

Moral education and the idea of reasonable moral pluralism

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Moral education takes many forms, so it is well to begin by delineating the form I propose to discuss. I shall be concerned here with approaches to the teaching of morality that aim to be *cognitive*, *directive* and *rational*.

Moral education is *cognitive* when it attends principally to children's moral beliefs, commitments, judgments and decisions, as distinct from their moral feelings, sentiments, habits and dispositions. Such education focuses on what children believe to be morally right or wrong, good or bad, obligatory, desirable, objectionable or impermissible, on why they hold those beliefs and on how they apply them in practice. Its subject matter is the spectrum of moral claims, from statements of general principle ('killing people is wrong') to verdicts on particular cases ('for Hamlet to have killed Claudius at prayer would have been wrong'), from thin affirmations of duty ('one ought to keep one's promises') to thick assertions about the good life ('the good for man is an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue').

Cognitive moral education is *directive* when it is undertaken with the aim of imparting moral beliefs, when there is a deliberate attempt to persuade children of the truth or correctness of moral claims. It is *nondirective*, by contrast, when discussion of moral beliefs is open-ended, when children are encouraged to interrogate and assess moral claims but brought under no pedagogical pressure to accept or reject them.

And *directive cognitive* moral education is *rational* when the method used to impart moral beliefs is the presentation of compelling (that is, epistemically decisive) reasons. There is, of course, a tight logical constraint on the range of moral beliefs capable of being imparted in this way: namely, that they must in fact enjoy the support of compelling reasons. Other methods of belief transmission are not subject to this constraint: one can impart more or less any moral belief, regardless of epistemic warrant, if one is prepared to mislead children about the force of the reasons supporting it, to manipulate them in such a way as to bypass or override their interest in those reasons, or to exercise what I have elsewhere called 'perceived intellectual authority' (Hand, 2002, 2003). And perhaps we should not be too quick to assume that such methods are always educationally unsound. But, insofar as the aim is to impart moral beliefs by the presentation of compelling reasons, it is self-evidently necessary that the beliefs in question are supported by such reasons.

By *rational directive cognitive* moral education, then, I mean the attempt to persuade children of the truth or correctness of moral claims by presenting them with compelling reasons. The question that interests me is whether one can consistently advocate moral education of this kind *and* subscribe to the idea of reasonable moral pluralism. I take the latter idea to be widely accepted among liberal thinkers and an underpinning assumption of much contemporary moral and political philosophy and philosophy of education. If we endorse this assumption, must we abandon the enterprise of rational directive cognitive moral education?

Reasonable moral pluralism

The idea of reasonable moral pluralism is particularly associated with the work of John Rawls, and I shall here take his account of it in *Political Liberalism* (1996) to be definitive.

Liberal societies, according to Rawls, are actually and inevitably characterised by the co-existence of multiple, incompatible and reasonable conceptions of the good:

The political culture of a democratic society is always marked by a diversity of opposing and irreconcilable religious, philosophical and moral doctrines. Some of these are perfectly reasonable, and this diversity among reasonable doctrines political liberalism sees as the inevitable long-run result of the powers of human reason at work within the background of enduring free institutions. (Rawls, 1996, pp.3-4)

That these religious, philosophical and moral doctrines are ‘perfectly reasonable’ is important. What it means is that we cannot explain the diversity of doctrines in terms of the ignorance, prejudice, sloppy thinking or self-interest of those who hold them, and thus view it as a problem remediable by better education for all. Fully reasonable and properly educated people, in a free society, will continue to disagree with one another profoundly on religious, philosophical and moral matters. Therefore ‘the diversity of reasonable comprehensive religious, philosophical and moral doctrines found in modern democratic societies is not a mere historical tradition that may soon pass away; it is a permanent feature of the public culture of democracy’ (p.36).

