

Alternative Education Versus the Common Will

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Liberal democracy combines two fundamental political commitments: one to popular sovereignty, the other to individual liberty. And since popular sovereignty, in practice, rarely achieves unanimity, a tension between these two is built in from the outset. Citizens in a liberal democracy often find their liberty limited by a majoritarian policy designed (in part) to protect it. Theories of liberal democracy thus face an integral question: when should individual liberty triumph over the will of the majority? This question pertains to the issue of alternative education's legitimacy in a democracy at its most basic essence. Public, common education has been enshrined and protected as a necessary prerequisite to the continuation of democracy over generations while alternatives have been, at best, tolerated within the American system as a stop-gap measure for special interest groups. This article, therefore, will examine the complexity of the concept of popular sovereignty with reference to alternative education in order to determine its application and limitations regarding the maintenance of both the letter and spirit of democracy.

The Deep Roots of Popular Sovereignty

Since the Enlightenment, the premise of popular sovereignty has been accepted as a major basis for democracy. Propounded most clearly by the seventeenth-century philosopher John Locke, popular sovereignty set out the template that a community can be likened to the parts of a physical body: the only way it can survive is if the parts (individuals)

are united in every action (community decision). Since it is unreasonable to believe that all individuals within any community should think the same way, the only means by which a democracy can function is if each member agrees to follow the decisions of the majority.¹

Jean-Jacques Rousseau formalized this axiom in his treatise, *The Social Contract* in 1762. Based on his belief that everyone is born in a natural state of 'goodness,' he defended each individual's right to have full participation within a democracy. However, Rousseau tempered this statement by the caveat that,

'goodness' merely requires the absence of an intention to harm others... In contrast, virtue is not natural; virtue requires the mastery of natural impulses and the intention to act well towards others, and hence presupposes that men have learned to think within society.²

Because men do things on the basis of self-interest and emotions, in a democracy there must be some superior guiding force to order their actions, and to enjoin them to go beyond the narrow field of their vision; to accept things non-proximate or unfamiliar that as isolated individuals they would reject. The state must therefore be of paramount interest to each of its citizens.

If we are heirs to the same father, if we are brothers in dependency, if we cannot move in any direction one without the other, we are bound to perceive the benefits of cooperation.³

Rousseau saw that only when every individual is bound to the state, would they relate to each other as equal citizens. As such, individual self-interest must be overcome by the *common will* embodied in a higher love and loyalty to the state. This would cause citizens to decide every issue on the basis of honesty and integrity instead of selfishness. In Rousseau's eyes, therefore, the common will could never be wrong, and it alone has the authority to direct the state towards some objective: Rousseau called this the *common good*.⁴

It was Rousseau's supposition, therefore, that for a democracy to truly work, its citizens cannot simply be coerced into conforming to the common will, but must be taught to suppress their individual "self-interest," to understand the common good, and to become virtuous.⁵ For this reason, Rousseau advocated that the only proper education for a child is one that has been devised and controlled by the state to inform succeeding generations of its common will. To do otherwise would injure both the child and the state.

Horace Mann, who pioneered the creation of the American common school system, built on Rousseau's common will premise to effectively argue against any form of publicly funded alternative education. In fact,

he asserted that if educational decisions were left to parents or special interest groups there would be a great potential for the mis-education of children, the creation of a class system, and the loss of democracy. In judging the end-result of a religious school (the most predominant alternative education school system of his time), Mann asserted that the education of the young to be good citizens was so momentously important a task that it could not be left to the negligence of the mere individual, but had to be carried out by the more rigorous and accountable state. Individual educators might make gross errors of judgement, and might, in fact, teach students how *not* to be good citizens. Mann worried that these types of teachers would indoctrinate students into some orthodoxy instead of into the overriding principles of common values and democracy.⁶ The child might be distracted from the study of being a good citizen and turned against others not of his/her particular belief, whereas the state (a mother figure) would encourage each student to regard his/her classmates (and by extension all other citizens) as brothers.

