

# Political Soul-Making and the Imminent Demise of Liberal Education

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We may become powerful by knowledge, but we attain fullness by sympathy . . . But we find that this education of sympathy is not only systematically ignored in schools, but it is severely repressed.

Rabindranath Tagore, "My School"

Achievement comes to denote the sort of thing that a well-planned machine can do better than a human being can, and the main effect of education, the achieving of a life of rich significance, drops by the wayside. Meantime mind-wandering and wayward fancy are nothing but the unsurpressible imagination cut loose from concern with what is done.

John Dewey, "Democracy and Education"

I begin with three examples, which illustrate, in different ways, a profound crisis in education that faces us today, although we have not yet faced it. All illustrate the loss of insights contained in the statements by Tagore and Dewey, two of our greatest educational reformers and thinkers about the role of education in a pluralistic democracy.

1. It is a hot March in New Delhi. I am attending a conference on pluralism and the Indian democracy at Jawaharlal Nehru University, most prestigious of Indian universities. Much of the conference is concerned with issues of education. All the papers on education focus on the content of required national textbooks, which are to be memorized and regurgitated on examinations. The Hindu Right wants a content that supports their view of India's history; the conference presenters, all opponents of the government then in power, inveigh against this aim and propose textbooks with a different, more Nehruvian content. But nobody mentions the children: the stultifying atmosphere of rote learning in classrooms, the absence of critical thinking and all cultivation of imagination. Tagore once wrote a fable called "The Parrot's Training," in which lots of smart people talk about how to educate a parrot, preparing a fine gilded cage and lots of fancy textbooks. Nobody notices that along the way the bird itself has died. The education debate at JNU, typical of the larger debate in India, reminds me of that story.<sup>1</sup>

2. It is a surprisingly warm November in Chicago, and I go across the Midway to the Lab School, the school where John Dewey conducted his path-breaking experiments in democratic soul-making. The teachers are having a retreat, and I have been asked to address them on the topic of education for democratic citizenship, something that I undertake with some trepidation because I am

sure they all know so much more about this topic than I do. As I defend the legacy of Dewey and introduce them to the very similar writings of Tagore, I discover that I am not where I thought I was, the safe home of Dewey's ideas. I am on a battleground, where teachers who still take pride in stimulating children to question, criticize, and imagine are an embattled minority, increasingly suppressed by other teachers, and especially by wealthy parents, intent on testable results of a technical nature that will help produce financial success. When I present what I thought of as a very banal version of Dewey's vision, there is deep emotion, as if I have mentioned something precious that is being snatched away.

3. And finally: one week later I keep a phone appointment to talk with the head of the committee that is searching for a new Dean for the School of Education in one of our nation's, and the world's, most prestigious universities. Hereafter I will just refer to the university as X, and its President as Y. Z. They want my advice, or think that they want it. Since, as a result of the first two incidents and many others of a similar nature, I am already alarmed about the future of the humanities and the arts in primary and secondary education, I lay out for this woman my views about education for democratic citizenship, stressing the crucial importance of critical thinking, knowledge about the many cultures and groups that make up one's nation and one's world, and the ability to imagine the situation of another person, abilities that I see as crucial for the very survival of democratic self-government in the modern world. To me, it seemed that I was saying the same thing I talk about all the time, pretty familiar stuff. But to this woman, it was utterly new. How surprising, says she, no one else I have talked to has mentioned any of these things at all. We have been talking only about how X University can contribute to scientific and technical progress around the world, and that is the thing that Y. Z. is really interested in. But what you say is very interesting, and I really want to think about it. She really seems to mean it. Well, say I, I will be very happy to tell Y. Z. exactly what I think, and you can tell him that I'd welcome a call on this topic—although, I add, I am not sure that he would really *understand* what I am talking about in this case. She agrees that the talk would nonetheless be a good idea. I know Y. Z., and have a pretty cordial relationship with him, so I actually think this conversation might happen. But I am not going to sit by the phone waiting. And I can just see it now: all over the world, initiatives sponsored by X and the huge money of X, focusing narrowly on scientific and technical training, producing many generations of useful engineers who have not a clue about how to criticize the propaganda of their politicians, and who have even less of a clue about how to imagine the pain that a person feels who has been excluded and subordinated.

