https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000211 Published online by Cambridge University Press

EDUCATING FOR AUTONOMY: AN OLD-FASHIONED VIEW

By Kyla Ebels-Duggan

In this essay, I argue that we cannot adequately characterize the aims of education in terms of narrowly intellectual virtues or some formal conception of what it is to think well. Implementing any such aim requires us to rely on, and to communicate, further substantive normative commitments. To put my point another way, there is no adequate ideal of being a good thinker divorced from the content of what such a person thinks or the commitments that she has.

Who would have thought otherwise? Consider a familiar debate in the philosophy of education. On the one side are those parents and teachers who understand their educational mission as that of handing on to children a particular worldview or normative outlook. Education set in the context of a religious tradition is a paradigm case, though there are cultural, political, and other versions of this approach as well. On the other side are those who object that education of this sort amounts to indoctrination and fails to respect the autonomy of the students subjected to it. Instead of trying to educate children into a single view, such objectors hold, we should aim to develop their critical thinking and reasoning skills. This latter ideal is put formally: it characterizes an educational goal specified in terms of *how* we should teach children to think, without reference to the content of *what* we should teach them to think.

The thesis that no such formal ideal could be sufficient to guide education, thus, has important implications for thinking well about how to educate. It reveals that this standard contrast between what I will call, respectively, the *old-fashioned* and *progressive* views of education is confused and misleading.[1] My intention here is not to support one of these approaches against the other, but rather to argue that the familiar way of characterizing the supposed opposition mischaracterizes, and so obscures, the most important disagreements between their advocates. I aim to re-characterize the terms of the debate in a way that clarifies what is really at stake.

In Section I, I begin by elaborating the two models in a way that I hope brings out the motivation for each. I conclude the section by characterizing

[1] Note that the labels "old-fashioned" and "progressive" are misleading in another way. It is not difficult to find exemplars of educational approaches that wholeheartedly embrace the "old-fashioned" model, seeking to shape students' loves and allegiances, but aim to do so in politically progressive ways.

doi:10.1017/S0265052514000211
© 2014 Social Philosophy & Policy Foundation. Printed in the USA.

the apparent opposition between them in the familiar way referenced above, as arising from disagreement over the value of autonomy. In Section II, I consider and reject several attempts to specify the conception of autonomy over which advocates of the two models might disagree. The section concludes with a diagnosis of the difficulty of articulating such a conception. I argue that disagreement between those attracted to each of the two models is better understood as concerning the content of a properly educated person's convictions. It is not a disagreement between those who think that we should teach some convictions and those who think that we should not. It is, rather, a disagreement about which convictions we should teach. In Section III, I provide some reflections on where this reframing of issues about education leaves us.

I. Two Views of Education

On an old-fashioned view, becoming educated is a matter of developing not just knowledge or skills, but wisdom. Wisdom, in turn, includes coming to value — I think that we can also say to love — the right things in the right ways. If one adds the plausible thought that loving things worth loving, and having the discernment to enact this love in appropriate ways, characterizes the virtuous person, then this model has it that education aims to develop virtue, and its success consists in making people better. This idea, favored by Plato and Aristotle among others, persists in vestiges. Witness the wide agreement that the best teachers express and inspire love of the subjects that they teach, or in the words of the teaching evaluations to which my students are asked to respond "show enthusiasm for the material."

But, on the whole, identification of education with the shaping of students' values or loves is not much in favor. And the old-fashioned view raises some familiar worries. It apparently demands a sort of dependence on and deference to one's teachers that may seem to pull against widely affirmed ideals of independence of thought. On the flip side, it requires a certain confidence on the part of educators: in order to educate someone in this way in good faith you must have, and must rely rather heavily on, convictions about what is worth valuing and loving. We live in a pluralistic milieu, marked by disagreement about what deserves our allegiance and makes for a good human life. In such a moment, both the deference and the confidence that the old-fashioned view requires can seem unwarranted, and a philosophy of education that renders them indispensable provokes anxiety.

In fact, one might think that there are two distinct, though related, sets of concerns in the neighborhood. The way that I just put it makes it sound as if the central concern is about the relationship between the *student* and the *teacher* that the old-fashioned view commends. It is this relationship that might be thought unduly deferential or dependent. But one might

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000211 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000211 Published online by Cambridge University Press

instead think that the basic worry is about the old-fashioned view's understanding of the relationship between *students* and their developing *beliefs or convictions*. The worry is that if students are simply taught to value certain things, rather than somehow coming to convictions about what is worth valuing on their own, their resulting commitments will be objectionably alienated or heteronomous. It will be helpful to keep these two characterizations of the possible problem with the old-fashioned view in mind as we go forward.

Moreover, either of these concerns can take a stronger or a weaker form. On the weaker view, the objections arise uniquely in a public context, especially in a pluralistic society where there is disagreement about what is good and what makes for the best human life. Construed this way, the objections provide reasons for rejecting the old-fashioned view *as a model for public education,* at least in such a society. Similar worries can motivate rejection of the view as a guide for universities, both public and private, that seek to accommodate or embrace diverse value convictions. But on a stronger view this sort of value pluralism only makes salient those features of the old-fashioned view that are objectionable in any case. This stronger objection claims that the old-fashioned approach to education is objectionable wherever it is practiced, either because it relies on a bad sort of relationship between teacher and student, or because it aims to produce objectionably heteronomous commitments, or both.