Mann also felt that an alternative school should have no place in a democratic society because it would create social inequality. If the alternative school was private, only the most rich and influential could afford to send their children to this superior form of education, undermining the quality of the common schools. If it were publicly funded, it would have certain criteria for entry which would also cause exclusion and inequality. Either way, the parent would inevitably wind up paying two school taxes.⁷ In Mann's view, the allowance of an alternative form of education would inevitably lead to a social gap between the two schools and create nationally funded inequality on the basis of wealth. This point is still being debated in political forums today. Mortimer Adler, for example, (co-instigator of the democratically-oriented *Paideia Program*), contended that North Americans live in a politically classless society; therefore, there should be an "educationally classless society":

A democratic society must provide equal educational opportunity not only by giving to all its children the same quantity of public education—the same number of years in school—but also by making sure to give to all of them, all with no exceptions, the same quality of education.⁸

The economist John Kenneth Galbraith contends that a society that sets up barriers between any members of the whole does more than just isolate, allow selfishness, or purport that some are at a higher level. Any person who reaps the benefits of democracy, but does not engage in the responsibility (sending his/her child to be educated as a good citizen) threatens the entire harmony of the democratic union. Galbraith further points out that one of the aims of education should be to help people

identify and resist the claims of special interests and to detect the person or group that puts their own interest ahead of the community.⁹

In this sense, alternatives that do not follow a democratic agenda or the common will would only weaken the system. As the basis of the regulation that demanded universal compulsory popular education in the United States, Mann's *11th annual report* stated that this would lead the nation on the road to social progress and virtue. It condemned alternative education for creating persons who, taught outside of the common school, would have "a poisonous influence ... upon all the rest": "universality in the end to be accomplished demands universality in the means to be employed."¹⁰ The Protestant reformer Horace Bushnell found reason to push Mann's doctrine one step further. Supporting the concept of America "the melting pot," he bemoaned the ingratitude of immigrants given all the privileges of a free society, but who "are not content, but are just now returning our generosity by insisting that we must excuse them and their children from being wholly and proper American."¹¹ Not only should *common-will* education surpass religion, in Bushnell's view, it should also proceed and overcome cultural considerations.

Just as strong in contemporary American society, this concept lives on in the feeling that democracy is more than just a form of government; it is "primarily a mode of associated living, a conjoined communicated experience." Building on his predecessors, John Dewey reiterated that one must consider the benefits to society as well as to one's own self in any action one performs; as long as one acts in any way that is antisocial in spirit (such as creating a private club within a state), one's group's behaviour will become rigid and formal rather than inquiring, and one's ideals will never rise beyond the selfish aims of the group. Translating individual to group dynamics, Dewey argued that actions beyond the purview of governmental affairs could still inevitably cripple the democratic spirit.¹²

Therefore, the premise of popular sovereignty, which supports the concept of democracy, demands that social progress and unity can only be fostered by a universal and uniform popular education system. Any non-public alternative should be perceived as a threat to this unity and should be heartily opposed (the hardest, such as Samuel Harrison Smith, would demand coercion if necessary). Being a citizen of a democratic society demands acceptance—if one embraces the freedoms it offers, one must also adhere to the *common will*. Short of giving up one's citizenship status, there is no opting out.

“Reasonableness” and Democratic Education

Since the Second World War, many democratic philosophers have recognized the dark side that may be present in the common will (for example, Nazi anti-semitism). The majority consensus, which *should* define the state’s aims, has been subjected to much more intense scrutiny—people now accept that it *might* be unreasonable, and even malignantly destructive. Therefore, a codicil has been added to Locke’s ‘popular sovereignty’ and Rousseau’s ‘common will’ by many philosophers: democracy can only demand unanimous acceptance of a premise once it has been judged to be *reasonable*. For some, this has been deemed absolutely essential not only because of the lessons of history, but also because of the pluralistic and complex societies in which we now live. Legal issues like this can no longer conform to simply-defined values.

Drawing upon James Fishkin’s distinction between *brute consensus* and *refined consensus*,¹³ John Rawls claims that the only path for a pluralistic society is the latter. In the former, any common values held by the majority of a particular society at a particular time may be enforced through socialization and political manipulation on the pretence of democracy (this may include racism, sexism, and other abuses). In attempting to accomplish this, Rawls states, the majority may ignore reasonable rejections and dominate others with their particular values. Instead, he argues for refined consensus and, by extension, the predisposition of a people to propose fair terms of cooperation to others, to heed the proposals others make in the same spirit, to settle differences in mutually acceptable ways, and to abide by agreed terms of morally grounded cooperation so long as others are prepared to do likewise.¹⁴

Rawls asserts that in a *true* democracy, reasonable persons must accept the “burdens of judgement”: while disagreements may arise among reasonable persons that are irreconcilable, mutual toleration and mutual accommodation must be strictly maintained at all costs so that disagreements do not destroy ongoing social cooperation.¹⁵ Refined political consensus, therefore, can only be achieved through an ongoing revision designed to ensure agreements between all members of a democracy that deserve respect. Using moral reason as a judge at all times, unreasonable views (even of the majority) will be filtered out of political deliberation.

