

Public Reason and Child Rearing: What's a Liberal Parent to Do?

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*The ways in we raise and educate children can appear to be at odds with basic liberal values. Relationships between parents and children are unequal, parents routinely control children's behaviour in various ways, and they use their authority to shape children's beliefs and values. Whether and how such practices can be made to accord with liberal values presents a significant puzzle. In what follows I will look at a recent and sophisticated attempt to resolve these tensions offered by Matthew Clayton in his book *Justice in Child Rearing in the context of general account of the proper limits of parental authority*. I argue that Clayton is unsuccessful in ways that point to fundamental and pervasive questions about the place of liberal values in child rearing and education that remain unanswered.*

I PARADOXES OF LIBERAL PARENTING

No one reaches functioning adulthood without an extensive period of socialisation and education, and all of us are who we are partly because of the efforts of our parents and others to shape and influence us. From a liberal perspective this banal fact can look worrisome, as this process of socialisation and education seems at odds with basic liberal values. Relationships between parents and children are unequal, as children typically have no say over who will be raising them, and putting aside the legal recourse available in cases of obvious abuse and neglect, little say in how they are raised. Parents routinely control children's behaviour, enforcing decisions with which the children may not agree and rules they may have had no hand in forming. Moreover, this authority is often backed by the threat of extra-legal punishment. Perhaps most worrisome from a liberal perspective, parents and other adults routinely use their authority to shape children's beliefs and values before they are in a position to choose such things for themselves.

Numerous attempts have been made to resolve these underlying tensions between the need for parental authority, deliberate socialisation and

education, and the commitments of liberalism. The results are something of a consensus on the following Principles of Liberal Parenting:

Equal Consideration: Children are persons deserving of equal moral consideration—children are not to be thought of or treated as property or mere extensions of their parents, and their interests and needs as individuals must be acknowledged as making fundamental demands on those charged with raising and caring for them;

Respect for Children's Autonomy: Because children are persons of equal moral standing, the principles of liberalism should be respected in their upbringing; this includes respect for their autonomy and fundamental right to govern their own affairs and live according to their own values;¹

Liberal Paternalism: Where currently ineliminable differences between adults and children make material equality impossible, differences in treatment must be justified according to a paternalistic standard that is itself defensible from a liberal standpoint, and consistent with Equal Consideration and Respect for Children's Autonomy; in particular, any decisions made on behalf of children, particularly when contrary to their currently expressed will, must be such that they nonetheless respect the child's fundamental equality and right to live autonomously.²

The first of these principles I will treat as unproblematic. It is the second two, Respect for Children's Autonomy and Liberal Paternalism, which are worrisome. Liberal parenting faces a fundamental problem in squaring the demands of equality and respect for autonomy with the distinct psychological and biological characteristics of children, particularly younger children, which render them unable to care for themselves or govern their own affairs except in limited ways. In particular, we need to make sense of the idea that parents can make decisions for a child, including decisions she may resist and which may shape her future development, while respecting her as a being entitled to live according to her own beliefs and values. The principle of Liberal Paternalism suggests an answer, but really just delays addressing the question. How do we determine that an act or practice is in fact one that respects a child's autonomy, particularly when it runs counter to her currently expressed desires? If the problem is that children currently lack the capacity for free choice and self-determination, what can it even mean to act on their behalf in ways that respect their autonomy?

In what follows I will look at a recent and sophisticated attempt to answer these questions offered by Matthew Clayton in his book *Justice and Legitimacy in Child Rearing* (Clayton, 2006) in the context of a general account of the proper limits of parental authority. I will argue that Clayton's answer is unsuccessful in ways that point to fundamental and pervasive questions about the place of liberal values in child rearing and education that remain unanswered. I will begin by situating Clayton's work in the broader context of liberal thinking about the family.

II LIBERALISM AND THE FAMILY

Though radical in its implications and often resisted in fact, the extension of liberal values into spousal relations is not complicated conceptually. Liberalism arose as a political ideology that sought to determine the appropriate limits of state power over equal and free citizens. In defining these limits, liberalism also places constraints on the behaviour of citizens in so far as they are likely to impact the wellbeing of their fellows. Though a political ideology, liberalism inevitably favours and works to produce a certain kind of moral character—one marked by the virtues of tolerance and respect for others—that demands we treat our fellows as the free and equal citizens the state recognises them to be. In liberal societies, relations between spouses are in fact also relations between full citizens, and so between equals. Any tendency to deny this, including tendencies rooted in traditional practices favouring the interests and powers of men over women, are thus appropriate targets of liberal criticism and reform.

