

## COMPULSORY AUTONOMY-PROMOTING EDUCATION

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**ABSTRACT.** Today, many liberal philosophers of education worry that certain kinds of education may frustrate the development of personal autonomy, with negative consequences for the individuals concerned, the liberal state, or both. Autonomy liberals hold not only that we should promote the development of autonomy in children, but also that this aim should be compulsory for all schools, private or public, religious or nonreligious. In this article, Anders Schinkel provides a systematic overview, categorization, and analysis of liberal arguments for compulsory autonomy-promoting education. He finds that none of these arguments can justify compulsory autonomy-promoting education, whether because they depend on empirical evidence that is not available, because they have as their basis an overly demanding concept of autonomy, or because they are intrinsically flawed in some way or another. Schinkel concludes with some suggestions as to what this means for the direction future research should take.

Schools are and always will be a *politicum*.<sup>1</sup>

Were the best formed state in the world to be fixed in its present condition, I make no doubt that in a course of time it would be the worst.<sup>2</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

Various developments in different Western countries have resulted in a (re)surfacing of similar worries among educationalists and philosophers of education — developments such as the advent of new types of faith-based schooling in Western Europe (mostly Islamic schools, but also Sikh schools in Great Britain), the increasing strength of the homeschooling movement and of calls for a school voucher system in the United States, support for teaching creationism or intelligent design next to the theory of evolution (especially in the United States), and a perceived growth of religious fundamentalism. A major concern is that some kinds of education may frustrate the development of personal autonomy, with negative consequences for the individuals concerned and the liberal state.<sup>3</sup> Autonomy liberals and like-minded authors (such as Eamonn Callan, Amy Gutmann, Meira Levinson, John White, Ian MacMullen, and Joel Feinberg<sup>4</sup>)

1. Maria Theresa (1770), quoted in Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (Harlow: Longman, 1995), 122.

2. Joseph Priestley (1771), quoted in Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* (London: Penguin Books, 2001), 346.

3. Although both the terms “education” and “schooling” are used, the authors I discuss generally emphasize schooling (as opposed to child-rearing), and this is usually what they mean by “education.”

4. Eamonn Callan, *Creating Citizens: Political Education and Liberal Democracy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Eamonn Callan, “Liberal Legitimacy, Justice, and Civic Education,” *Ethics* 111, no. 1 (2000): 141–155; Amy Gutmann, “Civic Education and Social Diversity,” *Ethics* 105, no. 3 (1995): 557–579; Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999); Meira

hold not only that we should promote the development of autonomy in children, but also that this aim should be compulsory for all schools, private or public, religious or nonreligious.<sup>5</sup> Levinson, for instance, argues “that the liberal ideal of autonomy not merely permits but *requires* the intrusion of the state into the child’s life, specifically in the form of compulsory liberal schooling.”<sup>6</sup> White states that “in an autonomy-supporting society *all* children must be protected against true believers who wish to impose on them a non-autonomous conception of the good life.”<sup>7</sup> And Feinberg writes that “the state can’t properly select the influences that are best for a child; it can only insist that all public influences be kept open, that *all children* through accredited schools become acquainted with a great variety of facts and diversified accounts and evaluations of the myriad human arrangements in the world and in history.”<sup>8</sup>

In this article I provide a comprehensive overview, categorization, and analysis of liberal arguments for compulsory autonomy-promoting education.<sup>9</sup> I provide a systematic overview of the arguments in the next section, and I follow that with a section focused on the adequacy of each of these arguments. My conclusion, in the final section, will be that none of the arguments can justify compulsory autonomy-promoting education. I end with some suggestions about the directions of future research on the subject.

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Levinson, *The Demands of Liberal Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); John White, *Education and the Good Life* (London: Kogan Page, 1990); Ian MacMullen, *Faith in Schools! Autonomy, Citizenship, and Religious Education in the Liberal State* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007); and Joel Feinberg, “The Child’s Right to an Open Future,” in *Whose Child? Children’s Rights, Parental Authority, and State Power*, ed. William Aiken and Hugh LaFollette (Totowa, New Jersey: Adams, 1980), 124–153, reprinted in Michael D.A. Freeman, *Children’s Rights*, vol. I (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2004), 213–242.

5. “Autonomy liberals” are distinguished from “diversity liberals” on the basis of the central value each type of liberal aims to protect (following Ben Spiecker, Doret de Ruyter, and Jan Steutel, “Taking the Right to Exit Seriously,” *Theory and Research in Education* 4, no. 3 [2006]: 313–327). Callan’s position is somewhat ambiguous. Some things he writes tend toward support for compulsory autonomy-promoting education, but certain remarks in *Creating Citizens* and “Liberal Legitimacy, Justice, and Civic Education” suggest that he favors a less intrusive approach, which would make him a moderate autonomy liberal. Also, I speak of “like-minded authors” here because White and Feinberg were not part of the debate between autonomy liberals and diversity liberals, and because Gutmann’s primary focus is not on autonomy but on civic education (see MacMullen, *Faith in Schools!* 24ff).

6. Levinson, *The Demands of Liberal Education*, 58.

7. White, *Education and the Good Life*, 105.

8. Feinberg, “The Child’s Right to an Open Future,” 139 (emphasis added).

9. In using the term “autonomy-promoting education” I do not mean to suggest anything about the possibility of there being an effective form of autonomy-promoting education; the term is merely intended to convey the *idea* of an education (in particular, a form of schooling) that promotes the autonomy of the children hereby educated — an idea autonomy liberals tend to believe in.

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Much of this article has a critical tone. Therefore, it is probably best to put my cards on the table right at the beginning. My aim is not to defend any particular form of “illiberal” education. Autonomy liberals often target (orthodox) religious education, and I can understand this to some extent. But it seems to me that they tend to leave too little room for the possibility of forms of education that do *not* educate for autonomy as they understand it, but can still be seen — from a less radical perspective than that of autonomy liberals — as acceptable, if not commendable, forms of education. My hope is that this article will provoke autonomy liberals (and others) to rethink why what kind of autonomy matters.

#### LIBERAL ARGUMENTS FOR COMPULSORY AUTONOMY-PROMOTING EDUCATION

In liberal theory three ways of defending the idea of compulsory autonomy-promoting education can be found.<sup>10</sup> It is defended on the ground that

- I. it is in the interest of the collective (society, the state);
- II. it is in the interest of the individual; and
- III. autonomy is intrinsically valuable.<sup>11</sup>

An additional criterion is of course that the collective or individual interest and the intrinsic value should trump other interests and values, so that autonomy-promoting education can be seen not only as ideal but also as something that should be and can legitimately be made compulsory for all schools.

Of the first ground there can be three versions:

- Ia. it is *necessary* for the *preservation* of the collective (society, the state) or its current form;<sup>12</sup>

10. Some of these (and their variants) are listed in Roni Aviram and Yossi Yonah, “‘Flexible Control’: Towards a Conception of Personal Autonomy for Postmodern Education,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 36, no. 1 (2004): 3–16; and Jan Steutel and Ben Spiecker, “Liberalism and Critical Thinking: On the Relation Between a Political Ideal and an Aim of Education,” in *The Aims of Education*, ed. Roger Marples (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 61–73.

