From the Margins to the Majority: The Possibility of a Liberal Education in Liquid Times

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June, 2008

"A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of M.A."

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Abstact/Résumé

Liberal philosophers of education often concentrate on issues of accommodation and recognition coming from minority cultures within pluralistic societies. While this remains an important task, I argue that there are troubling currents within the mainstream culture that merit philosophical critique by liberals. In this thesis I situate the educational platform of liberal philosopher Eamonn Callan within critiques coming from social theorists concerned with the growing influence of the market in our culture. I argue that unless these critiques are taken seriously liberals will have trouble translating their educational ideals into feasible modes of practice. I conclude by suggesting three ways in which this dialogue between liberals and social theorists can address these troubling currents.

La plupart des philosophes d’éducation libérale se concentrent sur les problèmes d’accommodation et de reconnaissance des cultures minoritaires dans les sociétés pluralistes. Alors que cela reste une tâche très importante, je soutiens qu’il y a des tendances inquiétantes dans la culture majoritaire qui méritent une critique philosophique par les libéraux. Dans cette thèse je mets en parallèle le programme pédagogique du philosophe libéral Eamonn Callan et les critiques des penseurs de la théorie sociale sur l’influence du marché qui ne cesse d’augmenter dans notre culture. Je maintiens qu’il faut aborder les problèmes découlant de cette influence si les libéraux veulent traduire concrètement leurs principes pédagogiques en modes de pratique faisable. Je conclus en suggérant trois façons par lesquelles un dialogue entre les libéraux et les penseurs de la théorie sociale peut aborder ces tendances inquiétantes.
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Frederick Law Olmstead for realizing that greening urban environments is the first principle for creating a world-class city. I composed a second (and no doubt superior) thesis on my many strolls around Parc Montreal. I would also like to thank Kevin McDonough. Without his guidance and wisdom my philosophical skills would have atrophied beyond repair. Christopher Miller was and continues to be the smartest person I know and was a very helpful friend over these past two years. Et finalement je remercie Marie-Noel pour l’assistance avec la traduction du résumé.
I don’t care to belong to any club that will have me as a member

-Groucho Marx

Introduction

There were two phenomena that I was trying to get a handle on when I wrote this thesis. First of all I had the fortune of writing it during the longest and in many ways most historic election cycle of my lifetime. Even Guy Debord may not have been able to predict the spectacular quality of this campaign, and the frustration that I felt witnessing the endless parade of “pseudo-events”¹ spurred many of my reflections on the need for politically minded educational theorists to address some dysfunctions in our political culture. Secondly I was (and still am) trying to understand what exactly goes on in a seemingly radical Education faculty (which houses the Paulo and Nita Friere Center). Despite being in substantial agreement with the political intuitions of the many critical pedagogues in our department I encountered a serious degree of resistance when I tried to discuss the interesting philosophical questions that these intuitions raised. One might think back to Kant’s assertion that “thoughts without content are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind”² when considering the cross purposes at which philosophers and radical political theorists often find themselves. So the second motivating factor for this thesis was the attempt to reconcile these twin impulses (political intuitions and philosophical reflection) as a way to get a better grip on the problem set that educational theorists are addressing.

¹ The term “pseudo-event” is taken from Daniel Boorstin and refers to the disconnect between significance generated in media representation and that rooted in lived experience.

² Albert Borgmann gives a clearer indication of what I intend here when he writes that “social science without ethics is aimless; ethics without social science is hollow” (2006, p. 15).
It is against this background that the thesis took shape. My argument is fairly straightforward, but my method of presentation may strike the reader as a bit unorthodox. The basic argument starts with the admission of Raymond Guess, that “we seem to have no realistic alternative to liberalism; that is, we know of no other approach to human society and politics that is at the same time as theoretically rich and comprehensive as liberalism and also even remotely as morally acceptable to wide sections of the population in Western societies, as they are now in fact constituted” (2002, p. 320). Given this position of rhetorical dominance liberals have often contented themselves with addressing the difficult border issues relating to accommodation and legitimate uses of state power (e.g. how to address the claims of recognition from fundamentalist religious communities when confronted with the demands of a secular curriculum). However, this fixation on border cases has drawn the attention of liberals away from certain corrupting elements in the mainstream that come from shifts in the economic and political culture of many liberal democratic societies. My main argument is that if liberals eschew the social bases of recognition and self-respect emanating from the mainstream culture they will forfeit the possibility of realizing those liberal ideals that they are extolling when they discuss the emancipatory possibilities of a liberal education. Put another way I want to follow David Blacker (2007) and keep in mind the object of inclusion as much as the process of inclusion itself.

It has often been said that collage is the quintessential postmodern art form, and coming of age in supposed postmodern conditions my affinity for this medium will be apparent to the reader. This is to say that the thesis is less of a linear argument than an attempt to draw contrasts and connections by situating ideas in relation to one another.
Chapter 1 begins with an examination of three themes in the work of the prominent liberal philosopher of education Eamonn Callan: the scope of a liberal civic education, the status of the nation in civic education, and the relation between liberal education and the conditions of human flourishing. In highlighting these themes I attempt to demonstrate how liberals are coping with various challenges posed by increasing pluralism and globalization (e.g. the charge of the imperialistic quality of liberalism, the attractiveness of a cosmopolitan civic education, the possibility of recognizing diverse social practices without leading to social fragmentation, etc.). In chapter 2 I contrast this liberal platform with that of three social theorists grappling with the same issue of growing pluralism and globalization. Through these theorists I raise three different issues that liberal educators may be forced to consider: the rapid urbanization of populations, the social fragmentation precipitated by a growing degree of uncertainty in our lives, and the personal consequences of changes within the labor market and welfare state. The upshot of these approaches is to raise the general issue of the social conditions necessary for liberal ideals to translate into real practices through an educational process. Additionally these approaches point to sources of informal education that may be gaining significance in the development of many children.

Chapter 3 attempts to bring together the diverse issues raised in chapters 1 & 2 by looking at the relationship between disability and community. Disability is an interesting issue because it poses significant challenges to liberal theorists and draws our attention to the darker aspects of societal trends highlighted by many social theorists. A growing number of philosophers and disability activists have argued that how we construct the social category of disability and how the disabled are treated is essentially a matter of
civil rights that liberals must pay attention to. Central to their claim is that liberalism labors under a misconception of the self and an inattentiveness to the social bases of recognition and self-respect, both of which lead to problems when considering the just treatment of the disabled in liberal societies. I investigate how these problems show up in both the setting of educational policy and in the school culture in general.

I conclude by suggesting three issues that could provide directions for cross disciplinary approaches to contemporary problems like those raised in the first three chapters. First I argue for a greater attentiveness to the ways in which social conditions temper the ambitions of students by limiting what I call their “aspirational field.” Secondly I argue that the nation is still a relevant issue in civic education and can serve as a useful narrative frame for inculcating a sense of justice. And finally I suggest that the development of a capacity for commitment in students may be a relevant educational ideal given our current social condition. In sum these suggestions attempt to construct interpretive frames which can accommodate the political and philosophical impulses that I mentioned above.

There are two final introductory remarks. First it should be noted that I am primarily concerned with the political and economic climate in the U.S., but similarities with other advanced capitalist nations will be easy to draw. Second the reader will notice my tendency to work in groups of three. Having been raised in a thoroughly secular household this probably has more to do with an admiration of Phil Jackson’s triangle offense\(^3\) than any veiled reference to a holy trinity.

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\(^3\) For those who don’t follow basketball (i.e. Canadians) this offensive model led the Chicago Bulls to six championships in the 1990’s and three L.A. Lakers championships in the 2000’s.
[We] sometimes forget that the vitality of the political order depends on an education that is dedicated to specific ideals of character.

-Eamonn Callan from Creating Citizens

CHAPTER 1: Liberal Education and Growing Pluralism

There is both a pragmatic and a philosophical question that lies behind an education for autonomy in liberal democratic societies. First we must ask ourselves to what extent can we realistically achieve our goal of instantiating autonomy in the lives of students? Even in the context of a totalitarian regime there still remains the empirical question of how much the animating educational ideals can come to structure the emotional, moral, and psychological development of children. This question should be of special concern to educators because we are well familiar with politicians charging schools with tasks that lie well beyond their reach. In addition philosophers of education need to ask how they are going to frame an education for autonomy in a liberal democratic context. Are we going to justify autonomy in terms of promoting the well being of students (i.e. in terms of virtues tout court) or in terms of promoting flourishing within a liberal democratic framework (i.e. in terms of civic virtues)? Another way to put the question is to ask if we are going to consider autonomy primarily in the context of a moral education or primarily in the context of civic education.

In many respects these two concerns provide the basic structure of Eamonn Callan’s investigation of the educational implications of liberalism and how they relate to the broader issue of educating for autonomy. On the one hand he has devoted serious attention (in the form of numerous articles and two influential books) to the practical implications of schooling vis a vis parent’s rights, children’s rights, the rights of
minorities, and the justifiable exercise of state power in response to the fracturing tendencies of pluralism. His engagement with these necessarily contentious issues that emerge out of liberal theory makes him both a worthy candidate for further examination and a formidable opponent for those who glibly reject the liberal project root and branch (see Geuss, 2005 for an account of these objections). On the other hand Callan does well to trace out the philosophical implications of these points of political dispute by framing the debates in terms of the ends of education. As he writes in *Creating Citizens*, “we sometimes forget that the vitality of the political order depends on an education that is dedicated to specific ideals of character” (Callan, 1997, p. 3). By introducing “ideals of character” and the language of virtues into political education he can negotiate the often troubled relationship between civic and moral education. In addition to this he can also construct a nuanced philosophical position from which to address the pragmatic concerns mentioned above.

In this chapter I’d like to concentrate on three issues that preoccupied Callan around the period when he published *Creating Citizens*. I take this to be a valuable task for two reasons. First, Callan formulates these issues within the larger project of giving liberalism its best interpretation (i.e. its best argument for meriting our political and moral allegiance) in response to the consequences of increased pluralism in liberal democratic societies. The second reason that I am undertaking this review is to use Callan’s influential writings to set the table for the subsequent chapters of this thesis. Developments since the publication of *Creating Citizens* have only strengthened the case for turning our attention to these following three issues that he addresses: the scope and content of civic education, the worries about creating a shared sense of identification for
political purposes, and the tripartite relationship between education, political institutions, and autonomy.

The Scope of Civic Education:

In a recent article Kenneth Strike (1998) compared the dilemma of liberal civic education to a Plains dweller’s relationship to the Platte River. He describes the river as “too thin to plow and too thick to drink” (p. 221), and finds the analogs in the character of civic education in a commitment to neutrality vis a vis comprehensive conceptions of the good and a strong commitment to substantive norms of civic participation and discourse. The image is apposite if we take it at face value. If a parcel of land is “too thin to plow” then we can’t expect sustainable yields from season to season. Similarly if a political order is devoid of deep roots in the character and beliefs of the citizenry we can’t expect that order to compel the kind of social reproduction that would sustain it over succeeding generations. At the other end of the dilemma we have a river that is too thick to drink. What this image points to is the introduction of encumbering elements that prevent an essential source of nourishment from serving its life supporting purpose. In political terms certain civic demands that come with a liberal political order (e.g. necessary dispositions for civic engagement) may be too much to swallow and may not provide the type of spiritual or personal sustenance that some other source of communal life could. In essence the considerations of the many that are supported by liberal institutions are seen by some as bringing certain beliefs and practices that subvert the meaning we draw from communal life\(^4\).

\(^4\) This point is both a problem for liberalism and a justification for its existence as a morally praiseworthy political philosophy. If our point of departure is the inevitability of difference and disagreement in our day to day interactions than we are likely to view a
This dilemma between thickness and thinness has come to frame the debate over civic education in liberal democratic societies. There are many who see this dilemma as damning of liberalism and argue for civic education to be framed in terms other than those set by liberal orthodoxy (for a sense of this debate see Feinberg, 1995: Brighouse & Swift, 2003). Callan is acutely aware of these charges against liberalism, but he is also aware that these debates often employ an ungenerous reading of liberal theory. Noting that “liberal orthodoxy” is not the settled doctrine that critics are so quick to reject, he follows the thinking of John Rawls and asks how a civic education would respond to a shift in emphasis internal to liberal thought (i.e. he tries to get his own house in order before responding to opponents). Callan is particularly concerned with Rawls’ book *Political Liberalism*, which Rawls wrote as a corrective to some of the more problematic elements of his earlier *A Theory of Justice*.

The difference between the Rawls of *A Theory of Justice* and the Rawls of *Political Liberalism* could be cast in terms of tempered ambition. In a *Theory of Justice* Rawls contemplates the institutional design, distributive patterns, and disposition of the citizenry (as exemplified by the constraints placed on those engaged in the “original position” and their adherence to the two principles of justice)\(^5\) in what he calls “the well ordered society” (Rawls, 1999, p. 14-19). His primary concern is to return justice to the regard for the other in political life as a necessary precondition for human flourishing. However we often see that the demands of the other sometimes poses serious challenges to the political aspirations of certain communities, which leads them to consider more particularistic visions of public life (as we see for example with the Amish in Pennsylvania).

\(^5\) These two principles of justice are that “each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others” and that “social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone’s advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all” (Rawls, 1999, p. 53).
foreground of political debates and recast justice in terms of “justice as fairness” (as opposed to justice cast in purely utilitarian terms or the more traditional sense where justice meant giving one their proper due given the norms of the social order). This shift in emphasis is most apparent in his discussion of the just distribution of “primary goods”, which are those goods that all rational citizens would value and require to lead a meaningful life. Rawls goes beyond merely ensuring the availability of these goods and introduces what he calls “the difference principle”, which states that any policy effecting the distribution of goods (e.g. tax policy or social welfare provisions) must benefit the least well-off significantly before they can target those higher up the social ladder (supply side economics would be the antithesis of a Rawlsian policy). This would ensure some degree of fairness by preventing the types of bargaining and interactions between citizens marked by stark inequalities of power and resources. Additionally the difference principle gestures towards the Kantian notion of the inherent dignity of individuals (as opposed to something like economic utilitarianism that measures justice in aggregate terms like GDP per capita).

While admittedly Rawls was engaged in an elaborate thought experiment with no direct bearing on existing social situations (ibid, p. 514), A Theory of Justice gives readers the conceptual tools to work through various important aspects of political life. Foremost amongst these are the legitimizing procedures for political institutions (which takes up a large section of the first half of the book), the constraints placed on citizens when deliberating about matters of policy (as exemplified by the “veil of ignorance” and

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6 The three main primary goods are basic right and liberties, goods inherent to offices, and finally income and wealth. It was only this final good that concerned many of the utilitarian political philosophers that Rawls is writing against.
the two principles of justice), and the acceptable domain of the exercise of state power (being bound primarily by the promotion and distribution of primary goods). As Meira Levinson writes, these tools give liberalism “a more human face” by going beyond mere rights talk and being concerned with “obligations, and about ensuring that as many individuals as possible have the ability to determine and make use of the freedoms provided them by a liberal state” (1999, p. 6). The liberalism that Levinson attributes to Rawls is more in line with the “liberal” policies of current political parlance (i.e. the state can actively play a role in the promotion of social justice within reasonable limits) than the libertarian strain of liberalism advocated by Hobbes or Hayek.

But Rawls’ views that emerge out of *A Theory of Justice* have come under heavy criticism from a number of different positions. Materialists find his whole construct too divorced from real social situations (be they class struggle or hegemonic practices of one group over another) to provide any meaningful insights into how social justice could be achieved. If anything they feel that Rawls’ project boils down to a sophisticated justification of extant unjust social arrangements. Liberals of a more libertarian stripe object to Rawls’ focus on distributive patterns, especially when they take the form of a principle like “the difference principle” (as the philosopher Robert Nozick has argued).

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7 Raymond Geuss accuses Rawls of ethnocentrism and writes that “it is extremely striking, not to say astounding, to the lay reader that the complex theoretical apparatus of *A Theory of Justice*, operating through 500 pages of densely argued text, eventuates in a constitutional structure that is a virtual replica (with some extremely minor deviations) of the arrangements that exist in the United States” (2005, pg. 22). He then goes on to cite Michel Foucault’s characterization of liberalism: “Le libéralisme n’est évidement pas une idéologie ni un idéal. C’est une forme de gouvernement et de ‘rationalité’ gouvernementale fort complexe” (“Liberalism is thus not an ideology nor an ideal. It is a form of government, and a strongly complex governing ‘rationality’ at that”) (cited in Geuss, p. 28). The plausibility of these charges will depend on how generous a reading of Rawls we allow, but it should be noted that amongst critical pedagogues these objections have widespread resonance.
But for the purposes of civic education the most important objection to Rawls’ *Theory of Justice* is the charge that the civic requirements of the “well ordered society” are too demanding and don’t respect (or incorrectly characterize) the pluralism that liberal theory purports to accommodate. There are three interlocking claims that communitarians employ to make this point.

First off communitarians often argue that Rawls’ theory fundamentally mischaracterizes the moral psychology of citizens by proscribing their civic duties to rational assent of principles geared towards mutual advantage. They feel that Rawls fails to consider the meaning that citizens draw from their specific communal contexts which might place obligation above mutual advantage in their moral reasoning (advocates of an ethic of care often make the same point). This leads to a second concern, which is that the demands of justice are strong enough to disembed individuals from traditions that provide the horizons of meaning within which their identity is constituted, while at the same time not providing enough substance to replace whatever has been lost. Many cast Rawls’ liberal political culture as overly concerned with procedural matters and argue that notions of justice need to be more attentive to the communally structured spaces where deep ethical concerns take root (the philosopher Michael Sandel first made this point in *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*). Taken together these arguments lead to a third claim, which is that Rawls has not adequately plumbed the depths of pluralism. Particularistic attachments may turn out to be more incommensurable than Rawls imagines because of how much they structure the horizons of meaning within with citizens operate.
In *Political Liberalism* Rawls accepts the fact that a flight to theory is going to run into some problems when faced with a growing fact of pluralism in liberal democratic societies. To compensate for this he backs off any comprehensive claim made about “justice as fairness” (which blurred the lines between moral psychology with political philosophy) and presents his position in purely political terms. Rawls moves the question away from “what would a well-ordered society look like and how would we arrive at it?” and reframes the issue as “[h]ow is it possible that there may exist over time a stable and just society of free and equal citizens, profoundly divided by reasonable though incompatible religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines?” (Rawls, 2005, p. xvii). We can see that Rawls cedes some ground to communitarian critics by bounding his inquiry by an acceptance of the “reasonable though incompatible” doctrines that structure a pluralistic society. But in order to avoid a Hobbsian state of all against all he is still concerned with preserving the moral force of a society of “free and equal citizens.” Rawls believes that a turn towards “a political conception of the person” should be an attractive option given that its point of departure is the problem of incommensurability. If we limit our inquiry creating a space for the bridging of differences (i.e. political culture) without assuming commonalities like primary goods then political life can be a powerful bulwark against oppression, social unrest, and tribalism.

There is a central idea that is operating behind Rawls’ turn towards political liberalism. He finds common cause with communitarians by noting that the ability to form a comprehensive conception of the good is of the utmost concern in the moral education of children. If communitarians are correct in arguing that this education cannot proceed without the moral resources of thick communal ties backed by a tradition then
political culture alone probably cannot do the job. But communitarians often overlook the need to provide a space within which a plurality of worldviews can flourish. Additionally the distinctive virtues that are attached to social harmony and civic cooperation need to be accounted for if there is going to be a moral component to civic education. In order for this to occur Rawls’ “freestanding” and adaptive political order geared towards generating “an overlapping consensus” provides a useful template.

