

Forthcoming in: *Justice, Education, and the Politics of Childhood*

CIVIC EDUCATION: POLITICAL OR COMPREHENSIVE?

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In determining the proper scope of political liberalism and how it differs from comprehensive liberalism, one of the central test cases has been the civic education of children as future citizens. Rawls argues that political liberalism's approach to education "has a different aim and requires far less" than comprehensive liberalism (Rawls 2005, 199).¹ The politically liberal state would only require the kind of education needed so that children as future citizens can understand the political conception of justice and cultivate important political virtues (*PL*, 199). To do so, civic education aims at cultivating the reasonableness of children as future citizens.

However, in order for political liberalism to remain distinctively *political*, rather than collapsing into a version of comprehensive liberalism, Rawls must show that cultivating reasonableness should not require all children to learn comprehensive liberal values. The challenge Rawls raises to his conception of a political liberal civic education is whether "requiring children to understand the political conception in these ways is in effect, though not in intention, to educate them to a comprehensive liberal conception" (*PL*, 199).

In this paper, I consider the problem that children pose to understanding the scope and limits of Rawls's *Political Liberalism* by focusing on the civic education of children as future citizens. Can a politically liberal state provide all children the opportunity to become reasonable citizens? Or does the cultivation of reasonableness require comprehensive liberalism?

In considering these questions, I show that educating children to become reasonable in the way Rawls outlines imposes a demanding requirement that conflicts with Rawls's aim of including a wide constituency in the scope of political liberalism. Rawls's aim of making reasonableness broadly inclusive for political purposes is in tension with his goal of using reasonableness as the standard that delineates the scope of liberal legitimacy. I argue that political liberalism can and should try to cultivate the reasonableness of its future citizens through the civic education of children. However, a defensible version of political liberal civic education requires introducing a bifurcation within Rawls's conception of reasonableness. Political liberal civic education should aim towards the inclusive scope of reasonableness by cultivating reasonableness in only two of what appear to be three senses that Rawls emphasizes. Teaching children that legitimacy

¹ Hereafter I will cite Rawls's *Political Liberalism*, expanded edition (2005) as *PL*.

requires embracing public reason demands more than may be justifiably required by a state that seeks to be broadly inclusive.

The argument proceeds in three parts. First, I survey the debate over political versus comprehensive liberal approaches to civic education (§1). Since one important goal of civic education is cultivating the reasonableness of future citizens, I outline (§2) the different criteria of reasonableness. I then (§3) consider which aims of political liberalism are embodied in each criterion for reasonableness and whether these are appropriate targets of civic education. I argue that political liberal civic education should aim to cultivate reasonableness as a moral notion that is tied to respecting one's fellow citizens. This requires teaching children respect for the freedom and equality of one's fellow citizens as equal moral persons and respect for the fact of reasonable pluralism, but need not include teaching children that legitimacy requires public reason. Teaching these two criteria sets the minimum threshold for qualifying as reasonable and, I argue, ensuring that children meet this threshold is the most important goal of a political liberal civic education.

1. Political versus Comprehensive Approaches to Civic Education

An education aimed towards having citizens embrace the political conception of justice must first ensure that citizens are reasonable.² The challenge concerning the civic education of children of unreasonable citizens is whether “requiring children to understand the political conception ... is in effect, though not in intention, to educate them to a comprehensive liberal conception” (*PL*, 199).

In order to defend the distinctiveness of a political liberal civic education (PLCE) from a comprehensive liberal civic education (CLCE), Rawls argues that political liberalism's approach to education “has a different aim and requires far less” than comprehensive liberalism (*PL*, 199). Unlike the comprehensive liberalisms of Kant, Mill, and Raz that would condone educational requirements promoting comprehensive conceptions of autonomy or individuality “as ideals to govern much if not all of life,” the politically liberal state would only require the kind of education needed so that children as future citizens can understand the political conception of justice and cultivate important political virtues (*PL*, 199). Rawls points to the “great differences in both scope and generality between

² Rawls argues that the publicity condition of the political conception of justice will itself play an educative role. The narrow role of the political conception of justice will ensure the “minimum condition of effective social cooperation,” for which the reasonableness of citizens is important. The wider role of the political conception includes the publicity condition, which is part of a citizen's education. Publicity ensures that citizens are aware of the principles of justice embodied in political and social institutions and are also aware of how “citizens' rights, liberties, and opportunities” are derived from “a conception of citizens as free and equal” (*PL*, 71). In this paper, I focus on the cultivation of reasonableness because this is a crucial first step for political liberal civic education and, thus, will be important in a child's civic education.

political and comprehensive liberalism” and “hope[s] the exposition of political liberalism ... provides a sufficient reply to the objection” (*PL*, 200). However, a number of philosophers and political theorists remain unconvinced that *Political Liberalism* contains a sufficient reply.

Common responses fall into three broad categories. First, some argue that when we examine civic education, the distinction between political and comprehensive liberalism *collapses*—Rawls fails to sufficiently distinguish the political liberal approach to civic education from comprehensive liberalism (Gutmann 1995; Callan 1996, 1997). Gutmann and Callan both argue that the educational implications of political liberalism converge with the educational implications of comprehensive liberalism insofar as civic education is intended to cultivate the reasonableness of future citizens.³ Because the effects of PLCE are no different from CLCE, Rawls’s political liberalism “is really a disguised instance of comprehensive liberalism” (Callan 1997, 13, 40).⁴ According to this line of response, not only did Rawls fail to distinguish PLCE from CLCE in his larger exposition of *Political Liberalism*—the very aim of cultivating reasonableness is precisely why the distinction between PLCE and CLCE collapses. Despite other differences between the systems’ methodological aims, there is no difference between comprehensive liberalism and political liberalism when it comes to the education of children.