11. I should note that the “it” here refers both to autonomy and to compulsory autonomy-promoting education. There is of course a gap between, for instance, the necessity of people’s being autonomous and the necessity of compulsory autonomy-promoting education. The latter does not simply follow from the former, as some authors acknowledge (for example, Levinson, *The Demands of Liberal Education*, 47; and MacMullen, *Faith in Schools?* chap. 5). I will not discuss this gap here, but assume that arguments adduced to support autonomy and merely assumed to support compulsory autonomy-promoting education can indeed be suitably supplemented to do the latter.

12. The distinction between a necessity for the preservation of the collective and a necessity for the preservation of the collective *in its current form* is not coincident with the distinction (introduced subsequently) between a particularist and a universalist interpretation of a necessity for the preservation of the collective. To say that “in our kind of society” something is necessary for the preservation of the collective (whether society or the state) is not the same as saying that something is necessary for the preservation of the collective in its current form; although the latter is very likely to refer to a particular society and thus to be a particularist statement, the former can relate both to the preservation of the collective in its current form *and* to the preservation of the collective as such, for which in a particular kind of society specific measures may need to be taken.

- Ib. it is somehow *better* for the collective (for example, because it increases the chances of "survival," because it improves the average quality of life, or because it benefits the economy); or
- Ic. it is *necessary* for the *legitimacy* of (liberal) political authority.

Of the second, there are two versions:

- IIa. it is *necessary* for individual flourishing; or
- IIb. it will/may/is likely to *contribute to* individual flourishing.

Moreover, in the case of I and II we may distinguish between a *universalist* and a *particularist* interpretation. All variants of I and II may be qualified

- in a *particularist* way (P): by reference to "our kind of society" (in which it is necessary, or better, to be autonomous); or
- in a *universalist* way (U): by saying that for any collective/individual, at any time or place, it is necessary, or better, that individuals are autonomous.

Finally, for II, there is a second way in which we may distinguish between *universalist* and *particularist* interpretations: IIa and IIb may draw attention to the necessity or advantage of autonomy for individual flourishing

- on a particular (liberal) conception of flourishing (p);
- on any conception of flourishing (u).

The authors I discuss in this article together occupy most, though not all, of these positions. Laying out all the logically possible positions helps to clarify what positions are actually held. In addition, one gains a clearer view of the grounds on which compulsory autonomy-promoting education is defended when the grounds excluded by these are also shown. For instance, although I have on several occasions encountered IIaPu (stating that in our kind of society autonomy-promoting education is necessary for individual flourishing, whatever one's conception of flourishing), I have not seen anyone defending IIaUu. Yet it is important to explicate the difference between particularist (P) and universalist (U) interpretations of I and II, so as to prevent certain basic assumptions to slide out of view. Not all authors are equally explicit in saying that they take their argument to hold "in our kind of society." But this qualification is highly important, for it raises questions of justification that a universalist argument (if it could be sustained) would not raise: it may be necessary or better to be autonomous in our kind of society, but why should our kind of society not be allowed to change such that it is no longer necessary or better to be autonomous in it? The systematic completion of the preceding scheme, then, should aid the clarity of the analysis of liberal arguments for compulsory autonomy-promoting education.

Here are a number of examples of the positions taken by various autonomy liberals and like-minded authors. White, following Joseph Raz, supports a particularist (in the first sense) and universalist (in the second sense) interpretation

of IIa; thus, he holds that in our kind of society autonomy (and compulsory autonomy-promoting education) is necessary for individual flourishing, whatever one's conception of flourishing.<sup>13</sup> Callan defends a universalist interpretation of Ic, in the sense that for him no regime is legitimate unless it is based on the free consent of autonomous citizens with a sense of justice.<sup>14</sup> Callan also defends III.<sup>15</sup> Feinberg defends a Pu version of IIa, arguing that

the state can't properly select the influences that are best for a child; it can only insist that all public influences be kept open, that all children through accredited schools become acquainted with a great variety of facts and diversified accounts and evaluations of the myriad human arrangements in the world and in history.<sup>16</sup>

This way, the state would protect the child's "right to an open future," which is an "anticipatory autonomy right," connected with the child's (and future adult's) good, understood in terms of self-fulfillment.<sup>17</sup> Levinson defends a particularist version of Ic (that is, in our kind of society — a liberal democracy — it is necessary for political legitimacy that people are autonomous; she may very well believe that a liberal regime is the only legitimate kind of regime, but she does not argue for that, nor does she argue for "an independent justification for liberal theory or principles").<sup>18</sup> MacMullen puts forward a Pu interpretation of IIb.<sup>19</sup> In "Civic Education and Social Diversity," Gutmann is concerned with the accommodation of social diversity through civic education as conceived by political liberalism and comprehensive liberalism, but her argument also gives (indirect) support for compulsory autonomy-promoting education. It is probably best characterized as a particularist (P) interpretation of Ia. When she writes that "any defensible standard of civic education must be committed to prepare children for the rights and responsibilities of citizenship even over the opposition of their

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13. White, *Education and the Good Life*, chap. 6; and Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986). Raz's justification of the centrality afforded to the ideal of autonomy in contemporary political theory has been highly influential. For an insightful discussion of his arguments, see John Gray, "Mill's Liberalism and Liberalism's Posterity," *Journal of Ethics* 4, nos. 1–2 (2000): 156–163.

14. Although Callan does not explicitly argue that there is only one way for a political regime to be legitimate, he also does not merely assume the liberal account of legitimacy (as Levinson does) but argues for it and criticizes alternatives: "A theory of legitimacy that permits the state to condition consent in ways that circumvent or stunt citizens' capacity for autonomous choice and reflection is a signally inept way of trying to accommodate anyone's misgivings about governmental overreaching" (Callan, "Liberal Legitimacy, Justice, and Civic Education," 152). In chap. 5 of *Creating Citizens* Callan argues against William Galston's view of civic education and the appearance of legitimacy a regime will have in the eyes of its citizens educated along those lines. Hence, I see Callan's interpretation of Ic as closer to universalist (U) rather than particularist (P).

15. See especially Eamonn Callan, "Autonomy, Child-Rearing, and Good Lives," in *The Moral and Political Status of Children*, ed. David Archard and Colin M. Macleod (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 118–141. Compare with White, *Education and the Good Life*, 95–96.

16. Feinberg, "The Child's Right to an Open Future," 228.

17. *Ibid.*, 143ff.

