AN UNWARRANTED FEAR OF RELIGIOUS SCHOOLING

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In this article, we challenge the common liberal assumption that religious schooling undermines the goals of liberal civic education, making it impossible for children to acquire tolerance, critical reasoning skills, or personal autonomy. As a framework for this argument, we respond to some of the claims made by Harry Brighouse in his recent book, *School Choice and Social Justice*, arguing that the liberal fear of religious schooling, as reiterated by Brighouse, is largely unwarranted. Rather, religious parents and religious schooling can offer children an education that promotes tolerance and critical reflection and that encourages and supports their future autonomy.

Key words: school choice, civic education, social justice, liberalism

Dans cet article, les auteurs contestent l'hypothèse libérale courante voulant que les écoles confessionnelles nuisent aux buts de l'éducation civique libérale en empêchant les enfants de devenir tolérants, capables de raisonnement critique ou d'autonomie. Dans le cadre de leur argumentation, les auteurs répondent à certaines des affirmations de Harry Brighouse qui, dans un récent ouvrage intitulé *School Choice and Social Justice*, avance que la peur libérale de l'enseignement religieux est largement injustifiée. Au contraire, les parents qui ont des convictions religieuses et les écoles confessionnelles offrent aux enfants une éducation qui prône la tolérance et la réflexion critique et qui encourage et favorise leur autonomie future.

Mots clés : choix d'école, éducation civique, justice sociale, libéralisme

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A primary goal of public education is the preparation of citizens who support and sustain liberal democracy. To meet this goal, it is necessary to create a sense of identification with the state, prepare citizens to participate in the democratic process, and communicate shared liberal values. Although varying models of democratic civic education have been proposed, most liberal philosophers of education identify the key characteristics of liberal education as the development of tolerance for diversity, a focus on the capacity for critical reasoning and democratic deliberation, and a commitment to the development of autonomous citizens (Callan, 1997; Gutmann, 1999; Macedo, 2000).

Liberals who argue for tolerance, critical reflection, and the development of autonomy as the goals of civic education tend also to assume that religious schooling that attempts to teach civic education from a religious perspective will thwart this aim. This position has determined public policy in at least some parts of Canada and in other Western societies. The province of Ontario, for example, has resisted appeals for funding of religious schools (with the exception of Roman Catholic schools whose funding is guaranteed by Section 93 of the Constitution Act) on the grounds that religious schooling would hinder efforts to "promote the values of a pluralist, democratic society" (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Sixty Seventh Session, 1999, 3.1). Religious schools, according to the government, would undermine Ontario's "very ability to create and promote a tolerant society that protects all religious freedom" (ICCPR 1999, 4.3.4). In the words of one of Canada's chief justices, "The denial of funding to separate schools is rationally connected to the goal of a more tolerant society" (Chief Justice McLachlin in *Adler v.* Ontario, 1996, 219). Nor is tolerance the only liberal virtue considered to be at risk. Liberal educators and philosophers commonly assume that religious schooling also will hinder the development of critical reasoning skills and thus the future autonomy of children (Callan, 1997; Dwyer, 1998; Macedo, 2000).

One liberal scholar who takes this position is Harry Brighouse (2000). His particular statement of liberal concerns serves as a useful focus for making some general arguments against this widespread liberal assumption. Brighouse situates his examples within the context of religious schooling in the United Kingdom and the United States, and,

although the educational contexts of both these countries differ from Canada's, the philosophical issues are identical. Indeed, we locate this article within a debate about religious schooling that transcends national and jurisdictional boundaries. The issues are about religious schooling in general, and about the possibilities that it opens and forecloses no matter what the particulars of school organization and governance. Brighouse argues that religious schooling will unlikely provide children with the education for autonomy to which they are entitled and which justice demands they receive. Religious parents and schools in his view are likely to protect children from outside influences and limit the development of rationality, failing to provide either the conditions or the skills necessary to support autonomy. Brighouse maintains that religious schooling will cause children to be culturally marginalized, unprepared for the "social milieu they will have to negotiate as adults" (p. 74) or for the "complex demands of modern economies" (p. 110). He makes it clear that he regards religious schooling as inferior and "repressive" (p. 71), and suggests that one of the roles of public education is to act as a defence against efforts of religious parents to control their children. Brighouse does appear sometimes to distinguish some religious schools or parents from others, but does not do so consistently. He leaves the impression that he judges all religiously based schooling and all religious parents with suspicion as threats to the future autonomy of children. It is our contention, however, that Brighouse and other liberal scholars err in making this generalization, and that many and perhaps even most religious parents and religious schools provide an education that encourages autonomous choice.