In his arguments, Rawls limited the extent to which the common will could democratically be applied: basic principles of justice should limit coercion by the modern state, and publicly justify reasonable disagreement. In accordance with the new relativism of the modern era, Rawls asserts that no one should expect his or her version of the whole truth to be embodied in the constitution; instead, we should ground

basic constitutional principles in those basic “goods” that we can agree upon, such as peace, freedom, material prosperity, and the welfare safety net. While, on the surface, Rawls’ political liberalism appears to be far more tolerant towards alternatives to public education than the earlier liberal philosophers, it does not give them unconditional support. He states that modern political liberalism, unlike its predecessor, will “respect the plurality of values citizens and affirm their aspiration to perpetuate those values across generations.”¹⁶ However, Rawls adds, that reasonableness must always remain the deciding factor.

Following this premise, education scholar Eammon Callan has tested the reasonableness factor of alternative education. Callan begins with the now familiar argument that in a contemporary complex, pluralistic society virtually nothing can be expected to secure any unanimity: the common will that represents a bare majority will leave minorities to be subjected to suppression by this dominant group as it thrusts its personal agenda forward. However, he also raises the spectre of an equally unpleasant alternative. If a common consensus is attempted, whereby the diverse needs and wants of the entire population is accommodated when creating a common curriculum, the result will be so superficial that it will merely teach to the lowest common denominator. This, Callan concluded, would lead to an education system that was incomplete and distorted, with public schools being “shackled to the paltry and uncontroversial aims of the consensual conception.”¹⁷

For Callan, therefore, the simple common will premise fails on both counts, requiring the development of some new guiding principle:

A common education that expresses unanimity is not a feasible social aspiration, and therefore we must settle for something less than that while at the same time eschewing majoritarian tyranny.¹⁸

Looking to Rawls, Callan proposed a new democratic concept in which the *means* of a common education would be dedicated to the *end* of reasonableness in order to attain a refined consensus. Reasonableness must be fostered in the school setting for it is here that all members of the community come together to create a morally-grounded consensus. If some members are left out or opt out, however, the dialogical setting would allow diverse interpretations of reasonableness to exist within the district. By accepting the “burdens of judgement,” searching one’s own philosophy for reasonableness, and searching out who among us is reasonable and who is not, this *means* will make better citizens of us all. For this reason, Callan deduced that all alternative schools “committed to educational ends at variance with the requirements of reasonableness should be prohibited”.¹⁹

Stephen Macedo, supporting Callan, made a specific judgement about what denotes reasonableness and, by consequence unreasonableness, in alternative education. His chosen example was that of the controversial Amish separate school/home-schooling case. Macedo challenged the 1925 court's decision to allow the Amish to withdraw their children from public schools; the court decided in favour of the Amish on the basis of the First Amendment, and on the grounds that their opting out would not pose a threat to the larger society.²⁰ For Macedo, this decision did not meet the criteria of reasonableness: although the Amish display the liberal mentality of the work ethic, they are not in other respects good liberals. Drawing on the work of Jeff Spinner,²¹ he concludes that their beliefs are based upon a patriarchal subculture in which women are not viewed as equal to men, and Amish children not prepared for being critically reflective citizens. Allowing Amish parents to merely withdraw their children from public high school could thwart the children's ability to make adequately informed decisions about how to live their lives. Moreover, while a democracy must respect various religious beliefs, this must not allow the individual to be exempt from reasonable public requirements.

Macedo thus fully accepted the legitimacy of Callan's argument against alternative education systems which might preserve cultural, religious, or personal diversity, but which could threaten the coherence and unanimity of a democratic state.

We must, in the end, be prepared to acknowledge and defend core liberal and democratic values... We should not announce ... that we intend to accommodate diversity wherever doing so is a direct threat to social unity. Such a stance gives too much to diversity and too little to shared liberal purposes.²²

To enforce this, Callan would strongly recommend the use of liberal selective forbearance, and not pure coercion. However, the final verdict is clear: alternative education should be regarded with suspicion as a potential detriment to the "reasonable" common will; as such it must be subjected to intense scrutiny in which uniform public schools provide the measure of acceptableness.²³