Even this stronger view might be thought to apply more or less generally. Perhaps the worries are limited to contexts of formal schooling. It is usually thought that good parents try to raise children to be good people, and so that it is appropriate for parents to teach their children to value some things and spurn others. If that's right, we might regard the old-fashioned view as an attractive conception of parenting or child rearing, but find it worrisome as a model for formal education. Some further believe that schools can play a positive role in serving as a counterbalance to the conception of the good that children learn in their homes.[2] But others go further still, worrying that what is called "education" by the old-fashioned model is better described as "indoctrination," and is always and everywhere inappropriate, even in the context of parenting. This amounts to the strongest rejection of the old-fashioned view.[3]

[2] See, e.g., Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 43; Stephen Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Harry Brighouse, *On Education* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 18.

[3] See, e.g., Matthew Clayton, *Justice and Legitimacy in Upbringing* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Joel Feinberg, "The Child's Right to an Open Future," in *Freedom and Fulfillment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), also advocates a version of this view; For an opposing view see Shelley Burtt, "The Proper Scope of Parental Authority: Why We Don't Owe Children an 'Open Future'," in *Child, Family, and State*, Stephen Macedo and Iris Marion Young, eds., *NOMOS* (New York: New York University Press, 2003). Burtt's view is in some ways similar to my own, though she seems to grant that what she calls "fundamentalist education" is in conflict with autonomy.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000211 Published online by Cambridge University Press

All of these versions of discomfort with the old-fashioned approach to education deserve reflection. But even the weakest faces a challenge: it can seem impossible to think about *how to educate* without taking some view about *what we are educating toward*, that is what sort of people we are trying to educate students to be or what a well-educated person is like. But detractors of the old-fashioned view have a solution, one that arises naturally from their objections to that approach. Keeping the distinctions among these objections in mind, we can nevertheless sum them up as a concern that *the old-fashioned view does not properly value students' autonomy.* It puts them in an objectionably dependent — nonautonomous — relationship with their teachers (where this might include their parents), and/or it results in their holding convictions that are merely dogmatic or heteronomous. It thus violates and/or fails to nurture students' autonomy. The progressive view of education corrects for this by conceiving the educated person as the one who is able and inclined to think autonomously, and so makes autonomy itself a — or even the — central educational aim.

So we have two approaches to education. On the old-fashioned view, education self-consciously seeks to shape students' normative outlooks or direct their loves, and thereby to form their characters. On the progressive view, education eschews these aims on principle. It substitutes for them the goal of creating autonomous thinkers who will be capable of deciding for themselves what to value or love. Rather than teach students *what* to think, this latter view holds, we should teach them only *how* to think and let them figure out what to think for themselves.

While this amounts to only the barest sketch of the two models, anyone who has even passing acquaintance with contemporary philosophy of education will recognize them. Opposition between these two approaches is among the most common themes of this literature. Consider, as just one among many possible examples, the way that D. C. Phillips characterizes a fundamental debate about education in the opening paragraphs of his survey of the field in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.[4] After identifying autonomy as a central educational aim, he invokes the opposition:

> It emerges that in pluralistic societies such as the Western democracies there are some groups that do not wholeheartedly support the development of autonomous individuals, for such folk can weaken a group from within by thinking for themselves and challenging communal norms and beliefs.

[4] D. C. Phillips, "Philosophy of Education," http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2009/entries/education-philosophy/. For some other examples see Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 1–49; Bruce Ackerman, *Social Justice in the Liberal State* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 139–67; Eamonn Callan, *Creating Citizens* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Brighouse, *On Education*: 13–26; Feinberg, "The Child's Right to an Open Future."

In the next paragraph, Phillips characterizes the issue between these groups that resist, and those who support, the development of autonomous individuals as disagreement over the proper approach to education. In particular, he tells us that the debate is about:

> . . . education as transmission of knowledge versus education as the fostering of inquiry and reasoning skills that are conducive to the development of autonomy (which, roughly, is the tension between education as conservative and education as progressive, and also is closely related to differing views about human "perfectibility"—issues that historically have been raised in the debate over the aims of education).

Here Phillips casts the two models as exclusive, perhaps exhaustive, and certainly deeply opposed alternatives. Other writers express this same contrast in terms of *education as indoctrination* on the one hand and *education for autonomy* on the other, or sometimes just *indoctrination* on the one hand and *education* on the other.

II. Autonomy as an Educational Aim

The standard framing of the debate between the old-fashioned and progressive views of education understands them as at odds over the value of autonomy, or its importance as an educational aim. The old-fashioned view, it is claimed, opposes or suppresses autonomy, while the progressive view makes the development of autonomy a — sometimes even the — central educational aim. To arbitrate the disagreement we need some further specification of this purportedly contested ideal.

To capture the opposition between the two approaches, any such specification of autonomy must pick out an ideal that progressives affirm but that advocates of the old-fashioned approach are somehow committed to resisting. Autonomy so understood must, thus, be incompatible, or at least in tension, with aiming to shape students' normative outlooks as the old-fashioned model does. It follows that autonomy would have to be distinct from and independent of the substance of an educated person's values and commitments. It must instead be an attitude toward a person's commitments as such, whatever their content, that the progressive model commends. In this sense, it must be a purely formal ideal. At the same time it must be rich enough to serve as an organizing aim of educational practice, and treating it as such must be plausibly attractive.

