

Creating Green Citizens? Political Liberalism and Environmental Education

DEREK R. BELL

This paper considers whether the promotion of an environmental ethic in schools is compatible with the political liberal's commitment to 'neutrality'. A new account of the implications of John Rawls's political liberalism for the 'basic structure' of education is developed. The prima facie incompatibility of political liberalism and the promotion of an environmental ethic is misleading. Rawls's political liberalism requires—as a matter of intergenerational justice—the promotion of the 'sustainability virtues'. Moreover, it permits the promotion of 'greener' ideals.

The 'ultimate' aim of environmental education is 'for each school leaver to have formulated a responsible attitude towards the sustainable development of Planet Earth, an appreciation of its beauty and an assumption of an environmental ethic' (Palmer and Neal, 1994, p. 29). The fundamental principle of 'political liberalism' is that the state should not intentionally promote any particular comprehensive religious, philosophical or ethical doctrines. Instead, the state should be concerned only with 'political' or 'public' goods such as peace, freedom, equality of opportunity, and the economic conditions of its citizens. If the liberal state should be neutral among comprehensive doctrines, how can it legitimately promote comprehensive ideals such as 'the sustainable development of Planet Earth, an appreciation of its beauty' or 'an environmental ethic'?¹

The conflict between political liberalism and environmental education might be resolved by abandoning political liberalism. There is no shortage of critics willing to question political liberalism's claim to be neutral.² For them, political liberalism is as much a comprehensive doctrine as any other. It is a Western, capitalist, individualist doctrine, which prioritises autonomy over community, materialism over spirituality and humanity over the rest of the natural world. In this paper, I will not attempt to defend political liberalism against these charges.³ Instead, I propose to start from a conception of political liberalism (based on John Rawls's work)⁴ and consider its implications for environmental education. I make the initial assumption that political liberalism is *prima facie* a plausible political theory for contemporary democratic societies to see what we can learn

about both political liberalism and environmental education by exploring the relationship between them.

Environmental education provides an important context for examining political liberalism for two reasons. First, environmental issues are becoming ever more prominent political issues. Therefore, it is important to understand the implications of any serious political theory for environmental governance. So far, few political liberals have seriously discussed environmental issues.⁵ Second, it is commonly argued that major environmental problems can only be solved by radical transformation of the attitudes, preferences and lifestyles of the citizens of contemporary liberal democracies. It is only by creating 'green citizens' and 'green consumers' that we can alter the patterns of demand that are driving environmental degradation. Environmental education of the kind envisaged by Palmer and Neal would seem likely to be a key component of any serious attempt to achieve this kind of transformation. On this account, environmental education should be an important part of citizenship education. Political liberals have tried to develop a conception of 'citizenship education' in the context of discussions of religious diversity and multiculturalism (and their critics have contested it) but they have not considered the new issues raised by 'green citizenship education'.

The aim of this paper is to consider the relationships among environmental education, citizenship education and political liberalism. I hope that by considering the implications of political liberalism in these two contexts we may develop interesting insights into all three subjects. More specifically, I try to show that political liberals should require an environmental component as part of citizenship education but that it should be different in important respects from the kind of environmental education envisaged by Palmer and Neal.

This paper is divided into four sections. In Section I, I outline political liberalism (as set out by John Rawls) and develop an account of the 'basic structure' of education in a politically liberal society. In Section II, I discuss the idea of environmental education. In Section III, I note the incompatibility between the idea of environmental education (as formulated in Section II) and the 'basic structure' of education in a politically liberal society (as formulated in Section I). However, I argue that a closer inspection of political liberalism reveals that it does provide grounds for environmental education in a revised form. Section IV is a short conclusion.

I POLITICAL LIBERALISM, CITIZENSHIP AND EDUCATION

Rawls explicitly (but briefly) addresses the role of education in his most recent book, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*. He suggests that political liberalism requires that 'children's education' should:

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

their society and that apostasy is not a legal crime, all this to ensure that their continued religious membership when they come of age is not based on simple ignorance of their basic rights or fear of punishment for offenses that are only considered offenses within their religious sect. Their education should also prepare them to be fully cooperating members of society and enable them to be self-supporting; it should also encourage the political virtues so that they want to honor the fair terms of social cooperation in their relations with the rest of society' (Rawls, 2001, p. 156).⁶

In summary, education should prepare children for citizenship in a society of free and equal citizens each with the capacity to form, revise and pursue their own doctrines and the ability to live by principles of justice appropriate for such a society. More specifically, Rawls expects education to promote 'freedom' by teaching children that they have the right to choose how to live their lives (within the limits of justice) and by ensuring that they have the necessary skills to support themselves in a modern society. In addition, education should promote respect for each other as equals (or a 'capacity for a sense of justice') by fostering the 'political virtues', namely, 'the virtues of reasonableness and a sense of fairness, and of a spirit of compromise and a readiness to meet others halfway' (Rawls, 2001, p. 116).