It is tempting to suppose that relations between parents and children ought to be equally amenable to a liberal interpretation, and it is not uncommon to see discussions about ‘the family’ that seem to assume both spousal relations and those between parents and children can be treated as of a piece. It is not, however, at all obvious how this is supposed to work, and the situation with children is complicated in ways that are often ignored.³ The problem with extending liberalism to relationships between parents and children is, as we’ve seen, accommodating the simple fact that children and adults *are not* equals in many seemingly relevant ways, and apparently cannot plausibly treat each other as such. Since spouses can be assumed to be equals in the relevant respects, it is a mistake to assume the two cases can be adequately addressed in a single analysis.

Working with an understanding of liberalism provided largely by John Rawls’ *Political Liberalism* (Rawls, 1996), Clayton’s work is important in offering a different model that would expressly embrace the inequalities between parents and children while endorsing a suitably limited role for parental and adult authority.⁴ The relationship between parents and children, according to Clayton, should be understood by analogy with that between the state and the citizens, rather than as a relationship between equal citizens.⁵ This allows him to argue that the application of liberal principles to parent/child relations is straightforward. Parents, like the state, wield a legitimate authority that at times is expressed in coercive measures. However, in both cases this authority, and the coercive power that comes with it, is limited by the same demands to respect the freedom and rights of those exposed to it: ‘parental conduct, as well as political conduct, should be in accordance with the ideal of liberal legitimacy’ (Clayton, 2006, p. 94). What this means is that while parents have the authority to control the behaviour of their children, and to influence what they believe and value, this authority is limited in both its range and the manners in which it is expressed by the rights and interests of the children themselves. Just as the power of the liberal state is limited by the rights and interests of those ruled by it, parents are not free to govern

their children in ways that violate their basic rights as free and equal beings.

Clayton's most radical application of this idea has to do with the effects of parenting on a child's future beliefs and values. Appealing to Rawls' ideal of Public Reason, Clayton argues that liberal parenting must eschew efforts to 'enroll children in comprehensive doctrines' in the same way a liberal state must resist enacting laws or policies that assume the truth of a particular comprehensive doctrine (CD). That is, he argues that appropriate respect for a child's autonomy and equality will prevent her parents from deliberately instilling in her a comprehensive set of beliefs and values of a sort traditionally provided by religion. Since a good Rawlsian liberal will insist on government neutrality between CDs, Clayton argues that the analogy between governments and parents ought to compel comparable neutrality in the latter:

[L]iberal legitimacy insists that parental conduct should be guided by ideals and principles that do not rest on the validity of any particular reasonable comprehensive doctrine. The ideals that guide parents must not, for example, be secular or religious ideals, which are disputed by reasonable persons (Clayton, 2006, p. 95).

If 'enrolling' their children in a CD—that is, deliberately instilling a set of beliefs and values that define a certain way of life or conception of the good, such as a religious faith—can be justified only if we assume the truth of that doctrine, this should be seen as illegitimate parenting, something akin to state favouritism of a particular religion at the expense of others. The demand of neutrality requires that parents instead deliberately raise their children in ways that respect their autonomy so that they can choose for themselves which conception of a good life to adopt. It is worth stressing here that the demand is not that children be raised in ways that will lead or allow them to be autonomous as adults. Rather it is that their capacity for choosing their own comprehensive doctrine be respected when they are children.