Appiah's book is splendidly argued and also splendidly written. I have little to disagree with concerning its proposal for a "rooted cosmopolitanism." Indeed, although he seems to think that we disagree, it is my belief that we really have very similar views.<sup>2</sup> But I do think that there is a good deal more to be said on the topic of education, which he rightly makes central. I shall begin by setting out the one serious normative disagreement I have with Appiah, insisting on the

importance of a distinction between “political liberalism” and “comprehensive liberalism” that does not figure in his argument—although he seems to lean, along with Mill, toward the more comprehensive form. I shall then locate the issue of education within a political-liberal conception of political principles, where its role will look subtly different from its role in Appiah’s autonomy-focused conception. I shall then make some claims about what is truly essential to public education for democratic citizenship, so construed. Finally, I shall make some observations about the crisis that faces us.

### **I. Political and Comprehensive**

Appiah neglects a distinction that I believe central to good thought about political principles in a pluralistic society: namely, John Rawls’s and Charles Larmore’s distinction between a liberalism that makes comprehensive recommendations for how lives should go, using comprehensive epistemological, ethical, and/or metaphysical doctrines, and a liberalism that carefully prescinds from reliance on any such comprehensive doctrines, out of respect for the plurality of different reasonable ways citizens may choose to live their lives. (That ethical reason of respect, not skepticism or neutralism for its own sake, is its reason for so prescinding.) Appiah does refer to the relevant works of Rawls and Larmore, but he mischaracterizes them, I believe. He imputes to Rawls the view that “governments should be neutral among different reasonable conceptions of the good life” (158). So far so good, though he does not tell us why this degree of neutrality is recommended. But he then infers from this that “government should not interfere in the ethical dimensions of our lives” (158). Later, similarly, he states that “When antiperfectionists inculcate civic virtues . . . they do so for . . . consequential reasons. The state’s principal concern isn’t with the ethical success of our lives; it’s with the stability and survival of the political order” (161). Since Rawls is the only antiperfectionist named in the preceding discussion, I take this as a characterization of Rawls’s position. (Later, in p. 187, he imputes a similar position to Larmore.)

The Rawlsian state, however, is not ethically neutral. The political sphere is what Rawls repeatedly calls a “partial moral conception;” he also characterizes it as a “module” that can be attached to the rest of one’s comprehensive doctrine by people who otherwise have very different views of the meaning and purpose of life. Larmore makes similar claims, emphasizing very strongly that the political conception is not morally neutral. So Rawls’s (and Larmore’s) “method of avoidance” means only that the political ought to avoid grounding itself in any comprehensive doctrine outside itself: it ought to be both partial in scope and “freestanding,” not invoking comprehensive doctrines in its own justification. So it will not use notions such as those of the soul, or self-evident truth, that are controversial among the major comprehensive doctrines. It will, however, use (partial) ethical notions: a partial ethical conception, indeed, is exactly what it is.

For Rawls, as for Larmore (and Larmore's own writing about Rawls emphasizes this point) the key ethical notion is that of equal respect, which grounds the political principles (the priority of liberty and the difference principle). It is for an ethical reason, the reason of equal respect, that the Rawlsian state will prescind from employing comprehensive theological, metaphysical, and epistemological doctrines, and also ethical doctrines about how lives go well in general. Rawls adds, however, that the state will have to have some way of talking about issues of objectivity (avoidance of bias and so on), and some way of dealing with issues of motivation to engender support for itself over time; it will therefore use a political notion of objectivity<sup>3</sup> and a "reasonable political psychology," which try to avoid the most contentious issues that divide the major comprehensive doctrines. Whether he has succeeded in this task the reader must judge; I believe that he does succeed, and I try to develop the psychological doctrine further myself, writing about the political role of compassion, and of the political critique of disgust and stigmatization.<sup>4</sup>

