

The Legitimacy of Critical Thinking: Political Liberalism and Compulsory Education

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ABSTRACT This essay examines the political-philosophical legitimacy of critical thinking as an aim of compulsory education. Although critical thinking is given an important role in Norwegian educational policy, the right to demand a critical attitude from all citizens has been extensively debated in political and pedagogical philosophy the last two decades. This debate stems in large part from the late work of John Rawls. In this essay, I start by stating the case for critical thinking as an educational aim, focusing on democratic education. Next, I give an account of the challenge that Rawls' later philosophy puts to education for critical thinking. Finally, I discuss some possible ways of responding to the Rawls. The upshot will be that some aspects of critical thinking can and must be defended as politically legitimate. However, any such defence must include a reply to the Rawlsian argument – if not, it will simply be naïve. In that sense, much Norwegian educational policy has been naïve.

Key words: Critical thinking; democratic education; autonomy; political liberalism

INTRODUCTION

Critical thinking is often held to be an important educational aim. Sometimes it is even incorporated into official educational policy. The Norwegian Core Curriculum for Primary, Secondary and Adult Education states that all education shall “foster the ability to plot one’s own course” and “train critical abilities to attack prevailing attitudes, contend with conventional wisdom and challenge existing arrangements”.¹ But is the value of critical thinking uncontroversial? Can it justly be made into an overall aim of compulsory schooling?

Critical thinking is often justified on grounds of its contribution to *political education*. In a broad sense, of course, all education is political, although this unavoidable political dimension may be implicit or part of the hidden curriculum. As I will apply it, however, the concept of political education refers to that part or aspect of education that consciously attempts to impart specific political beliefs or values to children. Now that is bound to raise suspicion in a liberal and democratic mind. Is political education legitimate? Is it necessary?

For some thinkers, political education is *the* aim of education. Many of us associate such a view with totalitarian minds and bygone undemocratic societies. The most famous example is Plato’s *Republic*, according to which all education is to be thoroughly informed by political aims; the good of the state, and in particular the preservation of it, is to regulate education down to its smallest detail. To us, such a view is peculiar and even repugnant, and for a long time it served to bring political education into disrepute.

Our kind of society, the modern liberal democracy, has traditionally been understood as not harbouring any particular notion of political education. Indeed, many would reckon such a notion to be at odds with the essence of liberal democracy, since political education seems to suggest that schools are to teach a particular political ideology, and that seems to be an infringement of the rights of either children or their parents, especially if the school is

state-run or compulsory. Nevertheless, the last two decades have witnessed a major upswing in interest in political education. More and more now accept that even a liberal democracy needs an education designed to enable this kind of society to thrive and endure. We are not born liberal and democratic; the beliefs, values and attitudes that uphold our way of life must be taught and learned. In other words, we need a conception of a liberal-democratic political education. This is not to be an education for a *specific* political view, e.g. that of a particular party, but an education for democracy itself, the framework that we suppose all parties share.

In the following I will first give a brief account of the case for critical thinking as an essential part of such a liberal-democratic political education. Although the term “critical thinking” is often associated with the “critical thinking movement”, I will discuss the idea more generally here. Next, I will mention a possible problem with critical thinking as an educational aim in a liberal democracy, a problem arising from the later thought of the influential philosopher John Rawls. Towards the end, I will sketch some distinctions that are vital to any fruitful discussion of these matters. In focusing exclusively on the possible convergence of political education and critical thinking, I do not mean to deny the obvious fact that such an education must include the teaching and learning of a whole host of skills, values, principles, and different kinds of knowledge. In other words, a liberal-democratic political education includes many other features than critical thinking, and, conversely, critical thinking serves other educational purposes than that of civic education. These other features and purposes, though, will not be treated here.

THE CASE FOR CRITICAL THINKING AS EDUCATIONAL AIM

The nature of an education stressing critical thinking is best seen by comparing it with its opposite, a traditionalist education, teaching the beliefs and values of some authority who

claims to represent that tradition, be it the king, the church, or parents. In this type of education, children are to internalise and even love the traditions of the society they belong to. They are not encouraged to question the authorities that epitomize those traditions, in effect treating their words as sacred. Indeed, questioning would be interpreted as a sign of disobedience or irreverence; criticism would be seen as lunacy or treachery. Although parents, teachers, or priests may hold that their traditional beliefs and values actually can be defended by arguments, they typically end up, an end that is usually reached sooner rather than later, by referring to some fixed authority: “This is the way we have always done it”, “It is God’s will”, or simply, “This is just how it is”. Such statements are not offered as reasons to be examined for validity. Rather, they proclaim the end of discussion – to go beyond this point is to *rebel*. In such a closed and fixed world, thinking for oneself means at most discovering for oneself truths that the authorities already possess. It does not matter for my purposes, but historically, this has probably been the dominant attitude towards education and upbringing.