18. Levinson, *The Demands of Liberal Education*, 6 and 14–22.

19. MacMullen, *Faith in Schools!* 4 and 88.

parents," she assumes the context of a liberal democracy. She thus concludes that "teaching toleration, mutual respect, and deliberation... supports the widest range of social diversity that is consistent with the ongoing pursuit of liberal democratic justice."<sup>20</sup> Gutmann's concern with the preservation of this kind of society is evident here, as when she points out that "[John] Rawls's standards [of civic education] are meant to be the minimum necessary to create and sustain a fully just society."<sup>21</sup> Her support for compulsory autonomy-promoting education derives from her belief that "the same skills and virtues that are necessary and sufficient for educating children for citizenship in a liberal democracy are those that are also necessary and sufficient for educating children to deliberate about their way of life" and that "in liberal political practice" there is "little difference between educating for citizenship and educating for individuality or autonomy."<sup>22</sup>

There is not always a big difference between Ia and Ic, because liberal legitimacy is said to require more than the free consent of autonomous citizens:

An egalitarian sense of justice is intrinsic to the hypothetical perspective from which legitimacy or illegitimacy is discerned, and given the educational relevance of the values which constitute that perspective, they must also be cultivated among those who would create or sustain a society in which legitimacy is achieved.<sup>23</sup>

Liberal legitimacy requires autonomous citizens with a sense of justice, but liberal legitimacy as defined in the preceding quotation is not really the final end, for that is rather a particular kind of society (the kind in which legitimacy is achieved). Hence, if autonomy is said to be required for liberal legitimacy (Ic), it could also be said to be necessary to "create or sustain" a certain (ideal) kind of society (Ia).<sup>24</sup>

It is worth noting, to conclude, that the same scheme can be used to categorize liberal defenses of autonomy-*facilitating* education (as in the work of Harry Brighouse, who supports this by means of IIbPu), of autonomy as a noncompulsory educational ideal, and of (compulsory) civic education.<sup>25</sup>

#### OBJECTIONS TO LIBERAL ARGUMENTS FOR COMPULSORY AUTONOMY-PROMOTING EDUCATION

Serious objections can be leveled against all of the preceding arguments, objections that in my view suffice to discredit any claim that the state would be justified in making autonomy-promoting education mandatory for all schools (or education outside school, for that matter). My claim is that the arguments adduced

20. Gutmann, "Civic Education and Social Diversity," 567 and 579.

21. Ibid., 567. Gutmann leans toward a universalist (U) interpretation of Ia here.

22. Ibid., 573.

23. Callan, "Liberal Legitimacy, Justice, and Civic Education," 149.

24. Compare with Harry Brighouse, "Civic Education and Liberal Legitimacy," *Ethics* 108, no. 4 (1998): 723–725.

25. Brighouse, "Civic Education and Liberal Legitimacy"; and Harry Brighouse, "Channel One, the Anti-Commercial Principle, and the Discontinuous Ethos," *Educational Policy* 19, no. 3 (2005): 528–549.

by autonomy liberals so far are not sufficient to justify compulsory autonomy-promoting education. This leaves open the possibility that there are better arguments; however, I cannot think of any satisfactory ones that retain the liberal conception of autonomy. I do *not* wish to defend the claim here that it is irrational or incoherent to favor autonomy-promoting education as a nonmandatory ideal (even though I still believe the arguments enumerated previously require serious revision to support such an ideal). The difference between favoring autonomy-promoting education as an ideal and advocating *compulsory* autonomy-promoting education is obviously important. In a liberal democracy especially, the latter requires significantly stronger support. It needs to be strong enough to override the presumption against state interference with the freedom (religious or otherwise) of its citizens, and the fundamental individual and collective (that is, group) rights underlying this presumption. This is why Callan addresses the concern that civic education and autonomy-promoting education might be at odds with the idea that “a liberal conception of legitimacy should be crafted to protect the many lives consistent with the basic rights of others that people choose under conditions of pluralism.”<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, whereas someone defending the ideal of autonomy-promoting education may freely use arguments deriving from his or her particular comprehensive conception of the good life, this option is not equally open to those arguing for compulsory autonomy-promoting education. To justify its being compulsory for all people, regardless of their comprehensive conceptions of the good life, on the basis of one particular such conception, is not a satisfactory line of argument.<sup>27</sup> (We will see further on that this is one ground for objecting to some of the liberal arguments for compulsory autonomy-promoting education.) This is also MacMullen’s position: “Whether one believes in pluralism as a metaphysical fact or merely as the inevitable and permanent inability of human reason to settle the major questions of ethics, the state cannot justify its actions by invoking a particular conception of the good life about which there will always be reasonable disagreement.”<sup>28</sup> This spells trouble for all justifications of compulsory autonomy-promoting education that in any way rely on the intrinsic value of autonomy or some other ideal. For liberals, these should be ruled out *a priori*, whereas instrumental arguments cannot be dismissed before assessing the evidence — assuming that some evidence is provided.

To advocate compulsory autonomy-promoting education need not entail that one would endorse the use of *any* means, however intrusive or violent, to realize its inclusion in the curricula of all schools,<sup>29</sup> but it certainly entails more than

26. Callan, “Liberal Legitimacy, Justice, and Civic Education,” 150.

27. Consider Gray, “Mill’s Liberalism and Liberalism’s Posterity,” 158: “The problem for a perfectionist liberalism. . . is that of accounting for the authority of the ideal of human character and of life which they contain.”

28. MacMullen, *Faith in Schools*: 92.

29. Callan is perhaps the most cautious of the authors discussed; see *Creating Citizens*, 44, and “Liberal Legitimacy, Justice, and Civic Education,” 152–153.



mere support for autonomy as an educational aim. All of the authors discussed in this article hold that *all* schools should educate *all* children for autonomy. Some (like Levinson) are more explicit than others about what this entails in terms of state coercion. Of the objections I offer subsequently, only some of those to arguments Ib and IIb relate to the advocacy of coercion or strong intervention, and this only in part. For the rest, all arguments pertain to those who advocate, even if only in principle, that the state should require all schools to include autonomy-promoting education in the curriculum — which includes all authors discussed here — and many would also apply to authors who merely favor autonomy-promoting education as an ideal, or (like Brighouse) prefer autonomy-facilitating education.

### THE CONCEPT OF AUTONOMY

So far, we have looked at liberal arguments for compulsory autonomy-promoting education without attending to what autonomy liberals tend to mean by “autonomy.” Before we move on to the objections to their arguments, it is best to look into this briefly.<sup>30</sup> What we might call the “standard” liberal conception of autonomy — shared by different kinds of liberals, including some autonomy liberals — singles out critical reflection as the key characteristic of personal autonomy. To be autonomous, in this view, is to be able to critically reflect on one’s preferences, values, and commitments, including the most basic, so that one can consciously affirm, reject, or revise them. Thus, Brighouse writes that “broadly speaking, the capacities involved in critical reflection help us to live autonomously,” and MacMullen defines autonomy as “the capacity for critical-rational reflection about one’s ethical beliefs and values, including those that are foundational, and the commitment to practice this reflection on an ongoing basis.”<sup>31</sup> A somewhat different view, found in the work of White, Callan, and Levinson, accepts the importance of critical reflection but emphasizes, above and beyond that, that autonomy is an aspect of character and implies or at least requires the support of a number of virtues, such as openness, resoluteness, and courage.<sup>32</sup> Although less one-sided, this view is even more demanding than the standard view, supplementing rather than countering its cognitivist and intellectualist bias.

