

**THE RIGHT TO ADULT EDUCATION OR ADULTS' RIGHT TO EDUCATION?
A FRAMEWORK FOR A FAIR AND JUST POST-COMPULSORY EDUCATION**

by

Andrew Pulvermacher

B.A., University of Calgary, 2007

B.Ed., University of New Brunswick, 2009

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in

The College of Graduate Studies

(Education)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Okanagan)

February 2022

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The following individuals certify that they have read, and recommend to the College of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis/dissertation entitled:

THE RIGHT TO ADULT EDUCATION OR ADULTS' RIGHT TO EDUCATION? A
FRAMEWORK FOR A FAIR AND JUST POST-COMPULSORY EDUCATION

Submitted by Andrew Pulvermacher in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts.

Dr. Christopher Martin, Okanagan School of Education

Supervisor

Dr. Lynn Bosetti, Okanagan School of Education

Supervisory Committee Member

Dr. Catherine Broom, Okanagan School of Education

Supervisory Committee Member

Dr. Tristan McCowan, Institute of Education, University College London

University Examiner

Abstract

For adults, education ought not be conceived of as a system of common beginnings, common waypoints, and common ends. In this thesis, I engage in ideal theorizing to defend a fair and just conception of education in a pluralistic democracy, inclusive and supportive of adults' own widely varied and equally worthwhile reasons for participation. In chapter one, I analyse current frameworks of lifelong learning and adult education, determining that both are premised on insufficient aims for a fair and just system of post-compulsory education. They engage in ideological circularity, viewing education as providing chances at success and promoting distribution of it according to adults' supposed deservingness of additional chances and the assumed concomitant external, labour-market rewards. In chapter two, I show how conceptual analysis at the intersection of political philosophy and philosophy of education can help conceive of Rawlsian principles of justice that ought to scaffold a system of public post-compulsory education for adults. I determine that when we recognize adults' substantive status as full and equal citizens, we arrive at two principles that support a framework of educational justice as fairness. In chapters three and four, I substantivize these principles, determining that the kind of equality this framework underscores is not defined by supposedly measurable *outcomes* of equal social position, but by the *matter* of an education compelled by the equal liberty assured by citizens' equal political status in society. Therefore, first, I propose the conception of relational autonomy required to substantiate citizens' equal liberty in a pluralistic society. Second, I show that in a pluralistic democratic society, equal liberty arises from a social ethos in which citizens support each other's mutual recognition, self-respect, and dignity in a society of equals. Without the liberty to shape and reshape who we are, we cannot be said to be free, and it is through citizens' shared interests

in ensuring this liberty for each other that we establish a sense of belonging in a shared and pluralistic civic community. Finally, in chapter five, I discuss the potential distributive implications of this framework for state-level policy, post-compulsory educational institution-level policy, and just relational practices for teaching adults.

Lay Summary

In this thesis, I aim to understand why existing systems of post-compulsory education and the principles of justice that support them are insufficient and unjust for adults. Extending from this analysis, I offer a philosophical perspective on what a fair and just system could look like and the principles of justice that it would need to uphold were a society to desire educational justice for its citizens. I argue that in a liberal democracy we must recognize adults as free and equal citizens. When we do, we realize that they are owed access to an education that supports their own interests, the criteria of which cannot be overridden by the state's or other actors' social, moral, political, and/or economic interests. This education ought to be available to adults throughout their lives as their ideas of what constitutes a good life are determined, defined, and redefined.

Preface

This thesis is the original, unpublished, and independent work of the author, Andrew Pulvermacher.

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Acknowledgements

This thesis exists because many people helped to make it possible and shaped what it has become. First, I would like to thank my supervisor, Christopher Martin. From the first email exchanges we had before beginning my studies, I've appreciated your support, enthusiasm, and dialogue. Through every hesitation, doubt, and uncertainty I experienced in my studies, research, and writing, you've encouraged me to trust my ideas and challenged me to do more than just trust them, given me space to be wrong and to sort it out, and remained understanding when I enthusiastically over-committed and wore myself out. In one sense, sure, that probably describes the scholarly process and the mess it needs to be before it all starts to be clear, but in another sense, I don't think such a process is possible without a great mentor.

Thank you, also, to the rest of the committee: Catherine Broom, Lynn Bosetti, and Tristan McCowan. Catherine, it has been my fortune to work with and learn from you while reading educational theory and in this project; I only wish I had more opportunities. Lynn, you teach and lead with authenticity, humour, and humility, and you inspire me to do the same. Tristan, I recall in the first months of my studies saying to Chris how much I admired and appreciated your philosophical perspectives, and I'm honoured that you are a part of this project.

Thinking is shaped into ideas and perspectives through conversations, and I'd like to thank Mark Button, Sasha Johnston, Jake Kennedy, Summer Li, Jesse Olafsen, and Warren Sookocheff for remaining friends with me even though I would not stop talking about the arguments I was piecing together. I'm not sure whether it's the case that no friends or only friends ought to suffer that, but either way I'm grateful you all did. Thank you, as well, to all

of my graduate colleagues who brought new perspectives and pushed my thinking further, and a special thanks goes to Kyle Hamilton for all of those engaging philosophical discussions about society, politics, education, and democracy.

Life is full with a family and work commitments, and I'm grateful for the supports I've had along the way that have allowed me the freedom of time to pursue graduate studies. Okanagan College provided me professional development leave through a year of studies. I'm also thankful to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for the financial support afforded by Canadian Graduate Studies Master's Award and to the University of British Columbia for the Graduate Fellowship.

And, most importantly, thank you to my family, Josephine and Corinna. I know that in order for me to do this, both of you have given so much. Josephine, thank you for bringing joy to this tired Papa. Corinna, thank you for picking up the slack and for being my second pair of editorial eyes, chapter after chapter. I have asked too much, yet you always found ways to make it happen anyway. I know that, I appreciate it, and love the ways that we are there for each other.

To my mom for creating space for me to really *be*
and teaching me to give others space to do the same.

CHAPTER ONE: Widening the Distributive Scope of Adult Education

Introduction

Public education is typically seen as a feature of democratic nations—a vehicle for cultivating functional and growth-oriented societies. In this sense, education is upheld as the most efficient and effective path towards better jobs, and thereby better lives for everyone. In this thesis, I will argue that seeing education merely in terms of its social and economic benefits to society is a narrow way of thinking that has contributed to many of the problems we are seeing in education systems today. In particular, I will focus on how this narrow conception impacts adult education. This way of thinking constrains what education *can be* for adults and also places expectations on those systems that are unreasonable to hold both parties accountable to.

Why should we allocate limited educational resources to adults? I see this as a question about the aims of education, and specifically, what and whose aims have the greatest value and worth within education. I think it is a particularly germane question to ask, given adults' increasing access to and participation in public post-compulsory education in liberal democracies. And I believe our answer to this question will reveal that the current, dominant rationale for the provision of adult education is mistaken, and potentially unjust in its implications.

Part of problem stems from the reasons we think that adults have for getting more education, and the policies and incentives that draw them to an adult education. For example, if we look to Canadian media, it seems that adults are participating in lifelong learning to retrain for higher-skilled jobs; they are responding to changing labour markets in order to

better contribute to the new knowledge economy.¹ If we look to adult educationalists for evidence of what is driving adults' participation, adults do so in order to lift themselves out of poverty, to create better opportunities for upward social mobility; that is, they participate to “learn themselves” out of socioeconomic precarity and unemployment.² The trouble is, these reasons narrowly conceive of educational attainment as instrumental to achieving social and economic benefits. These are socially valuable outcomes that often result from participation in education, but is that all an education for adults is and ought to be?

Of course, education *can* be instrumental in securing these social and economic interests and rewards, and participating in education often has positive socioeconomic status benefits for those citizens who do further their education (and, of course, many adults are motivated by these goods, too).³ Certainly, scholarship, practice, and policy ought to acknowledge these external rewards in theorizing about what is valuable to society in education; however, I want to show that, together, these conceptions of adult education and lifelong learning produce a kind of “ideological circularity.” By this I mean that they are motivated by their own reasons and to achieve their own ends, detached from principles of justice that prioritize adults' own self-determined, intrinsically motivated reasons for participating in education in the first place.

When scholars look to *those* reasons, there is a non-ideological basis for adult education as fundamental to liberal democracies. These are reasons why any adult could want

¹ See, for example, Stackhouse (2018) Press (2019), and Young (2019).

² As I elaborate below, see Powley, Kennedy, and Childs's (2005) analysis of lifelong learning and adult education policy in Canada. Ian Martin (2003) refers to adult education as distinct from lifelong learning because it is “social purpose education” that is necessarily social activism for those who are disadvantaged. See also Catalfamo (2018) for an analysis of a government-sponsored retraining program.

³ Tristan McCowan (2015) draws a similar clarification in his normative analysis of employability aims in universities.

to participate in an education that is itself responsive to and supportive of them better realizing their vision of a good life. And this means all adults have mutual reasons to support this system of education in a society of equals—because a society cannot be said to be a free democracy if only some of its citizens are free to pursue a good life. I believe a philosophical perspective can help us separate out what is the essential and nonoverridable criteria of education for adults, why it ought to be a basic feature of liberal democratic societies, and how it might be structured. As such, considering adult education from a philosophical standpoint offers a renewed perspective to better understand its most vital role in society, realize implications, and develop principles that ought to scaffold a fair and just framework for post-compulsory education.

But before getting into the philosophical details, and making a positive argument, I need to first defend my earlier claim that existing policy, scholarly, and practical frameworks of adult education are insufficient in addressing this problem. I will do this in three steps. In section one, I analyze the brief conceptual history of lifelong learning and the current state of adult education. In section two, I show that even where conceptions of adult education assert different aims, they fall into the ideological circularity of lifelong learning. Finally, in section three, I show how concepts and arguments from political philosophy and philosophy of education can help us conceive of a justifiable, non-ideological basis for education.

I. A Conceptual Analysis of Lifelong Learning and the State of Current Adult Education

Within the context of Canadian policy, the research report outlining the development of a pan-Canadian adult education policy framework produced by the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) (Powley, Kennedy, & Childs, 2005) acknowledges that an unclear definition of adult education as a key issue/limitation in coordinating policy (p. 45), and many provinces (including British Columbia, where I reside) have no formally recognized definition (p. 19-23). Consequently, “no province or territory has unique legislation that specifically supports adult education” (p. 23). The report also acknowledges that the concept of lifelong learning and the concept of adult education can conflict.⁴

In this section, I will use an approach called conceptual analysis⁵ to show that the use of the term ‘adult education’ is logically connected to the idea of lifelong learning, and the measurable success of adult education’s social purposes depends on its success in human capital production. If this is the case, while the literature appears to define distinct theories with different means, their common ends may betray their greater similarities.

K.H. Lawson (1982), analyzing the concept ‘lifelong education’, which he clarifies is synonymous with the more recent term ‘lifelong learning’, defines it as “less of a concept of education and more as a policy *for* education” (p. 44). By this he means that 1) where such policy embraces the mere act of learning as one and the same as education, this represents a

⁴ For example, as I will elaborate below, Ian Martin (2003) expresses the contrasting and conflicting human capital purposes of lifelong learning as being at odds with the social purposes of adult education.

⁵ Winchester and Manery (2020) underscore the value of conceptual analysis as a scholarly method in contemporary educational research to clarify what we mean by the concepts we use and their logical implications.

weakening of the concept of *education*; and, 2) where this policy does not depend on any particular concept of education, it lacks clarity in what it intends to promote.

Extending Lawson's analysis to my purpose helps show the limitations of the narrow concepts of LLL and adult education as learning for employment. For example, a policy promoting that people can and do learn throughout their lives as the bedrock of 'advanced' society suggests that education and job training are equivalent. It assumes that job training is sufficient to count as educationally worthwhile. While each of these endeavours can be said to be good for those who wish to engage in them, it is at the same time unclear how education and training are exactly the same thing. A conceptual shift towards lifelong learning might involve a shift towards narrowing the value of an education, as Lawson shows, and specifically to the social, political, and economic goods and benefits of learning as I claim—that learning is something adults can do to better contribute to society. In other words, what counts as educationally worthwhile for adults are only those things that are also economically beneficial *for society*.

Taking Lawson as a starting point, in this section, I first analyze the term 'lifelong learning' (LLL) and show how the use of this term narrows of the value of education to its strictly instrumental goods for policy purposes as distinct from theory conceptualizing the nature and scope of education that accounts for its wide-reaching aims, values, and purposes *for adults* (which may include their interests in the instrumental, human capital goods that it provides). I close this section by drawing connections between lifelong learning and the current state of adult education.

Lifelong Learning

LLL generally underscores “that people can and do learn throughout their lives” (Nesbit, 2006, p. 16). It is an umbrella term that takes on varying and complex definitions, and as a result, the CMEC report recommends the following comprehensive definition: “The development of human potential through a continuously supportive process which stimulates and empowers individuals to acquire all the knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and understanding they will require throughout their lifetimes as individuals, citizens, and workers” (Powley, Kennedy, & Childs, 2005, p. 7). Of course, such a comprehensive definition helps frame the broad-reaching concept of LLL; however, a historical overview of the concept’s emergence and its changing, era-defining conceptions will help illustrate that despite its broadness—or perhaps because of it—policies and practices that draw from the concept are often ideological in their uses and purposes.

Kjell Rubenson (2006) as well as Rubenson and Judith Walker (2006) provide a helpful historical overview of the ideological shifts in LLL in what they refer to as “the political project of lifelong learning” (p. 328 and p. 173, respectively). The first generation of LLL emerged as ‘lifelong education’ in the 1970s, within a liberal, humanistic tradition—particularly as promoted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)—advocating social equality, personal development, and civil society. It represented a call to reduce educational gaps in society and informed educational policy aimed at helping people to adapt to and affect change in post-war society (Lengrand, 1975; Dave, 1976). This first generation establishes what Dave (1976) refers to as a transnational “master concept” of education, inclusive of “formal, non-formal and in-formal patterns of learning throughout the life-cycle of an individual for the conscious and

continuous enhancement of the quality of life, his own and that of his society” (p. 11).

Clearly concerned with post-war social change, Paul Lengrand (1975), as I summarize below, offers tenets which continue to define LLL (granted, with differing priorities and emphasis); for example, it

- includes not only formal, structured education but informal and non-formal education, resisting categorization of knowledge structures, and treats all learning as interdisciplinary
- responds to the constant, rapid, and accelerating changes in the world—life, society, culture, and ourselves—seeing the physical, intellectual, and moral universe of ‘today’ as vastly different from ‘yesterday’
- supports demographic change related to population growth, increasing demand for education, increasing lifespans with medical advancements, understanding all to mean the function and nature of education must change to meet the expansion
- keeps pace with scientific and technological changes, expressly concerned with labour and employability
- fosters new relationships between citizens and government which embody the different political, legal, and social institutions, as well as the changing social class structures of post war society
- responds to new forms of media and access and availability of information.

(abridged, pp. 27-39)

As Rubenson (2006) clarifies, the first generation of LLL offered an educational vision that prioritized fostering agency in people. Within this conception, learning is valuable when it helps citizens actively respond to and create change in society in all aspects of public life.

The economic uncertainties of the late 1980s—rising unemployment, declining productivity, and increasing public deficits—brought about the second generation of LLL policy, particularly for member countries of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Conceptions of LLL became increasingly tied to the development of human capital, and de-emphasized individuals' democratic agency and self-worth as educational priorities (Rubenson, 2006). Thus, according to the second generation, learning is valuable when it responds to the needs and interests of the free market. Rather than staying with the first-generation conception of individuals learning to how to be proactive in society, this conception of LLL engages individuals in responding to the demands of society.⁶

By the early 2000s, the conception of LLL shifted yet again to its current form. This third generation shares similarities with the previous in its emphasis on human capital production; however, rather than viewing issues of social and economic circumstances as matters LLL could resolve for individuals, as was understood in the previous iteration, this generation is distinguished by the shifting of responsibilities and burdens for economic realities *onto* the individual.

Instead of those social priorities relating to individuals learning or cultivating independent agency, “the current promotion of lifelong learning, with an emphasis on adult

⁶ Thus, to my point about ideological conceptions of education, what begins to appear is a distinction whereby the first generation of LLL is a construction of the social liberal welfare state and the second and, as we will see, third generations are constructions of free-market liberalism and neoliberalism, respectively.

learning, signals a deconstruction of welfare through a reconstruction of citizenship as the responsibility of an individual to an economic agenda” (Rubenson & Walker, 2006, p. 173). This is representative of a political ideological shift to what is referred to as the Third Way discourse (Bastow and Martin, 2003; Martin, 2003).⁷ This generation also appears to situate ‘adult learning’ specifically within the umbrella of LLL, and according to the CMEC report (2005), it comes to bear the same political and social problems as a result. Thus, emerging policy within this generation frequently emphasizes individuals as responsible for learning that benefits state and economy (Mayo, 2018). In other words, following this conception, individuals’ engagements in learning amount to the fulfillment of a duty to society and state narrowly valued in terms of measurable economic contribution; in essence, their learning is worthwhile when it leads to better jobs and supports a more advanced economy.

Is the concept of LLL sufficient? There is little doubt of the influence LLL has had on all levels of education. Certainly, it represents a well-intentioned effort to develop an expanded ideal of education—one that has value throughout life. But it has unintended negative consequences. In this section, I show that LLL advances a conception of education as 1) mere learning 2) delivered through programs that are a public burden 3) intended for learners who are fulfilling their duty to society and state. These three features fail to do justice to the idea of education as a public good.

⁷ Ian Martin (2003) describes the Third Way as “essentially about the radical restructuring of the welfare state and the hitching up of social and educational policy to the imperatives of economic policy,” following which lifelong learning was being described as human resource development, and “wherever possible welfare is related to work (defined as income generation rather than human care and creativity), and work is the means by which citizens must learn to get by without welfare” (pp. 567-568).

1) Education as 'Learning'. To begin with, the all-inclusive nature of the term as one spanning all ages of students, all forms of education and learning, and all of the related purposes, aims, interests, and products of it, poses conceptual, theoretical, and practical challenges. Reiterating Lawson's concern with a lack of conceptual clarity of education embedded in LLL policy that opened this section, Tuijnman and Boström (2002) suggest that its wide-ranging definition actually evades conceptual clarity, posing challenges to theorizing and policy. In other words, where the concept includes all possible notions of learning, it becomes impossible to theorize distinct value in any one form of learning as opposed to another, let alone conceive of education as something distinctly more valuable than this constituent part. For example, we might think of learning as coming to know how to tie one's shoelaces or we might think of learning as engaging in a scholarly conversation that shapes others' and our own notions of what constitutes an education; both are valuable learning processes, yet to conceive of both as indistinguishable merely because both represent learning does little justice to the legitimate value of either. Therefore, to say that what matters is that citizens engage in learning throughout life, without clearly distinguishing between possible concepts and forms of learning, and the substance of that learning, is to state a truism so general that it carries little meaning beyond what it means to be alive. Without specificity, learning is not a concept but merely a vague act; it loses all conceptual gravity.⁸ It makes for easy policy to promote and enact, unburdened as it is by substance.

2) Programs as Public Burden. It seems as if each generation of LLL becomes increasingly ideological, placing greater onus on adult participants to accept responsibility

⁸ In his conceptual analysis of learning, Israel Scheffler (1965) affirms this in showing that, indeed, learning can happen by accident, and does not suggest a process that necessarily results in something valuable being learned.

for their own educational circumstances. For example, Ian Martin (2003) explicates LLL as a political (in the ideological, party-politics sense) rather than educational discourse. Related to my interests in making a case for a conception of education for adults, I understand him to mean that LLL is not concerned with the aims and values of education as determined by individuals (as wider ranging than, and perhaps overlapping in, economic interests), but rather the ideologically—and, more specifically, economically—instrumental value of what might loosely be called ‘learning’. Following this thinking, providing public access to adult education is only warranted when it is also in the state’s economic interests. As a current example, in response to the collapsing fossil fuel industry, the state has stepped in to offer retraining for the new clean industry to adults who have lost their jobs. This retraining, however, is only warranted because of the perceived economic value of retraining these adults, while those adults’ own intrinsic interests beyond mere employment are largely beside the point.

The current framework of LLL appears to parallel popular media and common assumptions about adult students that portray them as un- or under- employed, who through poor educational choices have left themselves without the skills to be (economically) resilient, and, to return to Mayo’s (2018) earlier point, places emphasis on individuals as responsible for their educational circumstances. In short, they have done it to themselves, and it is socially burdensome but economically necessary for the rest of society to help them transition to new employment. This involves a shift from the earlier approach, which posited LLL as a means to help citizens cultivate the agency needed to be *responsive* to the economy, and instead suggests that they should engage in LLL in an ongoing effort to build skills for resiliency in the labour force, as is their *responsibility* to the economy. Tuijnman and

Boström (2002) elaborate this by stating, “[t]he lifelong learning framework implies a shift in responsibility not only from the state to the world of work and the civil sectors of society, but also from the state to the individual,” and furthermore, with emphasis on learning rather than education, “[t]he individual is at the heart of a lifelong learning ‘system’, and the realisation of lifelong learning depends to a large degree on the capacity and motivation of individuals to take care of their own learning” (p. 102-103). Taken together, the implication of LLL is that adults are *responsible for* their own learning, meaning adults are *at fault for the circumstances of* their learning.⁹

3) Learners Fulfilling Their Duty to the State and Society. This may seem a subtle linguistic shift in phrasing from earlier generations. However, the implications are much broader-reaching than the plain accountability the rephrasing might be understood to imply. For example, adults engage in education for a variety of reasons. In the case of adult basic education, common assumptions about adult students include that they are where they are as a result of poor choices and a lack of accountability—the result of having failed, dropped out, or underperformed in K-12 schooling; that is to say, adults’ educational accomplishments or failures are merely the product of individual achievements or shortcomings. Additionally, while in the simple sense, it may seem natural, just, and good that students take ownership of their learning, where learning and economy are seen as inseparable, this actually establishes a claim that unemployment (and underemployment) is the fault of the individual rather than a fault in the market (Rubenson and Walker, 2006), or the system of education itself, for that matter.

⁹ For an example of this framework in practice, see the United Kingdom’s higher education policy document, “Students and the Heart of the System” (Great Britain & Department for Business Innovation, and Skills, 2011).

By consequence, such a conception of education as mere learning threatens to transfer, especially in a globalized, market-oriented context, educational responsibility to students, who must increasingly pay for service and for quality (Powley, Kennedy, & Childs, 2005). If the reason why you cannot get a job is because you failed to take advantage of these forms of educational opportunities early in life, so this line of thinking goes, you should be the one who pays for second-chances and retraining, not the public.¹⁰

This linguistic shift in phrasing, therefore, reflects a principle. It positions the individual as having failed to adequately invest in ‘the knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, and understanding they will require throughout their lifetimes as individuals, citizens, and workers’ (to return to the CMEC definition). As a result, LLL emerges as a charitable venture on the part of the state: the state is generously accommodating the shortcomings of its citizens.

As the brief historical overview reflects, lifelong learning has become a catchphrase within the politicized agendas of learning, and particularly adult learning. It has come to do so at the expense of functioning as a useful term for capturing and expressing a conception of education as something valuable and worthwhile *for citizens* throughout life. As this latter point is emphasized by Mayo (2018), this conceptual and discursive shift from ‘education’ to ‘learning’ renders the whole enterprise one of consumption rather than of public good.¹¹

¹⁰ There exists a body of literature addressing the kind of second-chance policies I refer to here. For further insight, see argument for second chances in education in Alexander Brown’s (2006) “Equality of Opportunity for Education,” and argument challenging the merits of second-chance conceptions in Simon Mackenzie’s (2008) “Second-Chance Punitivism and the Contractual Governance of Crime and Incivility.”

¹¹ Israel Scheffler distinguishes between mere learning and the educational act of teaching as follows: teaching signifies intention and is based in reasons and critical dialogue to bring about rational judgement in students; learning is incidental and defines a process of picking up new skills, procedures, and abilities. Thus, to conceive of education as mere learning is to simply focus on attainments of skills, procedures, and abilities, rather than “the formation of propensities and traits, and the development of understanding and appreciation” (1965, p. 9-21).

Interestingly, this again gives context to the media narrative surrounding adult learning that opens this paper: one concerned only with skills training, retraining, and developing Canada's 'knowledge-based economy' as the justification for more opportunities for lifelong learning.

II. Ideological Circularity

Having demonstrated the kind of instrumentalism promoted by the concept of lifelong learning and its lack of conceptual clarity, especially as it fails to distinguish learning from education, I now turn to alternate conceptions of adult education. Although adult education is often conceptualized within the broader framework of lifelong learning,¹² some conceptions of adult education actively appear to oppose the concept of lifelong learning. However, I will argue that they do so by forwarding their own ideological conceptions of what adults' educational participation is for, and that this creates an ideological circularity constraining conceptions of education to chances at employment success.

Ian Martin (2001) suggests that LLL is explicitly instrumental, resulting in a 'depoliticized vocabulary', by which he means that it makes no reference to the ways in which the practice of educating adults constitutes social activism, having the potential to create social justice for disadvantaged citizens. He continues his point determining that LLL is at odds with the "unashamedly political discourse of social purpose adult education [...

¹² André Grace (2013) provides a thorough analysis of the ways in which adult education is theorized within and outside of lifelong learning, particularly in North America. Specifically, readers interested in the impacts of globalization and neoliberalism on adult education and lifelong learning policies will find his work useful in the way that he looks to expand the notion of lifelong learning beyond its economically instrumental purposes to include social and cultural learning.

and is] at best indifferent, and at worse hostile, to the notion of adult education as a dissenting and visionary vocation” (para. 9-10). As an adult educator myself, I know this perspective dominates the field, and indeed, I relate to his sentiment that many adults participating in education experience significant injustices in their lives and schooling. However, I am not convinced that setting our educational sights squarely on injustice actually leads to a more just education, even though I think it is fair to say that he and I both want to work toward that same end.

A brief review of adult education literature in Canada shows the prominence of this conception of adult education. Two prominent scholarly collections surveying the field, compiled by the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education, outline such concerns: *Contexts of Adult Education: Canadian Perspectives* (2006) and *Building on Critical Traditions: Adult Education and Learning in Canada* (2013). It is worth noting that the introductions of both texts position the body of literature within in relation to LLL. In the case of the former, Nesbit (2006), declaring to be writing on behalf of the association of authors within, forwards that LLL “is too limiting” in that it is “individually focused,¹³ acontextual, and adopted a little too readily by those who believe that education entails adherence to, rather than challenge of, social orthodoxies. In contrast, adult education is more straightforward and inclusive” (p. 16). He adds that because “all adults’ lives differ, learning and education are highly context specific” and adult education “best describes the

¹³ Although Nesbit does not clarify what he means by ‘individually focused’, taking into account his other writings about the conceptual distinction between adult education and lifelong learning (Nesbit, 2013) and a review of these two collections by Budd Hall (2016), I believe Nesbit here is asserting a critique of individualism and, as he sees it, the socio-political move away from valuing the collective goods of social action, a common criticism of neoliberalism. Thus, I understand this to constitute criticism of the current, third generation of lifelong learning I address in the previous section and to insinuate a return to what I have expressed earlier as the UN model of lifelong education.

professional and practitioner commitment to Canada’s long-term educational and societal development” (p. 17). In his introduction to *Building on Critical Traditions*, Nesbit (2013) reiterates the same but adds clarity in defining adult education as a discourse of practice where LLL is a discourse of policy (p. 10-12). In other words, adult education theorizing must be politicized (following Ian Martin’s assertion above) in the way that it reflects a resistance to persistent concepts of LLL and Third Way discourses in adult education, and to do so, this theorizing defends “critically informed and politically engaged” pedagogies (Collins, 2006, p. 119).

