

> For Schiller, Fichte and Coleridge, the task of the state is the ethical formation of humanity. In this project, culture or *Bildung* forms the mediation between the brutish creature of civil society and the moderate, civilised, sweetly reasonable citizen. In civil society, individuals live in a state of chronic mutual antagonism; the state, by contrast, is the transcendent sphere in which these divisions are harmoniously reconciled. Culture is a form of ethical pedagogy which grooms us for political citizenship by liberating the collective self buried within each breast. It is this ideal self which finds supreme expression in the universal sphere of the state.[7]

Insistence on the uniquely civic role of government-managed public schools and on the dangers represented by schools not under direct government control, especially if they had a religious character, developed over the course of the nineteenth century. Increasingly assertive national states grew unwilling to continue to allow religious organizations not under government control to play a role in shaping the loyalties and mores of the rising generations. A good sense of what advocates of a state monopoly of schooling believed was at stake in their struggle over who would educate is provided by the famous warning of General Foy in 1822, that children attending Catholic schools "will have received in these establishments, which are not of the nation, instruction which is not national; and thus the effect of these establishments will be to separate French youth into two camps [*diviser la France en deux jeunesses*]."[8] This theme of *deux jeunesses* would be a constant in French policy debates from the Restoration (1815–1830) to the contemporary rallies of the Fifth Republic. Two decades later, in Connecticut, Horace Bushnell warned that children attending Catholic schools "will be instructed mainly into the foreign prejudices and superstitions of their fathers." It was, he lamented, "a dark and rather mysterious providence, that we have thrown upon us, to be our fellow-citizens, such multitudes of people, depressed, for the most part, in character, instigated by prejudices so intense against our religion,"[9] that is, Protestantism.

Schooling as an instrument by which the state forms its citizens to a unique pattern of loyalties seeks to create "a political order free of all ties or relationships save those which proceed directly from the state, itself based upon the sovereign General Will, and empty of all rights and liberties of individuals—whose renunciation or 'alienation' of these is the condition of entry into the redemptive state."[10] As Rousseau wrote in his recommendations for the revival of a battered and partitioned Poland,

> This is the all-important article. It is education that must give the souls of the people a national form, and so shape their opinions and their tastes that they become patriots as much by inclination and passion as by necessity. A child ought to look upon his fatherland as soon as his eyes open to the light, and should continue to do so until the day of his death. Every true patriot sucks in the love of country with his mother's milk. This love is his whole existence. He thinks of nothing but his country. He lives only for his country. Take him by himself, and he counts for nothing.[11]

Stating such a total claim became the program of the Jacobins during the radical phase of the French Revolution,[12] and it has been taken up again and again in the subsequent two centuries by those seeking to make the reach of government into society and individual lives powerful and effective.

Kuyper saw this claim of the state to a monopoly on the schooling of youth as a fundamental threat. "What we combat, on principle and without compromise," he wrote in laying out the program of his political movement in 1879, "is the attempt to totally change how a person thinks and how he lives, to change his head and his heart, his home and his country—to create a state of affairs the very opposite of what has always been believed, cherished, and confessed, and so to lead us to a complete emancipation from the sovereign claims of Almighty God."[13]

In the twentieth century, of course, such attempts to remold the loyalties and ways of thinking of a population through schooling took much more sinister forms under Fascist[14] and Communist[15] regimes. Stalin put it bluntly in a conversation with H. G. Wells in 1934: "Education is a weapon whose effect depends on who holds it in his hands and who is struck with it." A leading Soviet educator, more tactfully, told an American visitor in 1927 that "the over-all task of Soviet education was to 'change the character of the Russian people.'"[16]

We would recognize this as a totalitarian project, of course, and insist that American public education has no such intention. A recent book by the Polish philosopher Ryszard Legutko argues, however, that liberal democracies in the West have surprisingly much in common with totalitarian systems: "Both systems strongly and—so to speak—impatiently intrude into the social fabric and both justify their intrusion with the argument that it leads to the improvement of the state of affairs by 'modernizing' it." The elites who form opinion and shape administrative policy under today's liberal democratic regimes, Legutko argues, have the intention that