Rawls distinguishes between two kinds of moral doctrine or conception. A *political* conception is ‘a moral conception worked out for a specific kind of subject, namely, for political, social and economic institutions’ (p.11). A *comprehensive* conception is one that ‘includes conceptions of what is of value in human life, and ideals of personal character, as well as ideals of friendship and of familial and associational relationships, and much else that is to inform our conduct, and in the limit to our life as a whole’ (*sic*) (p.13). All citizens are held to subscribe to both a comprehensive and a political conception, which are always ‘in some way related’ (p.12).

A comprehensive moral conception is said to be reasonable when it satisfies three conditions. It must be (i) ‘an exercise of theoretical reason’, covering ‘the major religious, philosophical and moral aspects of human life in a more or less consistent and coherent manner’; (ii) ‘an exercise of practical reason’, covering ‘which values to count as especially significant and how to balance them when they conflict’; and (iii) embedded in ‘a tradition of thought and doctrine’ (p.59). Most religions and most ethical theories thus qualify as reasonable comprehensive conceptions.

Finally, comprehensive doctrines are understood to be determinative of people’s moral beliefs and judgments. They are not mere superstructures, sitting atop an independently intelligible base of moral belief and practice. Rather they supply the principles and criteria in light of which moral judgments are made:

Political liberalism... supposes that judgments of [moral] truth are made from the point of view of some comprehensive moral doctrine. These doctrines render a judgment, all things considered: that is, taking into

consideration what they see as all relevant moral and political values and all relevant facts (as each doctrine determines). (p.xx)

These, then, are the contours of the idea of reasonable moral pluralism. The source of doubt about the compatibility of this idea with the form of moral education identified above is not far to seek. Reasonable moral pluralism seems to preclude the possibility of identifying a set of moral beliefs supported by compelling reasons and therefore capable of being rationally imparted to children. If moral beliefs are derived from comprehensive doctrines, it is difficult to see how the reasons supporting a moral belief could be any stronger than the reasons supporting its originating doctrine; and if comprehensive doctrines are multiple, incompatible and reasonable, the reasons supporting any one of them cannot be compelling. So there is a strong *prima facie* case for the view that reasonable moral pluralism rules out the possibility of rational directive cognitive moral education.

Nevertheless, there have been at least two interesting attempts in recent years to find a way out of this bind. Both try to identify moral values suitable for transmission in schools by looking to the possibility of an *overlap* between different conceptions of the good. The first, exemplified in the work of the National Forum for Values in Education and the Community in the mid-1990s, tries to show that people with diverse religious and ethical commitments do in fact agree on a range of basic moral values, and that the existence of this agreement itself constitutes a reason to subscribe to those values. The second, associated with philosophers of education attracted by Rawlsian political liberalism, proposes that the public values Rawls derives from his political conception of justice can be pressed into service as the content of directive moral education. I shall consider each attempt in turn.

Shared values

The National Forum for Values in Education and the Community was set up in 1996 by the Schools Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA), with the remit of discovering ‘whether there are any values upon which there is common agreement within society’ and deciding ‘how schools might be supported in the important task of contributing to pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development’ (SCAA, 1997, p.10). The Forum comprised 150 people ‘drawn from across society’ and went about its work through a series of group discussion meetings, ‘with conclusions from each meeting being passed to the other groups before the next meeting’ (Talbot & Tate, 1997, p.2). The Forum’s deliberations yielded a Statement of Values and an accompanying Preamble (SCAA, 1997, pp.10-14), versions of which are still to be found on the National Curriculum website, under the heading ‘Values and purposes underpinning the school curriculum’ (QCDA, 2010).

Before we attend to the conclusions reached by the Forum, let me say a few words in defence of my construal of its work as an attempt to answer the question now before us: the question of whether rational directive cognitive moral education is compatible with reasonable moral pluralism. First, it might be argued that the Forum’s assumptions about the context in which moral education occurs have to do less with reasonable moral pluralism than with moral degeneration and social breakdown. It is certainly true that, in the SCAA Discussion Paper recommending the establishment of the Forum, there is much hand-wringing about our ‘living in a time of moral crisis’ and society being ‘rife with drug abuse, crime and violence’ (SCAA, 1996, p.8). But that at least some members of the Forum were animated by worries of this nature does not count against the claim that they were also exercised by the challenge of

reasonable moral pluralism. If concerns about moral degeneration provided the impetus for the Forum's work, concerns about moral pluralism gave definition to the problem it set out to solve. The clearest evidence of this is the care taken in the Preamble to distinguish agreement on values from agreement on the sources of value, which sources may be religious or secular:

Agreement on the values outlined below is compatible with disagreement on their sources. Many believe that God is the ultimate source of value, and that we are accountable to God for our actions; others that values have their source only in human nature, and that we are accountable only to our consciences. The statement of values is consistent with these and other views on the sources of value. (SCAA, 1997, p.11)

Second, it might be doubted that the Forum intended the values in their Statement to be directive taught in schools. One erstwhile member of the Forum, Graham Haydon, has recently argued that the value of the Statement lies in the contribution it can make to nondirective moral education:

So what is the use of the resulting statement? Teachers from other countries often tell me about their statements of values that the schools are expected to inculcate. That is not the English way... The educational value of the statement could be to see it as a set of reference points, in which the fact that there was widespread agreement on the values included is not the end of the matter, but a starting point for discussion. (Haydon, 2007, p.10)

But if Haydon's remark about 'the English way' is intended to suggest that the work of the Forum was never motivated by directive educational concerns, we should treat it with caution. One of the principal justifications for establishing the Forum, as set out in the SCAA Discussion Paper, was that 'national assent to core values would give schools authority and confidence in promoting them' (SCAA, 1996, p.19). Marianne Talbot and Nick Tate are in no doubt that, to the question 'whose values are we supposed to instill?', there is 'a simple and empirically justifiable answer: namely, *our* values' (Talbot & Tate, 1997, p.1). And the Forum's claim in the Preamble that the Statement 'neither implies nor entails that these are the *only* values that should be taught in schools' (SCAA, 1997, p.11) makes clear that these values *at least* should be taught, as does the promise of support and encouragement from society if schools and teachers 'base their teaching and the school ethos on these values' (*ibid.*).

Third, and most plausibly, objections might be raised to the idea that the Forum was committed to *rational* moral education. Here, I must concede, supporting evidence is thin on the ground. It may well be that some, perhaps many, members of the Forum were willing to sanction methods other than the presentation of compelling reasons for the transmission of shared values. But that there was at least some concern with the provision of reasons is indicated by the stipulation in the SCAA Discussion Paper that morally developed young people should be 'knowledgeable about standards of right and wrong' and 'skilled in moral reasoning' (SCAA, 1996, p.9). Good behaviour, it is argued, is not itself indicative of morality, because 'Good behaviour can be instilled by rigorous training or fear of punishment, rather than by an understanding of why such behaviour is desirable, right or necessary' (*ibid.*). Insofar as the Forum worked on the assumption that morality involves *understanding why* some actions are desirable or right, there cannot have been complete disregard for the place of

reason and justification in moral education.

I shall take it, then, that the problem with which the members of the Forum wrestled was roughly the one that interests us here. What was the solution they proposed?

To the question of whether there is agreement on values across society, the Forum responded with a resounding yes. ‘Almost as soon as they considered the question’, report Talbot and Tate, ‘they came up with a number of values to which, they believed, everyone would subscribe’ (Talbot & Tate, 1997, p.2). In a subsequent MORI poll of 1500 adults, some 95% agreed with the values in the Forum’s Statement. This, Talbot and Tate declare, ‘conclusively established’ that ‘the values identified by the Forum are values upon which everyone of goodwill will agree’ (p.3).

There is, of course, a plethora of worries here: about what is involved in conclusively establishing claims of this kind, about the size and representativeness of both the Forum and the survey sample, about the one in 20 people who apparently disagreed with the Statement of Values, and about the slippage from ‘everyone’ to ‘everyone of goodwill’. I shall, however, set these worries aside and move directly to the second step of the Forum’s solution: the inference from the claim that there are values shared by everyone of goodwill to the claim that those values can properly be transmitted to children in schools.