Despite the persuasiveness of the consensus argument regarding *common will* and the new amendment of reasonableness, such judgments may well give pause to any free-thinking individual. The most immediate criticism that the Callan-Rawls-Macedo argument provokes is: if reasonableness is the key, then who decides what it is and what it constitutes in any given situation? Mark Holmes dismisses Callan out of hand as being anti-democratic: he retorts—"to set up 'reasonableness'

as a central criterion is to insist on the superiority of a non-religious creed²⁴—asserting that such criteria negates all other virtues such as truth, courage, justice, consideration of the other person, and humility. Holmes concedes that these are merely his interpretations of virtue. However, he explains, this is the exact root of his dilemma with Rawls’ reasonableness: in a pluralistic democracy, people cannot agree on even first principles; it is illegitimate to force one’s own definition on others, and on other’s children. For Holmes, the only exception to this rule is not arbitrarily-chosen reasonableness, but “the consensual, majoritarian core of belief that forms the pluralist democracy’s foundation.”²⁵

To substantiate his critique, Holmes says there are many ways that children learn other than reason alone: teachers help develop instinct, emotions, trust, and faith.

My vision of the public mainstream school, one able to compete with separate schools, is one of high doctrine representing a significant consensus among large pluralities (a majority in some regions) of the population.²⁶

There is a difference between a consensus based on parents’ wishes and Callan’s artificial construct based on discrimination between admissible and inadmissible world-views. Holmes contends that he does understand the liberal’s distrust of the people to make decisions:

Given a free choice, most people may not choose the liberal option. The liberal answer is to forbid choice, or at least forbid the choices of those who most strongly oppose their views. Sophisticated arguments can be developed to justify French immersion and ultra-progressive schools while rejecting Christian schools because they lack ‘reasonableness.’²⁷

He suggests that the reasonableness argument stems less from traditional democratic values such as free market and individual choice than from a desire to control and manipulate:

I believe valid (representative) mainstream schools would be able to compete with separate schools because they would have a compelling, high-doctrine world view. Monopolies and authoritarians do not care for choice. They care no more for public will. The experts know best.²⁸

Instead of trusting in the original concept that common will denotes the majority opinion of common people, Holmes finds that modern liberalism, as represented by those such as Callan, consider themselves experts and, hence, superior. Ultimately, he must condemn the Callan-Rawls-Macedo reasonableness factor as a product of “liberal experts” who consider themselves to be legislator, judge and jury all rolled into one.

Individual Rights and the Desire for Alternatives

This continuing conflict, even as the common school has appeared to triumph, raises troubling questions in a democracy. How can a pluralism that we claim to value, the liberty that we prize, be reconciled with a “state pedagogy” designed to serve the state’s purposes? Is there not wisdom in Mill’s remark that,

All that has been said of the importance of individuality of character and diversity in opinions and modes of conduct, involves, as of the same unspeakable importance, diversity of education.²⁹

In their intent to deal with the threat of social disunity, the real extent of which may or may not be exaggerated, certain proponents of democracy have continually embraced potentially authoritarian limitations. The crisis of unity began with the democratic abandonment of the religious convictions of previous generations; democracy, acting as though a newly defined ‘religion,’ somehow had to find the means to reintegrate its new society. Initially, adherents of the state-controlled, common school program engaged in intense competition with established religious schools. However, despite tremendous achievements and its eventual success in overriding religious for democratic considerations in education, the public school system continued to promise more social integration than it has been able to deliver. The present crisis of confidence in public education derives from a basic flaw in the foundation laid by Mann and the other proponents of common schools: it offered nothing that might appeal to individual choice or eccentricity. Having replaced the religions it became one itself and has, thus, been attacked on all sides by a new breed of heretics.

Mark Holmes, perhaps unwittingly, tapped into this, the second major linchpin of democratic theory: the rights of the individual. He was by no means the first to argue that conditions such as “reasonableness” restricted the right of the individual to think, speak and live as s/he chose. In fact, the question of free expression and choice challenges the root of the Callan-Macedo-Rawls argument and earlier debates; the common will can be seen to be as despotic and denigrating as an absolute dictator. The freedom of belief guaranteed by the constitution and by popular consensus rests upon another freedom: that of *the formation of beliefs*. If the government were to regulate the development of ideas and opinions, freedom of expression would become a meaningless right, and individual consciousness would simply cease to exist.³⁰

When Holmes challenged the edict of “reasonableness,” he noted the degeneration of a majority decision to one made by experts. This has been a common complaint of those democrats who put individual

rights above the common will; once the limitation has been made that every citizen must follow the so-called majority consensus, it is all too likely that some elite will seize the means of determining and defining just what that consensus is. Today, such thinkers would argue that the educational system has been transformed from a majority consensus to a monopoly of elite experts. They cite as evidence the fact that the meaning of citizenship has changed from one that stresses each person's political power and rights to one that emphasizes social cooperation and working for the public good. By the dawn of the twenty-first century, this political ideology has come to mean working well with others under the control of expert managers who define the public good.