> the political system should permeate every section of public and private life, analogously to the view of the erstwhile *accoucheurs* of the communist system. Not only should the state and the economy be liberal, democratic, or liberal-

democratic, but the entire society as well, including ethics and mores, family, churches, schools, universities, community organizations, culture, and even human sentiments and aspirations. The people, structures, thoughts that exist outside the liberal-democratic pattern are deemed outdated, backward-looking, useless, but at the same time extremely dangerous as preserving the remnants of old authoritarianisms.[17]

The counterexample to this is England where, in contrast with its Continental neighbors, the central government, with Victorian complacency, was slow to become involved in providing popular schooling, and indeed did more to promote such schooling in its uneasy dependency Ireland than in England itself.[18] In addition to the absence of anxiety over national unity, however, the English policy context was one in which local institutions had long played a major role in meeting social needs, including for schooling; hundreds of locally endowed schools had been providing schooling since the Reformation. The English tradition of pluralism (later articulated by Figgis, Maitland, Laski, and others) held to "the belief in the vitality and the legitimacy of self-governing associations as means of organizing social life and the belief that political representation must respect the principle of function, recognizing associations like trade unions, churches, and voluntary bodies. In the pluralist scheme it is such associations that perform the basic tasks of social life." Such "[p]luralism is strongly antistatist in its basic principles."[19]

The Dutch School Struggle and Pacification

In the Netherlands and Belgium, schooling has come to be seen as primarily a function of civil society rather than of the state; educational pluralism is the unchallenged norm.[20]

This structural pluralism was not arrived at through abstract appeal to principles of liberty, but as the result of a political and cultural struggle that came to a boil in 1878, when a new generation of Dutch Liberals came to power, committed to government intervention in popular schooling and explicitly hostile to confessional schools.[21] "Religion, they insisted, especially religious education among young children, bred ignorance, superstition, and backwardness. It stunted the full development of the individual and of the nation."[22] They enacted legislation providing that the state would pay 30 percent of the cost of local public schools, and under some circumstances even more. Other provisions of this law increased significantly the costs of all schools, whether government-supported or not. The legislation was opposed by supporters of unsubsidized confessional education,

since it would make their schools much more expensive to operate. Confessional schools would remain free, Kuyper noted, "yes, free to hurry on crutches after the neutral [school] train that storms along the rails of the law, drawn by the golden locomotive of the State."[23]

The legislation reflected a growing antireligious sentiment in some elite circles. Liberal prime minister Kappeyne van de Coppello warned that making concessions to the advocates of public subsidies for confessional schools would have the result that "the struggle for liberty would have been useless … destroyed through the wrangles of factions. Dominance by priests and churchly intolerance would then be prevalent in our country."[24] While to an earlier generation of Liberals the role of the state was to provide support for schooling but without becoming involved in the content and goals of education, for "Kappeyne it was nearly the opposite: the State, the State, and again the State; everything must derive from it, in the spirit of 'the modern worldview,' which must penetrate the entire state apparatus, in a principled struggle with churchly authority, which was on its last legs." In an important parliamentary speech in 1874, Kappeyne insisted that "the State cannot leave to chance, to arbitrariness, to the care of any association whatsoever, what belongs to it in the first place: education."[25]

It was in opposition to this claim on the part of the state to shape the minds and hearts of youth, to be sovereign over the most intimate aspects of family and individual conscience, that Kuyper and his allies, as he wrote, "focused all our fight on the school struggle. For there the sovereignty of conscience, and of the family, and of pedagogy, and of the spiritual circle were all equally threatened."[26]

Kuyper's distinctive contribution was, in the name of God's sovereignty over all aspects of life, to give his confessional political party a strong agenda of social policies going well beyond explicitly "religious" concerns; "by associating Calvinism with social reform, Kuyper was able to bring broad, *klein burger* sectors and even segments of the working class behind the Anti-Revolutionary movement."[27] This was the first party program in Dutch history and, in the very year when the Liberals achieved their goal of enacting legislation to place new burdens on confessional schooling, their opponents achieved the nationwide organization that enabled them to reverse the Liberal program.[28]