The traditionalist view does not distinguish sharply between education and indoctrination, whereas this distinction is crucial to education for critical thinking. We value critical thinking because we value *autonomy*, that we choose our beliefs and values *ourselves*. Somewhere along the line we lost respect for those who do something just because others do it: we may adopt the beliefs and values of our parents, country, or religion, but we should nevertheless do so as a result of independent reflection. When this conception of autonomy was born, somewhere in or around the 18th century, it took awhile before it was converted into an educational value. After all, it is one thing to ask of one’s fellow intellectuals that they free themselves from the yolk of tradition, it is quite another to demand of children that they think for themselves. But that is where we are now. Critical thinking is now widely, though not universally, acknowledged as a central educational aim.

The crux of critical thinking is *accountability*, which in a minimal sense means to have reasons for what one is doing and saying. Yet in the sense relevant to critical thinking it signifies more than just simple rationality. First, to be accountable is to be capable, at least in part, of *articulating* those reasons, for instance in answering questions like, “Why did you do that?” or “Why do you say that?” Competence in giving reasons is a condition of the second aspect of accountability that concerns us here, namely the ability to *evaluate* reasons. If these reasons are adequate relative to the action or statement in question, then one is said to be *justified* in doing or saying what one did. So far, these two properties, articulation and assessment of reasons, are purely formal, since it all depends on what counts as adequate. However, if we think of critical thinking as part and parcel of a non-traditionalist idea of education rooted in the Enlightenment, then the heart of the matter is that human *reason* is to be the sole criterion for quality of reasons. For instance, to believe something merely on the grounds of some Bible verse is to be insufficiently critical. Hence, accountability in the Enlightenment tradition means *rational* accountability: we are only accountable to ourselves. This independence may be regarded as freedom or as a burden of responsibility.

To insist on an education for critical thinking is to insist that the business of articulating and assessing reasons is a business of education. Children can learn to ask for reasons; they can learn to articulate them; and they can learn to assess them rationally. And ideally they should learn to accept only what survives the test of rational reflection. Of course, no one will ever come to the point where every single belief is a result of rational enquiry. Furthermore, in order to alleviate the worries of religious parents, it must be noted that rational reflection may bring about the conviction that some things are a matter of faith. This was after all the message of Kant’s philosophy. Yet it is one thing to refer to faith in order to ward off discussion, quite another to do it as the conclusion of a careful consideration. There are good and bad reasons for not giving reasons. Accordingly, though the teaching of critical

thinking is not meant to rob anyone of his or her faith, it does transform faith into something chosen on the basis of reflection rather than external authority or unreflective habit.

Why is critical thinking supposed to be crucial to a democratic political education? We can distinguish between three main ways of answering that question, progressively richer but also progressively more controversial. The first kind of answer emphasizes the *representative* aspect of modern democracy and accordingly stresses the importance of critical thinking to *voting*. A democracy, like any other society, needs good leaders. Hence, the electorate must be capable of evaluating the quality of candidates: Voters must be wise enough to select wise representatives. Children must become capable of understanding public debates; they must learn how to resist media manipulation; and they must become reasonably skilled at assessing the reasons that candidates offer for policy proposals. All of this includes critical thinking. If this is our main justification for why critical thinking is necessary to democratic education, we probably have in mind a rather meagre conception of citizenship, that is, a conception of the citizen as being primarily a bearer of benefits and burdens, of rights and duties.

The second kind of answer insists on a fuller idea of citizenship. It emphasises the *participatory* aspect of democracy and accordingly stresses the importance of critical thinking to participation in public debate. Children are future citizens who are to take part in the political deliberation that, ideally, shapes the society they live in. Taking this justification as primary, we will probably attend more to the training of pupils' capacity for actively articulating and assessing their *own* reasons. To this second kind of answer there corresponds the idea of the citizen as something more than just a bearer of rights and duties versus the state. The citizen, rather, is to be part of the state through participating in its public life. Whereas defenders of this idea of civic education will consider the first kind of answer as a

betrayal of what democracy is or was meant to be, the defenders of the conception of citizens as primarily voters will find this second kind of answer unrealistic and even utopian.

