

Civic crusaders and civil peace

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1. Introduction

This chapter discusses some dilemmas for liberal governance in multiethnic and multifaith societies, arguing for a broader historical understanding of the link between security and civic formation. It does so by drawing on current efforts in Australia and Britain, to install the compulsory study of universal principles and core national values within the national curriculum, using the schools to open frank discussion, in the community, on what we share and on key differences, including those based in cultural, ethnic and religious custom.

I make a case for understanding these initiatives, and the dangers associated with them, in the context of the history of the liberal settlements that established a distinction between political and spiritual life. Due to the historical achievements that separated state concerns from those of civil society, moral communities and congregations, our public institutions have acquired a degree of indifference to private beliefs, however extreme, except insofar as they cause harm to others or otherwise affect civil peace or the rule of law. Through social institutions, including the schools, governments have of course sought to shape the capacities and conduct of citizens. However, they have done so by drawing on unobtrusive pastoral and disciplinary techniques for shaping souls and forming citizens.

By contrast, current efforts to legislate for civic virtue are surprisingly heavy-handed. Faced with the potential for civil violence, states are no longer indifferent to the beliefs and activities of private associations, cultural groups, faith-based movements and their members. Those who speak in the name of the state are prepared to be more explicit in making its interest in security clear. Political decision-makers are turning to prescriptive moral solutions to threatened conflict within and between community members: increasingly, they are deferring the responsibility for keeping the peace to the moral community and the conscientious citizen. The risk is that such 'community-building' tactics, with their emphasis on free and frank discussion of contentious matters of belief and custom, may provoke rather than calm civil conflict. This moralisation of politics indicates, I argue, the extent to which governments are feeling the limits of their own capacity, both to protect their borders and to secure the conditions of life that members of their political communities have come to expect.

2. Civics and stability

The education of citizens has long been connected to nation building. Through their school systems, the Western liberal democracies have focused consistent attention on building a common plateau of civic competence and civic values. They have done so in their own interests. Not only are citizens' knowledge and skills closely related to national productivity, industrial development and competitiveness, they are also strongly linked to civil peace and social security. For liberal democracy to function, as a political system, citizens and residents must have the capacity to exercise certain rights and fulfil certain obligations (voting, jury duty). The legitimacy of democratic systems hangs on the people's capacity to be self-governing: to make rational electoral choices and to obey the rule of law. Where a democracy is perceived as weak, plagued by corruption and faction, the legitimacy and therefore the security of the state comes into question (Dunn 1996, Hindess 1995, 1997).

The link between legitimacy, security and civic capacity is perhaps clearest in international ventures in which civic education appears as a component of foreign aid, development and international relations. Over the last decade, international agencies have devoted substantial resources to the establishment of civics initiatives in Eastern Europe, Africa, China, South-East Asia and, more recently, Afghanistan and Iraq. UNESCO, the UN, the World Bank and various private and non-profit civics institutes have sought, in partnership with nation states, to bring intercultural dialogue and liberal democratic values to unstable areas.

The rationales for these programmes draw heavily on a liberal philosophical vocabulary, especially in their faith in critical reason and moral reflection as the basis for civic virtue and justice. All human beings and political communities have the potential to live according to the absolute moral principles of justice, liberty, equality and the rule of law. This potential cannot be imposed, but individuals can be encouraged to recognise it for themselves. The rational individual can choose the good, once he or she has done the work of moral and critical reflection. In the process, the political community will itself become just; this means that it will be tolerant and pluralistic, overcoming racism and bigotry and recognising liberal democratic reasons to live with cultural difference, within a common political culture. Thus the preferred recipe for social settlement is the rebuilding of social trust, transforming sectarian loyalties into a healthy network of private civic association (Kymlicka and Norman 1994). An energetic associational life can be important for rebuilding civil society, it is argued, but it can also threaten civil peace, if what links people together makes them into a mob or a mafia (Foley and Edwards 1997). Civility and public reasonableness must be promoted then, to balance belligerent moral enthusiasms.