Kuyper and other Dutch Anti-Revolutionaries defined their political program in conscious opposition to the French Revolution with its assertion of the unlimited sovereignty of the nation-state, as famously expressed by Abbé Sieyès: "The Nation exists before everything, it is the source of everything" (*Qu'est-ce que le Tiers Etat?* 1789). Or, more officially, in Article 3 of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* (also 1789), "All sovereignty resides essentially in the Nation. No body, no individual can exercise authority which does not explicitly

emanate from it."[29] Kuyper insisted on an alternative understanding of the nature of sovereignty as ultimately belonging to God and attributed in only limited fashion to different spheres of the created order, including government. "Sphere sovereignty defending itself against State sovereignty," he wrote in 1880, "that is the course of world history.… It lay in the order of creation, in the structure of human life; it was there before State sovereignty arose. But once arisen, State sovereignty recognized Sphere sovereignty as its permanent adversary.…"[30] As Jonathan Chaplin explains,

> For Kuyper, the principle of sphere sovereignty (*souvereiniteit in eigen kring*) expresses the idea that there exist a variety of distinct types of social institutions, each endowed with a divinely ordained nature and purpose and each possessing rights and responsibilities that must not be conflated with or absorbed by those of other types.[31]

Contrary to the common stereotype about religious leaders in politics,[32] Kuyper did not seek to dominate the society and culture of the Netherlands, but to make room for institutional pluralism.

> He struggled against uniformity, the curse of modern life; he wanted to see movement and contrasting colors in place of gray monotony.… Thus the "antithesis," that originally [among orthodox Protestants] meant the unrelenting struggle against devilish modernity, with Kuyper imperceptibly [changed] to a teaching about diversity and about the independent, to-be-honored power of differences. All that was not logical … but it was successful and contributed to giving Dutch society a very distinctive flavor. The origin of what would later be called "pillarization" (*verzuiling*), the system through which each religious group thanks to government subsidies can create its own social world that includes everything from nursery school to sports club or professional association, lies in Kuyper's conservative love for pluriformity.[33]

The Liberals had overreached. This threat against the schools that many of the orthodox common people had labored and sacrificed to establish aroused and created a movement that, in a decade, reversed the political fortunes of the Liberals and brought state support for confessional schools. A massive petition drive collected, in five days, 305,102 signatures from Protestants and 164,000 from Catholics asking the king to refuse to sign the new legislation. When that failed, a national organization, "The Union 'A School with the Bible,'" created a permanent mechanism for the mobilization of orthodox Protestants.[34] Together with the orthodox Protestant Anti-Revolutionary Party, the Catholic party gained a majority in Parliament by 1888. This was made possible as a result not only

of mobilization around the schools but also of a revision of the election law the previous year, which greatly extended the franchise among the (male) population, thus bringing the religiously conservative common people of the countryside and small towns into political participation for the first time. As an historian of Dutch liberalism has pointed out, the effort to smother the last flickering flame of orthodox religion only succeeded in fanning it into vigorous life, and "no one has done as much harm to liberalism as Kappeyne."[35]

As a result of a similar struggle over schooling and popular resistance to Liberal aggression, something rather like the Dutch pillarization, though without the Protestant pillar, developed in Belgium and provided strong social as well as political support for many decades:

> The map of Belgium, especially in Flanders, was black with Catholic nuclei. Schools, convents, guilds, insurance societies, recreational, trade, and voter associations, religious, parochial, and philanthropic associations, associations for women, girls, soldiers, students and pupils, banks, credit institutions, museums, farmer unions, some united with one another and overlapping, some hierarchically dependent on the bishops or on the State, all led through priests who often besides their organizational work had hardly any time for their pastoral duties—all this formed the impenetrable, unimaginably ingenious complex of Catholic power.[36]

Kossman suggests that this period in the Netherlands, and also in Belgium, marked an emphasis, by religious conservatives, upon building up the capacity of societal institutions to resist any over-reaching by the state, and indeed to arrange for the state to subsidize the costs of these institutions, in what the Belgians called "subsidized freedom" and the Dutch Christian Democrats called "social decentralization."[37]

Emancipation of the "little people," for whom their Catholic or orthodox Protestant beliefs were central, and their emergence into public life, bringing their convictions with them, required intensive organization. The passions and the habits of cooperation developed during the long struggle for confessional schooling, then found expression across the whole range of social life, in both the Netherlands and Belgium. A Dutch political scientist notes that "*verzuiling* is inexplicable apart from the 'school struggle.'"[38]

In the two countries—Belgium and the Netherlands—that today have the most highly evolved systems of educational freedom, under which schools reflecting a variety of worldviews and pedagogical approaches enjoy equal public funding and protection of their distinctiveness, these arrangements did not simply drop from the sky but were achieved through bitter struggle (the *schoolstrijd* or *lutte*

scolaire) and mobilization of elements of the population who had been seen as the voiceless target of educational policy.

