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## Justice and Education

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# *Justice and education*

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## abstract

In asking whether a given view about education is justified, two distinct questions arise. The first asks whether a given educational program meets its intended end. The second asks whether a given end is an appropriate one for any such program to seek. Harry Brighouse has recently argued that children should be taught the skills and methods of rational inquiry. In this article, I argue that his instrumental justification is not compelling. Independently of this, the end that Brighouse charges schools with pursuing – providing children with equal opportunity to live well – is not, I argue, justified non-instrumentally. I argue that every non-instrumental justification must be given in terms of Rawlsian public reasons and that Brighouse's is not. After establishing this, I provide such a justification for my view, which is that schools should provide children with equal opportunities for developing an ability to revise rationally conceptions of the good, in part, by teaching the skills and methods of rational inquiry. In closing, I consider communitarian-based objections to both Brighouse's view and my own, concluding that none of them succeed.

keywords *Brighouse, education, justice, public reasons, rational inquiry, Rawls*

## introduction

In thinking about what and how schools should teach children, some have looked to the needs of the state, and others to the demands of justice. Proponents of the former view recognize the importance of state stability and legitimacy and see education as an important part of the best means of achieving such ends. For example, to help achieve state stability, William Galston (1992) argues that children should be taught historical falsehoods and encouraged to hero worship the founding fathers. To promote an active citizenry, Amy Gutmann (1987) urges that children be taught the virtues of tolerance,

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and the skills of rational inquiry. Harry Brighouse (1998) recommends that schools teach such skills as well, as a means of helping to ensure state legitimacy. Proponents of the latter view see education as a means of fulfilling the requirements of justice (Brighouse, 2000). Francis Schrag (1998) and Shelly Burt (1994) argue that children have a right to an open future and that schooling should do what it can to protect this right. Harry Brighouse argues that children should have equal opportunities to live a good life, and that teaching them the skills of rational inquiry is an important part of the best means of providing it to them (1998: 729, 2000: 68).

In evaluating such views, we should ask whether they satisfy certain justification requirements. One such requirement concerns instrumental justification. A given view is instrumentally justified if and only if the educational program it recommends satisfies its intended end better than some alternative program does. For instance, one might agree with Galston that education should promote state stability, but disagree that the best means of achieving this is by teaching falsehoods (Brighouse, 1998: 724). In this article, I argue that Brighouse fails to adequately support his claim that the skills of rational inquiry are a part of the best means of providing children with equal opportunities to live a good life. I agree that children should be taught such skills, but not for the same instrumental reason as Brighouse. In my view, these skills are an important part of the best means of providing children with equal opportunities for developing an ability to rationally revise conceptions of the good.

In addition to questions about instrumental justification, there are also those related to non-instrumental justification. For instance, one might ask what justifies designing educational programs for the sake of providing children with equal opportunities for living a good life, as opposed to providing them with some other type of opportunity. This is not a question about whether some program meets its intended end, rather it is about whether some end is the appropriate one for an educational program to seek. How should this type of question be answered? I will argue that every non-instrumental justification for any given education program must be given in terms of Rawlsian public reasons and that Brighouse's proposal fails this requirement. After establishing this claim, I provide a public reason's argument for my own view.

Within views that look to the demands of justice for answers to questions about education, there is disagreement about what these demands are. It may be that there are multiple such ends, and if so, that they conflict with each other. For instance, some argue that the type of education for which I argue conflicts with the demand that children have an open future, by impugning their opportunities to choose religious ways of life (Burt, 1994; Schrag, 1998). According to communitarians, my proposal conflicts with the demand that

children be given the opportunity to form strong community bonds (MacIntyre, 1981; Sandel, 1992). In the final part of this article, I argue that my proposal does not conflict with any of these demands.

### brighthouse's argument for why children should be taught the skills of rational inquiry

1. Justice requires that individuals have equal opportunities for living well. According to Brighthouse, living well has two aspects, one concerning the content of the way of life and the other concerning the way the agent relates to it. The way of life must be good; and the person living it must endorse it 'from the inside', as it were.
2. Providing persons with the opportunity for living well requires that 'persons have some sense of what constitutes living well'.
3. 'The basic methods of rational evaluation [hereafter RI] are reliable aids to uncovering how to live well'.
4. RI can be taught in school.
5. Individuals who are not taught RI in school will not know how to utilize them as well as those who are. (It is clear that most children will not learn such skills from cultural institutions other than school, such as the family and mass media, and that persons are not 'hard-wired' with RI.)
6. Other things being equal, children who are taught RI in school will have better opportunities for living well than those who are not.
7. Teaching children RI does not conflict with other demands of justice, therefore:
8. Children should be taught RI in school. (Brighthouse, 2000: 69, 70–2)