Recall the crucial distinction in the Preamble between agreement on values and agreement on the sources of value. The Forum explicitly endorses the view that the values shared across society are rooted for some in religious conceptions of the good and for others in secular conceptions. Different members of society explain and justify these values in different ways, invoking the principles and criteria of moral judgment supplied by their conceptions of the good. This makes things very difficult for the moral educator seeking to impart shared values by presenting children with compelling reasons for them. She cannot simply plump for the reasons supplied by one comprehensive conception, perhaps the one to which she herself subscribes, in part because she will incur the wrath of parents subscribing to different conceptions, but more basically because, assuming that we cannot rationally settle the question of which comprehensive conception is true, reasons of this kind are not compelling.

This is a difficulty to which David Archard draws attention in his discussion of the teaching of sexual morality. In the face of diverse comprehensive moral conceptions, each with its own criteria for determining the rightness or wrongness of forms of sexual behaviour, one strategy by which one might be tempted is a ‘retreat to basics’, whereby children are taught ‘a minimal, agreed sexual morality, the lowest common denominator among the different views’ (Archard, 1998, p.441). However, it would be educationally improper to teach the correctness of an agreed rule of sexual morality ‘without attempting to provide a warrant for that judgment’ (p.443); but any such attempt is bound to take one back into the contested territory one is trying to escape. The problem with the ‘retreat to basics’ strategy, then, ‘is that one cannot retreat far enough to secure a position that is free of the division of views that prompted the retreat’ (p.444).

How explicitly this difficulty was recognised and considered by the members of the Forum I do not know. Some, I have conceded, may have been content with forms of pedagogy not dependent on the availability of compelling reasons; others may simply not have noticed the problem. There are, however, grounds for thinking that at least some influential members of the Forum understood the difficulty and had in mind an answer to it.

In their summary and defence of the Forum's work, Marianne Talbot and Nick Tate (1997) set about justifying not the set of values on which we supposedly agree, but rather *the value of that agreement*. This is suggestive of the following line of thought. Although we cannot show that the moral beliefs we share are true, we can demonstrate the very great importance of the fact of our sharing them. And to demonstrate this importance to children is to give them good reason to adopt the moral beliefs in question. Admittedly my formulation here goes beyond what Talbot and Tate explicitly say; but that some such thought can fairly be ascribed to them is plausible, and I think helps to make sense of the Forum's otherwise puzzling jump from its empirical premises to its normative educational conclusions.

What is the basis for the claim that moral consensus is important? According to Talbot and Tate, a foundation of moral agreement is a necessary condition of meaningful moral communication and productive moral debate. Without it, they contend, disagreements 'become meaningless', 'argument would be pointless' and 'truth would be forever beyond our grasp' (Talbot & Tate, 1997, p.6). What they seem to have in mind here is some version of the familiar Wittgensteinian thesis that, for language to be a means of communication, there must be agreement in both definitions and judgments (Wittgenstein, 1953, Section 242). And it may well be true that meaningful communication on moral matters requires a substratum of moral agreement. But this argument does not gain Talbot and Tate much ground: someone unpersuaded of the importance of moral consensus is unlikely to change her mind on learning that it is a condition of moral communication. The advocate of what is sometimes known as 'pragmatic liberalism', for example, openly embraces the conclusion that, under conditions of reasonable moral pluralism, meaningful moral communication across the boundaries of comprehensive doctrines is impossible, devoting her efforts instead to finding a set of pragmatically and prudentially justified political arrangements that might allow us to live peacefully alongside each other. Even Rawls, no fan of pragmatic liberalism, admits that 'It is easy to see how there might be a reasonably just *modus vivendi* between a plurality of conflicting comprehensive doctrines' (Rawls, 1996, p.xl). Talbot and Tate give no indication of what they take to be wrong with the pragmatic liberal view.