It is important to notice that the requirements that political liberalism imposes on educational content apply to all schools whether they are state schools, voluntary-aided schools or private schools. 'Society's concern with [children's] education lies in their role as future citizens' and students at all types of schools (and those educated at home) are future citizens (Rawls, 1993, p. 200).⁷ We might call these requirements 'justice-based' (to acknowledge their importance in the maintenance of just institutions over time through the social reproduction of the political virtues), 'universal' (to acknowledge that they apply to all places of child education) and 'compulsory'. For short, the 'JBUC curriculum'.

Every child's education should satisfy the requirements of the JBUC curriculum but beyond them political liberalism does not prescribe educational content. It leaves room for families and communities to choose the content of their children's education allowing them to raise their children in their own religious or moral doctrines insofar as that is consistent with the child becoming a 'good citizen'.⁸ So, Catholic (or Muslim) schooling that aims to produce 'good citizens' and 'good Catholics' (or 'good Muslims') is as acceptable as a secular education that aims to produce 'good citizens' and 'good persons'. In particular, Rawls explicitly rejects the idea that schools should be *required* to promote 'autonomy and individuality as ideals to govern much if not all of life' (Rawls, 2001, p. 156). For political liberals, such ideals are too controversial to be part of the compulsory curriculum—like Muslim or Catholic ideals (or doctrines), they might be rejected by reasonable citizens committed to other reasonable ideals.

So, the JBUC curriculum may be supplemented in private and voluntary-aided schools by permissible education designed to 'initiate'

young people into the moral or religious world-views and ways of life of their parents and their parents' communities. Identifying the bounds of the 'permissible' in relation to the requirements (and constraints) imposed by the JBUC curriculum is likely to be a difficult task. It will depend on a multiplicity of highly contested moral and empirical judgements about how we can realise the goals of the JBUC curriculum. For example, how can we effectively teach children 'political virtues' such as 'reasonableness and a sense of fairness'? How might religiously or morally motivated education contribute to (or undermine) programmes and policies designed to prepare children for citizenship? In the context of this paper, we do not need to address these questions at this level of generality. However, we will return to the issue of the bounds of the 'permissible' in the specific context of environmental education in Section III.

In principle, a political liberal might suggest that all education should be provided by voluntary, community or private organisations supported (in whole or part) by state funding. However, it is usual for political liberals to assume that there will be 'state schools' that teach a (more or less) common 'national curriculum'. This raises an interesting problem: what should state schools teach besides the JBUC curriculum? How can a politically liberal state define a 'national curriculum' that extends beyond the JBUC curriculum without violating its own principle of neutrality among comprehensive ideals? There are three significant ways of responding to this problem. The first response tries to avoid the problem by suggesting that the JBUC curriculum is much more extensive than it first appears. The task of creating 'good citizens' leaves no room for anything else. If this were true, all schools would be obliged to follow the same 'national curriculum', which would be the JBUC curriculum. Accepting this 'solution' seems to undermine the idea of political liberalism as a 'module, an essential constituent part, that fits into and can be supported by various reasonable comprehensive doctrines that endure in the society regulated by [the principles of political liberalism]' (Rawls, 1993, p. 12).

The second response suggests that state schools should supplement the JBUC curriculum with a 'neutral' national curriculum. In other words, they should not seek to promote any particular comprehensive ideals but should provide a good 'general' education. The major difficulty with this response is that in political liberalism the idea of 'neutrality' is defined by the minimal political conception of justice. If we go beyond the political ideal of free and equal citizenship that is already fully instantiated educationally in the JBUC curriculum, we have no grounds for saying that one programme of education is 'more' or 'less' 'neutral' than any other programme. A good 'general' education cannot be a neutral education. It can only be one among many conceptions of 'education for living' (Barry, 2001, p. 221).⁹ In short, the second response is no more consistent with the principles of political liberalism than the first response.

The third response is that in addition to the JBUC curriculum state schools should teach a democratically chosen curriculum. On this account,

the *demos* collectively choose the content of the national curriculum to be taught in state schools. Of course, the *demos* must be limited by the requirements (and constraints) of the JBUC curriculum in the same way as voluntary-aided and private schools. The national curriculum must not exceed the bounds of the 'permissible'. Moreover, a state that takes political liberalism seriously should seek to ensure that non-state schools with alternative (but 'permissible') curricula have a genuine opportunity to flourish. The national curriculum should not become a *de facto* requirement just because the state has made it difficult for non-state schools to obtain state funding.

It might be objected that a national curriculum that is democratically chosen violates the principle of neutrality. However, as we have seen a complete education cannot be a neutral education. If there is to be a national curriculum its content must extend beyond (what is for the political liberal) the neutral JBUC curriculum. Perhaps, there should not be a national curriculum—all schools should be voluntary, community or private schools. On this 'market' model, there should simply be an education marketplace in which each school offers its own 'permissible' curriculum and attracts state funding according to the number of students on its roll. However, it is not clear why political liberalism should be tied to a pure 'market' model of education.