Second, some defend the distinctiveness of a political liberal approach to education, arguing that PLCE is both *distinctive* and *defensible*. Political liberals who defend the distinctiveness of PLCE follow Rawls in emphasizing the difference in scope by defending the freestanding nature of political justification or the basic structure restriction that teaches only those virtues required for political participation. The aim of these theorists is to expand on Rawls’s own, insufficient, remarks and offer a direct reply to the charge that the distinction between PLCE and CLCE collapses. Macedo and Costa focus on political liberalism’s freestanding requirement by defending the justificatory neutrality of PLCE.⁵ This

³ Gutmann (1995) argues that in requiring civic education to encourage mutual respect between citizens, Rawlsian political liberalism converges with comprehensive liberalisms in the effect it has on children. Callan argues that the fault lies in teaching children the burdens of judgment, which serves as a “a powerful constraint on the background culture of liberal politics” (1997, 36) such that the distinction between political and comprehensive liberalism collapses.

⁴ Mulhall (1998) also thinks the cultivation of reasonableness involves a comprehensive liberal conception of the person.

⁵ Macedo emphasizes the freestanding component by showing that despite teaching civic virtues, politically liberal civic education remains neutral between reasonable comprehensive doctrines because they can be “publically justified independently of religious and comprehensive claims” (Macedo 1995, 477; See also Macedo 2000). Furthermore, this is the only form of neutrality we should expect. Claims to more “substantive” neutrality or fairness are “more apparent than real” (Macedo 1995, 484). However, the reasonableness component places important restrictions on the kinds of diversity permitted and hence Macedo defends “political liberalism with spine” (Macedo 1995, 470). Costa follows Macedo in defending the justificatory neutrality of politically liberal civic education. She can agree with Callan that the cultivation of political virtues “will necessarily have a deep effect on citizens’ character” insofar as it requires the cultivation of reasonableness and in this sense a politically liberal civic education is not minimal. However, it is still distinctly political

line of response defends the distinction in justification between political and comprehensive liberal approaches to education, even while admitting the practical effects of these differences may not be significant. Davis and Neufeld argue that the freestanding component, on its own, is not a persuasive defense of political liberalism's distinctive approach to civic education. Instead, they argue against the "convergence thesis" of Gutmann and Callan by emphasizing "both the basic structure restriction and the freestanding condition" (Davis and Neufeld 2007, 50, original italics removed). There are significant practical differences between teaching children to respect the burdens of judgment and teaching children to embrace comprehensive liberal autonomy because political liberalism restricts its discussions to the basic structure of society and the public political realm (Davis and Neufeld 2007, 62-67).⁶

Third, some argue that a politically liberal civic education is indeed *distinctive—but not defensible* because the reasonableness requirement is too permissive of different comprehensive conceptions of the good. Some feminists have objected that by tolerating a wide variety of comprehensive doctrines as reasonable, political liberalism erodes tools for securing equality between the sexes (Okin 1994, 2004; Exdell 1994; Baehr 1996; Yurako 1995, 2003).⁷ A central concern of these feminists is the basic structure restriction. As long as citizens are reasonable when engaged in public political debate, their nonpublic views are of no concern to political liberals. As Okin, Exdell, Baehr, and Yurako argue, many traditional religious practices in the private sphere undermine women's equality, and thus including such religions as reasonable shows that political liberalism is indefensible without significant revision (Okin 1994, 2004; Exdell 1994; Baehr 1996).⁸ Following a similar argument, that reasonableness is too permissive of different comprehensive doctrines to be defensible, Fowler has argued that because reasonableness is a lax criterion, political liberalism cannot protect children from certain damaging forms of upbringing (Fowler 2010, 368). These are important objections to the adequacy of political liberalism; however, adequately responding to these objections will go beyond the scope of this paper.

because a politically liberal civic education is publicly justifiable (Costa 2004, 7-9). See also Costa's extended discussion of the educational implications of Rawls's theory of justice in Costa 2011.

⁶ Costa also emphasizes the importance of teaching children the burdens of judgment in order to cultivate reasonableness (2009 and 2011).

⁷ Hartley and Watson (2010) have defended Rawls from this charge, arguing that the reciprocity condition of reasonableness is restrictive enough to prohibit views that subordinate women to men. Okin has also argued that a robust form of civic education could counteract the problematic effects of comprehensive doctrines learned outside of the political realm (1994, 32); but note that the more robust the civic education is, the harder it will be to distinguish from comprehensive liberalism.

⁸ Yuracko argues that due to the lax understanding of reasonableness, political liberalism should be rejected in favor of a feminist perfectionism (Yuracko 1995, 2003). Lloyd (1995), De Wijze (2000), and Nussbaum (2003) defend political liberalism from the feminist critique on the basis of this split between what should be accepted for political justice and what can be permitted in nonpolitical realms. However, the response has not been satisfying to many feminists who continue to doubt the acceptability of the split between one's public and nonpublic practices (see, e.g., Okin's 2004 response to Lloyd and Nussbaum).

In this paper, I try to show that PLCE is distinctive and more defensible than CLCE as a form of civic education, but do so by arguing for a bifurcation within Rawls's conception of reasonableness.⁹

All three lines of response agree that a political liberal civic education requires the cultivation of reasonableness. However, the differences lie in the implications of this requirement and whether, in light of this, political liberalism can be sufficiently distinguished from comprehensive liberalism. In the remainder of the paper, I suggest a new way to draw the distinction. This departs from Rawls in significant ways, since I think much of the confusion lies in the divergent implications of embracing the different components of reasonableness. I will show that political liberalism has a distinctive approach to civic education; however, I argue that a defensible version of PLCE requires introducing a bifurcation within Rawls's conception of reasonableness.