Even in earlier centuries, certain democrats recognized the potential despotism of the common will. The English libertarian philosopher, William Godwin, most clearly outlined the argument against government-operated schools: he felt that if education were to be made the bailiwick of the government, then those individuals who controlled government could use education to maintain and strengthen their control.

Before we put so powerful a machine under the direction of so ambiguous an agent, it behooves us to consider well what it is that we do. Government will not fail to employ it, to strengthen its hands, and perpetuate its institutions.³¹

Mill also felt that no matter what form of government existed, be it an absolute monarch or majority rule, any state monopoly over the school system would eventually establish a "despotism over the mind" committed to moulding people to fit the whim of the reigning power.³² Herbert Spencer shared Mill's belief that government education, by its very nature, entailed indoctrination. While the state may say that it is creating good citizens, the state and only the people in control of it hold the definition of what a good citizen is.³³

To buttress their argument, common school critics refer to American democrats who were seduced by the public education's power of persuasion. Noah Webster, for example, has been accused of inciting the teaching of political nationalism and indoctrination. Selling 75 million copies between 1783 and 1875, his *Blue-Backed Speller* emphasized a strong federalist government.³⁴ He wrote: "good republicans...are formed by a singular machinery in the body politic, which takes the child as soon as he can speak, checks his natural independence and passions, makes him subordinate to superior age, to the laws of the state, to town and to parochial institutions."³⁵ Even Thomas Jefferson, who proposed the first accommodation for three years of free education for each child, indicated that in doing so the federal government should censor and

control the political texts at certain levels of education: "It is our duty to guard against such principles being disseminated among our youth, and the diffusion of that position, by a previous prescription of the texts to be followed in their discourses."³⁶ Therefore, critics say, even the arch-democrat with good intentions, could be induced to use the education system to perpetuate what he considered a political truth.³⁷

This nineteenth century rhetoric of fear (and advocacy for the supremacy of individual liberty) waned by the turn of the century when it was successfully argued that local control with democratic elections would keep government schools from becoming instruments of power and ideological control. The new supremacy of the common will concept was cited as early as 1918 with the issuance of the *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education* by the National Education Association; instead of commanding that a citizen learn political rights and individual liberties it stated that: "the purpose of democracy is so to organize society that each member may develop his personality primarily through activities designed for the well-being of fellow members and of society as a whole" and that the purpose of education within a democracy should be to "develop in each individual the knowledge, interests, ideals, habits and powers whereby he will find his place and use that place to shape both himself and society toward ever nobler ends."³⁸ What this document reflects is the major change that the government-run school has undergone (and is continuing to undergo), in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Its purpose was the identification of individual aptitudes and interests in terms of the occupational needs of society; the separation of students into different curricula and ability groups in order to meet some future occupational destination; and the creation of educational programs to serve these social needs. In this context a democracy was a social system which, by allowing individual talents to match the needs of the occupational structure, created a more efficient social organization.³⁹ While in the nineteenth century, equal opportunity in a democracy had been the function of competition in the marketplace, by the twentieth century it was the function of the government school.

Rather than leaving this balancing of equal opportunity to cutthroat competition, however, the advancement of students was to be objectively screened by scientifically-created tests and educational experts, whose role it was to guide the student to his or her proper place in society. It was claimed that teachers' ratings, vocational guidance and standardized tests provided equal opportunity by placing a student in a program on the basis of ability as opposed to social background.⁴⁰ Critics of this system assert that this may have seemed like equal opportunity but, with the transformation of the school, students no longer graduate with equal educations

which allow them equal opportunity to compete in the labour market. With vocational education and the separation of students into various curriculum tracks, students graduated with unequal education.⁴¹

The educational historian Charles Leslie Glenn argued that the effect of this change to elite experts was, as the earlier philosophers predicted, the transformation of public education from an effort to encourage democratic citizens to one that conformed to elite members of the political and bureaucratic system who wanted to produce a disciplined and trained force.⁴² Glenn also claims that this doctrine of equal opportunity helped to legitimize the increased power of professional educators by allowing them to claim to be the friend of the poor. Armed with scientific techniques that would help the poor by finding individual talent, the expert educator could promote and overcome the effects of social background. Government officials would also now wave the flag of “helping the poor” whenever the schools came under attack.