In general, Brighouse's claims regarding the importance of education for autonomy are not unlike those held by many other liberal scholars. Unlike some liberals, however, Brighouse suggests a somewhat cautious approach to education for autonomy, claiming that the liberal state has a responsibility to provide an education that facilitates autonomy, but must stop short of promoting autonomy. Brighouse's understanding of the requirements of an education for autonomy rest on this distinction between facilitation and promotion, and from one point of view, autonomy facilitation would seem to provide religious schooling a better chance of passing his test of liberal acceptability, although Brighouse

uses it to try to undermine certain arguments in favour of religious schooling.

In the first section, we provide a brief discussion of autonomy facilitation and promotion and the essential skills Brighouse believes children must develop. Throughout, Brighouse exhibits a fear of religion in defending three main claims with regard to religious upbringing: that religious schooling will shield children from an awareness of other ways of life, that religious parents and educators do not want children to think for themselves, and that religious parents and communities cannot claim a right to raise their children in a particular culture. None of these assertions can be adequately defended. In the second section, we challenge Brighouse's assumptions with regard to the inadequacy of religious schooling by addressing each of these three claims in turn. We argue, first, that religious families and schools are unlikely to be as isolated from society as Brighouse suggests, or their children as unprepared for modern life as he purports. We go on to demonstrate that religious ways of thinking need not preclude rational thought or critical reflection, and argue that most religious parents and schools want children to learn these skills. Finally, we show that to be raised in a particular culture, religious or otherwise, provides children with a necessary sense of identity and a stable moral environment from which to explore the world, something all parents and schools have an obligation to provide. In the concluding section, we claim that religious schooling is much more compatible with an education for autonomy than Brighouse presumes. Consequently, although there are religious groups who rear their children in objectional ways, liberals need not fear that religious schooling as a general rule will undermine the goals of democratic education.

AUTONOMY FACILITATION

Brighouse holds that education for autonomy is the "fundamental value that should guide the design of educational policy" (p. 65) and that all children, including those from religious families, must have the opportunity to become autonomous adults. Justice, he claims, requires that all children have the opportunity rationally to compare different ways of life and choose for themselves from a range of options a life that

they can "endorse from the inside" (p. 69). To deny children an education for autonomy is to deprive them of "skills that are of great value in working out how to live well" (p. 70). Brighouse makes it clear from the outset that he considers the rights of parents to control their children's education to be circumscribed narrowly, justifiable only on the basis of the interests of the children themselves. He holds that giving parents choice in education must not be allowed to prevent children from receiving the autonomy facilitating education they deserve.

Although he views education for autonomy as a matter of justice, Brighouse makes a distinction between autonomy promotion and facilitation, claiming that the goals of liberal civic education must be to facilitate but not actually to promote autonomy. Brighouse differs from many liberal theorists in his stance on this issue. However, the majority of liberals would support his more general claim regarding the desirability of education for autonomy (Callan, 1997; Gutmann, 1999; Macedo, 2000; Taylor, 1994). Those who do offer objections to education for autonomy tend to claim that promoting autonomy in children can discourage them from choosing to live in certain cultural communities (Galston, 1989, 1995; Lomasky, 1987). Thus, an education for autonomy can lead to an erosion of diversity by undermining ways of life that do not value autonomy as a primary good. As a consequence, it may be claimed that, in giving children an education for autonomy, the state is throwing its weight behind a particular way of life, something that is contrary to liberalism's commitment to free choice.