2. The Criteria for Reasonableness

A political liberal civic education should be designed to cultivate the reasonableness of children as future citizens. However, Rawls uses the qualification of reasonableness for at least two different aims: (1) setting a broadly inclusive scope of the type of pluralism that should be respected by the political conception of justice and (2) determining whether citizens' arguments about political justice have appropriately used public reason in order to meet the standards of political liberal legitimacy. I will argue that Rawls's aim of making reasonableness broadly inclusive for political purposes requires a conception of reasonableness that serves as a minimum moral threshold of respect for one's fellow citizens.¹⁰ This is quite distinct from Rawls's use of reasonableness as the standard that delineates the scope of liberal legitimacy. Educating children to become reasonable in all of the ways Rawls outlines requires more than would be justifiable for a broadly inclusive PLCE.

Recall that according to Rawls, reasonableness as a virtue of persons has several components.¹¹ First is a moral requirement of respecting our fellow citizens

⁹ I defend the conception of political liberal civic education that I propose from feminist objections in my dissertation, *Political Liberalism and Its Feminist Potential*.

¹⁰ I defend the minimal moral threshold conception of reasonableness in my dissertation *Political Liberalism and Its Feminist Potential*.

¹¹ In Lecture II, Rawls specifies two basic aspects of reasonableness considered as virtues of persons rather than directly defining the concept (*PL*, 48). Herein, I discuss these as three components because I will argue that what Rawls identifies as the second basic aspect has two distinct components that should be bifurcated. Leif Wenar has detailed 5 different aspects of reasonableness for both persons and comprehensive doctrines and argues that only some of these can be met without violating the restrictions Rawls elsewhere places on a political conception of justice (Wenar 1995). For the purposes of this paper, I am interested in the basic requirements for being a reasonable person, as this is of interest to the question of civic education designed to cultivate the reasonableness of children as future citizens.

as free and equal moral persons.¹² Let's call this the *respect criterion* of reasonableness. To be reasonable, one must recognize oneself and one's fellow citizens as free and equal citizens who deserve fair terms of cooperation in society.¹³ The second basic aspect of reasonableness that Rawls identifies can be understood as a moral requirement of respect for our fellow citizens as free and equal reasoners. What is respected here is not our fellow citizens' moral personhood, but their equal capacity to reason freely about one's conception of the good. This aspect has two parts, which I will number separately for ease of exposition.¹⁴ One must:

- (2) recognize the burdens of judgment, which leads to recognizing the fact of reasonable pluralism and
- (3) accept the consequences of this recognition by using public reason when "directing the legitimate exercise of political power" on matters of constitutional essentials and basic justice (*PL*, 54).

The burdens of judgment teach us that conscientious citizens may weigh evidence differently and come to differing, but equally reasonable, conclusions even after a full and free discussion has taken place (*PL*, 58).¹⁵ Thus, recognizing the burdens of judgment leads to the recognition of the fact of reasonable pluralism. Let's call (2) the *burdens of judgment criterion* of reasonableness. Rawls also argues that reasonable persons must accept the "consequences" of this recognition by using public reason when debating matters of basic justice or constitutional essentials. Let's call (3) the *legitimacy criterion* of reasonableness. Accepting that one must use public reason in matters of basic justice in order for political power to be legitimate is a way of demonstrating respect for persons, conceived of as free and equal reasoners, in light of the fact of reasonable pluralism. However, this criterion links the liberal principle of legitimacy to the basic qualification of reasonableness. Rawls's liberal principle of legitimacy holds that, "our exercise of political power is proper and hence justifiable only when it is exercised in accordance with a constitution the essentials of which all citizens may reasonably be expected to endorse in the light of principles and ideals acceptable to them as reasonable and rational" (*PL*, 217). I discuss the tight connection between reasonableness and liberal legitimacy in section 3.3 below.

¹² There will likely be a plurality of ways to interpret free and equal moral respect; however, examining these various approaches goes beyond the scope of this paper.

¹³ Rawls discusses the first basic aspect of reasonableness in *PL*, 49-54. Rawls explains, "persons are reasonable in one basic aspect when, among equals, they are ready to proposed principles and standards as fair terms of cooperation and to abide by them willingly, given the assurance that others will likewise do so" (*PL*, 49). Reasonable persons "desire for its own sake a social world in which they, *as free and equal*, can cooperate with others" on fair terms (*PL*, 50, emphasis added).

¹⁴ Rawls states, "the second basic aspect" of reasonableness "is the willingness to recognize the burdens of judgment and to accept their consequences for the use of public reason in directing the legitimate exercise of political power in a constitutional regime" (*PL*, 54).

¹⁵ *PL*, 54-58 describes the burdens of judgment in detail.

When a political liberal civic education aims to cultivate the reasonableness of children as future citizens, we need to ask which aspects of reasonableness are the appropriate targets of civic education. Which criteria of reasonableness are compatible with the inclusive scope of political liberalism? Which make PLCE too restrictive to remain distinct from CLCE?

3. Cultivating Reasonableness in Political Liberal Civic Education

3.1. Inclusive Reasonableness in Civic Education: Cultivating the Respect Criterion

One aim of the qualification of reasonableness is to include as many people as appropriate within the scope of political liberalism. This is tied to the general motivation that moved Rawls away from the comprehensive liberalism of *A Theory of Justice* towards the more inclusive and pluralistic approach to liberal justice in *Political Liberalism*. Rawls's key insight in *Political Liberalism* was to recognize that "a plurality of reasonable yet incompatible comprehensive doctrines is the normal result of the exercise of human reason within the framework of the free institutions of a constitutional democratic regime" (*PL*, xvi). This inevitable pluralism about morality creates difficulties in establishing a normative basis for a theory of justice. The solution Rawls proposed in *Political Liberalism* is to move away from comprehensive conceptions of justice, which are rooted in the truth of some moral theory, and towards a narrower political conception of justice, which is based on the overlapping consensus of reasonable comprehensive doctrines.