There is of course a long-standing set of objections to tying financial assistance to advice education and development. The alliance between international aid and

governance initiatives is readily characterised as one that serves the interests of the powerful western nations. For instance, international legal decisions made in the name of universalistic human rights principles have been characterised as means to serve the interests of the powerful western nations. As Douzinas puts it, human rights have become 'the new morality of international relations, a way of conducting politics according to moral norms and rules' (2003: 161). Human rights are used to justify 'humanitarian wars and interventions, in the sanctions imposed upon states to protect people from their own governments and in the increasing criminalisation of politics' (ibid). These 'new just wars' are defended in terms of 'the idea of an emerging cosmopolitan order, which brings together legality and morality under the promise of perpetual peace' (ibid.: 173). But western liberal democracies do not have a monopoly on moral absolutes. Nor does the moralisation of politics resolve conflict. Groups identified by faith, culture and ethnicity can reject moral arguments made in the name of a common humanity by asserting the absolute imperative to defend their community.

There are equivalent limits to the extent to which reference to universal moral principles can solve political and cultural conflicts within nations. Political and legal decision-makers have been faced with common dilemmas, in different national contexts, about how far they can accommodate or indeed encourage cultural, ethnic and religious diversity within school communities, while meeting their duty of care to children. Parents, as members of minority cultures, ethnicities and faiths have defended their right to determine their own values and those of their children (see Hunter and Meredyth 2001). However, the parent's right to privacy can be countered by the child's claim to choice. The right of a culture to self-determination must be balanced against the individual's right to exit from that culture, for some purposes, and be treated as a citizen like any other.

In the western liberal democracies, governments have tended to resolve these issues by acknowledging the political role of cultural groups as advocates and lobbyists, and sometimes conceding the separatist argument for faith-based or indigenous schooling. However, they have sought to protect the public school systems from divisive confrontations between rival moralities. Within the school, so the usual policy and legal understanding goes, the child should be treated in the capacity of citizen (or potential citizen) rather than as a soul, a representative of a culture or a member of a religious community. Faced with the potential for civil violence, states are no longer indifferent to the beliefs and activities of private associations, cultural groups, faith-based movements and their members.

Recently, we have seen quite heavy-handed efforts, on the part of governments, to assert an authoritative core of national values and universal liberal democratic principles, to be recognised by all reasonable citizens. This is explicitly discussed as a response to the rise of incivility and of social tension, often attributed to the social effects of immigration and the emergence of separatist communities identified by culture, ethnicity and faith. Reforming governments seeking to

rebuild a civic culture of tolerance and inclusiveness have found the means to hand in the classroom and school community: frank discussion and public debate can be used to air these differences and find consensus. But despite the stress on public reasonableness, those who advocate campaigns to rebuild civic values are not afraid to draw limits to pluralism and tolerance. Rather, they are prepared to state that some conceptions of right and wrong fall beyond the scope of civil disagreement and reasonable dissent. Those who hold to these views and impose them on their children can reasonably be asked to give up their allegiances to ways of life that are irreconcilable with the fundamental principles of liberal democracy. They may be persuaded to change their views; if not, they may have to accept that the political community is prepared to protect its core values and adapt their conduct, at least, to this realisation.

There are two things going on here. On the one hand, civic values and attitudes are being politicised. On the other, politics – and the political status of citizen – is transformed into a matter of morality, belief and allegiance. What is at stake in this remoralisation of politics? To explore this question, we turn first to recent citizenship education initiatives in Australia and the United Kingdom.

2. Values and the exercise of authority

Australian education in citizenship has recently taken a turn to values. The Commonwealth government has funded a new initiative, the Values Education Study, designed to elicit from parents, teachers and students their views on the 'values that the community expects Australian schools to foster' (Curriculum Corporation 2003; Ferres and Meredyth 2001). The initiative builds on a decade of policy and educational activity and on a twenty-three million dollar investment in establishing civics in all the state education systems, making sure that all Australian students 'learn about Australia's democratic heritage and the values underlying it, including equality, liberty, fairness, trust, mutual respect and social co-operation' (Nelson 2003). Some teachers, noted Brendan Nelson, federal Minister for Education, 'mistakenly believe their role to be neutral'. But 'our children should know right from wrong'.

