

What Parents May Teach their Children: A Defense of Perfectionism in Childrearing

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Abstract

Many liberals assume that, while children should not be rigidly indoctrinated, parents may raise them according to their own comprehensive values. Matthew Clayton, however, argues that the reasons for embracing antiperfectionism in politics also apply to parental authority. In this paper, I defend the perfectionist conception of childrearing. I claim that we cannot realistically foster a child's sense of justice without embedding it in a comprehensive doctrine. Furthermore, I argue that since parents cannot avoid bearing some responsibility for their children's initial orientation to comprehensive doctrines, they are justified in parenting according to their own views of the valuable and true.

Keywords

parents; children; parental authority; public reason; Matthew Clayton; perfectionism; justice; education

1. Introduction

"When you think about it," muses Richard Dawkins, "isn't it weird the way we automatically label a child with its parents' religion? ... What is so special about religion that it's allowed to label small children 'Catholic' or 'Protestant,' 'Jewish' or 'Muslim.' Nobody would categorize children by the political party their parents' support, call them 'Tory' or 'Labour' children; we agree they are too young to know where they stand on questions of politics. So why is it not the same for where they stand on the cosmos and humanity's place in it?" Why do we think of

children as born into particular religions, “rather than choosing for themselves by being shown all the evidence that is available?”¹

Liberals have long condemned “indoctrination” in the sense of making children resistant to questioning their received opinions, but they usually have not objected to parents teaching their children their own moral and religious views. For instance, in “A Child’s Right to an Open Future,” Joel Feinberg says of parents that “They are permitted and indeed expected to make every reasonable effort to transmit by example and precept their own values to their children,” so long as they permit their children to be exposed to outside influences in schools.² Dawkins is pitching the more radical position: that children should not be brought up as adherents of particular faiths or overarching worldviews at all, but should instead be raised in a more neutral way and left to make up their own minds when they are old enough.

The most sophisticated philosophical defense of this view is offered by Matthew Clayton.³ Clayton takes his point of departure from the Rawlsian assumption that political justification ought to invoke only “public reasons” accessible to all reasonable citizens and eschew any appeal to the “comprehensive doctrines” that divide people in an open society (including religious and metaphysical beliefs; ideals of family, sexuality, and personal character; and “thick” conceptions

¹ Richard Dawkins, *The Root of All Evil?* (Glasgow: IWC Media, 2006); cf. Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 2008), ch. 9.

² Joel Feinberg, “The Child’s Right to an Open Future,” in William Aiken and Hugh La Follette (eds.), *Whose Child? Children’s Rights, Parental Authority and State Power*, (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1980), 133. See also Harry Brighouse, *School Choice and Social Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

³ Matthew Clayton, *Justice and Legitimacy in Upbringing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Clayton, “Reply to Morgan,” *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 28 (2009), 91-100; Clayton, “The Case Against the Comprehensive Enrolment of Children,” *Journal of Political Philosophy* 20 (2012), 353-364; Clayton, “Antiperfectionist Childrearing,” in Alexander Bagattini and Colin Macleod (eds.), *The Nature of Children’s Well-Being* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015).

of the good).⁴ Clayton's contention is that the very features that justify excluding these "comprehensive" or "perfectionist" ideals from politics also apply to parental authority. Parents, therefore, ought to avoid "enrolling" children in religious or ethical doctrines that, as adults, they may one day reasonably reject as misguided or immoral. This does not mean that parents need to keep their own views on these matters a secret from their children, but they are not entitled to use their positions of authority to intentionally inculcate a particular outlook on "life, the universe, and everything."⁵ Thus, raising a child turns out to be much more like exercising the powers of a public office, and less like acting in one's personal capacity, than most of us have assumed.

This application of the ideals of political liberalism to the family is provocative, and some will dismiss it out of hand. But that would be a mistake. Debate about the similarities and differences between parental and political authority has a long history that goes back—through Locke, Filmer, and Hobbes—all the way to Aristotle and Plato. Whereas other periods found it useful to interpret political authority through the lens of the better-understood paradigm of parental authority, the foundations of the former are more thoroughly theorized today than those of the latter, so it makes sense to look to political philosophy to shed light on the ethics of the family. Moreover, we know that past attempts to shield the private sphere from principles that govern the public often look, in retrospect, like rear-guard actions against moral progress. Of course, not everyone accepts the Rawlsian view of political justification. But even a critic of political

⁴ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, expanded edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 13.

⁵ To quote the title of Douglas Adams's 1982 novel.

liberalism might take an interest in a counterintuitive argument like Clayton's, at least in the spirit of a *reductio ad absurdum*.

Though I think the antiperfectionist conception of parenting deserves a hearing, I will argue that, even if antiperfectionism in the political domain is warranted, it does not follow that we should apply the same norms to the family. In part, this is because the ideal of parental antiperfectionism isn't wholly coherent (3.2.1). Where coherent, moreover, the ideal's pretensions to neutrality are specious and superficial. Specious, because parents will bear some responsibility for whatever their children's initial comprehensive orientation happens to be (3.2.2). Superficial, if the supposedly neutral upbringing strongly predisposes children to a comprehensive liberal ethical outlook (3.2.3). Hence, I claim that it can be perfectly reasonable and appropriate for parents to justify their childrearing decisions by appeal to beliefs and values particular to their own comprehensive doctrines (3.3). Of course, it does not follow that all comprehensive doctrines are equally unobjectionable in substance. They might still be unenlightened, stultifying, or just plain wrong. The thesis defended here is simply that it is not unreasonable for parents to be guided by, and to impart, comprehensive doctrines *as such*.⁶

2. The Antiperfectionist View

Clayton's antiperfectionist position comprises two theses. The first is that parents ought to abide by a public reason restraint in rearing their children. The second is the more concrete claim

⁶ In this sense, my defense of perfectionism parallels influential arguments in political philosophy for perfectionism (as against liberal neutrality). Such authors do not claim that every perfectionist doctrine is equally worthy, but only that such views are not objectionable just because they are perfectionist. See, for instance, Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); George Sher, *Beyond Neutrality: Perfectionism and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Steven Wall, *Liberalism, Perfectionism, and Restraint* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

that parents ought not “enroll” their children in comprehensive doctrines. Let’s take these in turn.