Instead, they offer the following consideration in support of their position:

If, on the back of the belief that there are no common values, we lose our confidence in the claim that there are behaviours that are simply morally unacceptable, then how are we to argue convincingly with those whose values permit them to beat people up to signal disagreement? (Talbot & Tate, 1997, p.7)

But this appears to be incoherent. Under the circumstances described, how is the belief that there *are* common values supposed to help? Presumably 'those whose values permit them to beat people up to signal disagreement' are people who reject at least some of the values shared by everyone of goodwill. So it is difficult to see why they should be convinced by arguments that appeal to those values (and easy to see why we might think twice about engaging them in argument at all).

Notwithstanding these worries, let us allow that a strong case for the value of moral consensus might be made. It is the next step in the argument that presents the most insurmountable difficulties. From the fact that moral consensus is valuable it simply does not follow that we have good reason to subscribe to the values that happen to be agreed by

members of the society to which we belong. For it will always be intelligible, and necessary, to ask whether *shared* values are *good* ones, and quite possible to conclude that they are not. The Forum acknowledges this distinction in the Preamble when it remarks: ‘The remit of the Forum was to decide whether there are any values that are commonly agreed upon across society, not whether there are any values that *should* be agreed upon across society’ (SCAA, 1997, p.10). Unless one takes the extreme view that moral consensus is supremely or overridingly important, so that it is better to hold a false moral belief shared by all than to reject it and put oneself out of step with society, the value of moral agreement cannot itself constitute a good reason for adopting shared moral beliefs. We may properly yearn for consensus on true or correct moral values, and this yearning may warrant evangelical efforts to bring others into the light of moral truth; but no coherent moral view could prioritise consensus over truth and thus justify acquiescence in whatever moral values happen to be prevalent.

I conclude that the Forum’s attempt to build rational directive cognitive moral education on the foundation of an empirical overlap between different conceptions of the good must be deemed unsuccessful.

Public values

The second attempt to answer the question before us also looks to the possibility of an overlap between comprehensive doctrines. But here the area of overlap is not to be discovered by means of consultations and surveys, by looking to see whether there are values shared by everyone of goodwill. The procedure is rather to construct a political conception of justice, entailing a set of public values, and to ask citizens to find ways of aligning that political conception with their comprehensive conceptions of the good. The difference between the two procedures is explained by Rawls as follows:

One idea of consensus comes from everyday politics where the task of the politician is to find agreement... This idea of consensus is the idea of an overlap that is already present or latent... The very different idea of consensus in political liberalism – the idea I call a *reasonable overlapping consensus* – is that the political conception of justice is worked out first as a freestanding view that can be justified *pro tanto* without looking to, or trying to fit, or even knowing what are, the existing comprehensive doctrines. It tries to put no obstacles in the path of all reasonable doctrines endorsing a political conception by eliminating from this conception any idea which goes beyond the political... When the political conception meets these conditions and is also complete, we hope the reasonable comprehensive doctrines affirmed by reasonable citizens in society can support it. (Rawls, 1996, p.389)

Rawls’s political conception – justice as fairness – builds on the fundamental ideas of ‘society as a fair system of cooperation over generations’, of ‘citizens as free and equal persons’, and of ‘a well-ordered society as a society effectively regulated by a public political conception of justice’ (p.35). From these ideas Rawls constructs an account of reasonable persons as those who are ‘ready to propose principles and standards as fair terms of cooperation and to abide by them willingly, given the assurance that others will do likewise’ (p.49), a criterion of reciprocity requiring that ‘our exercise of political power is proper only when we sincerely

believe that the reasons we offer for our political action may reasonably be accepted by other citizens as a justification of those actions' (p.xliv), and his two well-known principles of justice regarding basic rights and liberties and the arrangement of social and economic inequalities. The resulting political conception entails a set of public values that are 'very great' and 'not easily overridden' (p.139):

In justice as fairness, some of these great values – the values of justice – are expressed by the principles of justice for the basic structure: among them, the values of equal political and civil liberty; fair equality of opportunity; the values of economic reciprocity; the social bases of mutual respect between citizens. Other great political values – the values of public reason – are expressed in the guidelines for public inquiry and in the steps taken to make such inquiry free and public, as well as informed and reasonable... [They] not only include the appropriate use of the fundamental concepts of judgment, inference and evidence, but also the virtues of reasonableness and fair-mindedness. (p.139)