Let us consider the instrumental part of this argument first. Given Brighthouse's conception of what it is to live well, premise (3) amounts to the claim that RI enhances opportunities for both (a) a good life and (b) a life that one endorses. There are many different views about what a good life is. Among them, however, we might identify some common elements, such as those that are necessary for any kind of life, e.g. adequate nutrition, shelter, safety, liberty, basic income, etc. The claim that RI enhances the opportunity for living well might be taken to mean that it enhances the opportunity to acquire some, most, or all of such elements. Since Brighthouse is not very clear about what a good life is, it is difficult to say which of these interpretations he has in mind. However, he does say that a life cannot be good unless it is morally good (2000: 69); and that a morally good life is one that is consistent with acceptable moral principles (Brighthouse, pers. comm.).

We will see in a moment whether RI enhances the opportunity for living

such a life. First, recall that the other part of living well, according to Brighouse, is living a life that one endorses. This concept has two parts, the first of which is that one identifies with, or takes as one's own, the values and beliefs central to one's sense of self; the second is that one lives in accord with these values and beliefs (Brighouse, 1998: 730–2, 2000: 69; Dworkin, 1989; Kymlicka, 1995).

Brighouse is not committed to the view that RI is *necessary* for living well, or to the view that it is *sufficient* for doing so. His position is rather that, for any two people S1 and S2, more often than not, S1 has a better opportunity for living well than S2 has, if, other things being equal, S1 has received an education in RI, while S2 has not. To see whether this is so, consider what kinds of skills RI includes and the capacities it provides to those who possess them. According to Brighouse (2000: 66), the skills of RI include 'methods for evaluating the truth and falsehood, or relative probability, of various claims about the world'. These methods can also help in developing the capacity to determine 'the difference between anecdotal and statistical evidence and the difference in reliability with respect to the truth' (2000: 67).

Do these skills and capacities provide better opportunities for living a moral life to those who possess them than to those who do not? RI helps one to discover what moral principles are plausible, or at least consistent with other moral principles, and to see how they apply properly to particular cases. In addition, RI assists one in learning how to evaluate moral theories, by helping one to see what their implications are, how to test them against one's moral intuitions, and how to adjust them if they conflict. Whether RI provides any advantage in motivating one to follow the moral principles and theories it helps one to discover is unclear, however. On externalist views, if S knows that P is a moral obligation, it does *not* follow that S is thereby motivated to follow P (for a discussion of this point see Brink, 1989). Moreover, even if externalism is false, from the fact that S is motivated to follow P, it does not follow that S will follow P on every occasion. Some considerations move us more strongly than others, and we are often moved by multiple considerations. For these reasons, it is not obviously true that teaching RI in school would increase the frequency of moral behavior, as Brighouse claims.

Living a life that one endorses from the inside is the other part of living well that RI purportedly helps one to achieve. An example might help to illustrate how RI can raise the probability of one living in this way. Imagine a person who either does not identify with certain of his beliefs, or if he does, does not live in accord with them. For instance, imagine that S is a homosexual teenager living in a community that prohibits homosexuality (Brighouse, 2000: 71). If S were encouraged to view his sexual beliefs and preferences as abnormalities, then, given a desire to view himself as normal, he would be disinclined to identify with them. The methods and skills of RI

may help to change this, as they would provide him with an opportunity to evaluate his community's views and arguments about homosexuality. Moreover, it is plausible to suppose that, without being taught RI in school, persons in his and similar positions will, more often than not, be less able to make these types of evaluations.

But notice that, even if S does come to identify with his sexual beliefs and preferences, he will not be living a life that he fully endorses unless he can also live in accord with them. Having the opportunity for this requires in part the opportunity to experience other communities that openly support homosexuality. Of course, the mere provision of RI does not provide this opportunity. Brighouse accepts this point, which is why his proposed curriculum includes exposure to different views about comprehensive conceptions of the good. Thus, together with RI, such a curriculum may go some way in meeting the demand that children be given an opportunity to live an endorsed life.

## on the opportunity for living well

### *An objection from public reasons*

The conclusion of Brighouse's argument – viz., that schools should teach RI – does not only depend for its success on RI being an important part of the best means of giving children an equal opportunity to live well. RI either has this property or it does not. I have argued it is not clear that it does. But if I am wrong, then Brighouse's conclusion follows only if we accept that (a) justice does demand that all have equal opportunities to live well and that (b) fulfilling this demand does not conflict with other more important demands of justice. Brighouse provides no argument for (a), which weakens his claim that children should be taught RI. One potential difficulty with any such argument however, is related to what Rawls refers to as public reasons. Here is what Rawls says about why such reasons are important:

[A] basic feature of democracy is the fact of reasonable pluralism – the fact that a plurality of conflicting reasonable comprehensive doctrines, religious, philosophical, and moral, is a result of its cultures of free institutions. Citizens realize that they cannot reach agreement or even approach mutual understanding on the basis of their irreconcilable comprehensive doctrines. In view of this, they need to consider what kinds of reasons they may reasonably give one another when fundamental political questions are at stake. I propose that in public reason comprehensive doctrines of truth or right be replaced by an idea of the politically reasonable addressed to citizens as citizens. (Rawls, 1999: 573–74)

Whether school policy is a 'fundamental political question' depends on what such questions are, which, according to Rawls, 'are of two kinds, constitutional

essentials and matter of basic justice' (1999: 575). Questions of the latter kind 'relate to the basic structure of society' (1999: 575, n. 7). Since schools are a part of the basic structure of society, certain aspects of school policy – such as those concerning the ends of a given educational regime – are matters of basic justice and so fundamental political questions. As such, every non-instrumental justification for a given type of curriculum and pedagogy should be given in terms of public reasons. Rawls defines such reasons as follows:

The idea of having public reasons be given by political values that others might endorse is the idea that such values are acceptable 'independently from comprehensive doctrines of any kind'. (1999: 584)

One reason why fundamental political questions should be settled on the basis of public reasons is pragmatic: if the plausibility of the values that form the basis of a society's constitution and basic structure do not depend on a particular conception of the good and are rationally acceptable to persons holding many divergent conceptions, then assent to those values and the civil stability which may thereby result is more likely than if the plausibility of these values did depend on a particular conception of the good that persons may reasonably reject. Another reason to rely on public reasons derives from the equal respect that justice demands the state show its citizens: if accepting the fundamental political values of a society requires some persons (but not others) to reject their reasonable comprehensive conceptions of the good, then that society has not shown its citizens equal respect, since any person's sense of identity is so closely tied with their conception of the good.

As noted, Brighouse claims that public schools should seek to provide children with equal opportunities for living well. The right to this type of equal opportunity may be one that children have. But relying on this right for the non-instrumental justification of RI education violates the requirement that such justifications be given by public reasons. This is because what it means to live well is something that figures centrally in every conception of the good. Brighouse does not say that schools should provide children with equal opportunities for living well, no matter how living well is understood. Rather, he says that living well means living a life that is both morally good and endorsed by the individual living it. Schools should work to provide children with equal opportunities for this specific kind of life, according to Brighouse. But this specific kind of life is too closely connected with a particular comprehensive doctrine to serve as a justification for an education that promotes it. Every such justification should be acceptable to persons with widely different comprehensive doctrines and understandings of what it is to live well. There are numerous ways in which these doctrines may differ. For instance, some might also hold that one cannot live well unless one lives a

morally good life, but disagree with Brighthouse that living a moral life has anything to do with the skills of rational inquiry. Others might believe that living well has nothing to do with living morally, but is primarily an issue of material comfort, or obedience to God's will. Similarly, we can easily find many comprehensive doctrines and understandings of what it is to live well that do not include the idea that life cannot be lived well unless it is endorsed by the person living it. Persons who live by such doctrines have little reason to be moved by Brighthouse's argument, which explains why it fails the public reasons requirement.

### an alternative argument for why public schools should teach rational inquiry

In my view, teaching children RI in school is an important part of the best means of giving them equal opportunities for developing an ability to rationally revise conceptions of the good. Conceptions of the good are life plans that include the ends one hopes to achieve, in addition to the values that give rise to and shape such ends. One might hope to serve the state, or to teach in a public school, believing that public service is the most valuable human activity. Persons often desire to achieve multiple long-term ends, which they rank in terms of importance, and/or feasibility. Conceptions of the good also include the means one intends to use in achieving one's ends.

Notice that conceptions of the good are subject to mistaken beliefs of various kinds, some of which can be distinguished as follows:

1. *Mistaken beliefs about the feasibility of certain ends.*

Joe believes that he will win the Tour de France this year. But he has only raced once, in an amateur event, and came in last. This was twelve years ago and he is in worse shape now than he was then. For these reasons, Joe has a mistaken belief about the feasibility of being victorious in the Tour. He can discover this by either trying the race, or by considering his physical condition and the demands of the Tour.

2. *Mistaken beliefs about the best means of achieving some end.*

Liz believes that the best means of becoming a marathon champion is to become a heavy smoker. This is a false belief, explained by the effects of smoking and the demands of being a long distance running champion. There are a number of ways for Liz to discover that her belief is false, for instance, by trying to finish a marathon after a year of heavy smoking.

3. *Mistakes about whether some end would be satisfying*

Lou believes that making a lot of money would make him happy. One way for him to discover whether this belief is true is to make a lot of money.



If he does so and finds that he is not happy, he will discover that his belief is false.