2.1. The Public Reason Restriction

As I’ve said, Clayton’s starting point is Rawlsian. Since Rawls’s views are well-known, I will restrict myself to a few stage-setting remarks. The problem of justice, for Rawls, is to work out fair principles to govern the system of major social, political, and economic institutions, since this “basic structure” of society has such profound effects on our life prospects.⁷ But he thinks that there is a puzzle as to how the coercion necessary to regulate the basic structure can be consistent with our fundamental freedom. Like Rousseau, he thinks that citizens can be fully free only when they are governed by laws that they in some manner give to themselves. This is the ideal of *political autonomy*.⁸ But Rawls rejects Rousseau’s appeal to an actual social contract, since he thinks that political membership cannot be sufficiently voluntary. Instead, he proposes a form of rational hypothetical consent. Citizens are politically autonomous when they are governed by laws based on principles that all reasonable citizens *could* accept. Rawls thinks of the reasonable citizen as fair-minded in two respects. First, moved by a principle of reciprocity (rather than uncompromising self-interest), he is willing to propose and abide by terms of cooperation that other reasonable people can accept as fair. And, second, he recognizes that reasonable people are divided in their comprehensive doctrines, not just out of bad faith or false consciousness, but to a significant degree because of the “burdens of judgment”: the inherent

⁷ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), §2; Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, Lecture VI.

⁸ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 77.

difficulties, when considering fundamental questions, in assessing evidence, weighing reasons of different kinds, and interpreting vague concepts. Taking these two ideas together, we are to conclude that a reasonable person, seeking to justify the exercise of political power to his fellow citizens, won't appeal to reasons that are only valid from within his own comprehensive doctrine ("comprehensive reasons"), but will instead recognize a duty to rely on "public reasons" about which there is an overlapping consensus among reasonable citizens who hold different comprehensive doctrines.⁹

Clayton's contention is that parental authority is sufficiently analogous to political power to imply that parents, too, ought to be subject to the public reason restriction in justifying their conduct in their role as parents. (Though, like a lot of our responsibilities as parents *and* citizens, this is not to be understood as a legally enforceable duty, since that would require intolerable levels of surveillance and interference.) Clayton's case rests on three points of comparison with the Rawlsian case for public reason in the political domain. First, like political power, parental authority is coercive: parents have authority to impose a range of sanctions to discipline their children which they could not impose on others. Second, for children, the family is a non-voluntary association. Although children are eventually freed from parental authority, their almost two-decades of subjection to parental authority is not by consent. Finally, like other institutions of the basic structure, the family has a profound and lasting effect on our life prospects by shaping our aspirations and transmitting unequal advantages. Since parental authority shares these features with political authority, Clayton concludes that respecting the full

⁹ More precisely, on Rawls's considered view, comprehensive reasons are admissible in political discourse as long as they are backed up with public reasons in due course. On this, see Rawls, "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited," *The University of Chicago Law Review* 64 (1997), 765-807.

autonomy of children requires that we apply a public reason restriction to both of them.¹⁰ In this way alone can children be understood to enjoy an analogue of full political autonomy—I'll call it "institutional autonomy"—in being subject, within non-political institutions, only to those coercive restraints that are freely consented to or, if that is impossible, that any reasonable person would have imposed upon himself.

One might object that this extension ignores Rawls's claim that the public reason restriction is only intended to apply to "constitutional essentials and questions of basic justice." But the exercise of parental authority, impinging as it does on basic liberties, may well fall into that category. Rawls, moreover, provides no clear argument for this limitation of scope other than that he wants to consider the strongest case for the public reason restriction first. In fact, he grants that "it is usually highly desirable to settle political questions by invoking the values of public reason."¹¹ So, as things stand, it seems like these parallels give us a good reason to seriously consider extending the ideal of public reason to the family.

Another natural worry is that, whereas political authority is exercised over adults with the capacity for autonomy, parental authority is exercised over children still in the process of developing that capacity. Therefore, parental conduct cannot impinge upon children's autonomy, except by hampering its future development.¹² Clayton thinks this response fails to

¹⁰ Clayton, *Justice and Legitimacy in Upbringing*, 93-94.

¹¹ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 215. For a sustained argument that the ideal of public reason should apply to all coercive actions undertaken by a government, see Jonathan Quong, *Liberalism without Perfection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹² Sarah Hannan and Richard Vernon, "Parental Rights: A Role-Based Approach," *Theory and Research in Education* 6 (2008), 173-189; Jeffrey Morgan, "A Critical Review of Matthew Clayton: Justice and Legitimacy in Upbringing," *Studies in the Philosophy of Education* 28 (2009), 79-89; Christina Cameron, "Clayton on Comprehensive Enrolment," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 20 (2012), 341-352.

recognize that the capacity for autonomy is not just a desirable end-state, but that its presence should also be a precondition for doing certain things to, or with, people when there is “the possibility of future reasonable rejection.” From the child’s future-adult perspective, her parents’ comprehensive doctrine may seem profoundly misguided, and the future adult might well object to having been brought up in accordance with that doctrine. If the child is brought up in a way that she might later reasonably reject, then Clayton believes that her “independence”—what I’m calling her “institutional autonomy”—is compromised, since she ought to be able to endorse the justification of the constraints she faces, not just in the present, but “taking her life as a whole.”¹³

2.2. The Prohibition on Comprehensive Enrollment

The public reason restriction is a thesis about neutral or antiperfectionist justification: *reasons* that are not valid within all reasonable comprehensive doctrines ought not to be invoked in justifying the exercise of authority. This differs from a commitment to concrete neutrality or substantive antiperfectionism, which says that the relevant authority ought not intentionally endorse or promote a particular comprehensive *doctrine*.¹⁴ While justificatory neutrality might establish concrete neutrality, they can come apart conceptually. Someone may argue against an established church on the comprehensive grounds that Christ instructed us to “Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s,” while a Hobbesian might defend religious establishment on the neutral basis that it promotes peace and stability.

¹³ Clayton, *Justice and Legitimacy and Upbringing*, 99; Clayton, “Antiperfectionist Childrearing,” 128-129. So, the *capacity for autonomy* is a precondition for certain kinds of upbringing, if those upbringings are going to be consistent with the subject’s independence or *full autonomy* over a complete life with respect to the institutions she is subject to. Thus, autonomy as a precondition is distinct from full autonomy. I’m not sure Clayton always makes this clear enough.

¹⁴ Peter de Marneffe, “Liberalism, Liberty, and Neutrality,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 19 (1990), 253-274.

Concrete neutrality, applied to parental authority, amounts to the prohibition on comprehensive enrollment: the upbringing that parents provide children ought not be (for example) explicitly Christian, Muslim, or atheist, but should rather simply foster the capacities integral to the child's becoming an autonomous and reasonable person. This means cultivating the child's two moral powers: (i) his sense of justice; and (ii) his ability to reason about comprehensive doctrines, along with the competencies necessary for forming, revising, and pursuing his own conception of the good. Clayton thinks this ethical norm prohibits parents from formally enrolling their children in groups or practices associated with comprehensive doctrines (for example, by baptizing or confirming them as members of a particular church), as well as intentionally inculcating convictions rooted in those doctrines.¹⁵ So, whereas the more orthodox liberal view is that parents may raise their children as members of a community defined by allegiance to a comprehensive doctrine *only if* children have an ability to exit as adults,¹⁶ Clayton's view is that one should not be inducted into a comprehensive community or way of life until one has the mature capacity *to enter freely*. Rights of exit are not enough; the rights of entrance must also be reserved to the individual.