Eamonn Callan is deeply indebted to Rawls’ thought and has been one of the major figures in bringing Rawlsian ideas to bear on educational issues. Callan is very sympathetic to Rawls’ turn towards accepting the inevitability of pluralism and addressing the consequences that flow from it. But Callan is not so sanguine about the argument that political liberalism will dispense with the charge of liberal subversiveness because it limits itself to the “political conception of the person” and leaves comprehensive conceptions of the good untouched. He begins Creating Citizens with a discussion of the move that Rawls suggests that he has made; from what is often called “comprehensive liberalism” to political liberalism. By considering the political education entailed by both strands of liberalism Callan challenges Rawls’ optimism that he has been able to adequately address communitarian critics by focusing only on “the political conception of the person.” This is to say that liberalism – political or comprehensive – is going to infringe on how comprehensive conceptions of the good are formed and how they are harmonized with broader political concerns.

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8 Callan paraphrases Rawls and writes, “comprehensive liberalism has a wide scope because it affirms some general and comprehensive or partially comprehensive moral doctrines” (Callan, 1997, p. 13). These doctrines are operative in most spheres of activity, whereas political liberalism purports to content itself only with how agents operate in political dealings (excluding activities like religious observation, aesthetic enjoyment, etc.).
To understand Callan’s rejection of the clean bifurcation of political and comprehensive liberalism we need to note two concepts that Rawls introduces in *Political Liberalism*. In addition to recognizing the inevitable ethical pluralism that can flourish within a liberal order Rawls also notes the inherent limitations of human reason (and the ability for humans to reason together). Both of these facts can (and often do) lead “reasonable” people to serious disagreement, and Rawls calls a sensitivity to the sources of these disagreements “the burdens of judgment.” As he puts it “many or most of our important judgments are made under conditions where it is not to be expected that conscientious persons with full powers of reason, even after free discussion, will all arrive at the same conclusion. Some conflicting reasonable judgment…may be true, others false; conceivably all may be false” (Rawls, 2005, p. 58). If we accept and respect this as the nature of public discourse (i.e. we accept the burdens of judgment) then we are on the way to a laudable “democratic ideal of toleration.” This ideal of toleration dovetails nicely with what Rawls refers to as “reasonable pluralism.”

Callan picks up on the fact that there needs to be some sort of standard for the ethical pluralism that political discourse can recognize and accommodate\(^9\). Like Rawls he sees “reasonableness” as providing these evaluative standards by ensuring that political agents are committed to moral reciprocity (in setting fair terms of cooperation, remaining receptive to facts and arguments presented to them, etc.) and incorporating the

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\(^9\) As Callan puts it “liberal democracies are hardly likely to endure, much less thrive once we cease to care about the difference between laudable political virtue and tolerable political vice” (Callan, 1997, p. 24). In essence this is the problem that Rawls has to address when dealing with the fact of ethical pluralism from the standpoint of political liberalism. If he were advocating a strong version of ethical (or comprehensive) liberalism the demarcations would be much clearer (i.e. political vice like willingly subsuming your political voice under that of another could not be tolerated).
burdens of judgment into public discourse. By limiting this “reasonableness” to the political conception of the person Rawls can, he thinks, sidestep the issue of imposing too stringent a commitment on citizens and limit the scope of his inquiry to public acts of political discourse. If reasonableness were a more general principle, as many felt was the case with comprehensive liberalism, then the evaluative standards meant to address pluralism would unfairly constitute the very nature of pluralism itself. In its ugliest form making reasonableness a general requirement animated much of the colonialist attitude towards education in the colonies (see the film “Afrique, je te Plumerai” (1993) by Jean-Marie Téno for an example of this in the French context).

Before getting into Callan’s treatment of Rawls it is important to note why the process of civic education is an important component to any political theory. As we saw above Rawls’ political liberalism is concerned with how a stable and just society will exist over time given an ethically diverse population. There are two notions that are imperative to this process: a highly moralized conception of the citizen and a concern for social reproduction across succeeding generations. If a just society is going to stabilize itself around the creation and preservation of just institutions it needs to inculcate some substantive moral commitments in the citizenry. Where an unwillingness to listen to the demands of others or unreasonableness abound citizens are unlikely reach morally praiseworthy solutions in their civic engagements. Rawls’ hope is that a commitment to reciprocity and accepting the burdens of judgment can serve as acceptable moral ideals for citizenship, which in turn gives a specific telos to civic education. This conception of the morally praiseworthy citizen provides the necessary support for the type of social reproduction that prevents the abandonment of just social arrangements. If succeeding
generations are not educated in a way that allows them to recognize the moral force of just institutions it is unlikely that they will be committed to their preservation or to their adaptation to evolving claims of social justice.

The open question that Callan aims to answer is to whether Rawls’ supposedly substantive but minimally intrusive moral ideals quell objections to the supposed overdemandingness of comprehensive liberalism. Rawls is convinced that political liberalism is freestanding and thus civic education leaves deep ethical commitments untouched by focusing only on the minimal requirements of political competency. These minimal requirements entail accepting the burdens of judgment and abiding by the standards of reasonableness. Callan’s main argument is that these requirements are not as minimally intrusive as Rawls would have it and a Rawlsian civic education would have transformative effects on the deep ethical commitments of citizens (effects which some may react to with discomfort). He believes this for two major reasons. First, once we have accepted the burdens of judgment we have fundamentally restructured how a comprehensive conception of the good operates in our lives. This is to say that limiting our focus to a “political conception of the person” is an impossibility insofar as accepting the burdens of judgment effects how people reason about the good. This leads to Callan’s second point, which is that the type of compartmentalization that a Rawlsian civic education calls for turns out to be a myth insofar as it still amounts to a full blown education for autonomy (which brings us back onto the terrain of comprehensive liberalism). Let me explain these points in more detail.

Imagine a child who has been raised in a relatively homogenous community that adheres to a strict interpretation of Christian tenets (we can think of the household of the
Lutheran minister in Bergman’s *Fanny and Alexander*). This child’s upbringing by their family would most likely inculcate beliefs that form a coherent and comprehensive conception of the good. Rawls believes that the ability to form and adhere to a comprehensive conception of the good is an important moral power for citizens, but Callan presses him on what would occur when the child in this example is asked to consider ethical pluralism via the burdens of judgment. He writes that the “attempt to understand the reasonableness of convictions that may be in deep conflict with doctrines learned in the family cannot be carried through without inviting disturbing questions that these convictions might be the framework for a better way of life” (1997, p. 36). After engaging in the type of imaginativeness that is required to understand why others hold such different beliefs than one’s own the child may reaffirm their commitment to those beliefs by which they were raised. But “these have a new psychological context that makes it implausible to say that the ‘same’ conception of the good is affirmed before and after we have come to accept the burdens of judgment” (*ibid*, p. 36). This new psychological context includes that type of independent reflection that characterizes autonomous behavior, and by seeing this we see that political liberalism has not been able to shake the intrusiveness of comprehensive liberalism.

Callan’s critique of Rawls is in no way a condemnation of a Rawlsian civic education. He is quite enthusiastic about the imaginative sympathy and reflectiveness that accepting the burdens of judgment inculcates in students (insofar as we can’t reject another conception of the good root and branch, but must imagine what it could possibly mean from their perspective). His primary concern is that the false distinction that Rawls tries to draw between political and comprehensive liberalism masks the deeper issues of
social reproduction and morally laudable traits that animate an enterprise like civic education. On the one hand it is important to distinguish the requirements of citizens when they are reasoning together about political matters and the deep ethical commitments that constitute our personality. But to think that these two matters aren’t contiguous in certain respects fundamentally mischaracterizes what it means to be an integrated, autonomous person. As Callan writes, “[a] strategy for distinguishing between the political and other aspects of the self that depends on juggling contradictory beliefs about the rational basis of our most central ethical convictions plainly yields the wrong kind of compartmentalization” (ibid, p. 31). This task of balancing the requirements of citizenship with an accurate conception of the self will not be easy (or uncontroversial) business, but unless we come to terms with the scope of civic education that liberalism (comprehensive or political) entails we will misconstrue the benefits and limitations of a liberal philosophy of education.

The upshot of Callan’s critique is that a focus on “justice as reasonableness” keeps related matters examined in A Theory of Justice very relevant to civic education (because of the imposing requirements of accepting the burdens of judgment). Political liberalism was not able to dispense with the charge of “liberal partisanship”, but all this means is that liberals will need to flesh out in more detail why their imposing form of civic education is justified in a pluralistic society. The following two sections explore ways in which Callan undertakes this project of justification.

**Patriotism, the Liberal Polity, and Civic Virtues:**

A common talking point of the Bush administration has been that “people around the world yearn for liberty” and liberal democratic regimes should be promoted wherever
this yearning is suppressed. Despite the intuitive appeal of this message it has been met
with a tepid response by the global community (especially in those societies that
comprise Bush’s intended audience). This is to a large extent due to the stark
contradictions between rhetoric and policy when it comes to democracy promotion (for
an example of this in the Iraq context see Harvey, 2005). But I think there is a larger
issue behind the lackluster response to Bush’s rhetoric that goes beyond the common
charge of political hypocrisy. In contemporary liberal democratic societies, where liberal
institutions are well entrenched (e.g. a well functioning justice system, systems of fair
representation, safeguards against corruption, etc.), there seems to be a void where the
animating principles of the liberal project once stood. This is to say that the justificatory
principles that grounded these institutions in a collective pursuit of social justice are now
either obscure or inoperative when it comes time to resolve conflicts amongst citizens.

In education we can see this ambivalence towards liberalism in debates over
multiculturalism. In a recent article Callan poses the problem this way: “How are stable
democratic institutions to be sustained in nation states whose citizens are increasingly
culturally diverse and increasingly resistant to the coercive assimilation and
subordination that once helped secure political stability?” (Callan, 2002, p. 465)\textsuperscript{10}. The
argument is that without a sense of shared identity or shared purpose the civic virtues and
civic participation needed for the flourishing of liberal institutions will not be an
attainable educational goal. Even if we take Callan’s criticism of Rawls, as reviewed in

\textsuperscript{10} In this question Callan implicitly touches on the inspirational void I alluded to above. Many multiculturalists see liberalism as a mask for eroding traditional social arrangements (usually of minority cultures) for a stable, yet uninspiring set of procedures for resolving disputes. What is lost is a sense of obligation, shared meaning, and cultural pride that had (they argue) flourished in these minority cultures prior to “coercive assimilation.”
the preceding section of this chapter, and accept the quasi-comprehensiveness of a liberal
civic education, we would still need to make another move to show how the outcome of
this education can function successfully within extant liberal institutions (which it could
be argued are being strained by growing diversity and a lack of public confidence). One
way to show that a liberal civic education is ill suited to extant liberal institutions is to
show that these institutions alone are not promoting the exercise of liberal civic virtues
attached to dialogue, reciprocity, and social justice. Another way to say this is that there
is a pervasive lack of commitment to liberal civic virtues because liberal ideas are not
finding (or cannot find) their realization in the traditional channels that liberals imagine.
We can think of the declining voter turnout, the increasing tendency to resolve disputes
through legal channels as opposed to public forums or informal arbitration, and the
penchant for absolving the public of collective responsibility through privatization of
once public institutions (schools, basic infrastructure, military operations, etc) as
indicators of this gap between ideals and practices.

An attractive, yet highly contentious option to address this problem is to instill a
sense of social solidarity through an attachment to one’s country and compatriots.
Inculcating patriotic sentiment is attractive because it sets clear boundaries on the moral
community, justifies the language of obligation and sacrifice, provides a coherent
(meta)subject in the form of the nation that can undertake noble pursuits, and militates
against an abandonment of social institutions and our fellow citizens who may be in need.
But at the same time these very reasons should give us cause for concern because they
can and have served as the justification for some of the most horrendous acts of cruelty,
xenophobic policies, and bankrupting of social morality that history has born witness to.
Additionally many cosmopolitans feel that the era rooted in the frame of discrete nation state is over in our globalized world and a universal focus on human rights should set the boundaries for the moral community and generate our moral obligations and duties. And finally multiculturalists see an attempt to instill patriotic sentiment (especially when done through the vehicle of sterilized historical fictions) as preventing the type of progressive thinking that is needed to reverse historically rooted injustices.

Despite these very powerful objections to the idea of patriotism Callan is in favor of retrieving some of the possible benefits of inculcating patriot sentiment (as a corrective to the kind of civic atrophy described above). Part of his attempt is developed in an attempt to address these objections (though not completely successfully as Harry Brighouse argues (Brighouse, 2006)) and the other part fits into his larger project of guaranteeing positive social reproduction by creating virtuous citizens. The argument in favor of patriotic sentiment gets its early articulation in Creating Citizens in a response to the communitarian critique that liberals are unresponsive to the communal sources of political (and personal) virtue (Callan, 1997, pp. 81-96). He later goes on to develop this point in response to the thorny debate between conservatives (e.g. Lynne Cheney and other intellectual descendants of Leo Strauss) and multiculturalists (e.g. Gary Nash) over the teaching of history, arguing that “only through history can [students] come to know how civic ideals can be enacted and betrayed in the messy, morally ambiguous world of the nation state whose future they inherit” (Callan, 2002, p. 476)\(^\text{11}\). The thread that

\(^{11}\) In addition to this idea of inherited responsibility this quote points to Callan’s emphasis on the importance of narrative in civic education. How the narratives that constitute a national character are presented and received is at the heart of the debate between Cheney and Nash (i.e. should they be sanitized to prevent trauma and shame or sober and critical to prevent a sentimental and uncritical patriotism). If “the liberal democratic tradition is
guides this development is a sophisticated consequentialism that acknowledges the worries attached to promoting patriotic sentiment, but ultimately sees what he calls a “liberal patriotism” (or in other places “democratic patriotism”) as an attractive and worthy candidate for ensuring the health of liberal democracies. This is so because patriotic sentiment, when experienced within certain moral constraints, can lead to the flourishing of citizens and the political communities in which they find themselves.

The defense of patriotism that Callan presents in *Creating Citizens* springboards off of a discussion of the role of community and affective relationships in moral education. The issue is first raised towards the end of a chapter that is trying to undercut a moral education that proposes a clean division of an ethic of care and the virtue of justice. Among other things Callan considers whether the austere considerations of justice are best conceived of as serving a remedial function in our moral reasoning when caring relationships have broken down. Intuitively this picture makes sense when we consider how obligations of selflessness and respect appear in our intimate relationships. We don’t consciously consider these people as instantiations of the impersonal duties that justice solicits from moral agents. However, as Callan puts it, “the virtue of justice is necessary as an expression of the interpersonal recognition that befits moral relations among equals, even when caring attachment is enough to motivate action that defuses conflict and gives everyone the liberty and resources to which they have a right” (Callan, 1997, p. 81). On Callan’s view this integration of the moral imperatives of justice with a complex narrative that weaves together stories of philosophical reflection, social activism, political accomplishment and failure, all revolving around the ideal of free and equal citizenship” (Callan, 1994, p. 216), then the focus of civic education should be on how to read this narrative in a way that avoids the vices of uncritical sentimentality and ungenerous rejection.
the affective ties of an ethic of care is necessary for either justice or care to receive their fullest articulation. This is so because both the moral status of the person (as a bearer of rights and inherent dignity) and the laudable moral intentions of the actor (driven by a rich sense of respect for the other) are both accounted for.

The case of patriotism and duties owed to fellow citizens serves as an excellent example of how Callan’s integrated approach would appear. He writes that the “severity and frequency of conflict under pluralism threatens the perpetuation of justice. The bond of mutual care that justice embodies may have to be allied with other ways of harmonizing lives of citizens if justice is to hold” (ibid., p. 87). The worry here is that in times of conflict the caring bonds of solidarity within social subgroups can eclipse or deemphasize the demands of justice towards fellow citizens (e.g. a commitment to equal consideration, attentiveness to the motivations of fellow citizens who are not members of one’s subgroup, etc.). If civic education cannot adequately address these conflicts between loyalty (narrowly conceived) and justice (broadly conceived) it will not create the citizens needed to sustain a healthy and vibrant liberal politics. To undercut this possibility we could either try to extend the bonds of solidarity as broadly as possible by promoting a strong sense of identification with all co-nationals (and thus continue to marginalize the role of justice in civic life), or we could try to reestablish the role of justice within these subgroups to reinforce the civic virtues necessary for its preservation in the general political culture. For Callan this is ultimately a false choice because each side implicates the other. As we saw in the case of a Rawlsian civic education, once the principles of justice take root in particular communities and particular associations they
imply a larger commitment to the institutions of a liberal civic society. But for these principles to take root Callan advocates a disposition towards “liberal patriotism.”

What liberal patriotism entails is the development of certain civic virtues that mirror Callan’s integrated moral education. These virtues emerge out of a Rawlsian civic education (i.e. the acceptance of the burdens of judgment) and cash out in the cultivation of sympathetic imagination and increased trust when dealing with others. Callan notes that “we come to draw on that reservoir of trust only through initiation into a just polity, and coming to care about the people and the particular institutions it encompasses” (ibid, p. 95). The important thing to note here is that a promising way to conceive of these institutions is to associate them with whatever constitutes the characteristic interactions of a polity (i.e. the justice system, school board meetings, or in a dwindling number of cases the town meetings that are still held annually in communities like my home town of Contoocook, New Hampshire). So it is not a matter of extending the moral community to all compatriots by appealing to overly particularistic criteria (i.e. those who belong vs. those who fall outside of our sphere of loyalty), but instead coming to identify particular others as bearers of rights who deserve our respect, sympathetic attentiveness, and other qualities that bolster the just liberal society\(^{12}\). Often these will take place within our immediate geographical communities, but the upshot is that wherever citizens interact it should be done against a background culture and institutional framework in which civic

\(^{12}\) Implicit in my discussion has been the basic liberal commitment to free and equal citizenship. It is worth making these points explicit at this point because the counterargument by communitarians holds that these commitments are so thin and uninspiring that they cannot be counted on as moral resources to unite a seriously pluralistic society (e.g. see MacIntyre, 1988, p. 326-348). Callan would respond that an imperfectly liberal society (burdened with its imperfect history) is no reason to doubt the efficacy of these resources. This response should be kept in mind for the following discussion of “shared fate.”
virtue can flourish. By locating this broadly diffused liberal patriotism in the polity and the institutions it encompasses Callan can lay the groundwork for a concern for all citizens as opposed to local liberal communities (i.e. where co-traditionalists are seen as the bearers of liberal rights, but not all co-nationals).

But there is a second move that Callan needs to make to ground liberal patriotism in real societies and not in some abstraction like Rawls’ “well ordered society.” He also wants to introduce some sort of progressive narrative, which he often calls a “shared fate” that occurs within the historical development of nations. A liberal patriot is thus equally devoted to the political and moral justifications for free and equal citizenship and how these ideals are instantiated in particular struggles over the course of a nation’s history. The hope for Callan is that if compatriots are encouraged to identify with these instances where bonds of solidarity and trust were built against illiberal social arrangements (and were justified in terms of rights, obligations, respect, and care), civic virtue can take hold and be deployed when facing future challenges. This cannot be achieved by a history presenting sanitized national myths or an overly morose fixation on the moral failures of history, but instead by a commitment to ensuring that communities and spaces of political action are places where civic virtues can take root and develop.