This theoretical position establishes a claim that the key aim of adult education should rightfully be to generate socioeconomic equality. I believe this aim is well-intentioned, but it simply relegates onto adults’ education another kind of instrumentalism—in this case, social and distributive justice understood as the priority of ‘levelling the playing field’ for the disadvantaged.¹⁴ And, by doing so, it shares more similarities with concepts of lifelong learning than distinctions from it. This is because levelling the playing field must mean defending adults’ educational interests on grounds of the valuable economic rewards it can lead toward.

Allow me to elaborate. Of course, I do not deny the importance of those sociopolitical perspectives and contexts emphasized in adult education theory as identified above—indeed,

¹⁴ To be clear, although I use contemporary Canadian adult education literature to exemplify my point, this notion of levelling the playing field and lifting people out of poverty as a central aim of adult education is not contained only there. For example, while critiquing adult basic education’s currently narrow emphasis on workplace development as more than employment, Belzer and Kim (2018) emphasize that other skills like literacy are the key because they have various social benefits, which, taken together, may more effectively generate economic well-being (broadly inclusive of health and civic engagement). Furthermore, adult education literature frequently focuses on disadvantage through contextualizing barriers for participation: see, for example, Busher, James, Piela, & Palmer (2014); Harden (2008); Hyland-Russell & Groen (2011) and Sissel, Hansman, & Kasworm (2001).

such sociological theorizing is essential to understanding the very real, relevant, and consequential circumstances of adults participating in education and the ways in which this will help shape a more just society; however, my point is that without basis in a fair and just conception of education for adults in the first place, both LLL and adult education justify educational provision as a means to the same extrinsic ends: ‘undereducated’ or ‘underemployed’ adults must receive an education in order to better contribute to society in narrowly economic terms; in the case of adult education, this is because in order to realize the objectives of upward social mobility that motivates theorizing, adults must be able to realize greater employment after their educational participation. Otherwise, adult education as practice cannot be defended on the grounds of creating upward social mobility. Thus, LLL and adult education both substantiate the same human capital account of educational goods. Only, adult education can be understood as a movement within LLL to reinvigorate the social justice interests of the first generation, UN model of ‘lifelong education’. But this does not change the fact that they are both motivated by the potential *outcomes of* rather than *the matter of* an education. In each case, adults are being treated as mere means to some other public good.

Nesbit’s clarifying distinction above—that LLL is a discourse of policy whereas adult education is a discourse of practice—invites me to realize that there is another distinction that ought to be made which has so far been neglected in the literature: we ought to have a clear conception of a fair and just education for adults in the first place. It will help us define what is particularly unjust about some adults’ educational participation and experiences. I see this conception as distinct from a deficit-principled notion of education merely for gains in economy or employment or a deficit-principled notion of education as a vehicle through

which societies can achieve their goals of righting social and distributive injustice;¹⁵ rather, a fair and just education for adults understands education as valuable and worthwhile to adults for their own sake.

III. Conceptions of Education Are Not Arbitrary

In this section, I distinguish adult education and lifelong learning from an education for adults. I believe that this distinction is essential to setting out a just, fair, and non-ideological conception of education because, as Kenneth Lawson (1982) notes, even in response to the earliest iteration of LLL, “‘lifelong *learning*’ [...] might be seen as a weakening of the concept of *education* [emphasis mine]” (p. 45). By this he means that these policy concepts suggest a certain structure and organization of education (or learning) throughout life that takes for granted what an education is, and may even screen out things that we think are educationally important. Allow me, then, take heed of Lawson’s analysis and establish my own claim of what constitutes an education specifically for adults.

¹⁵ Readers interested in critical literature about deficit models in current adult educational policy should see the following: Judith Walker (2009) interrogates the worthiness of access to and participation in lifelong learning; Judith Walker and Suzanne Smythe (2019) examine recent policy changes in adult basic education in British Columbia, Canada and its framing of adults citizens as deserving and undeserving of second-chance educational opportunities; and, within higher education drop-out literature, Brian Godor (2017) examines the significance of student drop-outs, the rates of which are often used to motivate institutional supports addressing assumed student deficits, and reframes them as intentional acts, not passive consequences, in response to social deficits that express in exclusionary institutional cultures.

What is an education? R.S. Peters's formative conceptual analysis of education, contained in *Ethics and Education* (1966), is useful here.¹⁶ Peters attempts to determine the criteria that an activity must conform to if it is to have educational value or worth. Peters identifies the following criteria of education:

- (i) that 'education' implies the transmission of what is worthwhile to those who become committed to it;
- (ii) that 'education' must involve knowledge and understanding and some kind of cognitive perspective, which are not inert;
- (iii) that 'education' at least rules out some procedures of transmission, on the grounds that they lack wittingness and voluntariness on the part of the student. (p. 45)

To clarify and elaborate, in the first criterion, Peters does not mean education must occur via 'transmission' in the sense of the 'banking model of education' (Freire, 2000); he means that education occurs via an exchange, a negotiation between a teacher and a student who has an interest, perhaps emerging even where there may have been no initial appeal.¹⁷ Thus, it is the student who finds the activity worthwhile.

¹⁶ For example, in the field of philosophy of adult education, Lawson (1979) works directly with Peters's conception of education in formulating his own definition of what makes it for adults, which is distinguished by what is taught, how it is taught, and how it is organized; he also returns to Peters's criteria to expose how the problem facing adult education research is that it does not qualify education as justifiably adult (1985); R. W. K. Paterson (1979), as I will elaborate below, analyzes the normative concept of adulthood to distinguish adult education, following Peters's criteria, as an education that is intrinsically valuable to a person who is an adult.

¹⁷ Peters elaborates on this by stating, moulding or growth models of education, which impose patterns, "share a common defect: that of regarding the educator as detached operator who is working for some kind of result in another person which is external to him" (1966, pp. 51-52). Relating this point to his further two criteria, for Peters, such an education fails to do justice to the value and worthwhileness of what is studied and to the criteria of education as "the initiation of others into a public world picked out by the language and concepts of a people and in encouraging others to join in exploring realms marked by more differentiated forms of awareness" (p. 52). Education is an invitation for students to shape their own thinking, to engage fully in the specific and unique exchanges (like discussion and deliberation or scientific method) of a given discipline, and to contribute and participate in refining what matters most to them within that realm.

In the second criterion, Peters clarifies the process of becoming educated as more than mastering a skill. More than simply being trained to complete tasks, or merely attain knowledge, an educated person comes to understand the reasons behind that knowledge and the purposes and uses of that knowledge and is able to see and place it within its broader contexts and disciplines. Bringing these concepts together, the educated person develops a cognitive perspective of the world—that is, a rich understanding of the field of knowledge and a comprehensive understanding of both their perspective within it and its wider roles in the world—and the way knowledge and understanding influence an educated person’s interactions with the world. This Peters refers to as a ‘wholeness’ that amounts to a widening of perspective through acquiring specific knowledge and understanding (p. 31-32).

And, following his third criterion, education is an engagement negotiated with the student (not in the sense of what constitutes knowledge, but rather what is worthwhile), and so it must be voluntary and participatory rather than a presumed goal judged valuable on behalf of the student by the educator, the state, or a political agenda. In other words, this criterion of education defends it against instrumental valuing of education by other parties. Instead, it defends a non-instrumental requirement: judgements about what is valuable and worthwhile in an education are open to be determined, defined, and reasoned by the student. In my view, this criterion rules out the instrumentalism of LLL in the strong sense and of adult education in the weaker sense.

Peters’s criteria of education offer clear distinctions between education as a “wider system of beliefs” and training as the “development of competence in a limited skill or mode of thought” (p. 32-35). The aims of education in this sense are broad and of direct intrinsic value to the student, and they may *and likely do* also impart extrinsic value to the student as

well: for example, employability, socially valuable knowledge, and upward social mobility. Skills training or retraining, however, imparts a narrowly extrinsic set of aims: skill(s) acquired in order to be performed in relation to a specific end or mode of thought. The link between acquisition and use is direct, limited, and possibly even singular in application.¹⁸

I imagine some tension when distinguishing between education and training. The work of this thesis on the whole is to develop a framework for public post-compulsory education informed by a conception of education for adults, and one might wonder if this framework is exclusionary of certain training-oriented programs. Allow me to address this concern, but note that I respond to a more forceful version of this objection in chapter four. First, it is worth noting that this is a conception of education, and training is certainly an element of education.¹⁹ Second, my point is not that job training cannot meet Peters's criteria; it is that a system of post-compulsory education cannot be built on job training alone.

Paterson (1979), in his philosophical analysis of adult education, agrees with Peters's conception of education as a set of criteria rather than a particular aim or goal. He emphasizes, perhaps as a restating of Peters's notion of wholeness, the intent implicit within an educational activity to foster human potential of each individual: it "enables people to really *be*—live more intensively and extensively, to manifest in themselves a higher quality of life, to live more abundantly" (p. 10).²⁰ Interestingly, his vision clearly parallels the

¹⁸ I do not mean to suggest there is no place for training within a system of education; rather, I am urging that an education is constitutively more than training. In this sense, it is notable that a notion of education as mere training suggests a challenge that an argument for lifelong learning and ongoing access to skills (re)training would need to overcome, particularly to make the case that it is a public good; such limited and likely short-term value in a rapidly changing economy would seem to imply that it only necessitates more ongoing retraining in the future. And, with respect to the economic case motivating this line of argument, this appears to reveal a significant inefficiency in public spending.

¹⁹ For more on the distinctions that can be made, see Peters (1966, pp. 32-35).

²⁰ For clarity, Paterson here is referring to the abundance of a life implicit in a fulsome pursuit of a one's vision of a good life, not in a materialistic sense.

humanistic ideals of the first-generation, UN model of lifelong education—agency, personal development, and enhancing civil society—yet, in his Petersian account, I understand him to be squarely focused on the intrinsic goods of human flourishing—that is, what helps citizens realize *their* best selves—as the principle matter of an education, which for me represents a departure from even the earliest notions of lifelong learning.

Particularly appealing in his definition is the sense of possibility he elicits in what an education can be for. Paterson expresses education as something of intrinsic value to those who pursue it, and this comes before any instrumental good. In this sense, education feeds the roots of our personal identities; it shapes and enriches our humanness, and this is its intrinsic value: “whatever the detailed ways in which the concept of education be given practical currency, it is not with the means but with the *ends* of personal existence that education is essentially concerned” (p. 10). What matters is that participants own reasons are respected. This means that, for example, for some participants, education will be for human capital, for others it will be for social capital, and for others still education will be for its own sake.

It may appear to follow that education is individualistic, that it carries little value or significance beyond its value and significance to the educated person; however, this is not the case: “An activity directed to the full development of persons is pre-eminently an activity which, among much else, is bound to nourish our potentialities for creative and responsible social living and our capacities for realistic fellowship” (Paterson, 1979, p. 12).²¹ That is to say, as I understand his point, the very concept of education denotes the fostering in people

²¹ For those interested in more response to the notion of the concept of education as individualistic, see Peters’s response to this and to interpersonal relationships (1966, pp. 55-60).

of their greatest holistic potential, and in recognition of education as this kind of a collective good, it nourishes a creative, responsible society with a greater capacity for pluralism.

What makes an education categorically for adults? Having set out what I take to be essential to education, one might ask how an education for children might differ from one for adults. Many educational theorists and philosophers of education have identified conceptual issues within the field of adult education. Of course, I have already illustrated this in the narrow concepts of LLL and adult education theory, yet the conceptual issues also extend to the very notion of an adjectively *adult* education, too—an education that is itself uniquely adult.

On account of this categorically ‘adult’ distinction, Brian Taylor and Michael Kroth’s (2009) meta-analysis scrutinizes the legitimacy of andragogy as an art and science of teaching adults separate from pedagogy in general. They conclude that it cannot yet be considered as legitimately akin to pedagogy because it lacks the fundamental characteristics of a science, in part due to its resistance to consistent definition and its variable interpretations, and so cannot be effectively empirically measured as a distinct practice and form of education (pp. 7-8). For example, a central andragogical assumption is that adults are self-directed—as in, they have clear self-concepts and prefer independence in learning (Knowles, 1970, 1980; Taylor & Kroth, 2009)—yet while this might be true in many or even most cases, to determine this as an assumption guiding the art and science of teaching all adults neglects to account for the fact that some adults may not prefer this kind of education, let alone find it valuable at all. Therefore, if not all adults want or prefer self-directedness in

education, including this as a basic andragogical assumption undermines the legitimacy of andragogy as a science of educating all adults rather than only some.²²

The ambiguity of what makes education categorically for adults, exemplified by the assumption of self-directedness, exposes the need for philosophical analysis—work largely neglected in the contemporary field of adult education.²³ Following Peters’s conceptual analysis of education in the context of adults, it is clear the criteria of what constitutes an education do not change between children and adults, and in my view, this reflects Taylor and Kroth’s concern; however, while the criteria are not distinguishable between children and adults, the *implications* of adults engaging in an education are distinct from children. It appears that the differences are mainly empirical and developmental, not a difference in the conception of education. For example, if I take an interest in studying rocketry, there will be differences in the knowledge I gather based on the extent of my existing knowledge, and there will be differences in the manner in which I study based on my age, skills, and abilities, but the criteria determining whether or not I am engaging in a process which can be called educational will not change.

In other words, what constitutes an education as being distinctly ‘adult’, as I have alluded to above, has do with the fact that one can ascribe attributes to characterize adults. Adult education theory as practice, probably quite rightly, does just this. Adults can be

²² Readers interested the ambivalence of this andragogical assumption, and how philosophical analysis can help clarify it, should see Kruszelnicki (2020).

²³ Elias & Merriam in *Philosophical Foundations of Adult Education* (2005) confirm that only Lawson and Paterson have engaged in analytic philosophy of adult education, both of whom did the bulk of their work in the 1970s and 1980s (see pp. 201-215). I would, however, like to acknowledge here that Christopher Martin’s forthcoming philosophical analysis of education in adulthood, *The Right to Higher Education* (2022), and his case for citizens’ political entitlement to it on liberty-maximizing grounds, will become foundational to my own theorizing in subsequent chapters.

characterized according to, for example, age; maturity; physiology; life experiences and circumstances; social norms; rites of passage (religious, belief system, and/or cultural ceremony); social roles; and/or in the context of formal education, educational attainment. These potential attributes represent one element of developing an account of ‘adulthood’: the sort of measures societies impose to determine one’s having become an adult; however, other matters of adulthood are the behavioural, cultural, social, and legal implications and responsibilities that come with the status of being an adult.

Thus, even though there may be no singular characteristic or attribute that alone classifies a person as adult, there exist unalienable benefits and burdens implicit in the status of being an adult citizen. There is something distinct about adulthood, and this has implications for education (if varied in application, method, and/or theoretical value to the practice of educating adults).

Lawson (1985) states that “In seeking objective characteristics of adulthood, there is always the problem of distinguishing between what is universal and what is culturally determined” (p. 41). In other words, with so many factors that each on their own, or perhaps any one in correlation with some other factor, contribute to determining a definition of adulthood, formulating a narrow conception is insufficient. Perhaps the complex challenge of defining what is relevant to adulthood is what leads conceptions of adults’ education to rely on arbitrary markers of adulthood. But this challenge ought not be understood as implying there is no way to characterize adulthood; it expresses that any formulation ought to be inclusive of a complex interaction of factors.

Paterson (1979) also acknowledges that many factors contribute to the recognition of adulthood as a stage of development but emphasizes that *status* is what constitutes adulthood

rather than narrowing measures and factors that can be attributed to one's becoming an adult. As such, he sees this status as

a *normative* concept [that] enshrines valuations, priorities, estimates of regard. Enfolded within the concept of 'status' there are all kinds of prescriptions and prohibitions, licences and requirements. In particular, a person's status comprises the ethical requirement that he act in certain specific ways and be treated by others in certain specific ways—and indeed the precise specification of these ways in large measure yields the precise specification of the status he enjoys. To be an adult, then, is to possess a certain status, with inherent proprieties and forms of comportment, inherent obligations and rights. When we consider someone an adult, we consider that there are distinctive compliances, modes of respect, which he may rightfully demand of us, and that there are natural dispositions, qualities of concern, which we may rightfully demand of him. (p. 3)

Patterson gets at the matter of substance in his status-conditioned conception of adulthood as being what is relevant to conceiving of education for adults. Indeed, this concept of adulthood as status can sufficiently categorize an appropriate education from the seemingly often conflated, practice-related matter of adult educators responding to the needs of the particular adults they are working with and those adults' particular circumstances, experiences, needs, and so on. This contributes clarity to the concept of education that has been neglected in the field of adult education. It defines a conceptual relationship between adults and education.

Furthermore, conceiving of education on account of the implications that the status of adulthood bears on it, I believe, says something about the fundamental right adults *qua* adults have to access and participate in a system of post-compulsory education. This is what motivates my theorizing about education for adults, and what signals the importance of constructing principles that can provide the foundation of this theoretical framework, to which I will turn.

Conclusion

When we accept the notions of education implicated by lifelong learning and adult education, we can only envisage non-ideal theories²⁴: lifelong learning as the burden of the state to make up for the shortcomings of its un- or under- employed citizens; or, adult education as a strategy to address social injustices. Merely aiming to right injustices does not constitute a claim about what justice in education for adults ought to be, however necessary and important those aims are. In the absence of a more general account, notions of adult education risk lapsing into ideology. However, I believe that we can theorize an education of intrinsic good for adults, and do so in such a way that is inclusive of these overlapping extrinsic goods and presumptive benefits. Part of this is determining what education means more generally, and then how this applies to the situation of adults.

²⁴ Ideal and non-ideal categorizations are expressions of a methodological debate in political philosophical theorizing that generally refers to a given theory's ability (or interest in) guiding action in real-world circumstances (Valentini, 2009, 2012). On the one hand, ideal theorizing often assumes full compliance in duties and obligations (i.e., how things would ideally function as intended), less constraint on feasibility (i.e., it is idealistic), and/or aims to identify an ideal end-state (i.e., social perfectionism). On the other hand, non-ideal theorizing often assumes partial compliance, more constraint on feasibility (i.e., it is concerned with real-world circumstances), and/or focuses on transitional improvements of the state. While the debate often provokes dichotomies, Valentini (2012) instructs that it might be better understood as a spectrum where the level of ideal is more a matter of theoretical aims and the questions the theory seeks to answer (p. 660).

But my initial analysis also suggests that key to this will be a conception of justice as fairness that is 'non-ideological'. In other words, a framework for a post-compulsory system of education for adults does not just advance a concept of education categorically for adults, it takes into account a broad range of benefits and goods that are valuable and worthwhile for those adults who engage in it, and to society as a result. Rather than a response to injustice, adult education must be partly founded on an argument about what constitutes a fair and just education for adult citizens, valuable in its own right and valuable throughout their lives.

CHAPTER 2: Principles of Justice in a Theory of Education for Adults

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I showed that adult education theorizing is ideologically motivated. Its justifications are contingent on party platforms and their social (and particularly economic) agendas, as I exemplified in my explication of the concept of lifelong learning. Following that educational framework, adult education is a response to socioeconomic contexts of injustice, wherein the system of education—and the students and teachers in it—have a hand in resolving or righting these injustices on behalf of and for the benefit of society. Such instrumentalism aims to use education as a vehicle to bring about socioeconomic equality for disadvantaged citizens, who have in one way or another been left out or have fallen behind preconceived notions of educational attainment, and where what is attained is merely positional goods that produce narrowly economically valuable outcomes. But is that all an education for adults amounts to? Is there a way to determine what adults are owed in terms of an education that is non-ideological in the sense I described in the last chapter?

I think that answer is ‘yes’. When we embrace the more substantive, non-ideological Petersian conception of education for adults, I think we uncover mutually agreeable reasons of justice for all adults to support citizens’ fair access to post-compulsory education. Therefore, in this chapter, I engage in normative reflection at the intersection of political philosophy and philosophy of education (to borrow wording from Culp, 2020). It elucidates the limitations of the existing frameworks for educational justice. More importantly, it guides development of principles that can advance a theoretical framework of education for adults that finds justification in justice and fairness as the foundation of liberal democracy. Thus,

the issue I address here is fair access to educational resources, and in liberal democracies such egalitarian theorizing is often motivated by the foundational political philosophy of John Rawls and his theory of ‘justice as fairness’. His theory defines impartial procedures, principles, and standards for determining justice in and through fair and democratic social institutions that comprise the basic structure of a ‘well-ordered society’.²⁵ In addition, philosophers often apply his theory to the ‘internal workings’ within social institutions like education (Schouten, 2012), including, for example, curriculum (Costa, 2004; Levinson, 1999) and resource allocation (Schouten & Brighthouse, 2014).

Unlike these authors, however, I apply Rawlsian ideal theorizing in order to develop a normative account of educational justice *for adults* through the procedural construction of the original position. By ‘Rawlsian ideal theorizing’ I mean theorizing about what a fair and just education ought to look like in a perfect liberal democratic society—but before I expand on this and why it matters in our real and imperfect societies, let me first explain how this theoretical approach works.

The original position is a construct whereby the theorist remains behind the ‘the veil of ignorance’—meaning they imagine the principles of justice that a group of citizens would agree to if they did not know their social position in society (i.e., they could be the most well-off or the least well-off or anywhere between), nor their particular comprehensive doctrine

²⁵ For Rawls, this is a society founded on a fairness conception of justice: “justice as fairness starts from within a certain political tradition and takes as its fundamental idea that of a society as a fair system of social cooperation over time, from one generation to the next. This central idea is organized around two companion fundamental ideas: one is the idea of citizens as free and equal persons; the other is the idea of a well-ordered society as a society effectively regulated by a political conception of justice” (1993, pp. 14-15). By ‘political conception’, he is contrasting a comprehensive doctrine; in other words, rather than a homogenous society comprised of one comprehensive doctrine, the political conception of justice assumes ‘the fact of reasonable pluralism’ in a society that is comprised of many different comprehensive doctrines that can come together to find overlapping consensus on political justice when they come to see each other as free and equal citizens with shared interest in the political stability that comes from fair social cooperation (see pp. 150-154).

(as I will elaborate later, their deeply held worldview or idea of what a good life looks like)—in order to realize principles of liberty and equality in a society defined by fair social cooperation between free and equal citizens (Rawls, 1993, p. 22).

This helps form a conception of justice without being restricted by particular and present real-world constraints. For example, if a citizen behind the veil knows that there is socioeconomic inequality in society but does not know what side of the divide they will find themselves on, they will be more likely to adopt a principle of justice that emphasises a role for the state in looking after the least well off.

However, this should not be understood to imply that real-world injustices do not have important place in theorizing;²⁶ rather, the purpose of an ideal theory is to remove self-interest and construct a non-biased representation of what is reasonably possible assuming all citizens in this ideal society agree to and fully comply with the principles of justice appropriate to the theoretical issue.²⁷ What results is not a conception of educational justice specific to my particular circumstances of injustice, nor to you given yours. Instead, by not centering theorizing on any one person's or social group's circumstance and identity, including my own, I am able to think about what a conception of educational justice *ought* to be in the interests of all in a well-ordered society.

Allow me to clarify how ideal theory can be understood as distinct from—but not necessarily in contrast to (because they can be complementary)—non-ideal theorizing. The

²⁶ I will elaborate on this below, but for those interested in the valuable role real-world injustices (and as philosophers refer to them, non-ideal circumstances) play in this form of ideal theorizing, see Winston C. Thompson (2015).

²⁷ Rawls refers to this as the full-compliance—or strict compliance—assumption: see Rawls, 1971 [1999], pp. 123-130.

latter takes as its starting point present obstacles of injustice in the ‘real world’.²⁸ To illustrate this distinction, take, for example, the case of theorizing adults’ educational justice: on the one hand, a non-ideal theory aims at reforms to resolve injustice(s) present in already-existing educational systems, such as how adults’ complex life circumstances affect participation in education; on the other hand, an ideal theory aims to determine what a just education for adults ought to look like *in the first place* according to the values, principles, and standards of justice in a liberal democracy.

What is required, then, is set of principles that can reliably guide the development of a non-ideological theoretical framework—that is to say, one mutually agreeable to all reasonable citizens. To construct these principles, I first ground theorizing in John Rawls’s political philosophical principles of ‘justice as fairness’. In section two, I examine existing political philosophical principles of justice in education, identifying key claims for which the ideal principles of justice guiding the theory of education for adults should also take into account. In section three, in light of the particular circumstances of *post*-compulsory education and adults’ status as citizens, I describe and defend the relational principles of equal liberty and treatment that will guide the theory of education for adults. And, finally, I conclude with considerations about the implications of these principles that motivate theorizing post-compulsory education for adults. With stable principles of justice in place, an ideal theoretical framework can begin to take shape, providing non-ideal theorists a metric that can help them better define how circumstances are not ideal in present contexts of

²⁸ See Rawls, 1971 [1999], pp. 215-216. For those interested in further distinction between the uses and purposes of ideal and non-ideal theorizing in education, see Harry Brighouse (2015). Applying Rawlsian theory to the case of race in education, Winston C. Thompson (2015) provides a clear analysis of how ideal theorizing can support non-ideal theorizing in the development of what he calls formative justice.

education, and affording policymakers a standard by which they can develop just policies for education for adults.

I. Principles of Justice in a Pluralistic Liberal Democracy

I articulate and defend a conception of education for adults grounded in the political liberal theory of John Rawls. In particular, I work with Rawls's 'justice as fairness' as developed in two of his foundational texts: *Theory of Justice (ToJ; 1971 [1999])* and *Political Liberalism (PL; 1993)*.

ToJ represents the original formulation of his theory, which he continued to revise throughout his scholarly career, and *PL* represents a substantial revision of his theory in light of what he often refers to as 'the fact of reasonable pluralism' in liberal democratic societies. The distinction between these two texts turns on what *ToJ* assumes is a society that shares a common 'comprehensive *liberal* doctrine' versus what *PL* assumes is a pluralistic society

comprised of many different ‘comprehensive doctrines’.²⁹ Thus, I first discuss the fact of reasonable pluralism and then turn to political liberal principles of justice.

The Fact of Reasonable Pluralism in an Overlapping Consensus

In *PL*, Rawls ideally theorizes in context of a society inclusive of citizens with different and rival comprehensive doctrines but who share common interests in political stability. Basically, these citizens have different ideas about morality and the good life, but they want to get along. The stability is generated by a political conception of justice not justified in term of any one comprehensive doctrine but from citizens’ overlapping reasons to support that political conception, notwithstanding their deep differences in worldview.³⁰ That is, this political conception ought to be mutually agreeable to all reasonable citizens according to each their own worldviews.

Allow me to explain the significance of the idea of overlapping consensus to educational theorizing. In a pluralistic liberal democratic society, it would be unreasonable

²⁹ Rawls explains the distinction between a ‘reasonably pluralistic society’ and one defined by a ‘comprehensive doctrine’ as follows: first, the pluralism Rawls takes as given would describe a liberal society comprised of many distinct religions and cultural groups. Within each of these groups, ‘reasonable’ citizens will have distinct moral views about right and wrong, good and bad, and God and faith, and these will give shape to different conceptions of what constitutes a good life, a valuable and worthwhile life, which taken altogether are what he calls a comprehensive doctrine (see, for example, 1993, pp. xvi-xvii and 175). Second, Rawls defines reasonableness as reciprocity among equal citizens in a readiness “to propose principles and standards of fair cooperation” and collectively abide by them. That is, “norms they view as reasonable for everyone to accept [...] as justifiable to them; and they are ready to discuss the fair terms that others propose” (pp. 49). Finally, to distinguish a society ordered around a single comprehensive doctrine, I use the example of a *comprehensive liberal doctrine*, as does Rawls in distinguishing his theory in *PL* from that in *ToJ*: comprehensive liberalism refers to those liberal doctrines not only pertaining to the political domain but to the ethical domain as well, and Rawls specifically refers to the individual autonomy ideals of Kant and Mills (p. 78, and as relating to education, p. 199). These are ethical ideals held by many liberals yet represent but one conception of the good life in a pluralistic society. For example, some religious and cultural groups will hold ideals of collectivism over or rather than individualism, but this does not make those comprehensive doctrines unreasonable. Political liberalism asserts that all reasonable citizens are free and equal in society, regardless of the different comprehensive doctrines they hold dear, one case of which might be this ethical liberalism.