4. *Mistakes about whether one end would be more or less satisfying than another.*  
Josh enjoys his job teaching high school math but feels pulled in other directions, as there are aspects of his job he does not enjoy, such as its low pay and relatively low social rank. Over time, these negative aspects of his job push him into looking for other work. He eventually decides to become a financial analyst, as he believes that he would be more satisfied overall by life with greater social standing and income than by a life with less. However, after working as an analyst for some time, he realizes that, while he likes having the money and social capital it provides him, he would rather have less of both and go back to teaching.
5. *Mistakes about whether an end is consistent with one's values.*  
Sima believes that her greatest moral obligation is to help the most people in need that she can, consistent with maintaining a decent life, and that the best way of fulfilling this obligation is become a dancer. This activity is consistent with her obligation only if there is no other career that she could do without sacrificing a decent life and that would involve helping more people. Whether there is such a career is something that Sima can discover.

Numbers 1–5 do not represent every type of mistake that conceptions of the good may involve. Conceptions of the good also contain certain values, which are often expressed by moral judgments concerning how one ought to live. Can one have mistaken beliefs about such judgments in the way that one can be mistaken about other parts of one's conception of the good?

First, notice that there are important differences among the different types of mistakes one can make regarding one's moral values. For instance, there are (a) mistakes as to which moral theory is correct, (b) mistakes in how to apply a given theory to a particular circumstance, and (c) mistakes concerning whether any moral judgment can be true or false. Given these differences, the question as to whether one can be mistaken about one's moral values must be made more precise as to whether the mistake in question is of type (a), (b) or (c).

The reason I point out these differences is because the first premise in my argument for why children should be taught RI in school is as follows:

1. *Conceptions of the good are fallible.*

Since this premise must be defensible in terms of public reasons, it is important to emphasize that its scope is limited to those types of mistakes that are acceptable independently of any comprehensive doctrine. With respect to mistaken beliefs about moral values, the acceptability of type (b) does not depend on any such doctrine. This type of mistake does not question the fallibility of the source of one's values, but only one's ability

to properly apply that source to a given circumstance. It assumes only that human judgment of this kind is not perfect. However, (a) and (c) type mistakes may not be as acceptable in terms of public reasons. For instance, accepting type (a) would require one to also accept that the source of one's values may be mistaken. On certain comprehensive doctrines, this would not be acceptable. For example, divine command theorists can accept that they may not know on every occasion what it is that God wants them to do, but they would not accept that they should do anything other than what God says. Accepting type (c) mistakes would also be unacceptable from certain comprehensive doctrines, such as those according to which there exist true moral claims. For these reasons, my claim that conceptions of the good are fallible cannot include the claim that mistakes of type (a) and (c) are possible. However, it does include the claim that mistakes of type (b) are, in addition to those discussed earlier in (1–5). The acceptability of these mistakes does not require also accepting any comprehensive doctrine.

I will now proceed with the remainder of my argument for why children should be taught RI in schools.

2. *Having mistaken beliefs about one's conception of the good generally makes one worse off than one otherwise would be.*

The reason for this is that being so mistaken can result in misidentifying one's desires, or the means of achieving them, or, given one's values, how to live in accord with them. Of course, sometimes such mistakes might not make one worse off, if the result of satisfying one's values and/or desires were itself harmful. However, I take it that persons generally do not want to harm themselves, and that, when they do so, it is usually as a result of having a mistaken belief.

3. Individuals have an interest in detecting accurately the mistakes to which their conceptions of the good may be subject. This is because one can realize that one has a mistaken belief but fail to realize exactly what that mistake is. If mistakes generally make us worse off, then we have an interest in knowing exactly what they are.
4. Being able to correctly revise mistaken beliefs about one's conception of the good generally makes one better off than being unable to do so.
5. Individuals have an interest in being able to correctly revise the mistaken beliefs in their conceptions of the good. When one has either failed to achieve one's desires or to live in accord with one's values, it is important to understand why. But to achieve one's desires and live in accord with one's values, it is also important to understand how. The importance of this point grounds 4 and 5.

6. Individuals are not born with, but can acquire, the ability to accurately detect mistakes in their conceptions of the good and to correctly revise the beliefs that generate them; let a revision in one's conception of the good be rational if it results from the proper use of this ability.
7. The methods and skills of RI are the most reliable aids in developing this ability.
8. RI can be taught in school.
9. Teaching RI does not conflict with others' demands of justice.
10. Individuals who do not learn the methods and skills of RI in school will not possess them to the same degree as those who do.
11. Other things being equal, children who have been taught RI in school will have better opportunities for developing an ability to rationally revise conceptions of the good than children who have not been so taught.
12. Individuals should have equal opportunities for developing an ability to rationally revise conceptions of the good.
13. Therefore, children should be taught RI in school.