I am going to argue that no way of filling in the notion of autonomy meets these desiderata. Thus, no ideal of autonomy illuminates what is at stake between advocates of and detractors from a model of education that self-consciously seeks to shape students' normative outlooks. I will proceed by considering several candidate conceptions of autonomy, each

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000211 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of which presents a certain formal intellectual ideal, or conception of the good thinker. In each case, I will argue that the appropriateness or value of educating for autonomy, so conceived, is not in dispute between progressives and traditionalists. Instead, the salient disagreements are better understood as concerning what substantive commitments an autonomous person, so conceived, has.

While this argument cannot show conclusively that *no* conception of autonomy could succeed in capturing the differences between the views, it at least places the burden on advocates of the progressive model to more fully articulate their alternative. More significantly, thinking about how these standard conceptions of autonomy fail focuses attention on important disputes that the standard characterization of the opposition between the two models obscures.

A. Autonomy as access to options

To begin, consider the idea that the autonomous thinker has, while the heteronomous lacks, access to various options from which she can choose her own convictions. This conception of autonomy emphasizes the relationship between a student and her views. The heteronomous person is somehow limited to a single or very narrow range of ways of viewing the world. The autonomous person, by contrast, has sufficient options among which she can make the choice that best suits her. The old-fashioned view is objectionable insofar as it denies students this access, and "locks them in" to a single view. This provides one way of understanding what Phillips might find worrisome about education that amounts to mere "transmission of knowledge." The problem, we might think, is that what is transmitted is a single, fixed view. This could also be the content of the worry that what the old-fashioned view is really engaged in is not education at all, but "indoctrination."

Here is one sense in which a practitioner of the old-fashioned model might seek to deny students access to options: she might suppress or deceive them about the existence of disagreement over the matters that she is teaching, when such disagreement exists. We might think that autonomy requires access to options in at least the sense of awareness that the view being taught is not the only possible view, nor even the only actual one. Relatedly, suppressing awareness of the fact that there is political space for disagreement, that dissent from the view on offer is not subject to political sanction, could be a way of objectionably denying access to alternatives.

These practices may indeed be objectionable, but they do not seem to capture the sense in which progressives think that the old-fashioned view denies students options. The old-fashioned view does not require suppression of options in either of these senses. An educator who seeks to bring you to love what she judges to be good need not hide from you that not

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000211 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000211 Published online by Cambridge University Press

everyone loves what is good; nor need she hide the nature of a pluralistic polity in which a wide range of views enjoy political protection. So, while some of the most extreme, insular approaches to education may engage in these tactics, they are not a feature of the old-fashioned view as such.

Moreover, avoiding these practices would not satisfy detractors from the old-fashioned view. When advocates of the progressive view call for access to options, they usually have a stronger condition in mind. It is common to speak of the further access condition in psychological-sounding terms: a person has access to options only if they are live possibilities *for her*.[5] The autonomous person is *able to choose* among various views or commitments. The heteronomous person, on the other hand, takes her views to be inevitable, natural, or unshakeable.[6] She can gain no critical distance from them, and so has no choice — no live option — but to affirm them. Let's grant that, in seeking to bring students to value what is good, the old-fashioned approach does aim to put alternatives out of reach in this way. It may then be on these grounds that critics believe that this approach violates autonomy and should therefore be rejected.

But we cannot understand the purported problem with the old-fashioned view as the inculcation of unshakeable, psychologically inescapable, beliefs. That's because *many* of our beliefs and commitments seem to be psychologically inescapable, and unproblematically so. Commitments to well-established scientific and historical facts, and to a wide range of mathematical truths are like this. Most of us cannot give up these convictions at will. We are locked in to them and have no access to alternatives. Moreover, those who taught us likely aimed to get us to regard these commitments in just this way. But neither this aim nor the relationship between students and their beliefs that results should seem objectionable. In aiming to get me to believe, in a way that I cannot seriously question, that George Washington was the first president of the United States, my teachers did not violate my autonomy or place themselves in any objectionable relationship with me.

So if anything like this characterization of the objection to the old-fashioned view is going to work, we need a way of further specifying when seeking to lock students in to a view is objectionable. The best candidate for this further specification may seem obvious. The examples above concern empirical matters, while worries about the old-fashioned view usually arise from its approach to normative or ethical claims and ideals. So, we might try this: *inculcating certainty about normative matters is an objectionable violation of students' autonomy*. With respect to questions having to do with what is of value, what deserves our allegiance, and how it is best to act and to live, students must be given options among which they can make up their own minds.

[5] Cf. e.g., Callan, *Creating Citizens*; and Brighouse, *On Education*.
[6] Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, chap. 1.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000211 Published online by Cambridge University Press

But lacking access to alternatives to a range of normative views, in the psychological sense above, also seems to be unproblematic. We learn early on that harming others requires some very significant justification: we cannot do so just because we feel like it, or because we cannot be bothered to pay attention. As with uncontroversial historical facts, many of us cannot seriously doubt that this is true, or take up some alternative view at will. Again, this is often precisely what those who taught us to regard harming others in this way were aiming to accomplish. And again, this does not seem to amount to an educational failure, or an objectionable violation of autonomy. If this is right, then aiming to inculcate certainty, and in this sense deny students access to options, with respect to normative matters is also not problematic per se.