Although Brighouse does not frame his position around the protection of diversity, he uses a similar argument in rejecting autonomy promoting education. He writes: "If the state helps form the political loyalties of future citizens by inculcating belief in its own legitimacy, it will be unsurprising when citizens consent to social institutions they inhabit, but it will be difficult to be confident that their consent is freely given, or would have been freely given" (Brighouse, 1998, p. 719). An autonomous life can be considered truly autonomous only if it is chosen without coercion. Thus education must "not try to *ensure* that students employ autonomy in their lives … autonomy must be facilitated, not necessarily promoted" (1998, p. 734, emphasis in original). The liberal state, he says, must not promote autonomy because civic education that

deliberately inculcates certain values undermines autonomous choice and, consequently, liberal legitimacy.

For Brighouse, autonomy facilitation has an additional, pragmatic benefit. He suggests that autonomy facilitation will overcome the difficulties created by religious objections to education for autonomy. He reasons that, although it is possible to argue against education for autonomy on the basis that such an education predisposes children to think in certain ways or that it may cause them to reject parental ways of life, such arguments cannot succeed against autonomy facilitation. An autonomy facilitating school program would continue to present traditional, content-based academic curricula, but in addition would teach children how to identify fallacious arguments and present students with a range of religious, non-religious, and anti-religious ethical views, thus providing the skills and conditions necessary for autonomy. According to Brighouse, autonomy facilitation does not require that children be encouraged to consider pursuing a life different from that of their parents, but "merely aims to enable children to take different ways of life seriously if they wish" (p. 108). Brighouse claims that autonomy facilitation will not threaten religious ways of life in the same way that autonomy promotion presumably does, and that for this reason, religious parents may be persuaded to accept autonomy facilitating education.

Is it possible, however, for any parent to differentiate between autonomy facilitation and autonomy promotion? Brighouse himself concedes this difficulty: "It is hard to see how a teacher could impart the skills associated with autonomy without simultaneously communicating some norms concerning the virtue of autonomy … in practice the policies will be difficult to distinguish" (pp. 197-198). This difficulty is not enough, however, to convince Brighouse to abandon the distinction. He insists that "although the skills associated with autonomy are taught, children are not encouraged by the state to live autonomous lives any more than children who are taught how to speak French are encouraged to live French-speaking lives" (pp. 94-95). Why are children taught to speak French if it is not for the purpose of speaking the language or, in other words, to live French speaking lives at least some of the time? Certainly in the process of teaching a skill one seems necessarily to be

promoting its practice. We choose to teach children to read or write or to speak French because we believe it is important for them to learn to do so. In the process of teaching them, we encourage them to use the skills they are learning. Indeed, we do more. It is difficult to imagine, for instance, how to teach students particular forms of critical thought without at the same time saying to them, explicitly or implicitly, that this is good thinking. It is even more difficult to imagine broadcasting this message without also sending the message that this is a form of thought that it is good to employ. Why else, the students reasonably would ask, is it a part of educational goals, part of instruction, and part of what is assessed?

Children who learn the skills necessary for autonomy, who have been exposed to diversity, and who have learned to reflect critically on the choices presented to them can still choose to live their parents' way of life. However, because of the autonomy facilitating skills they have learned, they cannot fail to be aware that this choice is not the only way of life available to them. Children who consciously choose to live a particular way of life are autonomous, whether or not the education they received was intended to promote, or merely facilitate, autonomy. In effect, there can be no difference between autonomy promotion and facilitation.

In spite of a lack of clarity regarding the distinction between autonomy promotion and facilitation, Brighouse continues to view autonomy facilitation as a useful means of ensuring that children of religious parents are given the opportunity for future autonomy. On these grounds, however, Brighouse's distinction is largely unnecessary, because religious parents are much less likely to object to education for autonomy than Brighouse fears, a point we explore in the following section. Religious parents' educational choices are likely to have more to do with providing a spiritual dimension to their children's education than with a desire to prevent their future autonomy.

MEASURING UP TO BRIGHOUSE'S STANDARDS

Exposure to diversity

Brighouse holds that "autonomy with respect to one's religious and moral commitments requires exposure to alternate views" (p. 75). Given

religious parents' presumed refusal to engage in deliberation with rival views, Brighouse is sceptical that they will be able to provide the necessary education for autonomy. If we allow religious parents to exempt their children from autonomy facilitating education, the children will not be prepared for a life outside the community in which they are raised, leaving only those children who happen to be suited for their parents' way of life any opportunity of living well. This, says Brighouse, constitutes a "strong prima facie injustice" (p. 73). Brighouse argues that a right to exit does not by itself mitigate this injustice. Children who do exit will be even worse off than those who stay because they will not have been prepared for the social milieu of modern society.