Rawls introduces reasonableness as a qualification intended to define the scope of plurality that political liberalism must address (*PL*, 36). Rawls distinguishes between *reasonable pluralism* and *pluralism as such*, arguing that political liberalism need only accommodate reasonable pluralism (*PL*, 36-37). Reasonableness should be seen as providing "minimal conditions appropriate for the aims of political liberalism" (*PL*, 60n.13). Rawls intends the qualification of reasonableness, in this vein, to be broadly inclusive of a diversity of comprehensive doctrines including "both religious and nonreligious, liberal and nonliberal" (*PL*, xxxviii). Rawls conjectures that most current moral doctrines and religions, except for certain varieties of fundamentalism, could qualify as reasonable (*PL*, 170).

The respect criterion of reasonableness seems to be best suited for Rawls's inclusive understanding of reasonableness. In distinguishing reasonable pluralism from pluralism as such, Rawls emphasizes that reasonable comprehensive doctrines still respect all people as moral equals. As Rawls explains, "all reasonable doctrines affirm ... equal basic rights and liberties for all citizens" and doctrines that fail to do so are unreasonable (Rawls 2005b, 482-83). In addition,

people are unreasonable if they are unwilling to propose or honor fair terms of cooperation (*PL*, 50).

Teaching children to be reasonable in the inclusive sense tied to the respect criterion is an important goal of a political liberal civic education. Respect for the equal basic rights and liberties of all citizens is a necessary component of being reasonable. Without this basic respect, a conception of justice is morally dubious because it would permit the subordination of certain classes of people to others. Doctrines that subordinate certain races, classes, or genders to others would not qualify as reasonable insofar as they deny that everyone is entitled to equal basic respect simply in virtue of being moral agents. We need not tolerate Nazis or Ku Klux Klan members who deny the equality of their fellow citizens.¹⁶

Political principles should attempt to be fair and treat everyone as free and equal moral persons. A civic education designed to cultivate the respect criterion will emphasize moral respect for all citizens as free, equal, and deserving of fair terms of cooperation. Since reasonableness sets the boundaries for who should be included within the scope of political liberalism, it should be broadly inclusive of many different comprehensive doctrines. A civic education that emphasizes the respect criterion is well suited for this goal because, despite their differences, many comprehensive moral doctrines include an account of respect for people as free and equal. Those that do not value respect are rightfully excluded from political liberalism as unreasonable. Of course, unreasonable citizens will not suddenly lose their rights and be expelled from society.¹⁷ However, unreasonable objections do not threaten the adequacy of the political conception of justice. Since political liberalism sets its scope as respecting *reasonable* pluralism, the political conception of justice should be able to be endorsed by all reasonable citizens. Political liberalism need not bend justice to accommodate the unreasonable because justice should not be held hostage to views that undermine equal moral respect for persons.

If civic education is designed to cultivate respect-reasonableness, PLCE could remain distinct from CLCE. If all that is required for PLCE is teaching children to respect their fellow citizens as free and equal with oneself, one need not even be a liberal to accept this educational goal—this is the most widely inclusive scope of reasonableness that should be tolerated.¹⁸ A comprehensive

¹⁶ I also think the respect criterion shows why certain comprehensive doctrines that subordinate women also fail to be reasonable in the broadest conception of reasonableness. I argue for this in *Political Liberalism and Its Feminist Potential*.

¹⁷ For more on the rights of unreasonable citizens, see Quong 2004.

¹⁸ Note that this would be to deny Gutmann's claim that teaching mutual respect is in effect to teach comprehensive liberalism. But Gutmann's conception of mutual respect is a fairly demanding comprehensive conception of mutual respect. I agree with Davis & Neufeld (2007) that a politically liberal conception of respect will be more minimal.

liberal education requires far more than teaching that one's fellow citizens should take one's moral status seriously.¹⁹

In addition, if the state only requires that civic education meet the respect criterion of reasonableness, there may be more latitude for differential parental choice in education. Ebels-Duggan has recently argued that political liberals should allow reasonable citizens latitude in choosing the worldview in which their own children are educated, as long as this education does not insulate children from other views.²⁰ I think the respect criterion of reasonableness could permit wide latitude on this front. In fact, the respect criterion alone is compatible with an education designed to promote the truth of certain comprehensive doctrines.²¹ For example, religious schools could be a permissible choice for parents, provided that these schools teach children that all people should be respected as free and equal moral persons and that the terms governing our shared political life should be fair to all, including those who embrace different comprehensive doctrines. This shows that there may be many ways to satisfy the requirement that children learn the respect criterion of reasonableness—including education into comprehensive doctrines that seem quite distant from the larger aim of political liberalism. The important requirement is teaching children to respect their fellow citizens as free and equal, but there are many different ways of meeting this goal. As long as children are taught to respect themselves and all other citizens as free and equal moral persons, their education has met a minimum moral threshold for reasonableness.

Families cannot be permitted to inculcate children with beliefs or practices that undermine their ability to respect themselves or others as free and equal citizens. As Rawls, explains, political principles “guarantee the basic rights and

¹⁹ This respect criterion of reasonableness is consistent with defenses of political liberalism's distinctiveness that emphasize the freestanding nature of public political justification and with defenses that emphasize the basic structure restriction. Respecting people as free and equal is one of the more stable considered convictions that form the touchstone of Rawls's reflective equilibrium procedure. Further, the basic structure restriction combined with the respect criterion yield a quite broad scope for incorporating comprehensive doctrines that differ on how best to respect people as members of religious organizations as long as the principles of justice protect citizens as free and equal throughout all realms.

²⁰ Ebels-Duggan 2013. It is worth noting that Ebels-Duggan's example to show that non-neutrality is permissible is that a parent or teacher can expose children to the existence and content of racist views while also teaching children such views are wrong (2013, 46). Distinguishing the respect criterion of reasonableness shows clearly why this example actually concerns exposure to an unreasonable comprehensive doctrine. The racist doctrines are unreasonable because they do not respect all people as free and equal moral persons. Thus, this case may not compellingly show that all such instances of exposing children to other views while teaching them the truth of one's own view is a permissible practice for political liberalism. However, the respect criterion alone will not settle this issue.