The definition of patriotic sentiment just described resists the worry that patriotism unjustly circumscribes the moral community or over determines the moral

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13 It is an open question as to whether the national community will become less important in these “future challenges.” Callan thinks that cosmopolitan outlooks greatly underestimate the “empathetic imaginations powerful enough to sustain a sense of common fate” with those who are distant from us culturally or geographically (1997, p. 131). This point is taken, but Callan is also aware of this lack of empathetic imagination taking root within nations as societies self-segregate along racial or socio-economic lines (for an articulation of this worry see Bauman, 2001, p. 50-57). I will take up this question in more detail in chapter 3.
motivations of citizens. One reason that this is so is because it is not tied to either a particularistic justification (e.g. Hirohito’s gestures towards Japan’s divine genealogical lineage as an argument for his Greater East Asia Prosperity campaign) or an account over reliant on the vocabulary of civic obligation (e.g. Churchill or Roosevelt’s pre and post WWII rhetoric). Instead, as Harry Brighouse notes, Callan thinks that “love of country can contribute something to the flourishing of the person who experiences it” (Brighouse, 2006, p. 548), though this experience should be disciplined along the lines of the integrated approach to moral education\(^\text{14}\). The hope is that this flourishing will occur in something akin to a feedback loop, where, in the American parlance, the march towards a “more perfect union” becomes associated with the characteristic civic dispositions and interactions that take hold within the polity. Theoretically there is nothing in this approach that erodes the goods of particular communities and there is something substantive (namely the realization of moral goods intrinsic to the exercise of civic virtues) to bind citizens divided by reasonable pluralism.

**Autonomy, Liberalism, and the Good:**

The previous two sections pointed towards the types of virtues Callan sees as ensuring the attractiveness of liberalism. Foremost amongst these are the capacities for sympathetic imagination and mutual respect that come from accepting the burdens of

\(^{14}\) In essence patriotic sentiment is a pedagogical tool attached to moral education. In a recent article Callan distinguishes “idolatrous” patriotism from “morally apt” patriotism (Callan, 2006, pp. 525-46). Idolatrous patriotism is marked by unconditional love of country given an idealized representational structure constituting “the nation.” This type of love is prone to corruption insofar as a representational structure can (and usually does) paper over objectively disturbing facts about the nation. Morally apt patriotism is grounded in a sober view of these disturbing facts, but ultimately geared towards a devotion of the country moving towards its better self (We could think about the tough love of a parent trying to help a teenager move away from destructive habits…or maybe a teenager encouraging her parents to quit smoking despite her profound respect for them).
judgment. These virtues are developed in characteristic types of interaction (be it in
dialogue or otherwise) in a pluralistic society. What has been left unsaid though is
anything specific about the ideal of autonomy, which is one of the primary educational
goals of a liberal education. I want to conclude this chapter by discussing how Callan
conceives of autonomy and how it figures into both his political and moral thought. By
raising the issue of autonomy I also want to consider the limits of compulsion in both
civic and moral terms (i.e. when is compulsory schooling justified for the health of liberal
institutions and when is it justified for ensuring minimal degrees of human flourishing).

In *Autonomy and Schooling* (1988), Callan’s first book, he offers a fairly strong
justification for a common education for autonomy. For the early Callan autonomy is a
justifiable educational ideal because it is “essential to the exercise of moral virtue and
justifiable self-respect” (p. 45). These are intrinsically valuable, and since autonomy
cannot be decoupled from them autonomy is a strong candidate for having great intrinsic
value as well. In light of these higher values schools are permitted, on Callan’s view, to
engage in some practices that don’t square completely with liberal theory (e.g. forms of
paternalism that place the development of autonomy above the rights of parents to instill
a comprehensive conception of the good in their children). What constrains these
practices is a calculus that weighs up the intended benefits (here a child’s ability to

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15 At this point Callan’s rough definition of autonomy was the development of interests, but with “a high degree of realism and independence of mind in the way [individuals] regulate their wills” (1988, p. 26).
16 We can see this connection when we think about Callan’s Aristotelianism. He writes, “one exercises virtue to the degree that one can resist temptation, and one can do that only to the extent that the will is regulated [though I feel ‘developed’ may be more apposite here] in a realistic fashion” (1988, p. 46). And of self-respect he writes that in addition to bearing virtuous traits we “also want to have a substantial and creative role in the *development* [italics mine] and expression of those attributes” (1988, p. 47).
develop her interests) against any non-trivial loss of freedom (here the suppression of a child exhibiting her interests). Callan is apt to note that this requires “a constant vigilance” because “where the benefits cannot be foreseen with any justifiable confidence, paternalism is sheer recklessness” (1988, p. 112). So the question here seems to be an empirical one: do children have strong nascent capacities for autonomy that call for more freedom in their development or do they require a strong paternalistic intervention to lead them in this direction (and who should this come from)?

The problem with framing the issue in empirical terms is that autonomy (or the exercise thereof) is not something that is easily quantifiable. The more promising way to approach Callan’s calculus is to inquire into school designs that seem conducive to the promotion of autonomy and see if this approach to schooling violates our intuitions about the nature of children’s abilities and their relevant rights. For Callan this design will have to respond above all to the following issue: at what point does compulsion exact a non-trivial loss in the child’s freedom to develop and express their interests? We can think of two extremes to see why this is an attractive way to frame the design of schooling. On the one hand “any child’s education will be liable to denigrate into projects abandoned when they become too difficult and interests never pushed far enough to realize much of their value” (ibid., p. 114). This violates Callan’s Aristotelian sense of development because unless children are given the means to develop their interests (e.g. in being exposed to new ideas and virtuous traits by knowledgeable, reliable others) they will be prone to stunted growth. On the other end of the spectrum we could see how compulsory education for all adults exacts a non-trivial loss of freedom to express our interests. As
we come closer to the process of “making a life for ourselves” the range of activities and foci of our attention are going to fall outside the purview of the school.

For the early Callan the ideal school design will begin with compulsion insofar as “it renders the compelled individual more autonomous or maximizes her liberty…[because] the extent of her overall freedom is contingent on the extent to which she can freely express her current interests or initiate certain kinds of self-transformation” (ibid., p. 111). This does not mean that we subject all students to a compulsory curriculum though. It is only to say that a range of information, an initiation into certain practices (e.g. to see how something could be intrinsically valuable), and a concerted effort to inculcate realism and independence of mind are needed if the whole project of developing personal autonomy is going to get off the ground. However, as one begins to develop their interests compulsion becomes more exacting insofar as the development of any interest is going to depend on the particular constitution of any individual. There is no one way to develop an interest in aesthetics, and this becomes especially apparent when we keep in mind that this interest in aesthetics needs to be squared with other interests. Callan is good to point out that “there is no reason to suppose that lives governed by a restless drive to perfect the self are not necessarily superior to those which place a greater emphasis on the values of repose, familiarity, and stability” (p. 115). Thus so long as students have deepened their interests in a reasonable way we have good reason to relax compulsion and respect either greater self-governance within the school structure (e.g. allowing students to set their curriculum and schedule) or the ability to pursue their interests outside of school.
In the decade between *Autonomy and Schooling* and *Creating Citizens* Callan has shifted his approach towards an education for autonomy in a manner similar to Rawls’ thoughts on liberalism. The above description gets much of its force by focusing on the act of self-formation over the course of schooling. This approach lends itself far better to comprehensive liberalism than to a supposedly more limited “political conception of the person.” But Callan’s recent reflections have dealt much more with the relationship between individual constitution (or personal virtues) and the problems associated with ensuring the types of positive social reproduction needed to realize the moral ideals behind liberalism across succeeding generations (i.e. on civic virtues). As we have seen in the first section of this chapter, a partially comprehensive conception of autonomy is invoked even in readings of liberalism that try to limit their scope to public political acts (see above, p. 16-18). In what follows I want to consider how this justification for autonomy leads to both a political order that “merits our rational faith” (Callan, 1998, 221) and a conception of human flourishing that can garner widespread support.

The conception of autonomy developed in *Autonomy and Schooling* relies on a distinction between positive and negative freedom. Briefly put negative freedom is often cast in terms of “freedom from” (i.e. liberty) and positive freedom is cast it terms of “freedom to” (i.e. autonomy in the Greek sense of *auto-nomos*, “to give oneself the law”). Callan is primarily concerned with building a conception of autonomy rooted in an argument for positive freedom. However, as the philosopher of education John White points out, there are two levels of self-determination that are often subsumed under the category of positive freedom—*autarchy* and *autonomy*. White writes that an autarchic person “enjoys negative freedom from force or coercion, and is also rationally self-
determining” (1991, p. 97). This is to say that the autarchic person has the capacity to give shape to their lives by reflectively deliberating on important life choices and choosing them freely. We can see how the ideal of autarchy relies on a background of negative freedoms, but ultimately draws on the self-determining aspect of positive freedom. But White goes on to argue that autonomy entails an additional capacity to distance oneself from conventions of one’s environment, which is to say that the autonomous person does not just choose reflectively, but instead chooses after critical reflection.

Though the early Callan does attempt to articulate this more full blown conception of autonomy, he fails to pay proper respect to the range of issues that White evokes. To argue for autonomy (in White’s sense) would be to say both that the background culture against which one makes valuable, reflective decisions should be a constitutive factor of one’s well being (i.e. it should also be an object of concern and in principle ratified for its intrinsic value or contested for restricting one’s full development) and that one’s well-being is intimately bound up with the well-being of others in a liberal democratic society. White gives the example of a musician who hypothetically runs in fairly self-contained circles and adheres to goods seemingly inherent to their specialized craft. He contends that she will inevitably be led to broader social reflectiveness once she begins to reflect on her basic needs, so that “what might promote or harm one’s health, for instance, cannot but lead one, in our society, onto considerations of public health policy, pollution, advertising, and food-processing methods” (White, 1991, p. 103). So instead of the personal development that Callan had foregrounded White argues that we should emphasize the kind of dispositions given to critical evaluations that ultimately
serve our political institutions best\textsuperscript{17}. Bringing in culture and community as a matter of concern leads White to situate the value of personal autonomy within the framework of a liberal democracy, where citizens must attend to “the inner logic of our political and educational institutions, not just their outward forms” (1991, p. 101).

The core arguments of Creating Citizens demonstrate how Callan has moved towards a conception of autonomy that is more amenable to White’s stronger sense of the term. By showing that a civic education geared towards accepting the burdens of judgment does entail a partially comprehensive justification for personal autonomy he can argue for a program of common schooling that binds autonomy to political and social structures. Building on this insight he goes on to show how critical reflection is implicated in our dealings with others by attaching the virtue of justice to caring bonds of solidarity (see above, p. 22-3). But where the bond between arguments for autonomy based on personal well-being and political well-being become the most explicit are in Callan’s discussion of the vice of “ethical servility.”

Ethical servility refers not to wedding our choices to the approval and well-being of significant others like parents or mentors (i.e. mere deference), but instead describes a condition where the moral education of a child has been undertaken in such a way that they cannot at any future date consider or conceive of goods that are not subordinate to the will of those who shaped them. With the deferential child there is a possibility of overcoming the manipulative powers of the parent or mentor, but in the latter case “a chain of ethical servility may link one generation to another, moving back into an infinite

\textsuperscript{17} White is partially following the philosopher Joseph Raz here by basing his arguments on the assumption that liberal democratic societies like the U.S., U.K, and Canada are designed in such a way that the exercise of autonomy (or capacity to) is woven into many prominent institutions (e.g. the legal system, voting arrangements ,etc.).
past, and obscuring for those whose lives it connects the character of their most basic choices and beliefs” (1997, p. 154). Besides being manifestly unacceptable for successful civic participation most would argue that ethical servility has little place in the good life.

Ultimately Callan argues that the kind of reflectiveness that autonomy (as well as the civic virtues of imaginative sympathy, moderation, etc.) promotes is justified as an “antidote to ethical servility.” He writes that the “lesson it teaches is that each of us must learn to ask the questions of how we should live, and that how we answer it can be no servile echo of the answers others have given, even if our thoughts commonly turn out to be substantially the same as those that informed our parents’ lives” (1997, p. 154-5). So schools are often justified in semi-coercive acts (including compulsion) if these minimal reflective capacities are not being developed in the home. At base they are necessary for the exercise and development of political virtue, but at the same time they are also necessary for a minimal sense of personal virtue insofar as human beings should be encouraged to develop past the stages of “mere agency.”

**Concluding Remarks:**

I have devoted this chapter to three planks of Eamonn Callan’s platform for an education for autonomy in liberal democratic societies. First I discussed Callan’s belief that liberalism—political or comprehensive—is going to invoke at least a partially comprehensive justification for autonomy. Callan argues that we must envisage a political order that recognizes this fact and in turn construct an educational system that creates the types of citizens necessary to realize and protect the moral ideals that liberals strive for (i.e. social justice, equal protection, an inclusive political culture, etc.). The
second section followed this insight and discussed one way in which Callan attempts to bridge political design and the qualities of citizens necessary for its realization and protection. Unlike critics who reject the notion of patriotism as an illegitimate basis for partiality, Callan argues that the presence of patriotic sentiment can promote the cultivation of certain civic virtues. This is because patriotism preserves both the formal considerations of justice (by recognizing the inherent worth of compatriots and thus treating them with due respect) and the affective dimension of care (by nurturing bonds of solidarity). While he is sensitive to the possible abuses of introducing partiality to a discourse on moral or civic education, the upshot of Callan’s approach is that civic virtue must find some sort of community in which to flourish (and there are certain structures of communal life that are more praiseworthy than others in respect to the flourishing of civic virtues). I concluded the chapter with some general reflections on the place of autonomy in both a political and moral education. Because liberalism is a moralized political order (which is why some communities charge it with cultural imperialism) these two spheres of education need to find areas of confluence, and Callan locates these in an argument for positive freedom and a political/educational that militates against “ethical servility.”

The preceding discussion has relied heavily on the thinking of John Rawls. As I mentioned earlier Callan is heavily indebted to Rawls and thus it has been necessary to provide some background vis a vis Rawls’ ideas. In addition to this Rawls’ ideas serve as a touchstone for many prominent political philosophers of education (liberal and communitarian), so it will be helpful to have him in mind in the subsequent chapters as other philosophers are brought into my discussion. But that being said examining a philosopher like Eamonn Callan, who emerges out of the mainstream Rawlsian tradition,
has accounted for only one side of the equation that I alluded to in the introduction. What makes philosophers like Callan and Rawls so valuable is their intellectual rigor and their willingness to identify and work through the problems that arise in societies divided by different (and often opposing) creeds and aspirations. Callan’s project of considering the education needed to promote and ensure the virtue of justice in public and political life provides us with some valuable conceptual resources when thinking about how to address problems associated with pluralism and globalization.

In the next chapter I turn to the other side of my equation and see how social theorists are coping with these same issues. My hope is that their standard of trenchant observation and critique will compliment Callan’s analytic rigor.
We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us.

-Winston Churchill

Chapter 2: Difference and Narrative in Liquid Times

In 1992 Albert Borgmann joined a growing number of philosophers and social theorists attempting to describe what many intellectuals have taken as a matter of fact: there has been an epochal shift underfoot in the past thirty years and it can best be described as a transition from modern to postmodern culture. For Borgmann modernism entailed “the fusion of the domination of nature with the primacy of method and the sovereignty of the individual” (1992, p. 25). Aside from the recognizable advances this brought in ethics, science, and economics it also organized human practices and shaped landscapes in novel ways. Advances in transportation and the possibility of integrating markets necessitated the construction of roads and railroad tracks (in North America carved out of an unforgiving landscape) and created focal structures like railroad stations and commercial corridors (often called “strips” in the United States) which gathered people in novel ways.

Postmodernism, aside from being a reaction to and critique of modernism is a much more elusive term for Borgmann. Like modernism it is going to entail a series of novel practices that gather people and organize environments in new ways\textsuperscript{18}, but there is much debate on how much these focal practices differ from modernist culture. The three thinkers that I consider in this chapter – David Harvey, Zygmunt Bauman, and Richard Sennett – are all very concerned with these changes in their specific domains. Harvey is particularly concerned with the way space is organized by political, economic, material, much more elusive term for Borgmann. Like modernism it is going to entail a series of novel practices that gather people and organize environments in new ways\textsuperscript{18}, but there is much debate on how much these focal practices differ from modernist culture. The three thinkers that I consider in this chapter – David Harvey, Zygmunt Bauman, and Richard Sennett – are all very concerned with these changes in their specific domains. Harvey is particularly concerned with the way space is organized by political, economic, material,
and social forces (drawing on the interpretive tools provided by urban sociology, architectural theory, economics, and cultural geography). Bauman’s insightful (though sometimes hyperbolic) writings on modern communities and their relation to the promotion or dissolution of civic virtues signal a definite epochal shift (though like Borgmann the “towards what?” question is difficult to answer). Richard Sennett’s sociological studies of labor conditions in “the new capitalism” track the consequences on economic changes on the character of modern workers.

On the surface it may appear as if these thinkers are engaging a fundamentally different problem set than Callan when considering this epochal shift. Callan is attempting to work out an articulation of liberalism and the political education that it would require against the associated problems of the fragmenting tendencies of growing pluralism, the temptation to increase coercive state intervention to counter this fragmentation, and the necessity of balancing the interests of individuals and families against a political culture that cannot function without substantial cooperation amongst people with divergent interests. Following Rawls he sits comfortably within the tradition of political philosophers associated with major institutions like Oxford and Harvard and operates with a fairly clear scope of concern (e.g. he is not concerned with the phenomenology of civic participation). Harvey and Sennett on the other hand both have roots in urban sociology and it is hard to place their interests in any well defined camp19.

19 Harvey’s writings are notoriously wide-ranging (architecture, cultural studies, geography, anthropology, and the political economy of capital accumulation to name just a few), but he is most well known for his account of “uneven geographical development”, which built a Marxian theoretical apparatus to study geographical differentiation. Sennett has also written on a number of topics (including some works of fiction), but his work has increasingly turned towards the sociology of labor in response to the economic upheavals of the post WWII period.
Bauman also casts a wide net, but his writings are a recognizable outgrowth of modern Continental philosophy and the Frankfurt School. The problem set that occupies these three writers are finding ways to track the influence of (post)modernity on human practices (e.g. at work or in the home), political consensus (what Habermas might call “deep background knowledge”), and issues of social justice (often interpreted in a Marxian framework). They are less enamored with formal political design and are more concerned with the material and symbolic conditions in which people find themselves in today’s advanced capitalist societies. To my knowledge none of these writers have devoted extensive attention to educational issues; and while each is concerned with social belonging little attention is paid to the formal category of citizen. So why do I think that it is a worthwhile activity to facilitate some sort of dialogue between the two camps? 

I can only suggest some preliminary responses at the moment because this thesis considers a thin slice of the possible directions this dialogue could take (I am primarily concerned with issues attached to citizenship and other matters of social belonging). First, as I alluded to in the introduction, I take Kant seriously when he says that “thoughts without content are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind.” Though my

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20 Roughly speaking these two camps are divided into social theorists and more traditional political philosophers. However in the previous chapter I introduced a wide diversity of thought falling into this second camp, so for the purposes of the thesis I want to sharpen up the divisions I intend here. Callan was introduced partly as a figurehead for a genre of educational thought concerned with the philosophical justification (and impactions) of formal political institutions like the common school (and the specific policies contained therein). Like his communitarian counterparts his analysis is disciplined by practical political considerations. In opposition to Callan’s tradition I want to place social theorists who set their sights on larger and more informal targets like culture and political ideology. The thinkers I consider in this chapter work more along the lines of “diagnosis and prescription” as opposed to a process of analytic clarification and proposition. This distinction will become much clearer when we compare the objects of concern in this chapter to those in the previous chapter.
employment of this quotation is taken out of its original context I believe it gets at the condition of degraded dialogue between different focuses in education (e.g. philosophers of education and critical pedagogues). But more importantly I think that bringing these divergent lines of inquiry together can elucidate some productive and important cross-disciplinary approaches to the multifaceted problems that educators face today. For example the fact that more than half of the world’s population now lives in urban areas should not go unnoticed by liberals and communitarians concerned with the role of communities in the moral education of students. Similarly theorists with a more critical bent should be reminded of the moral principles underwriting a liberal theory of education and the importance of engaging with policy makers instead of fetishizing “spaces of resistance.” In both cases I believe that the dialogue will strengthen the different perspectives by making them account for possibly problematic issues that go unchallenged within their own discourses.