The third possible answer emphasises the *liberal* aspect of modern democracy. Children must learn to think critically because it is necessary to make effective use of liberties they have in a liberal society. Freedom of thought and speech is not valuable unless one is *able* to think for oneself. Corresponding to this third type of justification for critical thinking is a conception of the citizen as an embodiment of the virtues that liberal democracy is grounded in. Given that our political system treats citizens as autonomous, as manifested by freedom of conscience, citizens must also *be* autonomous, since in order to choose one's way of life one must be able to evaluate critically the reasons that different ways of life are built on. This sounds obvious, but it is actually quite controversial. Many liberals would reply that it is one thing to have the right to autonomy, quite another to make that right into a duty by incorporating it into compulsory education. Does living in a liberal society imply an obligation to *be* liberal?

THE CHALLENGE TO CRITICAL THINKING AS EDUCATIONAL AIM

Many have pointed out potential conflicts in Norwegian educational policy. The Primary and Lower Secondary Education Act states that a principal aim of education is to provide a Christian upbringing. In the very same section, though, it also states that schools shall promote intellectual freedom and tolerance. A similar conflict is running through the Core Curriculum document. On the one hand, it emphasises the importance of acquiring a shared heritage; while on the other it lauds the virtues of critical and innovative thinking. To be fair, the document does admit that there *seems* to be a conflict of ends here, but nevertheless claims that this is only apparent and that the different aims can be integrated. Besides, the

authors seem to think of these conflicts primarily as psychological or pedagogical in nature, that is, as a problem of either combining two different abilities in one person or of teaching two different things simultaneously. They are not raised as potential *political* problems, as a problem of, not psychological or pedagogical schizophrenia, but *justice*.

The question as to whether the role of Christianity in Norwegian schools violates the principle of freedom of conscience has been the subject of extensive debate. Surprisingly perhaps, there may also be a tension between freedom of conscience and critical thinking, only this time it is the “traditionalists” who might feel unjustly treated. Critical thinking is often thought to be inextricably tied to democratic ideals of toleration and freedom, but the last years have seen an exciting debate take place in education over whether they may be at variance. This debate has mainly taken place in the US, inspired by the work of John Rawls, the most important political philosopher of the 20th century.²

In his classic work *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls developed a theory that was to serve as the basis for modern, liberal democracy (Rawls, 1971). Later, though, he saw a weakness in his approach. He had assumed that citizens share a conception of justice on the basis of a shared world-view or, as he came to call it, a *comprehensive doctrine*. Moreover, he had assumed that the comprehensive doctrine forming the basis of liberal democracy was the set of beliefs and values found in the tradition of Locke, Kant and Mill: equality, freedom, tolerance, and so on. Gradually, though, he came to see the full significance of the fact that a liberal society, because of its ideas of freedom and tolerance, tends towards a pluralism of comprehensive doctrines, religious as well as philosophical, so that the liberal world-view itself is not shared across the citizenry. Therefore, even a state built on Enlightenment liberalism would have to violate some citizens’ rights in order to *remain* liberal. In other words, *A Theory of Justice* was inconsistent, assuming a unity that its own liberal principles undermine.

The basic idea of democracy, an idea expressed in shared convictions such as religious toleration and the rejection of slavery, is that of society as “a fair system of social cooperation between free and equal persons” (PL, 9). Through articulating the implications of this idea, Rawls hopes to work out a conception of justice that is both widely acceptable and that can resolve fundamental political disagreements. Essential to a fair system of cooperation is that it is guided by public rules that those cooperating can reasonably *accept*. Of course, only in a dream world would everyone agree to everything in society. The democratic hope, though, is that we all accept the basic political structure, that is, democracy itself, including the constitution. However, not just any kind of acceptance is acceptable. We all agree, for instance, that belonging to a particular social class is no good reason to propose, endorse or accept any principle of justice. Agreement on the basics must be arrived at independently of irrelevant factors like sex, status, race, and, importantly, comprehensive doctrines.