Why should a society as a whole be any less entitled to choose a 'permissible' curriculum than a smaller community within that society? If all citizens in a society have an interest in the future of that society, why should they not have a 'say' in the education of the next generation of citizens? The JBUC curriculum may be designed to ensure that we live in a just society but there may be many different just societies. It matters to people that they have 'partial control' through the democratic process of the more specific context in which they (and their children) will make choices about how to lead their own lives. An important aspect of controlling the context of our future choices is controlling the education of future citizens. Of course, political liberalism must impose limits on our ability to determine the character of our society. It cannot allow us to violate principles of justice and, in particular, it cannot allow us to limit freedom by requiring conformity to the ideals of a majority. In education, it cannot allow us to override the JBUC curriculum and it cannot make attendance at national curriculum schools compulsory. A 'mixed' model of state schools and non-state schools is (at least) as consistent with the basic principles and aspirations of political liberalism as the pure 'market' model.¹⁰

So far, I have outlined a 'basic structure' for education in a politically liberal society. I have suggested that all children must receive an education that prepares them for citizenship, which I have labelled the JBUC curriculum. In addition, state schools might follow a democratically chosen national curriculum while non-state schools (supported by state funds) should be allowed to teach any 'permissible' curriculum. How might 'environmental education' fit into this kind of educational system?

II THE IDEA OF 'ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION'

The standard reference point for a definition of 'environmental education' is the Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education held in Tbilisi in 1977. The Tbilisi conference identified three 'goals of environmental education':

- (a) 'to foster clear awareness of, and concern about, economic, social, political and ecological interdependence in urban and rural areas;
- (b) to provide every person with opportunities to acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes, commitment and skills needed to protect and improve the environment;
- (c) to create new patterns of behaviour of individuals, groups and society as a whole towards the environment' (UNESCO, 1980, p. 71).

Many recent statements of environmental education have not departed substantially from these goals.¹¹ However, a more radical strain of environmental education has emerged that rejects the attempt 'to transmit from above environmentally "good" attitudes and behaviours' (Bonnett, 2000, p. 597).¹² On the radical account, environmental learning should be active rather than passive—it should involve critical reflection on and active engagement with the current economic, social and political system, the environmental ideals and 'knowledge' in society and the learner's lived experience (in her environment).

On both accounts, the goals of environmental education are not modest. At a minimum, it aims 'gradually to transform attitudes and behaviour . . . creating awareness, behavioural attitudes and values directed towards preserving the biosphere, improving the quality of life everywhere as well as safeguarding ethical values and the cultural and natural heritage, including . . . holy places, historical landmarks . . . human and natural environment, including flora and fauna and human settlements' (UNESCO, 1980, pp. 73, 75). Indeed, environmental education aims at nothing less than 'saving planet earth'¹³ from the effects of the hegemonic 'technico-economico-utilitarian view of the world' (UNESCO, 1980, p. 14). For environmentalists and (most) advocates of environmental education, the challenge of protecting the environment from 'global capitalism' is so great that nothing less than a radical transformation of human attitudes and behaviour will be sufficient.¹⁴ The only solution to our environmental problems is to create 'green citizens' who will use their democratic power and 'green consumers' who will use their financial power to protect the environment.¹⁵ The disagreement between the more and less radical accounts is principally a disagreement about how we can achieve this transformation in human attitudes and behaviour. Is it through top-down transmission of the 'right' attitudes or is it through developing critical reflection on and active engagement with the environment?

Genuine environmental education cannot be just about transmitting the 'right' attitudes. If it is to be 'education' rather than 'indoctrination' it must offer students a genuine opportunity to understand environmental

issues. For example, environmental education should not be satisfied to 'teach' children that recycling is 'good' without also giving them an understanding of the idea of 'recycling', the reasons for recycling and some of the criticisms of recycling.¹⁶ The goal of environmental education is not to produce 'children who can tell you what . . . is right and wrong, but who are woefully ignorant of the reasons why these might be so' (Kwong, 1997, p. 89).¹⁷ Instead, it should aim 'to help . . . individuals gain a variety of experience in, and acquire a basic understanding of the environment and its associated problems' (UNESCO, 1980, p. 71). Education 'about the environment (that is, basic knowledge and understanding of the environment)' is no less important than 'education for the environment (concerned with values, attitudes and positive action for the environment)'.¹⁸

If environmental education aims to produce future generations that can make environmentally aware decisions as citizens (including as voters) and as consumers, schools must provide children with 'the framework of fundamental core ideas which provides the basis for acquiring a more detailed understanding of specific issues as and when they arise' (Millar, 1997, p. 88). People with a basic understanding of environmental science (basic concepts, processes and theories as well as ideas such as risk and uncertainty) and the economic, social and political context in which environmental decisions are made have the 'mental equipment' to develop an understanding of new environmental issues as they arise.¹⁹ The rapid development of the environmental agenda makes genuine public understanding of the issues indispensable if we are to rely on the public—as citizens and consumers—to protect the environment. Teaching children what is environmentally 'right and wrong' on today's specific issues is unlikely to be enough to protect the environment in the future when as adult citizens and consumers they are faced with different environmental issues or even similar environmental issues in different socio-economic contexts. The ability to critically reflect on and actively engage with environmental issues is an essential aspect of environmental education.