30. A more elaborate discussion can also be found in Anders Schinkel, Doret de Ruyter, and Jan Steutel, “Threats to Autonomy in Consumer Societies and Their Implications for Education,” *Theory and Research in Education* 8, no. 2 or 3 (2010).

31. Brighouse, “Civic Education and Liberal Legitimacy,” 728; and MacMullen, *Faith in Schools?* 23. Other examples are Rob Reich, *Bridging Liberalism and Multiculturalism in American Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 92 (quoted in Catherine O’Leary Goldwyn “Schooling for Citizenship: Bridging Autonomy and Conflict,” *Political Theory* 33, no. 5 [2005]: 722); and Peter Gardner, “Religious Upbringing and the Liberal Ideal of Religious Autonomy,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 22, no. 1 (1988): 90. Autonomy liberals’ definitions of autonomy in philosophy of education hark back to certain aspects of the work of authors such as R.S. Peters, who wrote that “the search for reasons for action is the hall-mark of the autonomous person” (R.S. Peters, *Ethics and Education* [London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970]: 196).

32. White, *Education and the Good Life*, 32; Callan, “Autonomy, Child-Rearing, and Good Lives,” 127; and Levinson, *The Demands of Liberal Education*, 31 and 35.



Both conceptions of autonomy tend to be normative rather than descriptive.<sup>33</sup> In the case of White, Callan, and Levinson, it is normative in the sense that for them autonomy is an ideal of character; in the case of MacMullen and others with a similar conception of autonomy, rational normativity tends to be implied: autonomy is assumed to imply adherence to certain standards of rationality.<sup>34</sup> What *all* conceptions of autonomy put forward by the authors discussed in this article have in common, even if they are not normative in either of these two senses, is their *demandingness* (which, of course, also implies a kind of normativity). People have to be able to do too much in order to qualify as autonomous — they must have “the capacity for critical-rational reflection” on their most fundamental beliefs and values *and* have “the commitment to practice this reflection on an ongoing basis”; for Levinson autonomy “is the process of reflecting upon our beliefs and desires, attempting to resolve such incoherences as are troubling, and *revising* our preferences in light of self-critical reflection that makes one’s beliefs and desires our own — that permits us to claim that we truly are ‘self-legislating’.”<sup>35</sup> The average person is not captured by such definitions; few people are able to be self-critical to the extent autonomy liberals deem necessary for autonomy. Most people, I believe, cannot be expected to be able to reflect on their most fundamental beliefs — if they know what these are. That does not mean, in my view, that they are not at all autonomous. Although I can only remark on it briefly here, I would advocate a descriptive, more realistic conception of autonomy that would not be biased toward the intellectual and the cognitive. To be autonomous means, basically, to exercise self-control (that is, control over the state one is in; I do not mean self-control in the stricter — but perhaps more familiar — sense of keeping one’s emotions and impulses in check).<sup>36</sup> Autonomy is a matter of degree; most people are autonomous to such a degree that we leave them to make their own decisions, but we do not consider young children to be autonomous enough for that, at least in certain areas. What autonomy liberals focus on is simply one way in which people can be autonomous, restricted to one area, namely, that of their beliefs and values. Critical reflection may contribute to autonomy, but the relation is neither simple nor straightforward; and both everyday experience and

33. See Stefaan Cuypers and Willem Lemmens, eds., *Charles Taylor: Een Mozaïek van zijn Denken* [Charles Taylor: A Mosaic of His Thought] (Kapellen: Pelckmans, 1997), for the distinction between normative and descriptive conceptions of autonomy.

34. MacMullen, *Faith in Schools?* 171. See also Callan, “Liberal Legitimacy, Justice, and Civic Education,” 147.

35. MacMullen, *Faith in Schools?* 23; and Levinson, *The Demands of Liberal Education*, 31.

36. The most systematically elaborated concept of autonomy that I know of, which defines autonomy (system-theoretically) in terms of self-control, is in Kees Schinkel, *Reclame en Respect voor Autonomie: Een Moreel Onacceptabel Conflict?* [Advertising and Respect for Autonomy: A Morally Unacceptable Conflict?] (Master’s thesis, Utrecht University, 2008). Unfortunately, this is not yet available in English.

the new science of the unconscious suggest that we need to rethink the relation between consciousness and autonomy as well.<sup>37</sup>

For what follows, it is important to keep the preceding remarks on liberal conceptions of autonomy in mind; some of the arguments listed in the previous section fail partly or primarily because of the particular characteristics of autonomy liberals' concepts of autonomy, but might hold up on a less demanding account of autonomy (see my account of objections to argument IIa).<sup>38</sup>

#### OBJECTIONS TO ARGUMENT Ia

The argument that compulsory autonomy-promoting education is necessary for the preservation of the collective or its current form can simply be an empirical claim (or one that is normative only in a very weak sense). In that case, it is a highly dubious claim that requires strong empirical support not given by any author. In fact, the absence of references to empirical findings is one of the most striking characteristics of the debates concerning autonomy-promoting education.<sup>39</sup> Some authors concede that some of the things they discuss are matters for empirical investigation, but they have not undertaken action to find empirical support for their assumptions.<sup>40</sup> Others believe the prospects for such research to be bleak.<sup>41</sup> Examples of relevant research are studies concerning the value placed in various cultures on autonomy and the development of autonomy, values transmitted in secular (higher) education, and the effects of (ethnically or religiously) mixed as opposed to separate schools on children's attitudes toward children belonging to

37. For the latter, see, for example, Ran R. Hassin, James S. Uleman, and John A. Bargh, eds., *The New Unconscious* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Ap Dijksterhuis, *Het Slimme Onbewuste* [The Smart Unconscious] (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bert Bakker, 2007).

38. Liberal conceptions of autonomy have been criticized from various quarters. For Foucauldian educational theory, see, for example, Mark Ollsen, "Foucault, Educational Research and the Issue of Autonomy," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 37, no. 3 (2005): 365–387. For feminist educational theory, see, for example, Barbara Arneil, "Becoming Versus Being: A Critical Analysis of the Child in Liberal Theory," in *The Moral and Political Status of Children*, ed. David Archard and Colin M. Macleod (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 70–94. For communitarian critiques see, for instance, Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); and Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984). For a discussion of the communitarian and the "postmodernist" critique, see Colin Wringle, "In Defense of Rational Autonomy as an Educational Goal," in *Education, Autonomy, and Democratic Citizenship: Philosophy in a Changing World*, ed. David Bridges (New York: Routledge, 1997), 115–126; see also Donald Kerr, "Devoid of Community: Examining Conceptions of Autonomy in Education," *Educational Theory* 52, no. 1 (2002): 13–25.

39. See Gerald Grace, "Educational Studies and Faith-Based Schooling: Moving from Prejudice to Evidence-Based Argument," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 51, no. 2 (2003): 149–167.