By the end of World War Two, this doctrine of equal opportunity, judged upon by experts, became a function of the bureaucracy of a higher level of government. At the instigation of several reports in the late 1940s to the early 1960s,⁴³ the American Federal government began an exponential amount of funding and intervention. Duly elected, it now began to believe that the administration of schools and the creation of the curriculum must be put in the hands of high-ranking scientific managers who would decide what the common good would be, and government monies would assure acceptance of their decisions. With the passing of the *National Defense Education Act* (NDEA) in 1958, Congress was allowed to earmark funds for special areas (such as mathematics and science). The NDEA also represented the greatest fears of eighteenth-century opponents of government schooling: it made national educational policy merely a facet of the United States’ foreign policy, stepping up science education in a race to beat the Soviet Union at the arms and technological advancement game.

Federal involvement added a new layer of professional control and removed the schools even further from the democratic process. In fact, the 1965 *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* not only resulted in the expansion of federal bureaucracy but also provided money for the expanding departments of education at the state level.⁴⁴ Professionals moved into new upper level bureaucracies with hope that science and proper management would achieve the goal of equal opportunity. But this new breed brought with them a new set of skills which would make the schools even more undemocratic: in addition to previous reliance upon testing and curriculum design, this new generation became wedded to behavioural psychology and statistical method. The key to the

new system of control by professionals at state and federal levels was to force local school systems to write objectives so that they could be evaluated and controlled.

An ex-officer of the American Educational Research Association, Richard Dersheimer stated that “every research and development support program in education launched by the federal government was initiated by a small handful of persons, in other words, by a professional-bureaucratic complex.”⁴⁵ By the mid-1970s, the concern of overall educational direction, therefore, seemed to be one that was decided upon between federal bureaucrats and professional researchers. Democratic or popular control of educational research was not even taken into consideration. As earlier philosophers had warned, elite control ultimately depends on citizens who are, by and large apolitical, who define citizenship in terms of obedience to the law, and who are willing to accept a social system governed by expert managers.⁴⁶ According to studies by concerned scholars, by the late twentieth century, this was exactly what democratic citizens had become.⁴⁷

The evidence that a uniform, public education system controlled by elite experts is increasingly debasing the critical-thinking skills of democratic citizens legitimizes the need for alternative education as never before. Only by offering some option, some competition to the growing control of non-accountable, unknown elites, will individuality and the ability to pursue one’s own destiny be preserved. The founders of popular sovereignty, in all likelihood, did not intend for this end to come to pass; they merely tried to provide some unifying principal by which a nation’s citizens could transmit the essence of democracy from generation to generation. However, the ideal of popular sovereignty was flawed in its assertion that the state could somehow be safeguarded from self-interests in a way that small interest groups could not.

While the detached state, seeking to promote higher values, was supposed to be able to replace family, religion, and community in the transmission of knowledge, this has recently come under criticism from a number of groups throughout the United States. However they have been manipulated by government agendas, the original grass-roots movements for Charter Schools,⁴⁸ the voucher system,⁴⁹ federally funded private schools,⁵⁰ school choice,⁵¹ and a plethora of other alternatives demonstrate the individual resistance to an elite agenda, and a widening disenchantment with a common education system supposedly designed to fulfil the needs of all.

Democracy successfully challenged authoritarian government by enshrining checks and balances: popular sovereignty and individual rights; federal and state powers; government and courts. In education,

can anything less be acceptable? Alternative education systems, alone and unchecked, will lead to their own forms of exclusion, prejudice, and repression. However, it must not be ignored that a monolithic uniform, state-determined, public education system will do the same. The two together, competing and struggling to define what democracy means and constitutes is the sole hope for the maintenance of the democratic system in the future. Alternative education, therefore, is not only legitimate within a democracy, it is essential.

Endnotes

¹ John Locke, *Two treatises of government*, ed. Peter Laslett (New York: New American Library, 1963), 375-6.

² Rousseau in Maurice Cranston and R.S. Peters, eds., *Hobbes and Rousseau* (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 406.

³ Rousseau in James M. Tarrant, *Democracy and education* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1989), 100.

⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The social contract, and discourses*, trans. G.D.H. Cole (London, UK: Dent, 1968), 23. Rousseau also commented in *The social contract* that men should be encouraged to conform to the general will. He mentioned that of the various methods that can be used to affect this conformity, "patriotism is the most efficacious" (p. 246). Reason, Rousseau adds, can not be seen as a reliable method as "no people have ever been made into a nation of philosophers" (p. 247).