It thus seems that people who worry that a student is being denied access to alternatives cannot really be objecting to the inculcation of certainty as such. Of course, where historical, scientific, or mathematical questions are *genuinely open*, it would be objectionable to lead students to firmly embrace a given view. Similarly, many normative questions are much more difficult than: May I harm others just because I feel like it? Insofar as the answers to such difficult questions are treated as easy or obvious, we might object. But the objection here is not to closing off access to options as such, but closing off access to particular possible answers to particular questions. It is not that a student is being taught to regard "her beliefs" as unshakeable or natural or inevitable. It is that she is being taught to regard *some particular beliefs or convictions* in this way.

This changes the nature of the objection, and what would be required to evaluate it. Determining whether a practitioner of the old-fashioned view is doing something problematic now requires considering the content of the convictions she seeks to instill, and defending a judgment that it is inappropriate to deny students live alternatives to that content. One might make such an argument in one of two ways. First, if you think that there *are* several live options with respect to a question, such that no one should have a settled view about it, then you will probably think that students should be taught in a way that leaves all of these options open. Second, you might think that the matter in question is one of genuine value pluralism. That is, you may think that a variety of incompatible options would be equally or incommensurably valuable, and that determination among these would rightly be made according to individual preferences, talents, or other idiosyncrasies. For example, within broad limits, choice of career or life's work is almost certainly like this. Insofar as this is the case, it is clear why it would be objectionable to teach a student to regard just one, or a very narrow range, of career possibilities as live options.

Consider how this applies to the paradigm case of religious education — that is, education that is not merely about religion, but aims to instill a certain religious point of view. Those who worry about the appropriateness

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000211 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of religious education normally cast their objection at a high level of generality, claiming that the problem is that students are taught a single outlook.[7] I am suggesting that something more particular must be at stake. The question is whether it is objectionable to seek to instill a religious outlook, or perhaps even whether it is objectionable to instill the particular religious outlook in question. One might suppose that it is objectionable on either of the two grounds above. Objectors to religious education often believe that the claims being communicated are false, or at least take the weaker view that we cannot know whether such claims are true, so that the question is genuinely open, and agnosticism is the appropriate attitude. Others think that religious outlooks are a matter of value pluralism like careers: There are several incompatible, but equally valuable commitments that one might have, and the selection is rightly determined by individual idiosyncrasies. My point is that these are not merely formal commitments about access to options. They are instead substantive normative views about how an educated person should regard religious commitments. Conspicuously, most supporters of religious education will reject them. They will not endorse agnosticism about religious matters, or think that it is right to regard religion as a matter of taste. By their lights then, instilling the commitments at issue does not deny students' access to options they ought to have, and thus would not violate their autonomy on the conception under consideration.

The lesson here is that, if we understand autonomy as access to options, we cannot characterize the difference between old-fashioned and progressive approaches as disagreement over its value or appropriateness as an educational ideal. While the old-fashioned view transparently aims to pass on certain unshakeable normative convictions, only a very extreme and unattractive position would hold that this is never appropriate. To avoid saddling advocates of the progressive model with this extreme view, we need to interpret them as objecting that some particular instances of the old-fashioned approach teach students to have settled views about things that it is inappropriate to be certain about, or to regard their options as limited with respect to matters in which they ought to have multiple possibilities and be free to express their individual tastes or idiosyncrasies.

We cannot then teach for "autonomy" construed as access to options, without relying on some way of settling the question: *With respect to which matters should students be given live options?* The answer is plausibly: just those matters that are either open questions or areas of value pluralism rightly settled by individual idiosyncrasies. Traditionalists and progressives can agree up to this point; their disagreement is over which matters these are. This is a substantive, not a merely formal, disagreement. Of course it is not appropriate to teach students to view something as

[7] E.g., I. Snook, *Indoctrination and Education* (London: Routledge, 1972); Feinberg, "The Child's Right to an Open Future."

a settled matter when it is not appropriate to regard the matter as settled. But which matters are appropriately so regarded calls for substantive normative judgment about what, and not merely how, the educated person ought to think.

B. Autonomy as an ability to provide justification

Consider now a second attempt to specify the difference between the old-fashioned and the progressive views, this time focusing on the relationship between student and teacher. On this view, what characterizes the autonomous person is that he does not believe things just because someone told him to, but is able to articulate the reasons for or justification of his convictions himself. To teach for autonomy is to encourage this kind of independence.

As in the case of the first conception, this sort of independence from others is not a perfectly general ideal. Another's testimony is often perfectly adequate reason to believe something. We routinely depend on others' testimony about everyday matters, as when people tell us their names or give us directions. It is widely recognized that getting by without such dependence would be extraordinarily difficult, and it strikes me as pathological rather than commendable to try. Arguably, general refusal to trust what others say, in addition to being imprudent, manifests an attitude toward them that deserves to be called disrespect, and violates a compelling moral ideal. And reliance on testimony occupies a routine and almost certainly ineliminable role in education. Many historical and scientific claims (though perhaps not mathematical ones) can again serve as examples here. Most of what most of us believe about these matters is based on the testimony of our teachers or on the books that they selected. The view that the intellectual ideal at which education aims amounts to freedom from this kind of dependence strikes me as implausible.

Again, some will want to suggest that, while reliance on others for empirical information is fine, matters are quite different once we enter the realm of the normative. It might be thought that we ought not accept normative ideals or convictions on others' say-so, that this would amount to criticizable heteronomy.[8] The old-fashioned view seeks to direct students' loves. So it might be thought that the objection to it could be captured in the concern that it encourages students to form normative commitments based just on the say-so of others.