40. See, for instance, T.H. McLaughlin, "Religion, Upbringing and Liberal Values: A Rejoinder to Eamonn Callan," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 19, no. 1 (1985): 126; Gardner, "Religious Upbringing and the Liberal Ideal of Religious Autonomy"; and Callan, "Autonomy, Child-Rearing, and Good Lives," 139. McLaughlin, to be sure, is *not* an autonomy liberal; he defended the compatibility of liberal and religious education.

41. MacMullen, *Faith in Schools?* 6.

other (ethnic or religious) groups.<sup>42</sup> (Incidentally, the evidence afforded by the studies mentioned here weighs *against* the liberal case for compulsory autonomy-promoting education.) Apart from the insights from empirical studies, autonomy liberals might say, there is also common sense. My common sense, however, tells me that few people in our society are currently autonomous in the autonomy liberals' sense and that it is therefore odd to claim that the preservation of this society (which does not contain many autonomous people) depends on compulsory autonomy-promoting education (among other things, presumably). As it stands, then, the empirical interpretation of Ia is just a hunch, and therefore cannot justify compulsory autonomy-promoting education.

Moreover, MacMullen rightly claims that the defense of autonomy as an educational goal that is based on a supposed necessity for it to guarantee the continued existence of the liberal democratic regime "collapses once we recognize that it is only the degree of flourishing [of the collective] and not the continued existence of the liberal democratic regime that is at stake in most conflicts between civic values and private interests."<sup>43</sup> In other words, defense Ia collapses into Ib. The meaning of talk of "survival," being "self-sustaining," and similar terms must be evaluated: Is the survival of liberal democracy at stake, or do these terms signify an attempt to secure the conditions for the continued existence of the present form of liberal democracy, and so to immunize it against more than superficial change?<sup>44</sup>

A second interpretation of Ia is that it is in fact a strong normative claim, namely, that compulsory autonomy-promoting education is necessary if we do not want to end up with a (from a moral point of view) different society that is lacking in justice. This seems to be Gutmann's position. Here, too, it is difficult

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42. Charles Helwig, "The Development of Personal Autonomy Throughout Cultures," *Cognitive Development* 21, no. 4 (2006): 458–473; Philo A. Hutcheson, "Setting the Nation's Agenda for Higher Education: A Review of Selected National Commission Reports, 1947–2006," *History of Education Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (2007): 359–367; Ethan Schrum, "Establishing a Democratic Religion: Metaphysics and Democracy in the Debates over the President's Commission for Higher Education," *History of Education Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (2007): 277–301; and Joep Bakker, Eddie Denessen, Ben Pelzer, Martine Veneman, and Sandra Lageweg, "De houding jegens klasgenoten: etnisch gekleurd? Een onderzoek naar factoren van invloed op de attitude van basisschoolleerlingen jegens klasgenoten van verschillende etnische herkomst" [The Attitude Toward Classmates: Ethically Colored? A Study Concerning the Factors Influencing the Attitude of Primary School Pupils Toward Classmates of Different Ethnic Backgrounds], *Pedagogiek* 27, no. 3 (2007): 201–219 (my translation).

43. MacMullen, *Faith in Schools?* 4.

44. For such terms, see Callan, "Liberal Legitimacy, Justice, and Civic Education," 150; and Brighouse, "Civic Education and Liberal Legitimacy," 723–725 (discussion of William Galston and Amy Gutmann). Autonomy liberals — and this is even more evident among diversity liberals such as Galston (see William Galston, *Liberal Purposes: Goods, Virtues, and Diversity in the Liberal State* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991]) — sometimes approach Francis Fukuyama's thought, where they seem unable to conceive of the possibility of any real alternative to the liberal democracy they have in mind. Fukuyama, of course, argued "that liberal democracy may constitute the 'end point of mankind's ideological evolution' and the 'final form of human government,' and as such constituted the 'end of history.'" Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), xi. Compare this with the quotation from Priestley that opens this article.

to see how one could prevent Ia from collapsing into Ib. The question is never whether a society is just or not, but always in what way and to what extent. Apart from this, the claim that compulsory autonomy-promoting education is necessary to preserve the just society is not neutral; it invokes a particular comprehensive conception of the good life, which the state would endorse by making autonomy-promoting education mandatory.<sup>45</sup> Put otherwise, it appeals to the intrinsic value of a particular form of life (for which autonomy is supposed to be necessary), rather than to the instrumental value of autonomy for various forms of life. And again, in the absence of empirical support for the idea that what is supposed to be autonomy-promoting education would have the desired effect, it is hard to see how one could justify compulsory autonomy-promoting education. This is not to say that practical philosophers would be out of a job if it were not for the inconclusiveness of findings from empirical (social) sciences, but rather that in this area certain entrenched intuitions of plausibility are too unreliable to build a justification for something so controversial. For instance, empirical research has shown that the idea (common among autonomy liberals)<sup>46</sup> that regular contact between children from different ethnic, cultural, or religious groups will have a positive effect on their attitudes toward one another, and that mixed schools are therefore to be preferred over separate schools, does not — or at least not universally — hold.<sup>47</sup>

#### OBJECTIONS TO ARGUMENTS Ib AND IIb

The argument that compulsory autonomy-promoting education is justified because it is (somehow) better for the collective (Ib) and the argument that it is justified because it (somehow) benefits the individual (IIb), like Ia, can be interpreted either as empirical claims or as normative ones. In the latter case, it would have to be shown how they avoid conflict with the liberal prohibition on state endorsement of a particular comprehensive conception of the good life. In the former, the claims would stand in need of empirical investigation. But however they are interpreted, the question is whether Ib and IIb can ever be strong enough to support compulsory autonomy-promoting education: Is *enhancement* of flourishing enough to override the presumption against such drastic state intervention if without it we can still speak of flourishing, albeit on a somewhat lower level? Such an argument would certainly lack the urgency of Ia and IIa, that speak of *necessity* and suggest that without compulsory autonomy-promoting education, liberal democracy, justice, or individual happiness would be no more. Then again, we have seen that Ia cannot keep up the pretense of such urgency; it is a dramatically overstated form of Ib.

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45. Compare with Jan Steutel and Ben Spiecker, "Staatsburgerlijke Opvoeding in een Liberaal-Democratische Samenleving" [Civic Education in a Liberal-Democratic Society], in *Grondslagen van de Wetenschappelijke Pedagogiek: Modern en Postmodern*, ed. Paul Smeyers and Bas Levering (Amsterdam: Boom, 2001), 239.