All of this can, Rawls believes, be endorsed *as good*, and *not* just for consequential reasons of stability, by people who hold many different comprehensive doctrines. That is what the idea of "overlapping consensus" is: the idea that people *really affirm* the political principles as an ethically rich *part*, or module, of their own comprehensive doctrine. The idea of an overlapping consensus is carefully distinguished from the idea of a mere *modus vivendi* focused on stability. Whether such a consensus is possible is a question I will not discuss here. But it is a picture of political pluralism very different from the one that Appiah paints. And it is the one I accept, though my specific account of the content of the political is slightly different from Rawls's.<sup>5</sup>

What this picture means is that the political is both thicker and narrower than it is in Appiah's sort of pluralism, which seems to me to be a thin sort of comprehensive liberalism. On Appiah's view, the state can legitimately intervene to promote autonomous lives, so long as it does so with considerable restraint, focusing primarily on preventing and correcting obvious obstacles to such lives, such as misinformation, lack of self-control, and ignorance. Thus, his view is similar to the views of J. S. Mill and Joseph Raz, both comprehensive liberals, although Appiah has a lot more sensitivity to issues of pluralism than Mill and probably than Raz. On the Rawlsian view, by contrast, the state has a sphere that is narrower: that of ensuring continued support for the values that form part of the political conception itself, and of distributing to all citizens some important prerequisites of well-being, but stopping well short of any comprehensive doctrine of well-being, however thin.

It is important to see that the Rawlsian state does not limit itself to cultivating sentiments and attitudes required by the political conception and its replication over time, although this will be one of its most important educational tasks. The state also, in Rawls's view and mine, has a further job, namely, giving all citizens some very important prerequisites of general well-being. Politics is not

just about politics, it is about and for life. (Here lies one of the major disagreements between Rawls and Habermas.) That is why the redistribution of wealth and income is so important: because these are prerequisites for people's lives in general, not just for the sustenance of the political conception. Rawls's view, then, may overlap considerably with Appiah's in its actual recommendations, but its account of itself will be subtly different.

Describing the general prerequisites of well-being in a way that does not involve any comprehensive ethical doctrine is a difficult matter, concerning which Rawls kept changing his mind until the end of his life. (He began by saying that primary goods such as income and wealth are all-purpose means to the good in all comprehensive doctrines. Later, persuaded by Thomas Nagel and others that it simply was not true that income and wealth play a similar role in all the comprehensive doctrines, he altered his view of primary goods, saying, instead, that they should be understood in connection with the Kantian political conception of the person, which citizens accept for political reasons. He continued to insist, however, that the political must provide for more than itself. And so it remained somewhat unclear why primary goods should be understood primarily in connection with the political conception of the person. Later still, in making revisions for a new edition of *Political Liberalism*, which he did not complete due to illness and death, he emphasized that the Kantian flavor of the conception of the person troubled him, and he would prefer to recast the whole account in terms of a less divisive conception of reason.<sup>6</sup> All this means that Rawls had not fully solved the problem to which I refer, that of getting a conception of the prerequisites of well-being that could form part of the overlapping consensus.) My own preferred way of solving the problem is to state the general prerequisites in the form of a list of capabilities, not actual functionings, and to prescind very carefully from any recommendations as to functioning. Thus, the state will make it *possible* for all citizens to have decent health care, but it will not penalize unhealthy choices. It will give citizens the *right* to the free exercise of religion, but it will not recommend religious functioning. It will give political rights and opportunities to all, but avoid compulsory voting (which offends some religious doctrines). And so forth. I make exceptions for children in cases where the adult capability requires actual functioning as a child; in this way, once again, there may be considerable convergence between my political liberalism and Appiah's comprehensive liberalism in practice. The theoretical account, however, remains significantly different.

The state that I favor should probably not use the notion of autonomy, a notion that has (and had in Mill) strong historical links to the rejection of theistic sources of meaning.<sup>7</sup> It should not announce, with Mill, that non-autonomous lives (such as the lives Mill thought Calvinism urged one to cultivate, or lives in the military, or lives in a traditional community-based religion like that of the Old Order Amish) are less worthwhile than lives that have thrown off the shackles of authority. But it may reasonably support a general capability for practical

reasoning, understood in a more everyday way, both in order to support the political conception and in order to give citizens opportunities to think critically about their own way of life, at least enough so that exit options are available to them.