But in addition to this the dialogue will raise two very important issues that Callan does not devote much attention to. The first concerns the growing influence of the market in different spheres of modern life (education being prominent amongst them). While Callan is by no means following the tradition of Adam Smith and F.A. Hayek, he and other liberals need to ask themselves if the growth of neoliberal thought requires the revision of some core assumptions underwriting the Rawlsian liberal tradition (such as reexamining the efficacy of practical forms of civic obligation to countervail readings of liberalism that foreground a brand of minimally restrained choice) Secondly Callan doesn’t seriously consider the ways in which the social bases of recognition and self-respect have changed in contemporary society (aside from some problematic claims of
accommodation and recognition from certain minority groups). It is this concern that preoccupies Harvey, Bauman, and Sennett; and it will be useful to see if their writings have resonance with Callan’s formal considerations of a just political order (I will continue this line of thought in Chapter 3). For the remainder of the chapter I’ll provide some content to these two new issues by examining changes in the material fabric of lived environments, the troubles facing community building, and emergent trends in the national and global economy. While these considerations do draw us away a bit from educational issues I’ll attempt to keep the discussion on track by making frequent references to the issues raised in the previous chapter.

**Place, Perception, and the Mediation of Difference:**

For Callan and other liberal philosophers of education a perennial problem is to give an account of a coherent and unified political identity in a culture that is engineered to accommodate the divergent and often opposing interests and worldviews of individuals. Any measures taken by schools that resort to forced conformity or subtle degradations of cultural forms must be forcefully rejected. But in order to avoid tribalism or the domination of the weak by the strong some sort of account must be given to ensure the type of civic cooperation that is necessary if the liberal virtue of justice is to take root. In *A Theory of Justice* Rawls provides a popular approach to this problem by giving a contractarian account designed to mitigate the injustices that can stem from power differentials amongst parties or an antagonistic tribalism. The bargaining done in his “original position” provides citizens with diverse interests the conceptual tools to think through problems like distributing goods in the face of relative scarcity while taking into account the dignity and desires of all parties. But as we saw in the preceding chapter this
formal contractarian approach underestimates the incommensurability of some differences and the good faith needed from all parties for the resolution of real problems within the framework that Rawls imagines.

The later Rawls provides us with a second popular approach to the problem of political unity in a pluralistic society. In *Political Liberalism* he separates “the political conception of the person” from a more holistic account of citizens in order to construct a “freestanding liberalism”\(^{21}\) that will be accessible (and acceptable) to a wide diversity of people. On this picture a unified political identity entails the acceptance of the inevitability of differences amongst citizens (as opposed to what some see as the latent universalism in the consensus reached by participants in the “original position”). Given this condition differences are bridged by the civic virtues that Callan draws out of Rawls’ political thought; namely sympathetic imagination and openness when diverse groups come together for political purposes. As opposed to the fixed principles that the earlier Rawls may have gestured towards\(^ {22}\) the later Rawls believes that “an overlapping consensus” can emerge from dialogue occurring within this quasi-autonomous zone of political discourse. It is this “politically liberal” Rawlsian approach to political unity that Callan favors, albeit with the important corrective that the civic virtues he praises cannot leave the holistic conception of the person unchanged. Callan’s important contribution has been his ability to highlight the moral implications of a liberal political education by

\(^{21}\) Freestanding refers to Rawls’ idea that political liberalism can create a political space that remains neutral regarding comprehensive conceptions of the good (i.e. it can stand free of the metaphysical commitments people hold in their background culture). Though as we saw in Chapter 1 this idea of complete neutrality turns out to be a myth.

\(^{22}\) Primary amongst these fixed principles is an account of justice that relies heavily on the elevated moral status of equality. His “difference principle” serves as the classic case for the wedding of justice to equality.
showing its morally praiseworthy commitments. These include building sympathetic imagination and openness into a political education geared towards getting students to accept the burdens of judgment, as well as highlighting the fact that an education for autonomy can serve as an essential bulwark against the vices of ethical servility and rampant unreasonableness.

Implicit in the two approaches discussed above is an account of difference (or ethical pluralism if you like) that remains relatively unproblematic because of its centrality to the argument. In the very definition of the burdens of judgment lies a definition of difference—that given differences in lived experience, personality, and valuation of relevant data reasonable people will come to different conclusions even if presented with the same arguments or information. Callan gives a more deterministic sense of difference by rooting these sources of diversification in two of the major contributors to early education: the community and the family. While these are legitimate sources of learning and rightfully significant actors in the developmental cycle of children he notes that the broader political community has some justified interest in these levers of differentiation (see above, p. 32-3). But what might Callan mean by community here and where would the interests of the State run counter to it? He seems to have his sights set on traditional social arrangements that rub up against those liberal commitments that flow from what we call modernity (e.g. a rejection of arbitrary uses of authority, respect to peacefully pursue our projects within reasonable legal constraints, protections of basic rights, etc.). While this is undeniably an important aspect of liberal thought I want to suggest that there are alternative approaches that can help foster a richer sense of difference when taken in tandem with liberal theory. Following David Harvey
I’ll consider the notion of place as both an instructive and relevant lens through which to conceive of and evaluate this process of differentiation that Callan and Rawls often take for granted. The upshot of this analysis will be to suggest that there are good reasons to examine the material and symbolic conditions of communities and families as important factors in the project of a civic education geared towards getting students to accept the burdens of judgment and forge a coherent ground for political unity.

There are two central insights that guide Harvey’s forays into various social, cultural, and political phenomena. First, as he states in *The Condition of Postmodernity*, “there has been a sea-change in cultural as well as in political-economic practices” since around 1970. He believes that this change stems from a reorganization of global capitalism, the proliferation of new technologies (in media, transportation, IT, etc.), and currents in artistic production (especially architecture and film). Through a Marxian framework he aims to track these changes by seeing how forms of life within certain environments are affected by a regime increasingly geared towards assuring the free flow of global capital. But unlike many Marxists he doesn’t present the geographical differentiation resulting from this process as overly deterministic of the kinds of identities and political activities that citizens should have. This leads to Harvey’s second insight, which asks us to look at identity (political or otherwise) through the lens of “place.”

What he means by this is that social and political activities are mediated by material, representational, and symbolic environments that provide horizons of meaning within which we constitute our identities. One way to understand these horizons is to examine

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23 Harvey remains heavily indebted to Henri Lefebvre’s investigations into the social and material production of space. For a sense of this indebtednesses see his afterward to Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* (1991, p. 425-432).
how places gain a sense of permanence (i.e. come to take on some defining characteristics) through the actual social processes of mediating differences in lived environments. While this may sound obscure at the moment we will later see why this notion of place could play an important role in Callan’s project of civic education.

What are these changes in cultural and political-economic practices that Harvey is referring to and how do they have a bearing on civic education? As I alluded to above many of these transformations stem from a transition from a broadly Keynesian economic framework (with a strong role for the state and the aim of full employment) to the flexibility of Neoliberalism (with a diminished role for the state and the aim of keeping inflation low and barriers to capital flows minimal). In the United States we can see this shift in the economic decline of industrial centers like Detroit or Pittsburgh and the financialization of the American economy (often manifest in creating “good business climates” through draconian measures like Giuliani’s attempt to “clean up” Manhattan by displacing many poorer residents and increasing police activity (see Harvey, 2007 b)). These new conditions are obviously going to have an effect on the aspirational field of students as they exit the school and enter the economy. But in addition to these material changes Harvey believes that something fundamental has changed in the way we experience space and time. He calls this change a new round of “space-time compression,” by which he is referring to “the processes that so revolutionize the

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24 I devote significant attention to the term “aspirational field” in chapter 4 (see below, p. 83-88). As I state below I take the aspirational field to mean something like that range of representations that make up a definite spectrum of possible identifications for children. I introduce the term now because I think it begins to draw the link between the exercise of autonomy and the social bases of recognition and self respect. If liberals are going to cast autonomous behavior as “endorsing a way of life from the inside” they need to have a richer understanding of this process of endorsement and the conditioning effects of social change to certain ways of life.
objective qualities of space and time that we are forced to alter, sometimes in quite radical ways, how we represent the world to ourselves” (Harvey, 1992, p. 240). This compression is precipitated by advances in communication technologies and transportation and shows up in the familiar discourse about the “increasing interconnectedness of a globalized world.” What should be noted is that this compression is often facilitated through the channels of market activity and thus the objective qualities of cultural changes should be considered (at least partially) in light of underlying neoliberal market principles.

While Harvey is making a point about the logic of capitalist accumulation in a flexible economic regime his thoughts have some bearing on Callan’s civic education (though pointing out points of overlap should not cloud the fact that they are working in different domains with different vocabularies and problem sets). First of all he is commenting on a phenomenon that has so saturated our society that it has often had an exacting influence on the background culture of citizens. It is important to track these

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25 This compression also shows up in postmodern aesthetics and consumer behavior in advanced capitalist societies. In the former case artists have been fascinated by the ability to represent parallel worlds within the confines of a single work (Harvey points the mixed media works of Rauschenberg, novels like Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49*, and films like Wim Wenders’ *Wings of Desire*). In the later case consumers are more and more alienated from the processes of production as labor is dispersed globally and once isolated markets are connected.

26 Briefly neoliberalism entails a protection of individual rights (especially to private property) and an assumption of dessert (either for entrepreneurial success or failure). It sets a legal framework of “freely negotiated contractual obligations between juridical individuals in the marketplace” (Harvey, 2007a, p. 64) and sees the enforcement of this framework as central to the role of the state. Competition is seen as the spark of ingenuity and growth so the State will try to create markets where they once didn’t exist (e.g. in privatizing the management of formerly public programs or opening up a market in schooling through a voucher system) and enforce the legal framework mentioned above. Aside from this the State has a very limited role under the assumption that individuals will be better able to handle matters of personal importance instead of a large bureaucracy. (For a much more detailed description see Harvey, 2007a, pp. 64-86)
changes in the background culture if we are going to expand the vocabulary available to characterize differences specific to our epoch (i.e. viewing agents not as static bearers of tradition, but as people often swept up by these sweeping cultural changes)\(^{27}\). The inability (or antipathy) to appreciate the depth of social, political, or economic experiences infringes on the capacities for citizens to come together and develop reasonable policies to mediate new senses of difference (e.g. considering a community’s location in respect to the arc of national economic development in addition to their location in respect to “mainstream” cultural values). Callan is concerned with the political education necessary to inculcate the virtues needed to sustain positive social reproduction over succeeding generations. What Harvey is asking us to do is consider a range of issues that add new layers of complexity to Callan’s project. For example the phenomenon of decoupling process from product or obscuring the territorial logic of social differentiation (both prime examples of “space-time compression”) seem to call for an expanded set of virtues needed to bridge differences and promote social justice. These virtues will undoubtedly need to cope as much with the fragmenting tendencies of market pressures as with the fragmenting tendencies of pluralism.

The second important bearing that Harvey’s insights have on a liberal civic education is to draw our attention to the possible abuses of liberal notions like “freedom” and “choice.” As Blake \textit{et al} (2001) note, the managerialism of corporate entities and the entrepreneurial spirit of flexible and highly competitive workplaces have taken hold of

\(^{27}\) This is not to accuse Callan of providing an impoverished conception of difference. It is only to say that liberals must always be vigilant against the ossifying tendencies of pluralism. If liberals limit themselves only to religious commitments they run the risk of overlooking other power levers of differentiation that threaten social cohesion (e.g. the power of market forces to dissolve traditions and channels of civic cooperation).
how administrators and policy makers view the ends of education (e.g. the publishing of
U.K. league tables which rank school performance so as to provide parents with the
information needed to make “a more informed choice” about their child’s education).
Harvey’s focus on how market pressures can corrupt civic ideals and effect the material
fabric of lived environments should draw our attention to the growing influence of the
informal education received from both outside the school and within (i.e. when we
consider the lessons learned from aspects in the overall school culture). How these ideals
are reshaped show up in subtle ways, as the moral considerations of social belonging and
recognition are still foregrounded in the formation and implementation of policy (I’ll
explore this in more detail in chapter 3 in the context of special education policy). An
example may help demonstrate how such a subtle shift in civic ideals would appear.

In her article “Nearly Utopian” Lauren Berlant (2007) discusses the role of the
normative category of citizenship in Luc and Jean-Pierre Dardenne’s film *Rosetta* (1999).
The film portrays the struggles of a young Belgian woman named Rosetta, who is trying
to find steady employment while dealing with a less than ideal home situation (she lives
alone with her alcoholic mother in a trailer park at the edges of an urban center). After
being let go of another low-skill job (because her “trial period was over”, which is an
indication of the flexible labor policies highlighted by the three main authors considered
in this chapter) Rosetta is offered a job by a young man named Riquet, who works at a
waffle stand that she often visits. As the film progresses Riquet and Rosetta forge an
uneasy friendship, and we begin to see the damaging effects that Rosetta’s unsuccessful
navigation of the labor force has had on her social development (to say nothing about the
ulcer she develops throughout the film). After an awkward night that vaguely resembles
two friends relaxing over dinner Rosetta recites a little prayer before she goes to sleep:

“Your name is Rosetta. My name is Rosetta. You found a job. I found a job. You have a friend. I’ve got a friend. You have a normal life. I have a normal life. You won’t fall through the cracks. I won’t fall through the cracks.” As Berlant notes, “for Rosetta, all the world of possible desires has been pared down to a friend and a job, a state of attaining some bare minimum of social recognition…but Rosetta’s speech about falling through the cracks reminds that citizenship, in its formal and informal senses of social belonging, is also an affective state, where attachments take shape” (ibid, p. 273-4).

This vivid example of the nexus of affective attachment and social recognition in our role as citizens caused such a stir in Belgium that the government launched “the Rosetta Plan.” The plan was concerned equally with promoting corporate responsibility (in the domain of youth employment) and creating more inclusive spaces in the welfare system. But for our purposes this example should highlight the fact that liberals need to remain more attentive to the conditions of social recognition which citizens perceive as setting the conditions of normalcy (in this case being the socially defined categories of employment and friendship)\note{Though it should be noted that Rosetta betrays Riquet after a bond of friendship has been formed. She exposes Riquet’s scam of selling homemade waffles and pocketing the profit in order to take his job. This leads us to believe that economic recognition trumps the bond of friendship in Rosetta’s sense of normalcy.}.

Sophisticated accounts of civic virtue, like that of Eamonn Callan’s, would certainly not object to this plea for greater attentiveness to the symbolic and material
conditions that provide the background for civic interaction. Callan is especially salutary for pushing Rawls and highlighting the necessary link between the cultivation of specific traits of character like sympathetic imagination and accepting the burdens of judgment. What I mean to suggest here is that the creation of this link is a very complex process and the tools of disciplines like cultural geography and economic analysis (which Harvey fuses into a unique style of social theory) can prove to be indispensible.

Beyond Harvey’s reflection on the trajectory of social changes undergone in the past thirty five years is a theoretical interpretive framework that has a more direct bearing on civic education. In *Justice, Nature & The Geography of Difference* he spells out an account of how lived environments effect the possibility of collective (political) activity and the development of personal identity. He writes that “there is, then, a politics to place construction ranging dialectically across material, representational, and symbolic activities which find their hallmark in the way in which individuals invest in places and thereby empower themselves collectively by virtue of that investment” (Harvey, 1996, p. 323). Through this notion of place we can better understand three major components of Callan’s civic education and attach some sociological tools to his nuanced philosophical account of citizenship. First we can see the import of this “investment” in places if we think about the kind of sympathetic imagination that meaningful civic discourse requires. If an individual or group is fiercely protective of some physical or symbolic space this provides an opportunity to assess their motivations in a wider context. Second we can have a better sense of what it means for “a reservoir of trust” to be built up by examining

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29 This point is similar to the one that White was making in his attempt to draw a distinction between *autarchy* and *autonomy*. But I think attentiveness to how spaces are constructed through social practices is a more realistic way to broaden citizens’ reflections from their particular interests to an interest in broader social structures.
the ease or difficulty of resolving public disputes in a variety of social settings. And finally an examination of how lived environments or symbolic spaces gain a sense of permanence through individual and collective investments of meaning opens up what it means for liberals to bridge the social fragmentations of a pluralist society. Instead of focusing primarily on border cases like traditional religious communities or ethnic enclaves liberals can focus on new processes of social change like gentrification, suburbanization, and deindustrialization.

Communitarians often offer a similar approach to Harvey’s by arguing that most liberals disembled citizens from the lived environment within which they draw meaning for their lives. I’m not concerned with this dispute here (see Callan, 1997, pp. 52-59 for a characteristic exchange between the two camps), but rather with suggesting that an interpretive framework rooted in the social construction of space is helpful in understanding Callan’s overall project. Additionally these new frameworks can inject some liveliness into debates between liberals and communitarians that have reached a level of relative equilibrium (and have thus lost some inspirational force for educators and scholars alike). Being able to read an environment for elements relevant to citizenship (e.g. how social investments of meaning relate to formal policies and civic obligations, especially when the debate turns on a distinction between private and public responsibility) is another method for coping with the fact of increased pluralism. As space becomes contested or appropriated for partisan purposes the mediation of

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30 In my neighborhood there was a recent debate stemming from the Hasidic Jewish community trying to make a claim on public space. They asked the YMCA to install one-sided windows on an alley adjacent to the synagogue to prevent children from looking at scantily clad gym-goers. After much heated debate about the reasonableness of this request a solution was found and reflective half-windows were installed. This is a
differences provides a very real context for rooting the virtue of justice. Harvey writes that “[o]ur understanding of places here gets organized through the elaboration of some kind of mental map of the world which can be invested with all manner of personal or collective hopes and fears” (1996, p. 323). In a film like Rosetta we saw how such a personal investment appears when devoid of the civic capacities needed to sustain a just political order. A key task for liberal philosophers of education is to understand how such an investment has become possible and provide real pathways (e.g. an account of political education) which might bring us back towards a just society.

The foregoing discussion evokes the idea of community, but leaves the concept radically under described. In the next section I want to develop this concept by linking general notions of community to the idea of the political cum moral community that Callan envisions in “the nation” (which guides his argument for earned patriotic sentiment).

Collectivity, Individualism, and Uncertainty:

Commenting on the conditions of a postmodern world Jean-Francois Lyotard wrote that “the temporary contract supplants permanent institutions in the professional, emotional, sexual, cultural, and international domains, as well as in political affairs.” For many this description is not a desirable state of affairs, which may explain the rise in religious fundamentalism and entrenched partisan political debates that we have seen in recent years. But in terms of economic developments and currents in the cultural mass (especially where the media and market principles intersect) Lyotard does capture a relatively benign example, but it gives an indication of how mediating differences in the shared material fabric of a lived environment grounds abstract notions of civic virtues. More contentious cases would be found in land use and zoning disputes.
certain antipathy towards collective activities that require sustained engagement and substantial commitment to one single cause. The U.S. Department of Labor estimates that the average worker will hold nine jobs by the time that she is 32 years old and some foreign governments view this as an admirable trait of the American economy. For Zygmunt Bauman a prime register for this flux and instability is the way that communities come to embody certain social values and political realities.