The key move in *Political Liberalism* is the combination of the idea of a fair system of cooperation with the acknowledgment of pluralism in modern societies. Now the democratic need for agreement on basic principles does not compel us to bend our society to all kinds of wild doctrines. It would be democracy distorted to surrender the principle of toleration only because certain fundamentalists do not accept it. Yet the problem facing us is that even if we restrict our concern to reasonable doctrines, we *still* have pluralism. And this fact of *reasonable* pluralism constrains what principles we can legitimately assume and build on.

Rawls means two things by “reasonable”. First, persons are reasonable when they embody an idea of civic friendship, when they are willing “to act in relation to others on terms that they also can publicly endorse” (PL, 19). The terms of cooperation must be mutually acceptable. Second, to be reasonable is to recognize what Rawls calls *the burdens of judgment*. This refers to those sources of disagreement that cannot be reduced to a matter of prejudice, bias, stupidity, error, and the like. Some of these factors are: complex evidence,

which makes it hard to assess; vague concepts, especially the ethical and political ones; hard cases, where equally cherished values conflict; and difference in background and life-experience. The political importance of these burdens lies in the fact that we can disagree without any of us being biased, stupid or wicked. Those who hold a comprehensive doctrine other than my own are *not* simply unreasonable. A democratic citizen is characterized by an acknowledgement of the inevitability of reasonable disagreement and the incorporation of this acknowledgment into his attitude towards himself and others.

Together these two aspects of reasonableness entail that the basis of a democratic society must be independent of religious and philosophical views. Since there is reasonable disagreement about comprehensive doctrines, and society must be based on agreement, the basic principles cannot be dependent on any such doctrine. In a democracy we share equally in political power that might be used to constrain or coerce others. That authority must be exercised in ways that can be justified to those it is exercised over, and in terms they can reasonably accept. Only those constitutions and basic principles that satisfy this criterion are legitimate. What principles, then, can we agree on? Where can the foundation of democratic society be found? Rawls finds it in the political sphere as such

The distinction between comprehensive and political liberalism is pivotal in Rawls' late work. The difference is primarily one of scope. Comprehensive liberalism is a child of Enlightenment philosophy; it is a more or less complete world-view, usually of an expressly secular and anti-traditionalist kind. It includes a view of human nature as free and rational; it includes a view on ethics as involving rights and duties that pertain to everybody and that anyone can grasp by reason; and it includes a view of knowledge, usually with the implication that scientific knowledge is safer or sounder than religious belief. Political liberalism, though, deliberately avoids taking up any position on matters such as these. If it did, it could not serve as the basis for a society where there are deep disagreements on them. Not everyone is liberal

in this comprehensive sense, any more than everyone is Christian. Comprehensive liberalism is just as sectarian as any other comprehensive doctrine. Only a more modest, but also more widely acceptable *political* liberalism can be our foundation.

What is the content, then, of political liberalism? It contains the familiar liberal rights; it contains the egalitarian principles of distribution formulated in *A Theory of Justice*; it contains a conception of the citizen; and it contains an idea of public reason.³ In short, political liberalism contains most of the ideas of comprehensive liberalism, but restricted in two decisive ways. First, it is to be “freestanding”, and not derived from any comprehensive doctrine, including Enlightenment liberalism. For instance, the principle of toleration says that nobody shall be discriminated against because of his or her beliefs, but as a purely political principle it does not say anything about the truth-content of any such beliefs. Second, it only applies to “the basic structure”, that is, the main political, social and economic institutions; it is not a moral doctrine meant to govern all areas of life. Hence, it does not directly apply to schools or their content. However, political liberalism strongly affects educational institutions since it establishes the rights that parents have in relation to compulsory schooling.

The challenge that political liberalism puts to education is that when liberal ideas are recast as purely political ideas, they seem to lose their educational aspects or implications. One of these is *autonomy*, which in a broad sense refers to the value of living and thinking independently of tradition, religion, and other authorities. This idea has been important in the history of liberal democracy. Yet it cannot, says Rawls, be accorded any special political status in modern society, for the simple reason that not all reasonable persons accept it. Liberalism would be illiberal if it made the value of autonomy into a part of the foundation or framework of our society. Therefore, it is problematic to tailor education in schools to it. Rawls himself drew this conclusion (PL, 199). The state cannot legitimately make a comprehensive liberal conception, containing the moral ideals of autonomy and critical