[8] For discussion of the issue of moral testimony see, e.g., Philip Nickel, "Moral Testimony and Its Authority," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 4, no. 3 (2001); Sarah McGrath, "The Puzzle of Pure Moral Deference," *Philosophical Perspectives* 23 (2009); Paulina Sliwa, "In Defense of Moral Testimony," *Philosophical Studies* 158 (2012); Karen Jones, "Second-Hand Moral Knowledge," *The Journal of Philosophy* 96, no. 2 (1999); Robert Hopkins, "What is Wrong with Moral Testimony?" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 74, no. 3 (2007); Julia Driver, "Autonomy and the Asymmetry Problem for Moral Expertise," *Philosophical Studies* 128 (2006); Alison Hills, "Moral Testimony and Moral Epistemology," *Ethics* 120 (2009).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000211 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000211 Published online by Cambridge University Press

This way of putting the objection suggests that the old-fashioned approach amounts merely to reporting normative claims, and expecting students to memorize and so internalize them. Talk of "indoctrination" may also conjure up this picture. But indoctrination in this sense would be, at best, a very poor enactment of the old-fashioned view, ill suited to achieve its stated aims. Consider an example. Suppose you wanted to shape a student's normative attitudes about music. Contrast two approaches to this undertaking: on the first, you give your students a list of great composers and their finest works. You require students to memorize the list and test their mastery of it. This might result in students forming normative beliefs like "Mozart was a great composer." But surely, taken in isolation, this would fall far short of achieving your goal. You cannot shape someone's loves merely by reporting to him what is worth loving. If you aim to get people to value the music of Mozart, you need to expose them to the music itself. Likely you will also want to provide them with some further guidance, directing their attention to the features and qualities of the music that make it great. If you succeed, your students will come to appreciate the music directly, experiencing its greatness, rather than merely believing the proposition that it is great. This is a better example of the old-fashioned approach to education, and it is clearly not well described as the students coming to love the music just because you told them to.[9]

But one might think that this still fails to develop the autonomy that fans of the progressive view seek. In fact, someone might worry that the approach I have just commended to the practitioner of the old-fashioned view — exposing students to things purportedly of value and directing their attention in ways that aim to get them to appreciate this value — might just as well describe an effective plan of indoctrination as one of responsible education. It's all well and good when the object held up for appreciation is a Mozart sonata, but perhaps the example is misleadingly benign. What if the object were, instead, the glories of the dictator's reign?

Of course, that kind of case would be objectionable, and a stellar candidate for the pejorative "indoctrination." But the lesson we should draw is this: as above the question of what is appropriate depends not on the abstract or formal approach to education, but on the content of the things taught. When we worry about students being taught to value the glories of the dictator's reign it is because we think that the reign ought, rather, to be resisted. On the other hand, when we think that being taught to value Mozart's music is unobjectionable, it's because we think that this music is

[9] Cf. Gutmann on developing children's sensibilities so that they are repelled by bigotry. Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 43. It is interesting, too, that Gutmann describes the later stage of moral development as coming to "feel the force" of the reasons to avoid bigotry, not as being able to state these reasons. This bears on what I say below.

indeed wonderful. These are nothing other than substantive judgments about what deserves to be valued and appreciated, or what makes for a good life.

But perhaps this conclusion is too quick. So far in this section I have focused on only one aspect of the conception of autonomy under consideration, the suggestion that an education that demands that students accept normative commitments just on the say-so of their teachers would violate autonomy. But the conception under consideration also includes the idea that the autonomous student can give the justification for her normative commitments. The appreciation envisioned above may not be sufficient for an ability to state the reasons for valuing the thing in question. So, perhaps this ideal can capture the disagreement between the two approaches.

But, once again, I think that we should be skeptical of the generality of this ideal. It is far from clear that inarticulacy about one's normative commitments is always a problem. Consider again the person who accepts, indeed is absolutely convinced, that it is not acceptable to harm another person merely for convenience. Faced with a skeptical challenge to this commitment, she might well find herself inarticulate. I think most people would. But continuing to affirm her normative commitment in spite of this does not seem to mark any sort of fault in her.

Under pressure from this kind of example, we might try backing off to a weaker position. Perhaps autonomy does not require the ability to *give* a complete defense of all of our normative commitments, but something more like acknowledging a responsibility to be responsive to skeptical challenges. Andrea Westlund develops this idea into what she calls a "dialogical" conception of autonomy.[10] On her view, the autonomous person recognizes a standing responsibility to engage in dialogue about the reasons for her beliefs. The objectionably heteronomous person is the one who, when pressed for reasons, defers immediately to some other authority rather than making any attempt to articulate her own justification.[11]

We might question whether we have even this scaled back responsibility with respect to all of our normative commitments. Not all skeptical challenges obviously warrant the dialogical response that Westlund envisions. Perhaps some challenges, like that to the basic moral commitment considered above, can be appropriately dismissed. Another possibility is that at least some such challenges are better met in ways other than an attempt to

[10] Andrea Westlund, "Selflessness and Responsibility for Self: Is Deference Compatible with Autonomy?" *Philosophical Review* 112, no. 4 (2003).