It was overreaching by liberal elites in both cases that brought to naught what had seemed the inevitable progress of their agenda. In place of the unlimited intervention of the state to shape minds and hearts, loyalties and dispositions through popular schooling, the resistance of the Protestant and Catholic "little people" led to a great flourishing of grassroots organizations and institutions to meet a wide variety of needs.

The state's role became one of coordination, of support, of intervention only when local efforts failed. This political pluralism insists that "our social life comprises multiple sources of authority and sovereignty—individuals, parents, associations, churches, and state institutions, among others—no one of which is dominant for all purposes and on all occasions. Nonstate authority does not exist simply as a concession or gift of the state. A well-ordered state recognizes, but does not create, other sources of authority."[39]

The American "School Struggle"

Something similar to the Dutch and Belgian (and French, German, Spanish, Mexican, and other) school struggles has been happening in American politics recently, as evident not only in the populist resentment leading to the 2016 election of Donald Trump but also in the political shifts in many states, and—with respect to education—the growth of thousands of alternatives to the district public schools that, fifty years ago, seemed an unmovable and central institution of American life.

Already, nearly three million students attend public charter schools and nearly four hundred thousand are taking advantage of programs making it possible for them to use public funds to attend private schools; these numbers are growing sharply each year. What we have been hearing again and again from the supporters of Donald Trump —though it by no means began with them—is resistance to what they perceive as the overbearing power of the national government and of the liberal "coastal" elites who are thought to set the agenda of that government and to impose it on society in general. The conservative media have been full of examples of the overriding of local and parental concerns, of which the issue of transgender use of bathrooms and locker rooms is only the latest sensation. There can be no denying the political potency of such grievances, however exaggerated they may sometimes be.[40]

Nor is it very different from what Abraham Kuyper wrote in 1874, with similar exaggeration:

Can it be denied that the centralizing State grows more and more into a gigantic monster against which every citizen is finally powerless? Have not all independent institutions, whose sovereignty in their own sphere made them a basis for resistance, yielded to the magic formula of a single, unitary state? Once there was autonomy in the regions and towns, autonomy for families and different social ranks, autonomy for the courts as well as for the universities, corporations, and guilds. And now? The State has annexed all these rights from the provinces, one after another. Then it tells the towns what to do, comes in your front door. Expropriates your property. Commandeers the law, makes trustees and professors its servants, and tolerates no corporation but its own dependent.[41]

But Kuyper, unlike today's populists in the United States and in Europe, offered a conceptual framework for thinking about and prescribing for this overinflation of central government authority. He was able to do so by drawing upon the Calvinist tradition of focusing on the fundamental significance of God's sovereignty for every sphere of human life.[42] Without such conceptual clarity, it is doubtful whether a solution could have been reached in the Netherlands, or can be reached in the United States today.

By asserting the unique sovereignty of God, Kuyper relativized and limited all other sources of authority and thus provided a basis for a democratic pluralism protecting the freedom of faith-communities as well as of individuals. Is it too much to hope that we Americans can abandon the winner-take-all mindset that embitters our political discussions, and accept instead the principled pluralism that served as the basis of a lasting "pacification" in the Netherlands and in Belgium? To do so would require "neither that we agree completely with each other about our deepest beliefs (we don't) nor that we stop trying to convince each other about what we think is best (we shouldn't). Instead, principled pluralism simply asks us to agree to respect each other's convictions not only in private life but also in public life."[43]

What Is at Stake

When Stephen Bannon tells us that a primary goal of the Trump Administration is "the deconstruction of the administrative state," we may understand the frustration behind such an agenda—including the altruistic as well as self-interested motivations that have led to ever-greater governmental interventions in society—but wish fervently that current political discourse rested upon a solider foundation than resentments and fears.