Three other features of environmental education are especially important in the context of this paper. First, environmental education is envisaged as universal. The Tbilisi Conference recommended that 'it should be a right of every citizen to receive environmental education' (UNESCO, 1980, p. 71). The language of 'rights' might suggest that children should be entitled to the opportunity of environmental education but that it need not be compulsory. However, that seems incongruent with the aims of environmental education. If the aim is to protect the environment by creating new generations of citizens, who are 'greener' than their parents and grandparents, it will not be enough to make environmental education an entitlement. It is only by making it compulsory that we can ensure that 'everyone becomes environmentally conscious through proper environmental education'.²⁰ Environmental education must be 'an essential part of every pupil's curriculum' (Palmer and Neal, 1994, p. 28). So, environmental education should be universal and compulsory.

Second, environmental education is a 'cross-curricular theme' that demands a '*whole school*' approach (Palmer and Neal, 1994, pp. 23 and 32; emphasis in the original). Environmental themes 'could well be covered in science, geography, technology, English and mathematics'.²¹ Moreover, '[if] a real impact is to be made then environmental awareness in the school as a whole is surely essential' (Palmer and Neal, 1994, p. 32). The '*whole school* environment, its ethos, its approach to caring for people and other living things' must reflect its commitment to an environmental ethic (Palmer and Neal, 1994, p. 32; emphasis in original).²² In this respect, environmental education resembles citizenship education as envisaged by political liberals.

Third, environmental education and citizenship education are also similar in their explicit commitment to promoting particular values. In environmental education, the aim is 'to help . . . individuals acquire a set of values and feelings of concern for the environment, and the motivation for actively participating in environmental improvement and protection' (UNESCO, 1980, p. 71). We might plausibly talk about promoting 'environmental (or ecological) virtues' just as political liberals talk of promoting 'political virtues'.²³ In political liberalism, the 'political virtues' are understood in the context of a conception of an ideally just society. Similarly, 'environmental virtues' can only be understood in the context of an ideal of an 'environmentally-sound' society. The specific character of that ideal will be important for a more detailed account of the content of environmental education. For example, is an 'environmentally-sound' society one that aims to abide by the principle of 'sustainable development'? Or, might it be one that adopts a more ecocentric orientation to the non-human world? I will return to this point in Section III.

In summary, I have suggested that environmental education must provide future citizens with the *capacity* to make informed environmental judgements as well as the motivation to act on those judgements. It is a 'cross-curricular theme' demanding a '*whole school*' approach and to realise its ultimate goal of protecting the environment it should be a universal and compulsory part of every child's education. If this is how we understand environmental education, is it compatible with political liberalism?

III POLITICAL LIBERALISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

The conception of environmental education outlined in Section II might appear incompatible with the account of the 'basic structure' of education in a politically liberal society developed in Section I. For the political liberal, only the JBUC curriculum should be universal and compulsory, but there is no mention of environmental education in our account of the JBUC curriculum. Is it possible that the JBUC curriculum is under-described? Might environmental education (in some form) be an essential part of citizenship education in a society governed by the principles of political liberalism?

I want to suggest that Rawls's account of political liberalism does provide grounds for including an environmental education component in

citizenship education. Rawls conceives of society as ‘a fair system of cooperation between generations over time’ (Rawls, 2001, p. 160). Therefore, he cannot avoid including a principle of intergenerational justice (his ‘just savings principle’) as an integral part of his conception of justice (‘justice as fairness’).²⁴ The aim of saving for the future is ‘to make possible the conditions needed to establish and to preserve a just basic structure over time’ (Rawls, 2001, p. 159). A society needs to monitor its ‘wealth’ including its ‘stock of natural resources or productive assets’ and its ‘level of technology’ to ensure that it does not undermine the ‘circumstances of justice’ (Rawls, 1993, p. 273). In other words, the political liberal cannot allow his society’s wealth—including its ‘carrying-capacity’—to fall below the level necessary ‘for all to have a decent standard of life’ through ‘social cooperation’ (or what, Rawls calls, the condition of ‘moderate scarcity’) (Rawls, 2001, p. 84).