Supporting human capabilities without showing disrespect for comprehensive doctrines that urge people not to use some of these capabilities is a difficult balancing act, as *Wisconsin v. Yoder* shows us all. And yet it is plausible to think that the case was rightly decided, supporting sufficient public education to give Amish children exit options and the critical thinking relevant to citizenship, without undermining utterly the comprehensive doctrine of the Amish. Mill would not like the decision, and I am not sure whether Appiah would: much depends on how he defines the idea of autonomy, and how comprehensive he makes it. Clearly, as Rawls says, the state does not need to make it equally easy for all conceptions to accept the overlapping consensus; some will do so only with strain, and some may fail to gain adherents over time. But it will never say to the Amish adult, or the soldier, or the Roman Catholic, “Autonomy is a general good in human lives, and your life is therefore ‘pinched’ and ‘hidebound’ [I quote from Mill’s discussion of Calvinism in *On Liberty*], less rich and satisfactory than the lives of many of your fellow citizens who have dared to throw off the shackles of authority.” Does Appiah say this to the Amish, or to the career soldier? I am not sure, but I suspect that the answer is yes.

So: the political-liberal state narrows its claims. In another way, however, its claims may be considerably richer and deeper than Appiah’s thin comprehensive liberalism suggests. Anything that lies inside the political module is, *ex hypothesi*, affirmed by all citizens, at least all whose comprehensive doctrines affirm the key idea of equal respect that underlies the constitution, and the principles embedded in the constitution itself. So, the state does not have to pussyfoot around with these things: it can teach them flat out, as the best ideas to live with together, using whatever devices of imagery, rhetoric, and emotional suasion seem best suited to the task of imparting them to the young. It has no obligation to be fair to the opposing position. Take race, for example. The Constitution forbids discrimination on the basis of race. So, our schools should not simply teach that we have antidiscrimination laws; it should actively bring up small children as non-racist citizens, in the variety of ways that is familiar to us in daily life, since this is one thing our schools have learned to do pretty well: by not racializing the classroom; by strong opprobrium directed at racist behavior and speech in the classroom; by good teaching about the history of race, teaching that is in no way neutral, but which inculcates anger at racial injustice and hope for a world of racial harmony. Small children will, as they so often do, put on plays in which some of them pretend to be people forced to sit in the back of the bus. They will see how they feel when they sit back there, and those emotions will be a topic of classroom discussion—not at all neutrally, since the ethical principle of non-racism is part of the political module that we share. The school will celebrate Martin Luther King Jr.’s birthday, and it will not celebrate Strom Thurmond’s birthday. It will commemorate the life of Rosa Parks, and it will not commemo-

rate the life of George Wallace—except, perhaps, as an example of regeneration and apology. This non-neutrality is no problem for political liberalism, since it is a partial ethical conception, and neutrality is not what it is about inside the political module. (About related things that lie outside the boundaries of the political/ethical conception, however, such as the existence or non-existence of god or gods, and whether god disfavors the racist, the classroom will be normatively silent, although it certainly may and should tell people about the variety of beliefs that is held in their society.)

In Rawls's view, and my own, anyone who is willing to accept the basic political principles can accept all of this. There will be people in any society who do not accept its constitutional principles—who want to reintroduce slavery, for example, or to do away with our constitutional commitment to non-discrimination.<sup>8</sup> Those people will not be suppressed, unless they violate the rights of others. They may speak freely, unless their speech poses an imminent threat of public disorder.<sup>9</sup> But they are not going to be treated neutrally. The classroom will not give their views equal weight with the views that support the Constitution. It is under no obligation to do so, since, once again, the political conception has a definite ethical content, and is not a form of neutralism. Even when we are dealing with adults, these racists will be treated asymmetrically with those who do support the Constitution: they will not be able to propose legislation that goes in their direction, since the relevant contradictory values are entrenched in the Constitution. They will have to amend the Constitution itself—or even, in the case of India, call for an entirely new constitutional convention—if they want to change one of their society's "basic features."<sup>10</sup>

## II. Educating Citizens in a Pluralistic Society

One thing that a society based upon equal respect needs to do most urgently is to teach young citizens that their society contains many religions and many ethnicities, and that we are all committed to the fair treatment of all of them. Indeed, for both Rawls and me any such society should teach that this commitment to equal respect is the source of our most basic political principles. Understanding this commitment is an essential prerequisite for citizenship, so it is part of the political "module" itself. We do not even need to reach the question of whether it is a consensus-worthy prerequisite of good life in general.