It is here that Clayton faces the question raised above about what it means to respect the autonomy of children who currently lack a meaningful capacity for free choice or self-determination, something that seems to suggest a critical disanalogy between families and states. Liberalism assumes that citizens are capable of a significant degree of self-governance. In particular, they are assumed to be able to determine for themselves to a significant degree the beliefs and values according to which they will live. The demand that the autonomy these abilities engender be respected by the state is what lies behind the principle of state neutrality, and the state violates that principle when it presumes to answer questions that are the rightful provenance of autonomous citizens. How does this apply to children who currently lack the ability to determine their own beliefs and values? As Clayton himself puts it in anticipating this objection:

The wrongness of the coercive and involuntary imposition of a comprehensive doctrine is that it violates the freedom and equality of the

person on whom it is imposed . . . [C]itizens are free and equal only when they possess to a minimum degree the capacity to form, revise, and pursue a conception of the good and are capable of taking responsibility for their ends. But young children lack such capacities. Given these premises, it would follow that it is unobjectionable to impose comprehensive doctrines on children, since children lack the freedom and equality, the violation of which renders such imposition wrong (Clayton, 2006, p. 98).

Clayton has two burdens to discharge in response to this challenge. He must show first that we can make sense of the idea of respecting or violating a child's autonomy even when she is currently unable to think for herself in the relevant ways. He must then show that so understood, respect for the child's autonomy demands the same kind of neutrality between comprehensive doctrines that a Rawlsian liberal demands of the state's exercise of power. To meet these demands, Clayton leans on the Liberal Paternalism that is, as we've seen, a central component of much thinking about liberal parenting in order to argue the first premise.⁶ While children may not be capable of autonomous decision making, he argues we can nonetheless respect their individuality and freedom by constraining the decisions made on their behalf in the appropriate ways as urged by Liberal Paternalism. Once we adopt Liberal Paternalism, moreover, we can see that enrolment in a CD is not something that respects their autonomy and freedom. But it is at this point that trouble looms. Any plausible understanding of Liberal Paternalism, I will argue, assumes a CD, and so it cannot be used to argue for parental neutrality.

III RESPECTING HYPOTHETICAL BELIEFS AND VALUES

Clayton interprets the Paternalistic Principle as consisting in a counterfactual test, as demanding that we respect children's autonomy by considering what they *would* want or decide for themselves if they were capable of thinking independently. Specifically, Clayton argues that we can evaluate decisions made on behalf of children in the present in light of their future capacity to make up their own minds, and so the way to answer such questions is to consider the beliefs and values of the adult the child will grow to be.⁷ Since, in other words, children will be autonomous once they grow up, they can be treated as such now by evaluating choices made on their behalf on the basis of their future beliefs and values.⁸ Hence, we can still make sense of the question of whether a child's autonomy is violated if she is enrolled in a CD without her consent by turning it into the question of whether the child's future self would endorse or reject the decision to enrol her on the basis of her considered, mature beliefs and values. If it can be determined that this is something the child's future adult self would object to, or which would violate her eventual more considered beliefs and values, then we should judge it to be objectionable to the child in the present.

The idea of respecting a child's autonomy by asking how her future self will come to think of how she is now being treated is a tempting one, but following David Archard I will be urging that it is beset by numerous problems that undermine Clayton's use of the strategy.⁹ The first thing to ask is just what the test is exactly—what are we asking in considering the future beliefs and values of a child in trying to determine whether or not she would approve of how she is being currently treated? The most obvious interpretation would have us asking whether *in fact* this child's future self will come to endorse her parents' current parenting practices. As Gerald Dworkin puts it, '[p]arental paternalism may be thought of as a wager by the parent on the child's subsequent recognition of the wisdom of the restriction [on the child's freedom]' (Dworkin, 1971, p. 119). If we choose our examples well, this might appear to work. A promising and frequently used example would be something like compulsory schooling. Though a child may have to be compelled to go school against her expressed desires, we can be confident that a time will come when that same person, now grown, will come to appreciate her education, and so be glad she was forced to go to school as a child. We can claim, in this case, to be respecting her future wishes—her wishes, that is, as a fully autonomous agent—and so in this sense respecting her autonomy in our present actions.

The example of compelling a child to go to school works well because the value of education, and so the value of providing an education to even a reluctant child, is not seriously in doubt. Consequently we can comfortably predict a retrospective endorsement of a parent's practice of getting her child to school regularly. However, a child's future beliefs and values are not always so easily predicted, and in fact very often they are unknown. Adults disagree about all sorts of things, and particularly with contested issues we may not know which position the child will grow up to endorse until she in fact grows up and our uncertainty will be proportionate to the level of controversy surrounding the matter in question. This applies to controversies in child rearing as much as anywhere else. If educating children is uncontroversial, many practices parents engage in are quite contested, and the matter of by what right a parent acts in this or that way is often an underlying issue. Many parents do not consider mild spankings abusive, for example, though by now many others do. If we're considering the future beliefs of a particular child in asking whether the spanking she just suffered was an affront to her dignity or reasonable discipline she will someday appreciate, how do we know into which camp she will fall?