Brighouse refers to religious parents variously as deeply religious, fundamentalist, or sectarian. As noted earlier, it is not entirely clear whether he is concerned with a particular segment of the religious population to whom these terms might apply, or whether he believes any schooling of a religious nature poses a difficulty with regard to autonomy. Certainly, it is hard to conceive of any community, except perhaps the Amish, to be as isolated from society as Brighouse imagines religious families to be. Parents who waive autonomy facilitating education, he says, "typically live in tight-knit communities which limit the opportunities for exposure to other ways of life and for the development of critical faculties" (pp. 70-71), leaving children unprepared to engage in the economic and social organization of mainstream society. Except perhaps for a tiny minority, this fear, however, is scarcely reasonable. Modern culture is, as one writer describes it, "dominant, pervasive, and unavoidable," (Salomone, 2000, p. 212) and few families would be truly able to isolate themselves from it even if that were their aim. The majority of deeply religious parents live, not in separate communities like the Amish, but in neighbourhoods that are not segregated by religion. Most religious families engage in the activities of the larger community and many initially send their children to local public schools, only later seeking accommodations or withdrawing to religious schools. Many are active in politics, perhaps to the chagrin of those who, like Brighouse, lament the fact that "in the US, fundamentalist Christianity remains a strong cultural force, and even a remarkably strong political force" (p. 207). Nor is religion or religious

schooling an impediment to preparation for a mainstream career or a hindrance to engaging in the complex economic activities of modern society. Brighouse must realize that religious parents are themselves engaged in a range of economic activities and would want their children to be prepared for a successful future as well. As Raz (1994) notes, members of all communities inhabit the same economy and must possess "the same mathematical, literary, and other skills required for effective participation" (p. 173). Given the number of scientists, entrepreneurs, educators, and other professionals who were raised in religious homes and schools, and who are nevertheless highly successful in their chosen fields, a religious schooling does not seem to be a barrier to acquiring and using those skills. Brighouse highly exaggerates the isolation experienced by children from religious families, and children in religious schools are no doubt better prepared for modern society than he acknowledges.

What of the curricular objectives Brighouse argues must be met to ensure the exposure to diversity that is required for autonomy with respect to one's religious and moral commitments? Brighouse suggests children must be taught about a range of religious, non-religious, and anti-religious views and the ways in which secular and religious thinkers have dealt with moral conflict. However, there are serious limitations in Brighouse's educational model. Regardless of how serious any advocate may be, to be addressed by the proponent of a particular view in the "controlled environment of the classroom" (p. 75) is not the same as seeing a way of life lived out. It is very unlikely that a series of classroom presentations would have any significant role in children making a meaningful choice with regard to religion. Because of its limitations, a classroom presentation is an unlikely means of conveying the mystical or spiritual nature of religion or the full implications of committing oneself to a 'road less travelled.' As a means of exposing children to diversity, this approach is necessarily limited because few schools would have the resources to present any more than a small selection of views in any comprehensive way. In anything but urban schools, this limitation would be even more acute. Neither would this proposal satisfy religious parents because it fails to present children with a deep understanding of any one religious choice and may in fact omit the parents' particular

perspectives entirely. Thus, even in a common school that attempted to include some religious views, the choices made available to children would be limited substantially. Any upbringing and any education, religious or secular, will predispose children to select some options and reject others, while remaining ignorant of yet other possibilities. Brighouse's proposal is no exception to this rule, and suffers in addition from other shortcomings.

Religious schooling, then, may not limit a child's choices with regard to religion any more than any schooling does. Although religious schooling is likely to familiarize a child deeply with only one religion, it is improbable that a secular education will give a child a deep understanding of any religion. Yet, a deep understanding of one religious way of life may help the child to understand more fully the implications of choosing any religious way of life because most religions challenge many of the practices of a predominant consumer society and adopt a spiritual perspective on life in the world. At the same time, although most religious schools focus on a single religious perspective, they need not limit children's choices in other respects. If religious schools have the necessary resources, they can as readily as common schools present a broad range of courses for students, presenting everything from arts to sciences as fascinating areas of study, and can as well as other schools prepare students for careers in a wide variety of fields, from business to politics. In a liberal society that respects religious freedom, deeply religious persons, to use Brighouse's term, are free to engage fully in the social, political, and economic worlds that surround them, and a religious schooling need not in any way restrict their freedom to do so. Religious families are unlikely to be as isolated as Brighouse imagines, and religious schooling need not restrict children's awareness of the world around them.