We have seen that Kuyper and his followers shared with today's populists in Europe and North America a determined resistance to what they perceived as the overreaching of government into sensitive domains of community and personal life. He resisted the tendency of the state to put "itself in the place of God [whereby the] state becomes the highest power and at the same time the source of all right … as the ideal of human society, a state before whose apotheosis every knee must bow, by whose grace everyone must live, to whose word everyone must be subject."[44]

Sociologist James Davison Hunter importantly reminds us that "[w]hat is ultimately at issue, then, are not just disagreements about 'values' or 'opinions.' Such language misconstrues the nature of moral commitment. Such language in the end reduces morality to preferences and cultural whim. What is ultimately at issue are deeply rooted and fundamentally different understandings of being and purpose."[45] Or, in Kuyper's terms, "world-and-life views."

A crucial distinction between the sides in these culture wars is between those who—like Kuyper—argue that different worldviews have a right to exist and find unhindered organizational expression in society, and those who contend that ultimately only a single perspective, that which they identify with enlightened modernity, must prevail. While it may have been true several decades ago that, "[f]or progressivists, pluralism can only exist when there is an acceptance of all religious and moral commitments as equally valid and legitimate; as simply different but equally authentic ways of articulating truth,"[46] this is no longer the case. Today, alternative perspectives on a whole range of issues, but especially around sexuality and its expression, are simply condemned as "hate speech." This "charge of bigotry can be a potent tool to silence Christians. This weapon makes thinking Christians more cautious in expressing themselves and handicaps them in any attempt to engage in a fair exchange of ideas."[47] Those holding traditional beliefs about sexual expression are not only condemned, but persecuted and driven, as it were, into the refuge of unspoken private opinion. "What is becoming most divisive in American public life," James Skillen has pointed out, "is the insistence of some citizens (perhaps the majority) that they are morally justified in using legal and political means to establish as the only common basis for the civic order a viewpoint that pretends to be religiously neutral and capable of setting religious differences aside,"[48] but in fact is by no means neutral and has the character of an intolerant faith.

A primary target of this elite effort to remake the people—especially those whom Hillary Clinton unfortunately termed "the deplorables"—into enlightened liberal democrats continues to be the stubborn persistence of local communities maintaining alternative understandings of human nature and appropriate behavior.

In particular, the efforts of such local communities to socialize their children in their own values and loyalties is seen as a major impediment to enlightenment, and continues to be a target of the liberal elite. Like "the communists before them," liberal democrats "disliked communities for their alleged anachronism and, for that reason, thought them, because deep-rooted, to be the major obstacles to progress. Both believed that one cannot modernize society without modernizing communities, including rural areas, families, churches, and schools."[49]

If we take nothing else from Kuyper's sphere sovereignty, it should be that the family possesses a direct vocation to seek to shape the character and the convictions of the children entrusted to it, a vocation that it can elect to share with the educators who exercise their own vocation in a particular school. This conviction is not limited to those who accept Kuyper's Calvinism, of course. Thus, philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah has written,

> We believe that children should be raised primarily in families and that those families should be able to shape their children into the culture, identity, and traditions that the adult members of the family take as their own. One liberal reason for believing this is that this is one way to guarantee the rich plurality of identities whose availability is, as I have said, one of the resources for self-construction.

This reliance upon families implies, in addition, a pluralistic provision of schooling; after all,

> once we have left the raising of children to families, we are bound to acknowledge that parental love includes the desire to shape children into identities one cares about, and to teach them identity related values, in particular, along with the other ethical truths that the child will need to live her life well. A state that actively undermined parental choices in this regard in the name of the child's future autonomy would be a state constantly at odds with the parents: and that would be unlikely to be good for the children.[50]

It is not primarily government agendas that undermine educational pluralism in America today, however, but a prevailing educational theory—"ideology" would not be too strong a word—that has taken the place of positive instruction in national and societal loyalty and the virtues required by citizenship. In fact, the prevailing orthodoxy that today's public schools seek to inculcate is not some form of civic virtue, but rather the current platitudes about tolerance and nonjudgmentalism. Stephen Macedo, in his book on civic education, argues that the American "constitutional order must shape citizens, and not only establish political institutions."[51]

How should the formation of citizens be accomplished? Macedo assigns a significant share of the responsibility to schooling, and indeed suggests that "were the survival of free institutions really to depend upon it, and were it efficacious to do so, a law making public school attendance mandatory"—thus re-instating the requirement struck down in 1925 by the Supreme Court in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*—"would not be inconsistent with basic liberal values."[52] On the other hand, he admits that "although public schools are not morally vacuous, many schools and teachers have retreated to a position of moral subjectivism in the face of moral conflict and disagreement."[53]