²¹ It is important to emphasize that teaching the respect criterion could be *compatible* with an education promoting the truth of a comprehensive doctrine and *not* that teaching the truth of a comprehensive doctrine is *required* for this purpose. Below, I will argue that teaching the respect criterion is not *sufficient* for political liberal civic education, teaching the burdens of judgment is also required.

liberties, and the freedom and opportunities, of all [members of the family]. ... The family as a part of the basic structure cannot violate these freedoms” (Rawls 2005b, 469). The need to respect the freedom and equality of all is one of our firmly established convictions in contemporary society. An overlapping consensus on this conviction should be able to be supported by any comprehensive doctrine that can be counted as reasonable for the purpose of political justice.²²

In summary, a civic education designed to teach children to respect themselves and their fellow citizens as free and equal will be widely inclusive. Few of the moral and religious doctrines in society would find reason to reject a civic education designed to promote reasonableness in this sense. Thus, political liberal civic education promoting the respect criterion of reasonableness will not collapse into comprehensive liberal education. Many moral and religious doctrines could be included on this basis, including those that may reject liberalism.²³

3.2. Inclusive Reasonableness and Civic Education: Teaching the Burdens of Judgment

One might object that simply requiring the state to cultivate the respect criterion of reasonableness is not a distinctively *political liberal* civic education. After all, I have suggested one need not even be a liberal to embrace the respect criterion of reasonableness. For civic education to be distinctive to political liberalism it requires more than simply teaching the respect criterion. The respect criterion is an important minimum threshold for distinguishing between reasonable and unreasonable comprehensive doctrines, but political liberalism also requires respect for the fact of reasonable pluralism. To learn the difference between pluralism as such and reasonable pluralism, children must learn to recognize that people who hold differing comprehensive doctrines are nevertheless capable of being reasonable. For this, learning the burdens of judgment is important. A civic education that teaches children the respect criterion and the burdens of judgment criterion will be distinctive to political liberalism while maintaining the broadly inclusive scope of reasonableness.

In order to respect those who disagree with us as reasonable, we must learn to recognize that citizens who hold different comprehensive doctrines are nevertheless reasonable insofar as they embrace the respect criterion. Teaching children the burdens of judgment is an important way in which PLCE can cultivate this respect for reasonable disagreement.²⁴ Recall that the burdens of

²² Here I use overlapping consensus at a different stage than Rawls does in his defense of *Political Liberalism*, which follows a strategy similar to Quong’s (2011, 161-191). However I am using this for illustrative purposes to show the wide consensus on respecting people as free and equal.

²³ Liberalism includes more than simply respecting the freedom and equality of persons. Liberalism often also includes a commitment to the moral priority of individuals over the group and, as a political theory, typically focuses on how states should treat individuals in light of these other commitments.

²⁴ It is possible that there are other ways in which children could learn to embrace the fact of reasonable pluralism and the reasonableness of their fellow citizens. For example, religious decree

judgment identify the sources of disagreement between reasonable persons. Rawls lists six of the “more obvious sources” of reasonable disagreement: complexity of the evidence, disagreement about the relative weight of relevant considerations, the indeterminacy of political concepts, the way our experience shapes our understanding and weighing of moral and political values, that there are different kinds of normative considerations on both sides of an issue, and finally, the fact that not every moral and political value can be realized in social institutions (*PL*, 56-57).

Rawls’s enumeration of the sources of reasonable disagreement has been widely contested, with commentators arguing that many of these sources are, themselves, reasonably contestable. Callan draws on this controversy to argue that PLCE collapses into CLCE (Callan, 1997). Thus, including the burdens of judgment in PLCE may seem inappropriately restrictive. However, regardless of Rawls’s list of the sources of disagreement, the essential point behind teaching the burdens of judgment to children is not subject to similar contestation. Focusing on the motivation Rawls is trying to capture in his discussion of the burdens of judgment helps us see why including the burdens of judgment criterion in PLCE does not threaten collapse into CLCE.

The key point behind learning the burdens of judgment is understanding that those with whom one disagrees can nevertheless be reasonable. Rawls explicitly defines reasonable disagreement as “disagreement between reasonable persons: that is, between persons who have realized their two moral powers to a degree sufficient to be free and equal citizens in a constitutional regime, and who have an enduring desire to honor fair terms of cooperation and to be fully cooperating members” of society (*PL*, 55). The *reasonableness* of persons is defined in terms of their acceptance of the respect criterion—political principles should be fair terms of cooperation among free and equal citizens.²⁵ The burdens of judgment essentially show that reasonable pluralism is possible. It is possible for people who respect each other as moral equals to nevertheless embrace quite different moral and religious doctrines. To recognize the fact of reasonable pluralism, a person must therefore learn that her fellow citizens who hold different

that all god’s children be respected as free and equal reasoners. Herein I focus on teaching the burdens of judgment as a part of PLCE because I think this is likely the best way to cultivate this respect for one’s fellow citizens as free and equal reasoners in a way that is compatible with respecting differences between citizens’ conception of the good. However, I leave open the possibility that some religions could cultivate the appropriate form of respect in other ways. I thank Leif Wenar for pressing me on this objection.

²⁵ I set aside discussion of the two moral powers and full cooperation, as these are the ways Rawls defines persons for the purposes of political liberalism. He defines a person as someone who can be a “fully cooperating member of society over a complete life” and “we ascribe to them the two moral powers . . . namely, a capacity for a sense of justice and a capacity for a conception of the good” (*PL*, 18-19).

comprehensive doctrines can disagree with her—and that disagreement does not mean that they are either unintelligent or immoral.²⁶

Understood in this way, teaching children the burdens of judgment is important for developing the ability to respect one's fellow citizens as not only free and equal moral persons, but also as free and equal reasoners. Differences in beliefs need not impugn the intelligence of one of the parties. We should respect that other people have reasons for their beliefs, even if we disagree. As equals, we should respect one another's freedom to make important choices for oneself and to reason according to one's own lights. We must respect our fellow citizens' rights to embrace different comprehensive doctrines and make different decisions about how best to pursue the good life.