⁵ In advising the elite government of Poland, Rousseau counseled: "It is education that you must count on to shape the souls of the citizens in a national pattern and so to direct their opinions, their likes and dislikes that they shall be patriotic by inclination, passionately, of necessity". Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The government of Poland*, trans. Willmoore Kendall (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1972), 19.

⁶ Mann elaborated: "Amongst any people, sufficiently advanced in intelligence to perceive that hereditary opinions on religious subjects [that is, the belief of parents] are not always coincident with truth, it cannot be overlooked, that the tendency of the private school system is to assimilate our modes of education to those of England where churchmen and dissenters,—each sect according to its own creed,—maintain separate schools, in which children are taught, from their tenderest years, to wield the sword of polemics with fatal dexterity; and where the gospel, instead of being a temple of peace, is converted into an armoury of deadly weapons, for social, interminable warfare. Of such disastrous consequences, there is but one remedy and one preventive. It is the elevation of the common school." Horace Mann, *Lectures and annual reports on education* (Boston: Lee & Shepard, 1872), 56.

⁷ See Mann, *Lectures and annual reports on education*, 139.

⁸ Mortimer Adler et al., *The Paideia Proposal* (New York: MacMillan, 1982), 4.

⁹ John Kenneth Galbraith, "Democracy, leadership, commitment," *Listener*

31 March (1977): 405.

¹⁰ Mann, *Lectures and annual reports on education*, 130.

¹¹ Bushnell in Diane Ravitch, *The great school wars: New York City, 1805-1973: A history of the public schools as battlefield of social change* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 37.

¹² Specifically, Dewey stated that: "The isolation and exclusiveness of a gang or clique brings its antisocial spirit into relief. But this same spirit is found where everyone group has interests `of its own' which shut it out from full interaction with other groups, so that its prevailing purpose is the protection of what it has got, instead of reorganization and progress through wider relationships. It marks nations in their isolation from one another; families which seclude their domestic concerns as if they had no connection with a larger life; schools when separated from the interest of home and community; the divisions of rich and poor; learned and unlearned. The essential point is that isolation makes for rigidity and formal institutionalizing of life, for static and selfish ideals within the group." John Dewey, *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education* (New York: Free Press, 1966), 85-7.

¹³ James Fishkin, *The dialogue of justice* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 53-67.

¹⁴ John Rawls, *Political liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 49-50.

¹⁵ Rawls, *Political liberalism*, 54-58.

¹⁶ Rawls, *Political liberalism*, 49.

¹⁷ Eammon Callan, "Common schools for common education," *Canadian Journal of Education / revue canadienne de l'education* 20, no. 3 (1995): 257.

¹⁸ Callan, "Common schools for common education," 258.

¹⁹ Callan, "Common schools for common education," 268.

²⁰ This judgment had been built on the earlier cases of Quakers and Anabaptists. Friedrich Hegel had, in fact, done much to buttress the case by concluding that these particular dissenters "are private persons standing in merely private relations to others." Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of right*, trans. T.M. Knox (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 168.

²¹ Jeff Spinner, *The boundaries of citizenship: Race, ethnicity and nationality in the liberal state* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1994), 88-92.

²² Stephan Macedo, "Liberal civic education and religious fundamentalism: The case of God v. John Rawls?" *Ethics* 105, no. 4(1995): 490.

²³ Callan states: "Suppose we have compelling grounds to agree that some views that are commonly taught in certain separate schools are in clear conflict with the criteria of reasonableness. If our interest is in securing the eventual triumph of liberal ideals over time, it would not automatically follow that the blunt instrument of coercive law should be used to suppress efforts to teach the offending views—use instead liberal selective forbearance." Callan, "Common schools for common education," 268-69.

²⁴ Mark Holmes, "Common schools for a secularist society," *Canadian Journal of Education / revue canadienne de l'education* 20, no. 3(1995): 285.

²⁵ Holmes, "Common schools for a secularist society," 286.

²⁶ Holmes, "Common schools for a secularist society," 288.

²⁷ Holmes, "Common schools for a secularist society," 295.

²⁸ Holmes, "Common schools for a secularist society," 295.

²⁹ John Stuart Mill, *On liberty*, ed. David Spitz (New York: Norton, 1975), 98.

³⁰ Stephen Arons, *Compelling belief: The culture of American schooling* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983), 195-96.

³¹ William Godwin, "Enquiry concerning political justice," in *Primer of libertarian education*, ed. Joel H. Spring (New York: Free Life Editions, 1975), 13.