[11] It is worth noting that Westlund carves out an exception for deference to experts. Her view seems to be that such deference is compatible with autonomy as long as we are appropriately reflective about and responsive to challenges to the purported expert's authority in the domain (ibid., 486).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000211 Published online by Cambridge University Press

articulate an argument or state reasons for one's commitments.[12] If either is true of at least some skeptical questions, then while advocates and detractors of the old-fashioned view may disagree over the range of cases that are well characterized this way, they again need not disagree over the value of autonomy as such.

But suppose that we grant that the autonomous person recognizes a dialogical responsibility to defend any normative view. The content of this responsibility has now been weakened enough that it is unclear that anyone need dissent. Notably, it entails no reason to abandon or doubt your view if you are currently inarticulate about its justification. Conversely, this approach makes heteronomy quite an extreme deficiency.[13] Westlund characterizes the person who fails to meet the dialogical standard as one whose "deliberation *itself* takes a distinctly deferential form: . . . it is as if she simply cannot *hear* questions meant to challenge that deference. She is deeply unresponsive to critical challenges."[14] Eschewing education that would have these effects will not rule much out. Most importantly, it will not rule out anything approaching the full range of applications of the old-fashioned view, but at most only its most extreme instantiations. In fact, educating someone on the old-fashioned model —conscientiously bringing him into contact with and helping him to appreciate what he now values — would arguably make him more, rather than less, likely to meet the dialogical standard. In conversation, he can draw on and reference his experience of the appreciation of these values, and there is no reason why he should not.

Like the value of access to options, neither the value of refusal to take our normative commitments on the say-so of others, the ability to articulate reasons for them, nor the recognition of a responsibility to try, characterize points of disagreement between the educational aims of the two models. The question that divides them is apparently not whether students ought, in general, to have reasons for their views besides the testimony of their instructors, or ought to be able to defend their views by articulating these reasons. Disagreements will remain over which normative commitments students should be encouraged to form and which skeptical challenges they should be encouraged to take seriously. But these are, once again,

[12] Challenges like this might be better met with storytelling, or simply by relating to the challenger in a way informed by one's own ethical convictions. Or, rather than trying to *say* why Mozart's music is good, one might do better by playing some of the music for the skeptic.

[13] Westlund's characterization draws on Thomas Hill's description of the Deferential Wife. See Thomas E. Hill, *Autonomy and Self-respect* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991. Westlund chooses the case because she is interested in whether and how autonomy is compatible with deference. The case is potentially confusing for our purposes, because the content of the Deferential Wife's commitments seems paradigmatically heteronomous, and this may confuse the issue about whether the form of her reasoning is also objectionably heteronomous.

[14] Ibid., p. 487. And later, " . . . she appears not to grasp how the first-personal perspective from which she is being asked to defend her deference might be staked out independently of the perspective to which she defers" (488).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000211 Published online by Cambridge University Press

substantive normative judgments about what rather than how the educated person ought to think.

C. *Autonomy as reasons responsiveness*

I turn now to a final attempt to characterize the autonomy that the progressive approach nurtures and the old-fashioned view thwarts. According to this conception, whether or not she can *articulate* the reasons for her view, the autonomous person has beliefs and convictions that are properly related to the reasons supporting them. This would allow the defender of autonomy to account for many of the conclusions drawn above. She could grant that teaching for autonomy is compatible with aiming to get students to form some unshakeable commitments (just when there is good reason for doing so) and with asking students to take some things, even many things, on testimony (just those for which testimony provides sufficient reason).

An educational approach would violate autonomy, so conceived, if it aimed to instill commitments *regardless of the reasons for them*. The old-fashioned view is at least occasionally represented as doing this, and characterizing it as indoctrination may suggest that it does.[15] Instances of this sort of indoctrination are familiar. Here's a paradigm case: Hoping to maximize sales of a certain soft drink, I design an advertising campaign that aims to get people to believe that the beverage in question is superior to all alternatives, and preferred by superior people. I aim to get them to purchase and consume my drink, and to share it with others. I aim to get them to value and love the drink, and even to shape their self-conception around this love. It is of no concern to me whether the beverage in question merits these attitudes. What I care about is sales, and the view that I aim to inculcate is nothing other than a means to this end. The presence of this extrinsic goal makes the ad campaign a clear instance of seeking to form normative attitudes without regard to reasons. This aim makes intelligible the motive to inculcate values and convictions that may come wildly apart from one's own views about what is valuable.

But it should be obvious that the old-fashioned approach to education is singularly unlike this. Its practitioners do not seek to shape students' allegiances for some merely instrumental reason. Helping students get it right about what is valuable, and come to love what is good, is the characteristic aim and self-conscious goal of the old-fashioned view. Quite unlike those heading up the advertising campaign, practitioners of the old-fashioned view aim to communicate the convictions and loves that they do precisely because they believe there to be good reason for just these commitments.

One's convictions about which commitments are well supported by reasons might, of course, diverge from the convictions of these practitioners.

[15] This is the view, advocated by I. Snook, *Indoctrination and Education* (London: Routledge, Kegan, and Paul, 1972), among others.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000211 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000211 Published online by Cambridge University Press

But nowhere is it clearer that this is a substantive normative disagreement about content, not a formal disagreement about educational approach. It is, once again, a disagreement about what the well-educated person should think and what she should value.[16]

We have discovered a familiar pattern. The progressive model purports to offer an alternative to the old-fashioned approach, one that eschews substantive commitments about what is worth loving or what makes for a good life. Instead of educating students with the aim of inculcating any such convictions, the progressive approach aims to make them autonomous and so able to settle these questions for themselves. But we have encountered difficulties in filling in a conception of autonomy that plausibly captures the critique of the old-fashioned view and provides an appealing basis for an alternative.