Respecting our fellow citizens' decisions need not imply a smuggled in commitment to comprehensive liberal autonomy. Rawls considers the freedom of citizens to pursue their chosen conception of the good, provided it is reasonable, to be a part of the rational autonomy of citizens, which he considers "but an aspect of freedom" (*PL*, 74-75). But rational autonomy is distinct from both full political autonomy and full ethical autonomy.²⁷ In Rawls's terms, full ethical autonomy corresponds to the kind of autonomy promoted in comprehensive liberalism. Protecting citizens' freedom to embrace different comprehensive doctrines and pursue what one embraces as valuable does not limit the range of comprehensive doctrines one can embrace.²⁸ It is perfectly permissible to embrace the doctrine of one's family or community. In fact, those who reject the importance of liberal autonomy could still embrace this right to live according to one's preferred comprehensive doctrine because this right protects the right of those who reject comprehensive liberal autonomy to pursue other shared values. The political conception of justice protects the freedom of individuals to pursue varying conceptions of the good, provided that these conceptions respect all people as free and equal moral persons.

How should PLCE teach children that disagreement need not imply stupidity or immorality? One way to do so is to examine the reasons behind different comprehensive doctrines. Children could be taught some of the basic reasoning behind different major world religions and moral theories, in particular how each contains an account of moral respect for people as free and equal.²⁹ This could be presented neutrally, without any commitment to ranking the

²⁶ Rawls contrasts reasonable disagreement with unreasonable disagreement. The sources of unreasonable disagreement include being immoral, selfish, prejudiced, irrational, or simply "not very bright" (*PL*, 55 and 58).

²⁷ See *PL*, 72-81 for Rawls's discussion of the contrast between rational, political, and ethical autonomy.

²⁸ The minimum qualification is that comprehensive doctrines meet the respect criterion.

²⁹ I believe there are at least consistent interpretations of all major world religions that include a conception of respect for persons as free and equal. Of course, there are also interpretations that would not meet the respect criterion. With Rawls, I think fundamentalists probably are not reasonable. Likewise, justifications of slavery (regardless of historical attempts to justify slavery by drawing on religious sources) are not reasonable.

different theories, as it should be in state run schools. Or, if parents preferred a religious education, neutrality need not be required. One good example of non-neutrality that nevertheless meets the requirements of PLCE is a Catholic school education. Typically, such schooling includes required religion courses. However, religion courses are not simply indoctrination of the Catholic faith. They also include exposure to a wide variety of religions and moral theories even though there is an underlying presumption that Catholicism is the true religion. To me, it seems as if such an education meets the requirements for PLCE even though, since the school is not run by the state, Catholicism is presented as true. Students still learn that other faiths and moral theories are reasonable, and that different moral and religious doctrines still embrace the freedom and equality of all.³⁰

3.3. Restrictive Reasonableness and Civic Education: The Legitimacy Criterion

In addition to using reasonableness to delineate the scope of reasonable pluralism, Rawls also uses the qualification of reasonableness in a more restricted sense that is tied to the legitimacy of political principles. In this section, I will argue that the use of reasonableness for liberal legitimacy is tied to a different part of the political liberal project and, for the purposes of PLCE, should not be bundled with the other two criteria of reasonableness.

The third criterion of reasonableness holds that one accepts the consequences of the burdens of judgment by using public reason in directing the legitimate exercise of political power. Failure to use public reason constitutes a failure to offer a legitimate justification of coercive power and, for Rawls, a failure to accept “the consequences” of the burdens of judgment. Note the similarities between Rawls’s liberal principle of legitimacy and the legitimacy criterion of reasonableness. According to Rawls, the “second basic aspect of reasonableness” is “the willingness to recognize the burdens of judgment and to accept their consequences for the use of public reason in directing the legitimate exercise of political power in a constitutional regime” (*PL*, 54). I think accepting the burdens of judgment can be separated from accepting the use of public reason.³¹ I have called the latter the legitimacy criterion of reasonableness because of its resemblance to the liberal principle of legitimacy. Recall that the liberal principle

³⁰ History, literature, and philosophy are also subjects that could expose children to the burdens of judgment and the fact of reasonable pluralism. By learning the many ways in which beliefs change over time and vary according to our culture and circumstance, children can start to learn that differences in beliefs are expected given the diversity of people’s experiences. Likewise, literature exposes children to alternate ways of living by people who have clear reasons for their actions, aim to live a good life, and, often, desire to be moral. The disagreements between philosophers in any era are another good source of learning that smart people who aim explicitly at discovering what is just or good, nevertheless reasonably disagree with each other. These kinds of disagreements seem to motivate Rawls’s initial turn to political liberalism (*PL*, xiii-lx).

³¹ I defend the bifurcation of Rawls’s second basic aspect of reasonableness my dissertation, *Political Liberalism and Its Feminist Potential*. Here, I focus on why the separation is important in the context of civic education.

of legitimacy holds that, “our exercise of political power is proper and hence justifiable only when it is exercised in accordance with a constitution the essentials of which all citizens may reasonably be expected to endorse in the light of principles and ideals acceptable to them as reasonable and rational” (*PL*, 217). The basic idea is that the only way for political power to be legitimate is for the basic principles and laws governing our political system to be grounded in terms that all reasonable citizens can be expected to endorse as relevant reasons governing the specific actions or laws.