Might these Rawlsian public values supply us with a set of moral beliefs capable of being rationally imparted to children in schools? A number of philosophers of education have suggested that they do. Jan Steutel, for example, has argued in several recent publications (Steutel & Spiecker, 2004a, 2004b; Steutel & de Ruyter, 2009) that the moral content of sex education should be given by a 'public morality' consisting of 'principles and virtues which may be defended and promoted by the state', and that principles may be so defended when they can 'be justified in a neutral way towards all reasonable citizens, that is, to all citizens who sincerely endorse the criterion of reciprocity' (Steutel & Spiecker, 2004b, pp.2, 7).

That this idea may be finding its way into the classroom is suggested by some recent guidance for schools issued by the Citizenship Foundation:

Just as it is important for teachers to distinguish their role as private citizens from their role as public educators, so it is important for them to distinguish between private and public values... The kind of values that characterise a pluralist democracy, such as ours, include: social justice; political equality; tolerance; human rights; respect for the rule of law; and a commitment to negotiation and debate as the ideal way of resolving public conflict. This difference allows a distinction to be made between the values that may legitimately be taught in schools - indeed, which schools have a duty to teach - and those that are more properly the province of the home, particular interest groups and religious or political parties. (Citizenship Foundation, 2003, pp. 5-6.)

It would be a mistake to reject this proposed solution to our problem on the grounds that public values are political rather than moral. Rawls makes it abundantly clear that his political conception is a moral conception: this is the fundamental difference between political and pragmatic liberalism. Whereas the pragmatic liberal invites citizens to support liberal principles for pragmatic and prudential reasons, and is thus vulnerable to the objection that such support is too easily trumped by citizens' moral commitments, the political liberal requires that citizens subscribe to liberal principles as part of their morality. A political conception of justice, says Rawls, is 'a moral conception worked out for a specific kind of

subject'; it is intended to form 'a module, an essential constituent part' of a comprehensive conception of the good (pp.11-12).

Where I think the argument for imparting Rawlsian public values founders is, once again, on the requirement that children be supplied with compelling reasons to adopt those values. The proposal seems to be that the justification for public values presented to children should be an appropriately simplified version of the justification offered by Rawls himself. My contention is that this justification falls some way short of being compelling.

Rawls claims to offer 'three different kinds of justification' for justice as fairness, which he labels '*pro tanto* justification', 'full justification' and 'public justification' (p.386). His talk of different kinds of justification is, however, somewhat misleading. The weight of his positive case for justice as fairness rests entirely on the first kind, *pro tanto* justification. The second and third kinds, full and public justification, are better understood as attempts to remove impediments to the acceptance of justice as fairness than as additional or supplementary arguments in its favour. No matter how compelling the *pro tanto* justification, Rawls thinks, it will be reasonable for me to reject justice as fairness if I cannot reconcile it with my own reasonable comprehensive conception of the good, or if my fellow citizens cannot reconcile it with theirs. Showing that it can be so reconciled is therefore necessary to the justification of justice as fairness, but only in the impediment-removing sense. That some belief happens to be compatible with a range of comprehensive doctrines is not itself any sort of reason for adopting it. With this caveat in mind, let us consider each kind of justification in turn.

Pro tanto justification consists in showing that justice as fairness coherently knits together the fundamental ideas 'implicit in the public political culture of a democratic society' (p.13), in such a way as to yield reasonable answers to 'all or nearly all questions concerning constitutional essentials and basic justice' (p.386). The procedure is to start with 'the tradition of democratic thought', viewed as 'a fund of implicitly shared ideas and principles' (p.14), and to construct a political conception that imposes sufficient order on those ideas and principles to guide us in the design of political, social and economic institutions. A political conception is justified *pro tanto*, then, to the degree that it coherently articulates and orders the ideas embedded in the democratic tradition.