The first thesis (the public reason restriction) does not lead to the second (the prohibition on comprehensive enrollment) without further argument, since there might be public reasons for and against enrollment. Clayton argues that the public reasons against comprehensive enrollment are weightier though. First, he claims that comprehensive enrollment is

¹⁵ Clayton, *Justice and Legitimacy in Upbringing*, 103.

¹⁶ On exit rights, see Susan Okin for a demanding interpretation, and Chandran Kukathas for an undemanding one. Susan Moller Okin, "'Mistresses of Their Own Destiny': Group Rights, Gender, and Realistic Rights of Exit," *Ethics* 112 (2002), 205-230; Chandran Kukathas, "Are There Any Cultural Rights?" *Political Theory* 20 (1992), 105-139.

objectionably manipulative and fails to give due deference to the child's independence as a separate being who, considered over a complete life, shares with her parents the status of a free and equal person.¹⁷ Second, he argues that even if being enrolled in a comprehensive doctrine as a child does not absolutely prevent the adult from becoming autonomous, it may nonetheless make it emotionally costly to reason well as an adult about one's own good in a free and unburdened way, since one may feel that rejecting certain beliefs or values is a betrayal of one's parents or one's own childhood. Therefore, people are likely to reason better about their own lives, and suffer less when they do so, if they have not been raised with emotional attachments to particular comprehensive doctrines.¹⁸

3. A Defense of Perfectionist Childrearing

3.1. A Sketch of the Conceptual Landscape

Anyone who wants to defend the ethical permissibility of parents imparting their own moral and religious beliefs to their children needs to come to terms with Clayton's argument. Of course, one could simply reject the initial premise that the exercise of political authority ought to be justified in terms that abide by the public reason restraint. The ideal of public justification has certainly had its critics,¹⁹ but whatever we ultimately say about the details of the Rawlsian view, I think there is something appealing about the basic idea that political authority ought to be justified in terms that everyone could reasonably accept, and that this is only possible in a modern society if the sectarian arguments that divide otherwise fair-minded people are taken

¹⁷ Clayton, *Justice and Legitimacy in Upbringing*, 102-105; Clayton, "Antiperfectionist Childrearing," 127.

¹⁸ Clayton, *Justice and Legitimacy in Upbringing*, 106-109.

¹⁹ Wall, *Liberalism, Perfectionism, and Restraint*; David Enoch, "The Disorder of Public Reason," *Ethics* 124 (2013), 141-176.

out of the conversation. In any case, a lot of philosophers who work on the ethics of the family find it compelling, and it is of independent interest to know whether accepting the ideal for the political realm commits us to accepting it for the family.

A number of writers have argued that there are differences between political authority and parental authority that make this extension of the public reason restraint inappropriate. Rawls, for one, suggested that the family is different because it is based on affection.²⁰ Unfortunately, he never spelled out why that matters. He may have been thinking in a broadly Humean way about the “circumstances of justice,” supposing that affection supplants more individualistic principles of justice and respect for autonomy. But feminists have fairly objected that this attitude assumes an unrealistically harmonious conception of the family and an unnecessarily dichotomous view of the relation between affection and rights.²¹ Others, as I mentioned above, claim that parental power is distinctive in being exercised over individuals who are not presently autonomous. But this doesn’t respond to Clayton’s point that we should be focusing on the possible retrospective endorsement of future adults.

Finally, some writers agree that the exercise of parental authority ought to be justified by public reason, but they think that the weight of public reasons favors, or at least permits, what Clayton dubs “comprehensive enrollment.” For example, some say that transmitting one’s

²⁰ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 10-11, 137.

²¹ Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1989); Pauline Kleingeld, “Just Love? Marriage and the Question of Justice,” *Social Theory and Practice* 24 (1998), 261-281; Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). See also the related argument in Jeremy Waldron, “When Justice Replaces Affection,” in his *Liberal Rights: Collected Papers 1981-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

beliefs and values to one's children is inextricable from one's own pursuit of the good life,²² while others claim that the distinctively intimate relationship between parents and children would be damaged if parents did not feel free to share their deepest convictions with their children.²³ One difficulty regarding these arguments is that they make the issue turn on a delicate weighing of reasons. More elegant, then, is the claim that the child's development of autonomy actually presupposes a foundation of values and beliefs that only an initiation in a comprehensive doctrine can provide.²⁴ Anticipating this line of argument, however, Clayton simply denies that the only beliefs or values that can provide children with this foundation belong to comprehensive doctrines. After all, he asks, don't we have examples of people who acquired the capacities for autonomy, but who were not raised in a religion or other comprehensive outlook?²⁵

My defense of perfectionist childrearing rejects both of Clayton's theses, though on grounds that differ from those offered by other writers. In brief, I reject the ban on comprehensive enrollment in part because it isn't coherent across an essential part of moral education, and in part because its pretensions to neutrality are illusory. And if comprehensive enrollment is justified, I contend that it would be perverse to insist that parents ought to decide which beliefs and values to impart to their children without appealing to their own comprehensive outlook.

²² William Galston, *Liberal Pluralism: The Implications of Value Pluralism for Theory and Practice* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002).

²³ Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift, *Family Values: The Ethics of Parent-Child Relationships* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

²⁴ Johannes Giesinger, "Parental Education and Public Reason: Why Comprehensive Enrolment is Justified," *Theory and Research in Education* 11 (2013), 269-279.

²⁵ Clayton, *Justice and Legitimacy in Upbringing*, 120-121.

3.2. A Defense of Comprehensive Enrollment

The antiperfectionist approach to moral education looks straightforward. Parents are not to impart to their children any particular comprehensive doctrine but should limit themselves to the more neutral aim of fostering their children’s sense of justice and their capacities for coming to their own views about “life, the universe, and everything.” My defense of comprehensive enrollment consists of three independent claims. First, I contend that an effective education for justice will have to include comprehensive foundations. Therefore, the antiperfectionist ideal isn’t even wholly coherent. Then there are two reasons why I think the antiperfectionist education is not as neutral as it claims to be. On the one hand, I claim that parents can bear significant negative responsibility for their children’s initial orientations to comprehensive doctrines, even if they did not intentionally or actively try to pass on their beliefs and values. And, since all comprehensive doctrines are controversial, reasonable people could object to an antiperfectionist upbringing just as well as they could object to a perfectionist one. On the other hand, I suggest that a moral education that cleaves as closely as possible to the values of political liberalism will tend to engender a set of intuitions that is biased toward a broader liberal conception of the good—a consequence that some people will reasonably reject.