We can of course try to increase our ability to predict a child's future beliefs, which are surely not arrived at in an entirely random way, by considering what we know to influence such things. But this actually points to a bigger worry. One of the biggest predictors of a child's future beliefs is plainly *her childhood*, her experiences growing up and the sorts of things she was deliberately taught to believe as a child. Here of course her parents are going to be particularly influential. As parents inevitably discover the process is not fool-proof, but generally we can expect that a child who is taught by her parents to believe X is more likely to grow up to believe X, all else being equal. This too carries over to child rearing

decisions themselves. As Archard argues, just what adults find to be acceptable child rearing practices is often a function of their own upbringings and experiences as children. This means the counterfactual test will tend to be self-validating: that her parents engage in a given child rearing practice makes it more likely she will eventually be glad they did, undermining the relevance of the child's future belief. Archard aptly refers to deliberately instilled future beliefs and values 'self-validating paternalism, a paternalism that changes others so that they approve of it' (Archard, 2004).

We might try to avoid these problems of indeterminacy and self-validation by strengthening the principle so that the *possibility* that a child's future self might object will suffice to show a current parental practice to be illegitimate. That is, perhaps the idea should be that if this child *might* grow up to be an adult who finds spanking abhorrent, then her parents ought not to spank her now. This would certainly take care of worries about both indeterminacy and self-validation, but at further costs. For one thing, it's not immediately obvious why possible future rejection of a parenting practice should carry more weight than possible future acceptance. But even worse, giving this much weight to possible future rejection would make it impossible to raise children in a way that respects their autonomy. Once again, if we attend to the fact that actual adults disagree about many things, and many things having to do with child rearing in particular, it is clear that nothing remotely controversial will stand a chance if we reject any practice that a child *might* grow up to resent. This would include many things that seem to have obvious benefits to children and society, including, in fact, compulsory schooling, as well as standard healthcare practices such as vaccinations. Particularly damaging to Clayton would be the great many parents who find the idea of raising children without religion abhorrent.

In light of this result, perhaps the Liberal Paternalistic test should be understood in such a way that only certain kinds of possible objections to one's upbringings are given credence, namely those that are reasonable. This seems a promising strategy, as it would allow us to ignore examples of adults who have come to resent their parents for seemingly daft reasons and this seems to come closest to capturing what seems right about Liberal Paternalism. The thing to note about this reading, however, is that it effectively requires that we invoke and be able to justify a normative standard that we can apply to child-rearing practices—we need to know what defines the limits of acceptable parenting so we can say what kinds of objections to one's upbringing are reasonable, and which are absurd and to be put aside. Moreover, once that standard is made explicit, appeal to a child's future belief becomes otiose, as we will know already whether the practice conforms to or violates it and so is either reasonable or unreasonable. To see this, consider one last time the example of spanking. If our most compelling standards of minimally decent parenting preclude any use of physical punishment, it seems fair that someone who is spanked as a child might come to reject that aspect of their upbringing. At the same time we can set aside the opinions of those who grow up to be adults who do not mind having been spanked as children—by our lights they should mind. The thing to note however is that this pair of judgments requires a substantive

commitment to a standard that renders spanking wrong—it requires taking a normative stance that is in force *prior to* our attempts to discern what a child’s future beliefs will be. But for that very reason there is no longer any reason to worry about the child’s future belief. If we know already that it is wrong to spank any child, we know it is wrong to spank *this* child, and we know this regardless of her future opinions on the subject. Of course it will look this way only to those who accept our parenting standards; from the perspective of others we may be the ones who look unreasonable. Liberal paternalism, it seems, collapses into plain old paternalism—we end up doing what we believe is best for a child, her own beliefs, present or future, notwithstanding.