³⁰ For Rawls’s expanded idea of overlapping consensus, see 1993, pp. 133-172.

for some citizens to expect the state to endorse, or for the state to enact on its own accord, educational policies or practices that preference particular programs or disciplines which lead to particular external rewards and not others, because this means the state endorses that particular conception of a good life as more valuable and worthwhile than other citizens' reasonable conceptions.

For example, imagine that a state endorses educational policies and practices that preference the fine arts. The state does so because it endorses the belief that such a study produces citizens who will have refined senses of aesthetic judgment, enhanced divergent thinking skills, and deeper appreciation of the goods of cultural enrichment, and that this produces a 'better' society. But to set this preference is to do so at the expense of other studies, such as accounting, which potentially lead to higher earnings and employment prospects—ends which are valuable goods to some.

It is easy to see that this one-sidedness would be agreeable to a homogenous society in which everyone held as most valuable an education preparing citizens for these forms of high-paying jobs (i.e., a society sharing this comprehensive doctrine), but it would not effectively support a pluralistic society comprised of different and even rivalling conceptions of a good life. For some, there is more to life than great art. Therefore, it would be unreasonable for a pluralistic society to endorse these educational policies and not others, not because to hold dear these particular educational outcomes (doctrinal views) is unreasonable for those who do, but because it will come to bear on other reasonable beliefs of those equal citizens who hold an equal share of political power and who do not value those same outcomes.³¹ Readers might note that the distinction I am making also helps to explain

³¹ Indeed, Rawls provides a comparable example using the case of religion (1993, p. 138).

Rawls's notion of political liberalism as a revision of his earlier theory, which assumes a comprehensive liberal moral doctrine (see footnote 29)—because to prize individualistic moral foundations as a state ideal may undermine citizens who hold reasonable moral foundations which do not prize individualism as part of a good life.

Principles of Justice

Premised on the fact of reasonable pluralism, Rawls defends two such principles of justice, each of which I elaborate below:

- A) Each person has an equal claim to a fully *adequate* scheme of equal basic rights and liberties, which scheme is compatible with the same scheme for all; and in this scheme the equal political liberties, and only those liberties, are to be guaranteed their fair value.
- B) Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions:
 - 1. they are to be attached to positions and offices open to all under conditions of *fair equality of opportunity*; and
 - 2. they are to be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society [the *difference principle*]. (Emphasis mine; 1993, pp. 5-6)³²

First Principle of Justice. The first moral principle regards citizens' internal capacities of justice in that it states that free and equal citizens in a liberal democracy (the political conception of the person) must have claim to an *adequate* scheme of equal basic

³² For those interested in Rawls's earlier comprehensive liberal principles of justice, see *ToJ*, 1971 [1999], pp. 53-56.

rights and liberties,³³ such as the liberty of conscience and freedom of association securing citizens' powers of deliberative reasoning to form, revise, and rationally pursue a conception of the good over a complete life.³⁴ Additionally, citizens are guaranteed the fair value of their political liberties, which is to say the full liberties of democratic participation: fair and equal liberty to hold office and influence elections. Therefore, it is not enough to have these liberties in principle, people should be able to use them more or less equally. These elements together comprise their equal claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic rights and liberties.

Returning to the example of the state preferencing the study of fine arts versus accounting, for the state to preference one of these reasonable educational activities as more valuable and worthwhile (without sufficient justification) than the other clearly impinges on the equal liberties of those citizens whose reasonable conceptions of the good have been devalued. And this will have consequences for their political liberties: it means that their political liberties are, in fact, not equal, and thus, those citizens have not been guaranteed their fair value in society. They are subject to the state's and/or other citizens' more preferable conceptions of the good, rather than subjects of their own equally reasonable and self-determined choices. Importantly, it is for these reasons that the first moral principle takes priority over the second distributive social and economic principle—because it constitutes *what* is being equitably distributed following that second principle. So, for example, I cannot

³³ Rawls elaborates on the 'fully adequate scheme' as comprising two cases: first, the capacity for a sense of justice in application of the principles of justice to the basic structure and its social policies; and second, the capacity for a conception of the good in application of deliberative reason over a complete life (1993, pp. 332). Equal citizens are equal when they can act in accordance with their rational interests in relation to those differing interests of fellow citizens.

³⁴ For more on this example of the political liberties and for other such basic liberties, see Rawls (1993, pp. 334-356).

prevent you from getting an education on distributive grounds because it would undermine your right to political participation, and you need an education in order to know how to participate.

Second Principle of Justice. The second distributive principle is a set of two conditions addressing issues of social and economic inequality in the fair and equal distribution of public resources and their valuable outcomes in a well-ordered society. Egalitarians refer to the first as the principle of *fair equality of opportunity* and the second as the *difference principle*. Allow me to address each separately.

Fair Equality of Opportunity (FEO). FEO is a condition which determines justice as fairness according to equal opportunity to access valuable outcomes for all citizens on account of social and economic contingencies. For Rawls, the distribution of outcomes is fair when the procedure that led to those valuable outcomes is fair.³⁵ That is to say, following this principle, all citizens have fair and equal opportunity to pursue a good life, regardless of social and economic factors that may disadvantage some citizens more than others. For example, whether I grow up poor or wealthy, I am equally entitled to a basic education because the valuable external rewards of that educational resource—its outcomes, those positions and offices it affords—merit its equal division. Every citizen is entitled to their fair share of resources and opportunities.

The Difference Principle. The difference principle concerns inequalities resulting from natural contingencies, and states that the social and economic inequalities attached to

³⁵ Rawls calls this “pure procedural justice” (1971 [1999], pp. 75-76).

positions and offices (again, the concern is valuable outcomes) must be adjusted so that, whatever the degree or extent of those inequalities, they are of the greatest benefit to the least advantaged citizens (see Rawls, 1971 [1999], pp. 65-73). So, for example, given that citizens possess different natural talents in education, even if other social and economic factors have been ‘equalized’, those with greater natural talents will come to have greater opportunities and external rewards as a result of their educational participation. However, to suggest that the outcomes themselves ought to be equalized is untenable in a liberal, even social, democracy.³⁶

Hence, this principle recognizes that inequalities resulting from natural talents are unfair because citizens have no choice in the degree of their natural talents, and so those who gain more are to do so on terms that improve the lot of the those who have gained less. These fair terms of social cooperation facilitate political stability by avoiding a concentration of social, economic, and political influence with those who are privileged enough to be naturally talented. Therefore, equal distribution of education in this sense may not mean distributing an equal share of educational resources to each citizen, but rather a commensurate share of the resources which would increase the benefit to the least advantaged.

Taking both principles of justice together. Rawls states that in a just democratic society, “we can say that when basic institutions satisfy a political conception of justice

³⁶ Instead, this might be the intent of an authoritarian socialist state. It would mean the state distributes valuable outcomes (positions and offices) regardless of inputs, which would be incompatible with the first principle (because it would justify state coercion).

mutually acknowledged by citizens affirming comprehensive doctrines in a reasonable overlapping consensus, this fact confirms that those institutions allow sufficient space for ways of life worthy of citizens' devoted support" (1993, p. 187). This conception of justice intends to give space to pluralism in a society, to provide the background social conditions which support citizens' self-respect and dignity in holding equally valuable and worthwhile conceptions of the good and equal claims to the rights and liberties that allow them to freely pursue them.

Important to my analysis of the ideological bents of already existing frameworks of education, political liberalism can help philosophers of education theorize a just and stable framework specifically because it rejects moves to give primacy to particular ideologies (or comprehensive doctrines) within a political conception of justice—one limited to the political domain, whereby the express intent is political stability in a society comprised of doctrinal pluralism. And this means political liberalism creates equal social space for all reasonable ideologies. Therefore, political liberal theorizing can help create a conception of educational justice, ensuring the social institution of education must be compatible with the political imperative of fair social cooperation—the background social conditions which make justice possible.

I will now turn to examine how normative principles of educational justice proposed by philosophers of compulsory education can help define the principles of educational justice for adults in post-compulsory education that I will come to defend in the latter section. However, before doing so, I would like to motivate that analysis with a case, which I will apply to each of the principles below, including my own:

Imagine a grocery clerk, who, at 45 years old, having not sufficiently achieved a basic education, decides to return to school to eventually become a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN). (It should be noted that he is ‘upgrading’ rather than completing a basic education for the first time.) This is not a choice merely motivated by employment prospects; he comes from a family with no collective experience of higher education and, shaped by his experiences as an underappreciated and devalued front-line worker during the COVID pandemic, he wants to achieve this for the intrinsic sense of accomplishment—that is, for his own good. When asked why he chose the LPN program, he explains that the health profession carries inherent respect in his social community. He had thought about becoming a Registered Nurse, but the idea of going to university turned him away from that plan. Universities, he feels, have an air of ‘snobbery’, even in the physical spaces of them; the student body is younger, and, he says, everyone ‘peacocks’ their material, intellectual, and ethical privileges (as political philosophers define, ‘advantages’) in ways that he finds off-putting. They are not, he says, his people; colleges are for every-day, down-to-earth people.³⁷

I present this case for two reasons: first, as an adult educator myself, this is a representative example familiar in my everyday practice; second, it is one that could be understood as a non-ideal example of injustice, but I believe we need not conceive of it that way. Justice within the basic structure of a liberal democracy, even ideally conceived, does not erase cultural, social, economic, nor ethical differences in society. Thus, with Rawls’s theory of justice as fairness and its core principles, I ask in what ways these principles can be

³⁷ I emphasize this sentiment not only because it is realistic to many adult students but also because it is similar to one that Kristin Voigt (2017) takes up in analysing principles of justice in higher education as they relate to non-traditional students (a common term for adult students in higher educational literature). There, she makes the case for a pluralistic conception of equality, an aim I share in this work.

applied to post-compulsory education for adults aimed at fulfilling citizens' needs in a well-ordered society? To address this question, I now turn to examine how normative principles of educational justice proposed by philosophers of compulsory (child basic) education can help define principles of educational justice for adults in post-compulsory education.

II. Principles of Educational Justice: The Equality versus Adequacy Debate

In this section, I analyze the two prominent ways of reasoning about equality as educational justice forwarded by philosophers of education: first, I consider equality principles promoted by distributive theorists; second, I consider adequacy principles promoted by relational theorists.³⁸

Distributive Theorists and Principles of Equality

What does it mean for a society to value education primarily for its potentially valuable socioeconomic outcomes? Distributive theorists generally propose a variation on an ideal principle of fair equality of opportunity (FEO) and have come to supplement it with a non-ideal prioritarian principle. I show below that each is rooted in Rawls's second principle of justice, the first in his eponymous principle and the second in the difference principle. Thus, while I will refer to these as equality principles promoted by distributive theorists, I discuss each separately.

³⁸ I do so informed by the clarifying distinction Kristin Voigt makes between distributive and relational theories: the former focus on the fairness of inequalities of outcome and the latter focus on equality conceived in terms of relations among individuals. She writes, "while distributive theorists seek to directly assess the fairness of distributions, relational theorists argue that our assessments of distributions must be guided by broader concerns of relational equality" (2017, p. 110).

An Ideal Principle of Fair Equality of Opportunity in Educational Justice

(FEO). The idea of FEO has dominated the discourse of just distribution of educational resources.³⁹ According to distributive theorists, education is framed as a valuable and scarce resource: it is valuable because it is a ‘positional good’,⁴⁰ the valuable outcomes it produces; it is scarce because it is an expensive commodity and thus has limits on its distribution. Given both of these constraints, those opportunities that education affords must be distributed in an equitable manner to all citizens, regardless of their social and/or economic advantage or disadvantage.

First, the ideal equality principle of FEO is often referred to as the meritocratic principle and aims at ‘levelling the playing field’ through equal opportunities generated through a fair and just distribution of education for all. In other words, social and economic factors are equalized by ensuring all citizens have an equal education that affords each the fair opportunity to strive for its valuable outcomes. For example, K-12 public schooling is a basic right for all children in a liberal democracy; the same level of education is provisioned to all, regardless of their family income or status, and by graduation, all students ought to have equal opportunity to compete for valuable opportunities, rewards, and positions like higher education and/or employment. The thinking goes that in an ideal world, if all citizens are assured fair equality of opportunity, only their natural motivations, interests, and so on will distinguish the good lives they realize, and these on their own are not markers of injustice. I would like to draw two parallels between this principle of justice and lifelong

³⁹ See, for example, Brighouse, (2004, 2014), Brighouse & Swift (2009); Brown, (2006), Schouten & Brighouse (2014), and Swift (2003).

⁴⁰ Positional goods are goods that are desirable within a given society because they generate greater social status for those who possess or gain them, especially when they are goods enjoyed by few. For example, the higher the level of educational credentials I receive, the more likely I am to gain higher social status because there will be increasingly fewer people who enjoy a similar level of education.

learning policies: first, in the ideal sense, these policies are intended to realize equality of opportunity for all; and second, in the non-ideal sense, some citizens have fallen behind, and these non-ideal realities justify their use of additional resources (or perhaps it could be said that lifelong learning has become a non-ideal, real-world response to this form of ideal principle).⁴¹

However, even in the ideal sense, this principle violates the criteria of the Petersian conception of education for adults I defend in the previous chapter. It also represents a comprehensive doctrine defining what is most valuable about education, and thus, it is not a pluralistic conception of educational justice. This is because in order for it to be an ideal principle, all citizens must cherish specifically this merit-based view of distinguishing achievement from failure as what makes education valuable. Especially when conceived as a ‘one-off’ chance,⁴² the meritocratic principle relies upon linear thinking: what must be conceptualized are citizens’ socioeconomic starting points so that common waypoints and an equal endpoint can be arrived at in an equivalent timeline for each citizen, and from there, it is only good or bad choices and actions that separate the proverbial wheat from the chaff.

⁴¹ Similar to criticism about the conceptual ambiguity of lifelong learning I have expressed in the previous chapter, Christopher Jencks (1988) has criticized equality of opportunity in much the same way; wondering “whether an idea that can embrace so much means anything at all,” he concludes “for politicians of all persuasions equality of opportunity is therefore the universal solvent, compatible with the dreams of almost every voter in a conflict-ridden constituency” (p. 533).

⁴² Brown (2006) states criticism of Arneson’s (1989) one-off conceptions of equality of opportunity: “The basic idea is that at a single ‘canonical’ moment at the outset of each person’s adult life [...] he or she should have the same expected welfare as everybody else provided he or she behaves as prudently as we can reasonably expect given his or her particular choice-making and choice-following abilities” (p. 64). While, as I show in the next paragraph, Brown uses this criticism to motivate cause for more chances, even if no longer free but subsidized, I think what is worth more attention is the assumption of an external ‘we’ expecting to be reasonably and fairly able to judge other citizens’ attainment of outcomes. This seems to contravene Rawls’s first principle of justice, yet fair equality of opportunity is a second-order principle and cannot override the first.

Thus, it is also a comprehensive doctrine defining the moral characteristics of those who ‘deserve’ to thrive most.

For example, in the case of our grocery clerk, by the end of a compulsory education, at the onset of adulthood, he should have arrived at an equal base of education (again, maintaining an ideal theoretical assumption). Through even-handed competition for advantageous positions and valuable rewards, what set apart him from other citizens was their respective talents, abilities, and motivation. Therefore, the level field had been set for equal opportunity. If the grocery clerk failed to make choices which resulted in attaining valuable outcomes, this is not a problem of justice. Furthermore, perhaps his failings were the result of a lack of effort in compulsory school, and thus they are natural consequences and, again, not a problem of justice.

The issue with this principle for our grocery clerk is that it only allows that his circumstances are a matter of failure, and that this supposed failure could simply be isolated by an external judge of character as a result of internal failings according to *prima facie* choices, abilities, and/or efforts.⁴³ Readers might adduce that, instead of seeing our grocery clerk as being a grocery clerk because he failed to achieve other objectives, I am suggesting our grocery clerk might have chosen to become a grocery clerk and has since revised his life

⁴³ Briefly, this seems to contravene Rawls’s first principle of justice: free and equal citizens have the equal liberty to pursue their reasonable conceptions of the good, but this necessarily includes the liberty to revise them. For, if citizens cannot revise plans, we cannot say citizens are autonomous and free to shape them (see Rawls, 1993, p. 302). For analysis of this point in relation to education, see Levinson (1999, pp. 49-51). Further to the point, it turns on a comprehensive moral doctrine about how to lead a worthwhile life. In his foundational criticism of equal opportunity in education, Christopher Jencks characterizes this objection where such principles find basis in “The Moralistic Theory of Justice” (1988, see pp. 521 and 527-28). Finally, as I have noted above, fair equality of opportunity is a second-order principle of justice and cannot override the first principle.

plans, and that a fair and just conception of education *still* applies. This is a point I wish to flag here but come back to in due course.

FEO provisions ‘chances’ specifically because it ties education to its potentially valuable outcomes (inseparably, human capital), and claims it is up to adults to make good on them. Alexander Brown (2006) argues that such one-off conceptions of equal opportunity in adult education are inadequate. This is helpful, particularly to conceptualizing an ideal theory inclusive of a basic education for adults: as we see in contemporary Canadian adult education policy, just like in our case of the grocery clerk, adults will have to be assessed for whether they adequately received a fair first chance (i.e., the full compulsory education to which all adults are entitled) and whether they are deserving or undeserving of second chances.⁴⁴

In response to this insufficiency, Brown conceives of justice in adult education as second, third, or lifelong chances. Brown is correct that one-off conceptions of equal opportunity fail to account for the fact that skills and qualifications are valuable and also change throughout life, and so equal opportunities for positions and offices do not necessarily correlate to access to educational opportunities (p. 65). However, I disagree that the solution is to conceptualize justice as being inclusive of more *chances*. Indeed, the fact that one-off conceptions are inadequate invites me to question whether conceiving of justice as including

⁴⁴ As I have noted in the previous chapter, Canada has no national adult education policy. British Columbian legislation regards adults’ right to a basic education as being on the basis of first chances only (see *School Act*, Clauses 82 [2.1 and 2.2]) and the *College and Institute Act* only defines a requirement that the public institutions to which the Act applies provide comprehensive adult basic education consistent with the *School Act* (see Clause 6 in conjunction with 3 (c.1). Furthermore, British Columbia has a policy framework drafted by the current government extending tuition-free status to students on a second-chance basis on account of adult students’ complex life experiences that may mean they need to repeat a course (British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education, 2017, p. 6). For those interested, public universities falling under the *Universities Act* need only provision adult education programming where geographic constraints exist.

more or even ongoing, lifelong chances—as he does—suffices. To my point, in line with the meritocratic conception, Brown concludes that adults are receiving second chances because they may have failed to make an effort the first time around, and thus must be held fiscally accountable for access (p. 81).

But are the goods of education merely, or even primarily, external rewards and presumptive benefits? Distribution, in this case, is akin to doling out chances to compete in the labour market. However, my own Petersian conception of education for adults defends against such ideological, narrow instrumentalization of education. Recall that his third criterion requires education to be a non-ideological process: judgements about what is valuable and worthwhile in an education are open to be determined, defined, and reasoned by the student, and that their reasons ought to be respected. Even more chances will not allow educational justice for those who hold different conceptions of a good life.

For our grocery clerk, it is clear that his motivations are not merely or primarily related to his human capital potential, yet his reasons for pursuing an education ought to be included as worthwhile within our conception of education in a fair and just pluralistic society. Thus, where chances do not on their own lead to justice, distributive theorists move away from ideal theory and defend justice in response to injustice(s), supplementing theorizing with a non-ideal prioritarian principle.

A Prioritarian Principle of Educational Justice. As all of the above distributive theorists recognize, principles of FEO on their own will not lead to educational justice. Given that some participants in education will ‘fail’ to hold the necessary natural talents, abilities,

and motivations that will enable them to compete for valuable rewards and benefits, distributive theorists also adopt a non-ideal prioritarian principle grounded in Rawls's difference principle.⁴⁵ Recall that his principle says that natural inequalities resulting in greater advantages for some must be adjusted so as to be of the greatest benefit to the least well-off. The distinction turns on “a division of labour” whereby FEO principles aim to equalize academic achievement and its valuable rewards across socioeconomic backgrounds, and the prioritarian principle “works to improve the life prospects of those students whose natural differences interact with the external social environment so as to render them disadvantaged relative to their peers” (Schouten, 2012, p. 477). In other words, although this kind of principle represents a non-ideal turn it also calls into question whether what is valuable about an education—or what it is for—is not merely chances to compete for socioeconomic advantage. Thus, it is worth exploring further to see why this non-ideal principle is inadequate to our purposes.

Distributive principles “demand that educational resources be concentrated to some extent on the least advantaged students, with advantage understood either in terms of educational success or in terms of life-course outcomes” (Schouten & Brighthouse, 2014, p. 111). And, being supplemental to FEO, this prioritarian principle is still premised on human capital outcomes because the ideal remains valuable external rewards and benefits, while the fallback is to other goods under the umbrella of life prospects.

⁴⁵ See, for example, Brown (2006) application of a prioritarian principle to supplement lifelong equality of opportunity for adult education; as well, Schouten (2012), Schouten & Brighthouse (2014), and Brighthouse (2014) make the case for a prioritarian principle in conceptions of justice in compulsory education. In the case of the latter, Brighthouse (2014) refers to prioritarian principles as the educational analogue of the difference principle (see p. 785).

For example, given that some students will possess exceptional academic talents, they will need fewer educational resources to have equal opportunity to compete for valuable external rewards and advantageous positions, and thus those resources ought to be redistributed to those with the least advantage. In the specific case of adult education, for Brown, this principle helps to justify lifelong chances in education, which ought to be subsidized by the state but not free, because, for him, this would override the meritocratic principle and its natural consequences for a lack of adequate effort (pp. 79-83). However, for Gina Schouten, who is theorizing in the case of child education, where those human capital outcomes are further out of reach for less talented citizens, her prioritarian principle underscores an expanded notion of ‘outcomes’ that is helpful to my theorizing: opportunities for life prospects ought to be understood more widely than opportunities for employment (Schouten, 2012).⁴⁶

Thus, for our grocery clerk, we arrive at a conception of justice whereby he ought to be provided a second chance (because he is upgrading rather than completing his basic education for the first time) to complete his education to the standards that bring him an intrinsic sense of accomplishment and support his interests in becoming an LPN. Together,

⁴⁶ Christopher Martin (2021), whom I later show helps motivate the principles of justice that the theory of education for adults adopts, also takes up this feature of Schouten’s work. Schouten expands notion of what ought to be evaluatively determined as equal outcomes beyond external rewards and advantageous positions because some citizens with lesser natural talents will not be able to achieve these outcomes. She does so through a metric of all-things-considered flourishing to emphasize equality in actually valuable outcomes. Rather than mere opportunities, these are outcomes that are intrinsically valuable over the course of a life (pp. 479-480). However, given that she theorizes in context of compulsory education for children, she acknowledges a problem with her prioritarian principle inclusive of all things flourishing that limits its application to an ideal theory of education for adults: her principle assumes participants are children who do not have the agency of full adult citizens, and she departs from Rawls’s social primary goods (powers, positions of authority, income and wealth, and the social bases of self-respect) as a result. That children lack full agency is important for her because this means they cannot be fully accountable to the effort condition of principles of FEO (see pp. 480-481).

the prioritarian principles of Brown and Schouten reflect his deservingness of that chance to improve his life prospects, and this seems fair. Importantly, however, the issue is that where these principles are non-ideal supplements to the ideal meritocratic principle, they do so on the premise that his second chance is due to his own disadvantage because of natural differences (deficiencies). Remember, he already had a fair first chance that accounted for social and economic differences.

Analyzing this principle helps me understand how justice has been conceived in adult education theory and practice in Canada. Justice in adult education, following these principles (both the prioritarian principle and its higher order FEO principle), must be justified on non-ideal grounds. While the expanded notion of outcomes as life prospects motivates my own theorizing, within the prioritarian principle, it also includes negative consequences that an ideal theory of education for adults ought not accept. Firstly, by participating in an education following the FEO principle, our grocery clerk must confront a conception of education whereby the primary and most valuable reasons for it are to compete for valuable outcomes and advantageous positions. Whether understood as human capital or upward social mobility, both are driven by a labour-market conception of education and clearly contrast his own reasonable conception of a good life. Secondly, in order to be eligible for this second chance, following the prioritarian principle, our grocery clerk must confront and accept assumptions that his circumstances are the product of failure and/or deficiency—whether his own internal failings or inadequacies, or some broader social

injustice. Regardless of which, his educational pursuit must work to rectify this problem on behalf of society.⁴⁷

Thus, the framework for education that these distributive principles buttress becomes subject to the ideological interests of political parties and their agendas: one party might propose that adult education programs are a social justice intervention to respond to the educational injustices some citizens bear, and fund programs accordingly; another party might determine that because adults have had their equal educational opportunity but ostensibly lacked the moral character to earn particular advantages, the consequences are their own burden to bear. This is because neither principle defends educational justice on account of what might be socially good about education for adults in and of itself in the first place (apart from labour outcomes). And, furthermore, as I note above, because they give priority to a particular conception of educational goods—as a device to distribute fair chances to compete for valuable rewards and advantageous positions—they represent a constraint on education that is incompatible with my Petersian conception of education for adults because it neglects or overrides other equally valuable and worthwhile reasons to pursue education, which a social institution within a pluralistic society ought to support.

⁴⁷ And some cases even prove this: in British Columbia, for example, students apply for the Adult Upgrading Grant to subsidize expenses related to their basic education studies, and this includes determining whether they have previously graduated as well as their taxable income. During the period when adult upgrading was only subsidized for adults completing a basic education for the first time, this was also used to determine exceptions to or bursaries to cover tuition (which, at many institutions, were \$1600/semester). If students earned above the bursary threshold (minimum taxable income), they were required to write a statement to show their deservingness. For more on this matter, see Walker & Smythe (2019).

Relational Theorists and Principles of Adequacy

If the above distributive principles are flawed, are there other principles that can provide better guidance? What does it mean for a society to value education as foundational to democracy and citizenship? Relational theorists propose principles of educational justice that underscore an ‘adequate’ education for all citizens within a society of equals. In its most basic sense, adequacy seems to imply a measure of the minimal requirements of educational resources for all students, but it is more than that when a society views education as a basic institution of and for democracy.⁴⁸

Readers will recognize that adequacy principles, therefore, find their basis in Rawls’s first principle of justice, and in their emphasis on equal political liberties, they embrace reasonable pluralism. In this section, I show that adequacy principles and the return to Rawls’s first principle provide a starting point for developing principles of educational justice for adults. Yet, at the same time, the fact that adequacy principles are *for* citizenship or democracy suggests how they are insufficient principles within a framework of education for adults.