This brings me to Appiah's treatment of *Mozert v. Hawkins*, the case in which a Baptist mother requested an exemption for her children from a series of primary school readers that presented children with pictures of different American ways of life, appealing to them to imagine these different lives. At the outset of his discussion of education, Appiah states, and apparently endorses, Mill's view that the liberal state has two tasks, one related to individual autonomous lives, and one related to the good of society (p. 199). In the analysis that follows, however, he focuses entirely on the first job, more or less dropping the second. (See "would severely diminish a child's well-being," p. 204; "to protect the child's growth to

autonomy,” p. 206; “to compromise the possibility of an autonomous adulthood,” p. 209; “a child’s prospects for autonomy,” p. 209. In none of these contexts is the question of society’s good mentioned.) I believe that this neglect of the political part of the task skews his treatment of the issues involved in *Mozert*. Thus, Appiah says that the case could “readily” have been resolved by allowing the children to opt out of the reading series: after all, they could have been tested on reading in some other way (p. 210).

This may be so, if the only issue were personal autonomy. But this is far from being the only issue. These students are going to become citizens in a pluralistic society, so they had better learn about the existence of other ways of life, and they had better be encouraged to imagine those other ways. The mother’s claim that the truths contained in the Bible were all her children needed to know is just not reasonable from the point of view of citizenship and the political module.<sup>11</sup> If she does not accept the constitutional principles, then we do not have to give her equal treatment in framing the curriculum, any more than we need give the racist equal treatment. (Would Appiah say that a racist parent should have an exemption from a reading curriculum that teaches non-racism?) And I think she really cannot be accepting our constitutional principles, when she says that the Bible contains everything her children need to know. She is just wrong, from the point of view of the political conception: they need to know the history of race, and religious persecution, and many other facts about America not contained in the Bible, if they are to participate in and sustain a political conception based on equal respect and the political principles to which that value gives rise. The school wisely decided that a democracy needs to teach children to think (respectfully and imaginatively) about other ways of life. That is a primary task of the public education system, namely to devise ways of inculcating in the young the values that sustain the political conception.

The most significant opinion in the case said exactly this.<sup>12</sup> Citing another case in which the Court had affirmed that the public schools “serve the purpose of teaching fundamental values ‘essential to a democratic society,’ including ‘tolerance of divergent political and religious views,’”<sup>13</sup> the Court then makes a Rawlsian distinction between “civil tolerance” and “theological tolerance,”<sup>14</sup> saying that the reading texts do not ask students to accept any particular theological belief (including beliefs about the salvation of others) as true, but they do teach respect and understanding, a legitimate and indeed crucial civil (political) value. Correctly, in my view, they hold that such a teaching cannot possibly be an unconstitutional burden on Vicky Frost’s free exercise of religion. For after all, it is required for the sustenance of the whole set of rights and liberties of which the First Amendment is one part.

In my view, we can say quite a lot about what education for citizenship in a pluralistic democratic society that is part of an interlocking world should look like. Because I have written a book on this topic,<sup>15</sup> I shall simply summarize, in order to turn to the current crisis. I focus, as before, on the humanities and social sciences, leaving the science curriculum for another time. In my book I focused



on liberal education in colleges and universities, but it was always my view that these values need to be cultivated appropriately by primary and secondary education. Colleges will not get very far, unless students have begun much earlier.

Three values, I argue, are particularly crucial to citizenship in such a nation and for such a world. All, I now add, can be handily accommodated within the political module, as essential underpinnings for its most basic values—although all also have contributions to make to life more generally. The first is the capacity for Socratic self-criticism and critical thought about one's own traditions. Although some parents may object to this sort of teaching, as they always have since the time of Socrates, who lost his life on the charge of "corrupting the young," we may give them Socrates's own answer: Democracy needs citizens who can think for themselves, rather than deferring to authority, who can reason together about their choices rather than simply trading claims and counter-claims. Socrates, appropriately, compared himself to a gadfly on the back of a noble but sluggish horse: He was waking democracy up, so it would conduct its business more responsibly.