We have surveyed several candidates: (1) the autonomous person has access to alternative options; (2) the autonomous person does not rely solely on testimony, and has an ability to articulate the reasons for her views or at least recognizes a responsibility to do so; (3) the autonomous person is appropriately responsive to reasons. In each case, the advocate of the old-fashioned view seems just as much able to affirm these ideals as the advocate of the progressive view, and the disagreement between them is really over further judgments about how to apply the ideal. We make normative judgments not only about what to affirm and what to reject, but also about which matters to take to be settled, which to regard as matters of taste, what alternatives to consider, what to regard as plausible, when to accept something merely on testimony, when to seek to articulate the reasons for our beliefs, and a host of other matters. These are substantive ethical positions and our views about them are part of our overall normative outlooks. That is to say, once we start to fill in the details of our understanding of autonomy, we quickly run up against the very sorts of normative disagreements that the progressive approach tries to avoid, disagreements about what particular normative commitments an educated person should have.

One could take an extreme view about some or all of these questions. One could claim that a person should regard *all* of her commitments as doubtful, such that she could abandon them at will. Or one might think that *no* view can appropriately be taken on testimony, or that we should *always* be able to give an argument in defense for our views. We can call

[16] Cf. Snook's discussion of religious education. Snook holds that any attempt to teach religious convictions amounts to indoctrination. He characterizes practitioners of religious education as aiming only to instill convictions that have a certain content, without regard for the reasons for them. This strikes me as a straightforward misinterpretation of the aims of most religious educators, one that assimilates them to advertisers of soft drinks. As far as I can tell, Snook falls into this misinterpretation because he takes it to be clear that there is never sufficient reason to believe any religious claim. It is this normative conviction that does the work in his argument. And this commitment about what we have reason to believe, rather than any disagreement about the value of autonomy, divides him and the religious educator. Snook, *Indoctrination and Education*, 74–76.

this a view that prizes autonomy if we like, but it doesn't offer an alternative to an educational ideal that makes presumptions about what sort of person we should educate students to be. Instead, it advances one particular such ideal: that we should educate students to be thoroughgoing distrustful skeptics. Neither this, nor positions on the other extreme — that we should never doubt, never require independent corroboration of testimony, never feel responsible for offering a defense — will strike many people as appealing. The views that deserve attention and careful thought fall in the wide middle range that holds that each of these attitudes is appropriate with respect to some convictions and inappropriate with respect to others.

III. Some Implications

I have argued that a standard way of characterizing debates over education is unhelpful and misleading. This standard characterization appears in various guises: as a conflict between those who educate for autonomy on the one hand, and those who seek to hand down a given view on the other; as a conflict between those who seek to develop reasoning skills on the one hand, and those who look to inculcate particular convictions on the other; as a conflict between those who want to teach students to be good thinkers who can figure out or settle for themselves how to be good people on the one hand, and those who want to make students into what they take to be good people on the other. All of these pairs share a common feature. They contrast a formal ideal of intellectual virtue, skills, or characteristics on the one hand, with an ideal of the substance of what should be taught and learned on the other. I have argued that this is a false opposition. Everyone can accept these intellectual ideals in the abstract, and everyone must couple them with some ethically significant specification of the content to which they apply in order to employ them. Any plausibly attractive instantiation of the progressive model will encourage the attitude that it identifies with autonomy toward some contentful convictions and not others. And any plausibly attractive instantiation of the old-fashioned model will do the same. If all of this is right, the progressive approach is not really an alternative to the old-fashioned one, but an instantiation of it.[17]

Let's now consider where this leaves us. First, I want to be clear about what I am not claiming. I am not suggesting that there aren't real disagreements about education in the neighborhood, or that these disagreements are of no importance. My goal is rather to re-characterize these disagreements

[17] Likewise, most self-conscious enactments of the old-fashioned approach embrace the formal aims, and are in this sense instances, of the progressive approach. There is an asymmetry though: once we fix some conception of autonomy — including the content of the convictions to which it applies — educators could choose to embrace or reject the aim of autonomy, so specified. But no education can avoid communicating normative commitments, and in this sense any education will be an instance of the old-fashioned model.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000211 Published online by Cambridge University Press

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000211 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in a way that helps us see what is really at issue. These issues are genuine, and a lot can ride on getting them right.

Second, I am not advancing a more familiar complaint that "education for autonomy" fails in its claims to ethical neutrality, because it predictably *results* in students' rejecting particular normative convictions or embracing others.[18] The progressive model would not need to be neutral in this sense in order to provide an alternative to the old-fashioned approach. It proposes to understand our educational aims just in terms of intellectual virtues or skills. But nothing commits an advocate of this view to thinking that developing these will leave students' normative convictions just where they started, or that there will be no pattern in these results. A good thinker will tend to gravitate toward better-supported views, so if some normative views are better supported than others, and autonomy is a matter of thinking well, then the autonomous thinker will tend toward these. There is no embarrassment in this for the advocate of education for autonomy.