The idea of intergenerational justice raises a number of difficult issues, which cannot be properly addressed in the context of this paper.²⁵ In general, I assume that a Rawlsian approach to intergenerational justice is as capable of addressing these issues as any other approach. However, Dirk Willem Postma (2002) has recently argued in this journal that one particular feature of Rawls’s approach to justice is inconsistent with any theory of intergenerational justice. Postma’s claim is that Rawls’s theory cannot deal with ‘the problem of reciprocity’:

‘The problem of reciprocity follows logically from the asymmetrical relationship between contemporary and future generations; our behaviour, our choices will necessarily affect the lives of future generations . . . Influences in the reverse direction, however, are logically impossible . . . ‘Time’s arrow’ precludes every form of reciprocity. In itself this absence would not be a major problem if the very notion of reciprocity were not considered a defining characteristic of any moral relationship, at least within this [Rawlsian] liberal framework’ (Postma, 2002, pp. 45–46).

According to Postma, Rawls is committed to the view that ‘only if the moral parties are mutually dependent on each other, can there be grounds for a moral relationship in the strict sense’ (Postma, 2002, p. 49). We are not dependent on future generations; therefore, we cannot have duties of justice to them.

Postma is, of course, right that future generations (or, at least, those future generations whose lives do not overlap with ours) cannot affect our lives. He is also right that reciprocity plays a key role in Rawls’s liberalism. However, his understanding of both the nature and the place of reciprocity in Rawls’s theory are flawed. For Rawls, reciprocity is not the same as mutual dependency. Moreover, it is not a precondition for (what Postma calls) a ‘moral relationship in the strict sense’ or (what a Rawlsian might call) a ‘political’ relationship between citizens. Instead, reciprocity is itself a moral (or, more precisely, a ‘political’) ideal:

‘As understood in justice as fairness, reciprocity is a relation between citizens expressed by principles of justice that regulate a social world in

which everyone benefits judged with respect to an appropriate benchmark of equality defined with respect to that world' (Rawls, 1993, p. 17).

A society regulated by the principle of reciprocity is one in which all citizens who do their part benefit fairly from their mutual co-operation.²⁶

Citizens from non-overlapping generations cannot be mutually dependent but they can be engaged in a single co-operative venture, which for Rawls is 'realizing and preserving a just society' (Rawls, 1999a, p. 257). As Rawls puts it, 'the life of a people is conceived as a scheme of cooperation spread out in historical time' (Rawls, 1999a, p. 257). A Rawlsian 'people' is not a single generation but many successive generations extending through time. The 'just savings principle' can be regarded as an understanding between the many generations of a 'people' to do their part in their cooperative scheme and to share fairly the benefits and burdens of their co-operation. For Rawls, there is no 'problem of reciprocity' because his notion of 'reciprocity'—as the fair allocation of benefits and burdens between those engaged in a co-operative scheme—is perfectly compatible with the idea of justice between generations.²⁷

It is clear that there is a conception of 'sustainability' implicit in Rawls's 'just savings principle'. It is less clear how that conception of 'sustainability' might be more substantively defined. However, we can note some relevant considerations. First, 'sustainability' in the context of political liberalism need not be particularly 'green':

'A sustainable society need not be one big Yellowstone Park – we can imagine a worldwide version of Holland stuffed with cows, grain and greenhouses, or even a global Manhattan without the Park to be sustainable' (Wissenburg, 1998, p. 81).

'Sustainability' in this sense is an anthropocentric concept defined in terms of what is necessary for all (current and future) members of society 'to have a decent standard of life' through 'social cooperation' (Rawls, 2001, p. 84). If 'a global Manhattan without the Park' provides circumstances in which current and future generations can 'have a decent standard of life' through 'social cooperation', Rawls's notion of inter-generational justice does not rule it out.²⁸

Second, 'sustainability' is not necessarily the same as 'sustainable development'. The notion of 'sustainable development' has been defined in many different ways but it is often understood to include a commitment to economic growth.²⁹ Rawls makes it clear that the 'just savings principle' does not require continued economic growth once we have achieved a level of wealth that enables everyone 'to have a decent standard of life' through 'social cooperation' (Rawls, 2001, p. 84):

'Real saving is required only for reasons of justice: that is, to make possible the conditions needed to establish and to preserve a just basic structure over time. Once these conditions are reached and just institutions established, net real saving may fall to zero. If society wants to save for reasons other than justice, it may of course do so; but that is another matter' (Rawls, 2001, p. 159).

So, economic growth is not a necessary component of Rawlsian sustainability.

Third, the limits of what we can do to the environment without undermining the ‘circumstances of justice’—or preventing future generations from having a decent standard of life through social co-operation—depend (among other things) on how much faith it is reasonable to place in the capability of future science to solve environmental problems we create today. Should we be ‘promethean’ optimists about the capacity of science to ameliorate scarcity-creating environmental problems or do we believe that some of the natural preconditions of moderate scarcity are non-substitutable and irreplaceable once they have been damaged or destroyed?³⁰

The difficulty is that even if scientists occasionally agree on the immediate environmental impact of our actions, claims about the capacity of future generations to ameliorate the ‘problems’ we have caused are likely to remain controversial. Of course, to say that environmental claims can be controversial is not to say that the more general methods of either environmental science or the social sciences, which study the economic, social and political context of environmental decisions, are similarly controversial. Informed discussion of the environmental effects of our actions and the possibility of remediation (in the long-term and the short-term) would appear to be an essential part of any serious attempt to determine the limits of what we can legitimately do to the environment.