Critical reflection

Brighouse holds the view that religious parents want to control their children's thinking and that religious education would prevent the development of critical reasoning capacities, a view that is not uncommon among liberal education theorists (Curren, 2000; Dwyer, 1998; Macedo, 2000). No doubt, there are religious parents who, like

many non-religious parents, desire to control what their children think and believe. However, Brighouse is making an unfair assessment of religious parents and religious schooling in general. Although most religious parents would want their children to accept their particular way of life and to embrace it as their own, few would want them do so unthinkingly. It is not a desire to prevent critical reflection that leads parents to choose religious schooling. Rather, religious schools are chosen by parents who want their children to learn the skills of discernment and reasoning from within the traditions of their particular religion and not from a secular perspective.

Parents who want their children to think in religious ways would no doubt be sceptical that this goal could be achieved in common schools. Historically, public schools in North America have included some recognition of religion, even if it was only in the opening of the school day in prayer. Today, prayer and other religious observances no longer form part of the common school practice in North America. Although there is good reason to remove sectarian religious exercises from public schools in a religiously pluralistic society, the absence of religion in schools can be interpreted as a message about the insignificance of religion for daily life. Religious parents who do not fear critical reflection itself may nonetheless be concerned that the deliberation encouraged in common schools will undermine their belief system because religious ways of thinking are given no consideration.

We accept that in religious schooling it is likely that certain beliefs will not be subjected to trenchant critical scrutiny: for instance, the belief in God as Creator and the belief that the demand for respect for others is grounded in the equality of all people in the eyes of God. Such practice might be seen as indoctrinative. By way of contrast, some liberal theorists, such as Macedo, argue that schools must leave all religious questions aside and teach children that important public issues can be deliberated without considering the religious question (Macedo, 2000, p. 122). Is this practice also inherently indoctrinative? "Whatever is done or said in the classroom conveys an inescapable and powerful non-neutral message to children that convention and authority are behind a specific practice" (Salomone, 2000, p. 204). The message the school communicates by leaving the religious question aside is that secular views have more

validity than religious perspectives and that religion has no bearing on one's public life. Yet parents whose religion is deeply meaningful to them would want to see their religion's views inform the education their children are receiving in order that their children may also understand the vitality and applicability of those views. The obvious worry for religious parents may be, as Callan (2000) points out, that religious identity will be lost before it is even found, "because without yet understanding the life of faith, children come to feel it is something that is odd or shameful in a world whose predominant values declare it to be so" (p. 62). In the end, neutrality is an improper standard for judging whether any school is indoctrinative. Education cannot take place in a context where no stance is taken on anything. The question, as always, comes down to which stances are reasonable within a liberal democratic society.

Religious schooling need not prevent the development of critical thinking skills. Shelley Burtt (1994, 1996) contends that religious parents are not opposed to critical thinking in general, but simply to the nature of the critical thinking prescribed in secular schools. Burtt claims that fears that religious education will impair a child's ability to reason are unfounded and consequently supports parental authority over a child's education. She argues that the state must take into consideration "religiously grounded ways in which children might learn to choose well in civic and moral matters" (Burtt, 1996, p. 413). According to Burtt, conflicts that arise between religious parents and public schools are often framed as debates over whether children will receive an education that encourages critical reflection and civic competency or one that will not, when in fact the question is whether the children will receive an education for personal reflection and civic responsibility grounded in religious faith or based on secular reasoning. She challenges the assumption that is embedded "in most recent philosophical considerations of critical rationality that to reason from the basis of God's word as reflected in Scripture is somehow to abandon the exercise of critical rationality," noting the "long and distinguished traditions of religious scholarship which reflect critically on the requirements of one's own (perhaps unquestioned) fundamental commitments" (Burtt, 1996, p. 416). By way of example, Burtt cites Arneson and Shapiro, who assume

that Amish parents deliberately limit critical thinking so that their children will accept things on faith rather than through reflection (Arneson & Shapiro, 1996). Burtt argues that the Amish may not be opposed to the development of critical thinking skills, but rather to the materials used by secular schools to teach those skills (p. 416). Burtt's defense of religious scholarship may bring to mind names such as Augustine or Aquinas, but no doubt most of us could name at least one contemporary scholar who is able to conduct rational inquiry with his or her faith intact, effectively confirming that religion and critical reflection are not necessarily inimical.