Mutual respect is a very good quality, of course, but it is more procedural than substantive; that is, it may serve as the basis for getting along with fellow citizens, but not as the foundation for a full life of contributions and sacrifice. In fact, it begs the question of what is most worthy of respect, in others and in oneself. The "moral subjectivism" of which Macedo complains is, after all, the natural result of a focus on cultural differences that does not engage with the religious dimension of culture, the dimension that calls for respect based on frank acknowledgement of differences that cannot be trivialized away.

The bottom line for him, though, is whether "people have a moral or constitutional right to opt out of reasonable measures designed to educate children toward very basic liberal virtues, because those measures make it harder for parents to pass along their religious beliefs?" Macedo insists that they do not. "Liberal civic education is bound to have the effect of favoring some ways of life or religious convictions over others. So be it."[54]

There is no problem with that position, in a free society, provided that the liberal education so defined is only one of a variety of educational options equally accessible on the basis of parental decisions. As Jonathan Chaplin, drawing on Kuyper's philosophical expositor (and sometime critic) Herman Dooyeweerd, points out,

> [t]he state may not … legally impose purely ethical—as distinct from public-legal—obligations upon its citizens; it is beyond its power to mandate nonpolitical virtues among them. It may certainly require and stimulate adherence to the shared political morality, or civic virtue—respect for law, the capacity for political participation and critical deliberation, and so on—necessary for the sustenance and healthy functioning of the political community itself. Citizen virtues, then, have a specifically political referent. The virtues necessary for broader, nonpolitical ends such as social harmony (friendship), successful parenting, or industrious employment, for example, are not contained within or derived from the political virtues required for citizenship (they do not conflict

with but support them), and so responsibility for their promotion falls chiefly to agents other than the state.[55]

Macedo's position would be more convincing, of course, if it could be shown that individuals with deeply held religious convictions are *per se* bad citizens, but this is by no means the case, as demonstrated by Augustine in *The City of God* and by countless others, including social scientists, since his time. Noted political scientist Sidney Verba and his colleagues found that the

> domain of equal access to opportunities to learn civic skills is the church. Not only is religious affiliation not stratified by income, race or ethnicity, or gender, but churches apportion opportunities for skill development relatively equally among members. Among church members, the less well off are at less of a disadvantage, and African-Americans are at an actual advantage, when it comes to opportunities to practice civic skills in church.[56]

Of course there are, and presumably always have been, individuals who use religion to justify antisocial behavior, just as there are thoroughly secular individuals who make similar excuses, but that should not be a reason for prescribing a single model of education and educational goals in a society that claims to value diversity and freedom of conscience.

In fact, the prevailing orthodoxy among those who shape the agenda of public schools today, "embracing an intellectual tradition that has roots in the thinking of Plato, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and John Dewey, [has] unapologetically called for schooling to free students from the yoke of their families' provincial understandings."[57] These, as we have seen, are perceived as a limitation upon the capacity of students to reach the full self-defining autonomy considered the highest goal of human development. As Meira Levinson argues unabashedly,

> For the state to foster children's development of autonomy requires coercion— i.e., it requires measures that prima facie violate the principles of freedom and choice.… The coercive nature of state promotion of the development of autonomy also means that children do not have the luxury of "opting out" of public autonomy-advancing opportunities in the same way that adults do.[58]

After identifying frankly how promotion of this goal by the state violates other liberal principles such as "pluralism … basic liberties … the public/private divide by interfering with the family," she concludes nevertheless that "the state is justified … in helping children to develop the capacity for autonomy, even against parents' and children's expressed wishes."[59]

How can this be reconciled with the societal diversity so often celebrated by democratic liberals? "What liberals really mean to say," Levinson argues, "is that the state should be neutral among individuals holding competing conceptions of the good. Children, however, do not have developed conceptions of the good. Thus, neutrality seems not to apply to the relationship between the state and children." She concedes that "[p]arents would still be allowed to keep their children and act as primary caretakers, but decisions about child-rearing would be subject to collective deliberation,"[60] that is, by majority rule overriding the views of minorities, and of parents in particular.