There are a number of possible objections to this argument. I will consider the following three. First, since children do not have conceptions of the good, it makes no sense to teach them so that that might revise them well. Second, I have not explained why 12 is a legitimate obligation of justice. Third, even if 12 is such an obligation, it conflicts with other such obligations.

Let us consider the first objection. I accept that children do not have developed conceptions of the good. However, they do have certain abilities that their education can ignore, foster, or retard. Some of these abilities are related to those they will need as adults in order to rationally evaluate the conceptions of the good they will come to possess as adults. If these abilities are ignored or retarded by their early education, then, as adults, they will be worse off than they otherwise would be, with respect to their capacity for rational evaluation. If, as I have argued, individuals have an interest in being able to make such evaluations well, then a proxy of this interest constrains how we educate children. Notice that future interests that persons currently lack often constrain how they are to be treated in the present. According to Feinberg, '[t]he interests a child has now (in basic nutrition and safety) form the basis of certain rights, the right to be free from excessive harm. But the interests a child is presumed to have in the future form the basis of certain other rights' (Feinberg, 1980: 127). Thus, from the fact that children lack a conception of the good, it does not follow that schools cannot serve the interest they will develop in being able to revise such conceptions well.

Now let us consider the second objection. The strongest reason for why teaching RI is a demand of justice is that such an education is a social primary

good, as I will now argue. The social primary goods, according to Rawls, identify part of what justice demands be provided to individuals. On the account Rawls (1971: 260) gives in *A Theory of Justice*, these are goods that 'are normally wanted as parts of rational plans of life which may include the most varied sorts of ends'.<sup>1</sup> According to Rawls, these all purpose means are given by the choices a rational person would make from behind a veil of ignorance, which allows knowledge that one will have a conception of the good but not of (a) what it will be, nor (b) what one's initial starting place in society will be, nor (c) what one's natural assets and abilities will be (1971: 12). According to Rawls (1971: 408–15), a rational person is a person whose choices follow certain rules of rational choice, such as the maximin rule. However, Buchanan (1975) argues that we ought to understand persons in the original position as being rational in an additional sense, which makes it rational to have a certain attitude, which he defines as follows:

R: One ought, *ceteris paribus*, to maintain an attitude of critical revisability toward one's own conception of the good (or life plan) and of openmindedness toward competing conceptions. (1975: 399)

Buchanan's justification for R rests on the view – similar to my own discussed above – that conceptions of the good are fallible.

If one has a certain life plan or conception of the good and if one is rational, then one will realize that the acceptability of that conception, like the acceptability of a theory, is conditional on many factors. One will realize that conception construction, like theory-construction, is a fallible enterprise. One will realize that one's life plan or conception of the good may eventually require serious modification, perhaps even abandonment, in the face of a successor-conception. No matter how unlikely one thinks it to be that one's conception of the good will turn out to be mistaken, one must nonetheless view one's conception as revisable in principle. (1975: 399)

Buchanan's view, like my own, is that subscribing to this idea does not require anything more than accepting that, with respect to one's conception of the good, one may have to revise: 'i. one's beliefs about the feasibility of certain goals, ii. one's belief as to what is the most efficient means to a certain end, iii. one's beliefs about what one will find satisfying, or iv., one's beliefs that a certain activity will lead to further satisfying pursuits' (1975: 400).

If it is rational for persons in the original position to follow R, then Buchanan (1975) thinks that it is also rational for them to follow these two principles:

Re: One ought, *ceteris paribus*, to attempt to satisfy the epistemic conditions necessary for the effective expressions of an attitude of critical revisability. (pp. 399, 401)

Ri: One ought, *ceteris paribus*, to attempt to provide for the implementation of those new or revised conceptions of the good which one may develop (as a result of one's commitment to R and Re). (p. 402)

According to Buchanan, a commitment to R, Re, and Ri best explain why persons in the original position would choose the primary goods that Rawls predicts would be chosen:

Once it is seen that the preference for Rawls' primary goods is based on the fact that these goods are either (a) conditions for the pursuit of ends in general, or (b) maximally flexible assets, and hence required for implementing whatever new or modified conceptions one may develop (Ri), or (c) required for rationally formulating and criticizing one's conception (Re), then the claim that the preference for primary good is arbitrary is seen to be quite spurious. The best justification for the strong preference for primary goods is that this preference is required by certain principles of rationality, specifically, R, Re, and Ri. (p. 405)

As noted, Rawls characterizes persons in the original position as having an interest in advancing their conceptions of the good. Buchanan urges that we understand this as an interest in advancing their conceptions '*in a critical way*' (1975: 406, emphasis in original) which explains they should be viewed as committed to R, Re, and Ri.