Religious parents, then, are likely to choose religious schooling not because of an aversion to instruction in critical thinking skills, but rather because they want to teach these skills in an environment that is respectful of and informed by their particular religious perspectives. As McLaughlin (1992) points out, "It is clear that every cultural group and tradition will value and embody certain forms of reason and individual thought" (p. 127). The secular version of critical reflection adopted by common schools is not necessarily the only approach to rationality. Jane Roland Martin (1992) describes very different approaches to critical thinking from masculine and feminine perspectives and participatory and distant thinkers. Martin could well have added two more distinct categories of thinkers, the secular and the religious, showing how they differ in their approach to problems that require reflection and thought. Menachem Loberbaum (1995), writing from the perspective of the Jewish faith, says that "traditions provide a range of acceptable and authoritative argumentation and discourse, but also 'traditions when vital, embody continuities of conflict.' Within the Jewish tradition, the Talmud supplies both. It is a wide-ranging source of argumentation; indeed it is a rhetoric that celebrates argumentation" (p. 116). Loberbaum demonstrates that an education that teaches critical reflection need not disassociate the individuals from their religious beliefs, but that skills of reasoning and reflection can be developed from within religious traditions.

Liberal educators fear that children raised in such religious traditions will be so indoctrinated that they are unable critically to evaluate other choices. Most children will no doubt view the religion in

which they were raised as a more credible option than other choices they may encounter, and even the capacity for rational deliberation is not likely entirely to overcome this bias. However, it is impossible not to create a bias of some sort, regardless of the tradition in which a child is raised, and a religious upbringing is unlikely to lead to a greater or more limiting bias than a non-religious upbringing. A child raised by parents who practise no religion at all and educated in a secular common school, for example, is unlikely to view a religious way of life as a serious option, although, of course, the possibility is not entirely closed off. It would be nearly impossible for any parents to raise their children from a morally neutral perspective and it is not advisable to attempt to do so. Children are not, after all, born with the capacity for critical reflection and must for a time be given guidance with respect to what is demanded of virtuous and moral persons. The fact that the children are taught from a particular perspective does not preclude rational evaluation of this way of life at a later time. Critical reflection on a particular way of life may in fact be more meaningful if a child has first gained a deep understanding of that way of life and what is at stake in rejecting or accepting it as one's own. An understanding of a particular way of life is also likely to give one a starting point for reflection and comparison that is unattainable when all options are regarded from the beginning as neutral and equal, a condition that is, as we have already noted, not realistically attainable or educationally desirable.

Consider an argument made by Randall Curren (1998, 2000). Curren, who views religious schooling as highly indoctrinative, denies similar charges against his own recommendations that children receive a moral education in particular virtues. Curren (1998) claims that children who learn to think about moral virtues "will become morally serious and committed critical thinkers, motivated by conceptions of themselves as both moral and devoted to truth" (p. 6). Curren argues that although children necessarily will form certain perceptions and sentiments as a result of such an education, this does not preclude future examination of those beliefs. A similar argument could be made with regard to religious education. Certainly, religion stimulates consideration of some very significant aspects of human existence and encourages children to think more deeply about their own lives than they may otherwise have done.

Learning to think about important and serious matters is likely to develop, not impair, one's capacity for critical reflection. If this is the case, then religious education is much more compatible with the development of critical thinking skills than Brighouse and many other liberal theorists assume it to be, and should not be so quickly dismissed as a barrier to children's future autonomy.