It should be noted, in this connection, that the liberal agenda of autonomy through questioning all received opinions and particular loyalties has never been subjected to a democratic process of approval, either locally or nationally. It is an imposition by those who have successfully claimed the right to define the goals of education and of human development in general without regard to the views of their fellow citizens. As Robert George points out, "liberalism (considered a 'comprehensive,' as opposed to a merely 'political,' doctrine) is not held by citizens generally in contemporary pluralistic societies."[61]

This form of liberalism "seeks the transformation of the entirety of human life and the world" on the basis of an "understanding of liberty as the most extensive possible expansion of the human sphere of autonomous activity in the service of the fulfillment of the self."[62] Thus, it has no respect for ways of life based upon obedience to tradition or to group norms, since these lead by definition to lives that lack authenticity. Nor does it—for all the talk of freedom—approve of public policies that support institutional accommodation of the cultural pluralism characterizing contemporary democratic societies. Or, to be more precise, this cultural pluralism is celebrated so long as it limits itself to surface expressions, to music and dance and foods, but feared and opposed when it evokes fundamental beliefs, differences that "go all the way down." These have no place in the multiculturalism, the superficial "diversity," sought and celebrated in the contemporary educational system from kindergarten to graduate school. It has been said that "[d]iversity in Brookline [Massachusetts] means different colored people who have been trained to think alike. They treat different opinions with contempt."[63]

Lack of respect for fundamental differences, insisting that they are mere illusion or matters of definition, while celebrating superficial "preferences" as though such bricolage could lead to personal authenticity, has created tremendous pressure toward uniformity of opinion under all the superficial glitter of "doing your own thing." It is true that religious institutions provide support for those who share common convictions setting them apart from their contemporaries, but the whole trend of public policy and law today is to restrict the reach of such

associations to symbolic activities. Thus "religious freedom" is defined down to "freedom to worship," as though no other domains of life were protected spheres for the expression of religious convictions.

Philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff points out that "our contemporary proponents of the liberal position … are still looking for a politics … of a community with shared perspective…. The liberal is not willing to live with a politics of multiple communities."[64] The consequence is that, unless prepared to maintain a radical separation like the Amish or Hasidic Jews, individuals with deeply held religious convictions are forced in many respects to conform to the norms of the surrounding culture, and that culture in turn grows increasingly superficial because it is not allowed to evoke the deep motivations of life.

Such "Comprehensive Liberalism" is fundamentally partisan and intolerant, and political scientist William Galston stresses the threat that its ascendancy poses to traditional communities, since "liberalism is not equally hospitable to all ways of life or to all subcommunities. Ways of life that require self-restraint, hierarchy, or cultural integrity are likely to find themselves on the defensive, threatened with the loss of both cohesion and authority." As a result, Galston points out, "the more one examines putatively neutral liberal principles and public discourse, the more impressed one is likely to become by their decidedly nonneutral impact on different parts of diverse societies. Liberalism is not and cannot be the universal response, equally acceptable to all, to the challenge of social diversity. It is ultimately a partisan stance."[65] No wonder that religious organizations and individuals who take their beliefs seriously sometimes feel under attack in this allegedly tolerant society.

There is even more at stake than the right of individuals and groups to live out their religious convictions in the decisions they make about the education of their children. A "growing body of evidence suggests that[,] in a liberal society, the family is the critical arena in which independence and a host of other virtues must be engendered. The weakening of families is thus fraught with danger for liberal societies."[66] A healthy society requires citizens with the character, the "settled disposition," to act in accordance with the common good rather than with selfish interests at critical junctures, and there is a real danger that such citizens will not be available in a society whose prevailing culture has placed individual autonomy as the highest good, a culture in which the "secular, Enlightenment rhetoric of autonomy is bound up with a celebration of 'self' as the final arbiter, the trump to all moral claim."[67] In this welter of moral confusion, as Yuval Levin observes, "the ultimate soul-forming institutions in a free society are frequently religious institutions. Traditional religion offers a direct challenge to the ethic of the age of fracture. Religious commitments command us to a mixture of responsibility,

sympathy, lawfulness, and righteousness that align our wants with our duties. They help form us to be free."[68]

This is exactly the opposite of the belief promoted in Progressive circles today, that religious institutions are the epitome of un-freedom, subjecting children, in particular, to a numbing indoctrination, with "moral exhortations" that "effectively prevent many children from freely expressing themselves physically, exploring their sexuality, or even giving affection to others."[69]

Many see religious institutions in American society as under relentless attack, especially around issues of sexuality such as gay marriage and transgenderism. "The cultural left—which is to say, increasingly the American mainstream—has no intention of living in postwar peace. It is pressing forward with a harsh, relentless occupation,"[70] warns a recent book which has attracted wide attention. The requirement that faith-based schools, for example, comply with legal requirements for curriculum content or protections for staff behaviors that are contrary to basic teachings of their religious traditions is a fundamental challenge to their mission.