The great challenge for education, and increasingly the expectation of parents, is for it to transfer to children not only the ability to learn and acquire skills for an increasingly complex world. It is also to assist in the building of character. Ralph Waldo Emerson asserted 150 years ago that 'character is higher than intellect'. Aristotle saw character as the amalgamation of virtues, described by Benjamin Franklin as the prerequisite for the enjoyment of freedom. That is, each of us needs to know right from wrong and act accordingly if we are to enjoy freedom. When we do not, the price we pay is legislated loss of freedom... Passing laws is all well and good, but it is an exercise in futility if individuals have neither regard for laws nor respect for those who enact them (Nelson 2002)

The statement neatly summarises some important recent trends in Australian public policy: a populist emphasis on community will as the basis for attacks on elites, public servants and professionals; appeal to community and to self-government; and willingness to make American versions of liberalism a reference point for Australia.

The startling element in the comment is the assertion that freedom and security are at stake in civic education. Citizens' conduct is liable to be so uncivil, and the rule of law is so unstable, that legislation is an exercise in futility. Citizens must govern themselves through a foundation in common values: right and wrong. Evidence of the problem? It is in the classroom, playground and sports field: police in the school, students with machetes, bullying, parents abusing the referee. The state cannot be expected to solve such problems through legislation. Nor can it be expected to manage them more indirectly, through the mediation of school discipline, ethos and the expertise of teachers. Instead, community must be marshalled: parents have a high stake in making sure that teachers do not abrogate their responsibility to teach what we all know is right and wrong.

Ten or even five years ago, the comment would have been startling in Australia, not only in its rejection of relativism (or secularism in state schools), but also in its apparently archaic concerns with character (White 1999). Not so in the United States. There, 'character education' is a rallying point for Christian educators dissatisfied with the liberal pluralistic elements of the national civics standards, arguing that they fail to assert an authoritative core of national values (Center for Civic Education 1994, Stotsky 1994, Vont 1997). Character Education has a strong popular and institutional base, from which American educators have launched international missions, extending to Eastern Europe, China and other nations (International Education Foundation 2003). US-funded civics agencies have formed alliances with various international donors and agencies, in efforts to accelerate modernisation, introducing both market liberalism and liberal democratic values, while preventing these unstable areas from exploding into civil wars between rival ethnic and religious minorities, no longer restrained by punitive state actions against private civic associations (Frazer 1999).

The Howard government's turn to values in Australian education is not simply a matter of a socially conservative government seeking to undermine the teaching profession, to introduce Christian values into the schools, to raise security alarms or to promote fundamentalist liberalism (though it may be all these things). The important point is that the focus on citizens' limited capacity to control themselves actually helps to highlight the limited capacity of government to intervene in social conflicts (Hindess 1996).

Liberal democratic governments are well aware of the dangers of intervening too directly in either economic or civil life, in part because these domains are

understood as properly self-governing, operating according to their own rules. Intervention is best achieved indirectly, through the institutions, agencies and personnel of social life and pastoral care at the local, domestic and personal level. Responsibility for civic and moral formation is devolved to educational experts, to teachers -- and increasingly to parents and school communities. Where there is evidence of more ambitious governmental efforts to intervene in patterns of private choice and civil (or uncivil) conduct, this can be taken as evidence of a loss of confidence in such liberal settlements. At points where a crisis of some sort calls for direct intervention by political decision-makers, by police or the law, it is possible to hear reason of state arguments articulated. Active citizenship, as a political recipe for change, is in part a recognition of government's limited capacity to intervene and alter conduct and choices.

To make the point more clearly, it is worth comparing Australian directions in citizenship education and community values taken by the Blair government, a regime with an apparently very different political agenda. Here, the concern with security and social unrest is more explicitly linked to racial tension and the effects of immigration.

3. Civic commitment and moral detachment

Civic education has been phased into British schools since 2000, becoming a compulsory element of the curriculum in September 2002. According to the national standards for stage 3 Citizenship Education outlines by the English Department for Education and Skills, pupils in years 7 to 9 should be taught about the structure of legal and human rights and responsibilities, basic aspects of the criminal justice system, central and local government, public services, parliament, the electoral system, the role of community groups and conflict resolution. They should also be familiar with 'the diversity of national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom and the need for mutual respect and understanding', about 'the world as a global community, and the political, economic, environmental and social implications of this' (DfES 2002).