Cultural Identity

School choice is sometimes defended on the basis of parent rights to protect their particular ethnic or religious culture from erosion and to enable them to pass their way of life on to their children. However, inasmuch as he considers an upbringing in such particular ways of life harmful to the development of autonomy, Brighouse argues that parents have no right to raise their children from within their particular culture or religion or to send them to religious schools. Unlike Taylor (1994), who argues that governments can both be liberal and also "weigh the importance of uniform treatment against the importance of cultural survival and opt sometimes in favour of the latter" (p. 61), Brighouse doubts that liberal governments should take measures to ensure the survival of threatened cultures. According to Brighouse, parents cannot claim the right to their culture as a basis for controlling their children's education or denying them an education for autonomy.

Brighouse claims that, even if children are raised exclusively in their parents' culture, "there is no guarantee that that will be their culture in adulthood" (p. 101). Brighouse (2000) says,

Fundamentally children do not have a culture. Ensuring that children are being raised exclusively in the culture of their parents is not granting them their right to culture because they do not have their own culture. To suggest that they do is to suggest that they are the kinds of beings that can evaluate and assess options available to them, which they are not. (p. 101)

Brighouse's claim here is most curious. In this passage, he seems to suggest that culture is something that one does not have until one chooses it after critical reflection on the available options. However, this seems scarcely credible. Is Brighouse suggesting that, upon maturity, one chooses one's ethnicity or religion, having until that point lived without

any cultural affiliation? Certainly adults can, after reflection, choose to abandon cultural customs and traditions and to reject certain moral virtues held in their childhood. Conversely, they may choose to adopt the traditions or the language of a new culture. Such choices seem to require the adaptation or rejection of cultures of which they are already members. How did they attain that original membership? Did it become theirs only on achieving adulthood, or could they claim it as their own from childhood?

Brighouse would agree for the most part, we believe, that individuals are born into particular cultures. Cultural communities, says Van Dyke (1995), are "groups of persons, predominately of common descent, who think of themselves as collectively possessing a separate identity based on race or on shared cultural characteristics, usually language or religion" (p. 32). Membership in these cultural communities is seldom chosen, but rather it is assumed because of the circumstances of one's birth and the acculturation experienced as one grows up within the group into which one is born. Margalit and Raz (1995), in considering group rights and group membership, argue that cultural membership is largely involuntary:

To be a good Irishman, it is true, is an achievement. But to be an Irishman is not. Qualification for membership is usually determined by nonvoluntary criteria. One cannot choose to belong. One belongs because of who one is. One can come to belong to such groups, but only by changing, e.g., by adopting their culture, changing one's tastes and habits accordingly – a very slow process indeed. (pp. 85-86)

We are Irish or French, Catholic or Jewish, because of the circumstances of our birth. Whether we would have chosen that culture given the chance to do so, we would be very surprised during our growing up years to find it was not our culture, just as we would be surprised to find out the family we were born into and grew up in was not our family. Children develop an identity in a dialogical relationship with the family and the particular group surrounding the family. They participate from early childhood in family activities, including religious observances, and find stability and comfort in the traditions the family maintains. It is only natural that as children share in the cultural, perhaps religious, life of

their parents that they will come to identify with that culture as their own. This point is reiterated by Colin Macleod (2002), who points out that "children come to have a sense of self partly by locating themselves in a distinct family history and ongoing participation in the practices identified as valuable by the family" (p. 215). When parents share with children the history, beliefs, and traditions of their culture, they provide them with a sense of identity and security in a place that is uniquely theirs.

If, for the most part, individuals belong to a cultural group because they have been born and raised in that culture, then it is reasonable to assume that the culture of the group is theirs from the time they first become, even if not by choice, a member of that group. It is rather pointless and wrongheaded to claim that children do not have culture of their own simply because they have not autonomously chosen membership in a particular group, when for the most part cultural membership is involuntary. Likewise, it is pointless to distinguish between being a part of, or member of, a cultural group, which is an undeniable social fact for most children, and having one's own culture, which is what Brighouse denies to children. We cannot discern the difference. If children do have their own culture, as we believe they do, then, contrary to what Brighouse claims, cultural claims can be made on behalf of the children who are members of those groups. Any argument in defence of group protection is as much for the benefit of the children as for the adult members of the group.