If these principles pick out what goods are social primary goods, then an education that includes RI is also a social primary good. Such an education is part of what Re requires, since Re picks out those goods 'required for rationally formulating and criticizing one's conception [of the good]' (1975: 405). An education that includes the teaching of RI would not be required for this end if persons were either hard-wired to be rational evaluators, or if public institutions outside of the school reliably supplied the teaching of RI. But as noted earlier, neither of these claims is true. Of course, an education that includes the teaching of RI is not all that's required by Re. In addition, according to Buchanan, Re requires 'freedom of speech, thought, and religion' (1971: 404).

One difficulty in saying that the provision of RI is a social primary good is that Rawls himself does not say this. But this is because Rawls does not characterize persons in the original position as Buchanan suggests. My claim about RI education being a social primary good depends in part on accepting Buchanan's suggestion. That Buchanan's suggestion is plausible depends in part on the plausibility of his claims about conceptions of the good being fallible and rationally revisable. I have argued with Buchanan that both of these claims are plausible. If these arguments succeed, then RI education should be considered a social primary good.

Another way of seeing why Rawls' theory supports the provision of an education that includes the teaching of RI is to look carefully at what he does say about public education, which is as follows:

[C]hildren's education [should] include such things as knowledge of their constitutional and civic rights so that, for example, they know that liberty of conscience exists in their

society and that apostasy is not a legal crime, all this to insure that their continued membership when they come of age is not based simply on ignorance of their basic rights or fear of punishment that does not exist. Moreover, their education should prepare them to be fully cooperating members of society and enable them to be self-supporting. (1999: 464)

Nothing in my argument for RI impugns this type of education. That Rawls does not say here that RI should be a part of schooling does not imply that his theory does not yield this conclusion. To see how it does, notice that this passage expresses a concern with 'membership' (i.e. within a community), and with being a 'cooperating member of society'. I will now argue that both of these concerns imply that children should be taught RI.

Consider Rawls' concern with 'membership'. This is a concern that persons born within a particular community are not effectively coerced or manipulated into remaining members as adults. Now, there are many ways in which a person may be coerced or manipulated into remaining a member of a community. Rawls mentions one, which is ignorance of one's legal rights. If Simon believes that he has no legal right to leave the Branch Davidians – because this is what they have told him – his remaining a member of that community is a result of coercion and manipulation. But being kept ignorant of one's legal rights is not the only way a person may be coerced or manipulated. If Simon also believes that whatever David Koresh say is true, then, if Koresh tells him that God's wrath will fall upon him for leaving, he has been coerced and manipulated into staying. We should be as concerned that persons are less susceptible to this type of manipulation and coercion as they are to being kept ignorant of their legal rights, and for similar reasons: the ignorance that ensues from the former cause can make one's membership within a given community as troubling as that which ensues from the latter cause. If children should receive an education that includes the teaching of their legal rights then they should also receive one that includes RI, since such an education would increase our confidence that community membership was not based on coercion and manipulation.

The second concern that Rawls believes education helps to address is that children have opportunities for being fully cooperating members of society. This concern is an expression of a more general one that children be provided with fair equality of opportunity, which is a principle that impugns preventable inequalities of opportunity that arise from factors for which persons are not responsible. One thing for which no child is responsible is the type of education he or she receives. Moreover, how children are educated significantly affects their future opportunities. Thus, inequalities of opportunity that result from how persons are educated are unjust. To avoid this injustice, education must seek to provide children with what they need in order to have normal opportunities of becoming cooperative members of society.

To see why such an education should include RI, consider the fact of reasonable value pluralism and the fact of dispositional pluralism, which are defined as follows:

*Reasonable value pluralism:* In a liberal society, there exist a number of incompatible and reasonable conceptions of the good. A conception of the good is incompatible with another if it cannot be instantiated in the same life, over the same period of time (Raz, 1986). For example, it may be that one cannot live a life committed to physical activity and one committed to intellectual pursuits. A conception of the good is reasonable if it does not violate established principles of justice (Rawls, 1999).

*Dispositional pluralism:* Individuals are either born with or develop different types of dispositions that suit them well or ill for different sorts of lives distinguishable according to the conceptions of the good they respectively embody (Brighouse, 2000). For instance, some have dispositions well suited for a life of contemplation in relative isolation from others. Others have dispositions well suited for a life of intense physical activity.

One consequence of these two types of pluralism is there may be conflict between the conception of the good one is born into, and the disposition one is born with or develops. This is a concern of equality of opportunity for the following reason: other things being equal, for any two individuals S1 and S2, if S1's disposition fairs poorly and S2's fairs well within an available range of conceptions of the good, then S1 and S2 face unequal opportunities. They face unequal opportunities because fairing poorly is debilitating psychologically and otherwise.