The new curriculum has been controversial. In contrast with other European members states, such as France, Britain has not had an educational tradition of civic education. Although there have been recurrent proposals for political education, school systems have focused on indirect moral and civic education, through English, History, Geography and Social Studies teaching and through sport and other forms of moral education (Davies 1999). The liberal constitutional political traditions of the UK have made a civic republican emphasis on the rights of citizens foreign: the British were reared to regard themselves as subjects of the Crown or the Empire, rather than as citizens collectively forming a republic (Lister 1998; cf Davidson). While there has been a post-war interest in promoting 'active citizenship', patriotic ceremonies and republicanist models of civic virtue have been regarded as having the 'whiff of the continent' about them (Lister 1991, Carr and Hartnett 1996, Edirisingha and Halford 2000: 33-34).

The 1998 report of the Advisory Group on Citizenship, chaired by Sir Bernard Crick made a strong case for change (1998). It was responding, in part, to the imperatives of European unionisation. The European Union has devoted considerable funding to civic education, professional development and local community-building projects across member states (European Commission 1998, Osler and Starkey 1999). Part of the aim is to build cosmopolitan recognition of both universal human rights principles and specifically European traditions, while recognising distinct national cultural heritages and educational approaches. More broadly, civic education and cultural exchange is seen as a means to address problems common to the European nations: civic apathy and low levels of trust within cultural majorities, as well as a breakdown in social bonds, due to the xenophobia associated with immigration and resettlement (see Council of Europe 2003, Holford and Edirisingha 2000). Lifelong civic learning, in schools, work and private life, is expected to spin a 'stronger and more inclusive social fabric' while 'achieving greater economic competitiveness and prosperity' (Holford and Edirisingha 2000: 1). Schools will be able to draw on the resources of faith-based organisations and powerful civic associations, to open civic dialogue, manage negotiations and secure consensus on liberal democratic values.

The aim of the new citizenship education in the UK is to adapt British education to European unionisation and to cultural changes linked to immigration, multiculturalism and the recognition of multiple allegiances within a multi-national state. British citizens, the Crick report argued, need to be more familiar with the civic traditions particular to all four component parts of the United Kingdom, with European, Commonwealth and global dimensions of citizenship, including the traditions of minority communities. Citizenship education has the potential to resolve class, ethnic, national and regional tensions. Schools should promote the conception of a common European cultural heritage, in which national cultural traditions are merging in a universalist understanding of democratic principles as recognised in international treaties. But they should also teach the imperatives of pluralism and tolerance.

The Crick report placed a strong emphasis on non-denominational spiritual values as a foundation for a civic life free of sectarianism and racism. But while emphasising the need to recognise cultural diversity, it stressed the dangers of relativism on questions of core values. Governments can legitimately aim to resolve class, ethnic, national and regional tensions through the school system. But they must also use the school systems for common moral and civic purposes, to make each individual into the kind of person who is responsible for his or her own personal and moral development and own commitment to common citizenship. They must do so even at the risk of offending minorities. While religious toleration and cultural pluralism are important, a common national identity must be secure before pluralism can be achieved (Crick 1998). It is the job of the school system to achieve this security, through civic commonality.

The position combines elements of the communitarian focus on community consultation and dialogue with a liberal emphasis on the civil virtues (Levinson 1999, Macedo 1991, Galston 1991, Gutmann 1987). Liberal democracies become fragile if there is no shared public morality. All citizens must acquire the liberal virtues: open-mindedness, self-restraint and respect for the rights of others. This means developing intellectual, if not moral detachment, from their own cultures, group affiliations, and conceptions of the good. This detachment is fundamental to the non-sectarian nature of the liberal state. It should be balanced, though, by the willingness to make informed judgements on public affairs and to engage in debate (Levinson 1999). The democratic solution to cultural clashes is to make them the focus of critical discussion for the students themselves, making the classroom a place to learn and display informed moral choice and 'public reasonableness' (cf. Gutmann 1995).