“Community,” he writes, “is nowadays another name for paradise lost – but one which we dearly hope to return, and so we feverishly seek roads that may bring us there” (Bauman, 2001, p. 3). Such a quotation raises some obvious questions. What is it that we have lost? Why have we lost these things? And what are these roads that might signal a return? For Bauman the loss that many feel comes from a general sense of insecurity that pervades our society. He has made a cottage industry of describing the “liquid” conditions of our times, which he sees as stemming from an imbalance between the security we seek and the freedom we crave. In a line of argument similar to Harvey (and Sennett), Bauman thinks that market notions of freedom have supplanted the sense in which liberals have traditionally used the term (i.e. in terms of liberation and non-oppression). This brings the effects of competition, individual initiative, and consumer preference into collective political projects or more broadly community building. But instead of mitigating these effects by regulating the influence of the market

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31 In 2006 France tried to introduce a new labor law (Le Contrat Première Embauche) that would allow more flexibility in the hiring and firing of young workers. The aim was to spur entrepreneurial activity in an overly bureaucratic system, but the measure was fiercely resisted by students and labor activists and eventually abandoned.

32 This term “liquid” comes from Marx’s famous quotation that under capitalism “all that is solid melts into air.” This quotation shows up in the works of all three authors that I am considering in this chapter.
and articulating collective goods communities often respond to this situation by locating these pressures elsewhere (e.g. the way “the terrorist”, “the gang member”, or “the sexual predator” are used to define communities in exclusionary terms). What results is an incoherence in political action because citizens have trouble locating the centers of power that may be responsible for this feeling of insecurity. This is, Bauman argues, primarily a consequence of the decoupling of power and politics in traditional political channels (e.g. the decline in State management of public spaces, the decline in direct political participation through unions and local councils, and the growth in global treaties usurping the control of local or national actors).

Bauman is unequivocal about what path might redeem our society to a more harmonious balance between freedom and security. He argues that “individual liberty can only be a product of collective work (can be only collectively secured and guaranteed)” (1999, p. 7). But this prescription is problematic on Bauman’s own terms. First we can no longer assume that this work will be undertaken by stable, well defined communities of “mutual understanding shared by all its members” (Bauman, 2000, p. 10). Thus communities of mutual interest will likely spur political action as opposed to the obligations which flow from a mutual understanding of what needs to be done for the good of the community (which would reflect a more traditional communitarian argument like Alasdair MacIntyre’s). This process often precipitates the liquid conditions where communities are dissolved and reconstituted in light of shifting dominant foci of

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33 Freud makes a similar point about community formation in *The Future of an Illusion*. He argues that “civilization” initially springs into being when people bond together to face a collective threat (for him coming initially from nature). But in order to ensure coherence within a group initially formed by a negative association useful myths like religion are created to regulate the destructive impulses of community members.
attention. For example as communal interests shift to the protection of employment centers (as we see in the resonance of populist rhetoric in declining industrial states like Ohio and Michigan) a novel form of mutual understanding is likely to emerge and reconfigure who stands out as the bearer of communal values. Second this collective work must be undertaken in a changed landscape where power has been decoupled from traditional political channels by the process of deregulation and privatization. As Bauman puts it, “none of the most important levers and safeguards of their [the political actors] current situation comes under their jurisdiction, let alone control, practiced singly or severally” (1999, p. 172).

Despite these difficult “liquid” conditions Bauman ends up at a point similar to Callan. It is worth quoting him at length here:

“The good society can – and should – make its members free; not only free negatively…but in the positive sense, that of being able to do something with their freedom, in order to be able to do things…And that means primarily the ability to influence the conditions of their own life, to formulate the meaning of ‘the common good’ and to make institutions of society comply with that meaning. If ‘the question of paideia’ is ineliminable, it is because there is still the unfulfilled democratic project of autonomous individuals constituting an autonomous society…And so the task on the agenda is to recapture the ecclesia by the agora” (1999, p. 106-7).

Like Callan he seems to be interested in creating spaces within which citizens can exercise those civic virtues that “make institutions of society comply” with a reasonable diversity of conceptions of the good. Additionally he is adamant about these spaces being “public” as opposed to spaces of private associations inaccessible to larger political
institutions associated with the State. But unlike Callan he is content to conceive of collective activity on the ground level without having to track this process through the narrative frame of “the nation.” He writes that “universality of citizenship is the preliminary condition of all meaningful ‘politics of recognition’.

And let me add, universality of humanity is the horizon by which all politics of recognition, to be meaningful, needs to orient itself” (Bauman, 2000, p. 140). For Bauman ensuring the formal conditions often attached to citizenship (i.e. protection of basic rights and institutions charged with promoting the well being of citizens) is enough to facilitate the kinds of inter-cultural dialogue between communities increasingly formed as “a shelter from the gathering tides of global turbulence” (ibid., p. 142). And because this global turbulence cannot be tempered by national policies alone a more diffused and universal conception of citizenship is an essential element to balancing security and liberty in a time of flux.

Bauman’s cosmopolitanism doesn’t serve as a rejection of Callan’s justified patriotic sentiment though. Both agree that the structure of communities and our rootedness within them is an essential condition of meaningful collective action. Callan writes that “if minimally virtuous citizens cannot be expected to grow up in environments devoid of any real community, then nurturing community where that is needed is an urgent task of liberal politics as any other” (1997, p. 88). Both also have an idea of what constitutes an illegitimate basis of community building (i.e. exclusive accounts based on a misrepresentation of insecurities or pretentions to the universality of one’s own beliefs).

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34 In a general sense this coincides with Callan’s focus on defending the common school ideal. However Callan is less concerned with a general critique of privatizing the commons.
The differences between the two may ultimately boil down to constraints set up by the different intellectual traditions with which they are engaging. The main reason that Callan limits his inquiry to questions of institutional design and justifications for the common school ideal is his belief that the state can (and in some cases must) play a prominent role in forming a just political community. Bauman on the other hand favors a more organic process rooted in shaping elements of civil society because of his skepticism of the benevolence of the state.

What should be noted from the preceding discussion is that morally laudable political activity and community building are both activities that cannot get off the ground in the conditions that Lyotard described. Nietzschian joyfulness in the midst of perpetual flux and self re-definition cannot point towards a coherent political platform, even if it does indicate new possibilities for representing our modern experience in artistic production. For Callan and Bauman there is a strong argument for the virtue of constancy as we attend to our political projects (including a project of political education) through difficulties that we may encounter. There is no reason to think that they would disagree about the attractiveness of an approach like Callan’s which centers on the cultivation of civic virtues over sustained periods of political engagement (using “the Nation” as a means to track moral progress). The main difference between the two is that

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35 This notion of constancy lies at the heart of Bauman’s explanation of the dissolution of strong communal ties. Borrowing from Robert Reich he laments the “succession of the successful,” which points to a denigration of communal goods (e.g. public transportation) by those who have successfully climbed the social ladder (see Bauman, 2000, pp. 50-7). Instead of paying back into their local communities (or even the national community) we see the rise of mobile communities of global elites (with indistinguishable luxury suites in global financial centers) and gated communities. In many cases, as we will see in the next chapter when I discuss some Black conservatives, the success that has allowed this “opting out” has been achieved by virtue of these very communal goods that they are now critiquing.
Bauman may be less optimistic about the project because of his increased sensitivity to harmful forces coming from governments infused with market values. I want to round out this chapter with a closer discussion of those economic conditions that give Bauman pause when he envisions collective activity that can sustain over difficult periods.

**Flexibility and Character in “The New Capitalism”:**

As Paul Standish sarcastically reports, debates about the ends of education seem to have been settled in Europe and North America. Citing a 1996 European White Paper he writes that “the purpose of education is to serve the economy…[What] seems crude philistinism on the part of the Commission may not be so remote from the assumptions of the public at large. We need, do we not, a healthy economy…[and] the way to secure this is, now as ever before, through education” (Standish, 2003, pp. 221-2). In the United States we can see this consensus forming in the Clinton administration (with his initiatives aimed at increasing science and math scores to create a “high skill, high wage” economy) and getting its full articulation in the current No Child Left Behind laws. As I discussed above, structural changes in the U.S. and global economy may give liberals reason to welcome this increased focus on the future economic prospects of students. If relatively well paying and secure manufacturing jobs are drying up educators should be concerned with expanding the field of choice in employment by emphasizing the “marketable” skills associated with science and math education. Yet as Standish goes on to note, this consensus inappropriately circumscribes the practices and pursuits that constitute “an education” and similarly overlooks the possibly deleterious effects of an “economization” of educational policy (e.g. complaints of “transactions” supplanting “interactions” or of the cult of efficiency invading spheres of activity where it should
have no place). The question that needs to be asked is why this economic framework has penetrated the background fabric of educational debates and what consequences flow from this shift in focus (especially in the non-economic realm of civic education).

The labor sociologist Richard Sennett has looked for answers to these questions by examining the character traits of workers as they navigate “the new capitalism.” In a three book arc he has documented the personal consequences of labor flexibility on both middle-class workers and the new breed of aggressive entrepreneurs (*The Corrosion of Character* (1998)), the changing bases of social recognition and self-respect in the face of a diminished welfare state and a competitive culture (*Respect in a World of Inequality* (2003)), and finally the ways in which the flexible regimes of cutting edge industries have come to suffuse political and public culture (*The Culture of New Capitalism* (2006)). The thread that binds these books is a reflection on the relative insecurity that has been bred by dismantling traditional bureaucratic organizations in the name of increased freedom. In Sennett’s view this insecurity manifests itself in a “crisis of narrative” that many workers feel as stable poles of identity recede into unstable and opaque networks of power (as opposed to rigid, but comprehensible bureaucratic hierarchies). Taken as a whole this cultural shift poses a powerful threat to a liberal civic education based on broadening autonomy promoting environments and fostering cooperation amongst citizens. In order to understand this threat more clearly I need to say more about what cultural trends Sennett is talking about and what effect they are having on the character formation of many workers.

The “new capitalism” is juxtaposed against what Sennett sees as the older form of “social capitalism.” Social capitalism was marked by large bureaucratic institutions with
well defined roles and a clear hierarchy of power relations. Following the analysis of Max Weber he notes that these large institutions were integrated into broader power structures that pacified society through maximum inclusion in socially recognized “offices.” Despite the fact that life within these structures might be viewed as quite dull by today’s standards “performing [one’s] tasks afforded people in the corporation a sense of their own agency; the institutional narrative of promotion and demotion became their own life story” (Sennett, 2006, p. 35). However, the radical movements of the 1960’s started to challenge the relative security provide by this structure and argued for the liberation of individual expression outside of restricted “offices.” Despite the failure of the student movement the general idea that bureaucratic structures stifled creativity and entrepreneurial activity began to infiltrate mainstream economic thinking, and after the 1973 economic crisis a great wave of deregulation occurred. In place of government regulation and a robust welfare state (often referred to as “the social compact”) companies were now free to reconfigure their internal structures and institutional affiliations in order to become more “efficient” and maximize their productivity. In order to do this they needed to create a new breed of worker and a new relationship to political culture.

Sennett has much to say about the “young Turks” that can successfully navigate the new capitalism. He says that “the idealized person eschews dependency; he or she does not cling to others” (2006, p. 46). Because of the casualization of labor workers “who prosper in this milieu have a high tolerance of ambiguity” (ibid, p. 50). People are judged more for their “potential ability” than their experience because jobs increasingly demand “quick, flexible results” in short term projects with different teams on a range of
tasks. This leads to a workforce that eschews craftmanship, specialization, and loyalty to only one company (because all contracts should be revocable if the company again goes through a “restructuring”). Nowhere in this new scheme is anything resembling the social compact. Instead of being held accountable to their workers and government bureaucracies (via regulation or frequent collective bargaining) companies are now accountable mainly to their dispersed shareholders (a process that Sennett calls “concentration without centralization”). Within the workforce this produces “social deficits of loyalty and informal trust” and “erodes the value of accumulated experience” (ibid, 127), but from the standpoint of unleashing productive capacities through free competition this is seen as an acceptable outcome.

Sennett notes that “the new economy is still only part of the whole economy” (ibid, 10), mainly showing up in the worlds of high finance, IT, advertising/media, and corporate consulting. His worry, and part of my argument in this thesis, is that the ethos of the new capitalism is invading other spheres like governance, education, and civic participation. As Sennett notes, “the global growth spurt had left an enduring trace on non-business institutions, particularly institutions of the welfare state…The values of the new economy have become a reference point for how government thinks about dependence and self-management in…the kind of skills the education system provides” (ibid, p. 7-8). Blake et al (1998, 2001) have documented how pernicious “skills talk” and managerialism are in the framing of educational debates in the UK. The question that we need to ask is whether this cultural shift poses as serious a challenge to Callan’s political and educational project as ethical servility. Callan writes that “each of us must learn to ask the question of how we should live, and that how we answer it can be no servile echo
of the answers others have given, even if our thoughts commonly turn out to be substantially the same as those that informed our parents’ lives” (Callan, 1997, p. 154-5). What I am suggesting is that the cultural norms of the new capitalism (as well as market influences noted by Harvey and Bauman) may undercut the development of children past “mere agency” in ways as powerful as parental despotism. But in order to understand this worry there are two ideas that need to be kept in mind.

The first idea is that possible sources of informal education in adulthood (employment being a significant one) should be a concern in the formal process of schooling. Sennett’s critique of the new capitalism is that it has radically altered the bases for “justifiable self-respect” and subverted social principles like interdependency and trust. These principles, and other moral commitments, are central to the justification procedures for any liberal society. Even if the prevailing political culture is imperfectly liberal formal education may be able to encourage principled traits of character that can attend students over the course of their lives as they confront the corrosive elements of this culture (I’ll explore this more in Chapter 4). The second idea is that prevailing assumptions about “the self” have a significant impact on the development of character. The new capitalism assumes “a self oriented to the short term, focused on potential ability, willing to abandon past experience” (Sennett, 2006, p. 5), which Sennett notes is an odd type of person. But liberalism may be equally guilty of operating with a skewed conception of the self that overestimates its capacity for self determination. For liberals this problem is often found in their unwillingness to consider in depth the types of social changes highlighted by Harvey, Bauman, and Sennett.

**Concluding Remarks:**
There is a tendency in social theory to concentrate on the ills of society and proceed in the manner of a physician (i.e. diagnose the problem in order to find the proper remedy). This approach often leads to rhetorical excesses that understandably turn off philosophers of education disciplined by the necessity to translate theoretical accounts into formal policies. While I am sympathetic to this reaction I do feel that some substantive account of current societal conditions (drawing from different intellectual traditions) must be integrated into this process of policy formation. My attempt in this chapter has been to give this account (albeit partially). In the next chapter I hope to make this link between policy formation, analytic rigor, and social awareness more concrete by examining issue of disability.
Here you will fail to detect the least trace of any monument of superstition.

-Arthur Rimbaud, from “City”

**Chapter 3: Disability and the Social Bases of Recognition**

My attempt in the previous two chapters has been to situate the moral and political ideals of a liberal education within a culture that makes their realization in many important aspects of life a difficult endeavor. Chapter 1 gave an account of a strong liberal response to pluralism by examining the work of Eamonn Callan. He persuasively argues that the health of a liberal democracy is ultimately going to depend as much on the qualities of citizens as on the justness of institutional design and policy. Chapter 2 pushed on some of Callan’s suggestions by situating them within a growing discourse on certain troubling aspects of (post)modernity and globalization. What I would like to do in this chapter is unify some of the themes that I have raised by looking at an example that shows how these loose threads hang together in educational policy. There is a growing body of work by thinkers from a variety of fields on the moral, political, and social implications of how disability is conceived of and how disability policy is established and implemented. The upshot of their work has been to highlight the inherently social genesis of how liberal principles become translated into modes of practice and conceptions of justice. To enter this discussion I’d like to give some brief attention to how the nature of political and moral differentiation contributes to the construction of “disability.”

Differentiation, taken in its phenomenological or political sense, is a significant form of judgment. Sometimes we differentiate in order to clarify the grounds for action

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36 I could easily have chosen issues of multiculturalism or gender equality to show how current cultural conditions effect the realization of liberal theory. I chose disability because it has a certain personal resonance (my mother is a special education teacher and my sister has a severe learning disability) and it foregrounds social justice issues.
and determine the best strategy given certain wants and needs. I choose one route over another because it is more direct and will get me to my destination quicker.

Differentiation along the lines of relevant physical characteristics like size, color, or surface texture is a relatively unproblematic process. The process becomes much more interesting when questions of meaning and value become relevant to our actions. If I am confronted with two people in need of my assistance and identify one as a friend and the other as a stranger then the ground for my action becomes morally a lot messier. The qualities that we notice at either the point of perception (i.e. “the glance”) or in a sustained gaze bear witness to certain biases of evaluative organization. Action that attends to this organization has decidedly moral implications, clarifying what qualities constitute a “good” order and what will constitute “corrective” or “positive” interventions.

While some patterns of differentiation are hardwired into the nature of perception (e.g. the basic modes of space, time, and causality outlined by Kant), the genesis of how we evaluate and produce organizational structures can be alternately traced back to cultural practices, personal experiences, the location of the agent, or other focuses highlighted by the social sciences. Each approach aims to substantiate the value component of differentiation. Disability theorists like Lorella Terzi, Linda Ware, and Alasdair MacIntyre have noticed that when such debates concern human potential there is too often a tacit assumption of an independent rational subject as constituting good order, and this consequently attaches a negative value to dependence. While dependence lies at the root of many professional and public discourses about welfare and care, there has not

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37 Emmanuel Levinas was the most forceful thinker to draw a link between perception and ethical duty. He writes of the encounter with the other thusly: “The ‘for the other’ arises within the I, like a command heard by him, as if obedience were already being listening for the dictate. Alterity’s ploy is born before knowledge” (1999, p. 101). In education both those writing from an Aristotelian perspective or from an “ethic of care” similarly place moral duty closer to perception (either in our moral intuitions or our attentiveness).
been much serious inquiry into the warranted assumptions underlying the qualities that mark one as “dependant.” Such a shift in focus would situate disability within a larger discourse, one which Slee suggests will raise “questions about the nature of society and the status afforded to people in varying forms and structures of social organization” (2000, p. 135). It would also bring the liberal ideal of equal consideration into stark relief when confronted with the stigma of dependency described in the previous chapter.

In what follows I’d like to situate some of the challenges presented by disability theorists and special educators within the broader interplay between compelling liberal theory and troubling social realities. Particularly I’ll focus on shifting conceptions of community and the demands that they place on education. How traditional and progressive theories of disability are reflected in the trajectory that Sennett, Bauman, and Harvey have sketched will provide an interesting lens through which to further press Callan on the social bases for recognition and self-respect (in addition to noting the significant influence of the market on these categories). Taking this broad view will clarify the value component of differentiating students in reference to the broader goals of education that link schools to the society at large.