The skills of RI can assist those who possess them in (a), evaluating different conceptions of the good in terms of how well or ill they are suited for one's own disposition, and (b) in learning how to exit a given conception well. As an illustration of what it is to exit a given conception well, Brighouse invites us to imagine two persons – say S and P – who both exit from their parent's religion (Brighouse, 1998: 743). S does so with bitterness and rancour, while P does so with neither, but rather with a better understanding of why she chose to leave and of what she chose to adopt. The bitterness and rancor that S feels may negatively affect his relationship with his parents, which may in turn have adverse affects on his psychology, rendering his opportunities inferior to P, whose exit affects her parental relationship less adversely. Brighouse claims, I think correctly, that:

[a]utonomy-facilitating [i.e. RI] education might *mitigate* the tendency of former believers to bitterness, so that when people abandon their parents' way of life for another they do so not irrationally and with resentment, but with a cool appreciation of the good and bads of both. It may help to salvage aspects of the relationships between the defectors and their parents, the good of which relationship motivates some skepticism about autonomy-facilitating education. (1998: 743)

Brighouse also claims of those who never received such an education that:

[s]uch children are doubly disadvantaged, having been less well prepared for the complex demands of modern economies than other children, and having lost, in many cases, the security which comes from good relationships with parents continuing into adulthood, and the sense that short-term failures will be mitigated by parental support. (1998: 743)

As noted, the education that any child receives is not something for which they can be held responsible. In addition, how a child is educated has significant effects on his or her opportunities. Finally, some types of education do better than others in providing children with the sorts of normal opportunities that Rawls believes justice demands each individual should possess. For these reasons, justice demands the provision of that kind of education that best delivers these normal opportunities. I have argued that the teaching of RI is an essential element of any such education.

Before considering objections to this type of education that affect both Brighouse's argument and my own, let me summarize. I have argued that Buchanan's characterization of the type of rationality that should guide how persons in the original position choose the social primary goods is plausible and yields an education that includes the teaching of RI; while Rawls does not say this, I see no reason why he should not. In addition, I have argued that a proper understanding of what he does say about public education yields the conclusion that justice demands children receive an RI education.

### two objections to an education that includes the teaching of rational inquiry

Brighouse's argument and my own are committed to the view that educational policy must be guided by considerations about what children are owed as a matter of justice. If providing the type of education we recommend conflicts with other things that justice owes children, then there is at least a *prima facie* reason to deny children this type of education. Consider two such possible conflicts: first, that RI education conflicts with the demand that children have opportunities for religious ways of life; and second, that it conflicts with the demand that children have opportunities to become committed members of communities. What distinguishes these two objections is that one can be religious without also being a part of a community, in addition to the fact that many community memberships do not also require professions of religious faith. The following strategies are available for dealing with these potential conflicts. First, agree that they exist and argue for a resolution in favor of or against RI education. Second, reject that there's a conflict, either (a), because



justice does not owe children either type of opportunity, or (b), if it does, because an RI education does not conflict with fulfilling either. I will now argue for this last position.

The first objection is well developed by Shelly Burt, according to whom:

Certain of these [religious] lives may depend for their possibility on not being exposed too early or too insistently to secular alternatives, [so that] if children are truly to have the choice of a strong religious faith, their early contact with the pluralistic and secular values of modern society must be guarded against and carefully supervised. (Quoted in Brighouse, 1998: 740)

There are at least two reasons to be concerned that children do have opportunities for living religious ways of life. First, living one may be an important part of having a healthy relationship with one's parents, which is a relationship that can have significant impacts on one's opportunities. Second, such ways of life may be best for some children independently of how living one affects their parental relations. So the question is whether receiving an education that includes RI threatens such opportunities.

Notice that one of Burt's worries is that children not be exposed to the 'pluralistic and secular values of modern society'. On her view, such values include materialism and commercialism. Burt's worry that children taught to adopt such values would be disinclined to adopt religious values and ways of life that denigrate them may well be correct. But an education that includes RI need not be an education that also teaches children to value materialism and commercialism. Moreover RI is a method, and not a substantive value such as materialism (see Brighouse, 1998: 728, for a similar point). Commercialism and materialism are, as used by Burt, doctrines that overtly value certain ways of life over others. RI is not like this. The skills and methods of rational inquiry do not imply that certain ways of life are better than others. Such methods and skills tell us what means to choose, given our ends, and not what ends we should choose.

Even if teaching children RI has the unintended effect of making them believe that only rational lives are valuable, being rational is compatible with being religious. Suppose that being rational means adopting only those beliefs that are supported by reason. Suppose further that there is no evidential reason to believe that God exists. This does *not* imply that there is no reason to believe in God. In addition to evidential reasons for believing that P, there are also prudential reasons for doing so. For example, if S's happiness depends on leading a religious life, then, given a desire to be happy, being rational implies that S should choose a religious way of life.