While a number of key stakeholders and citizenship experts have welcomed the national curriculum, it has also been seen as a vehicle for social conformity and moralism (see Fraser 1999). Critics have seen national citizenship education, both in Britain and Australia, as undoing decades of work by educationists who have engaged, in their teaching, with political and cultural identity and resistance (e.g. Gilbert 1996). Those who have been marginalised need to think politically as members of cultural groups and classes: they need to see the public domain as a place for struggle and contestation, one in which individuals have unequal status, power and resources. The obstacle to this is the liberal assumption that each individual can and should be responsible for his or her own personal and moral development and civic commitment, through the processes of public debate and critical dialogue. Even if it is accepted that political institutions are founded on core liberal and democratic principles, and transparent to critical reason, how much is it asking to make all citizens capable of detaching themselves from their own cultural and religious allegiances, on the basis of this rational recognition? Should all children really be required to engage in classroom debates on culturally sensitive or religious issues? Apart from the discomfort this might cause them or their parents, the frank and open discussion of customs, beliefs and commitments is as liable to provoke cultural tension as to calm it (see Singh 1998).

Given the current British government's emphasis on community decision-making, within the stakeholder society, these are difficult complaints to counter. In programmes such as the New Deal for Communities and initiatives on social exclusion, the government has promoted civic values, community decision-making and consultation, based on a 'new type of partnership between civil society and the formal political arena' (Edirisingha and Halford p. 39). Parents have been encouraged to become stakeholders and decision-makers in an increasingly privatised school system. On the other hand, if parents and communities are given too much power, can education authorities be sure that they will not teach cultural sectarianism? Parents can and have made the case

that their children should be inducted into their family's customs and beliefs, rather than being reared by the state in values that are anathema to the community from which they come. But if states surrender their authority to parents, then they lose their most effective means to ensure that citizens learn mutual respect for one another.

These thorny problems have been thrown into sharp relief by recent events in the UK. In late 2001, David Blunkett, the Home Secretary, instituted efforts to make citizenship applicants pass tests for language and civic comprehension, take a formal oath of allegiance to the Queen and pledge to uphold democratic values and respect for human life. New immigrants must demonstrate the ability to speak English, Scottish or Gaelic to a certain standard. The proposals generated surprising support from the progressive media for 'radical action' to address 'the perilous state of race relations' and 'civil disorders' within 'a community fragmenting along social, ethnic and religious lines' (The Guardian 2001).

This reaction was a response to riots 'involving large numbers of people from different cultural backgrounds' in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham during the summer of 2001 (Community Cohesion Review Team 2003). A series of Home Office reports identified 'deep polarisation and fragmented communities living parallel lives' (2003) Northern English towns were retreating behind ethnic lines: 'Separate educational arrangements, community and voluntary bodies, employment, places of worship, language, social and cultural networks, means that many communities operate on the basis of a series of parallel lives'. These 'legitimate choices to be separate' may lead to isolation. Government programmes must therefore counter 'enforced choices', while countering the 'ignorance which may be associated with completely divided or segregated communities', across the majority white community, black, Asian and other ethnic minority groups. The review argued that existing efforts to tackle 'disadvantage and disaffected groups' tended to 'institutionalise the problems', reinforcing division and a perception of unfairness. Area-based regeneration had reinforced the separation of communities. What was needed instead was for government to lead 'an honest and open national debate'. From this a consensus on clear shared values would emerge. The responsibility would then lie with community leaders, schools and local governments to build on these core values, promoting greater understanding through cross-cultural contact. The result would be a reduction in incivility and intolerance and the consolidation of social solidarity and a common civic culture, based on the core values of cultural pluralism.

As in the Australian values education campaign, schools and school communities are charged with the responsibility for building these core values and for hosting frank and open debates on questions of right and wrong. Under new statutory responsibility to promote respect and cross-cultural understanding, schools 'would not be afraid to discuss difficult areas'. All schools in the UK would be expected to meet their 'demanding responsibility' to address cross-cultural understanding while building loyalty to the common civic culture and the Nation.

In some cases, this might mean reducing the euro-centric and Christian emphasis in the curriculum. But it might also mean that other forms of monoculturalism, including faith-based schooling, would have to adjust to integration: one proposal would have all schools, including Anglican schools, limiting their intake from 'one culture or ethnicity', offering at least a quarter of places to other cultures or ethnicities within the local area, in the interests of 'religious tolerance and understanding'.