Educating children to embrace the legitimacy criterion of reasonableness requires teaching all children to use public reason when debating matters of basic justice or constitutional essentials. To meet the legitimacy criterion of reasonableness, children would need to be taught that appealing to the whole truth of one’s comprehensive doctrine, when that truth is reasonably contestable, is disrespectful and a way of illegitimately imposing one’s own comprehensive doctrine on others. Rawls explains that “insistence on the whole truth in politics [is] incompatible with democratic citizenship and the idea of legitimate law” because political legitimacy is “based on the criterion of reciprocity,” which holds that the reasons offered must be reasonably acceptable to our fellow reasonable citizens whose comprehensive doctrines may conflict with our own (Rawls 2005b, 446-47). This is far more restrictive than simply requiring that children respect others as free and equal citizens, part of which requires accepting the idea that people could disagree with someone without being immoral or unintelligent (i.e., embracing only the respect and burdens of judgment criteria). The legitimacy criterion also teaches children that the best way to respect reasonable disagreement in political life is the use of public reason.

However, the liberal principle of legitimacy is a distinctive solution to the question of what could make the coercive power of the government legitimate. It is a substantive conclusion with which many who satisfy the respect criterion of reasonableness could disagree. I think this criterion is far too restrictive if included in PLCE as a necessary criterion for reasonableness. While the liberal principle of legitimacy is arguably the best way to respect reasonable disagreement, it is not the only way. Philosophical anarchists, liberal perfectionists, and libertarians all disagree with political liberalism’s solution to the problem of legitimacy. Nevertheless, all agree that people should be respected as free and equal. The differences arise in *how* political power can best respect freedom and equality. For example, philosophical anarchists would teach children that there is no such thing as a moral right to be obeyed precisely because it is incompatible with the freedom and equality of persons. This seems like a perfectly acceptable justification of the rejection of legitimate authority and one that is not based on immoral or unintelligent considerations. The anarchist justifies her rejection of legitimate authority by appealing to the very same respect criterion of reasonableness, which holds that citizens should be respected as free and equal

moral persons, that lies at the heart of Rawls's conception of reasonable persons.³² Thus, according to Rawls, the anarchist would qualify in one sense as a reasonable person because she respects the important moral respect threshold for being reasonable. However, using the restrictive sense of reasonableness, defined in terms of the legitimacy criterion—which the anarchist rejects—she would be unreasonable. The question is whether legitimacy-reasonableness should be included as a necessary component of reasonableness for the purposes of PLCE.

I have argued (in 3.1 and 3.2) that the respect criterion and burdens of judgment criterion are *necessary* components of the moral qualification of reasonableness and should be included in PLCE. I have also argued that these two criteria preserve the inclusive scope of reasonableness that is tied to Rawls's conception of reasonable pluralism. But if the legitimacy criterion is also a necessary component of reasonableness, then reasonableness becomes far more restrictive—only those who embrace Rawls's liberal principle of legitimacy would qualify as reasonable. This restrictive conception of reasonableness is not appropriate for PLCE.

Civic education that cultivates respect for freedom and equality seems justifiable, even if it has a disproportionate effect on certain comprehensive doctrines. Despite the political liberal's goal of justifying political power in a way that respects deep disagreement between different comprehensive moral doctrines, the political liberal need not tolerate those views that threaten the very conditions of freedom and equality in a society. But I think it is a further step to argue that those who fail to embrace political liberalism's liberal principle of legitimacy pose the same kind of threat to society. Provided that people embrace the respect criterion of reasonableness, they have recognized the moral status of their fellow citizens as free and equal.

However, there are many different ways that political theories justify or reject the legitimacy of coercive power, including many which also embrace the moral freedom and equality of citizens. As such, justifying the inclusion of the legitimacy criterion as a necessary component of reasonableness in civic education becomes far more difficult. Rawls raises the challenge of children's civic education when considering whether or not political liberalism treats justly those comprehensive doctrines that fair the worst under political liberalism (*PL*, 197-200). Justifying PLCE seems far more straightforward if all that is required in order to cultivate reasonableness in children is a civic education designed to teach respect for the freedom and equality of all people and that disagreement does not mean our opponents are immoral fools. The justification for teaching children one answer to how coercive power could be legitimate seems like a much taller order. It may very well be defensible, but it is a far more restrictive understanding of reasonableness.

³² Recall that in explaining reasonable disagreement, Rawls defines reasonable persons by referencing the respect criterion of reasonableness (*PL*, 55).

If, in order to be reasonable, children should learn to embrace a particular solution to the problem of legitimacy, a political liberal civic education would be as demanding as a comprehensive liberal civic education. This would succumb to the worry Rawls articulated at the outset—that a political liberal civic education would be *in effect if not in intention* to educate children for comprehensive liberalism (*PL*, 199). Even if the justifications for these two forms of education diverge, as Macedo and Costa have emphasized, the practical results would be similarly restrictive (Macedo 1995; Costa 2004).³³

Furthermore, an education designed to teach children the liberal principle of legitimacy as a necessary component of reasonableness seems particularly vulnerable to Brighouse’s famous challenge to liberal civic education. Recall that within the family of liberal theories of legitimacy,³⁴ many require the “free and unmanipulated assent of reasonable citizens” (Brighouse 1998, 726). Brighouse argues that civic education tends to condition and manipulate the assent because civic education is specifically designed to promote “loyalties, habits, and beliefs conducive to” the continued stability of the state (Brighouse 1998, 726).³⁵ Thus, Brighouse argues, civic education seems to undermine the very conditions for liberal legitimacy.

Brighouse’s challenge can be taken to apply to a Rawlsian who requires that civic education promote a particular solution to the problem of legitimacy as a part of educating children to become reasonable citizens.³⁶ If one is educated from early childhood that there is one clear solution to the question of what, if anything, could make the coercive power of the state legitimate, this may tilt the scale in favor of a citizenry that is less likely to critique the government’s coercive use of power. In all liberal theories of legitimacy, the acceptability of the government to citizens is important.³⁷ However, if education promotes the acceptance of the legitimacy criterion of reasonableness, then the extent to which legitimacy is freely obtained is threatened. Any education that teaches only one acceptable solution to the problem of legitimacy looks worrisome, because there are many competing theories of legitimacy that all claim to be the best way to

³³ What I have called the legitimacy criterion has not been the focus of arguments about civic education. But Rawls’s second aspect of reasonableness, taken as a whole to include the recognition of the burdens of judgment and their consequences, have lead many to conclude that political and comprehensive liberalism converge.