**The Process of Urbanization in “Liquid Modernity”**

In the early 1900’s Chicago sociologist Robert Park was instrumental in developing the field of urban sociology. Park looked to decipher the peculiar logic of city life and wrest some sense of human agency from complex and obscure economic, governmental, and geographical forces that shaped the urban landscape. He argued that “[t]he city is not… merely a physical mechanism and an artificial construction. It is involved in the vital processes of the people who compose it; it is a product of nature, and particularly of human nature” (1967, p. 1). Park saw a dynamic relationship involving the individual and her expanding and contracting environment characterized by motion, mores, and complex transactions beyond mere economic exchange. In a holistic sense the organization of a city (mapped over history) was taken as a substantiation of the
collective imagination\textsuperscript{38} of its inhabitants and its leaders. Taken in this sense the organization of physical and symbolic space will give us an indication (albeit a partial one) of how we can evaluate organizational structures at the level of perception.

Park’s method points towards an analysis of social organization that centers on human activity as opposed to deference to some preexisting plan of organization. In the city “space” becomes contested, but as Harvey (1973) suggests, “the problem of proper conceptualization of space is resolved through human practice with respect to it” (p. 13). These activities can organize physical spaces (e.g. spontaneous roadside markets in Lagos\textsuperscript{39}) or symbolic/ideological spaces (e.g. property transactions establishing the space for monopolies or religious activity establishing “sacred spaces”). More concretely the absence of playgrounds or safe public bike paths reflects an attitude towards the needs of children in respect to play and independent mobility. As we saw in the previous chapter, the way that places gain a sense of permanence and the way leaders try to invest space with significance both have decidedly moral components.

These initial reflections on the nature of space in the city are meant to provide a concrete context for the theoretical accounts of difference brought up in the previous chapters. As opposed to Callan’s more philosophical approach to difference (where difference is conceived of in terms of ethical pluralism), an account of urban organization can highlight the growing tendency, in the West especially, to make community a matter of choice for those who are privileged enough to do so. The organization of space can

\textsuperscript{38} In Chicago Park sees instances of “social junk” in areas like hobo camps (“Hobohemia”) that spring up on the edge of business areas. This is one instance of social organization stemming from a collective imagination of city space. Economic factors certainly play a large part, but human activities in relation to these factors need to be considered. Guliani’s draconian measures to “clean up” Manhattan is a more striking example of leaders trying to imagine poverty and lack out of the collective consciousness of citizens.

\textsuperscript{39} For an interesting portrait of Lagos see George Packer’s article in the November 13, 2006 issue of The New Yorker.
either become extremely valued (as in gated communities or affluent suburbs) or public space can become a secondary concern if one’s primary associations are based on eccentric mutual interests (as with an online community or a jazz club). Competing claims for the value of certain public institutions are going to depend in large part on the location of common interests among “community members” (however they are going to be conceived). If such a space lacks a coherent consensus on overarching values (or public goods) a limited vision of community and “inclusion” will prevail because of the fragmenting tendencies precipitated by unrestrained choice. Similarly the types of civic interaction needed to build a “reservoir of trust” or develop the capacities for sympathetic imagination are not likely to occur if a diverse set of community members are not willing to share a claim on the common material fabric of their lived environment.

The centrality of choice and ambivalence in articulating shared causes is a symptom of what Zygmunt Bauman has called “liquid modernity.” As mentioned in the previous chapter, he and otherx are referring to the consequences of globalization and deregulation in the economic sphere and the failings of public institutions or popular culture to instill a sense of shared purpose and provide deep meanings for civic participation. Bauman characterizes the gloomy picture this way: “Insecurity affects us all, immersed as we all are in a fluid and unpredictable world of deregulation, flexibility, competitiveness and endemic uncertainty” (2001, p. 144). This is the environment observed by Richard Sennett, where the institutions that once anchored life narratives (stable jobs, participation in powerful groups like unions, regular interactions with the State through strong social services) no longer hold their life orienting significance for many workers. This is coupled with a difficulty in locating centers of authority as the State cedes power to private industry and religious institutions struggle with a secular public sphere. In the face of such insecurity Bauman, Sennett, and Harvey see a turn
towards consumerism and individualism as means to reinforce some sense of security\textsuperscript{40}. If collective sources of well being or security are frequently failing individuals it is understandable that they would search for solutions on a more personal level. The fact that a sizable minority supports the privatization of social security accounts in the United States gives a strong indication of this general condition.

Cornel West (1994) provides an eloquent account of a community coping with the condition of liquid modernity. In the 1990’s many urban African-American communities were dealing with widespread poverty, crime, and sense of hopelessness. West sees the roots of this in economics (the exodus of once available urban manufacturing and public service jobs), in leadership (with myopic politicians failing to place the community within a larger historical narrative), and the decline of constructive cultural institutions which attended blacks in the face of the horrors of slavery and Jim & Jane Crow (e.g. churches and the arts). In the absence of coherent life narratives West sees urban youths living a series of “random nows” which reflect a reverence for “the market-inspired way of life over all others and thereby edge out non-market values--love, care, service to others--handed down by preceding generations” (p. 17). We should be reminded here of Callan’s justification for retrieving patriotic sentiment as a valuable component for a liberal education. The attachment to just institutions (especially those specific to the historical struggles of the African-American community) that patriotic sentiment can promote would provide safeguards against the social breakdowns mentioned above.

There is a curious contradiction that arises in the liquid conditions described by West and Bauman. The ideological forces behind neoliberal reforms were a faith in free

\textsuperscript{40} Harvey also adds a turn towards militarism to these methods of coping. He argues that a way to mitigate the disorienting effects of “space-time compression” is to reassert a “territorial logic” that plays up the significance of dominating specific places. He suggests that the U.S. invasion of Iraq shows this return to territoriality instead of focusing on imperialistic behavior via immaterial means (i.e. through their significant influence on the movement of global capital).
markets, an elevated importance placed on choice, and a distrust of what some saw as “welfarist” state interventions. Liberalizing the system would increase both productivity and autonomy (with its sense of personal responsibility). Yet the nihilism and vertigo described by West speaks to a lack of genuine autonomy. On John White’s terms (see above, p. 30) these conditions are not even conducive to autarchy because there is not a component of reflective choice in a series of “random nows.” By clearing away government interference the average citizen came to feel less confident in her ability to make valuable life choices. Absent from the lives of young urban African-Americans was the ability to ascribe to themselves some sense of agency in a broad narrative.

This example may serve as an argument in favor of Callan’s approval of locating historical narratives in the context of the nation if we attribute the decline of certain African-American communities to the retrenchment of constructive institutions associated with the national political community. Loïc Wacquant’s insightful comparison of Chicago’s predominately African-American ghettos and the poor banlieues that make up the Parisian red belt (so called because they were traditionally strongholds for the Communist Party) highlights this broad crisis of narrative in areas where a larger sense of citizenship remain unavailable. Wacquant draws a distinction between the “brutal implosion” of Chicago’s black hyperghettos and the “slow decomposition” of Parisian banlieues. What places Chicago at a more “advanced level of marginality” is “the double retrenchment of the labor market and the welfare state from the urban core, necessitating and eliciting the corresponding deployment of an intrusive and omnipresent police and penal apparatus” (2008, p. 3). In the French case “marginalization is primarily the product of class logic,” where the harsh economic effects of deindustrialization are in part “mitigated by the strong presence of public institutions catering to social needs” (ibid, p. 5). In a tone similar to Harvey he warns that a refusal “to check the social and spatial accumulation of economic hardship, social dissolution and cultural dishonor…promise to engender abiding civic alienation and
chronic unrest which pose a daunting challenge to the institution of citizenship” (ibid, p. 7). What this example should suggest is that social recognition and symbolic or material interactions with institutions of the State\textsuperscript{41} work hand in hand in ensuring that the possibility of a collective historical narrative. It should also highlight the complex social conditions of inclusion – a point that should be kept in mind as I now turn towards a discussion on disability.

**Reimagining Disability: A Challenge**

Inherent in the conditions of liquid modernity is a reverence for independence and the “self made man.” Consider West’s description of black conservatives. For them “mobility by means of affirmative action breeds tenuous self-respect and questionable peer acceptance...despite the fact that they had achieved their positions by means of such programs” (1994, p. 53). Many black conservatives have sublimated the idea that assistance is somehow an affront insofar as assistance implies some sort of deficient ability (a claim which has particular resonance in the black community). On such a view the process of achievement is value laden, but value is conceived of in a one-dimensional manner. Little consideration is given to value of receiving care from the national community. Aid is dismissed as breeding a crippling sense of entitlement and not considered as a way to feel included in a community (i.e. to be deemed worthy of concern by community members). If this sense of inclusion is lacking in the general culture large swaths of the population will be imagined out of public and political space (as Wacquant so brilliantly describes).

Current philosophical reflections on disability venture a more nuanced critique of the value of independence. I’ll take up three examples that approach the issue in slightly different ways. Eva Kittay’s moving account of her relationship with her daughter Sesha challenges the notions of merit and utility that are bound up with a climate where

\textsuperscript{41}And it should go without saying that these should be constructive institutions as opposed to the penal system.
sustained engagement with the economy (usually through the private sector) is almost a necessity. Linda Ware and Lorella Terzi take up the ways in which disability is determined and engaged. Ware’s suggestion that it is time to have a “moral conversation” on disability provides a useful thought experiment to assess the broader conditions of dependency and justice in the current public imagination. A final challenge is posed by Alasdair Macintyre, who sees the goal of independence as denying something central to our humanity (and thus impoverishing any discourse about values). Taken as a whole these thinkers should bolster the need for bridging a nuanced conception of the self with the structural conditions of communities and public culture.

In *Love’s Labor* Eva Kittay (2002) describes her daughter Sesha as “deeply dependant.” This dependant nature requires an amount of childcare that exceeds both in intensity and scope the care needed for a “normal child.” In the case of Sesha and other disabled children this usually requires some support from outside the family in the form of dependency workers. Kittay feels that too little attention is paid to the relationship between extra familial personnel and children, but there is a broader point that relates to the role of disability in society. In the U.S. childcare is not a heavily subsidized service, which leaves parents the choice of either searching in the private sector or relying on public programs that too often provide a minimal service. In the case of heavily disabled children “perfunctory custodial care” is available (i.e. attending to basic physical needs), but the invested emotional care that would attend to the individual needs of the child is extremely expensive and often rare. Kittay, being relatively well off, “had the moral luck to make a lucid moral choice” (2002, p.154), whereas others are faced with the choice of abandoning other goals (e.g. professional goals) to richly care for their child or to trust

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42 I say this for the simple reason that healthcare is not guaranteed for all citizens in the U.S. (and the current campaign cycle has made us acutely aware of this fact). If one were to devote their life to various political causes they would be doing so without the safety net of healthcare in the case of an emergency.
the child to “perfunctory custodial care.”

The decision that faces the parents of “deeply dependant” children is related to a culture that is oriented towards a particular form of individual achievement. Neoliberal reforms don’t as such orient our activity towards the private sector, but without social support individuals are de facto reliant on an engagement with the economy and it is on this terrain that social goods are formulated. Take the issue of health care in the United States for example. In order to get health care one must often be employed and the precondition for a company to provide health care is a certain degree of financial success. An individual who has a marketable skill will be able to secure this social good by contributing their services to the financial health of a company and by extension the national economy. Yet as Sennett notes because of the liquid conditions of the economy the worker remains open to continual engagement by not wedding themselves to one project or one aspect of the market. The rapidity of shifts in labor market (especially in service sectors that require little infrastructure modifications to create or eliminate jobs) often means that this continual engagement is achieved through a superficial and easily revisable attachment to one’s current job. There is very little room in this picture for the emotionally invested caretaker.

Kittay describes Sesha’s abilities in the following way: “Given the scope and breadth of human possibilities and capacities, she occupies a limited spectrum, but she inhabits it fully because she has the most important faculties of all. The capacities for love and for happiness” (ibid, p. 152). Certainly “love” and “happiness” are commonly recognized goods, but without accompanying abilities Sesha will never be able to engage in economically constructive activity. I say economically constructive because in the absence of a rich community that recognizes communal goods in a wide variety of

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43 It should be noted that there do exist many devoted care workers in the U.S. The point here is that the availability of these workers is often a matter of luck as opposed to the result of some systematic plan of social justice.
practices the status of “socially constructive activity” is unclear. The scarcity of emotionally engaged caretakers like the one described by Kittay reflects this ambiguous status of social goods. On the one hand there is enough support in the public sector to provide basic care for the severely disabled. Ensuring the absence of undo suffering from physical neglect is something that we feel is owed to the severely disabled (which marks some moral progress from the days of “institutionalization”). Yet at the same time there is not a rich public support system that attends to deeper quality of life issues such as the individual emotional needs of those requiring heavily involved care and those non-family members that are providing this care. The same can be said for those requiring emotional care who are otherwise independent.

Sesha’s limited scope of ability makes her claim for special care clear, but there are intermediate levels of need that make moral claims less cut and dried. In public schools the engagement of disability takes a more concrete form in the implementation of IEPs (Individual Educational Plans) and the support systems provided by Special Education departments. They run into certain practical difficulties which relate to what Terzi (2005) calls the “dilemma of difference.” This dilemma has “a theoretical dimension, concerned with issues of conceptualization and definition, and a political one, which refers to the question of provision in order to meet the equal entitlements of all children to education” (2005, p. 444). Briefly put the conceptual dilemma lies in the determinative factor of difference (personal deficiency vs. structural incapacity to accommodate diversity) and the political difference deals with the nature of classification (is it discriminatory or a morally neutral metric). As with the case of attending to the physical needs of the severely disabled there is no disagreement about minimal provision (access to education is an entitlement to all children), but the quality of engagement will clarify the degree to which schools see a moral claim in accommodating difference (here disability).

Linda Ware provides a nice example of what a deep accommodation of disability
in education would require. First, following MacIntyre, educators must engage in a serious reflection on their assumptions of “normal ability” (and thus their construction of disability). MacIntyre argues that the acceptance of disabilities like blindness and deafness “as if [they] were a fact of nature” (2001, p. 75) led to an inability to imagine a future condition where these limitations were no longer a hindrance to full participation in society. Ware feels that the best way to facilitate this reexamination of disability is to interrogate the limited existing narratives (which contrast disability with an assumed standard of ability) and to create new narratives that take a more holistic approach to the process of identifying disability. This, she argues, will lead to more creative and effective policies. What we need to move away from is “the differential treatment of students based on professional ‘perceptions’ of ability linked to the cultural transmission of society’s devaluation of people with disabilities” (2002, p. 154).

A central component to Ware’s reconception of disability is inclusion and visibility. She notes that “my students often report that while disabled students were in their schools, they never came ‘in contact’ with these students” (2002, p. 151). Part of this problem is the tendency in special education to rely heavily on specialists, which reflects a tacit acceptance of the personal deficiency definition of disability. A second and related problem is the bureaucratic interventions that orient curriculum towards content as opposed to a concentration on school culture and patterns of socialization. This second problem places a special claim on the school. Consider the following statement: “It is not enough to imagine the perspective of the other; we must also try to

44 Though it should be noted that some disabilities, like that of Sessa’s, foreclose on the ability for some to fully participate in the democratic process (e.g. voting may remain out of reach for those without the deliberative capacities needed to make a strong choice). However this does not mean that meaningful inclusion in civil society in a range of settings and activities is also off the table.

45 Notice the similarities between the school and the types of communities of choice described by Bauman. Both seem to pose a threat to the intercultural exchanges needed for civic virtues to take root.
share deliberation with other people” (Minow, quoted in Ware, p. 156). If the
descriptions from the last chapter are any indication there are likely to be few models of
this in popular culture or the organization of society at large. Yet co-deliberation is
central to the democratic process and in name a recognized social good. For Callan there
can be no political order that merits “our rational moral faith” if diverse groups are not
interacting or engaging in discussion. Ware would argue that there is a moral claim on
the school to respect the democratic principal of co-deliberation and to further investigate
the possibility of fruitfully incorporating the disabled into the process.

How would such a process appear in the public school? Ware again follows
MacIntyre by invoking a conception of community where “each member of [it] is
someone from whom we may learn” (MacIntyre, 1999, p. 135). This seems to fly in the
face of the choice based community of individuals that Bauman has posited as a fact of
our times. For him the formation of communities is based on mutually beneficial choices
and would not entail an obligation to accommodate those who would like to join your
community but require some concessions. Imagine a gated community in Arizona that is
formed because of a shared interest in safety. Would such a community be willing to
accommodate a convicted sex offender who also shares the interest of security, or is the
social stigma attached to the offense the relevant differentiating quality that determines
his or her inclusion? Harvey comes at the issue from a different perspective, showing
how this question can never be raised for many because policies based on neoliberal
economic principles can determine to a great extend the character of the community and
who counts as a community member (again we can think of the transformation of
Manhattan as an example).

A similar ethic seems to be present in many public schools. In advanced classes
students are competing for grades that will allow them to get into a good university. Say
they were assigned a group project that would have them build mousetrap cars and some
were paired with blind students. There is an added stipulation that each student will be
called on to explain the process of building and the theoretical framework behind the design of the vehicle. Most are likely complain that the assignment is unfair because they will have to take extra time and effort to make the process accessible to the blind students (and this may negatively affect their grade). Such a reaction would show a process of socialization that has imagined dependence and obligation out of a notion of success. We could also extend the possible lessons learned to notions of achievement outside the context of “doing well in school.” The blind student, due to their limited capability, may push the other student about elements of the design, which will furnish a deeper understanding in each student. Additionally process of mutually overcoming certain limitations has intrinsic benefits that a student limited to advanced placement classes may never otherwise encounter (this critique could extend to daily activities in upper class suburban enclaves).

The inflexibility of the curriculum accommodates this impoverished conception of disability and dependency. These are seen as a hindrance to achievement as opposed to an existential fact that makes up the fabric of communities. This broader point is the focus of MacIntyre’s *Rational Dependant Animals*. A very important insight in the book is the recognition of certain assumptions underlying moral philosophy. Kittay picks up on one of these assumptions, namely the centrality of reason in our conception of the good (MacIntyre also sees this assumption as unfairly separating humans from other animals). Not only do moral philosophers tend to overlook the process that all must pass through in order to become an “independent practical reasoner”, they also omit the inclusion of dependants in communities formed by the independent practical reasoners’ conceptions of “the good”. As MacIntyre notes, “those who benefit from common flourishing will include those least capable of independent practical reasoning... and their individual flourishing will be an important index of the whole community” (1999, p.108-9).

Old age, illness, childhood, and the consideration of others are unavoidable
conditions of life in a community. In any progression towards a way of life based on independent practical reasoning there are going to be moments of dependency, lack, trust, and for MacIntyre animality. The tendency to resist this acknowledgement reflects a movement that Bauman and Sennett see as having occurred in modern America. Those who have ascended the economic ladder “do not like to be reminded how it happened that they came to be self-reliant...they reforge their own disgust of ‘dependency’ which they no longer need as a universal moral condemnation of dependency” (Bauman, 2001, p. 50). Likewise schools with the resources to hire professionals remove a wholesale engagement with significant dependency in the school culture. Without a serious “skepticism of ourselves” and engagement with dependency as an existential condition the valuation of disability will remain impoverished.

**Convergence: Disability meets “Liquid Modernity”:**

The public school occupies a relatively privileged space in the community at large. There are procedural points of contention (like an overly restrictive curriculum), but it must be kept in mind that in most developed nations schooling is compulsory for the formative years of childhood. In addition to this the fact that schools are trusted with the care and positive development of children guarantees them attention in the public sphere. Parents may challenge the particular “values” of a school curriculum (as with some deeply religious parents in secular societies), but the project of education is never abandoned (it is simply relocated to a private school). Given this privileged space, does the school have basic obligations specific to its institutional integrity regardless of external pressures that may contradict school practice?