46. See Callan, *Creating Citizens*; and Levinson, *The Demands of Liberal Education*.

47. Bakker et al., "De houding jegens klasgenoten."

The particularist (P) interpretation of Ib could only be sustained with any plausibility if it could be shown that (in liberal democracies) the collective is currently, without compulsory autonomy-promoting education, in a very poor state, and that compulsory autonomy-promoting education is the only, the least intrusive, or at least clearly the best cure for the situation (which will not improve without intervention). Similarly, the particularist (P) interpretation of Iib could only be upheld if it could be demonstrated that individual flourishing in liberal democracies is currently at a level unacceptable to any reasonable person (let's assume, in good liberal fashion, that we know what this means), and that compulsory autonomy-promoting education is the only, the least intrusive, or at minimum the best means available to raise the level of individual flourishing to an acceptable degree. Somehow, neither seems very plausible to me.<sup>48</sup>

MacMullen acknowledges that the argument for the instrumental value of (ethical) autonomy is controversial, but believes that Brighouse has found the right way of dealing with this controversy.<sup>49</sup> Brighouse appeals to the distinction between moral and epistemological claims, and says that the instrumental argument "invokes not a moral claim but a true epistemological claim: that rational evaluation is more reliable than other methods for discovering the good. This is controversial, but the controversy concerns epistemology, not morality."<sup>50</sup> Brighouse goes on to say that "neutrality does not prohibit sincere appeal to controversial empirical premises: it prohibits only appeal to controversial moral claims."<sup>51</sup> This is a bizarre argument. According to Brighouse and MacMullen the state must refrain from endorsing any particular conception of the good, because claims as to the intrinsic value of particular ways of life are always controversial (even among reasonable people). But to base policy (that does not endorse a particular conception of the good) on controversial epistemological claims is right and proper, apparently, *even if a strong moral claim is made on its basis*, namely, that the state has a duty to make rational evaluation (as a "method" for discovering the good) a mandatory part of the school curriculum. First of all, this moral claim cannot remain untainted by the controversiality of the epistemological claim;

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48. As no one defends a universalist (U) interpretation of Ib or a Uu or Pp interpretation of Iib, I will deal with them briefly: IibPp would hold that in our kind of society, autonomy (and compulsory autonomy-promoting education) may or is likely to contribute to individual flourishing on a specific (presumably liberal) conception of flourishing; this defense of compulsory autonomy-promoting education would fail because it would violate liberal neutrality (because it would promote one particular conception of flourishing); the same would hold for the unlikely combination of IibUp (unlikely because particular conceptions of flourishing tend to arise in particular kinds of society). IibUu, according to which autonomy (and compulsory autonomy-promoting education) would contribute to individual flourishing in all kinds of society, on all conceptions of flourishing, is — given the liberal conception of autonomy — simply empirically untenable. The same holds for IbU, for some kinds of society would certainly not benefit from the (liberal) autonomy of its members.

49. MacMullen, *Faith in Schools!* 104.

50. Brighouse, "Civic Education and Liberal Legitimacy," 738; also quoted in MacMullen, *Faith in Schools!* 4.

51. Brighouse, "Civic Education and Liberal Legitimacy," 738.

because the truth of the former depends on the truth of the latter (among other things), it is itself a controversial claim. Second, it is important to note that the controversiality at issue here is not trivial; there is a real controversy here. MacMullen compares the judgment that rational evaluation is the most reliable method for discovering the good to the judgment that medical treatment is best based on “traditional biomedical remedies” rather than “prayer alone,” implying that both judgments are equally uncontroversial. But this is thoroughly misleading. Someone who doubts the importance of rational evaluation with regard to “discovering the good” is not in a position of controversiality comparable to someone who believes prayer to be the only useful response to serious illness. The idea that feeling and intuition are most important for the former is much more widespread (and is much easier to argue for) than the belief that prayer is the best remedy for serious illness. In sum, the Brighouse-MacMullen trick to save the instrumental argument does not work.

Again, what makes the argument for the instrumental value for autonomy problematic is the specific conception of autonomy endorsed by the authors under discussion. I would not deny — few people, anywhere, would deny — that some form of autonomy is a constitutive element of flourishing. But it is a different thing altogether to argue that the capacity to critically reflect on one’s most fundamental values and commitments contributes to flourishing so strongly that government interference with the curriculum is required. It is not self-evident at all that this capacity contributes to individual flourishing (nor that, when individuals have this capacity, the collective will be better off); in fact, a strong tendency to reflect in this way could just as easily lead to uncertainty and depression, and thereby indirectly even to reduced autonomy. There can still be reasons to prefer an autonomous life in this sense to a nonautonomous or less autonomous one, but this is likely to depend on a particular comprehensive conception of the good life, rather than a comparison between degrees of flourishing of the same kind.

#### OBJECTIONS TO ARGUMENT IC

The argument that compulsory autonomy-promoting education is necessary for the legitimacy of political authority, as put forward by Levinson and Callan, depends on one particular and contestable conception of legitimacy, namely, “liberal legitimacy.” This means that if compulsory autonomy-promoting education is to be justified, it must be shown that there can be no acceptable conception of political legitimacy that does not require citizens to be autonomous in the liberal (or, more specifically, Callan’s) sense, and that compulsory autonomy-promoting education is indeed a necessary (and the only available, least intrusive, or clearly the best) means to achieve the autonomy of citizens. This has not been demonstrated, but even if it could be (which I doubt), the argument is threatened by circularity. Liberal legitimacy requires both the hypothetical consent of reasonable people endowed with a sense of justice and the actual consent of the majority of

the governed.<sup>52</sup> The actual consent does not count if the people consenting are not autonomous, so the state should make sure that they become autonomous.<sup>53</sup> In other words, the liberal state is justified by its concern for legitimacy in producing the kind of citizens that can legitimate the liberal state.

Perhaps “can” is the word that provides the escape route from circularity here, for there is no guarantee that autonomous citizens will support a liberal regime. MacMullen notes:

Both [Stephen] Macedo and [Amy] Gutmann endorse this idea that liberal democratic civic education... must involve developing the capacity of future citizens to think critically not only *within* the political sphere but also *about* the nature and rules of the political sphere. Otherwise, “an originating point of the consent of the governed [is] controlled by the government,” which illiberally “becomes a kind of political perpetual-motion machine, legitimizing its long-term policies through the world view and public opinion it creates.”<sup>54</sup>

But even if circularity can be avoided in this way, and the liberal state does not become a *perpetuum mobile*, the equally difficult question arises whether a (by its own account) nonlegitimate state is justified in taking action to secure (the conditions for) its own legitimacy. As long as its citizens are not autonomous in the liberal sense, any action taken by the state to make them autonomous cannot be legitimated by the consent of the majority — in short, such action cannot be legitimate. If this sounds too stringent, the stringency is not mine; Levinson and Callan have pushed a legitimate concern with legitimacy too far. The paradox that results may be interpreted as pointing toward a less theoretical concept of legitimacy, as, for example, something achieved through a historical process in which a state, by being just, proves itself to be deserving of the support of the governed.

## OBJECTIONS TO ARGUMENT IIa

The claim that autonomy is necessary for individual flourishing is usually defended in a Pu form, the idea being that in our kind of society autonomy is

52. See Brighouse, “Civic Education and Liberal Legitimacy”; and Callan, “Liberal Legitimacy, Justice, and Civic Education.”