Relational theorists distinguish adequacy principles from the idea of FEO as follows: the latter are externally comparative conceptions of justice (as I showed, how much educational resources each citizen has in respect to others for equal opportunity to compete for valuable rewards), whereas the former are internally comparative. To illustrate, Deborah Satz’s account clearly exemplifies this relational notion of internal comparison: adequacy principles concern whether each citizen has enough education “for full and equal

⁴⁸ See, for example, key theorists including Anderson (2004, 2007), Gutmann (1987), Howe (2013), Kotzee (2013), and Satz (2007, 2012).

membership in the political community,” and they are equal not only when they have equal basic political and civic rights, but when they have equal social and economic rights, “such as access to employment, health care, education, housing, and a level of income essential to being, and being regarded as, a full member of one’s society” (Satz, 2007, pp. 635-636). In other words, on account of adequacy, education is democratically *for* equal citizenship: this kind of principle promotes education that provides the skills, knowledge, and dispositions for the equal political liberties held by all citizens. Thus, it is a principle for a basic education, for which the adequacy threshold of educational justice is determined by whether or not it results in creating adult citizens of equal democratic status.⁴⁹

My concern with adequacy principles of educational justice as being for democracy and citizenship has to do with an education aiming to *create* citizens of equal status—that is, one for children, and one which prepares them for adulthood. As Christopher Martin (2022) has addressed, and as I will expand upon in the next chapter, the issue is that adults in a free, just, and well-ordered society are already equal citizens in principle.⁵⁰ I want to emphasize here that an adequate education is *for* full citizenship, but I want to develop principles of educational justice compelled by adults’ substantive status *as* full citizens.

This concern would present obviously negative consequences for our grocery clerk. For him to participate in a basic education as an adult, following this conception of educational justice, would suggest that he does so because he is not yet an equal citizen. Certainly, readers might recognize that there is an implicit sense of unequal treatment in his

⁴⁹ Victoria M. Costa (2007) develops an account of a Rawlsian political education following this line of thinking.

⁵⁰ In brief, a just education for adults cannot be one that aims to make them ‘more’ adult or ‘better’ adults. And it especially cannot justifiably do so as an ideal theory—one that understands education for adults qua adults not one for creating adults.

case. His labour does not carry the dignity he feels that it should deserve as an equal citizen—a relational injustice, for sure. This motivates his participation, and perhaps even constrains his aspirations, too. But it would be unfair to conclude that the education he chooses to participate in ought to treat him as not a fully equal citizen as a result. This represents a deficit mindset that would only exacerbate the indignity he experiences.

Another issue with these principles in context of theorizing *post*-compulsory education is the problem of the democratic ‘adequacy’ threshold itself. Reflecting on our grocery clerk, even if adequacy principles could justify his participation in a basic education, they could only do so on the non-ideal grounds that he had not received an adequate education in the first place. They could not justify further education. He would have already received the education they are owed. Everything else is extra.

To use adequacy principles to do so would produce an argument that the current conception of a basic education is insufficient, and what is required for full citizenship is a now-higher level of compulsory education.⁵¹ But, because further education does not have a universal core curriculum, this could also motivate a comprehensive doctrine about what is ‘actually valuable’ about higher education so that all benefit from that good. Furthermore, it would remove educational choice, an inherent feature of post-compulsory education. This is because what would make that level of education ‘adequate’ is its good for all citizens, and what would make it part of a comprehensive doctrine is that, beyond the capacities for equal

⁵¹ Readers interested in the limits of citizenship aims in higher education along these lines should see Martin (2021, see Ch. 2, especially pp. 6-17). There, he takes this point further to show that attempting to justify higher education on these grounds would, at best, make a case for improving citizenship education within a basic education. I agree with Martin that the social goods of higher education may have indirect benefits to society through enhancing citizens’ civic capacities, but that this is not a central aim of higher education, nor then its justification as a basic institution.

citizenship that define a basic education, there must now be something specifically essential above that level that all citizens ought to have.

In other words, a basic education would no longer end at completion of secondary schooling but now include something more in a just, democratic state. While one could certainly make the case that higher education has become a rite of passage and a *de facto* extension of schooling for young adults in liberal democracies,⁵² I believe all adults ought to have a right to access post-compulsory education (basic and beyond) if they so choose, and focusing on an ideal conception of educational justice in the case of adults participating in a basic education helps me to show how. Carrying this purpose, then, I now turn to describe the principles of justice this theory adopts.

III. Principles of Justice in a Post-Compulsory Education for Adults

What does it mean for a conception of educational justice to take as its basic premise adults' substantive status as full and equal citizens, and what distributive requirements does this compel? Returning to Rawls, recall that his two principles taken together—in lexical order, the first moral principle and the second distributive principle—comprise a conception of justice in a liberal democracy. He is also clear that the first moral principle must be compatible with the fact of reasonable pluralism in the interests of overlapping consensus. Thus, it is with this understanding that I present the requirements of educational justice for adults.

⁵² See, for example, Collini (2012).

The first moral principle entails that adults participating in education must be recognized and treated as equal citizens holding equal liberties and political status, free of the burdens of any state-held comprehensive doctrine, and due the respect and dignity their equal political status compels. As such, they each hold the liberty to form, *revise*, and pursue their own reasonably held conceptions of a good life and pursue education that supports their life pursuits. Building from Rawls (see 1993, p.313), Levinson astutely points out that what substantiates citizens as free in a liberal democracy is not only that they are free to form and pursue their reasonable life plans, but that they are able to revise them as well (1999, pp. 49-51).⁵³ This is because without the liberty to revise life plans, citizens cannot be said to be substantively free to form and hold them in the first place. Furthermore, this principle states a requirement that citizens are guaranteed the fair value of their liberties, and this means that their own reasonably held conceptions of the good not only can be freely formed but also ought to be treated as equally valuable and worthwhile in a pluralistic society.

This first principle, therefore, has at least two significant and categorical consequences for a framework of education guided by it. Firstly, for adults, the social and economic goods of education do not amount to making them citizens, nor generating human capital; the goods of education amount to giving citizens the space to be citizens. Therefore, a system of education for adults ought to be understood in terms of the ethos it creates and supports, defined by its intrinsic goods for adults, more than simply the external rewards it

⁵³ Levinson (1999) underscores this point, writing that the freedom to revise life plans is liberty, that this is the transformative basis of the liberal democratic project (p. 53), and, as I understand her to be suggesting, that the civic space for such transformation is the space for self-respect—the social conditions which make justice possible.

potentially espouses.⁵⁴ Secondly, this principle underscores the injustice of fair equality of opportunity for education conceived as ‘chance(s) for success’, which will have implications for its distribution: education is not a competition for a singular conception of a better life as defined by particular comprehensive doctrines (or ideological agendas). Therefore, its provision ought not be justified according to, or constrained by, supposed chances, and distributed according to the assumed external rewards and failures that result. Instead, citizens are free to pursue what is valuable in an education that supports their pursuit of their own better life, without the test of deservingness of additional chances to do so.

Subsequently, the second distributive principle regards the just distribution of what the first principle defines as publicly good about education for adults, and it describes how *that* ought to be fairly distributed.⁵⁵ Thus, educational justice is not found in the distribution of chances at competition, but by a more substantive requirement (and potentially inclusive of such chances, should that be a citizen’s personally held conception of a good life): education distributes the conditions supporting citizens in having and holding self-respect (where education is relevant in supporting citizens’ life pursuits).⁵⁶ Therefore, the

⁵⁴ Stated another way, the goods of education are not simply that it is or can be instrumental to attaining external rewards but that its intrinsic goods have external social value as well (see Kotzee, 2018; Kotzee & Martin, 2013).

⁵⁵ Following Christian Schemmel, Rawlsian equality of opportunity pertains to obtaining “social positions and offices to which social and economic advantages are attached, and applies to equality of opportunity in education insofar as it is instrumental to the former” (2011, p. 386). He points out here that even in an ideal, well-ordered society, education is not on its own instrumental to social positions and offices; therefore, for relational egalitarians, FEO in this narrow conception is not a sufficient principle of justice. Instead, he writes, relational egalitarianism relies “on a defeasible presumption that social goods, including education, ought to be distributed equally [...and] requires strictly that every member of society is given the educational resources necessary to be able to avoid relational injustice” (p. 386). In other words, equal distribution of education is not the pinnacle of a relational conception of justice, rather, the basic assumption of it. Instead, what is required as a central feature of a relational conception of educational justice is that all citizens have equal liberty to participate in education where it supports them in avoiding relational injustices.

⁵⁶ It will become clear in the next chapter that this notion of education supporting citizens borrows from Christopher Martin’s theory of the goods of higher education (see 2021, Ch. 3, pp. 11-13).

opportunities that it distributes are not merely or necessarily competitive but are aimed at supporting and enabling citizens' self-realization.⁵⁷

Finally, a system of education rooted in the principles already described is necessarily one that abides by the difference principle (recall that the difference principle states that social and economic inequalities are just only when they are of the greatest benefit to the least advantaged citizens). Yet it does so without the self-respect diminishing consequences of determining who is deserving or undeserving of additional resources according to their disadvantage. Importantly, the difference principle is not only a distributive principle, but a relational one as well—one which ensures distributions are in the interests of fair social cooperation and egalitarian distributions can only be justified where the results are to the greater benefit of the least well off.⁵⁸ In other words, the difference principle is already implicit within this framework because it supports citizens in their reasonable life plans, and treats those as valuable and worthwhile throughout life even if those plans are not aimed at well-paying jobs; therefore, allocation is not conditioned on whether citizens' measurable circumstances of disadvantage justify resource distribution.

To illustrate, let us return to the case of our grocery clerk one last time. In a system of education framed by these principles, our grocery clerk is free to pursue Upgrading and LPN studies because these are consistent with supporting his own reasonable and personally held

⁵⁷ Kassimir Stojanov offers: "education is not something which one receives from the school. Rather, one lives one's own education in the school (and beyond); one 'produces' it within and through relations with one's teachers and fellow students, relations which one experiences every day in school" (2018, p. 41).

⁵⁸ For a careful exegesis of Rawls's principle and its relational significance in ensuring fair social cooperation and political stability, see Schemmel (2011, pp. 370-375). Furthermore, for an analysis of the negative consequences of meritocratic bases for the difference principle (i.e., the prioritarian principle), the problems with this conception to liberal theories of justice, and how relational theorizing can help respond to this problem, see Schemmel (2012).

conception of a good life, and to deny him such liberty would be to deny him the equal dignity and respect compelled by his status as a citizen in a liberal democracy.

Readers might urge that there is an unaddressed pedagogical injustice, then, in his case, that must be resolved: his ideal plans are to become a Registered Nurse, but he settles for becoming an LPN because he does not see university as a place for him. Given that these principles do not immediately right that injustice, they are not, in fact, sufficient principles. This is a mistaken argument, however, as it is premised upon a linear, chance-based conception of justice as outcomes (i.e., he has not, in this singular occurrence, been assured his equal chance). It imposes upon citizens a requirement to pursue life plans according to ideological assumptions about what constitutes a good life, not one that is internally transformative. In contrast, recall that Rawls promotes an ethos of justice available across life (Rawls, 1993, pp. 15-22). Rawls's ethos maintains the social conditions which make a just society possible so that throughout a life course citizens can define, revise, and pursue their own life valuable plans, transforming themselves in ways consistent with their own intrinsically held, personally valuable, and revisable conception of a good life. Therefore, the kind of equality this framework underscores is not defined merely by supposed measurable outcomes of equal social position, but by the substantive equal liberty compelled by citizens' equal political status.

Of course, my purpose in this chapter has not been to provide a complete analysis, but rather to make the case that existing principles of justice are insufficient and that the principles I will propose are not only just and fair but motivate an alternative framework for education for adults in liberal democracies. In closing, it is to the purpose of constructing that theoretical framework that I now turn. And to do so, I think Christopher Martin's liberty-

maximizing conception of justice in higher education offers a necessary conceptual next step. As Martin emphasizes, the valuable goods of education for adults as citizens are in the ways that education supports their reasonable, valuable, worthwhile, and changeable life pursuits.

CHAPTER 3: At the Differend of Epistemic Individualism: A Relational Reconsideration of Autonomy-Supporting Education

Introduction

In the first chapter, I showed that scholarly literature as well as national and international policy frameworks call for increased programing and support for adults' access to education and training.⁵⁹ I also argued that adults' access to a basic education, particularly when they have not already completed one (i.e., on a first-chance basis), is an entitlement in Canada. Yet, as I showed in the second chapter, there exists no normative account of their educational rights beyond that first chance, and I theorized what principles of a just education for adults could look like. I analysed principles of educational justice and found that current frameworks of education defend adults' participation in the interests of promoting their chances at socioeconomic success: the meritocratic principle of fair equality of opportunity aims at an education for all in order to equalize social and economic contingencies and claims to level the playing field for competition based on natural talent; its supplementary prioritarian principle defends second- or lifelong- chances for those without equally high degrees of supposed natural talents. For example, recent policy changes in British Columbia have questioned adult students' right to a second chance at a basic education (i.e., upgrading for higher academic results for entrance into competitive programs and adults returning later in life to refresh their academic skills in preparation for higher education). As such, they also sort adult students as either deserving or undeserving of state charity.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ See, for example, Powley, Kennedy, and Childs (2005).

⁶⁰ For example, see Walker & Smythe (2019) for an overview of British Columbia's reluctant and conditional support of adult basic education.

Given that no existing principles defend what more substantive entitlement adults have to education—the educational entitlement adults have *qua* adults—I developed two Rawlsian-inspired justice as fairness principles.

Recall that my first principle is modeled off of Rawls’s own moral principle, and entails that adults participating in education must be recognized and treated as equal citizens upholding equal political liberties and political status, free of the burdens of any state-held comprehensive doctrine, and are due the respect and dignity their equal political status compels.

My second principle regards the just distribution of what the first principle defines as publicly good about education for adults, and it describes how *that* ought to be fairly distributed.⁶¹ It states that education distributes the conditions that support citizens in their having and holding self-respect (where education is relevant in supporting citizens’ life pursuits). Therefore, the opportunities that it distributes are not merely or necessarily competitive but are aimed at supporting and enabling citizens’ self-realization.⁶² They are owed to citizens as a matter of impartial justice.

⁶¹ Following Christian Schemmel, Rawlsian equality of opportunity pertains to obtaining “social positions and offices to which social and economic advantages are attached, and applies to equality of opportunity in education insofar as it is instrumental to the former” (2011, p. 386). He points out here that even in an ideal, well-ordered society, education is not on its own instrumental to social positions and offices; therefore, for relational egalitarians, FEO in this narrow conception is not a sufficient principle of justice. Instead, he writes, relational egalitarianism relies “on a defeasible presumption that social goods, including education, ought to be distributed equally [...and] requires strictly that every member of society is given the educational resources necessary to be able to avoid relational injustice” (p. 386). In other words, equal distribution of education is not the pinnacle of a relational conception of justice, rather, the basic assumption of it. Instead, what is required as a central feature of a relational conception of educational justice is that all citizens have equal liberty to participate in education where it supports them in avoiding relational injustices.

⁶² Kassimir Stojanov offers: “education is not something which one receives from the school. Rather, one lives one’s own education in the school (and beyond); one ‘produces’ it within and through relations with one’s teachers and fellow students, relations which one experiences every day in school” (2018, p. 41).

In this chapter, I begin substantiating a conception of education that is grounded in these principles, and I do so here specifically by expanding on the first moral principle as one aimed at assuring an overlapping consensus in a reasonably pluralistic society. I remind readers that this means I aim to develop an account of education agreeable to all reasonable conceptions of a good life. Therefore, I am theorizing a conception of education premised on adults' equal liberties and entitlements as citizens, grounded in the political conception of the person as free and equal.⁶³ I believe that one crucial advantage of this approach is that it avoids imposing ideologically motivated instrumental values on adults' educational interests in order to justify its provision. Given the fact of reasonable pluralism in liberal democracies, I believe we ought to make a claim about educational justice based on the intrinsic value of education in the lives of adults as an entitlement (still with benefits to the state and society) by virtue of their status as free and equal citizens.

Thus, where I share his interest in making a case for a new framework of education for adults, I draw from Christopher Martin's *The Right to Higher Education: A Political Theory* (2022, henceforth RHE) and then use a critique of this work to make my own argument. I do so because Martin forwards a compelling alternative to an instrumentalist (or

⁶³ I wish to emphasize the three key features of what Rawls defines as the political conception if the person:

1. citizens are free when they can conceive of themselves and of one another as having the moral power to have a conception of the good, and this means they must see those conceptions as revisable and have the power to enact those changes if they desire. Importantly, "[g]iven their moral power to form, revise, and rationally pursue a conception of the good, their public identity [in both the individual and collective sense] as free persons is not affected by changes over time in their determinate conception of it" (p. 30);
2. citizens are free when they are free to regard themselves as self-authenticating sources of valid claims, meaning they are capable of and entitled to make claims on their institutions to advance their own reasonable conceptions of the good and that this has both an intrinsic weight in their own lives as well as duty and obligation in a just society; and,
3. citizens are free when they are able to take responsibility for their own ends and see their own claims as adjustable accordingly—thus, they fair system of social cooperation they shape and participate within is not understood to provision for wants and desires but citizens' needs. (1993, pp. 29-35)

merely instrumentalist) conception of education. Indeed, I should note that outside of *RHE*, the political question of adults' interests in education as motivating arguments for entitlement to education is virtually absent in the literature (as Martin himself identifies, Ch. 4, p. 4).⁶⁴

Important to my own theorizing, Martin's ideal theory of education in adulthood claims that an education aimed at supporting adults' interests in pursuing a good life as central to what it means to be a citizen in a free and equal liberal democratic society. Therefore, in section one, I provide an exegesis of his account of autonomy education, which as a collective good, ought to be provisioned as a social institution within the Rawlsian basic structure (1971 [1999], pp. 6-10).⁶⁵ By 'collective good' he means that the provision of education that supports the autonomy of each citizen as an individual return *is also a* social return for society in general.

However, as I show in section two, there exists an unresolved tension in his argument as it would pertain to adults' interests in a basic education: if adults are entitled to an autonomy-supporting education (which he defines is the aim of higher education, as distinct from an autonomy-instilling basic education, which is the aim of child education), how can we provide adults a basic education in a manner that is consistent with and respectful of adults' status as already autonomous persons?⁶⁶

In fact, this tension informs a further problem. An ideal conception of education for adults must be ideal for *all adults*, regardless of their reasonably held conception of the good;

⁶⁴Another argument for the right to higher education comes from Tristan McCowan. He argues that a right exists from a human rights perspective, "given that [higher education] can be seen in the context of a general right to education that runs through life" and specifically because of the non-instrumental value it holds (2012, p. 117-118).

⁶⁵ Note that I will come to call for further argumentation on this point.

⁶⁶ One could rightly counter this line of questioning by suggesting that this is equally a concern of the aims of ABE. I agree, but I wish to pursue this resistance even still as a potentially fruitful avenue of inquiry.

however, without further relational consideration, Martin's autonomy-supporting education, whose aims are principled on the minimal conditions of personal autonomy, will preference 'epistemically individualistic' belief formations.⁶⁷ Thus, section three aims to resolve this tension, adapting Martin's three features of an autonomy education, fleshing out the framework of education for adults that I defend.

To be clear, I do not see this line of inquiry as a question of justice solely within ABE; instead, I see ABE as a site of unresolved injustice that extends beyond the broader education system that governs it, which must be addressed in order to fully realize a theoretical framework of education for adults who are full citizens in a liberal democratic society. Through analyzing this tension in Martin's own conceptual scheme of autonomy education, I believe we encounter what David Olney calls the 'differend of justice' (2019),⁶⁸ and in uncovering the remainders of this justice conception, I show that my own relational account addresses these concerns, giving shape to the political conception of education that this theoretical framework secures.

⁶⁷ Following Peter Nelson (2010), I take this to mean a belief that, ideally, citizens form as an internal process within individual agents. In other words, "while agents have initial desires and wants that may be inspired by any number of social experiences and relationships, they distinguish autonomous people from those who are unreasonably influenced by the ruly mob; the autonomous are those who reflect upon their initial desires and undertake a process of deliberation that leads to the rational choosing of some over others" (p. 335). The minimalist conditions of autonomy, he holds, project a belief that agents possessing a minimum threshold of autonomy ought to form preferences, make decisions, and represent their rationally chosen aims as the result of rational reflection "free from the coercion of influential others" (p. 336).

⁶⁸ Olney offers the concept of the differend of justice as referring to what remains excluded in our ongoing pursuit of justice. In the process of formalizing injustices, we articulate them to comprehend them as we seek to neutralize them; we make distinctions about what has been excluded so as to include them into a new conceptual scheme of justice (p. 167-168). Justice, in this view, is an ongoing process of drawing distinctions between forms of exclusion, so redeeming injustices.

I. Entitlement to An Autonomy-Supporting Higher Education in Adulthood: The Liberty-Maximizing Justice Argument

Martin develops and defends a comprehensive justification of a system of higher education throughout adulthood within a liberal democracy, and makes a politically compelling case for its place within the basic structure of society. As he frames in his argument, “we can say that higher education systems can be found *in* liberal democracies. But can we also say that they are *part of* liberal democracy?” (Ch. 1, p. 12). He delimits an important distinction about the purpose of education for adults that I understand to be the central thesis of his work. In recognition of this shared objective, I intend to use aspects of his work, as I do here with his notion of autonomy-supporting education, as a foil in developing my own theory.

As I will come to clarify, the autonomy conception I forward will diverge in its priorities from Martin’s thesis. However, while this divergence will at first seem marginal or small, their implications within a system of post-compulsory education will gain greater significance as my own argument unfolds. Thus, having articulated my own relational account of autonomy-supporting education, in the next chapter I will be able to look at the requirements it imposes on education as a social institution within the basic structure and the state. As I cannot overview the entirety of Martin’s work, I focus on his conceptions of i) personal autonomy-promoting education in childhood and ii) the corresponding autonomy-*supporting* education in adulthood.

Personal Autonomy-Promoting Education

In Martin's view, while the core aim of a compulsory basic education is the civic goods of *promoting* the political ideal of personal autonomy and this is a central justification for schooling as a right, a similar autonomy-promoting education for adults is unjust. First of all, given that a compulsory education is already provisioned on the basis that those who complete it will possess the minimal conditions—knowledge, skills, and dispositions—to autonomously flourish, an argument justifying adults' right to a post-compulsory education cannot make the case for an education that merely does more of the same.⁶⁹ This would be an argument for remedial education, or for improvements to compulsory education, not for a right to further education. Secondly, were a higher education specifically promoting these civic goods made compulsory, it would violate adult citizens' already existing autonomy and so defeat its own aims (Ch. 2, p. 11-13). Martin then moves to see higher education in relation to already autonomous adult citizens and to see potential civic goods as indirect benefits to the state rather than as direct benefits to satisfy particular state interests.

Once citizens are free to form and pursue their own personally autonomous conceptions of a good life, they may determine futures that necessitate or benefit access to higher education. This Martin terms the *autonomy-supporting* aims of higher education, and they entitle equal access to education throughout one's life, not just in childhood. It is at this point that Martin establishes the central aim, and what I believe is the defining contribution, of his work: rather than making a case for the majority to democratically support public policy for free higher education, he is aiming for a substantive argument for higher education as a basic right or entitlement, and for something to achieve this it must be:

⁶⁹ Readers will note the parallel here to the concerns I raised in the previous chapter regarding adequacy principles and their insufficiency in theorizing about in educational justice for adults.

- i) in the *equal* interest
- ii) of each *individual* citizen
- iii) regardless of their *particular* conception of the good. (2021, Ch. 3, p. 3)

Citizens, he writes, following the political conception of persons as free and equal, have a substantive right to higher education that is not contingent on political will. In fact, a society which fails to “provide for such an education would be at risk of undermining citizen’s equal interest in autonomy: some citizens will inherit social, cultural, economic and other resource bases as a matter of luck that will make it easier for them to cultivate minimal conditions of autonomy than it will for those unlucky citizens who do not inherit such bases” (Ch.3, p. 4).

Building on Norman Daniels’s (1985) normative work in health care entitlements and then more directly from Joseph Raz’s (1986) political philosophy, Martin urges an expanded view of the conditions for personal autonomy—one not simply understood as an internal, fixed state of mind promoted in childhood, arrived at by adulthood, and constant from there, but as a set of conditions that continue to change along with our circumstances and stages of life. We must, therefore, distinguish between internal moral and cognitive abilities to act autonomously, and the environmental conditions for autonomy understood as the range of available options on which we can act; it is both together that make us authors of our own lives (Ch. 3, p. 8). He provides the example of a young student whose family has told him he must choose to study a profession---law, medicine, engineering—but is forbidden from contemplating any other option outside this range (Ch. 3, p. 8). Such a student cannot be said to be author of his own life. It is not enough that he has the internal capacities to freely to make decisions, but he must also be in an environment in which he is free from limits and restrictions imposed on the options that can be available to him.

Autonomy-Supporting Education in Adulthood

Thus, Martin parses that education not only instills those internal conditions, as we might see more directly in autonomy-promoting child education, but where an adult already possesses fulsome internal capacities, education in adulthood supports “the autonomous pursuit of a good life by opening up to the individual options in the environment [the social forms and practices⁷⁰] that would not have been accessible” otherwise (ch.3, p. 11). As such, he defines three features of an autonomy-supporting education (Ch. 3, pp. 12-13):

1. it must increase the knowledge, skills, and understanding of citizens in ways that help them realize their self-determined goals;
2. it must help individuals realize goals that are socially significant, meaningful, and worthwhile;
3. and, it must have value regardless of life stage, reflecting the diversity of meaningful and worthwhile goals it helps citizens realize.

Thus, where education is necessarily connected to self-determination, that education cannot be “merely supporting, but ‘autonomy’ supporting” (Ch. 3, p. 14). I agree with the substance of these three features. They intuitively constitute adults’ fundamental right to education in the strong, politically compelling sense.

⁷⁰ Following Martin’s definition reference to Steven Wall, social forms and practices refer to those ways of life, including but not limited to those afforded by occupational choices, available to citizens in a society which comprise their opportunities in leading a good life. Free and open societies will tend to have a range of social forms and practices which are open and available to its citizens. Furthermore, pursuit of a particular social form will have different significance to citizens based on the society in which it exists. For example, the occupation of teaching has unique requirements to access, responsibilities of practice, and social status depending on the society in which that form is practiced. A free and open society would ensure that social form is available to any citizen who chooses to pursue it (Ch. 3, pp. 8-9).

With his account of autonomy education established, I can now shift to a point of criticism: his expanded view of personal autonomy, as it stands, may not yet be compatible with these three features of an autonomy-supporting education, and so it is in uncovering this tension that the theory requires further argumentation, and it turns on the question of autonomous formation. To further explicate, I believe Martin to be on the right track in differentiating internal capacities from environmental conditions. I agree that securing autonomy involves his second condition, that we have an environment consisting of an adequate range of available options. However, I think we need go further to secure them.

To clarify, in my understanding of Martin's work in this regard, the kinds of environmental conditions (as a range of available options) to which he is directly referring are those social forms and practices we are exposed to by our various affiliations, and those which a higher education may also or alternatively make available, and he urges us to recognize that they change at different stages of our lives as our circumstances change. For example, Martin writes,

The relationship between health care and opportunity for an early career professional athlete will likely be very different than it is for a retired one. This difference does not entail a right to health care for the active professional athlete and not the retired one. Accordingly, the design of basic institutions should follow from a broad interpretation of opportunity, allowing us to see why the right to health care extends over one's entire plan of life (Daniels, p. 103-105). A lifespan view of the meaning of 'opportunity' entails much more than valuable jobs and offices for a political conception of the person, and one consequence is that health care institutions have a

more robust public and political role to play than earlier theories of justice have tended to assume. (Ch. 3, pp. 6-7)

In other words, our life stages have a bearing on our self-determined pursuits and our visions of what it means to live a good life. Yet, I think what warrants more attention is what we see in his example of a young citizen with an externally limited range of options, as his family imposes narrow parameters on appropriate professions (Ch.3, p. 8). This urges a relational consideration between self-determined choices or preferences and our environmental conditions. In other words, it is worth asking the question, what actually counts as an autonomous formation of one's conception of a good life?