The second ability is the one that was involved in *Mozert*, namely the ability to see oneself as a member of a heterogeneous nation, and world, understanding something of the history and character of the diverse groups that inhabit it. Most of my book is taken up with spelling out the curricular dimensions of this one and the pedagogical pitfalls involved, so I shall say no more about it at present.

The third ability seems to me possibly the most crucial: It is what I call "the narrative imagination," the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person very different from oneself, indeed a whole range of such persons. For this ability, we need literature and the arts. The great progressive educators of the twentieth century, Dewey and Tagore,<sup>16</sup> understood this extremely clearly, building the arts into the very core of their curricula for democratic citizenship. (Tagore did this through elaborate dance-dramas and other student productions, Dewey more abstractly, leaving a lot to the teacher's own ingenuity, though at the Lab School he favored curricular requirements in the arts that are still, though barely, in place.<sup>17</sup>) Both felt that the cultivation of imaginative sympathy was a key prop to good citizenship; that children had this ability to be tapped, if it was not killed off; but that it had to be made more sophisticated and precise through education.

### **III. Democratic Education on the Ropes**

Education of the type I recommend is doing splendidly in the place where I first studied it, namely the liberal arts portion of college and university curricula. Indeed, it is this part of the curriculum, in institutions such as my own, that particularly attracts philanthropic support, as rich people remember with pleasure the time when they read books that they loved, and pursued issues open-endedly. (Some of their enthusiasm is related to the personal-life contribution of liberal education, some to its contribution to citizenship.) Many nations whose univer-

sity curricula do not include a liberal arts component are now striving to build one, since they acknowledge its importance in crafting a public response to the problems of pluralism their societies face. I have been involved in such discussions in the Netherlands, in Sweden, in India, in Germany, in Italy, in India and Bangladesh. (Whether reform in this direction will occur is hard to say: for liberal education has high financial and pedagogical costs. Teaching of the sort I recommend needs small classes, or at least sections, where students get copious feedback on their writing assignments. European professors are not used to this idea, and would at present be horrible at it if they did try to do it; and bureaucrats are unwilling to believe that it is necessary to support the requisite number of faculty positions.)

The abilities of citizenship are doing very poorly, however, in the most crucial years of children's lives, the years known as K through 12. Here the demands of the global market have made everyone focus on scientific and technical proficiency as *the* key abilities, and the humanities and the arts are increasingly perceived as useless frills, which we can prune away to make sure our nation (whether it be India or the United States) remains competitive. To the extent that they are the focus of national discussion, they are recast as technical abilities themselves, to be tested by quantitative multiple-choice examinations, and the imaginative and critical abilities that lie at their core are typically left aside. At one time, Dewey's emphasis on learning by doing and on the arts would have been second nature in any American elementary school. Now it is under threat even at the Dewey Laboratory School. National testing has already made things worse, as national testing usually does: for at least my first and third ability are not testable by quantitative multiple-choice exams, and the second is very poorly tested in such ways. (Moreover, nobody bothers to try to test it even in that way.) Whether a nation is aspiring to a greater share of the market, like India, or struggling to protect jobs, like the United States, the imagination and the critical faculties look like useless paraphernalia, and people even have increasing contempt for them.

Thus in West Bengal, Tagore's pathbreaking Santiniketan school, which produced Amita Sen, Amartya Sen, Satyajit Ray, and many more gloriously independent and imaginative world citizens, is now viewed with disdain as a school for problem children. Long ago, Jawaharlal Nehru sent his daughter Indira there, though she spoke little Bengali. (And it was the only happy time at school she had, though she attended many famous schools.) Today nobody from outside West Bengal wants to go there. A parent's glory is the admission of a child to the Indian Institute of Technology. Meanwhile, at the Dewey Lab School, the arts requirement is being watered down under pressure of the drive for success on the part of parents and administrators. Worse yet, the sheer burden of homework in all disciplines makes it impossible for children to enjoy the use of their critical and imaginative faculties.