³⁴ There are a number of different approaches to liberal legitimacy beyond Rawls’s own favored approach articulated in *Political Liberalism*.

³⁵ Brighouse argued against Galston’s and Gutmann’s proposals for civic education and ultimately concluded that more robust training for autonomy and critical scrutiny could mitigate the worries. Brighouse 1998, 734-736, 739. He argues, “civic education can meet the requirements imposed by legitimacy only if tied to autonomy-facilitating education, which in turn can be justified on independent grounds” (Brighouse 1998, 744).

³⁶ Callan 2000 responds to Brighouse’s challenge but does so in a way that leans heavy towards comprehensive liberalism. Indeed, the distinction between political and comprehensive liberalism is not at stake in Callan’s 2000 essay.

³⁷ Differences between liberal theories of legitimacy often lie in articulating how this acceptability is obtained (hypothetical consent, normative consent, explicit voluntary consent, etc.).

respect the freedom and equality of citizens—including philosophical anarchism, which rejects the possibility of legitimate authority. Furthermore, including one model of legitimacy in children’s civic education is particularly troublesome since civic education is monitored by the very government that seeks to establish its own legitimacy. This could be understood as an instance of the state’s coercive use of force to encourage a shared understanding of the best way in which to respect citizens as free and equal.³⁸

Education aimed at cultivating only one acceptable approach to establishing the legitimacy of the government demands more than may be justifiably required by a state that seeks to be broadly inclusive. Note the restrictions that accompany the inclusion of the legitimacy criterion of reasonableness in civic education. Only those who embrace Rawls’s liberal principle of legitimacy would qualify as reasonable citizens. This would exclude many more citizens as unreasonable. According to Rawls, using public reason when debating matters of basic justice and constitutional essentials is the best way to respect our fellow citizens as free and equal in the context of reasonable pluralism; however, it is not the only way. It is far too restrictive and, as such, has drawn the most vehement criticisms of Rawlsian reasonableness.

Beyond being restrictive, the legitimacy criterion is indefensible as a component of the civic education of children. Following Brighouse, I worry that some forms of civic education could undermine the legitimacy of a government. In particular, if children are taught that there is only one appropriate response to the fact of reasonable pluralism, this may undermine future political debate about criteria for legitimacy. While debate about legitimacy is not foreclosed by including the legitimacy criterion of reasonableness in the civic education of children—it would be significantly curtailed when compared to civic education that teaches children only the respect and burdens of judgment criteria of reasonableness. If PLCE is modeled after the inclusive conception of reasonableness that does not consider embracing Rawls’s liberal principle of legitimacy a necessary component of qualifying as reasonable, this opens the door to an education that presents a variety of theories of legitimacy. Children would learn that there is not only reasonable disagreement about conceptions of the good, but also reasonable disagreement about the best way to respect the freedom and equality of citizens in the context of reasonable pluralism.

In addition, including the legitimacy criterion as a part of PLCE will distract from some of its more significant educational aspirations. Since Rawls’s liberal principle of legitimacy is widely contested, even among liberals, including the legitimacy criterion as a necessary part of PLCE could lead many to reject PLCE entirely. In contrast, if PLCE teaches that the first two criteria are the only necessary qualifications to be considered reasonable, this is both widely inclusive and could establish an important basis for securing the rights of all citizens.

³⁸ This looks suspiciously similar to what, in other contexts, Rawls calls “the fact of oppression” (*PL*, 37).

Focusing on respect for others as free and equal moral persons as the primary moral qualification to qualify as reasonable highlights the key moral threshold that sets the limits for which disagreements are reasonable and which are unreasonable. If reasonable disagreements are disagreements among reasonable persons, they are disagreements among persons who have met this minimum moral threshold. Beyond this, there are many conceptions of the good that persons will pursue, given freedom of conscience and freedom of thought. Furthermore, as I have suggested in this section, there are also many different political proposals that explicitly aim to respect people's freedom and equality. Teaching children these goals in PLCE could set the stage for a diverse citizenry that, by learning to respect even those with whom one disagrees as reasonable, may be less vulnerable to the extreme group polarization that characterizes contemporary politics in which those who disagree on important matters are deemed immoral or unintelligent.

4. Conclusion

A political liberal civic education should aim towards the inclusive scope of reasonableness by cultivating the respect and burdens of judgment criteria of reasonableness. These two criteria should set the minimum moral threshold for qualifying as reasonable, which is the most important goal of PLCE. If we do this, PLCE will be far more inclusive of a variety of comprehensive doctrines than any comprehensive liberal civic education. In so doing, we could make good on Rawls's claim that PLCE requires far less than CLCE. Nevertheless, this type of civic education would also be distinctive to political liberalism, as teaching children the burdens of judgment teaches them that political justice ought to respect reasonable pluralism among its citizenry. However, if PLCE requires cultivating the more demanding acceptance of the legitimacy criterion of reasonableness, it may risk collapse into comprehensive liberalism—at least in its practical effects. Including the legitimacy criterion in civic education as a component of reasonableness will have the practical effect of making it the case that only political liberals would qualify as reasonable citizens. To preserve a distinctive political liberal civic education, the legitimacy criterion should be bifurcated from the other aspects of reasonableness. Teaching children to embrace a particular approach to liberal legitimacy is not the proper aim of a civic education designed to be broadly inclusive of a wide variety of comprehensive doctrines.³⁹

³⁹ Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the 2014 Manchester Center for Political Theory Workshop and at Vanderbilt University's Social and Political Thought Workshop. My thanks to the audiences at both workshops for their thoughtful comments. A special thanks to Marilyn Friedman, Rob Talisse, Larry May, Leif Wenar, and the editors of this volume for their helpful suggestions on earlier drafts of this paper.

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