It is the crux of this last question that comes closer to my more pressing interests with the first condition of securing personal autonomy. This is because the notion of individual internal capacities for a self-determined life— “the expectation that we independently arrive at decisions” (Ch. 3, p.9)—defines what constitutes the minimal conditions of personal autonomy as underpinning Martin's view of human flourishing. But what about those who see little value in independence of this kind?

What I am getting at is that this conception of human flourishing reflects a particular set of epistemically individualistic values. And that means that if we justify educational rights on this account, we justify an educational right that preferences some reasonable conceptions of the good over others. This is the substance of what I have referred to as the unresolved tension which comes up against an account of personal autonomy as ideal belief formation. Given that how we respond to this question has a bearing on the virtues of tolerance within a liberal democracy, I believe we must first take full account of the objection.

II. The Adult Basic Education Objection

I title this ‘the adult basic education objection’, as it conveys the broader tension of ABE in relation to what I interpret as the imperative virtue of epistemic individualism (the minimal conditions of personal autonomy) as the foundations of an autonomy-supporting education. However, I view this as entailing a pair of interrelated objections that arise when we think of the practice of ABE within Martin’s theory: i) the conflicting aims objection, and ii) the external influences objection.

Before moving on to these objections in detail, allow me to take a moment to revisit the current conception of ABE. As a concept, it is understood as the provision of a basic education to adults, who, whether by choice, exclusion, or circumstance, lack or are deemed to lack a basic education. In practice, however, it takes on a narrower form, revealing assumptions about for whom it is politically and socially perceived to be.

Recall that adult education is theorized and practiced on non-ideal grounds, and, broadly speaking, is premised on either the social justice argument for adult education, which highlights the instrumental value of education in lifting people out of poverty, or the argument for adult education rooted in economic policy, often termed ‘lifelong learning’, which frames education as chances at success (specifically, high-paying jobs). While both of these camps take up different grounds, there is a common deficiency assumption unifying them: some adults are lacking the learned skills and abilities to contribute to ‘today’s economy’, and education ought to serve the instrumental purpose of making up for that shortfall. Thus, as I showed in the first chapter, the tension between lifelong learning and adult education theory in the context of ABE is that while they at first appear to stake diametric claims on the value of education, neither can take full stake in a complete

conception without admitting some concession to the competing claim. The difference between the two appears to be largely in means, since they arrive at common externally valuable ends, and those ends are used to justify the means (in other words, their logic is circular).

Martin's case for higher education as an entitlement offers a compelling alternative that rejects these positive externality justifications for education in adulthood in favour of adult citizens' interest in the free and equal pursuit of a good life. However, while not in the extrinsically valuable ends sense, the autonomy aims of his account appear to create a tension in values, nonetheless. I turn now to present how.

The Conflicting Aims Objection: A Conceptual, Reductio Objection

Martin's dichotomy of autonomy-instilling child education versus autonomy-supporting higher education in adulthood risks perpetuating the injustices and assumptions of current conceptions of adult education. This is because it appears to make ABE a non-ideal remediation within his ideal system, just as in lifelong learning and in adult educational theory.

Remember that in ABE's present conception, it is non-ideally theorized as remedial: adults engage or re-engage in a basic education to make up for a lacking, deficient, or insufficient child education (and, for adults, it is narrowly conceived in terms of skills training with direct aims of human capital production and upward social mobility). Yet, in an autonomy-promoting account of educational aims, ideally conceived, a basic education instills autonomy and a higher education supports it. Therefore, a basic education—we might here clarify, including one provided to adults—embraces a wider set of aims than skills

training for human capital production and upward social mobility. But even where this is the case, ABE can still only be understood as remediation or reparation.

For example, imagine a restaurant server, who, having not sufficiently achieved a basic education, decides to upgrade as an adult. That is to say, she wants post-compulsory experiences, not more basic education. This represents an opportunity to finish a goal to the standards she wants to achieve, and she chooses to do so for her own sake. Her motivations for study have little to do with human capital interests and upward social mobility. To be sure, we need not conceive of this as a non-ideal example. Recall from the previous chapter that the basic structure, even ideally conceived, does not erase ethical, political, nor social differences in society; any one or combination of factors could explain how her circumstance commonly arises. Is it reasonable to conclude that she lacks sufficiently instilled minimal conditions of autonomy? If not, does this mean that she ought not have such an educational entitlement even though it is consistent with her plans for a good life and would support her flourishing? Or, need her education be premised on basic autonomy-instilling aims rather than on supporting aims, and what impact might this have on her dignity as an adult citizen?⁷¹

Thus, applying Martin's autonomy education to ABE as a case study, we see a potential contradiction of aims and reveal a concern that reaches beyond ABE. I see this contradiction in the following terms: either i) adults must only be entitled to an autonomy-supporting education without the benefit of sufficiently instilled autonomy at an earlier stage

⁷¹ With these questions I intend to draw critique of the idea of individual responsibility that sometimes inadvertently passes through egalitarian theorizing as Jonathan Wolff describes and that even still leads to distinction between the deserving and undeserving. Thus, I agree with his critique of luck egalitarianism whereby holding individuals responsible to equality overlooks the social conditions of equality (1998, 2010).

of life; or, ii) adults must be deemed insufficient in their autonomous capacities and so only entitled access to a non-ideal remedial education to instill the autonomy that ought to have already been in their possession. In either instance, this impinges on their dignity as adults and the status attributed to them within the political conception of the person.

It is the imperative imposed by the minimal conditions of autonomy which motives a redundancy for adults' basic education. This is because if autonomy education aims for epistemic individualism as the ideal form of autonomy, once it is instilled (as is the function of a basic education), aiming further towards it undermines the aim itself. To explain, once I have come to possess the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that enable me to rationally act on my own individually-determined plans, an education that instills this further suggests I was not already in possession of these capacities and disregards the plans I had already determined.

This reveals a differend of justice when an autonomy-supporting education for adults preferences personal autonomy. It risks situating adults' education, exemplified in the case of ABE, as non-ideal within this theory because adults ought to have already received a basic education in an ideally adequate child education. The trouble is, assuming that adults should receive a basic education only due to non-ideal circumstances – that to not receive a basic education in childhood is somehow 'deviant', for example – presupposes that educational processes necessarily occur at socially and, in this case, politically and morally rightful times.

There is another potential risk. If ABE does not clearly fit within either basic (autonomy-instilling) or higher (autonomy-supporting) educational aims, and these aims are the grounds for adult citizens' educational rights on ideal grounds, then on an epistemically individualistic account of autonomy education, a basic education may not be included. This

is because if we accept that a basic education is personal-autonomy instilling, and adults have already (ideally) received it in childhood, there are no grounds for providing it again, forcing ABE to be understood as a non-ideal response to injustice. Furthermore, this would particularly be the case when conceiving of adult basic education on a second-chance basis. To conceive of educational access to this education in terms of ‘chances’ here mean chances at autonomy, so if adults are already autonomous, they have no justifiable reason to access a basic education.⁷²

The External Influences Objection

Even under ideal conditions, are adults (already) autonomous in forming their conceptions of a good life?⁷³ Martin’s account seems to assume as much, but we have reason to question this assumption.

In order to further explain this objection, I begin with a problem Wojciech Kruszelnicki (2019) claims can arise between autonomy and the andragogical premise of self-directedness in adult education.⁷⁴ Kruszelnicki does not deny autonomy as an ideal; he doubles down on the cognitive interests of human (self-) knowing in relation to external influences

⁷² Recall that political philosophers, particularly in relation to the broader distributive justice interests in fair equality of opportunity have done much theorizing about the concept and question of second chances. Of course, I have been clear that I think a fair and just education for adults ought not find justification in chances. For those interested in this debate, see argument for second chances (or lifelong chances) in education in Alexander Brown’s (2006) “Equality of Opportunity for Education,” and argument challenging the merits of second-chance conceptions, all be it not in education, in Simon Mackenzie’s (2008) “Second-Chance Punitivism and the Contractual Governance of Crime and Incivility.”

⁷³ Paul Benson (1990) expresses a similar sentiment: “The problem of comprehending freedom, conceived as perfect self-domination, therefore frequently manifests itself as a puzzle about whether and how a free agent’s creation of her very self is possible” (p. 50).

⁷⁴ For more on the prominent andragogical assumption of self-directedness in adult education literature, see for example, Knowles (1970, 1980) and Mezirow (1981, 2000).

to distinguish the vital cognitive interests in the process of learning and investigate the forces that oppose their realization in order to be able to show the extent to which andragogy's self of the learning adult is "the exploited self of 'false consciousness' whose experience is rendered inauthentic by distorting ideology and oppressive social structures." (p. 190)

Addressing false consciousness, especially in the strong sense of oppression, evokes a Marxist form of critical pedagogy. Yet, in line with my own purposes, I understand Kruszelnicki to be maintaining an analytical philosophical stance, saying that to take autonomy as an educational ideal must mean placing the self within those wider external influences. He begins with the Kantian view that a mature person is "one who was capable of using his or her own understanding, one who had resolve and courage to use one's own reason without guidance from another" (p. 193) and then complicates the notion that 'without guidance' does not necessarily mean 'without influence'.

To accept adults as already autonomous may overlook external influences, and this could generate the following kinds of problems: i) citizens may uncritically accept externally influenced oppressive impositions as self-determined choices; ii) citizens may perceive that self-determined choices must ideally be made in an epistemically individualistic way, in disregard of external influences that they actually find worthwhile and meaningful in shaping their conceptions of the good; or, to take this point further, iii) citizens may believe they are unsuccessful in their autonomous flourishing merely because they do not prize epistemically individualistic self-determined choices in their belief formations.

Similar objections emerge from within feminist liberal philosophical theorizing of adaptive preferences. Adaptive preferences are preferences formed through the

internalization of oppression, and are characterized by unconscious, covert influences which undermine autonomy (Colburn, 2011; Begon, 2015; Walsh, 2015). For example, a girl growing up in a community that praises women who abide by the choices authoritative men make for them, and those men view women to be leading a good life when they live in service to their husbands, has come to decide that to she wishes to lead such an adult life as her preferred good life. In other words, oppressed people can form preferences as a result of covert influences whereby they reproduce their domination in those preferences and perpetuate injustices against themselves (Khader, 2012). In this way, supporting what may appear to be citizens' personally autonomous conceptions of the good may in fact undermine their real preferences and further perpetuate their self-oppression.⁷⁵ Thus, a wider conception of autonomy education may be called for to uncover and support citizens 'actually held' preferences.⁷⁶

Allow me to now turn to exemplify the external influences objection more broadly. We can think of more obviously destructive examples of oppression that undoubtedly undermine agency and autonomy in clearly offending ways, which would demonstrate the need to account for such influences in a conception of autonomy;⁷⁷ however, I think this also moves toward non-ideal theorizing because they would be obviously undesirable within a

⁷⁵ As Schinkel, de Ruyter, and Steutal (2010) show, another case where personal autonomy may perpetuate self-oppression is in the influences of consumer societies, particularly where attention is not actively given to the ways such societies undermine autonomy. Interestingly, the authors use this case to motivate a wider reaching and less epistemically individualistic account of autonomy.

⁷⁶ While adaptive preferences may, therefore, represent unreliable guides to supporting holders' interests, Jessica Begon (2015) argues that preferences may also be adaptive in the sense that they are unreliable guides to distributive entitlements and so have implications to social contract theory: theorists may be justified in ignoring some individual's preferences without disrespecting or undermining their rationality or culture.

⁷⁷ For readers interested, Khader (2009) delineates adaptive preferences in this way, distinguishing oppressively nonautonomous conceptions versus alternative conceptions with implications on one's preferences. The latter of which, she forwards, may be more appropriate in offering practical guidance to public institutions and theories of the good.

just democratic society, and I want to show that theories of education for adults need not be theorized in this way. I think further argument will be more productive with nuanced consideration gleaned from illustration of external influences which present in more subtle ways that connect theory with reality but maintain our ideal interests.

For example, noting that Martin provides a similar case (Ch.3, p.8), what of the young man who comes from a family of engineers and has come to view engineering as the most prized social form, particularly to live up to tacit expectations of family and social community (we might see this as a doctrine)? While he might think that his upbringing and values-conditioning were restrictive, perhaps he comes to accept the way he turned out, nevertheless. I think we can make the case that he possesses autonomous capacities and dispositions in that he arrives at such a conclusion, yet doing so ties us to external influences in ways that complicate epistemically individualistic accounts of autonomy: can we say that he formed his own life plan?

This leads us to question what educational autonomy aims would best support him: would an autonomy-supporting education ideally help him uncover his epistemically individualistic desires—that is, what he would want, separating out the influence of social others—and act on specifically those? Or, would such an education ideally help him be freely able to speak for himself, aware of and accepting of his social influences where they are warranted by him, and act according to *his* own consistently held beliefs and values, which may not in the end be individualistic? To conclude the former asserts that those plans that are epistemically individualistically formed are his best plans, and ideally, his education supports him in realizing those life pursuits. The trouble is, this could potentially be in conflict with

his own most deeply held values. To conclude the latter calls for a different understanding of autonomy, one that I argue next is relational in nature.

III. Toward a Relational Conception of Autonomy

Political and educational philosophers frequently employ relational conceptions of autonomy in order to respond to the kinds of external influences such as adaptive preferences and false consciousness.⁷⁸ In arguing for a relational understanding of autonomy, Paul Benson (1990) forwards that while free agency has always allowed that “personal and social involvements modify our prospects of fulfilling the conditions of free action,” it assumes that the capacities we must have to act freely have “always been thought to be conceptually independent of the interpersonal relationships in and through which we act” (p. 49). Yet ethical agency ought also to account for “the demands that our particular interpersonal relationships and social situations pose” (p. 50). John Christman (2005) echoes this: “the conditions set out for autonomy [here he means what I have defined as an epistemically individualistic conception] refer at best only to some in the population and not others, thereby valorizing certain personality types, value perspectives, and social positions over others” (p. 330).

It is, therefore, necessary for an account of autonomy to acknowledge the deeply embedded, interpersonally constructed, historical nature of the self out of which forms our

⁷⁸ As noted, Khader (2012) and Mackenzie (2014) explicitly make the connections between false consciousness and adaptive preferences. Mackenzie, for example, shows just how consistent analysis of adaptive preferences is with a relational analysis of the concept of autonomy. Similarly, Peter Nelson (2010), argues for a ‘minimally externalist relationally-focused notion of autonomy’ in response to class-consciousness issues in schools. While he does not name false consciousness, it is embedded in the subtext of the paper.

beliefs and our conceptions of a good life. In this way it involves self-trust and a capacity for critical self-reflection.⁷⁹ That is to say, “the authenticity that autonomy requires obtains when, were one to turn a reflective eye toward the motives, values, and concepts that structure one’s judgments (and do so in a piecemeal manner), one would not feel deep self-alienation, self-repudiation, and unresolvable conflict” (Christman, 2005, p. 345).

Returning to the notion of epistemic individualism, I share Peter Nelson’s (2010) view that critiques of autonomy theories (broadly speaking) as ‘individualistic’ do not adequately account for the ways that those theories are indeed inclusive of social relationships (p. 335). Instead, as Nelson argues, some liberal autonomy accounts “inadequately address the social quality of a primary feature of autonomy—belief adjudication. They embrace a version of epistemic individualism—a position that the judgement of beliefs is best understood as an internal process of individual agents” (p. 335). But relational autonomy theorists invigorate the interpersonal “significance of human connection, [and] awareness of the ways in which prior values impinge on theoretical conceptions of persons” (Benson, 1990, p. 51). And I think it is worth emphasizing these elements are already present in Martin’s autonomy-supporting education, especially given the social forms thesis.

Indeed, I am confident that inclusion of social features of autonomy can be seen in the overview of his work above, and it is also clear in statements like, “Adult citizens should be free to critically question aspects of the education they receive, especially education aimed at shaping their character or beliefs in particular directions” (Ch.2, p. 10). Further to my point, I

⁷⁹ Developing a full account of these capacities and implications to practice is for another project; however, one might turn to Anderson & Honneth (2006), Benson (1994), Kruszelnicki (2020), Mezirow (2003), and Yacek & Ijaz (2019).

view Martin's three features⁸⁰ of autonomy education as entirely compatible with and endorsing of these 'social qualities of belief adjudication', or conception formation, as autonomous flourishing. Nothing in them negates or undermines those reasonable external, social influences on conceptions of good so long as it is the individual who realizes the worth of their life plans. They reinforce the sense of worth, value, and confidence in one's life plans in a way that is clearly grounded in Rawls's notion of self-respect (1971 [1999], pp. 386).⁸¹

It is only in Martin's reference to the *minimal conditions* of personal autonomy, and its evocation of a specific kind of a self-determination, which I have shown is principled in epistemic individualism, that I think needs reconsideration. It is with this purpose in mind that I show how a relational understanding of autonomy can better respond to the ABE objection.

Responding to the Objections: Relational Not Epistemically Individualistic Autonomy

In justifying the case for a relational notion of autonomy in place of epistemic individualism, let us first revisit the young man who, at least partly as a result of a restrictive upbringing and values-conditioning, prizes engineering as a social form. That is, a social form within his vision of the good life that he chooses to pursue in post-compulsory education. I have argued that we cannot say his decision comes about as the result of internal, individual capacities for a self-determined life; he does not arrive at this formation of a good

⁸⁰ To revisit Martin's three features, and autonomy-supporting education 1) increases the knowledge, skills, and understanding of citizens in ways that help them realize their self-determined goals; 2) helps individuals realize their goals are socially significant, meaningful, and worthwhile; and, 3) must have value regardless of life stage, reflecting the diversity of meaningful and worthwhile goals it helps citizens realize. Thus, where education is necessarily connected to self-determination, that education cannot be "merely supporting, but 'autonomy' supporting" (Ch. 3, pp. 12-14).

⁸¹ I develop my own account of recognition self-respect, building on Rawls, to form a conception of justice in the basic structure in the preceding chapter.

life independently, particularly not in the internal individualistic sense. But he is aware of and does rationally accept that those social influences which brought him toward this formation are reasonable and so embraces this life plan.

This underscores relational autonomy as the relevant conception; he has capacities for critical self-reflection and self-trust that allow him to structure his own judgement. He recognizes and values (without necessarily rejecting or neglecting) the social conditions influencing his belief formation, yet he is able to speak freely for himself and act according to his own held beliefs and values. This last point, it is worth elaborating, is inclusive of both *a freedom from those social affiliation influences* as well as *a freedom from the social influences of an education aiming at a notion of autonomy prizing epistemic individualism*. He is free to really be what he is and pursue what he chooses without overlooking the external pressures of broader society which may or may not share his own particular values nor of an education that places influence on him to act on decisions which more directly reflect preferable forms of internalized rational choice.

I now turn to recall the restaurant server with motivation to pursue a basic education for her own sake.⁸² As we saw, this example problematizes the dichotomy between the instilling and supporting aims that, respectively, justify entitlement to an autonomy-promoting education in childhood and adulthood. That is, it is not clear in this case whether what is most relevant is an autonomy-instilling or autonomy-supporting education, yet she has a right to education nonetheless. Remember that because of the conflicting aims objection, we again cannot embrace a conception of personal autonomy that makes epistemic

⁸² We also considered the added possibility that she continues on to higher education, but I believe that in resolving the other objections as we have, we also resolve this aspect of her example.

individualism its central value. However, with an account of relational autonomy in mind, we need not determine whether her autonomous capacities have or have not been sufficiently instilled to justify her entitlements to post-compulsory education. But we can support her critical self-reflection and self-trust, which can only serve to strengthen and reinforce her capacities for her own autonomous flourishing. Furthermore, a relational notion of autonomy engenders no paternalistic concern, whether she was receiving a basic education for the first time or in a subsequent choice to participate, and advances only an interest in ensuring her entitlement to an education that aims to support *her* life plans.

One might take either of these examples and ask, does not a relational conception of autonomy simply exchange epistemic individualism as its ideal for the social qualities of autonomy as a primary feature? I think the suggestion here would be that this merely substitutes preferable values. Replacing individualistic agency with relational agency imposes its own unwarranted influence.

To this objection, I offer a two-fold response. First, in any reasonable account of social relationships (i.e., individual, cultural, traditional, societal, political, economic), it is unreasonable to suggest people are removed from social influence.⁸³ But, second, I imagine a sense in which one might argue that an individual must opt not to prize epistemic individualism, something of a mirror to my own line of objection. In this case, to be clear, just because someone critically reflects on their social influences—that is to say, evaluates how those potential influences contribute to their belief formations of the good (or of doctrines for that matter), and so determines for themselves what formation they most value,

⁸³ Indeed, as Schinkel et al. (2010) offer, while philosophers of education regularly point to religion as an example of such social influence as a threat to autonomy (especially religious fundamentalism), consumerist societies existing within most liberal democracies also presents threats to autonomy and are often overlooked.

and what warranted action to take accordingly—this need not imply that they ought to accept what they view as unwarranted, undue, or unwelcome influence on their self-determined life plans. Thus, they can continue to prize epistemic individualism. My point is that we maintain both as equal values.

Finally, I offer a sense in which relational autonomy is the preferable notion, not only in my own theorizing but implicit within Martin's theory as well. One way in which that is true, I will remind, is that Martin's three features of autonomy education are already compatible with relational autonomy. Another way has to do with the environmental conditions for autonomy, which he carefully lays out as the range of available options on which we can act, and which change along with life circumstances and life stages (Ch. 3, p. 8). Thus, there may be points in our lives where our senses of self-determination change according to our interests, circumstances, and stages of life. And an education aimed at *that* kind of collective good ought to be able to adapt along with us.

Conclusion

Martin asserts that we ought to expand the view of personal autonomy-promoting education to make the distinction between instilling and supporting aims of education. I agree, but I think he ties instilling and supporting too closely to compulsory and post-compulsory education, and this requires him to draw distinctions that defy the justice he intends. Thus, where he asks us to expand the view of autonomy education, I have argued that we ought to expand it further still. When we do, we arrive at a relational account of

autonomy education for adults, a conception that aims to account for the differend of justice—those unintended remainders that define the life pursuit of justice itself.

I have made my case for replacing epistemic individualism as the ideal quality of autonomy for a preferable relational conception which takes into account those social qualities which are a central feature of autonomy. Doing so embraces the multiple ways in which individuals in a pluralistic society form their conceptions of the good. It removes the possibility of an ideal like epistemic individualism imposing its own unwarranted influence on adult citizens' belief formation. And, finally, a relational understanding of autonomy-supporting education maintains adults' interests in a basic education as ideal—not depending on ideological or non-ideal arguments—and so accessible to adults throughout life as basic universal entitlement.

However, through this analysis I have also come to realize that when we take this argument seriously, it comes to bear on the virtue of tolerance and what it means for the state to hold preferences about the makeup of citizens' reasonable conceptions of the good, and both have a spill-over effects on legitimate authority. Thus, this chapter opens the door to further argumentation: for example, what does an account of relational autonomy-supporting education mean for liberal neutrality, and how does this impact political authority over a system of post-compulsory education so conceived? And, in the next chapter, I offer my response, addressing political authority over post-compulsory education as a social institution within the basic structure, and will do so with my own account of the primacy of recognition self-respect in a theory of educational justice.

CHAPTER 4: The Primacy of Recognition Self-Respect in a Pluralistic Education for Adults: Neutrality of Treatment and the Limits of State Authority

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued that relational autonomy is the preferable conception of autonomy in theorizing the aims of education for adults.⁸⁴ It best motivates and underpins an autonomy-supporting education, following Christopher Martin's contribution to the literature defining adults' substantive right to education (*The Right to Higher Education*, 2022), particularly as one inclusive of adults' interests in a *basic* education. I have asserted that Martin's account of personal autonomy requires prioritizing epistemic individualism, by which I mean it holds that, ideally, what constitutes rational reflection and choice is when citizens' conceptions of the good are internally formed and free from the influence of others.⁸⁵ One implication of his position is that it would require some adults (as I exemplified in the case of adult basic education in chapter three) to compromise, reject, or view as being of lesser value their own conception of the good and their life pursuits, where they may not be motivated by individual preferences alone. But it would also mean that adults would only be entitled to basic education for non-ideal reasons like poverty and indoctrination.

However, a relational autonomy account can better address those social qualities and realities of adult lives, embracing the multiple ways in which individuals in a pluralistic society form their conceptions of a good life. For example, on Martin's account, an education ought to support personal autonomy, meaning such an education upholds that the best version

⁸⁴ As opposed to the minimal conditions of personal autonomy defining Martin's theory.

⁸⁵ While this is the focus of the previous chapter, recall that the consequence of this conception of autonomy is that citizens might come to reject the external and social influence in their decision making, prizing their own choices merely because they are their own

of a life plan is one that arises from individualistic reasoning. While this kind of educational provision will support those who share that ideal, it will not support those citizens whose conceptions of the good are shaped by other valuable-to-them external influences. Thus, his conception gives preference to a particular kind of comprehensive doctrine and undervalues others. For this reason, I believe a relational autonomy education can resolve some persuasive objections to Martin's autonomy-supporting education and rescue his account from these objections, further substantiating the educational entitlements his theory compels.

It bears revisiting that relational autonomy represents adults' wide-ranging notions of, and values in, self-determination as reflective of and changeable according to their interests, circumstances, cultural values, and stages of life. And a system of education for adults within a fair and just society understands their reasonably held conceptions of the good, and it supports their pursuits of the good throughout their lives as a basic universal entitlement. A relational autonomy-supporting education, then, requires that the state remains neutral regarding ideals about citizens' belief formations and conceptions of the good as long as they have fair opportunity for self-determination. It is with this basis that my account diverges from Martin's perfectionist account.⁸⁶ This leads to a different picture of what political authority over this system of education would look like; therefore, in this chapter I ask, what constitutes just political authority over a system of education in a pluralistic democratic society?

⁸⁶ Briefly, John Rawls (1971 [1999]) argues that perfectionism requires that less ideal pursuits of excellence must be compromised or sacrificed in order to increase the overall success of perfectionist ideal pursuits. The issue, as he sees it, concerns equal value in conceptions of the good, which ought to be distinguished from equal liberty in conceptions of the good. The criterion of perfection "Insists rights in the basic structure be assigned to maximize the total of intrinsic value" (p. 290), so prioritizing notions of excellence over principles of justice (see pp. 287-290).

I attempt to answer this question by looking to a Rawlsian political liberal account of the state's authority, examining more closely what he defends as the social bases of self-respect as the most important primary good in a liberal democracy (1971 [1999], p. 386). While I expand on this below, briefly, Rawls defines self-respect as a person having a sense of their own value, secure in their convictions that their life plans are worth carrying out and with a confidence in one's power to do so. It is for this reason that it forms the basis of those social conditions which make justice possible. Therefore, in section one, I define recognition self-respect as a central feature of post-compulsory education for adults that promotes the background social conditions of justice, substantiating education for adults' place in the basic structure. In section two, I first establish my claim that the theory of education for adults is *in principle* compatible with the liberal ideal of state neutrality on account of recognition self-respect before turning to conceptualize the kind of neutrality required in order to meet this obligation.

I argue that when we understand education for adults not as a discretionary good, supporting the preferences and benefits of a few, but as a public good promoting social conditions of justice—that is to say, on the basis of self-respect as a primary good within a liberal democracy (Rawls, 1971 [1999])—it is crucial on my account that the state has political authority over this system of post-compulsory education. It protects individuals' dignity, and in the case of basic education, requires that adults' reasons for engaging in it not be understood as educational remediation for failures resulting from past 'wrong choices', and it gives every citizen reason to value, appreciate, and support such a state.