The solution is consistent with liberal philosophical advice from civic educators, concerned with how to balance a universalistic appreciation of fundamental principles, based in critical reason, with the pragmatic need to educate children as future citizens of 'separate sovereign societies'. Civic induction into national traditions makes moral sense, Amy Gutmann has argued (1995), because sovereign states retain a role, as political actors, in 'bringing about better or worse conditions for its own citizens as well as other people significantly affected by its policies'. Civic life can be engendered on a local scale, without neglecting the imperatives of world politics and global justice, if children are taught the universal principles of human rights, tolerance and justice by coming to 'respect those closest to them'. However, sovereign societies are also within their rights to set limits and thresholds for what can and cannot be tolerated. It may not be possible to achieve settlements between groups who advocate the right to determine the values and beliefs of their children, including the right to reject liberal freedoms and the liberal virtues of tolerance and reasonableness.

This robust emphasis on the hard choices liberal democratic states must make is one resource for understanding why it is that national governments are prepared to make such direct and authoritarian interventions into curriculum and pedagogy, installing common and compulsory character training and core values within their school systems. Nevertheless, the danger of the current policy emphasis on making citizens 'disciplined for virtue' is that of losing the liberal distinction between politics and moral community. The state is 'no longer the keeper of the public domain, but the pastor of 'our' commonality, our shared norms and values'. (Koenis 1997 in Basten and van der Veen 2000: 96). What has been lost is the sense of the citizen as an individual who occupies a definite and limited status: not a moral individual, but an individual 'who happens to act sometimes within political systems' and who requires the competence to do so effectively (Basten and van der Veen 2000: 111).

Such examples of the problems associated with remoralising politics are an uncomfortable reminder of how incomplete and uncertain the liberal democratic settlements in the west are. To understand why states are turning to such clumsy solutions, and risking the accusation of moral authoritarianism, we need to place these rationales in a broader context, understanding International and national civic education campaigns as driven as much by concern with security as by certainty about universal liberal or democratic principles.

4. States, security and pastoral concern

Concerns with security and with civil peace no longer seem as foreign as they might once have done to domestic discussions of curriculum, educational planning and relations between schools and parents. Given lingering anxiety about the safety of everyday life in Australian and British cities, it may not be surprising that governments are exerting their prerogative to insist on the inculcation of common values through the school system, or to give up a careful indifference to 'imbalance' in faith-based schooling. It may be that they can calculate on a general electoral understanding that some freedoms must be sacrificed in the interests of the security and peace of all. This is by no means certain though. Citizens of western liberal democracies are still unaccustomed to hearing direct articulations of reason of state rationales for incursions on civil freedoms. Nor are we used to thinking of education as the legitimate concern of the state as a state. Arguably, we are more used to states that keep at a distance, offering intermediary bodies like the local schools or councils as the face of social governance. Nevertheless, Western states have a shared resource, in political thought, for explaining the legitimacy and limits of their authority, both within and outside their territory. This includes ways of understanding the relationship between state, territory and citizenship that bear little relation to cosmopolitan principles of universal human rights based in critical reason and autonomy.

Following recent scholarship in the history of political thought, we can understand Western liberal democratic settlements as part of the historical process of deconfessionalisation, or the establishment by absolutist states of a form of governance based on the relationship between administrative states and their citizens rather than on supra-national bonds between members of a confession or moral community. In the post-Westphalian settlements, modern administrative states defined themselves by setting limits to their own actions: limits to the extent to which they could intervene in one another's territory in the name of religion, and limits to the degree to which states would concern themselves with matters of religion and conscience within their own borders. The establishment of a public domain indifferent to the private life of conscience helped to defuse sectarian passions. The state, it was clear, was not 'the pastor of 'our' commonality'. Civil society emerged as a domain of private association and communion, with which the state need not be concerned unless security and civil peace were under threat (Hunter 2001).