I have suggested that (Rawlsian) political liberals are committed to an idea of ‘sustainability’ that can only be worked out concretely through informed discussion.³¹ It is reasonable to assume that this should have implications for the content of citizenship education in a politically liberal society. In addition to promoting ‘political virtues’, which are designed to ensure intra-generational justice, the JBUC curriculum should aim to promote ‘sustainability virtues’, which are designed to ensure inter-generational justice. In particular, citizens should recognise that the current generation has a duty to ensure that the ‘circumstances of justice’ are maintained for future generations. Moreover, they should be motivated to play their part in the fulfilment of that duty by participating in discussions and decisions about the limits that should be placed on what the current generation does to the environment. Citizens should have the ability to make informed judgements about environmental issues—especially the connections between environmental conditions and human well-being—in full awareness of the complexity of those issues. In short, the JBUC curriculum should aim to promote a positive attitude toward ‘sustainability’ and a basic understanding of the environmental and social science frameworks that citizens need to participate in ‘sustainability’ decisions.

It might be objected that such decisions are best left to a scientific-bureaucratic élite of ‘experts’. There is no need to involve citizens in ‘sustainability’ decisions, therefore, there is no need for the JBUC curriculum to include an environmental component. Political liberals should be uncomfortable with the idea that ‘experts’ are the right people to

make such vital decisions for two reasons. First, there is a recent body of literature that casts doubt on the distinction between 'experts' and 'public' in the context of environmental issues.³² The complexity and place-specific nature of many environmental issues may often make 'indigenous' knowledge as important as 'expert' (or scientific) knowledge. Moreover, insofar as it is possible that a true understanding of nature is 'not simply [rational], but intuitively [known] through a certain kind of intimacy' or 'acquaintanceship' that only comes through particular lived experience, we cannot rely on the abstract and general knowledge of scientific experts (Bonnett, 1997, pp. 256–257).³³ Second, one of the purposes of democratic debate in a politically liberal society is to ensure that decisions made by élites do not violate principles of justice. If the current generation is collectively responsible for the effects of its actions on future members of the society, it cannot reasonably 'hand over' that responsibility to 'experts'. A just society will make use of 'expert' knowledge in the decision-making process but it will not neglect its duty to future generations by failing to promote the 'sustainability virtues' in all of its citizens.

So far, I have argued that the JBUC curriculum should include an environmental component because political liberals are committed to a principle of 'sustainability', which must be worked out concretely through informed democratic deliberation. However, I have admitted that the political liberal's conception of 'sustainability' might not justify standard 'green' ideals such as the preservation of natural landscapes or habitats or even the provision of 'green spaces'. Therefore, compulsory environmental education in a politically liberal society should not aim to promote these ideals. It should provide children with the 'mental equipment' and the motivation for informed participation in 'sustainability' decisions but it should not seek to promote specifically 'green' ideals.

Similarly, we have no grounds for thinking that the promotion of 'sustainable development' should be part of the JBUC curriculum. In this respect, the environmental component of citizenship education in a politically liberal society may be quite different from contemporary citizenship curricula in terms of the specific ideal it seeks to promote. For example, it is 'sustainable development' that is identified as the key environmental concept in the Report of the Advisory Group on Citizenship Education in the UK chaired by Bernard Crick (Advisory Group on Citizenship, 1998, pp. 42, 44, 50).³⁴

The promotion of 'green' ideals should not be part of the compulsory education of every child but it might legitimately be part of a 'permissible' national curriculum. If the *demos* chooses to create 'good citizens' and 'good environmentalists' because it has a 'green' conception of the good society, there is no obvious reason why it should find that its two goals are irreconcilable. There may be limits on the kinds of environmentalism that are 'permissible' educational ideals in a politically liberal society. For example, some ecocentric theories might go so far as to view humans as a dispensable nuisance. The political liberal cannot allow this kind of misanthropic attitude to be promoted in schools at the expense of a

conception of citizens as ‘self-authenticating sources of valid claims’ (Rawls, 1993, p. 32). Citizens must be able to conceive of themselves and their fellow citizens as making valid claims on their society’s resources if they are to have the self-respect necessary for freedom. Political liberalism is to this extent undeniably anthropocentric but that does not mean that it cannot allow the promotion of less radical ‘green’ ideals. There is nothing in political liberalism that prohibits citizens from recognising the intrinsic value of nature.