I. Education for Adults and the Primacy of Recognition Self-Respect

Within John Rawls's theory of justice as fairness, what he defines as the bases of self-respect is frequently critiqued for its seeming contradictions of being broadly construed and yet structurally necessary within his political theory.⁸⁷ But it is notable and instructive that although he has revised his theory over the course of his career, he does not let up on the centrality of self-respect in his theory—not in his emphasis on the primacy of the bases of self-respect above all other social goods nor about its conceptual vagueness and the potential uncertainty it injects into his theory throughout every major work (Doppelt, 2009). This, I believe, is because Rawls recognizes the bases of self-respect within his theory as the flexible space for citizens as human beings⁸⁸—our social relationships with each other in public; that is, within Rawls's theory, it creates the possibility of pluralism in a liberal polity, and this gives it great significance to a conception of education within such a democracy. Using his concept as a starting point, I define what self-respect would have to look like in the context of education for adults.

Defining Recognition Self-Respect

By developing a conception of self-respect I aim to answer the following question: how can we provide education for adults—inclusive of a basic education—in a manner that is

⁸⁷ For example, one prominent critic of Rawls's bases of self-respect, Nir Eyal (2005), argues that both the primacy of self-respect and Rawls's conceptual confusion between self-respect and self-appraisal "calls into question Rawls's ethical framework" and these views commit him "to accept objectionable and illiberal politics" (p. 196). See also Shue (1975) and Zaino (1998).

⁸⁸ By this I mean human beings as nuanced, fallible, inconsistent, and contradictory, yet as social beings also necessarily accepting of these inevitabilities in each other. I think Jonathan Wolff expresses this when he writes "Communitarianism has been the most obvious attempt to recover the idea that political philosophy needs to recognise that its subjects are human beings, rather than bundles of ambitions and endowments, but communitarianism has only partially been integrated into egalitarian thought" (2010, p. 337).

consistent with and respectful of adults' status as already autonomous persons? I have previously made the case that an ideal political theory of education for adults as universal entitlement must be inclusive of a basic education in light of the state's interest in supporting adults' relationally, autonomously formed pursuits of the good. Yet, here, I will come to show this requirement is justified in terms of self-respect as a primary social good, undergirding this social institution of education, which is to say that it is a conception of education supporting all citizens reasonable conceptions of the good as equally valuable and worthwhile in a liberal democracy. And this means that it is legitimate to allocate resources in order to support its provision.

In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls describes self-respect as "perhaps the most important [social] primary good" (1971 [1999], p. 386). It plays a central, buttressing role in his theory as justification for the priority of liberty (Zink, 2011). He defines self-respect (or self-esteem) as having two aspects as preconditions of one's pursuit of life plans:

First [. . .], it includes a person's sense of his own value, his secure conviction that his conception of his good, his plan of life, is worth carrying out. And second, self-respect implies a confidence in one's ability, so far as it is within one's power, to fulfill one's intentions. When we feel that our plans are of little value, we cannot pursue them with pleasure or take delight in their execution. Nor plagued by failure or self-doubt can we continue in our endeavors. It is clear then why self-respect is a primary good. *Without it nothing may seem worth doing, or if some things have value for us, we lack the will to strive for them.* All desire and activity becomes empty and vain, and we sink into apathy and cynicism. Therefore the parties in the original

position would wish to avoid at almost any cost the social conditions that undermine self-respect. (p. 386, emphasis mine)

For example, when I hold self-respect in this sense, I feel free to form, revise, and pursue my own reasonable life plans—say first to study engineering and then to realize and pursue a deeper interest in the Arts—unencumbered by coercion, restrictive influences, and self-doubt brought on by a sense that those plans and convictions are not equally worthwhile and valuable and that those options are available to me.⁸⁹ Furthermore, it is imperative that self-respect not only secures confidence in one’s conception of the good, but that it also extends to include one’s self-determined formation of that good. I have added emphasis in his definition where it shows a clear connection between those conditions which influence the formation of our preferences and our own self-confident commitments to carrying them out. Such freedom is essential in a society of equals not simply because citizens ought to have equal liberty in their range of pursuits but because without such liberty, citizens have little reason to pursue anything fully. I ought not be denied my equal and basic right to live a life that gives me reason to live more fully.

That a fair and equal society ought to support citizens’ confidence and self-worth in their reasonable life plans and the power to pursue them is intuitively appealing.⁹⁰ Yet, this

⁸⁹ Alternatively, I might come to realize that while I, personally, hold the Arts dear, my commitments to my social community justify my pursuit of engineering—but I am free to reflect and make choices consistent with the values I cherish (because, as noted in the last chapter, free from coercion does not necessarily mean free from influence). And, either way, I may arrive at different decisions at different points in life as part of the liberty I have to shape and reshape my vision of a good life.

⁹⁰ I am not here implying that education ought to be understood, therapeutically, as confidence-boosting; although this may have some place in a particular contextual practice of education, minding my interest in a stable political conception of education, such a therapeutic notion of education could also potentially result in an education that is self-respect undermining. Of course, this debate requires analysis beyond my scope. Instead, I mean that an education, on account of recognition self-respect, ought to uphold with integrity the legitimacy of citizens’ reasonably held and equally valuable interests in pursuing their education.

notion is not without controversy. Although it is beyond my purpose to overview that literature and criticism, as I elaborate below, its key point turns on the distinction between self-esteem as an evaluative psychological notion of self-appraisal and self-respect as effectively normative.⁹¹ An evaluative notion of self-respect as self-appraisal would mean that when I look in a mirror, I can like the person I see. Normative self-respect is when I am free to really *be* the person I hold conviction to be in a society of equals, and this requires that others must also value the liberty implicit in this notion of self-respect.

The distinction has come to be referred to as that between “appraisal self-respect” as an evaluation of a person’s qualities, virtues, and abilities and “recognition respect” (‘self intentionally dropped’),⁹² “which responds to the object of respect as a kind of being deserving certain consideration, such as a rational agent or a moral person, and attaches equally to all beings” (Brake, 2013, p. 61). Taking my lead from Brake’s close reading of Rawls’s definition, I take recognition *self*-respect as the preferable notion. She refers to Rawls’s *Political Liberalism* (1993) in stating that “it requires a recognition of oneself as an agent possessing the moral powers, and consequently, as having certain entitlements (*PL*, 76-77)” as an equal citizen (p. 62). Accordingly, self-respect is grounded in the political conception of the person. It means persons as free and equal citizens are entitled to equal liberty both within their conceptions of a good life and in their pursuit of them. This is

⁹¹ I have previously referred to work that is critical of Rawls’s notion self-respect (see footnote 87); however, Elizabeth Brake (2013), Christian Schemmel (2019), and Jonathan Wolff (2010), and James R. Zink (2011) all provide thorough overviews of the literature and embrace this normative stance.

⁹² Stephen Darwall (1977) first makes the distinction and then Gerald Doppelt (2009). Important to the point, Doppelt rejects as primary social goods the social bases of self-respect as defined by Rawls’s self-appraisal thesis (p. 132). He argues that we must revise Rawls’s notion of the social bases of self-respect to recognition respect—dropping the ‘self’ to assert the distinction that is the moral responsibility of individuals to extend respect to others.

contingent upon their agency rights: being equally free and able to form and revise their conceptions as well as make and pursue plans through warranted action worth carrying out.

To be sure, this is not an evaluative judgement of a person's conception of the good life or its worthwhileness; rather, liberty arises from citizens "right to view their persons as independent from and not identified with any particular such conception with its scheme of final ends" (Rawls, 1993, p. 30). In other words, what defines citizens as free and equal is not the particular plans they form and the choices they make, but their ability to form and pursue plans, and to reengage in this process throughout their lives (that is, revise their plans). Recognition self-respect "emphasizes the equality [...] between each person and others; without some special reason (such as contractual obligation), my plan should not be subordinate to that of another" (Brake, 2013, p. 65).

I understand this to mean that in a fair and just society, citizens are not only free and equal as citizens; they also ought to be afforded a liberty that comes from being a part of a society whose social conditions extend equal worth to all reasonable conceptions of the good and uphold their entitlements to pursue those conceptions. If, for example, a citizen's life plans are motivated by the collective interests of her community—a cultural value she holds dear or a shared religious life, and so those plans are not in and of themselves formed of the individual preferences that she carries—those plans and her liberty to determine them still ought to hold equal worth and value in a society of equals.

Finally, and importantly, the primacy of recognition self-respect is not merely that it protects an individual's dignity to value, revise, and pursue their own conceptions of the good. It is that this liberty comprises a collective good securing state legitimacy because it gives every citizen reason to value, appreciate, and support such a state. The kind of

recognition self-respect I establish in this section is theoretically complementary to a relational conception of autonomy: “that is, the authenticity that autonomy requires obtains when, were one to turn a reflective eye toward the motives, values, and concepts that structure one’s judgments (and do so in a piecemeal manner), one would not feel deep self-alienation, self-repudiation, and unresolvable conflict” (Christman, 2005, p. 345). Thus, an agent is autonomous when she is freely able to speak for herself and act according to *her* consistently held beliefs and values, regardless of what decision she chooses to enact. With this in mind, in the recent example of our collective-valuing citizen, what matters is that she has the freedom to speak and act according to her beliefs and values. The concern is not whether the actual plan she enacts is the one that is individualistically derived. Freedom arises through respect and social cooperation, not merely having individual choice. And it is through citizens’ shared interests in ensuring this liberty for each other that we establish a sense of belonging in a shared and pluralistic civic community. This, I believe, is what for Rawls qualifies recognition self-respect as the most important primary good.

Turning to its significance to education for adults, I will show how securing recognition self-respect within the theory allows me to *ideally* conceive⁹³ of post-compulsory education as inclusive of basic education.

Let me restate the significance of this move for my argument. As Jonathan Wolff (1998) suggests, citizens would have had to justify their access to these goods by explaining

⁹³ Recall that, following from Chapter One, ideal theorizing concerns how a state ideally functions whereas non-ideal theorizing concerns how the state functions to account for real-world insufficiencies that need to be resolved to bring the state towards its ideal (see Valentini, 2009, 2012). Following my analysis of lifelong learning and adult education in that chapter, both—especially in relation to adult basic education—are theorized in non-ideal terms: failures in society ought to be accounted for in forms of education as stop-gap measures, and they represent those measures.

how poorly their lives have gone and how bad their choices have been. However, taking seriously recognition self-respect requires that adults' reasons for engaging in a basic education not be understood as educational remediation for failures resulting from past 'wrong' choices; it ought to be allocated regardless of whether these non-ideal conditions are in play. As in the examples above, to do otherwise would qualify as unjust and disrespectful because it would mean denying citizens the full value of their equal liberty to determine and revise their own life plans according to reasons that are relevant to them according to their own interests, circumstances, cultural values, and stages of life.

Instead, my account of educational justice as fairness understands that adults' choices and circumstances change throughout life, and the role of education as a social institution within the basic structure is to foster and support those liberatory social conditions which make justice possible.⁹⁴ But it also allows me to conceive of an ideal theory of education for adults *inclusive of a basic education* for another important reason: adults' reasons for their pursuits of their life plans—and in this instance, their choices to engage in a basic education—ought not to be conceived as subordinate to another conception of the good. In other words, recognition self-respect does not constrain ideal theorizing of adults' education

⁹⁴ Fredrik Sandberg (2016) draws similar importance in recognition theory to adult education through his qualitative sociological study analyzing the problematic economically instrumental traditions of adult education. For him, recognition has the potential to offer greater intrinsic worth and substance to this education, which means rebuilding self-worth in adult students who are part of a precariat class. Yet, underscoring the motivations of my theoretical framework of education for adults, it is worth noting that his analysis of adult education understands it as non-ideal, second-chance education, and notably his concluding follow-up questions betray the philosophical problems my project seeks to address: his theorizing relies on instrumental confirmations to determine 'success' of education now informed by recognition theory (as in, are these students now in better positions of employment?).

on the basis of their already autonomous status as adult citizens.⁹⁵ Thus, it buttresses theorizing against not only conceiving of adult basic educational access on the basis of ‘chances’, but also against theorizing adult basic education as remediation of or an improvement upon adults’ autonomous capacities.⁹⁶

Allow me to show how with the following example: imagine a student in secondary-level (compulsory) education has determined for herself that pursuing higher education is not consistent with her vision of a good life. She does, however, value completing a basic education. Where academics have not been her priority, the courses and grades that she obtains allow graduation but will not enable access to post-secondary education—and she is okay with this. However, after working in the restaurant industry for several years, her vision of a good life changes: she determines that she would like to pursue the Arts and enrolls in adult basic education both to obtain entrance requirements and to acquaint herself with the knowledge, skills, dispositions, disciplines, and culture of formal study. I use this example as one that represents common circumstances motivating adults’ reasons to pursue a basic education.

⁹⁵ A common justification for entitlement of children to a basic education is on the basis of its autonomy-instilling aims, the state’s interest in creating citizens within liberal democracies. Christopher Martin (2021) provides rich insight into this account as it relates to education in adulthood. See also Eamonn Callan’s *Creating Citizens* (1997) for a leading and foundational account of the autonomy-instilling requirements of children’s basic education. I have developed an objection to theorizing adults’ autonomy interests in education along these lines in Chapter Three of this thesis.

⁹⁶ In my view, this alludes to the case for liberal neutrality I will later claim in this chapter, and I think it does so in a unique and nuanced way: it emphasizes the state’s requirement to foster the social conditions of liberation which make justice possible, rather than merely the state’s interest in protecting citizens’ individual autonomy.

Following the conception of recognition self-respect I forward, second-chance policies in adult education hinge on assessments of deservingness⁹⁷ and would impose unjust social, political, and economic conditions constraining her pursuit of a good life. Recall that as I showed in previous chapters, in our current system of adult education, she would only be entitled to a basic education if she had not completed one in the first place. Yet her reasons for choosing not to pursue post-secondary in the first instance are not a reason to deny her access now in a just society; rather, a society so ordered ensures citizens' liberties to form and change reasonable plans, and it maintains this liberty as a social good throughout life for all of its citizens, avoiding injuries to self-respect. She would, therefore, be entitled to further education because it is part of her life plan—the liberty of which is defined within the concept of recognition self-respect and undergirds the state's interest in supporting the social conditions of justice—without assessment of individual deservingness.

Furthermore, her reasons for choosing to access a basic education need not be determined by a need to improve those autonomous capacities, as would be the case for children accessing a basic education, but by the support this education provides her in her pursuit of her life plan. Accordingly, this conception of educational justice also recognizes her equal status as a citizen. Without having the equal liberty to revise her plans—and pursue

⁹⁷ Recall that in British Columbia, Canada (education in Canada is provincially governed, and there exists no national adult education policy), adults over 19-years-old have a legislated right to a basic education only where they have not already attempted the course(s) in which they are enrolled. Thus, adult students are subject to what are known as a second-chance policies, which determine their deservingness of a basic education. Evidenced by recent changes in government from Liberals to New Democrats, these second-chance policies are susceptible to ideological bents: under the Liberals, these second-chance cases motivated defunding of adult basic education and the implementation of tuition at public institutions capped at up to \$1600/semester, yet when the New Democrats took office, they reversed the policy changes and restored funding. For a full account, see Smythe & Walker (2019).

these revised plans—as Rawls asserts, her desires and activities become empty and vain, and little would seem worth doing.

Now that I have shown how my proposed account is better able to include basic educational provision to adults as a matter of justice, I will now move on to show how this approach to justice is also more *legitimate*. I have argued that recognition self-respect justifies fair and just access to post-compulsory education. As I move to address now, it also requires a kind of neutrality that constrains the state’s authority—as I will show, in order for citizens to be truly free to hold different conceptions of the good and equal liberty to pursue them, the state must not unjustly impose preferences for any one conception of the good over another. Thus, the requirements of recognition self-respect limit the ways the state can and cannot use its power.

II. For Whom and For What is an Education: Neutrality of Treatment as Educational Fairness and the Limits of State Authority

The line of argument I have so far forwarded for the development of a fair and just system of education for adults necessitates that I address the implications of this account for rival conceptions of the good. Recall the philosophical debate about liberal state neutrality—i.e., the view that the state should not favour some conceptions of the good over others. This is because if citizens have the free and equal liberty to choose, change, and pursue their own reasonable vision of a good life, the system of education for adults must be responsive to that range of conceptions. For an obvious example of the concern, a non-neutral state might provide all adults who want one an education, but only offer programs that lead to high

employment fields. I believe that I have made clear from early in my thesis why this is unjust.

As I have shown, citizens have different ways of giving shape to their conceptions of the good. Given the fact of reasonable pluralism in liberal democratic societies, the system of education a fair and just theory proposes ought to be fair and just for all equal citizens and their overlapping interests in political stability.⁹⁸ Therefore, in what follows, I press upon two essential debates in political liberal philosophy: first, I defend my stance that this theory is *in principle* compatible with the ideal of state neutrality; and, second, I address the spillover implications of what constitutes legitimate state authority.⁹⁹

Liberal Neutrality

Recall that I defend a political theory of educational justice for adults. A fundamental idea of Rawls's political liberalism, the fact of reasonable pluralism—respect for the diversity of doctrines presented and professed by reasonable citizens—requires limits on what counts as legitimate state authority. For Rawls, state neutrality determines and sets parameters limiting the exercise of state power. Neutrality, broadly speaking, expresses “the view that the state should not reward or penalize particular conceptions of the good life, but rather, should provide a neutral framework within which different and potentially conflicting conceptions of the good can be pursued” (Kymlicka, 1989, p. 883).¹⁰⁰ Yet the ideal of

⁹⁸ I am referring to the idea of overlapping consensus, that a political conception of justice ought to be mutually agreeable to all reasonable citizens according to each their own comprehensive doctrines who share a common interest in political stability (Rawls, 1993, pp. 132-172). For more on this idea and my own theorizing about education, see Chapter Two.

⁹⁹ Note that John Rawls (1993) defines these concerns as the two fundamental questions that political liberalism addresses (pp. 3-11).

¹⁰⁰ Notably, however, as I will come to below, Kymlicka is troubled by what he sees as the inevitably non-neutral effects of even well-designed policy that intends neutrality.

neutrality, especially in relation to autonomy, generates significant philosophical debate.¹⁰¹ For that matter, Rawls himself has stated that political liberalism and its commitment to neutrality requires only a minimal child education—one designed to foster knowledge of constitutional and civic rights as a key feature of self-supporting and fully cooperating members of society—rather than a substantive education fostering the values of autonomy and self-respect. That is, one that fosters and supports political virtues so that adults participating in education honour “the fair terms of social cooperation in their relations with the rest of society” (see Rawls, 1993, pp. 199-200).

I have so far defended a relational-autonomy supporting education as a collective good contributing to justice and political stability, yet I also claim that recognition self-respect demands state neutrality. Otherwise, the state would be recognizing some citizens with certain conceptions of the good over and above others.

However, recall that relational autonomy represents adults’ wide-ranging notions of and values in self-determination as reflective of and changeable according to their interests, circumstances, cultural values, and stages of life. Following Rawls, it is a *political* value “realized in public life by affirming the political principles of justice and enjoying the protections of the basic rights and liberties; it is also realized by participating in society’s public affairs and sharing in its collective self-determination over time” (1993, p. 77-78). This is a notion distinct from the individualistic, Kantian conception of personal autonomy that Rawls rejects on the grounds that it is an *ethical* value realized by rational principles of how one ought to live one’s life, giving shape to a particular comprehensive doctrine (1993,

¹⁰¹ This is because, Rawls argues, citizens interests in ethical autonomy (like personal autonomy) represent particular conceptions of what constitutes a good life and therefore state endorsement would constitute a violation of state neutrality between rival conceptions.

p. 78). Rawls leaves “the weight of ethical autonomy to be decided by citizens severally in light of their comprehensive doctrines” (p. 78), which is to say, citizens are free to shape their lives according to their own reasonably held values.

But there is a second reason why my account does not lead to conflicting ideals, and this has to do with how we should understand the role of neutrality in education. Although I think that Rawls is at least partially correct, that a pluralistic conception of educational justice ought not find basis in *personal* autonomy, I also think he is misguided in the impositions that he claims neutrality makes on education, allowing only a minimal civic notion of it. Allow me, therefore, to briefly explain my conception of relational autonomy as compatible *in principle* with neutrality, and then I will turn to defend the kind of neutrality that this theory adopts.

Firstly, I wish to remind readers that this theory of education is motivated by the status of adults *qua* adult citizens: it is informed by the political conception of adults as free and equal persons. An education that *fosters* autonomy (a child education) is quite different—as Christopher Martin (2022) correctly distinguishes—from an education that *supports* adults’ freely chosen and equally worthwhile and valuable life pursuits. Yet, Martin himself adopts a perfectionist account, determining that “the educational value of [personal] autonomy bypasses the neutrality constraint: an education for liberal citizenship, in order to be successful in its aims, requires students to acquire knowledge, skills, and dispositions quite similar to, if not indistinguishable from, those proffered by defenders of personal autonomy—virtues of tolerance, reflectiveness, and critical thinking” (Ch. 2, p. 4). This is to acknowledge that liberal philosophers generally prefer to remain neutral to conceptions of the good in arguments about justice. For Martin, where theorizing relates to education for

autonomy rather than for a particular conception of autonomy, the neutrality constraint need not factor. The general idea is that an autonomy education is not biased, it is just what anyone needs to be a functioning citizen. Where autonomy education does not impose any virtues, capacities, dispositions, and abilities other than those a liberal state, ideally conceived, already endorses as part of a civic life, it is essentially neutral.

The trouble this carries in my interest in a pluralistic conception of educational justice is that, outside of a society ascribing to a single comprehensive doctrine, perfectionism is not neutral. And although a political conception of autonomy does define what *any* citizen needs to be a functioning citizen, this is not necessarily the case for an ethical conception of autonomy.¹⁰² Recall from the previous chapter that the epistemic individualism of the minimal conditions of personal autonomy gives substance to a particular conception of what constitutes ideal belief-formation of a good life.¹⁰³ Of course, those who prize this conception ought to tolerate those who do not in the interests of social cooperation; however, on account of the neutrality that recognition self-respect requires, the problem is in the inverse: what would it mean for adult students with conceptions of the good which are incompatible with an individuality-prizing one to engage in a perfectionist education in which their own less-than-ideal conceptions are, at best, merely tolerated? For example, if I hold collectivist values reflective of my cultural community in an education that ideally aims to support participant's internal individual processes of rationalization, I can expect to be tolerated by others and by

¹⁰² Note that Rawls draws this distinction in *Political Liberalism* (1993, pp. 77-81).

¹⁰³ Kymlicka (1989) affords another way to understand this in expressing that perfectionist ideals have an important place in liberal society (individuals and groups are inherently perfectionist) but not in the liberal state, which presupposes social non-neutrality as precisely the justification requiring state neutrality (pp. 893-899). Yet, Kymlicka reminds readers, the key is to learn from the range of positions within this debate, and what neutrality requires becomes complex in states with more than one culture.

the system of education but I can also expect that my own reasons for pursuing an education will be merely tolerated and so not be fully supported.

If this basic institution is not neutral, adult students will not be participating in a system of equal toleration.¹⁰⁴ (I do not mean ‘equal toleration’ in the simple sense that citizens tolerate each other in equal measure, rather, a social position where they, too, tolerate other conceptions from a base of equal status and worth—the social conditions which recognition self-respect promotes.)¹⁰⁵ Instead, it would seem that some must accept their own conception as tolerable but not ideal within a system of education ideally conceived for another set of prized ethical values. In this way, paradoxically, perfectionism may—

¹⁰⁴ We see a similar criticism of liberal toleration launched by communitarian philosopher Michael Sandel (1989). He writes that the minimalist case for toleration, which I understand to be a critique of Rawls’s *Political Liberalism* (1993) and the notion of overlapping consensus, “proposes bracketing controversial moral and religious issues for the sake of securing social cooperation in the face of disagreement about ends, not for the sake of such ‘comprehensive’ liberal ideals as autonomy or individuality” (p. 531). Alternatively, the voluntarist case, which I understand to be a critique of Rawls’s *Theory of Justice* (1971) as a comprehensive liberal doctrine, ties toleration to autonomy rights alone: the Rawlsian/Kantian conception of the person as free and equal. As he describes, where there exists “deep disagreement about values,” the voluntarist position presents a neutral case for tolerance that “offers social peace and respect for rights without the need for moral conversion,” (536). It brackets moral arguments by claiming those individuals who reject a given view on the controversial issue need not change their own minds, only tolerate those who practice it in private, yet toleration comes at the price of devaluing what it tolerates. I believe Sandel is only partially correct. Exemplified by Eamonn Callan’s case of Michael’s interest in justice without autonomy (1997, p. 47-55), we can respond to this criticism with a political conception of the person whereby autonomy enables citizens to see and confront their own ends and interests in relation to the society and their available options. Yet, in my view, a substantive account of personal autonomy (as Callan endorses) cannot achieve a neutral position of equal toleration in which this form of social cooperation can be achieved—which, I believe, also explains Martin’s turn to perfectionism.

¹⁰⁵ I will elaborate on this point when I discuss neutrality of treatment and educational fairness in what follows; however, to my purposes here, in Andrew Jason Cohen’s conceptual analysis of toleration, particularly in relation to neutrality, he clarifies that toleration is not the same thing as neutrality, but rather “neutrality is a manifestation of toleration in the political setting such that a state is neutral towards conceptions of the good when it tolerates them all” (2004, p. 76). I read a similar understanding in Ian Carter’s analysis of the compatibility between recognition respect and toleration, whereby their compatibility is limited insofar as recognition respect treats persons as opaque: “it rules out evaluations of the basic agential capacities upon which people’s moral personality supervenes” (2013, p. 206).

ironically perhaps—create *self-determination-diminishing* social conditions.¹⁰⁶ This justifies my move away from perfectionism and towards the ideal of state neutrality.¹⁰⁷

Although I have not yet defended the conception of neutrality this theory upholds, an example will help motivate the issue at stake. Allow me to apply the case of teaching Darwinism borrowed from Steven De Wijze (1999): a perfectionist policy might justify such teaching as necessary for critical, rational assessments of various views on human origins; a neutral policy might justify such teaching on the grounds that citizens ought to be aware of different ideas and theories influencing fellow citizens' reasoning and judgements in the public sphere.

In what way might the former be self-determination-diminishing? What's wrong with teaching a person that understanding evolution is essential for one's *own understanding* of what it means to be a person in the modern world? If I hold a particular cultural or religious worldview about the existence of life, it is one thing for me to learn that the theory of evolution carries great significance in other worldviews, and that it grounds particular disciplines—it holds great significance in the public sphere. It is another thing for me to learn in an institution that is based on a comprehensive doctrine which presumes that without holding this Darwinian worldview, I am unable to engage in, or less capable of, critical assessment in the public sphere and self-understanding. In the latter case, I am likely to come to experience self-determination-diminishing consequences, not because my own reasons for viewing world are not shared by others (this can be accounted for with liberal tolerance), but

¹⁰⁶ Allan Patten levels an objection to perfectionism along these lines (2012, p. 266-267).

¹⁰⁷ Readers interested in these unintended consequences of perfectionism in relation to non-liberal communities within liberal democracies might look at David McCabe (2001), who concludes his analysis of Razian perfectionism in light of a state regarding all cultural communities as having equal standing, and he suggests that such theorizing must endorse neutrality to defend the liberal state.

because the reasons for viewing the world as I do mean that my views are to be merely tolerated amongst otherwise better ones. Because I hold those conceptions dear, I am not entitled to the equal toleration that secures the dignity and recognition self-respect that define the social conditions supporting my equal status and worth.