The United States has some resilience still, thanks to its traditions of local autonomy. Thus, Indian-American friends of mine wistfully compare the educa-

tion their children receive here (my example of the play about Rosa Parks comes from one such discussion) with the education they themselves never had in India, where rote learning rules the roost. But the United States is moving toward India, not vice versa.

Indeed, most outrageously and thoughtlessly, the United States is currently egging on other nations to emulate our worst, not best, traits. The phone call from X University was more upsetting to me than any other confrontation with the recent decline in democratic education: for X is currently investing a lot of money to set up educational outposts all over the world. These narrow ways of thinking about what is worth cultivating will, then, be exported widely, with great money attached. Imagine the spectacle of Y. Z. telling the people of Kolkata, who have their own rich and glorious traditions of democratic education, that X can provide wonderful new assistance toward the further destruction of precisely that tradition. And yet exactly this is about to happen. Imagine, too, the elites of Kolkata lapping all this up, since the prestige of X is superior even to the prestige of the Indian Institute of Technology, so much so that every controversial word of Y. Z. (and there are so many) makes the front pages of every national Indian newspaper. Will Y. Z. even urge people to think about what makes democracy strong, and to cultivate abilities that strengthen it? Not very likely, since the same Y. Z. has proposed eviscerating the core curriculum at X itself, in such a way that instead of one course in Moral Reasoning one could take two technical economics courses, and in such a way that the Humanities make up a much smaller fraction of the entire curriculum than previously. (He may not get his way, but that will not mean that he has broadened his conception of education.)

What will we have, if these trends continue? Nations of technically trained people who do not know how to criticize authority, useful profit-makers with obtuse imaginations. What could be more frightening than that? Indeed, if you look to the Indian state of Gujarat, which has for a particularly long time gone down this road, with no critical thinking in the public schools and a concerted focus on technical ability,<sup>18</sup> one can see clearly how a band of docile engineers can be welded into a murderous force to enact the most horrendously racist and antidemocratic policies. And yet, how can we possibly avoid going down this road?

I believe that outrage is called for, on the part of every person who cares about the future of democracy in the world, and I think philosophers should be leading the expression of outrage. And yet, sad to say, virtually no prominent philosopher writes much about education (one of the great subjects of the profession from Plato to Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Mill, and Sidgwick), and virtually no current philosopher writes on K through 12 in a way that makes a public impact.<sup>19</sup> (Here I very much include myself.)

Appiah's book is a welcome step back to a philosophical focus on public education. Its brilliance and its literary quality suggest that it may reopen a wider debate in the United States, and possibly in other nations as well. The book does not go far enough, however, because it focuses on the personal rather than the