The connection between civic formation and security is long-standing. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, western states made the calculation that an educated population was more valuable to the state than an uneducated one, and that an ignorant and illiterate one was positively dangerous to civil peace. Looking for means to form citizens, they found the means to hand in both Catholic and Protestant scriptural teaching and spiritual discipline, which had emerged from rival campaigns by the confessions to educate lay populations,

promoting both literacy and moral discipline. In Prussia, for example, Pietist pastoral schools provided the reforming state with models of school architecture, spiritual supervision and means to inculcate the capacities required for self-government (Hunter 1994). Adapting these teaching techniques, but stripping them of their doctrinal religious elements, the early German states developed mass school systems designed to make the population literate, civil, healthy and capable of governing itself. Pastoral techniques of spiritual guidance were yoked to state-based administration. These techniques of pastoral discipline and civic formation were extraordinarily influential. The moralising architecture of the classroom was adapted and exported by pioneering educationists in the mid nineteenth century, remodelling British education and spreading from there to the new mass popular education systems of America and Australia (Hunter 1988, 1994, Meredyth and Tyler 1993). Drawing on the close pastoral relationship between teacher and student, and on the moralising link between school and neighbourhood, the new education bureaucracies were able to link intimate knowledge of the individual, through play, discussion and self-expression, to large-scale campaigns to levels of literacy, numeracy and health. Nation-building states were able to use school systems to build both skills and 'habits of the heart': civic disposition such as the capacity to reason one's way, through dialogue, to a recognition of principles of justice, drawing on examples from one's life.

Such an account, which treats both liberal freedoms and the capacity to exercise them as artefacts of government, is antipathetic to the current emphasis on what is universal in human potential. Advocates of 'world citizenship' and universalist approaches to citizenship education have been able to point to success in developing models of democratic deliberation and public reasonableness. This is perhaps not surprising: the western nations have, in their school systems and civil associations, powerful instruments of civic formation, moralisation and the securing of consensus. Historically, the moral and civically formative influence of popular schooling was a key element in the expansion of democratic political life. Not only did mass literacy make it possible to have an informed citizenry, but it became possible to claim that education could and should provide a common and minimum plateau of preparation for civic life – and should provide equality of opportunity for social and vocational advancement. As mass education has expanded, both within and outside the modern west, it has been claimed as a universal human right based in the capacity for reason and self-determination and therefore irreducible to the limited status of citizen, the claims of nations on loyalty and allegiance or the interests of states in civic capacity and security. Nevertheless, schooling is still something that happens under the aegis of territorial states – even when it is undertaken by private schools, cultural groups or religious organisations, or by crusading international civics agencies.

5. Self-limiting government

During the last fifty years, states' direct interest in civic formation has been less explicit, partly because they have been able to assume that schools and (increasingly) school communities and parents have taken up the task of building a common civic culture. The current increase in direct efforts to secure consensus is in part a panic response to the pressures of internationalisation, and mass immigration. No doubt the relationship between nation state and citizen is a 'conspiracy against the rest of the world', as Hindess has put it (1995, 1996), one in which nation act to protect members and to maintain standards of living within the polity, protecting those within from those without. They act, to recall Gutmann's phrase, to secure 'better or worse conditions for their citizens'. But faced with unstable borders and apparently endemic cultural, ethnic and faith-based tensions, states have a limited range of options. They cannot afford to be heavy-handed or to take on too much responsibility for maintaining civil order, especially if their reach is not long enough. On the other hand, deferring the responsibility for civic formation to communities themselves is a weak strategy. In asserting that the political community must be refounded on a common moral basis, governments risk giving up on one of their key historical responsibility – to maintain the distinction between politics and morality. In invoking the power of community, governments are at risk of exposing their own incapacity to maintain key liberal settlements.

In focusing on the moral community and the citizen as a moral being, civic enthusiasts risk obscuring the definite and limited historical achievements of liberal democratic politics. Because of liberal settlements that establish the state's indifference to matters of conscience, moral belief and faith, public decision-making looks to the law and political decision-making for neutral adjudication on difficult matters of public morality, rather than to the voice of 'the community'. We have also established limits to the influence of interest groups and communities on public school systems, making exceptions, within limits, for faith-based schooling. These systems depend on delicately balanced liberal settlements that maintain regulated freedoms and supervised self-direction. Regard for the rule of law and respect for those who enact laws cannot be made compulsory, though the capacity to understand the issues and their context can be required in a mass compulsory school system. Stipulating core values may be an exercise in futility – to recall the Australian education minister's phrase – if it results in heavy-handed interventions in delicate settlements on which life in liberal democracies depends.

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