Secondly, and more specifically in response to Rawls's minimal education, it is not entirely clear that an autonomy education necessarily violates neutrality.¹⁰⁸ And if I am able to defend such a claim, then I believe my account of education for adults is consistent with Martin's emphasis on the necessary relationship between autonomy education and collective goods, but with the advantage of not having to turn to perfectionism in order to make such a case.¹⁰⁹ For example, M. Victoria Costa (2004) makes the case for a political, not minimal (nor comprehensive), conception of civic education (in K-12). She argues that Rawls premises his theory on neutrality of aims, or what she refines to be 'restrictive justificatory neutrality', whereby policies ought to be restricted to public reasons that all reasonable citizens could find reasonable.¹¹⁰ Policies so informed do not reject an appeal to common values, but rather limit what values can be identified to only those compatible with all comprehensive doctrines. For example, policies in favour of universal childcare could be

¹⁰⁸ See additional examples reflecting a range of accounts of autonomy education and neutrality: Callan refutes political liberalism as veiled comprehensive liberalism on the issue of autonomy (1997, especially pp. 39-42), and Ben Colburn claims that neutrality obtains on autonomy grounds, and only briefly addressing adult education, states adults' autonomy interests "give reasons to provide adult education so as to allow people (within the bounds of practicality) to decide later in their lives to retrain and pursue something new if they come to change their judgements about what is valuable" (2010, p. 97) yet he constrains this political entitlement to adult basic education.

¹⁰⁹ The issue I am referring to here, as Martin alludes to in his own theorizing, is known as the convergence thesis: "that the normative commitments of political liberalism would mandate a civic educational curriculum [... virtually identical to one] mandated by comprehensive liberalism" (Davis & Neufeld, 2007, p. 48).

¹¹⁰ Recall that my concern thus far is to constitute this theory of education for adults as in principle compatible with neutrality, yet also not objectionable on the Razian perfectionist grounds Martin adopts, and Joseph Raz objects to this kind of neutrality in *The Morality of Freedom* (1981, p. 116). Therefore, I will aim to establish a compatible conception of neutrality ending this section.

justified through reasons that it would be a benefit for all reasonable citizens who wanted to access the benefit, but it could not be justified as accessible to only families where the parent(s) chose to access the benefit to allow employment.

Thus, they place emphasis on citizens' widely shared interest in the stability of a just society (fair social cooperation) rather than particular interests. This, she writes, reveals that Rawlsian civic education is not as minimal as it seems; rather than viewing education as either comprehensive or minimalist, there is overlap in a *political* conception. Important for my own account of education for adults, she clarifies:

The main difference between educational proposals supported by political liberalism and other liberal views is not to be found in their content but in the sort of arguments used to justify them. The political theory would always limit itself to arguments that are acceptable to reasonable persons. This provides political liberalism with a theoretical advantage in explaining legitimacy of the policies it recommends. Moreover, political liberalism has practical advantages, for the very same policy, when defended by political arguments, may have wider appeal and, for that reason, gain more stable support. Finally, when one's educational policy is based on a comprehensive doctrine that *happens to be* a liberal one, there is no guarantee that future shift in the popularity of that doctrine will allow the same sort of educational policy to persist. But if that policy is defended in political terms, such shifts will not have such a practical impact. (p. 8)

In other words, Costa's move is to, in effect, reverse the argument that comprehensive liberals (and liberal perfectionists) use to justify substantive ethical conceptions of autonomy

in order for her to prove the advantages of her own political, not minimal, conception. This is because comprehensive liberals underscore the inevitability of bringing autonomy into theorizing—Callan’s argument that fair social cooperation “bring[s] autonomy through the backdoor” justifies political liberalism as a veiled form of comprehensive liberalism (1997, p. 40)—but this merely suggests the two may be similar in practice. What matters, on Costa’s account, is differences *in justifications*.

Furthermore, this stabilizes a political theory of education for adults against another line of argument, leveled by Suzy Killmister (2013). For her, in order for political liberals to avoid bringing in substantive ethical conceptions informing the construction and organization of social institutions within the basic structure, they would have to do two things: 1) “show that a content-neutral conception of autonomy would *not* suggest institutional structures that are inimical to reasonable conceptions of the good”; and 2) “show that restrictive structures would follow *necessarily* from adopting a substantive conception of [autonomy]” (p. 368). In other words, a politically neutral system of education will need to demonstrate that it is 1) truly supportive and rewarding for all reasonable conceptions of the good, and 2) a liberatory improvement upon an ethically perfectionist system of education.

I have attempted to lay the groundwork to do just this. I have so far made the case that this political theory of educational justice for adults respects the autonomy of students in their desires and goals, but it does not require that they have to be individualistic in their outlook on life in order to have their interests fully valued in that system. By extension, I have also shown that the theory is at least *in principle* compatible with neutrality, which is to say that it treats all reasonable conceptions of the good as equally valuable and worthwhile.

What I have yet to do is conceptualize the kind of liberal neutrality I mean in order to fully realize the kind of equal treatment I defend, and it is to that purpose that I now turn.

Liberal Neutrality of Treatment and Educational Fairness. Alan Patten (2012; 2014) proposes a conception of neutrality of treatment in order to address a number of criticisms of neutrality by philosophers.¹¹¹ Patten takes a novel tack in responding to this neutrality debate: “rather than contrasting neutrality exclusively with perfectionism, [his analysis] opposes it to a broader range of uses of political power” (2012, p. 250). For him, rather than treating neutrality as a strict prohibition, he understands it as a significant *pro tanto* constraint. He frames his analysis of neutrality around state policymaking as thus: “With intentions *I*, the state adopts policy *P*, which can be expected to have effects *E*” (p. 254), where *I*, *P*, and *E*, relate to focal points of distinct theorizing about neutrality. Patten makes a novel case for neutrality in relation to focal point *P*. It is, therefore, worth briefly explicating the two broad traditions that neutrality is often conceived within first: *neutrality of intentions I* and *neutrality of effects E*. I will then examine Patten’s own notion of *neutrality of treatment P* and justify it as the preferable notion in the theory of education for adults.

Neutrality of Intentions. Following neutrality of intentions, which is sometimes referred to as neutrality of aims or neutrality of justifications, a state maintains neutrality

¹¹¹For example, Joseph Raz (1986), who argues that neutral policies will either end up being non-neutral or they will have to be so weak in what they defend that they will be ineffective; also, as footnoted above, Amy Gutmann (1999) and Eamonn Callan (1997), as determined by Davis & Neufeld (2007) adopt the convergence thesis which defends that there is effectively no difference between a neutral and perfectionist account as they share the same goals of mutual respect, and that a political liberal education would have to accept a comprehensive notion of personal autonomy. Readers might also see Sher (1997).

when it adopts policy that does not reward or punish particular conceptions of the good—that is, such policies are justified when their aims remain neutral. For example, where some conceptions of the good will take great value in the theory of Darwinian evolution and others will not, the state ought to only adopt policies that do not preference or diminish either.¹¹² Neutrality of this kind aims to find justification when the state abstains from basing policy decisions on grounds that value particular conceptions over others.

Patten (along with Martin and Raz) gives us reason to reject this kind of neutrality, using the example of a state's advantaging of a particular religion, one that policymakers may not believe is truly or intrinsically valuable but for which they still judge desirable social consequences, like greater authority and state legitimacy (see case on pp. 255-256). This justification would allow the state to promote that religion over others without it being deemed 'non-neutral'. However, a state promoting religion in this way would clearly violate neutrality for some citizens.¹¹³

Neutrality of Effect. Following neutrality of effect, which is sometimes referred to as neutrality of consequences, a state maintains neutrality when it adopts policy that does not lead to one conception of the good becoming more *successful* than its rival(s), assuming an appropriate baseline of what constitutes reasonable success. Success in this case is measured

¹¹² Steven De Wijze provides precisely this example of neutral intentions (1999, pp. 91-92).

¹¹³ Since I develop support for my analysis in M. Victoria Costa's case for a Rawlsian political not minimal civic education above, which she defends on grounds of what she calls 'restrictive' justificatory neutrality, it is worth accounting for her position: Costa adds the 'restrictive' condition, which pre-emptively restricts justification to abstaining on grounds that could be reasonably rejected by some citizens (2004, p. 4). Although Costa resists the objection Patten by adding her 'restrictive' condition, some might also suggest she maintains the normative challenge of realizing distinctions between what counts as minimally neutral policy versus what counts as more substantial policy but is still politically neutral. By this I mean that, following the case for restrictive justificatory neutrality, it is unclear whether any state policies related to religion would be possible, because it would be reasonable to conclude that some reasonable citizens would reject them, yet a resulting absence of policy is not neutral at all.

either in terms of its relative popularity or its realizability in society (its availability as an option).¹¹⁴ In our Darwinism case, a policy on teaching evolutionary theory can only be neutral when it does not lead to other conceptions of the good becoming less realizable in society. Kymlicka (1989) weighs this kind of neutrality in consideration of how states remain neutral when they are comprised of more than one culture, writing this “may require special linguistic, educational, and even political rights for minority cultures [...rather than] colour-blind laws applying to persons of all races and cultures” (1989, p. 903-904). In other words, the state cannot be neutral toward dominant cultural conception(s) of the good without non-neutral implications for minority cultures.

Indeed, Patten picks up on Kymlicka’s point, suggesting that the trouble is that while this kind of neutrality might explain why policies are non-neutral, it also excludes all policies from being neutral: what meaningful policies could be enacted that would not have different effects for at least some citizens and groups? In this way, it becomes an ideal that is itself untenable.

Neutrality of Treatment. Patten’s neutrality of treatment, however, responds to these conceptual limitations. It requires that the state’s policies be equally accommodating of different and rival conceptions of the good, understood as ranging across related policies rather than implying an attempt to achieve neutrality in a single, neutral policy. For example, continuing the case of teaching Darwinian theory, one could imagine creating several distinct, but overlapping, policy responses reflecting relevant accommodations within a program of study. Accepting that this were related to an earth sciences department, one policy could emphasize coursework reflecting a range of scientific evolutionary approaches

¹¹⁴ See Patten’s expanded analysis (2012, pp. 256-257).

to understanding human relations with the world as well as other cultural approaches. This would allow that students might come to better know, understand, and shape their own worldviews through these complex and varied relationships. Another policy could relate to hiring faculty who themselves represent a range of distinct and rival worldviews. And, finally, another policy could promote student reflective practice emphasizing the transformative education resulting from their divergent studies and experiences.

By conceptualizing neutrality of treatment as a downstream value, Patten means it is “guided by a particular, justifiable, liberal value—what [he] call[s] ‘fair opportunity for self-determination’—that the state has a weighty, if defeasible, reason to be neutral between conceptions of the good” (2012, p. 253).¹¹⁵ As a downstream value, self-determination establishes a range of conceptions for which the state has reason to be neutral, yet some conceptions reject the value of self-determination that serves as the basis for neutrality, making neutrality impossible. Stated another way, the state should make sure its neutral policies only support citizens’ conceptions of the good which themselves support others’ fair opportunity for self-determination. This is because doing otherwise could lead to and support coercion and oppression. Extending neutral treatment toward citizens who reject the value of self-determination means doing so would deny others the fair opportunity for it.

¹¹⁵ I remind readers that even though self-determination is a central and required condition for and of autonomy, there are different conceptions of autonomy, each of which will include some notion of self-determination. Recall that I defend a conception of relational autonomy within the theory, represents adults’ wide-ranging notions of, and values in, self-determination as reflective of and changeable according to their interests, circumstances, cultural values, and stages of life; it takes into account that personal and social involvements influence our prospects of fulfilling the conditions of free action. It acknowledges the deeply embedded, interpersonally constructed, historical nature of the self out of which forms our beliefs and our conceptions of a good life. In this way it involves self-trust and a capacity for critical self-reflection, but it does not require that they have to be individualistic in their outlook on life. As John Christman writes, “the authenticity that autonomy requires obtains when, were one to turn a reflective eye toward the motives, values, and concepts that structure one’s judgments (and do so in a piecemeal manner), one would not feel deep self-alienation, self-repudiation, and unresolvable conflict” (2005, p. 345).

For example, it is one thing for me to override my own self-determined ideal conception of the good in light of what I consider a more valuable social influence in my life (one might think of parental duties, mentors, or faith-based/cultural influences). I may accept some external influence or constraint that determines a reasonable good life for me—even if it is inconsistent with what I determine for myself to intrinsically want—rejecting my own self-determined choice and pursuing another life path instead. In this case, I have had fair opportunity for self-determination, and chose not to value it (or, perhaps, place less value in it) through that decision in my life. However, the state ought to extend neutral treatment to my resulting reasonable life pursuits because *those plans* are valuable to me nonetheless. That I do not chose to act on my self-determined vision of a good life does not justify nonneutral treatment and an education that does not support me, nor does it justify me believing others ought not have opportunity for self-determination.

It is another thing for me to conclude that there is no value in self-determination at all, because this would mean I believe that there is no reason to support fair opportunity. Were the state to extend neutral treatment to this conception, it would mean the state is not neutral; instead, the state would be endorsing coercion. It would allow the conditions for illiberalism and unfreedom to grow. Not only, then, would this violate neutrality, but significantly, it would also be inherently undemocratic.

I have defended recognition self-respect as a central feature of post-compulsory education for adults that promotes the background social conditions of justice, and Patten's neutrality of treatment has particular appeal in helping to conceptualize the constraints on state authority that this theory compels because it ensures a just and fair society extends fair opportunity for self-determination through policies based on equal treatment—again, this is

not to be understood in the sense that one policy is necessarily equal for all but that there exists a range of policies wherein each provisions substantive support for particular conceptions of the good and whereby fairness and justice are accounted for across those policies. Therefore, with a sense of what counts as legitimate state authority in this system of post-compulsory education beginning to take shape, I now move to more completely fleshing it out.

Legitimate State Authority

The neutrality that recognition self-respect requires is not expressed in minimal policy; rather, it is expressed in a wide-reaching policy accommodating different conceptions of the good, or in a range of policies, each of which having the capacity to recognize the intrinsic value and worth in particular reasonable conceptions of good. This range of policies on the whole maintains the requirement of equal accommodation. Thus, neutral treatment has another important feature that justifies its place within the theory: the value of fair opportunity for self-determination means that the state may have justificatory reasons to adopt a perfectionist policy where it maximally advantages citizens “holding an interest in a maximally worthwhile conception of the good” while not damaging others’ fair opportunity (Patten, 2012, p. 267). In other words, neutral treatment opens to the state the authority to endorse a liberal perfectionist education for, say, personal autonomy insofar as it does not constrain others’ fair opportunity for self-determination. Furthermore, neutral treatment may compel the state to adopt additional policies that are equally accommodating of different conceptions and motivated by other belief formations, maintaining their treatment as equally

worthwhile and valuable. In other words, perfectionist policies would have to be one among a range of policies.

Having now established a full account of the neutrality required within the theory of education for adults given the primacy of recognition self-respect, allow me to explore an example to illustrate the limits on the state's authority that it compels. Thus far I have focused on the requirement of a system of education to be itself neutral to different and competing notions of a good life and valuable life pursuits. I understand this to compel the state to support a range of options of educational programs, that themselves support citizens' wide-ranging reasons for pursuing them. The value of an education need not be determined by, nor the range of available programs confined to, only those that are instrumental in producing extrinsic benefit, whether civic, economic, moral, or otherwise. Instead, on my account, that fact that I want to engage in a given educational pursuit is sufficient reason for the state to provide me that educational path. And this comprises a just system of education when everyone has their fair opportunity to self-determine in this way.

Thus, I would like to turn here to a case which allows me to consider neutral treatment in another sense. It is no stretch to imagine how, even where a system of education for adults has been established as a right to which all adult citizens are entitled in a liberal democracy, many citizens will choose not to pursue an education. For example, imagine an adult citizen who wishes to become an electrician but her vision of a good life entails learning what it means to be an electrician through life experience rather than formal study at a trade school.

Of course, in this case the state has no role, and so state neutrality is not of any concern: a citizen's reasonably made choice, which carries consequences ruling out particular

ends by the very nature of choice, is not an issue of neutral treatment.¹¹⁶ However, it is worth noting that in a system of education available throughout life, if this citizen were to choose to *later on* pursue further electrical trades education at some point in her life, the state does have a role. Now neutral treatment does come into play.

It is arriving at this possibility, then, that I am interested in the systemic pedagogical requirements of neutral treatment: what equal accommodations ought to be made for participants who gain knowledge, skills, and experiences outside of formal education that is relevant to a particular field of study and who later engage formally in that field of study? Continuing to follow the electrician, it may be the case that her valuable life experiences may mirror equivalent educational knowledge, skills, and experiences gained through formal study. Indeed, invaluable, she will likely have gained experience that establishes her as a veteran in her field.

It is worth noting, however, that there are important public safety reasons that justify the standards and certification of red seal electricians that give shape to formal study, which require that only a red seal electrician can validate electrical projects to meet building code regulations.¹¹⁷ Indeed, these may be the very realities motivating her engagement in formal study to obtain her red seal later in life. This kind of case may, therefore, demonstrate

¹¹⁶ Martin's own theorizing has effectively dealt with the related important, but distinct, matter of benefits and burdens, see Martin (2021, Chapter 6); furthermore, a central thesis in Martin's perfectionist account of education in adulthood is the availability of an adequate range of valuable social forms and practices to support human flourishing (2021: Chapter 3, p. 10; Chapter 4, p.13; Chapter 5, p. 15), and it represents another sense in which neutrality of treatment might be conceptualized: recall that it can also obtain across a range of policies supporting different life pursuits that are intrinsically valuable to citizens. This gives greater shape to the social conditions of justice and the fair terms of social cooperation that together ensure political stability.

¹¹⁷ I will pre-empt that there exist distinct and valuable reasons that certain trades, careers, and professions uphold particular training, certification, and/or professional membership and standing, and neutral treatment does not constitute an objection to upholding any such standard. Similarly, neutral treatment does not invalidate justifiable entrance requirements and prerequisites.

justification for policy in recognition of citizens' life learning and experience and support their entrance into formal study mid-stream.¹¹⁸ On this point, we might imagine similar cases that apply to academic fields of study, too, where an instructor joins a faculty by virtue of their achievement and experience in a given field (but this could not justify the unequal treatment that often accompanies these positions). So understood, neutral treatment ensures that a range of educational policies support adults' reasonable conceptions of the good as they encompass life pursuits which include the benefits an education can offer in supporting them to realize their life plans. Stated another way, the state would have the legitimate authority to put in place a certification process based on informal educational experiences.

Conclusion

I have been motivated to substantiate a conception of autonomy-supporting education to better include reasons that all adults might want to participate, and this means developing an ideal conception of post-compulsory education inclusive of a basic education. I started out by asking: must a system of education impose a particular, perfectionist ideal of belief formations which give shape to adult citizens' own conceptions of the good, and what are the consequences of an education theorized on these grounds? My conclusion is that Martin's perfectionist claim ultimately cannot hold. Its reliance on toleration to account for those citizens who do not share its perfectionist ideals means that it must accept unintended consequence for those at the differend of justice: 1) citizens encounter coercion in another

¹¹⁸ I am aware of existing policies in various jurisdictions, which recognize work/life experience. They range, for example, from 'mature student status' entrance policies at various Canadian post-secondary institutions, which relieve certain entrance prerequisites or grade-point requirements, to prior learning assessments and recognition entrance policies like 'challenge for credit' at Athabasca University or 'credit for life learning' at Thompson Rivers University.

form of oppressive external influences: state perfectionism imposes an idea of what constitutes a worthwhile good life on to citizens' educational pursuits, and 2) this creates self-determination-diminishing conditions whereby some citizens must come to view their own belief formations, such as their beliefs about the good life, as less than ideal.

A political liberal theory of education, given the fact of pluralism and the primary social good of recognition self-respect it understands, finds these outcomes unjust. In responding to these objections, and with the aim of maintaining compatibility with Martin's theory in its broader strokes, I have turned to ask, if the justifications of an autonomy-supporting education ought not be found in liberal perfectionism, can a theory undergirded by the ideal of state neutrality meet these objections and still uphold the autonomy-supporting educational interests of adult citizens on which Martin's theory is based? I have defended that it can.

I have argued that when we conceive of education for adults and the limits on state authority that its neutrality entails, we arrive at not only a theory still compatible with Martin's own liberty-maximizing account of education in adulthood, but also one that expands the conception of liberty within it. This is because education for adults gives primacy to recognition self-respect and obtains on account of neutrality of treatment. Therefore, it comes to bear on what constitutes liberty in a just and well-ordered society: citizens in a liberal democracy are not only free and equal as citizens, they are also afforded a liberty that includes equal value and worth in reasonable conceptions of the good and their entitlements to freely pursue them without assessment of individual deservingness. It is this condition of liberty that creates the background social conditions which make justice possible.

Furthermore, where education for adults constitutes a relational autonomy-supporting education, I have also established the terms by which recognition self-respect is theoretically complementary to a relational conception of autonomy: “that is, the authenticity that autonomy requires obtains when, were one to turn a reflective eye toward the motives, values, and concepts that structure one’s judgments (and do so in a piecemeal manner), one would not feel deep self-alienation, self-repudiation, and unresolvable conflict” (Christman, 2005, p. 345). Thus, an agent is autonomous when she is freely able to speak for herself and act according to *her* consistently held beliefs and values regardless of what decision she chooses to enact. And it is through citizens’ collective interests in ensuring this possibility for each other that we establish a sense of belonging in community. I believe this creates space for the kind of humanness which Rawls intends with political liberalism. And even though it is a space that cannot form out of comprehensive liberalism, it can ensure those social conditions that equally encourage the values and goods of comprehensive liberalism to flourish in those who hold it dear.

CHAPTER 5: Conclusion: Distributive Requirements and Implications

Introduction

Education is not a system of common beginnings, common waypoints, and common ends. It is a process unique to each of us that is initiated with purpose that is self-determined.¹¹⁹ And a fair and just system of education reflects this understanding in its structuring, as an ethos, and as the basis of what it distributes. In this concluding chapter, I show how this can be possible and what it can look like. It is worth reminding, however, that I am engaging in ideal theorizing. As a result, the circumstances and situations of the real world could motivate a different make up—but, as I establish at the outset of this thesis, this is not the point of ideal theorizing, anyway. The point is to theorize what can be reasonably possible if a society desires greater fairness and justice, in our case, in education.

It will be helpful to briefly rehearse the case I have so far developed:

In the first chapter, I showed that current frameworks of lifelong learning and adult education are premised on insufficient aims for a fair and just system of post-compulsory education. They promote a conception of education viewed as providing chances at success and distributed according to adults' supposed deservingness of additional chances and the assumed concomitant external, labour-market rewards. Accordingly, this education is understood primarily in terms of benefits of capital to society. Counter to this model, I

¹¹⁹ Recall that as per chapter three, 'self-determined' does not necessarily mean epistemically individualistic self-determination, but rather it is a notion inclusive of reasonable and reasonably accepted external influence. That is to say, citizens are self-determinate when they are free to choose to self-determine if they so desire (or do not desire), that they are free of illegitimate coercion, but this does not mean that they necessarily chose to prize epistemically individualistic belief formations. This notion of self-determination is a basic requirement of democratic society, because without this basic liberty, the state might inadvertently endorse any (and potentially all) form(s) of coercion as legitimate. It would, therefore, at best, not allow for a pluralistic society, in which all conceptions of the good are treated as equally worthwhile and valuable. At worst, it would be tyrannical.

defended a stable conception of education in a pluralistic democracy, inclusive and supportive of adults' own widely varied and equally worthwhile reasons for participating in education. And when we think of education fulfilling this purpose in society, justice is at least ideally possible.

In the second chapter, I showed how conceptual analysis at the intersection of political philosophy and philosophy of education can help conceive of principles of justice that can justify a system of public post-compulsory education for adults. I determined that when we recognize adults' substantive status as full and equal citizens, we arrive at the following educational justice principles which, in lexical order, support this theoretical framework:

1. The first moral principle states that adults participating in education must be recognized and treated as equal citizens holding equal liberties and political status, free of the burdens of any state-held comprehensive doctrines or ideological agendas, and due the respect and dignity their equal political status compels. As such, they each hold the liberty to form, revise, and pursue their own reasonably held conceptions of a good life and pursue education that supports their life goals. They are free to determine for themselves what is valuable and worthwhile in an education that supports their pursuit of their own better life, without the test of deservingness. (Chapter 2, pp. 18-19)
2. Subsequently, the second distributive principle regards the just distribution of what the first principle defines as publicly good about education for adults, and it describes how *that* ought to be fairly distributed. In other words, education distributes the social conditions supporting citizens in having and

holding self-respect (where education is relevant in supporting citizens' life pursuits). That is to say, it constitutes *an ethos* of justice. Therefore, the opportunities that it distributes are not merely or necessarily competitive chances but are aimed at supporting and enabling citizens' self-realization.¹²⁰ (Chapter 2, pp. 20-21)

I elaborated and substantivized these principles in chapters three and four, determining that the kind of equality this framework underscores is not defined by supposedly measurable *outcomes* of equal social position, but by the *matter* of an education compelled by the equal liberty assured by citizens' equal political status in society. Therefore, in chapter three, I proposed the conception of autonomy required to substantiate citizens' equal liberty in a pluralistic society. I made my case for a relational conception which integrates those social, familial, and communal qualities that are a central feature of autonomy. Doing so removes the possibility of external comprehensive doctrines and ideological agendas imposing unwarranted influence and embraces the multiple ways in which adult citizens in a pluralistic society do form conceptions of the good.

In chapter four, I showed that in a pluralistic democratic society, equal liberty arises from citizens' "right to view their persons as independent from and not identified with any particular such conception with its scheme of final ends" (Rawls, 1993, p. 30). In other words, justice is a social ethos supporting citizens' mutual recognition, self-respect, and dignity in a society of equals; it is not simply a result. Therefore, in a just society, what

¹²⁰ I should clarify that, following the notion of self-determination I defend within a relational conception of autonomy, self-realization does not necessarily mean an epistemically individualistic self is the most prized version of self to realize. Rather, what citizens realize is the goods of an education that is most valuable and worthwhile to the reasons motivating their participation in the first place. And I state 'necessarily' because, of course, one could prize such epistemic individualism, and this ought to be perfectly reasonable and acceptable in pluralistic society, too.

defines citizens as free and equal is not the particular plans they form and the choices they make, but their ability to form and pursue plans, and to reengage in this process throughout their lives (that is, to revise their plans). The notion of recognition self-respect I defend “emphasizes the equality [...] between each person and others; without some special reason (such as contractual obligation), my plan should not be subordinate to that of another” (Brake, 2013, p. 65). I understand this to mean that in a fair and just society, citizens are not only free and equal as citizens, they are also afforded a liberty that comes from being part of a society whose social conditions extend equal worth to all reasonable conceptions of the good and uphold their entitlements to pursue and change those conceptions. Because, without the liberty to shape and reshape who we are, we cannot be said to be free. And it is through citizens’ shared interests in ensuring this liberty for each other that we establish a sense of belonging in a shared and pluralistic civic community.