thinking, into official educational policy. What it can do is cultivate the *political* value of autonomy, which is far more unassuming. This means informing children about their civic rights, for instance the liberty of conscience, which implies that they are *legally* allowed to believe what they want, but it does not mean encouraging them to think for themselves. If parents consider critical thinking dangerous to their beliefs and values, it is, at least *prima facie*, a violation of their rights as free and equal citizens to make it into an aim of compulsory education.⁴ Traditionalists cannot be swept aside as simply unreasonable, on par with Nazis and other extremists as something that can be safely constrained without too much harm to the principle of toleration. It may be wrong, but it is not unreasonable to deny the value of autonomy. Consequently, it discriminates against non-liberals to teach critical thinking in schools in exactly the same way in which it discriminates against non-Christians to preach Christianity in schools.

RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGE

How are we to react to this Rawlsian argument? Assuming that we endorse the basic liberal and democratic ideas at work in it, as I do, then there seems to be three ways to respond to it. The first is to accept it. In practice, teachers would then have to be very careful not to favour critical and independent thinking, nor to disparage unquestioning conformism. Free reflection on reasons would then be on a par with answers like, “Because my father says so” or “Because the Bible says so”. Is that tolerable? Be that as it may, it would certainly amount to a radical change in our attitude towards education if we were to give up critical thinking as an educational aim, more radical, perhaps, than it seems at first. We could attempt to reduce the cost of accepting Rawls’ argument by making institutional arrangements, for instance by retaining critical thinking as an aim of state-run schools but at the same time subsidizing

private schools for the traditionalists, or vice versa, so that minority rights are respected.

The second way of responding to Rawls' argument is to refuse it. The most promising strategy would be to insist that critical thinking *is* part of the political basis of our liberal democracy, so that we *have* to teach it to our children. Critical thinking constitutes democracy – it is not an optional extra. A culture in which critical thinking was absent, or not more esteemed than conformism, would not be recognizable as a genuine liberal democracy: The political value of autonomy would be worthless without it. Perhaps something like this is in fact already implicit in Rawls' own conception. Eamon Callan emphasises how acceptance of the burdens of judgement already incorporates just the critical thinking that Rawls does not consider essential to liberal-democratic citizenship (Callan, 1997). Accepting these burdens cannot consist in merely paying lip service to them, but must shape one's attitude to others, and to oneself, which implies that children must be educated towards such an active acceptance: They must learn to see both how comprehensive doctrines are formed and informed by personal, historical and cultural background, and how disagreement between such doctrines partly results from complex evidence, vague concepts, and hard cases. And to do that, is already a feat of critical thinking, in particular when the contingency of one's *own* comprehensive view is brought out. Thus, even Rawls' political liberalism requires an education for a kind of critical distance to comprehensive doctrines.

The third possible response is to attempt to avoid the awkward implications of Rawls' argument by modifying it. We could, for instance, distinguish between two different aspects of critical thinking, which we may label *logical* and *autonomous* thinking, and to insist that the Rawlsian argument only applies to the second aspect, whereas the first is a legitimate goal of compulsory education. The difference between the two is revealed in the fact that logical thinking could exist without autonomous thinking: highly sophisticated logical thinking has been developed inside closed systems where all the premises are laid out beforehand and have

to be accepted blindly. A case in point is Scholasticism. Non-autonomous logical thinking includes the ability to draw inferences and analyse concepts, but it does not include independent reflection on the foundation of that thinking. Thus, a child raised in a strict religious environment that is hostile to critical thinking in the full sense, could yet develop advanced logical skills in a way acceptable to its parents. To develop *autonomous* thinking, on the other hand, the child would need more than logic; it would also need the ability and courage to question premises, including those of its religion.

This distinction, though, even if it is theoretically sound, is not tenable as a practical solution to the educational problem, since the practice of asking for and assessing reasons is essential to *both* logical and autonomous thinking. To ask pupils to articulate reasons for their beliefs and to assess the logical relations between them are in a large part already to promote autonomous thinking. The philosophical distinction between logical and autonomous thinking does not come out as pedagogically relevant. In other words, even a Rawls-reading teacher will find it well-nigh impossible to teach (legitimate) logical thinking without at the same time teaching (illegitimate) autonomous thinking. That would indeed be a case of educational schizophrenia. Furthermore, this implies that it is difficult to imagine an education that did not contain at least some training in logical and autonomous thinking, since, first, very few would deny the educational relevance of logical thinking, and, second, logical thinking in practice amounts to autonomous thinking. Hence, an education that did not promote critical thinking in *this* sense would be hard for us to recognize as education at all.