In a totalitarian society these external constraints are not likely to diminish the value of compulsory attendance and a guaranteed operational mandate. In these societies

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Note: New Hampshire provides a nice example of this condition. Despite being one of the wealthiest states there is still an impoverished rural class and a growing number of urban poor. Yet voters continually turn down a state income tax that would fund public works projects like public transport as well as the adequate funding of all schools.
school integrity is predetermined by a highly regulated process of socialization through indoctrination (and inculcating the presence of threat for dissenters), but it should be noted that the value of education is not diminished. In a liberal democratic society indoctrination is replaced by inculcation of democratic values, which grant schools greater flexibility by enlarging the goals of education. The ability to dissent, for example, would play a large part in an education towards democratic citizenship. Given this distinction many would argue that a commitment to democratic values would be the reference point for school integrity. Callan would fall into this camp if we supplemented democratic values with enabling a minimal condition for human flourishing (its threshold set at overcoming ethical servility) and the inculcation of civic virtues upholding “justice as reasonableness.”

There are two related challenges to this democratic ideal. Some say that the integrity of schools has been eroded by the shifting value of democratic institutions towards market based values. The United States’ “No Child Left Behind” policy is a reflection of this shift. An increased focus on scientific and mathematical proficiency serves the purpose of allowing students to be more competitive on the job market. Again this reinforces the importance of engaging the economic sphere on the terms set by the market (here in the transition to a technology based economy). A second challenge, related to the first, confronts the declining focus on moral reasoning which leads to some of the darker aspects of liquid modernity like xenophobia, myopic consumerism, and an inability to imagine things like electoral systems and patterns of distribution as otherwise. Park and Harvey’s concepts of development and utilization of space should be kept in mind here. For them a sensitization to the material fabric of urban life and a focus on who has a right to urban spaces provides a powerful bulwark against such destructively stagnant thinking.

Educators concerned with the status of the disabled in public schools are very helpful in addressing these issues because the scope of their work extends beyond the
domain of the school (in both their analytical scope and range of creative proposals they are willing to consider). Ware suggests that if conversations about disability and inclusion take place within the school then “perhaps later in life, as members of a broader community, similar conversations might occur to define the common good” (p. 162).

Similarly Terzi’s adoption of Amartya Sen’s capability approach sees the framing of disability policy as a matter of social justice. What matters in policy is a frank discussion about what students will be able to achieve if identified as disabled and thus afforded some special treatment. Such an approach, as Terzi notes, “allows an understanding of disability as the interrelation of individual and circumstantial elements” (p. 445), which surely includes broader cultural conditions and the material fabric of lived environments.

Sen’s introduction of a capabilities approach to quality of life measurements and the social justice discourse may be a helpful way to approach these challenges to education. A capability approach is constructed on the basis of functionings, which “represent parts of the state of a person--in particular the various things that he or she manages to do or be in leading a life” (1993, p. 31). Basic functionings include being able to feed oneself, while more complex ones would be finding a meaningful place in one’s community or achieving self-respect through one’s daily activities. Capabilities are “the alternative combination of functionings the person can achieve, and from which he or she can choose one collection” (p. 31). Education has a significant impact in this picture. Generally education can address basic conditions of ignorance (e.g. the inability to see opportunities to achieve valuable functionings). More pointedly education can bring one to recognize and change structural inequalities that are preventing valuable functions (as Freire argued).

There is a partial capability approach behind current special education policy (which in the United States is dominated by a personal deficiency/specialist approach). An Individual Education Plan is in large part recognition that certain students will not be capable of fulfilling the requirements of the curriculum as set. Fulfilling the curriculum
here implies the ability to perform certain acts (e.g. calculating, reading, responding intelligently to arguments) and these abilities are to serve students into adulthood (be it in further education or employment). Given some sort of learning disability an IEP is created to honor our public commitment to equal access to an education. The important thing to note is that IEPs don’t abandon the commitment to assuring that students will leave the school with certain skills that will serve them in the future. The problem, as Nussbaum notes, is that society is often unresponsive to these skills. Discussing Sesha she writes that “employment, political participation, and the choice of a way of life seem less pertinent to her”, but she will grow as a human being if her education centers on “attachment, emotional equanimity, and health” (2006, 169).

The process of differentiation among students seems to serve two functions in the pursuance of IEPs. The first is a soft acceptance of the collapse of community. Deficiencies in mathematical or verbal skills are identified early in the schooling process and the relevant marketable skills that the student has are accentuated in the IEP. An inability to fulfill the curriculum in certain regards is overlooked because there are still methods that will allow the student to become an independent member of society (in terms of cost-benefit analysis the disproportionate cost of educating a student with special needs is offset by their future role as independent citizen and contributing member of the economy). This economic function is accompanied by a second, more pragmatic consideration. If education is considered a social good it seems like a reasonable claim on the school to create an environment where each student has the opportunity for self-improvement.

The predominance of IEPs may reflect an acknowledgement of the conditions described by Bauman, Sennett, and West. Independence is accepted as an essential element to valuable functionings in modern western societies. When the public (and to some extent the private) sphere has retreated from a commitment to rich support systems independence must be amongst the main goals for educators. The school can provide
support so long as students are in the system, but there is a recognition that support may not be there after students graduate. This is a reasonable goal given current societal trends, but there still remains the challenge of moral impoverishment. This is to say that the acceptance of societal trends is not accompanied by any moral evaluation of the justness of the system. Ware, for example notes that “schools are vexed by the social and economic stratification that is only intensified with the mandated ‘inclusion’ of students with disabilities in general education classrooms” (p. 153). Against White’s hope\(^{47}\) this does not serve as an initiation into a broad critique of social structures effecting the distribution of goods and life chances. Terzi seems to be on the right track when she suggests that the ability to imagine things as otherwise will provide useful insights if it is in line with the type of moral reasoning present in Sen’s capabilities approach.

A return to the perceptual stage of differentiation would be a good starting point. First it must be accepted that the identification of disability is a value-laden instance of differentiation. If this claim were accepted then there would need to be a reorientation towards the nature of valuation and away from a fixation only on qualities that mark students as “disabled.” In current practice the relevant characteristics of disability are formulated primarily in negative terms (i.e. an inability or hindrance towards independent participation in economic and social activity). There is little attention paid to what would constitute a valuable life given the circumstances and the possibility of changing certain environmental elements. This holds equally for “normal students”, a fact which is often overlooked in a society that tends to abandon these notions of value once the requisite qualities of independence have been met.

**Restating the Issue:**

The foregoing discussion has hopefully raised some pointed questions for

\(^{47}\) For White’s hope see above, p. 30-1. I bring White back into the conversation here because his assumption that our culture is predicated on autonomous behavior is challenged when we consider the social trends considered in this chapter.
Callan’s educational project while at the same time reminding us why it is valuable. In the first half of the chapter I focused primarily on the destructive social consequences of a culture that derides the notion of dependence. As opposed to acknowledging positive duties towards communities subjected to historical discrimination an ethic of individual achievement has paved the way for the recession of the State in troubled areas. Cornel West and Loïc Wacquant show how this process severely forecloses on the ability for positive notions of citizenship to form. The question that this raises is how patriotic sentiment or an integrated moral approach to communal life is initiated in communities that may have lost the vocabulary to make sense of these ideals. Callan writes that “so long as we endorse justice as reasonableness, any credible account of its development and stability will take the formation of particularistic political attachments as critically important. That is so because of the dependence of justice on established relations of trust within a given polity” (1997, p. 94-5). However, should the State (possibly through the education system) be more proactive in encouraging the kind of civic friendship that is obviously not establishing relations in many sections of the polity? And in addition to this do the complexities of urban environments and economic pressures influence this process? These questions will be addressed in the next chapter.

The second half of the chapter extended the critique of independent achievement as a cultural ideal by showing how it impoverishes the moral discourse on the status of disability. The discourse is impoverished in two significant ways. First of all an assumption of independence forecloses on an ability to interrogate normative conceptions of the self and evaluate the justness of social arrangements that flow from it. In addition to this independence radically circumscribes the social bases for respect, which in turn can have the effect of setting the terms of educational policy (e.g. the turn towards standardized tests and the denigration of the arts in favor of science and math). The concerns raised by Ware and others show how these limited ways of thought prevent a frank discussion on disability that treats it as a civil rights issue instead of a technical
matter to be solved by specialists. Additionally it is hard to articulate goals specific to civic education (in the philosophically rich vocabulary that Callan uses) in this type of social landscape which tends to foreground and facilitate the brand of individualism described above. Following Nussbaum this may lead us to ask whether Callan and others following in the Rawlsian tradition have sidestepped a serious consideration of the self by always assuming that children are potential autonomous practical reasoners. Additionally we might ask if the civic virtues attached to “justice as reasonableness” are enough to encourage the social bases of respect that a serious consideration of disability (or social inclusion) requires.

Given these concerns and the preceding discussion I want to return to the three issues that I raised in chapter 1 and restate why I think that Callan provides a valuable template. Additionally I want to suggest how his ideas might be amended to address the liquid conditions that worry Harvey, Bauman, and Sennett.
Chapter 4: Liberal Prospects

In the introduction to *Creating Citizens* Callan presents the reader with a thought experiment. He asks us to imagine a political order that has settled the central concerns of liberalism such as arriving at a just distribution of wealth, ensuring the protection of essential rights through a well functioning legal system, and creating safe spaces for all manners of personal and collective expression. But when it comes time for civic participation like voting and debating substantive political matters citizens remain largely uninterested. “Although citizens respect each other’s legal rights, they shun contact with those who are different so far as possible because they despise them. When transactions across cultural divisions are unavoidable, everyone tries to exact as much benefit from the other…within the limits imposed by the law” (Callan, 1997, p. 2). In this “Brave New World” scenario Callan wants the reader to note the importance of a “shared public morality” that can animate collective projects oriented towards significant goods (as opposed to the fulfillment of mere desires). As we saw in Chapter 1 this shared public morality is rooted in “a constellation of attitudes, habits, and abilities that people acquire as they grow up” (*ibid*, p. 3) and that they deploy in competently considering and evaluating goods held dear to themselves and others. Ultimately the health of just institutions, no matter how elegantly they are designed, requires compelling and animating moral commitments in the psychological dispositions of citizens.

Chapter 1 tried to demonstrate how these ideas would operate in three spheres of public morality. A political education based on “justice as reasonableness” spoke to the comprehensiveness of the psychological dispositions needed to ensure a commitment to
reciprocity and free and equal citizenship. In terms of civic cooperation Callan attempted to show how an integrated approach to moral education can retrieve the constructive possibilities of patriotic sentiment. When patriotism was morally apt\(^{48}\) it could promote a commitment and sense of responsibility towards the national institutions that citizens received from preceding generations. And finally liberalism was shown to have a morally relevant interest in ensuring the minimal conditions of flourishing in all children. Without a political culture and educational system that militated against “ethical servility” no compelling account could be given of what it would mean to make moral progress from one generation to the next or to arrive at a rich conception of what would constitute a good life for someone to lead.

In this final chapter I’d like to return to these ideas in light of the account given in chapters 2 and 3 of cultural conditions that had more in common with the “Brave New World” scenario than a healthy public morality. In the first section I’ll complicate the ideal of “justice as reasonableness” by arguing that a richer conception of ethical pluralism will need to take the aspirational field of children more seriously. Some reflections on the ambiguous status of queer children in the U.S. and Muslims in France will show how the social bases of respect can add another dimension to the burdens of judgment. In the second section I will argue that Callan is right in the U.S. context to locate the possibility of moral progress in the framework of the nation. But in order for

\(^{48}\) Morally apt patriotism is opposed to sentimental citizenship. For patriotic sentiment to be morally apt it must fall between the vices of uncritical reception of national myths and morose fixation on the moral failures of the nation. Discussing the temptation to valorize those who violently struggled for Irish independence instead of frankly assessing the actions of these “patriots” Callan writes that to explore the issue “seriously and imaginatively is to pursue history in an unsentimental spirit, and whatever public emotion can survive the process is emotion on has paid for” (1997, 107).
patriotic sentiment to resist the corruption that we’ve seen since 9/11 the narrative will need to find its expression in rich phenomenological encounters with particular institutions and agents that become identified with the nation (the public school being one of these institutions). In the final section I’ll add the specter of market based ideals to the threat of ethical servility. As opposed to fleeting quality of a society saturated by market values I will argue that children have a prospective interest in developing a capacity for commitment.

The Aspirational Field and the Burdens of Judgment:

Autonomy, in the sense that liberals often use the word, is intimately bound up with the language of possibilities and achievement. One of liberalism’s great contributions to the project of modernity was to sensitize people to the moral corruption that occurs in societies marked by institutionalized forms of oppression. In addition to the Greek sense of “giving ourselves the law” liberals were able to gesture towards the great personal benefits of self-definition and self-knowledge. Current debates about authenticity are a recognizable outgrowth of the more positive uses of autonomy in liberal theory. The sympathetic imagination that the burdens of judgment requires is meant to create the social conditions whereby a wide diversity of self-determining citizens can pursue these self-authenticating valuable life projects (within reason and bound by minimal constraints like “the harm principle”). But as we saw in the previous chapter there is still much work that needs to be done in order to fulfill the promise of a widespread commitment to autonomy.

A significant domain in which this work should be done is in the social conditions that influence the aspirational field of children. By aspirational field I mean something
like that range of representations that make up a definite spectrum of possible identifications for children. Another way to say this is that the aspirational field is made up of the range of intelligible ways of life (and their associated goods) that children can grow to identify with. In past times the aspirations of children were often made up of a very limited range of defined roles usually set by the economic realities and broadly understood social norms of their community. A major justification for a liberal education is to enlarge this field by exposing children to different ways of life, providing different interpretative lenses through which to view the world, and to encourage the development of skills and habits of mind that will make achievement in a range of activities an attainable goal. There is substantial disagreement about what this ideal entails in practice⁴⁹, but in general the aspirational field is enlarged with the hope that the child will find a way of life with which they can positively identify.

The problem with this model is that it tends to locate the aspirations of children outside of a culture that can be actively hostile to certain modes of self-affirmation. As we saw earlier in my discussion of the film *Rosetta* the process of positive identification (there with the normative qualities of citizenship) is subject to substantial corruption by cultural ideals. If we take into account the influence of media representations the possibility of misidentification with a way of life (based on thin assumptions as opposed to rooted in lived experience) becomes as real a possibility as the positive identifications

⁴⁹ One of the more substantial points of contention centers on the question of compulsion. Some liberals think that all students should be compelled to take a curriculum that exposes them to a wide range of morally admirable pursuits. This is the type of thinking that leads universities to set general education requirements that make students take courses outside of their discipline. Other liberals reject this idea of compulsion because it may ultimately restrict a student’s aspirational field (as post-colonialist thinkers argue) or it may not foster the depth of learning that comes from a commitment to specialized pursuits (as the early Callan argued).
that liberals imagine. Recent work by Kevin McDonough and Diane Gereluk provide
nice examples of how liberal philosophers of education need to pay more attention to the
social location of students and the structural conditions of society which can reduce their
chances of positive identification. Taken in tandem with the discussion of disability in
the previous chapter this should point to the importance of examining the intersection of
social bases of recognition and the aspirational field of students (as future citizens) when
trying to think about the differences meant to be accommodated by the burdens of
judgment.

In a recent article McDonough (2007) focuses on the concerns raised by many
queer theorists that liberals - despite their high minded ideals of inclusion and equal
consideration – are unwilling or unable to consider claims for recognition from queer
students and queer communities. Citing Chris Mayo he puts the issue thusly: “liberalism,
and the educational institutions it sponsors, has thus far failed to address, and perhaps
cannot address, the fact that ‘queer children are denied a sense of futurity’ in liberal
societies and in public schools” (p. 796). Futurity here refers to a bundle of issues related
to the possible development of autonomous practical reasoning in students. These issues
include accommodation and recognition of identities, the capacity to imagine alternate
future possibilities for oneself and one’s community, the ability to ascribe some sense of
meaningful social agency to one’s life, and access to the aspects of communal life
necessary to develop our practical reasoning skills. The issue facing queer children in a
culture that (for the most part) has trouble recognizing queerness as a “normal” identity is
“that individual agency and flourishing depend on ‘knowledge and imagination’ about
one’s future possibilities and that this must be developed through concrete,
phenomenologically rich encounters with real communities, stories and identities, then
the problems facing queer children seem especially severe\textsuperscript{50} (p. 803).

Using the criticisms by queer theorists as a template for other sub-groups\textsuperscript{51} McDonough concludes that liberal philosophers of education should seek “to determine what prospects exist for maximizing the individual autonomy of all citizens when present social, legal and political conditions illegitimately restrict it” (p. 808). The issue that he raises in his article is that the aspirational field of queer children is subject to significant corruption by a culture that often does not provide the necessary tools for positive identification (i.e. autonomous practical reasoning skills) or the necessary range of options to provide them with a strong sense of self-affirmation. To try and understand how queer children cope with this situation may be an occasion for the type of disturbing (though ultimately necessary) questions that Callan thinks the burdens of judgment lead children to ask.

I would argue that an analogous case can be made for students operating from other marginalized social locations. The force of Harvey’s reflections on the social construction of space is that he sees a subject’s engagement with the field of representations as a definite spectrum of possibilities (for both individual and collective action). When you interact with an environment, you are attuned to aspects of this

\textsuperscript{50} The problem is also exacerbated if queer students are isolated in queer communities that offer an overly deterministic conception of queer futurity. This tendency for oppressed groups to develop oppositional and highly determinative communal identities can also be seen in many arguments for Afrocentric schools. Though sometimes this isolation is justified if widespread hostility in the general culture is denying the possibility of educational goals like the development of practical reason (McDonough cites the Harvey Milk School).

\textsuperscript{51} Though by no means am I (or McDonough) suggesting that the demands of queer theorists are not qualitatively different from say post-colonial or religious theorists.
environment that take on significance and value. We can see this on a collective level when places assume a sense of permanence within which aspirations and interactions are tempered (we can think of gentrification as an obvious example). So if we are to assume that citizenship entails a sense of shared purpose and fate we need to have an account of how collective action is possible given how we come to terms with and mediate our immediate environments. In the case of queer children and others operating from possibly stigmatized social locations (e.g. the neighborhoods described by Wacquant) this process of attunement and sensitization is likely to produce aspirations and judgments that may fall outside of the “reasonable” category that Callan is imagining (e.g. gang membership needed to successfully navigate the “grey economies” that form in many of the U.S’s urban cores). Similarly, as McDonough points out, the aspects of the environment that these students are sensitive to may not be those needed to develop the skills to foster a rich and positive identification with a way of life embedded in thick communal ties.

Diane Gereluk’s recent article on the banning of the *hijab* in French public schools provides another way to think about this issue in a slightly different context. She notes that for liberals in the Rawlsian tradition “developing one’s capacities to make informed judgments about how to lead one’s life is a fundamental [aim of education]” (2005, p. 261). In the case of banning the *hijab* the French government would have to prove that wearing it or being exposed to it (as a symbol of an ideology) was a hindrance to the development of “children’s future autonomy.” Unfortunately, as she goes on to argue, since the government has failed to understand the complex cultural significance of the *hijab* they have also failed to make the case for its exclusion from school culture.
First of all wearing the *hijab* is, at least doctrinally, “a voluntary act of religious observance” (p. 262). Even if we look past this and track the cultural significance of the *hijab* we run into a variety of meanings that cannot be reduced to a symbol of oppression restricting the self-expression of Muslim women. The danger of such a reductive definition is that it opens up the possibility for a host of limited identifications with the *hijab* as a cultural symbol and remains dangerously unresponsive to other contextual considerations (e.g. the appropriation of the *hijab* by some young women as a way to publicly resist the chauvinistic and sexist elements of French public culture⁵²).