Moreover, providing religious children with an RI education may actually protect their opportunity for remaining religious better than not doing so would, to the extent that defections from religious ways of life are often the

result of misunderstanding the attraction of secular, commercialist culture. For these reasons, I conclude that non-religious children who learn RI in school are not thereby less likely to choose religious ways of life as adults. In addition, religious children receiving such an education may thereby be less likely to leave their religions than they would be were they not to receive such an education.

The second objection is closely related to a standard objection that communitarians have made against Rawlsian Liberals, according to which the type of person that Liberalist political philosophy encourages to flourish undermines the sort of commitment that community membership involves.<sup>2</sup> This is the person who, viewing herself as detachable from her ends, subjects these ends to critical scrutiny. According to many communitarians there are two problems with this picture. First, it assumes falsely that 'the self is given prior to its ends' (Sandel, 1984: 163). Second, it erodes the opportunity for community membership.

For the sake of argument, let us assume that justice demands children have an opportunity for community membership. If these objections are sound, they may provide reasons against any education that includes the teaching of RI. For such an education may also seem to presuppose that the self is given prior to its ends, and also encourage persons to subject their ends to critical scrutiny.

There are a number of possible responses to these objections. First, one could argue either that the self is detachable from its ends, or if it is not, that nothing in RI education requires it to be. Second, that the opportunity for community membership does not require anything that an RI education erodes. Consider the first response. Let us now assume that the self is not detachable from its ends. There is nothing in either RI education or my public reason type of justification for it that presupposes otherwise. My justification of RI does include the premise that conceptions of the good are fallible. But this idea does not require accepting the view that the self is detachable from *all* of its ends simultaneously. Individuals often identify themselves with multiple ends. In such cases, they can partially detach themselves from one in order to critically see another. For instance, S may be committed both to her religious community and to her philosophical one, such that the values of each figure prominently in the ends she has chosen to pursue. Being able to distance herself from one set of values may enable her to view critically those of the other. Moreover, scrutinizing critically the ends and values of one's life need not require that one be able to *fully* detach oneself from these ends and values. I do not see any problem in both maintaining a commitment to the value of say, pursuing a career in philosophy, and simultaneously questioning whether I should continue doing so. For these reasons, I conclude that the first

communitarian objection does not undermine the provision of a public education that includes the teaching of RI.

The second communitarian objection assumes that community membership requires something that RI education threatens. Buchanan summarizes this communitarian argument as follows:

Community requires commitment, but commitment is not an attachment one can simply freely choose to sever. Any attachment that one freely chooses, one can freely choose to sever. For liberal man all attachments are freely chosen. Therefore, liberal man is incapable of commitment and, being incapable of commitment, is barred from community. (1999: 868)

The reason this argument may impugn RI education is that a communitarian may see individuals becoming this type of 'liberal man' as a predictable outcome of any such education. But even if this is so, it does not follow that such 'men' don't have opportunities to become community members. To see why, we should note the distinction Buchanan (1999: 871) draws between commitment on the one hand, and 'blind obsession, wholly non-rational attachment, [and] instinctual bonding' on the other. It may be that those who have received an RI education are less susceptible to these latter types of attachment than are those who have not received one. It may also be that these latter types of attachments form the basis of commitments that are stronger than commitments based on different types of attachments. If the attachments of individuals who have received an RI education are ones from which they feel separable, however, this does not mean that they cannot form strong commitments to various sorts of community. Moreover, the strength of a given commitment is far less important than how well it was formed. For instance, some commitments are formed on the basis of ignorance, manipulation, or coercion, and often, to unsavoury ends. In such cases, being weakly committed is good, as is being able to scrutinize critically the ends to which one is committed, which is an ability that RI education helps to develop.

## conclusion

Brighouse and I agree that children should be taught RI in school, but for different reasons. I have argued that the reasons Brighouse offers are subject to the following two objections: first, RI may not effectively provide children with equal opportunities for living well; second, even it does, providing equal opportunities for living well is not an appropriate end for schools to seek. My own argument for RI substitutes this end with another – viz., the equal opportunity to rationally revise one's conception of the good. I have argued that the justification for why schools should seek this end is supported by public reasons and that the type of education which best serves it is a social primary good.

Of the objections that affect both Brighouse's argument and my own, I have concluded that none suffice to undermine our claim that RI should be taught in school.

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notes

1. The account Rawls gives in *Political Liberalism* (1996), which is different from that in *A Theory of Justice* (1971), does not affect my proposal, as will become clear. According to his account in *Political Liberalism*, the social primary goods are determined 'by asking which things are generally necessary as social conditions and all-purpose means to enable human being to realize and exercise their moral powers' (p. 527), one of which is the 'capacity to form, to revise, and rationally to pursue a conception of the good' (Rawls, 1980: 525).
2. For a development of this objection see MacIntyre (1981) and Sandel (1992).

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