What I would conclude from all this is that a rendering of Liberal Paternalism that interprets it as appealing to a child’s hypothetical or future beliefs and values suffers from an ambiguity, and either way we read it there are problems. If it is read as relying on empirical, possibly probabilistic, predictions about a child’s future beliefs it will be indeterminate, self-validating, or too demanding. If it is read in such a way as to invoke an implicit standard of reasonableness that substantially constrains child-rearing practices, it avoids these problems, but renders the appeal to the child’s beliefs and values pointless. On this reading, we should act towards a child not in ways we predict she will come to accept, but according to our best judgment of what is and is not good for her, regardless of how she may come to feel about things in the future. To be sure, this entails a risk of future repudiation of the choices we make on the child’s behalf at any point where we make a choice others might disagree with, because the child might grow up to be among the dissenters. But this stems from the currently and perhaps ineliminably controversial nature of child rearing. We cannot avoid the risk of having our parenting practices rejected, as any stance we take on a controversial issue will incur them—when it comes to child-rearing controversies, there is no neutral place to stand. I will be returning to this point.

IV CLAYTON’S PATERNALISM

Returning now to Clayton, it seems his use of Liberal Paternalism is beset by exactly these ambiguities and their attendant problems. As we’ve seen, the specific question Clayton would have us ask when it comes to children is whether deference to their future, mature beliefs and desires would require us to refrain from any upbringing that effects enrolment in a Comprehensive Doctrine, what I’ll refer to as a Neutral Upbringing for short. In trying to determine whether enrolling a child in a CD is consistent with her autonomy, he writes,

[we] should assess which principles the future free and equal adult, who the child will grow up to be, may reject as the normative basis of her upbringing. Given these considerations, [we] must believe that it is highly likely that the adult who the child will become would object to having been subjected to an upbringing that depends for its

justification on a comprehensive conception, which she (as an adult) rejects as mistaken or evil. On the basis of *the possibility of future reasonable rejection*, then, [we] must object to the appeal to the comprehensive doctrines on behalf of the child (Clayton, 2006, p. 99).

According to Clayton, as adults living in a liberal democracy we should appreciate government neutrality regardless of our personal commitments to particular CDs. Consequently we will wish to have been brought up in a manner neutral between CDs, particularly if we come to reject the CD we were brought up in, as in retrospect it will strike us as wrong that we were brought up according to beliefs and values we now regard as false or evil. More generally, however, Clayton presumably also holds that even those who come to endorse the CD they were brought up in should reject having not had the opportunity to choose it freely as an adult.¹⁰ Regardless of our adult commitments to this or that particular CD, then, we should reject our upbringing if they were not neutral. Hence we can safely assume our children will or possibly will come to reject a non-Neutral Upbringing, and so in deference to their future preferences we should avoid such styles of parenting.

In light of the previous discussion of the strategy of respecting a child's autonomy by asking what the adult the child will become will endorse or reject we need take a close look at this line of argument. Here too we must ask just what kinds of claims are being made. Perhaps we should take Clayton at his word and read him as making an empirical claim to the effect that people who were brought up in a way that effects enrolment in a particular CD in fact are 'very likely' to come to resent it once they come to endorse the ideals and values of modern liberal democracy. This, however, is simply not plausible.¹¹ Many people brought up in a religion are glad for it despite also being committed to basic democratic principles. Even those who reject the religion of their childhood do not necessarily reject the idea of non-neutral parenting—many continue to believe that raising a child in their faith (or lack of faith) is a prerogative of parents and plan to do the same with their own kids according to their new beliefs and values. Hence that aspect of their upbringing may not be what they reject. Nor, as we saw, does it help to lean, as Clayton also might be understood to be doing, on the mere possibility of such a rejection. While it is certainly possible that someone will reject having a non-Neutral Upbringing, it is equally possible such upbringings will not be rejected. Moreover, it is also possible that a Neutral Upbringing will be rejected by the adult convert who wishes she had been raised in her more recently adopted religious faith. As before, this way of thinking paternalistically by allowing merely possible rejections of child-rearing choices to limit parental authority makes legitimacy in parenting impossible.