3.2.1. An education for justice must have comprehensive foundations

Although parents are to avoid enrolling their children in comprehensive doctrines on the antiperfectionist view, they still have a duty to provide a moral education that fosters their children’s sense of justice. But these two things exclude one another: an effective education for justice must involve imparting certain comprehensive values and beliefs. Perhaps an education for justice could avoid imparting to children certain comprehensive doctrines if it involved

nothing more than communicating the principles of justice. And yet a realistic education for justice has to involve more than that: a critical part of acquiring an effective sense of justice consists in having some initial idea as to the source of authority of moral norms and how the moral life fits into the good life.

Some people, for example, suppose that the source of moral authority must ultimately come from God's law. Others conceive it as coming from some kind of agreement or as resting on our recognition of our inherent dignity as persons. Yet others will say that it is simply a bedrock normative principle incapable of further justification. Then there is the question as to how being just relates to our individual good. Many traditional religions explain the congruence with a vision of divine reward and punishment. Plato famously argued in *The Republic* that, since the unjust person's soul is at war with itself, this would inevitably lead to unhappiness. And, in Part III of *Theory of Justice*, Rawls argued that our attachments to individuals and society will move us to want to live on fair terms with others. At the same time, he defended the ambitious Kantian idea that we will accept principles chosen from behind a veil of ignorance because this expresses our conception of ourselves as autonomous beings with "independence from the contingencies of nature and society."²⁶

The innovative idea in Rawls's *Political Liberalism* is that no set of answers to these difficult questions could be agreed upon by all reasonable people. Accordingly, the content of public reason, including the principles of justice, is presented as "freestanding." That is, for the political liberal, justice has no publicly recognized foundations: each reasonable comprehensive doctrine answers these questions about the source of moral authority and the congruence of justice with

²⁶ Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, 256.

the individual's own good in its own way. So long as there is an overlapping consensus about the content of a theory of justice (or at least its underlying values), there is no need for agreement on the more fundamental philosophical and theological questions.

By contrast, children's moral education cannot appeal to an overlapping consensus. If children are going to accept the authority of justice and have some understanding of how being just fits into the good life, then they will need to be at least provisionally initiated into a certain comprehensive doctrine that makes sense of these things. Now someone might object that this distorts the real nature of moral education by making it look too philosophical. While I grant that there is much more to moral education than learning answers to these questions, I think some understanding of these matters is a critical part of developing a sense of justice. After all, it is not far down the road of moral development before the child starts to ask questions about *why* he must treat others fairly if he doesn't want to. True enough, you may reply, but are there really no non-comprehensive answers to these questions? What if parents just told their children that, while reasonable people disagree about *why* we ought to treat others fairly, nobody can reasonably reject the principle that we ought to do so? This may be the most logically consistent response, but I think it is also the most unrealistic pedagogically. Maybe adolescents could understand and accept this reasoning, but it seems improbably abstract and noncommittal for teaching younger children. What, then, if the parent told the child something about taking up another person's perspective or looking at things from behind a veil of ignorance? This isn't a parochial perspective, is it?²⁷ As far as concrete, action-guiding principles are concerned, perhaps not. But we are asking, here, about our reasons for abiding by such principles: what is the source

²⁷ Thanks to two anonymous referees for pressing this point.

of their authority and how does abiding by them fit into the good life? If we present these principles as completely self-standing or self-certifying, then we are presenting them as the whole truth about justice—as a comprehensive doctrine, in other words. Well, you might reply, even if the child’s initial education for justice must be embedded in such comprehensive values, this is only a very partial doctrine that covers a limited range of questions: these answers do not touch wide swaths of ethical questions about personal virtue or what matters in living a good life. Perhaps we should just admit that political liberalism requires that we give an account of the whole truth about justice, but not about other issues.²⁸ But this is an enormous concession. The nature of morality and its place in the good life are not peripheral issues; they lie at the heart of most comprehensive doctrines. To require parents to instruct their children about such central matters in a secular, contractualist way is to ask some of them to raise their children in a comprehensive doctrine that they do not themselves believe and which makes their own views seem like optional appendages to the necessary core of liberal morality. This takes us very far from the vision of liberal principles as subject to an overlapping consensus.

3.2.2. Parents bear significant negative responsibility for their children’s initial value orientations

An education for justice must have comprehensive foundations, but this won’t necessarily implicate the whole range of comprehensive values. For instance, a conception of justice likely won’t depend significantly on claims about valuable forms of sexuality. So perhaps parents ought

²⁸ *Pace Rawls*, Clayton allows that the best liberal theory might have to be partially comprehensive in insisting on the value of personal autonomy (*Justice and Legitimacy in Upbringing*, 24-27). But he thinks it would still be possible for citizens from different comprehensive doctrines to articulate the importance of personal autonomy in different ways. (Is it of instrumental value, intrinsic value, or a precondition of other values?) My argument is that education for justice will require a much deeper commitment to a particular comprehensive doctrine.

to avoid intentionally communicating to their children just those comprehensive values that aren't necessary for imparting a commitment to justice. This isn't an incoherent suggestion, but I don't think its pretensions to being inherently less controversial than other upbringings—and thus more reasonable or neutral—withstand scrutiny.

The talk of “comprehensive doctrines” that this debate has inherited from Rawls can easily mislead us into thinking about a person's values in a highly cognitive and systematic way, as if it were primarily a matter of accepting certain teachings or claims about what is good or bad. This, in turn, might lead us to suppose that, until children have been taught what to believe about something, or have worked out such ideas for themselves, they won't have any values in this domain at all; they will remain evaluative blank slates. Of course, to even put this picture into words makes it look naive.

The more plausible view is that valuing is tightly bound up with emotions and desires, which often precede explicit value judgments. Let us say that a person “cares” about something when she manifests an attentive and cohesive pattern of emotion and desire toward that thing over time.²⁹ Typically, when someone cares about something, has the capacity to make normative judgments, and isn't swayed by countervailing considerations, she will come to judge that the object of concern is, indeed, good or valuable—at least if she reflects upon it.³⁰ When caring is

²⁹ Agnieszka Jaworska, “Caring and Internality,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 74 (2007), 529-568.

³⁰ This is intended as a very weak thesis about how our values are related to more unreflective emotional and conative attitudes. It is, of course, possible to care about something and yet judge that it is valueless or bad. But that is often not the easiest psychological state to maintain. We are inclined to believe that what we care about is good.

accompanied by supporting normative judgments in this way, we have a paradigm case of valuing.³¹

For our purposes, the important point is that the affective and conative orientations which underlie our “valuings” seldom take a neutral setting. Even if parents have never taught their child any “doctrines” about the divine and mundane, how to measure success in life, the value of nature, or the worth of different kinds of sexual relationships—and even if the child has no explicit opinions about these matters—the child can hardly help but develop a certain affective and conative orientation toward them. Perhaps this orientation is something soaked up from the surrounding culture, or is an extension of the child’s innate temperament, or has been picked up from observing her parents. Whatever the explanation, the child is not usually going to be neutral with respect to the kinds of values that comprehensive doctrines address. She will typically care about some, be averse to some, and manifest a cool indifference toward others.³² And, absent any reason to judge otherwise, this initial orientation will typically lead the person as she matures to draw corresponding conclusions about what is really valuable in life.