As a justificatory strategy, this is problematic in two ways. First, it does not rule out the possibility that there might be more ways than one of coherently articulating and ordering democratic ideas. Indeed, Rawls admits that one of the challenges for political liberalism is 'how a well-ordered liberal political society is to be formulated given not only reasonable pluralism but a family of reasonable liberal political conceptions of justice' (p.xlvi). While he considers justice as fairness to be the most reasonable of these liberal political conceptions, he recognises that 'many reasonable people seem to disagree with me' and that 'I would simply be unreasonable if I denied that there were other reasonable conceptions' (p.xlvii). But one cannot allow that there are other reasonable ways of ordering democratic ideas, and that people reasonably disagree about which way is the most reasonable, and at the same time charge moral educators with the task of rationally imparting the belief that justice as fairness is a political conception superior to the alternatives.

Second, and more fundamentally, by taking as its starting point 'the tradition of democratic thought', *pro tanto* justification largely presupposes the values it sets out to justify. The set of public values Rawls derives from justice as fairness are the very 'shared ideas and principles' from which he constructs it. The project of showing that democratic principles can be

coherently ordered and balanced is an important one, but does not itself amount to a justification of those principles. This is a point on which Rawls's critics have not been slow to pick up. It will not do, says William Galston, for Rawls to rest content with producing 'the most plausible interpretation of what the core commitments of liberal democracy entail' (Galston, 1991, p.157):

When Americans say that all human beings are created equal and endowed with certain unalienable rights, they intend this not as a description of their own convictions but, rather, as universal truths, valid everywhere and binding on all. Indeed, that claim is at the heart of their normative force. If our principles are valid for us only because we (happen to) believe them, then they are not binding even for us. (p.158)

Note that any attempt to make good this deficiency in *pro tanto* justification by asking citizens to seek justifications for democratic principles within their own comprehensive doctrines seems contrary to Rawls's intent. He repeatedly insists that his political conception of justice is 'a freestanding view': 'it is neither presented as, nor as derived from, [a comprehensive] doctrine applied to the basic structure of society, as if this structure were simply another subject to which that doctrine applied' (Rawls, 1996, p.13). The point of political liberalism is that it 'moves within the category of the political' and 'leaves untouched all kinds of doctrines – religious, metaphysical and moral' (p.375). The stability of public institutions designed in accordance with justice as fairness requires that citizens' comprehensive doctrines are 'congruent with, or supportive of, or else not in conflict with, the values appropriate to the special domain of the political' (p.140); but it is not held to require that their doctrines supply the justification for those values.

Pro tanto justification, then, must itself explain why we should sign up to democratic ideas and principles. But it is hard to see how it can do this, or why any child disinclined to subscribe to public values should be rationally persuaded otherwise merely by a demonstration that such values can be coherently ordered.

Do full and public justification fare any better? Full justification consists in showing that the individual citizen is not prevented from endorsing public values by a conflict with her wider, nonpolitical values. Each citizen must find a way to make justice as fairness compatible with her comprehensive conception of the good. Rawls's favoured image here is that of a self-contained module being fitted or inserted into a larger structure. Where the fit with comprehensive doctrines does not come easily, he hopes that justice as fairness 'will have the capacity to shape those doctrines towards itself' (p.389). Just how the alignment of political and comprehensive conceptions is to be accomplished, however, is a matter on which 'the political conception gives no guidance': 'it is left to each citizen... to say how the claims of political justice are to be ordered, or weighed, against nonpolitical values' (p.386).

But Rawls's principled forbearance on this point leaves his argument for justice as fairness radically incomplete. If it is an open question whether or how each citizen will be able to bring about the required alignment of conceptions, the moral educator is plainly in no position to assure children that the demands of full justification can be met. Perhaps it will be suggested that the task Rawls leaves to each citizen is one the moral educator can leave to each child: but this would be to make the dubious assumptions that children already have stable and coherent comprehensive conceptions of the good and understand them well enough to determine their congruence or consistency with a political conception of justice. And it

would hardly solve the problem, for it is as open to children as to any other citizen to conclude that justice as fairness is incompatible with their comprehensive doctrines.