In order to function effectively as educative communities, it is essential that schools—like families and churches—enjoy real independence to hold and to express distinctive worldviews. As Levin notes,

> Being valued and protected is what these mediating institutions all require from the larger society. And in return, they help to form us as free citizens who can live together—not by agreeing with one another about everything (as different institutions and communities can inculcate quite different ethics), but by living out the genuine potential, and recognizing the real limits, of human liberty in practice.… [I]t is our attachments to these very institutions that have been most degraded in modern America. The progress of the ethic of diffusion and liberalization has meant growing estrangement from precisely these prerequisites for human flourishing.[71]

Democratic pluralism insists that no healthy society can be based exclusively upon individual possessors of rights and an overarching state that guarantees those rights and possesses "the only legitimate authority."[72] It calls instead for deliberate and evenhanded support of the social, political, and economic arrangements that allow communities drawn together around shared convictions about the nature of a flourishing life to live side by side and cooperate in common tasks and respond to common challenges, drawing upon the qualities of character and loyalty that cannot be developed in the "naked public square." A healthy society has

> communities of memory and mutual aid, of character and moral discipline, of transcendent truth and higher loyalty.… American society is best conceived as a community of communities. Citizens move in and out of communities, crossing

lines and languages in often confusing ways—confusing to themselves and to others. The resulting dissonance is called democracy. The national community, to the extent it can be called a community, is a very "thin" community. The myriad communities that constitute civil society are where we find the "thick" communities that bear heavier burdens of loyalty.[73]

The mandatory and monopolistic "common school" so much praised since the days of Horace Mann as the crucible of democratic citizenship can no longer function as it did when it was the expression of a coherent local community but is instead a shopping mall of competing messages with no moral core, where the overriding virtue of tolerance "precludes schools' celebrating more focused notions of education or of character. 'Community' has come to mean differences peacefully coexisting rather than people working together toward some serious end."[74] The effect of such moral chaos on young citizens is predictable: "Exposing them to plurality and a Babel of beliefs and values too soon will in fact prevent the development of abilities which are a key to later functioning in a complex and pluralistic environment."[75]

Real and effective education is provided in a school that

> will be stabilized by its commitments and respond to the needs of a group of students and parents to whom it is committed rather than to the politically bargained preferences of society as a whole.… Social trust and community feeling are higher when schools are distinctive and families have choices. In an ongoing study, the author has found that students in schools based on a clear set of common premises are more likely than students in less well-defined schools to engage in vigorous discussion of values and social policy. In schools that throw together students from different races and social classes without creating a common intellectual and values framework, students are likely to resegregate socially and academically along racial and class lines.[76]

Public policies supporting structural pluralism in schooling are thus capable not only of reducing significantly the political and cultural conflict so evident today, but also of permitting schools to be more effective in the development of character and citizenship. The resulting enhanced level of trust, based on the voluntary choice of families for a particular school, and of teachers who share a commitment to that school's explicit mission, can also have a measurable effect on academic outcomes. In Chicago, for example, "[s]chools reporting strong positive trust levels in 1994 were three times more likely to be categorized eventually as improving in reading and mathematics than those with very weak trust reports."[77]

Conclusion

Opponents of allowing publicly funded schools to be autonomous and, in some cases, to have a religious character, often argue that the effect of such policies will be to further divide society. They have been arguing that for nearly two hundred years, only to be proved wrong again and again by actual experience. Most other nations with advanced levels of universal schooling provide such public support,[78] with no evident harm to their social fabric and with considerably less conflict over schooling than occurs in the United States. Surely the time has come for a similar American "pacification," through adoption of principled pluralism as the fundamental structure of our education system.

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