Of course, a sophisticated antiperfectionist like Clayton will concede all this. His claim is not that parents must raise their children so that they don’t have any initial orientation to

³¹ For a conception of valuing in the same spirit as the one I am working with, see Samuel Scheffler, “Valuing,” in R. Jay Wallace, Rahul Kumar, and Samuel Freeman (eds.), *Reasons and Recognition: Essays on the Philosophy of T.M. Scanlon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). See also Monika Betzler, “Enhancing the Capacity for Autonomy: What Parents Owe to Their Children to Make Their Lives Go Well,” in Alexander Bagattini and Colin Macleod (eds.), *The Nature of Children’s Well-Being* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015).

³² The point is not that we are unable to *conceive* of what might count as a neutral emotional setting—perhaps one could argue that would be a kind of unattached open-mindedness or curiosity. My central claim, which I hope isn’t controversial, is just that children do develop non-neutral orientations toward things without explicit teaching. In my own life, I have observed preschool-age children already taking an interest in the relative size of their Manhattan apartments. Where this interest comes from is no mystery: when grown-ups visit one another, they often remark on just this sort of thing. Children in other milieus will, of course, pick up on the “importance” of different things: how nice parents’ cars are, how strong each child’s dad is, and so on.

comprehensive values, but only that parents ought not intentionally shape those values. The antiperfectionist is, thus, relying on a distinction between intending and foreseeing to justify an essentially *laissez-faire*, non-directive approach to the child's comprehensive values.³³ And, in this, he is following the approach of most proponents of liberal neutrality, who maintain that the state should avoid intentionally promoting any particular comprehensive doctrine, but that it is free of any responsibility for the particular doctrines that citizens under a neutral regime may foreseeably come to avow.³⁴

But even if you think that the intending/foreseeing distinction often bears moral weight and has a legitimate role in the explication of state neutrality, we should be skeptical of applying it broadly to a relationship in which an accountable agent is charged with the primary care of another person lacking accountability. Suppose we hold other factors fixed: it is not obviously worse (say) to intentionally shield a child from education than it is to instruct him in a way that will be foreseeably, though not by design, ineffectual. Turning to the issue at hand, it would seem that, given certain facts about the child's temperament and environment, some values are foreseeably more likely to be fostered by a hands-off policy, whereas others can be expected to only take root if the child is actively initiated into a particular way of life. But all these comprehensive values are controversial, and as the antiperfectionist has pointed out, as adults, people may reject the values they initially found themselves identifying with. Plainly, children are not responsible for developing these initial value orientations. And that is how the parent-child case clearly differs from the state-citizen relationship, for adult citizens *are* accountable for

³³ Clayton, "Antiperfectionist Childrearing," 137.

³⁴ For discussion, see Steven Wall, "Neutrality and Responsibility," *Journal of Philosophy* 98 (2001), 389-410.

their value commitments. Therefore, *inasmuch* as the general direction of their moral development was something that their upbringing could foreseeably influence, the parents bear significant responsibility for that initial value orientation, even if they did not actively and intentionally shape it. And this means that reasonable people might fail to endorse their *laissez-faire* upbringing just as much as a more directive moral education, given that either approach may foreseeably engender values that a person could reasonably reject. But if there is no upbringing that would be endorsed by all reasonable people, then reasonable people cannot object to being raised within a comprehensive doctrine, since there is no neutral alternative.³⁵ This means that comprehensive enrollment, in itself, is not less consistent with a person enjoying institutional autonomy than is an antiperfectionist upbringing.

It might seem as if I am missing the relevance of the parents' *agency* in intentionally bringing about a certain outcome. To bring out this point, Clayton asks us to consider the aversion many have to the prospect that parents might one day genetically design their children. He thinks our qualms are rooted in our concern for autonomy:

An individual's autonomy is violated if the genes that constitute her motivations and abilities are manipulated or chosen on the basis of the individual's parents' conceptions of the good. Even if she possesses the other conditions of autonomy, her life will always have a particular history marked by her interests and ability having been to some extent chosen by her parents.³⁶

Clayton thinks this last point parallels what is wrong with comprehensive enrollment. Independence from the will of others is a condition of autonomy, and we cannot be fully independent if the characters, abilities, or outlooks we find ourselves with were the intentional

³⁵ Dennis Arjo comes to a similar conclusion, though we get there by somewhat different routes. See his "Public Reason and Child Rearing: What's a Liberal Parent to Do?" *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 48 (2014), 370-384.

³⁶ Clayton, *Justice and Legitimacy in Upbringing*, 104-105.

products of another's will, as guided by their personal conception of the good. It is much better, he thinks, for these things to be shaped by chance or one's own unfolding nature.

It is, indeed, common to think that a person is not autonomous if his will is subject to another's, but the application of this idea to *the formation of a new will* is not, of course, straightforward. Indeed, this whole issue is so difficult to resolve precisely because it is unlike any other part of our moral experience. While I feel the pull of Clayton's worries about genetic engineering, it strikes me that this is precisely the kind of thing that reasonable people might disagree about. Surely, some people would much prefer that their characters and values were shaped by attentive and loving parents, rather than by meaningless blind chance. (There is no question that many prefer to think of their constitution as the handiwork of Providence than as the product of happenstance.) Moreover, what really bothers us about the genetic design of children may not automatically extend to shaping a child's values. For instance, we might think that parents who designed a child in detail would not relate to her as a distinct "Other"—as a genuinely separate person—but would rather conceive of her as their creation and, thus, as an expression of their own personalities. Now it is true that this same pathology can infect a child's upbringing, but the danger lies not in imparting our deepest beliefs and values as such, but rather in the overweening drive to mold the child according to a rigid pattern that pays no heed to the child's own nature and developing inclinations.³⁷ We might also be troubled by the genetic engineering of children because it seems to be a way of shaping a child by brute physical manipulation. The child quite literally becomes an artifact that her parents have directed their

³⁷ Michael Sandel, *The Case Against Perfection: Ethics in an Age of Genetic Engineering* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2007).

doctors to fashion. But passing on beliefs, values, and practices need not be at all like that. In comprehensive enrollment at its best, we *share* our convictions and enthusiasms with our children as we live our lives alongside them; we point them toward the models of virtue to which we ourselves aspire; and we initiate them into the practices that we too are in the process of living.³⁸ These things require us to interact with our children as fellow subjects, not as manipulable objects.