Even if Brighouse were to concede this point, it may not affect his claim that parents must prepare their children to live in cultures other than the one in which they are raised. Because children may quit their parents' culture, Brighouse argues that we must prepare them to live well in whatever culture eventually will be theirs. Whereas elsewhere he expresses regrets about the isolation experienced by religious families, Brighouse, in making this argument, suggests that all children are to some degree exposed to mainstream culture, and that it is therefore essential that they be equipped to scrutinize both their own way of life and others they encounter. Although they may seldom entirely abandon the culture of their birth, it is true that as children reach maturity and gain life experience, they tend to reject at least some aspects of their

ancestral culture and adopt patterns of behaviour from new cultures they encounter. This is an inevitable result of the multicultural nature of much of the Western world. Until children reach some degree of maturity, however, we would be wise to encourage parents in their efforts to raise their children in a stable moral environment. This encouragement may include support for school choice and religious schooling because without such support some cultural and religious communities may be unable to protect their communities from erosion by pervasive secular and consumer societies. Brighouse of course claims that there is no reason to take measures to ensure that cultures continue to exist, in part because evidence shows that people can adapt easily to changing cultures. This may be true. However, it is not an argument against supporting communities in their attempts to preserve some aspects of their particular cultures. People are able to adapt to all manner of situations, some of them tragically unfortunate. That we are adaptable does not suggest that we should allow cultures to disappear, if options exist to preserve ways of life that are meaningful to families and their children. If reasonable options such as school choice allow the preservation of particular religious or other communities, such choice should be a legitimate possibility for these communities. Far from being harmful, growing up in a distinctive community can provide children with the sense of identity crucial to engaging in a self-fulfilling, autonomous future, including the self-assured adoption of another community later in life if that is their choice.

CONCLUSION

We do not doubt that Brighouse and others who are so quick to label religious schooling as harmful have at least some basis for their conclusions. Most of us are aware of religious groups that bring up children in ways that we abhor, and to whose educational efforts we would not lend support. Knowledge of the objectionable practices of some religious groups sometimes makes it difficult to defend support for any religious schooling. Concerns about some religious practices have led to a rather unreasonable fear of religious schooling in general. It is much too hasty, however, to assume that all or even most religious communities raise their children in ways that would impair their future

autonomy or harm them in any way. We would not presume to make broad judgements about particular religious groups based solely on their identity as fundamentalist, orthodox, or even liberal religious organizations. Within any of these groups, one may find educational practices that do not in any way undermine democracy. For the most part, the theorists and citizens who built our liberal society had religious roots and upbringings, and most of schooling was at one time sectarian in nature. This did not impede the development of autonomous individuals or societies devoted to justice. Religious families care deeply about their children and generally raise them in caring and responsible ways. Many, perhaps most, religious groups are concerned about individual rights and freedoms, including the rights and interests of their own children and the children of those whose parents think differently from them. Brighouse and other liberal educators cannot make any general and conclusive claims about the harm religious education imposes on children. Many religious parents and religious schools offer children an education that encourages and supports their future autonomy and does not in any way undermine the goals or aims of civic education in liberal democracies.

Such a conclusion has important implications for public policy. We have already referred to arguments made by the government of Ontario in resisting appeals for the funding of religious schools. That province, in more than one case, has claimed that religious schools would undermine the goals of liberal democracies (Adler v. Ontario, 1996; ICCPR 1999), fears very similar to those expressed by Brighouse. In its response to religious claimants in *Adler v. Ontario*, for example, the province argued that funding religious schools would stand in the way of the goal to build a more tolerant society, a claim that at least one justice upheld. Chief Justice McLachlin argued, in this case, that "the encouragement of a more tolerant harmonious multicultural society" (p. 10) was reason enough to deny funding to religious schools. Like Brighouse, McLachlin claims that religious schooling diminishes the multicultural exposure of children and that this "lack of exposure, in turn, would diminish the mutual tolerance and understanding of Ontarians of diverse cultures and religions for one another"(*Adler v. Ontario*, 1996, 215, 217). However, we have shown that these fears are unwarranted and that religious

schooling need not result in isolation or intolerance or undermine children's future autonomy. If, as we have suggested, religious schooling is not necessarily or even in most instances a barrier to a satisfactory civic education, the fears expressed by Brighouse and other liberals are largely unwarranted. It would be reasonable, then, to consider the possibility that religious schools have a legitimate place in the liberal democratic state.

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