The controversy surrounding the *hijab* and Gereluk’s exploration of the questions it raises goes far beyond the worry of misidentification. For the most part the justification for banning the *hijab* centered on France upholding its tradition of *laïcité*, with its commitment to equal exclusion of all religious symbols from schools. But the major reason for bringing up this example is to show how difficult it is to determine what constitutes reasonable ethical pluralism if we don’t remain sensitive to subtle forms of degradation coming from the general public culture or economic climate. To not understand what it means to engage one’s aspirational field against these forces is to remain oblivious to a phenomenon like the appropriation of the *hijab* for moral/political purposes mentioned above. As we saw in the examples of disempowered African Americans, often invisible handicapped people, and queer children this need to remain sensitive to the motivations of children *vis a vis* their lived environments (and not just

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⁵² I was lucky enough to have this explained to me first hand by some of the young women I taught in Roubaix, France, which is a mixed suburb of Lille with a sizable Muslim population (mostly of Maghreb decent). I’m sure that they are less than pleased with the current political situation because Nicholas Sarkozy was the figurehead for much of their criticisms.
credal commitments or relation to a tradition) is vital if we are to give “justice as reasonableness” its fullest articulation. Importantly it also draws our attention towards the qualities of citizens and their lived experience as opposed to a myopic fixation on institutional design.

**National Myths and National Institutions:**

The example of French republicanism’s struggles to cope with minority cultural symbols like the *hijab* may give us pause when considering the benefits of inculcating a sense of patriotic sentiment in students. Given similar events like the challenges to British free speech laws by firebrand imams or the uproar over Danish cartoons depicting the prophet Mohammed isn’t it better to characterize the French struggle as an instance of a “clash of civilizations?” If such a struggle were cast in terms of “love of country” then we would likely see the exclusionary misidentification of “others” that Bauman warns us about. Instead, as many including Bauman have argued, civic education should not need to rely on national myths because of their tendency to obscure the moral horizons that bound admirable forms of solidarity. They argue that we should look for the resolution of cultural tensions in reference to a baseline of human rights and not, as Callan suggests, in reference to inclusion into the shared fate of the nation.

In many cases the debate between those receptive to inculcating patriotic sentiment and those skeptical of its use turns on how we conceptualize “the nation.” The worry that unites cosmopolitans with localists is that the narrative framework of the nation is too abstract to cohere with the rich experiential content of our day to day lives in instances when civic duty is called for. In her book *Queen of America Goes to Washington City* Lauren Berlant (1997) gives an indication of how the grandeur of
national myths opens up the possibility for lived contradictions, especially in times of crisis. She argues that within the symbolic order of a liberal democratic nation in which subjects constitute their relative ideas of both the nation and civic/personal identity, something called the “paramnesiac image” emerges in a situation of national crisis or re-definition. These have the consequence of over-determining the subject and enacting a systematic forgetting of concrete inequalities, facilitating an imagined sense of community organized around patriotic affectivity. This possibility of evacuating the subject of lived experience and leaving only an image trace of patriotic identification with the national symbolic order opens up patriotic sentiment to a host of corruptions supporting very partisan interests (Berlant focuses primarily on the abuses of patriotic sentiment by Reagan and the New Right). The subject is left with an image trace of political experience that has no attachment itself to actual memory/experience, and in this way remains in what she calls an infantile state of “unknowing,” confusing fact with fantasy.

Callan would of course agree with Berlant and argue that any conception of citizenship that relies on sanitized myths will not lead to the earned emotions that are needed to promote serious attachment to national institutions. Focusing on patriotic rhetoric instead of national myths he writes that “we should probably expect little correlation between morally apt patriotism and the frequency with which the rhetoric of patriotism is actually used” (2005, p. 544). But liberals still need to pay attention to the type of informal education that students are receiving from a general culture that might have trouble addressing the painful lived experience of many citizens. As we saw in Chapter 2 one of the more troubling aspects of this culture is the delegitimization of
political institutions and collective ownership in the name of increasing personal freedoms. We should then take pause when Callan claims that “patriots have a general advantage over nonpatriots: their love of country blurs the distinction between self interest and the interests of compatriots in a way that makes action to support the creation of just institutions less costly” (ibid, p. 543). If collective activity is increasingly cast in terms of market values where does this support for the creation of just institutions develop? Do we run the risk of leaving a paramnesiac image trace when we evoke this notion of collectivity in a landscape that more often than not speaks approvingly of self-interested pursuits?

The belief that I am pressing here is the Rawlsian idea that there is a correspondence between the care and obligations citizens develop in their particularistic attachments (to family, friends, etc.) and those deployed on the larger level of establishing and maintaining just institutions. Callan extends this by making a third move which establishes a correspondence between just institutions and the narrative frame of the nation if guided by morally apt patriotism. Generally I think that this is the right move to make, but the strength of commitments developed in rich phenomenological encounters with particular others should also point to the depth of engagement needed to link institutions to the nation. One way that this may be achieved is to link up the narrative frame of the nation (as a historical achievement that can include long term collective projects, the institutionalization of struggles for social justice, and the richness for collective life) with the perceptual experience of citizens. McDonough suggests how this may be achieved and under what conditions it may be successful.
In the case of queer children love of country is an unlikely educational outcome because supposedly just institutions have not protected them from systematic harm coming from many parts of the national culture. Additionally the progressive and constructive elements of national institutions remain obscure to them because these elements have often denied them a sense of futurity. In light of this McDonough makes the common sense suggestion that queer identities should be more present in schools and the curriculum if the ideal of the common school is going to undertake the task of democratic education. In a tone similar to White he suggests that for queer children this will draw attention to “the ways in which their queerness has affected the social, personal, economic and political dimensions of their lives” and “to the ways in which contemporary liberal societies have broached or failed to broach issues of queer oppression and discrimination” (p. 806). This integration of queer identities holds across the school culture, as it will also be of vital interest to expose non queer students to queer identities if there is a moral imperative to include queerness in the range of “reasonable pluralism.” This mere fact of exposure and engagement with a particular state institution like the common school holds constructive possibilities for a variety of social groups that are defined against normative categories (e.g. how disability is opposed to able-normative conceptions of the person).

The reason that I think this basic fact of seeing possible forms of recognition in particular state institutions is best undertaken under the framework of the nation draws from Wacquant’s account of “advanced marginality.” In the French banlieues “highly conspicuous public institutions weave a vital socio-economic safety net and contribute significantly to increasing social control…by contrast, in the Black Belt of the American
metropolis, the collapse of public institutions is the leading cause of systematic physical and social insecurity” (2008, p. 223). Given this fact he goes on to argue that “so long as public institutions have the capacity to adequately service [poor urban populations] and form an organizational buffer against exclusion, the concentration of the poor in isolated urban districts need not necessarily translate into an aggravation of their situation” (ibid, p. 224). Despite growing claims of the irrelevance of the nation in a globalized world, the sheer fact is that for the children most in need of recognition by liberal theorists (queer children, disabled children, minority children, etc.) particular national institutions remain the main point of access to notions of justice that resist their further marginalization from collective life. It goes without saying that public schools remain a prime candidate for developing some type of relationship with the particular instances of the institutional framework that constitutes the national political community.

This suggestion only has force if we develop a conception of “the nation” in opposition to the modes of social recognition provided by neoliberal market principles. If industry sees areas like Paris’ Red Belt and America’s Black Belt as “human excess” it provides a horribly destructive mode of recognition. As we have seen with the current neoliberal regime, the market has not been willing to take a moral stand on the influences of their pursuits (except a dogmatic commitment to maximizing individual liberty in a formal sense)\(^{53}\). This is most visibly manifest in the fleeting and amoral quality of the cutting edge industries described by Sennett. In opposition to this Wacquant shows the tremendously constructive role played by state institutions in troubled areas because of the moral claim they can embody. The state can at least gesture towards “free and equal

\(^{53}\) The social compact provided a better (though by no mean perfect) framework of integrating industry and community interests.
citizenship” and provide real experiential content for a shared fate through institutions like the common school. If we evaluate the quality of this experiential content through the frame of the nation we may have a better opportunity to arrive at the morally apt forms of patriotism Callan has in mind. But if the nation continues to cede the commons to private interests I find it improbable that meaningful attachment to social institutions or a commitment to increasing modes of recognition for moral reasons will develop.

Commitment and Flourishing:

In 1846 a despondent Søren Kierkegaard looked out onto the Danish social landscape and lamented that “a revolutionary age is an age of action; ours is the age of advertisement and publicity. Nothing ever happens but there is immediate publicity everywhere” (1962, p. 35). Kierkegaard was responding to two major trends that we can associate with the advent of a modern society. The first was an imbalance that he saw arising between the reflective tendencies promoted by the new intellectual class (professors, clergymen, and bourgeoisie parlors) and the passionate commitment of authentic individuals (embodied by the figure of “the knight” for Kierkegaard). Where reflection reigned over commitment people shunned “the harsh judgment of existence” (ibid., p. 37) for the safety of “objective” disengaged speculation and “idle chatter.” The second trend was what he called “leveling”, which referred to the effacing of qualitative distinctions by making everyone and everything an object of interest, but not an object soliciting our commitment. The process was precipitated by the co-arising of the Press and the Public, twin abstractions that stoked the flames of an aesthetic disposition

54 Kierkegaard distinguishes between three basic modes of existence. The aesthetic realm concerns our dedication to enjoyment for its own sake (the seducer being his paradigmatic aesthetic character). The ethical realm moves us towards a more principled
What unites these two trends is the general sacrifice of depth for that of scope. As Kierkegaard put it, “from the point of view of love, properly understood, any addition is really a subtraction…and the more one adds the more one takes away” (ibid., p. 76).

Kierkegaard believed that this situation was ultimately untenable and the pervasive nihilism that it would encourage would hopefully drive people towards “the harsh judgment of existence” (which would inevitably mean the death of the age he was describing). Recently the philosopher Hubert Dreyfus has extended Kierkegaard’s critique to modern forms of disengagement (e.g. surfing the web or text messaging) and argued that the incapacity for involved commitment may also have disastrous educational consequences. Dreyfus’ central claim is that the risk necessary for plunging into harsh waters of existence is also a necessary component of learning a skill. His argument relies on a developmental model that views embodied commitment and risk as essential ingredients for the progression from novice to expert. Dreyfus claims that any newcomer to an activity or a discipline will usually begin by learning a set of rules that guides them towards the completion of certain tasks. However, as they become more familiar with the activity and the tasks take on a greater complexity the learner will need more than recourse to a limited set of rules. In addition to general guidelines for action the learner will also need a method for discerning relevant from irrelevant information and translating this into skillful behavior. For Dreyfus it is the willingness to take risks and disposition where we aim for a degree of constancy and pare down the hedonistic choice set of the aesthetic mode of existence by rooting our decisions in the type of “best selves” we’d like to be. The third realm, which Kierkegaard sees as the highest mode of existence, is the religious realm. It is here that all social roles are transcended and we are given a defining commitment that gives our life true meaning. This mode of existence remains elusive because Kierkegaard often talks about these defining commitments as coming from divine providence or requiring a leap of faith via an acceptance of the absurd.
throw oneself passionately into an activity that brings about this further stage of
development. He writes that “unless the outcome matters, and unless the person
developing the skill is willing to accept the pain that comes from failure and the elation
that comes with success, the learner will be stuck at the level of competence and never
achieve mastery” (2002, p. 374). Let me make this clearer through an example.

Dreyfus thinks that we begin, as novices, by being given a set of rules to follow
and information to pay attention to. As a new basketball player we are taught the rules,
learn the mechanics of shooting, are shown how to shuffle our feet on defense, etc. We
then gain some more experience by testing out these general rules in real situations and
get a better idea of what counts as relevant to playing good basketball. In practice we
may have a scrimmage and begin to see how these various skills fit together (e.g. I can
see that if a player is faster than me I back off a bit on defense. There wasn’t a rule for
speed, but it became a factor in following the rule of staying in front of your man). But
as we become more and more familiar with the game we come to realize that there is a
tremendous amount of relevant information to playing good team basketball and this can
be overwhelming. At this point (which Dreyfus calls competence) we would need to take
some risks and try out what we think might work in a game situation. We have become
somewhat invested and responsible for the stance we take on the situation so we are more
likely to have an emotional reaction to our success or failure. If I beat my man to a spot
and take a charge I feel elated, but if he gets by me and I foul him I feel terrible. In
succeeding and failing we come to learn much more about the situation and become more
familiar with what we need to do (without having to constantly refer to rules or general
principles). When we have this mechanism for determining relevance we can come to
think about higher level things like strategy and goals (even if we’re not quite sure how to achieve them yet). Eventually we may reach the level of expert, where we both recognize these goals and know how to achieve them right away, and there is almost an improvisational quality to our play (announcers would say that we are “in the zone” and Aristotelians would praise our phronetic behavior).

For both Kierkegaard and Dreyfus the social conditions for human flourishing are bound up with a commitment to standards, but these are not the standards that cultural conservatives argue for. Deeply skeptical about the worth of communal values, Kierkegaard believed that authenticity was the only true register for human flourishing. Striking a Lutheran tone he writes the “the leveling process is as powerful where temporary things are concerned as it is impotent where eternal things are concerned” (1946, p. 264). Where societal trends drew people away from the eternal and towards the temporal nihilism was the inevitable outcome. For Dreyfus the stakes aren’t as high, but he too sees an antipathy towards passionate commitment as a hindrance to achieving excellence in many spheres of activity. If commitment and depth of engagement are eschewed for access to a greater quantity of information (as we often see in the rhetoric extolling the benefits of online learning) we are likely to encourage competence (in the sense of mediocrity) instead of excellence. Ultimately for both thinkers the social basis for flourishing lies at the cross section of perspectivism and commitment.

Perspectivism may be an awkward term meant here to accommodate Kierkegaard’s existentialist orientation. However I do think that it captures the idea of individual accountability that both he and Dreyfus favor (though Dreyfus does a better job incorporating the communal standards needed to create praiseworthy conditions of accountability).
For liberals this talk of commitment encroaches on dangerous territory. On the one hand the capacity for developing a comprehensive conception of the good is an important moral power. But the type of commitment that this might entail cannot malign the types of concessions to the burdens of judgment and sympathetic imagination that is required for harmonious communal life. In theoretical terms one of the most difficult tasks for liberals is to strike a balance between these two poles. However the worries that I raised in chapters 2 and 3 point towards pervasive market values that erode both ends of the equation. In what follows I’d like to follow Sennett and look at the notion of craft as a way to reconcile liberal commitments with the corrosive elements of the market and other fluid aspects of contemporary life. If liberalism is to distinguish itself from the more radical strain of neoliberalism it will need to give an account of how a capacity for commitment can be developed in students within the moral constraints of a sophisticated liberal platform like that of Callan’s.

Sennett is very clear about the adversarial relationship between the new capitalism and craftsmanship. The new capitalism “is too mobile for the desire to do something well for its own sake to root into a person’s experience over the course of years and decades” (2006, p. 194). Instead of this accumulation of experience and attunement to standards (i.e. to do something well for its own sake) those on the cutting edge of the economy demand a capacity for flexibility and change. What is lacking in this picture is commitment, which in Sennett’s view is the cardinal virtue of craftsmanship. “Getting something right,” he writes, “even though it may get you nothing, is the spirit of true craftsmanship. And only that kind of disinterested commitment…can lift people up emotionally; otherwise, they succumb in the struggle of
survival” (ibid, p. 195-6). Disinterested is not meant in the sense that Kierkegaard and Dreyfus disparage, but instead is very much in line with their critique of deriving standards for commitment from a society oriented towards the fleeting, short term dimension of everyday life.

These arguments for commitment ultimately refer to a particular style of choice and self-affirmation. David Blacker has argued that a pressing issue for liberal philosophers of education is to look past issues of inclusion which arise in the border cases that Callan is concerned with (minority cultures, deeply religious communities, etc.). He contends that “liberalism’s generations-long focus on educational inclusion has left it ill-equipped to respond to those who question not the inclusion – as would, say racial segregationists – but rather the worthwhileness of the object of inclusion” (2007, p. 2). While the threat of ethical servility is undoubtedly a hindrance to human flourishing so too is a culture that promotes the types of character traits that often lead people to “succumb to the struggle of survival.” The depth of engagement that comes with commitment can serve as a countervailing influence to the fluid aspects of society and possibly serve as a basis to reevaluate Callan’s project of creating a coherent political unity that will resist the fracturing tendencies of pluralism.

It remains an open question as to how this notion of commitment would show up in the education of children. The type of education that Sennett and Dreyfus have in mind would point towards the growth of apprenticeship programs. But if an argument for commitment is serving as a general critique of a degraded political and public culture there must be an added consideration for political education. Callan certainly gestures towards commitment to just national institutions with his conception of morally apt
patriotism, but as we saw in the previous section this already assumes a level of solidarity that seems to be lacking in our culture. Anything beyond speculative suggestions would require an insight far beyond the scope of what has been demonstrated in this thesis.

However, if we are to take Blacker’s challenge seriously, promoting a capacity for commitment\(^5\) (and the associated ability to appreciate depth and sustain interest over time) may be an essential component of a political order that “merits our rational moral faith” in times of fluidity and uncertainty.

\(^5\) Like Callan’s argument for the earned emotions of morally apt patriotism this use of commitment does not refer to the reductive allegiances of partisans and demagogues.
Conclusion

After German air raids destroyed the British House of Commons in 1943 Winston Churchill offered a simple guide to those charged with its reconstruction: “We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us” (quoted in Borgmann, 2006, p. 5). Some might say that Callan’s project lies on one side (the building), while social theorists lie on the other (describing how we have been shaped). But this is an ungenerous reading of both camps. As we have seen Callan is equally concerned with the qualities of virtuous citizens as he is with the justness of institutional design. His engagement with extant arrangements in families and minority cultures shows a sensitivity towards the ways that institutional design has shaped agents across an increasingly diverse population. Social theorists are similarly attentive to the shaping effects that environments have on agents operating from different social locations. However, we can still see the great modernist fixation on design in their gestures towards a more just and humane society.

My attempt in this thesis has been to heed both sides of Churchill’s warning. It seems like the path towards constructive political and moral dialogue is going to lie somewhere between our hopes for a society guided by sound principles and an attentiveness to how these principles are translated into practice. But that being said my starting point has been to note some troublesome currents in our mainstream culture. The economic and political trends that I discussed are rarely direct instances of oppression so liberals sometimes have trouble dealing with them. Yet if neoliberal ideals have come to suffuse the economic and political culture in which we live they will undoubtedly shape us in profound ways that liberals may find disquieting. Foremost amongst these
problems is the possibility that this culture may not be able to accommodate a
philosophically rich vision of the good or support types of human flourishing attached to
political life.

Education is more often than not inserted into political debates as a prime engine
for social change. Advocates of many political stripes see the process of schooling as a
means to prefigure the type of society they hope to achieve. What advocates often fail to
consider though are the structural elements in the mainstream culture that provide an
informal education working against these goals. Notions of success, cooperation,
recognition, achievement, and self respect need to be as present in discussions about
educational policy as they are in critiques of cultural and economic trends. If these
broader trends can have damaging effects on the character of agents in their civic
capacities and in their interpersonal relationships then they should be of interest to liberal
philosophers of education. Taking Churchill’s warning seriously requires much effort
and a constant vigilance, but compared to resignation in the face of endemic uncertainty I
see no other option.
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Press.