³² In full: "That the whole or any large part of the education of the people should be in State hands, I go as far as any one in deprecating...A general State education is a mere contrivance for moulding people to be exactly like one another: and as the mould in which it casts them is that which pleases the predominant power in the government, whether this be monarch, a priesthood, an aristocracy, or the majority of the existing generation, in proportion as it is efficient and successful, it establishes a despotism over the mind..." Mill, *On liberty*, 98-99.

³³ "For what is meant by saying that a government ought to educate the people? Why should they be educated? What is the education for? Clearly, to fit the people for social life—to make them good citizens. And who is to say what are good citizens? The government: there is no judge. And who is to say how these good citizens may be made? The government: there is no other judge. Hence the proposition is convertible into this—a government ought to mould children into good citizens, using its own discretion in settling what a good citizen is and how the child may be moulded into one." Herbert Spencer, *Social statics* (New York: Schalkenbach, 1954), 297.

³⁴ "Within the section of the speller called 'a Federal Catechism' there were certain passages that were encouraged to be memorized, such as 'What are the defects of democracy? In democracy, where the people all meet for the purpose of making laws, there are commonly tumults and disorders...Therefore a pure democracy is general a very bad government.'" Sol Cohen, *Education in the United States: A documentary history* (New York: Random House, 1974), 769-70.

³⁵ Harry R. Warfel, *Noah Webster: Schoolmaster to America* (New York: MacMillan, 1936), 21.

³⁶ Frederick Rudolph, ed., *Essays on education in the early republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 133.

³⁷ Joel H. Spring, "The evolving political structure of American schooling," in *The public school monopoly: A critical analysis of education and the state in American society*, ed. R.B. Everhart (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger, 1983), 77-108.

³⁸ *Cardinal principles of secondary education* (Washington, DC: US Bureau of Education, 1918), 35.

³⁹ Adolphe Erich Meyer, *An educational history of the American people* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 278-295

⁴⁰ Meyer, *An educational history of the American people*, 296-315.

⁴¹ For more information, see C. H. Edson, "Schooling for work and working at school: Perspectives on immigrant and working-class education in urban America, 1880-1920," in *The public school monopoly: A critical analysis of education and the state in American society*, ed. R.B. Everhart (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger, 1983), 145-188.

⁴² Charles Leslie Glenn, *The myth of the common school* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 95.

⁴³ Some landmark reports include *Science—the endless frontier: A Report to the President* by Vannevar Bush (1945), that accelerated the introduction of science into the curriculum through government intervention; A.B. Hollingshead's *Elmtown's youth* (1949), Arthur Bestor, *Educational wastelands* (1953), Admiral Rickover, *Education and freedom* (1959), and Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-intellectualism in American life* (1962) all called for increased government funding for education.

⁴⁴ For detailed description, see Eugene Eidenberg and Roy D. Morey, *An act of Congress: The legislative process and the making of education policy* (New York: Norton, 1969)

⁴⁵ Richard Dershimer, *The federal government and educational R & D* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1976), 2.

⁴⁶ To show that the education system no longer represented the common will, the author and activist Miriam Wasserman cites the community control-accountability controversy of the late 1960s. When a movement arose to try to have more control over the selection of teachers, determine the curriculum, and choose learning material, it was harshly attacked by a coalition of school boards, government officials and teachers' unions. See Miriam Wasserman, *The school fix: NYC, USA* (New York: Outerbridge & Dienstfrey, 1970), 185-391.

⁴⁷ See Lee H. Ehman, "The American school in the political socialization process," *Review of Educational Research*, 50 (1980): 99-119; Edward S. Greenberg, ed., *Political socialization* (New York: Atherton Press, 1970); Dean Jaros, *Socialization to politics* (New York: Praeger, 1973).

⁴⁸ See Louann A. Bierlein and Lori A. Mulholland, "The promise of charter schools," *Educational Leadership*. 52, no. 9 (1994): 34-40; Linda Diamond, "A progress report on California's charter schools," *Educational Leadership*. 52, no. 9 (1994): 41-3.

⁴⁹ E. G. West, "The prospects for education vouchers: An economic analysis," in *The public school monopoly: A critical analysis of education and the state in American society*, ed. R. B. Everhart (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger, 1983), 369-392; Valerie E. Lee et al, "Parental choice of schools and social stratification in education: The paradox of Detroit," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 16, no. 4 (1994): 434-457.

⁵⁰ Daniel C. Levy, *Private education: Studies in choice and public policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Pearl Rock Kane, ed., *Independent schools, independent thinkers* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1992).

⁵¹ Philip Woods, "Responding to the consumer: Parental choice and school effectiveness," *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 4, no. 3 (1993): 205-229.