Yet even a combination of logical and autonomous thinking does not automatically amount to fully-fledged critical thinking. The reason is that autonomy does not in itself undermine tradition and authority, since one can choose, as an effect of one's own reflection, to become like one's parents, to become part of a tradition, or to accept the words of the Bible blindly. Sometimes, though, autonomy is cast in a more radical form, where idiosyncrasy,

experimentation and innovation take on a value of its own. Even this quite extreme idea of autonomy is found in the Norwegian Core Curriculum: Education shall “nurture the individual’s uniqueness”; pupils shall have “the nerve to think anew and the imagination to break with established ways” (CC, 40). Thus, fully-fledged critical thinking includes what we may call a *sceptical* and *innovative* aspect: one actively seeks to criticize, improve on and find alternatives to what is given in the cultural repertoire. Educationally that implies encouraging pupils to deconstruct traditional beliefs and values. What has happened here is that the values of artistic innovation and experimentation have become pervasive in all activities, even the intellectual.

This distinction between autonomous and innovative thinking can be employed to formulate a position acceptable to both Rawlsians and defenders of critical thinking: Any reasonable education must include logical and thereby autonomous thinking, the essence of which is the articulation and assessment of reasons. Nevertheless, Rawls is right that one particular aspect of what is ordinarily called critical thinking, namely sceptical or innovative thinking, cannot legitimately be made part of compulsory education, on the grounds that the value of such thinking is part of one particular comprehensive doctrine and not accepted by all reasonable persons. To put it differently, one cannot reasonably deny the value of critical thinking in the sense of autonomous thinking, since that would amount to denying logical thinking as such, but one can reasonably deny the value of critical thinking in the sense of innovative thinking, e.g. by arguing that it leads to fundamental insecurity and restlessness.

But does not autonomy inevitably lead to sceptical and innovative thinking? Isn’t there a destructive element already implicit in autonomy? Isn’t the path from logic to scepticism, via autonomy, exactly the history of our modern western civilization? That may be so. But it is irrelevant to the political legitimacy of demanding fully-fledged critical thinking of everyone: The right to reject A is not suspended even though A usually coincides with the

mandatory B. For instance, even if members of a particular religion were always law-obedient, it would nevertheless be unjust to demand of criminals that they convert to that religion. The principle of freedom of conscience is not trumped by that kind of empirical link. Assuming that logical and autonomous thinking is a legitimate aim of compulsory education, then even if logical, autonomous, and sceptical thinking tend to be mutually reinforcing, it does not follow that sceptical or innovative thinking is legitimate as an educational aim. Indeed, the argument could be turned on its head. A member of the Old Order Amish could argue that since logical thinking tends to lead to sceptical thinking, it cannot be part of compulsory education, since we do not all accept the value of sceptical thinking. This argument would have exactly the same political status as the converse argument for the necessity of fully-fledged critical thinking. In other words, if it is unreasonable to deny logical and autonomous thinking as educational aims, then it is equally unreasonable to affirm sceptical and innovative thinking as such aims.

To conclude: I started out by asking whether critical thinking is legitimate as an educational aim in a liberal democracy, and then argued that Rawls' later political philosophy seems to imply that it is not. However, I then tried to show that we need to distinguish between different aspects of critical thinking in order to discuss this question fruitfully: logical, autonomous, and innovative thinking. The two first can legitimately be set up as educational aims in a liberal democracy, whereas the third cannot, even though the two first will in practice lead to the third. This may not be the fully-fledged support that the supporter of fully-fledged critical thinking would hope for. Nevertheless, it is the best we can hope for given that we accept the basic liberal-democratic values.

NOTES

¹ *Core Curriculum* (1999), p. 39-40. This document is referred to in the text as “CC”.

² See Gutmann (1987), Galston (1991) and Callan (1997). The following account of Rawls’ mature thought is based on Rawls (1996), referred to in the text as “PL”.

³ I cannot go into these here, but my account of autonomy will indicate what Rawls means by a *political* idea.

⁴ I say “prima facie”, because the difficult question of children’s rights is looming in the background here.

PREPRINT

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