Therefore, it may be ‘permissible’ for a national curriculum (or a ‘permissible’ curriculum in a non-state school) to promote an ‘environmental ethic’, an ‘aesthetic appreciation of the environment’ or a conception of humans as ‘a part of the environment’ rather than ‘apart from the environment’. It may even be permissible for schools to ‘encourage a personal interest and love in nature’ and a ‘planetary consciousness’ (Bonnett, 2003, chapter 10, pp. 700–703). Political liberalism deliberately avoids taking a stand on the purposes of human life or what constitutes our well-being. Instead, it aims to find principles of justice for a society that can be accepted by people with radically different metaphysical and ethical commitments. Therefore, any doctrine that is compatible with the requirements of a liberal education—namely, the promotion of political and sustainability virtues—can be a permissible basis for an educational programme.³⁵

Of course, the promotion of any ‘green’ ideal would be subject to the same kind of constraints as other forms of religious and moral education (with which we might expect it to be connected). In particular, schools would also have to teach the JBUC curriculum promoting the ‘political virtues’ and the ‘sustainability virtues’. Moreover, they would be obliged to recognise the priority of justice—intra-generational and intergenerational. In other words, they should not advocate ‘unsustainability’—for example, allowing present or future generations to starve for the sake of preserving parts of the environment that have ‘aesthetic value’. Schools that seek to promote ‘green’ ideals should also pay proper respect to the political liberal’s concern for freedom. Children should not be raised to believe that the school’s environmental ethic is the only environmental ethic that can legitimately be held in their society. Therefore, environmental education should include an opportunity to learn about other ethical responses to the environment and its constituent parts. In other words, education *about* some competing ‘green’ ideals (and ‘non-green’ or ‘anti-green’ ideals) should be part of the compulsory curriculum in all schools.

IV CONCLUSION

Political liberalism forces us to consider carefully the character of environmental education that should be provided for children. I have argued that common conceptions of environmental education may not be compatible with political liberalism. However, the political liberal is committed to a specific form of environmental education that combines

'education *about* the environment' (and *about* some competing environmental ideals) with 'education *for* sustainability'. Moreover, political liberalism is able to permit more explicitly 'green' ideals to be promoted in both state and non-state schools. The position of political liberalism on environmental education may not satisfy some of the advocates of environmental education but it is a distinctively liberal position designed to accommodate disagreement and diversity on environmental issues within the limits of liberal principles of justice.³⁶

Correspondence: Derek R. Bell, Politics, School of Politics, Geography and Sociology, University of Newcastle, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 7RU, UK.

Email: derek.bell@ncl.ac.uk

NOTES

1. Postma (2002) poses a very similar problem about the relationship between Rawlsian political liberalism and environmental education (although, his specific focus is on 'education for sustainable development' (p. 44)). However, he arrives at a rather different conclusion, namely, that 'sustainable development cannot be justified on liberal grounds' (p. 49). I discuss his position further in Section III below. See also Bonnett (2003, chapter 9, pp. 676–677).
2. In the specific context of discussions of education, see, for example, Mulhall (1998) and Callan (1997).
3. For general defence of political liberalism see, especially, Rawls (1993, 1999b, 2001). In the specific context of discussions of education see Macedo (1995).
4. I focus on Rawls's conception of political liberalism for several reasons: it is the most well known; it is the most fully articulated and discussed; it is conceptually the richest of the leading versions of political liberalism.
5. The only leading political liberal to have seriously discussed environmental issues is Brian Barry. See, for example, Barry (1999). Barry has also discussed education (2001, pp. 199–249) but he has not attempted to address the issue of environmental education.
6. The same passage is in Rawls (1999c, p. 464) and Rawls (1993, p. 199).
7. See also Barry (2001, p. 205).
8. On the respective roles of parents (legal) and communities (sociological) in educational choices see Barry (2001, p. 208).
9. Barry presents 'education for living' as an objectively good ideal with some objective content (2001, p. 221) but that is clearly beyond the bounds of political liberalism (at least, as Rawls understands it). But compare Nagel on the 'reasonableness' of 'the promotion of what is excellent' (1991, p. 134).
10. I have discussed the relative merits of the 'market' and 'mixed' models more generally in Bell (2002, pp. 716–721).
11. See Palmer and Neal (1994, pp. 14, 16, 26, 28).
12. For a very interesting account, see Bonnett, 2003, especially chapter 10.
13. The title of a children's book on the environment by R. Kerven (New York: Franklin Watts, 1992), cited in Kwong, 1997, p. 91.
14. On the role of global capitalism in creating environmental problems see, for example, Benton (1999, pp. 213–218) and Williams (1996, pp. 51–54).
15. On 'green citizens' and 'green consumers' see, for example, Smith (2001, pp. 88–89), Hawthorne and Alabaster (1999), Christoff (1996, pp. 158–162).
16. Jo Kwong relates a story on this subject which suggests that environmental 'education' does not always meet these standards (Kwong, 1997, p. 90).
17. Compare Barry's analogous criticism of William Galston's conception of citizenship education (Barry, 2001, pp. 231–232). I would suggest that the same kind of considerations should apply to