To be clear, I have not argued that parents should try to transmit *all* their beliefs and values to their children. You might think that the best way of fostering children's individuality, authenticity, or intellectual integrity is to prevent them from getting into the habit of receiving their opinions from other people. Rousseau defended a view like this in *Emile*, and a similar case might be made on the basis of Mill's *On Liberty*. But from the Rawlsian perspective that the antiperfectionist adopts, these are reasons rooted in individualistic comprehensive values. Whatever their merits, they are not more neutral than more traditional upbringings.

3.2.3. A non-perfectionist education will dispose children to a liberal comprehensive outlook

To the antiperfectionist, an education ideally provides a child with a neutral point of departure that is not itself a possible destination. The child is regarded as a potential adherent of any reasonable comprehensive doctrine, but as actually belonging to none. Thus, the educational authority of parents is thought to reach no further than fostering children's capacities to autonomously arrive at their own views about life, the universe, and everything, while also cultivating the ability to collectively deliberate about, and the willingness to abide by,

³⁸ See R.S. Peters, "Education as Initiation," in R.D. Archambault (ed.), *Philosophical Analysis and Education* (New York: Humanities Press 1972).

principles of justice that express a respect for others as free and equal. The basic picture, then, is that the child is taught the rules of the road and how to navigate, but not where it's worth going.

I have just been arguing that, even if parents can provide their children with an education that is abstemious in preaching the truth of any comprehensive doctrine, the upbringing will nonetheless not be more neutral, from a justificatory point of view, than a comprehensive one. That argument turned on the expected causal connections between a particular kind of upbringing and a particular orientation to comprehensive values. Now I'd like to turn to a different, albeit related, point which turns on what is actually transmitted in an upbringing.

Once again, the antiperfectionist approach looks most workable if we think about an education as imparting explicit "doctrines," for then we can imagine parents simply abstaining from teaching the truth of any particular comprehensive beliefs or values. But I suspect that, far more important than explicit doctrines, is the transmission of what I'll call an "implicit outlook." As I am thinking about it, to possess an implicit outlook is to have certain paradigmatic schemas of thought and patterns of feeling that inform one's pre-theorized intuitions and gut feelings about all manner of things, and which, consequently, one readily—and often uncritically—draws upon in interpreting the world at large. For example, in many cultures, kinship is so central to social life that it seems natural to conceptualize all kinds of relationships—from politics to nature—in terms of kinship. Or, to take another example, recall how some early moderns so readily draw upon the notion of property in conceptualizing political, familial, and divine authority as forms of "dominion." Implicit outlooks are set in high relief, at least in retrospect, when a schema that had originally had a very circumscribed field of application comes to

challenge and eventually replace a formerly hegemonic set of concepts. For example, think about the way that notions of horizontal, mutually expedient, contractual relationships came to supplant, in one domain after another, older paradigms of fixed hierarchies rooted in nature and divine will.³⁹

The transmission of implicit outlooks is of the highest importance in an upbringing, for it is on account of these pre-theoretical schemas that certain doctrines will, throughout life, tend to strike us as plausible or not. And, whereas it may be possible to minimize teaching the truth of explicit doctrines, it doesn't seem possible to avoid sowing an implicit outlook. Think about what is going to happen when a child is raised to respect political values like freedom and equality, along with the naturalistic forms of inquiry suitable for public discourse, but is not taught to honor any particular metaphysical views or any substantive ideals of personal character or family life? Even if the young person is made aware of rival views about these matters, there will be a marked tendency for him to apply the schemas modeled on public reason to other domains of life. Thus, he will be strongly predisposed toward a naturalistic outlook and his ideals of personal life will tend to give pride of place to equality and individual autonomy. In this way, the antiperfectionist education contains a "hidden curriculum" that biases the child toward a comprehensive liberal ethical outlook in all domains of life.

By contrast, suppose the child is raised (say) within a traditional Jewish worldview that nonetheless endorses a liberal conception of public reason as an implication of its own commitments. While there may still be a tendency for the values of the public culture to

³⁹ My thinking, here, is influenced by Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

influence the young person's conception of his own religious and ethical values, those liberal values will now at least encounter the resistance of other deeply internalized modes of thought. As before, I am not saying that it would be a bad thing if more people became thoroughgoing ethical liberals. Perhaps on the best perfectionist view, children will be better off if their minds aren't cluttered with old myths and traditions. Nevertheless, if we are being honest, I think we have to admit that the professed neutrality of the antiperfectionist approach is, at best, rather superficial. Even if the antiperfectionist upbringing does not explicitly endorse any particular comprehensive doctrine, it cannot help but shape a particular way of thinking about things that inevitably shapes our comprehensive doctrines.

3.2.4. The question of public schools

Of course, the family is not the only institution concerned with the moral education of children; schools, in particular, also play an important role. But do the foregoing arguments also apply to schools? That could be a problem, since we might feel confident that public schools in a liberal state should avoid taking sides between comprehensive doctrines that divide reasonable people. So, without pretending to exhaust this subject, let me indicate why I think my arguments do not simply carry over from the family to schools.

First, although I have argued that the child's moral education must have comprehensive foundations, I think schools can avoid taking a stand on what they are, so long as children receive a sense of morality's foundations from their families.⁴⁰ Like the state, the schools can appeal to an overlapping consensus on mid-level principles like fairness and respect for individual rights.

⁴⁰ State-run orphanages, however, would take a stand on comprehensive matters. Interestingly, so far as I can discover, most Western countries do not have these institutions today.

(To the extent that there is no existing consensus on those principles, schools just have to “teach the controversy” with the ideal of consensus operating as an aspiration.)

Do schools, like parents, bear negative responsibility for children’s developing orientations to comprehensive values? It might seem hard to understand how we could attribute that responsibility to parents and not to schools as well. But I think we can spot the difference if we think about schools as playing a specific institutional role, given that institutional roles often constrain the range of consequences we hold agents responsible for. A philanthropist, for example, will typically bear some responsibility for the value of the aims he has enabled, but the judge will set aside that sort of consideration in deciding a property dispute.