53. Moreover, it does not count if the people lack a sense of justice. In response to Brighouse’s argument in “Civic Education and Liberal Legitimacy,” Callan goes so far as to say: “if ‘their own reason alone’ refers to how citizens would reason if they had not been educated for autonomy, justice, and other civic virtues consistent with these, then we have no basis for saying their consent would have been forthcoming in conditions where ‘their reason alone’ prevailed. But then ‘their reason alone’ is bereft of interest for any theory of legitimacy that acknowledges the necessity of autonomy and justice to the ability freely to consent to political authority” (Callan, “Liberal Legitimacy, Justice, and Civic Education,” 150). In my view, this amounts to a conflation of the conditions for hypothetical and actual consent.

54. MacMullen, *Faith in Schools?* 130–131. Note that there is a tension between IIa and this counterargument against the circularity objection to Ic. For if it were true that personal autonomy is necessary for flourishing in our kind of society, or particularly suited to our kind of society, how likely would it be that people with capacities particularly suited to their society would decide against a social organization that also suits their own makeup?



necessary for individual flourishing, on any account of flourishing.<sup>55</sup> It is then taken to be an empirical claim. But as such, it is obviously problematic. In his discussion of John Stuart Mill, John Gray writes, “the connection between a person’s autonomous choices and that person’s well-being or happiness is, on any empiricist assessment, a chancy and exception-ridden affair — and certainly not one that warrants the privileging of autonomy in human well-being that Mill’s qualitative hedonism requires.” He also remarks that “common experience does not support Mill’s belief that people will not trade off their autonomy for the sake of their other interests. Nor does experience suggest that they are unreasonable in doing so.”<sup>56</sup> It is hard to see how liberals could uphold the claim that (in our kind of society) autonomy is necessary for individual flourishing without implicitly assuming a particular conception and standard of flourishing in the light of which many people at best *believe* they are flourishing, whereas in fact they are withering, if they have even sprouted at all. For many people who cannot be said to be autonomous in the liberal sense — who, for instance, cannot or do not critically reflect on their most basic values and commitments — will evaluate their life positively. Moreover, they may do so by appealing to criteria most of us would include in our definition of flourishing, such as physical and mental health, relationships of love and friendship, job satisfaction, and so on. In short, it seems to be quite possible for an individual to live well without the kind of autonomy that autonomy liberals favor.<sup>57</sup> This qualification — “*the kind of autonomy that autonomy liberals favor*” — is important, for it is because their concept of autonomy is highly normative, intellectualist, and demanding that the connection between autonomy (thus understood) and individual flourishing is strongly overstated, if not simply untrue. This point must be made here without delving too deep into the autonomy liberal concept of autonomy, and this can be done because it is clear enough that the kind of reflection MacMullen and others integrate into the definition of autonomy is not necessary for individual flourishing. The possibility remains that a connection between individual flourishing and autonomy can be found to hold on a less demanding conception of autonomy, and that (on this basis or another) compulsory autonomy-promoting education (where “autonomy” is understood in a more basic sense) can be defended.<sup>58</sup>

Another, counterfactual, objection is this: if the empirical claim were true, and autonomy (in the liberal sense of the term) were indeed a necessary prerequisite for individual flourishing, state intervention would be required on a far greater

55. A brief remark on the other options: IIaUu would fail for the same reason as IIbUu (but even more clearly). IIaPp would fail for the same reason as IIbPp: it would violate liberal neutrality, as would the unlikely combination IIaUp (see note 44).

56. Gray, “Mill’s Liberalism and Liberalism’s Posterity,” 151.

57. See Schinkel, De Ruyter, and Steutel, “Threats to Autonomy in Consumer Societies and Their Implications for Education,” for a further objection to Raz’s instrumental argument.

58. This is what we try to show in Schinkel, De Ruyter and Steutel, “Threats to Autonomy in Consumer Societies and Their Implications for Education,” which also includes a more elaborate discussion of autonomy liberal concepts of autonomy.

scale and in far more areas than (I assume) liberals would wish to support. The state would presumably have to intervene in child-rearing, not just schooling, not to mention various aspects of our consumer society (media, advertising, the entertainment industry, and so on). To believe this unnecessary while sticking to the empirical claim for the instrumental necessity of autonomy and compulsory autonomy-promoting education would imply a gross overestimation of the impact of schooling.<sup>59</sup>

A similar objection can be made from the other end — that is, starting from the concern with individual flourishing rather than the supposed necessity of autonomy — for there is something suspicious about the motive for adducing the enabling of individual flourishing as a justification for compulsory autonomy-promoting education. If one is so concerned about children's possibilities for flourishing, are there not many other policy measures that recommend themselves, measures that are at the same time less controversial and more conducive to flourishing? Even if one would want to restrict state intervention to cases where the parents are (at least in part) responsible for the deprivation of the child(ren), there are, from the perspective of enabling individual flourishing, matters of more urgency than the possible frustration of autonomy (understood in the liberal sense). Many children are condemned to a shorter, less comfortable, and less healthy life, simply by the diet provided by their parents. But as yet I have seen no autonomy liberals concerned with individual flourishing advocating compulsory healthy diets next to compulsory autonomy-promoting education. I do not doubt autonomy liberals' sincere concern with people's flourishing, but I find it hard to believe that it is this that ultimately underlies their concern with autonomy rather than the intrinsic appeal autonomy has to them. In other words, I cannot believe that autonomy liberals are able to separate autonomy and flourishing, seeing the first as a means to the latter; autonomy, for them, is a necessary element of flourishing — it is part of the definition of flourishing. But this amounts to a particular and controversial conception of the good life, to which the state cannot appeal in justifying compulsory autonomy-promoting education.

### OBJECTIONS TO ARGUMENT III

The argument for compulsory autonomy-promoting education on the basis of the supposed intrinsic value of autonomy or autonomous lives carries a heavy burden of proof. Not only does it have to be demonstrated that autonomy is intrinsically valuable, but even if one could successfully make this case, the intrinsic value of autonomy would also have to be shown to trump other intrinsic values. On the assumption of value plurality and the incommensurability of values, it is hard to see how the latter could be done. (But the alternative of

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59. This cannot be turned into an argument *for* compulsory autonomy-promoting education ("if its impact is so limited, why object so strongly to it"), for the — from certain perspectives — negative (side-)effects of autonomy-promoting education (that is, education intended to promote autonomy) may very well occur much more easily than the intended effect of such education. For instance, it may be easier to (unintendedly) alienate children from the traditions in which they are raised than to enable them to take an autonomous stance with regard to their tradition and its alternatives.

ranking the intrinsic values of autonomous and nonautonomous ways of life is too implausible to be attractive.)<sup>60</sup> So, assuming one can show that autonomy (or living an autonomous life, in the liberal sense of “autonomous”) has intrinsic value, is it also possible to show that the intrinsic value of autonomy trumps other intrinsic values? In an admirable display of honesty, Callan, defender of the idea that autonomy is intrinsically valuable, admits that “the comparative judgment that would favor autonomy cannot rest on any compelling argument unless it could be demonstrated that nothing of distinctive value is possible in lives without autonomy. I do not understand how this could be demonstrated.” He then tries to show that “the best conception of autonomy” would “exclude no or very few lives that we would reflectively consider as good.”<sup>61</sup> But “very few” such lives would be enough to vitiate the case for *compulsory* autonomy-promoting education, which means that, as it stands, this hesitant attempt can hardly be enough to justify compulsory autonomy-promoting education — and perhaps Callan would indeed shy away from advocating this on such a shaky basis.