social task, on autonomous lives rather than the prerequisites of citizenship. I call for a second volume, and for all of us to write on the topic in our own ways, with the sense of urgency that our situation demands.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup>See my discussion of the Indian situation in “Education and Democratic Citizenship: Beyond the Textbook Controversy”, in *Islam and the Modern Age* 35 (2005), 69–89; and a slightly different version, “Freedom from Dead Habit,” *The Little Magazine* (New Delhi) 6 (2005), 18–32.
- <sup>2</sup>See my reply to his and other essays in *For Love of Country*, and the preface to the new edition of that volume. A fuller version of that preface, and the fullest statement of my view on the topic, is in “Compassion and Terror,” *Daedalus* (Winter 2003): 10–26. A slightly different version, same title, in *Terrorism and International Justice*, ed. James Sterba (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 229–52.
- <sup>3</sup>See my “Political Objectivity,” *New Literary History* 32 (2001), 883–906.
- <sup>4</sup>See the discussion of political liberalism in *Upheavals of Thought*, chap. 8 and *Hiding From Humanity*, chap. 7. I give a detailed account of the conception in *Rawls, Justice, and Tolerati: An Introduction to Political Liberalism*, forthcoming from Columbia University Press.
- <sup>5</sup>Thus, when Appiah writes that the doctrine of perfectionism is “controversially” imputed to me and to Sen (315n.2), I would rather write—of myself, since Sen has not taken a position on this controversy—that it is “falsely” imputed. I have endorsed political liberalism very clearly in articles dating back to 1995 and in two books, *Women and Human Development* (2000) and *Frontiers of Justice* (2005). I am not aware of anyone who imputes perfectionism to me, but it may be so.
- <sup>6</sup>Here I am referring to correspondence between Rawls and his Columbia editor a copy of which is in my possession, and which I have Mardy Rawls’s permission to cite.
- <sup>7</sup>See Jerome Schneewind, *The Invention of Autonomy* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- <sup>8</sup>Putting it this way obscures a problem in Rawls’s text that is actually very difficult, since the concept of “reasonable comprehensive doctrines” is actually given more than one definition. In one view, which I take to be the one Rawls ought to affirm, a reasonable doctrine is one that accepts and affirms the political “module.” Rawls also, however, has an independent characterization of the “reasonable” that involves other ideas such as comprehensiveness, consistency, and ordering of values. I believe that it was mistaken of him to offer this characterization, deep though the reasons for it are, and that it actually sweeps far further than he believes. It is not just New Age religion that will be ruled out by these criteria, it is, arguably, Christianity itself, since that religion is deliberately grounded on belief in a contradiction: the Trinity is standardly understood to be a doctrine belief which humbles reason, because it cannot be given a logically coherent form. I discuss all this in my forthcoming book on PL, Columbia University Press forthcoming.
- <sup>9</sup>Rawls does not think the *Brandenburg* test speech-protective enough: he recommends protecting all speech unless there is a constitutional crisis and the speech risks upsetting the Constitution itself. Madison had a similar view, in his debate with George Mason.
- <sup>10</sup>Term taken from *Keshevananda Bharati*, the Indian Supreme Court case that introduced this doctrine—after Indira Gandhi had gotten Parliament to repeal the whole list of Fundamental Rights, and voters, thinking this a bad thing, turned her out of office.
- <sup>11</sup>See *Mozert v. Hawkins County Board of Education*, 827 F.2d 1058 (6th Cir. 1987): Frost, the mother who brought the case, said that the Bible “is the totality of my beliefs.”
- <sup>12</sup>The case was heard by a three-judge panel; there was no majority opinion, though all three reached the same conclusion, because all three wrote separate opinions. I cite from Judge Lively’s, which was (since he was Chief Judge) the opinion of the court.
- <sup>13</sup>The other case, *Bethel School District no. 403 v. Fraser*, 478 U.S. 675 (1986), is long on theory but peculiar in content. It concerns a high school student who gave a speech on behalf of a friend who was running for student president; the speech had a mild sexual content that deeply shocked

the Justices leading them to wax eloquent about matters of civil toleration—before they proceed to take away the student’s right to be valedictorian of his class! (The majority opinion, written by Chief Justice Burger, refuses even to quote from the speech, saying it is offensive, but Justice Brennan, in dissent, quotes the entirety of it, and we see just how innocuous and stupid it really is.)

<sup>14</sup>This distinction goes back at least to Rousseau’s *On the Social Contract*, where Rousseau argues that societies are entitled to enforce both sorts of toleration, since “it is impossible to live at peace with those whom one believes to be damned.” Experience would appear to have proven him wrong.

<sup>15</sup>*Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

<sup>16</sup>We might add Leonard Elmhirst in England, whose Dartington Hall School was closely modeled on Tagore’s Santiniketan, where Elmhirst had spent a good deal of time.

<sup>17</sup>At The Cambridge School, in Weston, Massachusetts, where my daughter went to high school and where I am a trustee, the Dewey values continue in their full force, in part because the Boston area contains so many private schools that a Dewey-style school can carve out a market niche and avoid the pressure toward conformity that Lab, the leading private school in Chicago, continually faces.

<sup>18</sup>For details, see my *The Clash Within: Violence, Hope, and India’s Future* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, forthcoming 2007), chap. 1.

<sup>19</sup>One excellent book, philosophical in orientation though not by a professional philosopher, that should have received more attention is Leon Botstein’s *Jefferson’s Children*; but Botstein, President of Bard College, has recently been focusing all his attention on post-secondary education (and on his musical career); the book’s recommendations for the public schools have been little discussed.

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