There are two reasons why the special role of the school should exempt it from responsibility for children’s orientation to comprehensive values. First, if there are good reasons to have state-run schools, then assuming that the state ought to remain neutral between comprehensive doctrines, it would seem to follow that the schools ought to strive for neutrality as well. The other consideration is that an initiation into a set of comprehensive values and beliefs is not all there is to a moral education. Children also need to be initiated into the forms of interaction and dialogue appropriate to the public sphere that includes people from different backgrounds. Simplifying a bit, we can think of the family and the school as participating in a division of labor in this regard. The family assumes primary responsibility for the child’s initial orientation to comprehensive values, which seems suitable, since parents are generally motivated to share their values with their children, and since children tend to initially adopt the outlook of those they love and trust. The school, on the other hand, is charged with first integrating the child into the public

life of the wider society.⁴¹ This, too, seems fitting, since the school is already tasked with forging a community out of a diverse body of students. It seems reasonable, moreover, to think that the best way for the school to initiate children into their roles as participants in the public culture is to avoid any tincture of official sectarianism. This doesn't mean that schools should avoid any discussion of comprehensive doctrines. They should, for instance, introduce students to the different comprehensive doctrines in their society, but they don't have to worry about the doctrines their students end up embracing. That's just not their job.

3.3. Should Parental Conduct be Governed by Public Reason?

3.3.1 What it means for parental conduct to be justifiable by public reason

I have argued that Clayton's case against imparting comprehensive beliefs and values to children is not persuasive, but you could still think that parental conduct ought to be justifiable in terms acceptable to all reasonable persons (Clayton's first thesis). Before we can settle that question, however, we need to flush out an ambiguity. The thesis might mean that we should be able to justify to all reasonable people the legitimate boundaries of parental authority as defined by a system of legal and ethical rights and duties. In that case, we are talking about the justification of a set of rights, a role, or an institution. I will refer to this as *institutional justification*. But it might also mean that parents, in deciding how to conduct themselves within

⁴¹ I have been asked whether this is also an argument against faith-based schools that aim to fortify the religious instruction children receive in the home? The reasoning does tend in that direction. But reaching a final conclusion would require considering a number of other points. For instance, to what extent can such schools successfully combine their religious mission with the responsibility of preparing children for the wider life of the community? And does it make a difference whether we are talking about a minority religious group whose members cannot but help encounter the mainstream culture? In any case, I cannot further pursue this important issue here.

that institutional role, ought to be personally guided only by those reasons that could be accepted or endorsed by all. Then we would be referring to the *justification of conduct* internal to the role.

Sometimes the public justification of an institution requires those playing roles in that institution to guide their conduct by public reasons. For example, the justification of the judiciary includes the duty of judges to reach decisions based on a restricted set of public reasons. But it is by no means always the case that the public justification of an institution implies that conduct internal to the institution ought itself to be guided by public reasons. After all, the individual's freedom of religion can be justified in public terms too. When there is a legal or political question about the proper scope of individual religious freedom, citizens in liberal states generally appeal to certain publicly recognized interests (like the importance of religious freedom to individual well-being or self-determination, or whether any harm is done to others), not to the truth or falsity of the religion at issue. That being so, the individual's religious life need not be guided by public reasons, so long as he acts within his publicly justified rights. But it is here that we might get confused, for there is an indirect sense in which the religious believer acting within his rights *is* conducting himself in terms that are justifiable to all reasonable persons. The key point, however, is that his conduct is only *indirectly* justified to all—justified because he is acting within his institutionally justified rights, not because all reasonable people would personally endorse his religious convictions. Of course, there is a relatively trivial way in which conduct that intentionally conforms to a publicly justified institution will be guided by public reasons as broad *side constraints*. But that is very different than the way that judicial decisions must be restricted in their *content* to public reasons.

Now, if you accept the ideal of public justification at all, then you are going to suppose that the basic system of rights and duties that defines the ground rules for social interaction should be publicly justified. And that means that the scope and boundaries of the parental role, just like those of our individual freedoms, should be publicly justifiable. Indeed, that institutional justification of parental authority should respect a norm of public reason receives ample support in the legal traditions of liberal states. For example, in the U.S. Supreme Court case *Wisconsin v. Yoder*,⁴² a group of Amish parents wanted to withdraw their children from the schools two years prior to the statutory minimum age of 16, because they thought that a secular high school education would corrupt their children and endanger the transmission of what they regarded as a Biblical way of life. Their legal arguments, however, did not appeal to the superiority of the Amish culture or to the wickedness of a secular lifestyle; rather, they focused on interests that they believed non-Amish citizens could recognize, like those of exercising their own religious faith and maintaining their own distinctive culture.

Rawls accepted that the institution of parental authority ought to be justified in terms of public reasons. For Clayton's claim to be novel, it must be that the parental role can only be publicly justified if parents are also guided in their conduct as parents by public reasons. Thus, parents would never be justified in making decisions about how to raise their children by appealing to the intrinsic worth of their own faith, conception of virtue, or ideas about the good life (unless, perhaps, these overlap in their implications with public reasons). So, the real point of contention is not whether parental authority needs public justification, but whether that implies that conduct internal to the parental role needs to be guided by public reasons as well.

⁴² 406 U.S. (1971) 205.

In fact, I think some of the writers who think they agree with Clayton about the application of public reason to the family, and only take issue with his prohibition on comprehensive enrollment, would think again if they were clearer about this distinction. In a moment, I will argue that parental conduct need not be guided by public reason, but at present I only wish to insist upon a more modest hypothetical claim. Assume, for the sake of argument, that the public justification of the institutional role of parent does not require that conduct internal to that role itself be guided by public reason. In that case, parental conduct not guided by public reason, but which nonetheless respected the publicly justified limits of that role, would be consistent with the full institutional autonomy of all, including that of the children over whom it is exercised. Again, the comparison to the individual freedom of religion is instructive. If I am publicly justified in worshipping according to my own conscience, then my adherence to Islam is consistent with the full autonomy of my fellow citizens, even though many reasonable people would not endorse the tenets of my faith. What ultimately matters for full political or institutional autonomy is the public justification of the institution or role. Any conduct that conforms to a publicly justified institution or role is itself consistent with the full autonomy of all.

3.3.2. Appealing to comprehensive reasons to justify childrearing decisions

Clayton insists that, even if we accept the permissibility of comprehensive enrollment, we might still believe that parents ought to justify the way they raise their children by appealing to public reasons, since public reasons might conceivably favor comprehensive enrollment. For example, if sharing a comprehensive doctrine is integral to maintaining a good relationship with one's children, or is essential for the child to develop autonomy, then that might constitute a public reason to enroll your children in your own comprehensive doctrine. This differs from

justifying enrolling your child in your comprehensive doctrine on the grounds that your comprehensive doctrine is good or true.