Finally, public justification consists in showing that citizens are not prevented from endorsing public values by the reasonable rejection of those values by other citizens. ‘Public justification happens’, says Rawls, ‘when *all* the reasonable members of political society carry out a justification of the shared political conception by embedding it in their several reasonable comprehensive views’ (p.387, my emphasis). It is not enough for me to be persuaded that public values are compatible with *my* comprehensive doctrine: I must be persuaded that they are compatible with the comprehensive doctrines of my fellow citizens too. Unless I have confidence in ‘the fact – the existence – of the reasonable overlapping consensus’, it will be reasonable for me to reject justice as fairness.

Why should this be? The answer is that a political conception of justice is intended to furnish us with principles by which to govern not only our own lives but also the lives of others. It is supposed to supply us with an answer to the question: ‘when may citizens by their vote properly exercise their coercive political power over one another when fundamental questions are at stake?’ (p.217). Insofar as I am proposing to use justice as fairness as the basis for my exercise of coercive political power, I must ask whether this basis is one my fellow citizens can reasonably be expected to endorse. An adequate political conception is not ‘an account of how those who hold political power can satisfy themselves, and not citizens generally, that they are acting properly’, but rather ‘an account of the legitimacy of political authority’ (pp.143-4). Therefore ‘justice as fairness is not reasonable in the first place unless in a suitable way it can win its support by addressing each citizen’s reason’ (p.143).

But, fairly obviously, if the moral educator cannot assure children that the demands of full justification can be met, nor can she assure them that the demands of public justification can be met. Because we do not know, and Rawls’s political theory cannot tell us, whether our fellow citizens will be able to align public values with their reasonable nonpolitical values, we cannot easily dismiss this impediment to our own acceptance of justice as fairness.

Rawls’s positive case for justice as fairness, as formulated in his *pro tanto* justification, is question-begging; and the task of demonstrating its compatibility with reasonable comprehensive doctrines, as required by his full and public justifications, is simply deferred to the citizens who adhere to those doctrines. So Rawls can scarcely be said to have clinched his argument. It does not follow that justice as fairness is false, or that its merits cannot profitably be explored in the classroom, or that children will be unmoved by those merits; but it does follow that moral educators cannot impart public values to children by presenting them with a compelling Rawlsian argument for those values.

Conclusion

I have examined two attempts to show that rational directive cognitive moral education is compatible with the idea of reasonable moral pluralism, and found both of them wanting. Other attempts must, of course, be judged on their own terms; but it is hard to see how they could avoid the sort of difficulties besetting the two attempts considered here. Our *prima facie* objection to the compatibility thesis – that reasonable moral pluralism precludes the possibility of identifying a set of moral beliefs supported by compelling reasons and therefore capable of being rationally imparted to children – looks very much like an objection *sans*

phrase.

If this conclusion is accepted, we are left with two options. The first is to give up the enterprise of rational directive cognitive moral education. No doubt some will welcome this. By abandoning the chimera of rationally imparting moral beliefs, they will say, moral educators can better focus their energies where they belong: on the cultivation of moral sentiments and sympathies, perhaps, or on the nondirective exploration of moral theories and perspectives. But others will rue the loss of a form of moral education that promised to equip children with a set of epistemically warranted and rationally held moral beliefs.

The second option is to give up the idea of reasonable moral pluralism, at least in the form given to it by Rawls. It is not, after all, *obviously* true that the citizens of liberal polities subscribe to ‘a diversity of opposing and irreconcilable religious, philosophical and moral doctrines’ (Rawls, 1996, p.3-4). One line of thought worth pursuing here is that religion, philosophy and morality may not be quite so readily assimilable as the Rawlsian account of comprehensive doctrines implies. Perhaps it is true that we must understand the sphere of religion as splintered into a multiplicity of mutually incompatible and equally reasonable doctrinal systems; but are we obliged to understand the sphere of morality on this model? Or is it possible that moral belief and practice can and should be conceived in altogether different terms? These are large questions, and I must leave them for another occasion.

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