But I have been arguing for the stronger thesis that the progressive model does not constitute a genuine alternative to the old-fashioned model. This is not on account of the fact that it *results* in substantive normative commitments. It is rather because it *cannot be enacted* without presupposing and relying on substantive value commitments and seeking to pass these commitments on to students. It is not possible to specify the aim of intellectual autonomy such that it can sufficiently guide educational practice, thus meeting one of our desiderata, without bringing in commitments of this kind, thereby violating another.

Finally, in reframing the controversies as I have done, I've not said anything about how they should be settled. It may seem that my argument targets the progressive view, and in a limited way this is right. If successful, the argument exposes as illusory a certain appealing supposed feature of the progressive approach. Concerned that the old-fashioned view relies on presumptions about the settlement of contested normative questions, progressives encourage the hope that we can educate in a way that avoids such reliance. I have argued that this is a false hope. Advocates of the progressive view, no less than advocates of the old-fashioned one, have and rely on substantive and contested normative ideals and commitments.[19]

[18] This seems to be the sort of non-neutrality that Macedo acknowledges and embraces in Stephen Macedo, "Liberal Civic Education and Religious Fundamentalism: The Case of God v. John Rawls?" *Ethics* 105, no. 3 (1995).

[19] My view has some similarities to the view advocated by Amy Gutmann (Gutmann, *Democratic Education*.) and Stephen Macedo (Macedo, "Liberal Civic Education and Religious Fundamentalism: The Case of God v. John Rawls?"), among others. These thinkers agree that autonomy is not neutral with respect to worldviews or value convictions. But their view seems to be that this is so because thinking critically, or autonomy itself, is an ideal that is affirmed by some outlooks and not by others. They are concerned to argue that it is nevertheless appropriate for the liberal state to seek to aim to make students autonomous thinkers. My view is different. I claim that autonomy itself is an underspecified ideal, one that different normative outlooks do or can fill out in different ways.

If I am right, we should not accept the progressive view on the grounds that it represents an appealing neutrality. But this has no tendency to show that its advocates are not right about the substantive normative commitments that they make, or that we should not accept these commitments on other grounds. I have only shown what sorts of claims self-identified advocates of the progressive and old-fashioned views, respectively, would need to defend in order to make their cases. These are not claims about the value of autonomy.

The view that I have defended has important implications for discussions about the aims of publicly administered education and of universities that eschew official positions on value outlooks. It puts out of reach a certain popular story about these aims. It makes it impossible to understand them as educating toward autonomy, conceived as an intellectual ideal, without at the same time taking a position on other substantive issues about value.

That may be unsettling. The attraction of giving an apparently intellectual virtue like autonomy a central place in our educational aims is that this seems like something on which all people of good will, or in standard liberal parlance all "reasonable people," could plausibly agree. It, thus, apparently allows people with otherwise differing value convictions to participate in good faith and in good conscience in a common educational project, obviously an appealing possibility in a pluralistic society. If I am right, the task that faces us is much more difficult, and much more fraught, than this makes it seem. Difficult because we must acknowledge rather than sidestep certain normative disagreements. Fraught because we can be confident in advance that no matter how these are settled, some people of good will are likely to find the settlement unwarranted. It may thus seem that the alternative view that I am offering takes us to be in a state of irreconcilable struggle with one another for influence over the minds of the next generation.

Here I can only mention several lines of response to this pessimistic conclusion, each of which could likely be developed into an essay of its own. First, though we do live in a pluralistic society marked by real disagreement over what is worth doing, valuing, and loving, it is important not to overemphasize the scope or the depth of the disagreement. I hope that some of the examples that I have offered above are instances of value claims that are both important and uncontroversial. We can acknowledge that we have important disagreements without ruling out the possibility that we agree on enough to cooperate on matters of education.

Second, an extension of this point: it does not follow from what I have said that people who have important disagreements cannot possibly cooperate in education. People may disagree about first-order questions of value, and yet agree about the second-order normative questions that I have highlighted here. For example, those who disagree about which view of a matter is best, might nevertheless agree about the range of views

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000211 Published online by Cambridge University Press

that students should be encouraged to take seriously. This latter kind of agreement may be enough for full cooperation in educational contexts. A benefit of articulating these second-order questions as I have here is that it allows us to see the possibility, and consider the attraction, of a significant gap between those views that we find most compelling and those that we think are worthy of serious engagement and consideration.

Third, even if any particular educational program requires us to settle on some controversial normative commitments, we may be able to sidestep our disagreements in another way. Instead of looking to settle these disagreements directly, we can ask: Who is rightly authorized to settle them? Who should determine the ideals according to which children and young adults are taught? Perhaps these questions about where to locate authority will prove to be more tractable than questions about conceptions of the good. For instance, it may be that in the pluralistic university, this authority is rightly located, not at the level of the institution, but with the individual faculty members. This may render the university's aims somewhat chaotic, or even make it not quite appropriate to speak of "the university" as if it were the sort of thing that has aims. But it need not bring education to a standstill. I think that this is not so far off from how things run in practice, and that it is not the worst approach. In debates about primary and secondary education, we can think about the extent to which it seems appropriate to settle these questions at the levels of federal, state, or local government, or to vest authority in individual schools, teachers, or parents. What we cannot do, if I am right, is pretend that we can avoid settling these questions at all, or that there is some educational approach that does not amount to a particular way of doing so.

Philosophy, Northwestern University

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052514000211 Published online by Cambridge University Press