However, I think that, insofar as parents are shaping their children's comprehensive outlooks, it is perfectly reasonable for them to appeal to the intrinsic worth of their own comprehensive convictions. Let me make the case first in connection to giving the child an education for justice. I have claimed that it is not possible to provide a child an education for justice without imparting certain elements of a comprehensive doctrine. If I am right about this, then since there are public reasons for providing children with an education for justice, and enrollment in a reasonable comprehensive doctrine is a necessary part of that education, then there turns out to be a public justification for comprehensive enrollment. But which comprehensive doctrine should the parent initiate the child into? Public reason doesn't settle that. You might say "the parent's own," since that answer doesn't invoke the intrinsic worth of the doctrine. But most conscientious parents will not transmit a comprehensive doctrine to their children *merely* because it is their own. That places the focus wrongly on the parents themselves, and in any case only pushes the question back one step, for why do the parents subscribe to this doctrine? Usually the reason parents have for passing on a particular comprehensive doctrine to their children is that it is (as they judge) good, perhaps even superior to all others. Those are obviously comprehensive reasons, but surely they are perfectly defensible reasons for raising one's child within a particular religion or worldview.

The point is even clearer when we turn to the parent's responsibility for the child's orientation to comprehensive values beyond the scope of justice. If parents are going to bear significant responsibility for their children's developing orientation to comprehensive values no

matter what they do, then it would be odd if they did not make their parenting decisions by appealing to their own comprehensive views about what is worthwhile in life. The reason why is simple. Parents are properly charged with promoting their children's good, and arguably there is no mode of beneficence more basic than ensuring that your children are properly oriented toward what is valuable and true. Moreover, it is even harder to represent imparting this broader range of values as consistent with a meaningful public-reason restriction that applies directly to parental conduct, for this is not a case in which comprehensive enrollment is a condition for something else (like a sense of justice) that *is* publicly justified.

Again, none of this implies that parents should always attempt to impart all of their values to their children. A parent might well think it is better for the child to work out some of his values and beliefs for himself. But, since there is no neutral upbringing, the parent will have to make that decision, too, on the basis of certain comprehensive values of her own—perhaps on the basis of a liberal ethics devoted to Mill's ideal of individuality or a broadly Rousseauian conception of education as the unfolding of inner potential. It is doubtful that a parent could appeal solely to public reasons in making decisions about her children's upbringing if she wanted to; public reason just leaves too much open. But the more fundamental point is appealing to one's own fundamental convictions is often desirable. It is appropriate that the state, acting in the name of all of its citizens, promote only those goods that virtually everyone values, and leave it to individuals to pursue more controversial aims in their private capacity. But since children cannot take responsibility for their own pursuit of the good, this same division of moral labor isn't called for in the family. When parents make decisions about how to raise their children, they rightly consider how the whole realm of value bears on the matter.

4. Conclusion

A perfectionist approach to childrearing is ostensibly less restrictive than the antiperfectionist one, but that doesn't mean there are no limits on the way that parents may educate their children. Parents have a duty to raise their children so that they are, as adults, capable of assuming their place in a society of free and equal individuals. Exactly what these end-state requirements involve is much debated, some positions being more permissive, some more demanding. Since the argument of this essay would be compatible with a variety of views, I have tried to leave these questions open. But a few points are worth highlighting. First, parents do not have a right to enroll their children in comprehensive doctrines incompatible with sharing a democratic society with others. At the very least, this will require a willingness to tolerate some amount of diversity,⁴³ and it may well require much more demanding forms of "reasonableness," including dispositions and aptitudes for dialogue, justification, and empathy.⁴⁴ Second, permissible upbringings will foster a range of basic skills and capacities for pursuing one's own good. This might involve, not just certain cognitive skills, but also the possession of certain emotional dispositions, like an openness to new ideas and the courage to reexamine one's own beliefs. Children might then have an interest in an early and sympathetic exposure to different perspectives; encouraging them to identify themselves too closely with a particular faith or worldview could hamper that. This would represent a different source of concern about the notion of comprehensive "enrollment": we might decide that there is an important difference

⁴³ William Galston, "Two Concepts of Liberalism," *Ethics* 105 (1995), 516-534.

⁴⁴ Amy Gutman, *Democratic Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Eamonn Callan, *Creating Citizens: Political Education and Liberal Democracy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Tasos Kazepides, *Education as Dialogue* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014).

between intentionally imparting certain values and beliefs to children and constructing an identity for them which makes it difficult to reexamine, revise, or reject their parents' particular views. This, though, is a large issue that will have to be explored elsewhere. Also to be reserved for another occasion is the important question as to whether the views of older children and adolescents warrant a respect that limits the educational authority of their parents—something I've ignored here for simplicity's sake.⁴⁵ And however we settle these matters, we must remember that even if parents are not abusing their educational authority, we can always criticize the comprehensive doctrines they impart to their children on the substantive grounds that they are misguided or immoral. The defense of perfectionism is not meant to show that all comprehensive doctrines are of equal merit. There is, naturally, a difference between the legitimate exercise of authority and its wise execution. My claim is just that there is no blanket objection to imparting comprehensive doctrines as such to one's children or appealing directly to those doctrines in making child-rearing decisions.

It is often by considering whether the reasons of one domain apply equally to another that ethical thought advances. Therefore, it is important to ask if the "neutral" principles that restrain the legitimate exercise of political authority should also restrain parental authority. In the end, I think the answer is no. Legitimate political authority acts in the name of citizens who fundamentally disagree in their comprehensive doctrines, and that is why it's plausible to think that the state appropriately prescinds from such matters. The family differs from the state in that, because the family is the primary institution for the formation of new individuals, it does

⁴⁵ See, for example, Amy Mullin, "Children, Paternalism, and the Development of Autonomy," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 17 (2014), 413-426. I have some things to say about this in my "On Becoming an Adult: Autonomy and the Moral Relevance of Life's Stages," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 63 (2013), 223-247.

not act as a representative body for citizens already holding a variety of views. From a political perspective, the fundamental responsibility of parents is not to act in their children's name, but to raise those children in a way that enables them as adults to assume their station as free and equal individuals. Insofar as parents fulfill this duty, they have conformed to norms that are justifiable to all reasonable persons. Parents are not further obliged to raise their children in specific ways that all reasonable people would endorse, and by extension, parents do not wrong their children if they raise them in ways the children might, as adults, not endorse. Indeed, I have claimed that this isn't even a coherent position. Public reason is only possible because it appeals to an existing overlapping consensus of comprehensive doctrines and leaves many matters to the private discretion of autonomous individuals. Thus, it cannot reach down all the way to the authority that parents exercise over children who come into the world without comprehensive doctrines and without responsibility for the formation of their own values. It remains possible, of course, for parents to emulate the neutrality of the state by actively imparting their own values and beliefs to their children as little as possible. But since this cannot be justified on neutral grounds, this will really just amount to childrearing according to another comprehensive doctrine.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ I'd like to thank the journal's anonymous referees for helpful feedback. Thanks are also due to Thomas Hurka, an audience at the University of Toronto Centre for Ethics in 2016, and the participants of the 2018 "Autonomy and Education Conference" at the Akademie für Politische Bildung in Tutzing, Germany—especially Matthew Clayton, André-Anne Cormier, and Anca Gheaus.

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