- 'permissible' religious education in a politically liberal society. Of course, requiring the presentation of reasons and criticisms is not the same as requiring some kind of ideally unbiased presentation of the arguments nor is it the same as requiring that only one kind of reason (for example, a secular reason) should be regarded as authoritative.
18. UNESCO (1977), *Final Report*, First Intergovernmental Conference on Environmental Education, Tbilisi (Paris, UNESCO) cited in Palmer and Neal (1994, p. 26).
 19. B. Andersson (1990), 'Pupils' conceptions of matter and its transformation (age 12–16)', *Studies in Science Education* 18, pp. 53–58 cited in Millar (1997, p. 88).
 20. UNESCO (1987), *Environmental education in the light of the Tbilisi Conference, Education on the Move* (Paris, UNESCO) cited in Palmer and Neal (1994, p. 14).
 21. National Curriculum Council (NCC) (1990), *Curriculum Guidance 3: The Whole Curriculum* (York, NCC) cited in Palmer and Neal (1994, p. 24).
 22. See also Bonnett (1997, pp. 260–261).
 23. On the idea of 'ecological virtue' see Barry (1999, pp. 31–35). The distinction between 'environmentalism' and 'ecologism' is often used in political theory and environmental ethics to make several related distinctions, most notably, between an anthropocentric reformism ('environmentalism') and an ecocentric radicalism ('ecologism'). However, accounts of environmental education tend to be ambiguous between 'environmentalism' and 'ecologism'—although, the underlying idea may be closer to environmentalism.
 24. On the 'just savings principle' see Rawls (2001, pp. 159–160) and Rawls (1993, pp. 273–275).
 25. For example, future people do not yet exist (and the decisions we make will determine whether they do), so to whom do we have duties? If we do not know what future people want, will we not be imposing our ideals on them? For a useful introductory discussion of these and other common issues (as well as a critical appraisal of Rawls on intergenerational justice) see Visser 't Hoof (1999). In my opinion, a Rawlsian theory may be particularly well placed to address these and other common issues (notably, because of its conceptions of society and citizen) but I cannot defend that claim here.
 26. 'Fairness' is defined by what they would agree to as free and equal persons (as modelled by the 'original position' in Rawls's theory (Rawls, 2001, pp. 14–18)).
 27. It might be objected that Rawls's notion of 'reciprocity' is unusual—perhaps, it is not even properly called 'reciprocity'. In my opinion, Rawls's use of the term is defensible but it is the ideal rather than the label attached to it that really matters.
 28. However, Rawls himself recognises that 'public goods (in the economist's sense), as in the case of measures ensuring public health (clean air and unpolluted water, and the like)' should be included in an assessment of the wealth of citizens (Rawls, 2001, p. 172). If 'a global Manhattan without the Park' could not provide these goods, it might not provide a 'decent standard of life' through 'social cooperation'. Moreover, even if it could provide a decent standard of life, it might not satisfy Rawls's intra-generational principles of justice, especially, the 'difference principle'. For further discussion of Rawls and intra-generational environmental justice see Bell (forthcoming). I do not consider the implications of any Rawlsian intra-generational principles of environmental justice for education in this paper. However, it should be clear that insofar as the requirements of intra-generational environmental justice exceed those of intergenerational environmental justice they should also be taken into account in the development of the JBUC curriculum.
 29. See, for example, the current British Government definition (HMSO, 1999, section 1.1) and Langhelle (2000, p. 299). The 'definitive' Brundtland definition does not explicitly require economic growth but does assume it (WCED, 1987, p. 43). However, in the international context discussed by Brundtland, the Rawlsian argument from the circumstances of justice (presumably) would justify economic growth in many less-developed societies. The problem with applying the concept of 'sustainable development' to a more developed society in isolation is that the grounds for 'development' (or economic growth) no longer exist.
 30. On 'prometheans' see Dryzek (1997, pp. 45–59).
 31. For a similarly 'democratic' notion of 'sustainability' see Barry (1996, pp. 118–120). For more general discussion of the relationship between sustainability and democracy see Arias-Maldonado (2000).
 32. See, for example, Owens (2000), Wynne (1996) and Irwin (1995).
 33. See also Bonnett (2003, especially chapter 10, pp. 699–701).

34. The report recommends that other concepts (for example, 'stewardship') should be introduced as children grow older but it is sustainable development that is foregrounded.
35. Contra Michael Bonnett (2003, chapter 11, p. 710–713), I do not believe that (political) liberalism and his account of environmental education are incompatible (except insofar as he considers that his programme of environmental education should be compulsory). It is the 'baggage' associated with liberalism—for example, economic growth, a particular kind of rationalism, and a commitment to technological 'progress'—rather than the genuine commitments of political liberalism that generate any incompatibilities. For further discussion of the relationship between political liberalism and ecologism more generally, see Bell (2003).
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