I argued that to achieve these social conditions, the state must extend neutrality of treatment to all reasonable citizens’ conceptions of the good—that is, to all citizens who support fair opportunity for self-determination.¹²¹ These kinds of neutral policies accommodate different and rival conceptions of the good, and this ought to be understood in terms of ranging across related policies rather than as an attempt to achieve neutrality in a single policy. By conceptualizing neutrality of treatment as a downstream value, it is “guided by a particular, justifiable, liberal value—what [Patten] call[s] ‘fair opportunity for self-determination’—that the state has a weighty, if defeasible, reason to be neutral between

¹²¹ Recall that this is because not doing so could lead to and support coercion and oppression. Extending neutral treatment toward citizens who reject the value of self-determination means doing so would deny others the fair opportunity for it. But that they support the value of self-determination does not commit them to prizing only those conceptions which are derived through self-determination. See Patten (2012), pp. 252-254.

conceptions of the good” (Patten, 2012, p. 253).¹²² And, thus, it is to the policy implications of this framework that I now turn.

My aim is to show that my ideal theory is applicable to the institutions we have and in ways that motivate more just policies and practices, in section one, I consider implications to public post-compulsory education policy at the state level. In section two, I narrow to implications to policy at the post-compulsory educational institution. And, finally, I look at practice as the site of distributive justice. Recall that I do not intend to fully realize *the* system of education in a just society; instead, I aim to show that when we apply the framework of education for adults that I have theorized, we can create a system of post-compulsory education upholding the social conditions which make justice possible in a pluralistic democracy.

I. State-Level Policies

Education does not merely provide chances at success, narrowly conceived as opportunities for higher-income employment and/or upward social mobility; as a social institution within the basic structure, following the first moral principle, it supports the equal liberties of all citizens by securing the social conditions of a relationally just society. As I

¹²² I remind readers that even though self-determination is a central and required condition for and of autonomy, there are different conceptions of autonomy, each of which will include some notion of self-determination. Recall that I defend how a conception of relational autonomy within the theory represents adults’ wide-ranging notions of, and values in, self-determination as reflective of and changeable according to their interests, circumstances, cultural values, and stages of life; it takes into account that personal and social involvements influence our prospects of fulfilling the conditions of free action. It acknowledges the deeply embedded, interpersonally constructed, historical nature of the self, which forms our beliefs and our conceptions of a good life. In this way it involves self-trust and a capacity for critical self-reflection, but it does not require that they have to be individualistic in their outlook on life. As John Christman writes, “the authenticity that autonomy requires obtains when, were one to turn a reflective eye toward the motives, values, and concepts that structure one’s judgments (and do so in a piecemeal manner), one would not feel deep self-alienation, self-repudiation, and unresolvable conflict” (2005, p. 345).

have shown, this is a fundamentally different conception of post-compulsory education than one principled on meritocratic equality of opportunity, and as such, it demands a fundamentally different policy framework.

As Christian Schemmel describes, relational egalitarianism relies “on a defeasible presumption that social goods, including education, ought to be distributed equally [...and] requires strictly that every member of society is given the educational resources necessary to be able to avoid relational injustice” (2011, p. 386). In other words, following the second distributive principle, equal distribution of educational opportunities is not the pinnacle of a relational conception of justice, but rather, the basic assumption of it. What is instead required as a central feature of a relational conception of educational justice is that all citizens have equal liberty to participate in education which supports them in each their own equally valuable and worthwhile reasonable conception of a good life, and *no* justifiable distribution of educational resources can override that right.

Therefore, policies promoting adults’ educational opportunities merely as employment training and ‘levelling the playing field’ are unjust, not because some adults ought not desire employment, but because not all adults desire employment at all stages in their lives, and those adults ought also to be entitled to an education that is valuable and worthwhile in supporting their visions and goals. A well-employed adult, happy at their work, could still access these goods if they wanted. Furthermore, as I have also shown, such narrow conceptions of education as *outcomes* undermines the very concept of education as a *process*. And this means such a conception holds the system of education accountable to outcomes it may not even be able to secure in the first place.

But, assuming that my argument stands, what is possible in policies promoting a fair and just education when we apply this framework? Let us look at a case. In Canada, education falls under provincial jurisdiction, and in the province of British Columbia (BC), we see the value of an education constrained to its employment outputs in the *BC Student Outcomes Survey: Shaping Post-Secondary Education (2018-2020)*¹²³ and the public post-secondary *Accountability Framework: Standards and Guides Manual*. I will later turn to the *Accountability Framework* and directly address the matter of policy but allow me to first explicate the *Survey*.

How Can a Student Survey Help Shape Post-Compulsory Education?

Within the provincially directed and funded *Survey*, beyond general assessments of quality of instruction, skills development (i.e., reading comprehension, working with others, and effective writing and speaking), and identifying what percentage of graduates went on to further studies, respondents' educational outcomes are compared solely in terms of labour-market correlations: the number of program-specific graduates in the labour force and the unemployment rate; median salary by program area; specifically, how many are employed full-time and how many are employed in jobs related to their studies; and, finally, the extent to which the knowledge and skills gained were useful in performing their jobs.

This is telling of the principles that underscore the existing educational framework. According to the Ministry, “this information is used to improve the quality of training, to meet accountability requirements [tied to funding], to help with policy development, and to inform prospective students” (“Current Surveys”). In other words, in BC, public post-

¹²³ Accessed via the BC Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills, and Training website.

secondary institutions are shaped by the labour market, and it is therefore significant to the conceptual analysis that motivated chapter one in this thesis, that what the survey guides is the improvement of *training*. Why? Because this survey and its uses create a recursive feedback loop: it precludes that the only relevant and valuable metric in public post-compulsory education is the outcome of employment, and those results will justify the system of education the state provides. There is no data reporting any other metric of what is valuable and worthwhile to graduates in their *education* which could improve and support the quality of education, policy, democratic accountability,¹²⁴ and prospective students' decisions.

According to the framework I defend, a survey relevant to shaping the policies of a fair and just education in a pluralistic democratic society, *as BC is*, ought to include metrics on the value of the process itself as well as a range of valuable outcomes. For example, did graduates' educations support them in better realizing themselves and their visions and goals in relation to the knowledge of their particular *shared community of practice* (a term I will use henceforth to include vocation/way of life/profession/field of study/discipline/program)? Did graduates come to understand the reasons behind the knowledge they gained, the purposes and uses of it, and its broader contexts, in ways that influence and shape their interactions with the world? Did they feel they were part of a process that invited who they were into a shared community of practice so that they were becoming educated in such a way that was at least open to being defined, determined, and reasoned by them, but also initiated them into a community of shared understanding? These are questions about processes of

¹²⁴ For a careful political philosophical analysis of the current political language of accountability in education and what democratic accountability can look like, see Levinson (2011). For those interested in critical analysis of the term as it is used in contemporary political economics, see Jankowski & Provezis (2016) and Mark Olssen (2016).

education that are not leading questions guided by predefined outcomes, because an education (notably distinct from training) does not merely produce an end (like employment), even where citizens might hold that end to be what is valuable and worthwhile in their education.

The metrics resulting from a survey founded in this widened concept of education would shape different educational institutions, guided by different educational principles and policies; it would broaden accountability beyond funding for labour-market production to include the collective goods of a diverse—and diversely educated—polity with a greater capacity for pluralism; and, it would inform prospective students on the range of possibilities an education *actually* provides, inviting them to pursue what is worthwhile to them in an education, and through that engagement, to live more fully and to realize their best selves—to really *be* (to paraphrase Paterson, 1979, p.10).

A Just Educational Framework of Standards and Guides

In the framework of education for adults that I defend, policy must be neutral in treatment, not in the sense of one even-handed, neutral policy that should work for everyone but as the outcome of/across a range of policies, each intending to support the different reasons citizens have to access and pursue post-compulsory education. This means that a state can continue to maintain policies promoting labour-market production, but it would also need to draft policies promoting other, non-economic reasons to access and pursue education.

To draw out this distinction, allow me to turn to BC's *Accountability Framework: Standards and Guides Manual*, which outlines a two-fold purpose:

- To ensure individual public post-secondary institutions are accountable to government, their boards and students, and the public for their performance related to ensuring students receive quality educational opportunities relevant to their needs and the needs of the labour market; and
- To ensure the Ministry is accountable to the public for the performance of the public post-secondary education system in B.C., with the aim that it should benefit all residents of the province by ensuring the system's ongoing contribution to social and economic development. (2020, p. 5)

With these purposes, it should be no surprise that labour-market responsiveness and the province's economic needs are defined priorities throughout every subsequent element of the document: the relevance defined within the five strategic objectives (capacity, access, quality, relevance, efficiency), the post-secondary institutional mandate letters, and the appended performance measure specifications. Furthermore, although readers might notice that the first defined purpose appears to allude to other reasons to pursue education 'relevant to students' needs', the relevancy performance measures in the document relay exclusively the labour and economic priorities I have already outlined. Finally, the document contains social objectives as well—i.e., lasting reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and expanding access to vulnerable and underrepresented groups (p. 6)—but, notably, the relevancy does not change. In other words, these social objectives are met only when the people described within them achieve the state's economic objectives.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ One might suggest, then, that the social development priorities the document defines invite contradiction with the labour and economic priorities, holding institutions to account for outcomes they may not be able to secure. For example, if reconciliation constitutes some notion of rectifying colonial relationships, but educational institutions are mandated to specifically pursue and train citizens for the state's economic interests

The existing policy cannot create an ethos of justice, yet there is no single policy on its own that could do so in a pluralistic society. Recall that following neutrality of intentions, that policy would need to be so vague as to have little substance and significance, and following neutrality of consequences, it could mean the norms and ideals of the dominant conception would override others, which have not been distinctly defined and supported.¹²⁶ Thus, I imagine a way in which several distinct policies, each with substantive and distinct priorities, could overlap to create such an ethos applying neutrality of treatment in the state's political authority. But this requires accepting *other relevant features* of an education as equally valuable, and so it would not constitute a framework supporting the already existing system of education. Extending from the kind of survey questions I envision above, several distinct and possibly non-neutral policies could be developed, across which an overlapping neutrality could begin to take shape.

For example, one policy can continue to ensure citizens an education relevant to their interests in the extrinsically valuable rewards often brought on by educational attainment, as this represents some citizens' legitimate reasons for pursuing education. And even still, any just educational policy would need to make clear that 'citizens' ought to be understood as inclusive of all adult members of society according to their full status as free and equal citizens. But there would also need to exist equally substantive, equally supported additional policies representing other reasons worth citizens' prizing of an education. For example, a

(notably, not citizens' own interest unless they happen to be the same), it would be interesting to see an example of how these priorities can align, especially when, according to the document, education is only relevant when it achieves those economic objectives.

¹²⁶ See the section on neutrality in chapter four of this thesis. For those interested, the philosopher Herbert Marcuse (1970) makes a similar point from the standpoint of cultural analysis in defending why pure tolerance is insufficient where dominant cultures attempt to share equally (here again in the pure sense) cultural space with minority cultures, resulting in what he refers to as repressive tolerance.

policy ensuring citizens an education relevant to what is intrinsically valuable to them—i.e., coming to recognize oneself as part of and contributing to a discourse representative of distinct views about the world explored through a shared community of practice and a nuanced vocabulary which gives shape to a richer perspective on the world. Or, an education relevant to the invigoration of their cultural identity, by which they realize more deeply the values shared by their community. Or, an education relevant to the constructive social change they hope to enact, perhaps regardless of the external rewards associated with the social action their vision entails.

Of course, these are only examples and do not represent an exhaustive range of the goods an education can support and the ways in which it can enrich our lives. And, certainly, for many of us, what we prize most in our lives is in the overlap of, convergence in, or space between these things. I think it is fair to say that for all of us, these notions of what is most valuable to us also changes throughout our lives, and a fair and just system of education ought to give space to the possibility of change that makes us human.¹²⁷ And in this sense, neutrality in state policy ought to support this liberty through access to education. For, if citizens are not free to revise and pursue their revised plans, they were never free to form them in the first place (Levinson, 1999; Rawls, 1993).

Such fixed notions of life plans constitute a relational *injustice* which the very concept of an education is understood to address—it helps us realize change. Recall that it is not only the purpose of an education that I have argued requires revisiting, but also who an education is for. And if we truly value education for all in a democratic society of equals, there can be no just exclusion of reasonable citizens. As the principles of educational justice I

¹²⁷ And, as Rawls expresses, this substantivizes what it means for a citizen to be free (1993, p. 30).

defend secure, the relational requirements of justice in a pluralistic democracy mean that there can be no test of socioeconomic deservingness, of ethical deservingness, nor of ideological deservingness. Schemmel's statement opening this section bears repeating: relational egalitarianism "requires strictly that every member of society is given the educational resources necessary to be able to avoid relational injustice" (2011, p. 386). Therefore, the only just policies of access to education support universal access as a fundamental right. This is because any policy setting conditions on access for reasonable citizens will carry the negative consequences of limiting specifically for whom and for what an education is in the first place. It would create and reinforce relational injustice.

This first section, in consideration of state-level policy, establishes context for the policies and consequences at other levels of authority within this social institution. I will now turn to those policies and consequences at the individual educational institution level.

II. Educational Institution-Level Policies and Consequences

If state-level policies establish the basic background social conditions which make educational justice possible, then regional educational institutions play out those policies defined by the state. However, regional institutions do not only uphold the consequences of state policy; they have reasons to establish their own policies (minding that I maintain theoretical focus on the broader social justice framework), and they too must stand up to the principles of educational justice for adults. Thus, allow me to deal with state-level policy consequences and regional institutional policy obligations separately.

State-Level Policy Consequences on Regional Institutions

There is one sense in which regional post-secondary institutions play out the policies defined by the state—they are arms of the state. And this shows one way in which the above state-level policies produce fundamentally different educational institutions, so allow me to elaborate before moving on to what might be unique requirements of policy at the level of individual educational institutions.

To do so, I pick up on two points made in the previous section: 1) what makes each of us human is the overlap, convergence, and distance between the ideals and values each of us holds and the good life we seek to pursue (humans are inherently contradictory in their values and ideals); and, 2) a range of educational policies must substantively reflect these distinct and competing conceptions as they relate to the goods of education supportive of participants' interests. This means, for example, that as a student, I may hold competing reasons for pursuing education, and educational institutions will need to create space for that humanness. I may choose to pursue a Business degree (regarded as an educational pathway with high employability and earnings outcomes within the existing *Survey*) yet do so not to pursue high earning potential, but instead, in hopes of running a non-profit that gives back to my community. Or, I may determine that what I want to bring into the labour-market is application of the creative problem-solving and artful communication that an English degree and its meticulous study of language and meaning-making uniquely produce, and I do not care if another discipline has a higher return on investment and that (sadly) few private industries realize the potential of the knowledge, skills, and abilities of this discipline as I do—it is what I desire to carry into the world, regardless. Or, I may pursue carpentry after a lifelong career in accounting not because I wish to increase my earnings, or even change

careers, but because I have come to see this as contributing to a better and more full life *for me*.

Following the state-level policy I have defended, institutions will need to respond to and reflect the diverse, competing, and changeable interests of all citizens. Maintaining the requirements of the second distributive principle, educational institutions must distribute opportunities to have and hold self-respect, supporting citizens' self-realization; it would, therefore, be unjust for institutional programming to aim at training me for some predetermined labour-market, for example, in any one of these scenarios. Thus, doing so would also breach the first moral principle: it would give me an impression that my own plans are not equally worthwhile, denying me the liberty of recognition self-respect that is due given my status as a citizen.

Regional Institutional Policy Obligations

But there is another sense in which educational institutions are not only required to uphold the consequences of state policy but also establish just policy specific to the regional institution. Continuing our case focusing on BC, compelled by provincial legislation, individual educational institutions have regional obligations and commitments to maintain relevancy within the communities they support.¹²⁸ Accepting this, regional institutions should have room to create their own unique policies and mandates. For example, local programming may reflect the specific interests of the students themselves and the unique characteristics of the region—whether they be ecological, cultural, or otherwise—and how

¹²⁸ This commitment to regional interests is drafted into the respective public post-secondary institutional acts: see, for example, the *College and Institute Act* and teaching universities within the *University Act*. Notably the legislation does not obligate regionality merely in terms of labour-market training, but in research, program development, and service jurisdiction.

these engage the interests of the student population and the broader community. For example, a college in Vancouver serves a different community, and therefore different purposes within its community, than one in Kelowna or Haida Gwaii. These local differences would follow from the first principle, because citizens ought to be free to determine for themselves what is valuable and worthwhile in an education that supports them, free of state-held doctrines and ideological agendas.

Readers might at this point question how my proposed framework looks different in practice from the already existing post-secondary system and its existing regional institutions. But remember, where the existing system determines relevancy according to the distribution of labour and economic opportunities, even where institutions already offer regional programming, those programs are only relevant insofar as they attain the state's labour and economic interests. They are justified on very different grounds. The framework I defend, building on the second distributive principle, gives space to institutions to develop regionally specific policy that might lead to the distribution of other kinds of opportunities—that is, other relevant features of an education—and so result in other kinds of programs, or different program make-ups, developed for locally significant reasons.

Let us consider viticultural education in the Okanagan to demonstrate, taking into account that other relevant features of an education create different relationships between institution, student, regional community, and state. How would a viticulture program be different if it were not driven merely or primarily by economic relevancy, but also by, for example, ecologically and/or culturally relevant regional interests? Such programming in Kelowna (in the Okanagan, a renowned wine region and semi-arid desert) might integrate Indigenous land relationships and stewardship, sustainable farming practices, and water

resource management that may invite students into discursive interactions with knowledge and broaden understanding within that shared community of practice, even if it does not (re)produce the human capital and economic interests of industry and/or a nonneutral state.¹²⁹

Indeed, it may be the case that an education supporting regional, cultural, and/or student interests can run counter to some economic interests, but that does not preclude that such an education is less relevant. And in this way, this broadened framework of education demands distinct requirements of just policy at the regional level. But the case we have just looked at suggests specific requirements of the practice of teaching to uphold the social conditions of justice as well, and it is to this consideration that I look next.

III. Teaching to Uphold the Social Conditions of Justice

The fact of the matter is, policies alone cannot create the ethos of justice I defend. A just education is one in which all participants feel a sense of belonging, all reasons for participation have equal place, and all reasonable life plans are worth pursuing. And where that is the case, the site of this kind of justice, as G.A. Cohen (1997) argues, is distributed through the interactions with self and others in public spaces. That is, justice comes from citizens supporting these social conditions by ensuring recognition self-respect for each other and themselves, not merely from a social structure that promotes equality (like taxing the rich to provide more resources for the less well off).

I do not want to be misunderstood as arguing that education for adults is education for *its* own sake; rather, education for adults must be conceived as being valuable to adults for

¹²⁹ Readers familiar with the theory behind the argument I am shaping may notice that I indirectly refer to Stojanov's (2016) notion of discursive initiation. Although I want to acknowledge this here, I elaborate on it later, so I will leave further explication until that point.

their own reasons, and this means that it must leave open the possibility that for some adults, education is for its own sake.¹³⁰ This also means that for others it is for their own human capital interests, and for others still it is for social capital, or any other worthwhile reason to pursue education. So, to understand how to approach pedagogy in light of all of these diverse possibilities, we must first understand that there remains a common basis for this wide concept of education in the first place: the fact that students are adult citizens means that there are some aspects of an education that adults are owed and that should not be subject to change, and this applies not only to policy but also to practice.

As I state in Chapter 1, it should not matter whether, for example, an adult student values a radical education that aims to address social injustices or an education that leads directly to employment; for either educational engagement to meet the criteria of what an education is in the first place, it must mean that the student is free to determine what is worthwhile and how it is valuable to them, in an interaction that the student shapes. This does not mean that knowledge only counts as knowledge to some,¹³¹ but rather that they can come to understand it and truly come to know it in relation to *their* wider world and contribute to the knowledge of a shared community of practice in ways that are relevant, significant, and meaningful to them. It is in this sense that a fair and just theory of education for adults is not a competing theory of adult education; it is not arbitrary. Instead, it is a framework for the basic conditions which substantiate the infeasible criteria of an education for adults in a

¹³⁰ Kruszelnicki (2020) draws, I think, a similar point in his analysis of adult education; however, he makes this case to claim that a critical (or radical) adult education, in fact, is just adult education because it is for adults' own liberation, and as I show in the counterpoint that follows in the next paragraph, it is on this claim that we diverge.

¹³¹ Because this misunderstands knowledge for opinions and beliefs.

democratic society, and can thus be compatible with rather than oppositional to a variety of existing and emerging educational theories.

But what does this mean in practice? Of course, I do not intend to explicate here a single complete pedagogical theory to realize this framework of education for adults. What I do intend, though, is to define what is required and nonoverridable regardless of an educator's particular pedagogical mode and particular discipline. In other words, rather than describing an ideal pedagogy for justice, I outline just pedagogical relations (to borrow Kasimir Stojanov's phrase, 2018). For Stojanov, students' experiences ought to "figure not as a deficit but as a valuable educational potential" through which all students "could reach an equal moral standing in social relations—and this is not only *through* their education but *in* their education itself" (2018, p. 44).¹³² His statement suggests that the kind of relations education supports match up with the social conditions of recognition self-respect I have defended. Thus, in what follows, I substantiate what pedagogical relations require if practitioners are to uphold social conditions of justice compatible with the framework of education for adults.

Just Pedagogical Relations: Discursive Initiation into an Ethos of Justice

Imagine that I am teaching within the Arts, and I want to teach students about race and privilege in a way that is compatible with this framework.¹³³ By acknowledging

¹³² Stojanov states this in specific context of immigrant families and rejects the common disadvantaged immigrant narrative (deficits to be corrected according to non-ideal theory) as counterproductive and potentially reproducing disrespect. Instead, he makes the case that when we recognize migrants' moral equality in an ideal theory of educational justice understood as fostering equal social relations, we build respect and a greater capacity for pluralism. This has obvious appeal and relevance the case I am making for adults' education.

¹³³ Although here I provide a case within the Arts, I can imagine how this applies to other educational communities of practice, readers will find a case addressing evolutionary theory in the sciences in the last

‘compatibility’ here, I reveal a basic assumption that there are ways that are *incompatible*. Thus, to be clear, it would be incompatible with this framework were I to avoid/neglect the concept of privilege as *one* way in which theorists have come to understand racial (in)justice. However, it would also be incompatible with this framework for me present the concept of privilege as *the* way to understand racial (in)justice. As the practitioner in this case, I have heard about the polarization that this topic has provoked in social and political arenas: the ideological right says that privilege (especially as it appears in media as ‘white privilege’ or recently as synonymous with Critical Race Theory) misconstrues present and historical sociopolitical relations to the detriment of national pride, and the ideological left says that discussing privilege provides a framework by which we can know and contextualize racial injustice, and this is a necessary step in creating a more just society.

What is certain is that the topic addresses nonideal circumstances of injustice in the real world—circumstances that are relationally unjust—and the mere fact that these circumstances exist tells us as practitioners and contributors to the shared community of the Arts (and as equal citizens in a pluralistic democracy) that there is disagreement about this topic that merits analysis. To be sure, I want to teach this topic not only because it is a pressing issue of justice, but also because I recognize a range of comprehensive doctrines exist relevant to just social relations in a pluralistic society. In other words, I know this is a prominent social issue in public and private spheres, and as such, it holds discursive value in a public educational space that is pertinent to our shared community of practice. Three features of just pedagogical relations, therefore, emerge:

section of the previous chapter that might help demonstrate the practical implications of this theoretical framework. Furthermore, I choose this example because I want to demonstrate that my theorizing about fair and just education does not merely pertain to employment training and economic outcomes but to all knowledge and relations within education.

First, although privilege represents one way to understand issues of racial injustice, it is not the only way, and this is true both of the critical theoretical approach it adopts as well as its nonideal theoretical aim of understanding injustice as a way of bringing about justice.¹³⁴ The latter implies a value about the way to arrive at justice and implicates what justice looks like. This means that just pedagogical relations require practitioners to teach about other knowledge that also helps us understand justice.¹³⁵ For example, that liberty is a necessary precondition of justice and might be more pressing to address in already existing societies with pre-existing norms of justice, as the Canadian literary figure Dionne Brand asserts (2017), or that it is not a given that justice is something we can necessarily even aim toward (see essays anthologized in Tuck & Yang, 2018).¹³⁶

Second, just pedagogical relations uphold the social conditions of justice. Thus, practice guided by the framework of education for adults gives all participating reasonable adults space to figure their own experiences as educational potential shaping their own understanding. This means *some* may not define their racial identities—including those from racial minorities—in terms of (nonideal) disadvantage or as deficits that ought to be resolved in order to arrive at justice or just relations. And, of course, my own experiences as an equal citizen also factor but are equally beholden to the requirement that I extend the equal

¹³⁴ As Hand and Levinson (2012) remind, an issue is not actually controversial, and there can be no real discussion and deliberation, if the practitioner already has rightful conclusions in mind. Indeed, teaching controversy while holding forgone conclusions may have more in common with indoctrination than education. Similarly, Bialystok (2014) writes about how to approach social justice education without ‘brainwashing’.

¹³⁵ To be efficient in demonstrating the requirements of just pedagogical relations I here seem to suggest that it must be the case that one practitioner must also teach other knowledge, but as I have defended in the previous chapter and in earlier sections of this one, such diversity of knowledge and understanding can also be shared across multiple practitioners and courses. What matters is that this range of reasonable conceptions is available and held to be equally valuable and worthwhile.

¹³⁶ McDonough (2010) argues that dissent and disagreement are vital to moral education. See also Stitzlein (2012).

recognition to all reasonable participants that assures them a sense of belonging, where they feel a deep sense of self-respect.¹³⁷

Finally, consistent with the first moral principle's aim of assuring an overlapping consensus in a reasonably pluralistic society, the commitment to just pedagogical relations requires practitioners to give space to *reasonable* adults to draw their own conclusions of relevancy.¹³⁸ Central to the first moral principle, what makes adults *unreasonable* is not the differing values they hold and the ways that they consider knowledge to be worthwhile (their educated perspectives), but rather that they hold perspectives that deny others the equal liberty of determining for themselves what is valuable and worthwhile. In other words, this topic is a 'discursive initiation'¹³⁹ (Stojanov, 2018) whereby participants discuss just and unjust relations and the ways that knowledge relevant to a community of practice helps us understand these circumstances and issues, and deliberate on the extent to which recognition of each other as equal citizens supports mutual conditions of self-respect, without necessarily requiring each citizen to arrive at a common conception of what constitutes justice.

Discursive initiation is the process at the site of distributive justice, and as such it helps to create an ethos of justice.

¹³⁷ Where here I refer to practices of teaching through controversy, readers may find the following articles helpful: McAvoy and Hess (2013) write about class deliberation in the era of political polarization; Waghid (2008) writes about mutuality and love as overlooked democratic goods of academic friendships which ought to be cultivated in the pedagogical spaces of post-secondary; Yacek (2018) considers what it means to teach, and to teach how to think, through controversy; Yacek (2020) analyses the transformative consequences of teaching controversy.

¹³⁸ Again, see Hand and Levinson (2012).

¹³⁹ Stojanov (2016) revises R.S. Peters's notion of education as initiation to discursive initiation which he describes as initiation into the "practices of conceptual and argumentative articulation and transformation of one's own subjective beliefs and ideals by means of public reasoning" (2016, p. 761). Thus, in his view, Peters is not merely referring to initiation into the traditional disciplines, but initiation into intersubjective practices of public discourse and the articulation of knowledge.

What education for adults requires is space for humanness: space for each of us as full citizens to be and belong, recognized as part of a community of equals; space to be changeable, complex, and contradictory; and space to be free and freely able to fully realize and express our best selves. And this means that each of us must be free to envision who we are and who we want to be, and to have the substantive liberty to do this means that we must collectively create an ethos, not an end, of justice. After all, education does not define an outcome, but describes a process for realizing change. In a fair and just society, justice is not a given, but that society must at least uphold the social conditions which make justice possible. And a system of education which abides by this requirement has the potential to influence other social institutions to reimagine and work towards a truly just society.

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