Another way of putting the problem with argument III is to say that it conflicts with neutrality,<sup>62</sup> for the reason it is impossible to demonstrate the superior value of autonomous over nonautonomous lives is that it concerns the kind of judgment reasonable people will still disagree about. This, in turn, implies that the state should refrain from endorsing a particular point of view on this matter.

### CONCLUSION

One important conclusion can be drawn from the preceding analysis: none of the arguments for compulsory autonomy-promoting education offered by autonomy liberals are adequate; not one is solid enough — and some are not solid at all — to justify making autonomy-promoting education mandatory for all schools. Those arguments that are not internally flawed depend on empirical support that is lacking and, in my view, not likely to be found.

All in all, what most autonomy liberals do amounts to a conceptual play in which logically necessary connections are drawn between autonomy and some other thing (the preservation of liberal democracy, individual flourishing) that they believe everyone values absolutely. (Some also try to show empirical connections, but these attempts are, to my mind, unconvincing.) Once the conceptual connections are in place, they can claim the necessity (and therefore legitimacy) of compulsory autonomy-promoting education. Thus, MacMullen observes that “Callan argues persuasively that ethical autonomy is conceptually inseparable from an active recognition of the burdens of judgment: since civic education in a

60. See Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 56ff, for a discussion of value plurality and noncommensurability, and a powerful critique of the “science of measurement” represented in our time by certain forms of utilitarianism.

61. Callan, “Autonomy, Child-Rearing, and Good Lives,” 127.

62. MacMullen, *Faith in Schools!* 8 and 92.

liberal democracy must aim to develop in citizens this grasp of the burdens of judgment, it must necessarily encourage ethical autonomy."<sup>63</sup> To dwell in this kind of reasoning is like wandering around in a light and dreamy world, eerily resembling the real world, yet crucially different from it — a world where everything falls exactly into place.<sup>64</sup> Callan knows these worlds are different, and so, I assume, do the others.<sup>65</sup> But somehow this awareness I assume they have does not really seep into their reasoning about compulsory autonomy-promoting education. There are good reasons for favoring the promotion of autonomy and its development in children. But none of these can be stretched to provide a conclusive justification for compulsory autonomy-promoting education; none can make such a strong case for autonomy-promoting education that no exceptions could be allowed.

In this article I have focused on liberal *arguments* for compulsory autonomy-promoting education, rather than attending to the basic assumptions underlying these arguments. Assumptions concerning the nature of autonomy have been touched upon, but not discussed in depth. I have not discussed the assumption, common among autonomy liberals, that there is an intrinsic connection between religion or religious upbringing and education on the one hand, and the frustration of the development of autonomy on the other — better put, that if one wants to see how education can frustrate autonomy, orthodox religious education is the place to look.<sup>66</sup> Nor have I attended to crucial assumptions concerning the state's right to control education and to make education mandatory. Finally, I have not questioned the crucial assumption, immediately underlying all the arguments discussed here, that compulsory autonomy-promoting education can be effective in promoting the

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63. *Ibid.*, 131.

64. I am not being sarcastic here; this is a genuine description of my reading experience, which I include because I believe that liberal theory (at least as discussed here) has become too self-enclosed and has to some extent forgotten its own status as an attempt to understand reality, but no more than that. As in science, every theory in which people have invested a lot of time and energy has a tendency to solidify, with people becoming more and more reluctant to accept the provisional and merely instrumental nature of their theory. I think this is what has happened here as well.

65. See Callan, *Creating Citizens*, 11, quoted in MacMullen, *Faith in Schools!* 131: "Autonomous reflection does not necessarily lead everyone to a way of life in which civic engagement has an impressively prominent place."

66. This topic has been debated extensively by Gardner, McLaughlin, Callan, among others. See, for example, Gardner, "Religious Upbringing and the Liberal Ideal of Religious Autonomy"; Peter Gardner, "Personal Autonomy and Religious Upbringing: The 'Problem'," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 25, no. 1 (1991): 69–81; Peter Gardner, "Should We Teach Children to Be Open-Minded? Or, Is the Pope Open-Minded About the Existence of God?" *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 27, no. 1 (1993): 39–43; McLaughlin, "Religion, Upbringing and Liberal Values"; T.H. McLaughlin, "Parental Rights and the Religious Upbringing of Children," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 18, no. 1 (1984): 75–83; T.H. McLaughlin, "Peter Gardner on Religious Upbringing and the Liberal Ideal of Religious Autonomy," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 24, no. 1 (1990): 107–125; Eamonn Callan, "McLaughlin on Parental Rights," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 19, no. 1 (1985): 111–118; and Michael Hand, "Religious Upbringing Reconsidered," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 36, no. 4 (2002): 545–557. Compare with Shelley Burt, "Comprehensive Educations and the Liberal Understanding of Autonomy," in *Citizenship and Education in Liberal-Democratic Societies*, ed. Kevin McDonough and Walter Feinberg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 181.

development of autonomy in the liberal sense of the term. There are good reasons to doubt this, and there are problematic features in all these assumptions — which means that the arguments for compulsory autonomy-promoting education are not only intrinsically flawed, but also built on a shakier basis than autonomy liberals like to believe. But all this is material for future work.

As to the directions I believe future research on this subject — not just my own — should take, I would like to make three suggestions: (1) a realistic, descriptive concept of autonomy should take center stage, rather than the normative ideal of autonomy that occupies that position now; (2) more interdisciplinary research should be done — specifically, philosophers should at least make use of empirical findings concerning autonomy and its development in children; and (3) with regard to the possible frustration of the development of autonomy, the focus of research should be shifted away from religious education and toward “common” upbringing and schooling in consumer societies, which contain many significant threats to the development of autonomy.<sup>67</sup> If such research is undertaken, we may be able to defend compulsory autonomy-promoting education after all — but this might then turn out to be nothing more or less than an education for adulthood.

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67. On this and the first point, see Schinkel, De Ruyter, and Steutel, “Threats to Autonomy in Consumer Societies and Their Implications for Education.” A gradual realization of the third point is visible in the liberal debate, even in the work of autonomy liberals. See, for example, Brighouse, “Channel One, the Anti-Commercial Principle, and the Discontinuous Ethos”; Burt, “Comprehensive Educations and the Liberal Understanding of Autonomy,” 197; and Callan, “Autonomy, Child-Rearing, and Good Lives.”

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