As an alternative, we should focus on the second part of the above quote which suggests Clayton holds that those who do not reject having been enrolled in a CD as children are being unreasonable, but this is to read his claim as defining the limits of reasonable or appropriate child rearing. So read, the idea would be that we should be resentful of non-Neutral

upbringings, whether or not we are, and that we would be if we better understood the implications of the liberal democratic values we endorse as adults. But this, as we saw, is effectively to render the appeal to the child's future beliefs unnecessary, and indeed uninformative. What Clayton is effectively arguing is not that it is likely or possible that a child will come to reject an upbringing that effects enrolment in a CD. He is arguing that it is unreasonable and illegitimate to engage in non-neutral child rearing and so it should be rejected by reasonable adults, and this no matter what any particular child grows up to believe. But this is to assume a standard for proper child rearing that is both substantive and itself controversial, as it is not possible to hold such a view without implicitly rejecting as false CDs that would urge an upbringing that does involve enrolment. It is precisely here that Clayton's attempt to limit parental authority according to the principles of Rawls' political liberalism becomes untenable. If Clayton's argument depends on him rejecting as false those CDs that demand enrolment, he is holding to a liberalism that goes beyond providing procedural constraints that all should respect regardless of their CDs. Instead he can make his argument only if he is holding to liberalism as a full-blown CD whose truth is incompatible with competitors.

V CLAYTON'S COMPREHENSIVE LIBERALISM

To see this we need to focus on two points that are under-appreciated by Clayton, and which jointly undermine his analogy between parents and the liberal state. The first is that we expect parents to provide goods for their children that we do not expect adults to provide for other adults, or for the state to provide for adults. The second is that what constitutes the goods parents have a duty to provide their children is often a matter of substantial controversy among reasonable persons. In particular, what counts as an adequate or minimally acceptable upbringing according to some CDs will appear to be inadequate from the perspective of others. The conjunction of these two points demonstrate the impossibility of a Neutral Upbringing—there is no parental counterpart to state neutrality between competing CDs.

Beginning with the first point, we expect, indeed demand, that parents provide as best they can those things that are critical to their child's wellbeing and proper development. This is a distinctive feature of parenthood, and not a feature of adult relations in liberal democracies, or a feature of the relation between the state and citizens. Parents are charged with protecting and furthering the wellbeing of their children in ways that adults are generally not responsible for in the case of other adults. These responsibilities require parents to make all kinds of decisions for their children that we do not expect or allow adults to make for other adults: decisions regarding, for example, medical care, schooling, and social activities. We expect parents to pursue for their children the goods provided by doctors, schools, and good friends because we agree that education, health, and beneficial social growth are critical to a child's current and future wellbeing.

An analogy does not depend on perfect correspondence, and so in itself it is not a problem for Clayton that parents are expected to do more for their children than a liberal state is expected to do for its citizens. However, just what kinds of good a child needs to flourish and develop can be controversial in ways liberalism must accommodate, which brings us to the second point mentioned above. Education, health and beneficial social growth are uncontroversial goods in the sense that no reasonable CD denies that they are beneficial to children and need to be provided.¹² Adherents of competing CDs ought all to agree that parents have special duties in this respect. But once we move beyond these kinds of obvious goods, the question ‘what do children need?’ can only be answered from the perspective of particular CDs. Consider something like baptism. Is this something children need to flourish? A political liberal must acknowledge that reasonable people disagree about this. Consequently, any decision a parent makes about baptism will be controversial—to *deny* a child baptism is to make a decision on her behalf she may come to reject as it is a decision to deny her what by many (reasonable) people’s light is a fundamental good. To suppose we know already that children will do just fine without being baptised, or even to suppose this is the kind of decision that can be postponed until adulthood, is to assume it is not a good children need to flourish. Put differently, it is to assume a comprehensive picture of how the world works according to which infant baptism is unnecessary. Whatever they do, parents will be taking a substantive position on a matter that we expect the liberal state to remain neutral on.¹³

To see how far reaching this conclusion is we need to appreciate a further disanalogy between children and citizens of a liberal state. As has been repeatedly noted, we cannot expect children, as children, to formulate their own beliefs and values in the way adults do. But neither is it realistic to suppose that this process of coming to understand how the world works and how one should live can be postponed until adulthood. Children must begin to make decisions in the light of some conception of how the world works, and some conception of what is right or wrong, as soon as they begin to make decisions for themselves. Some set of beliefs and desires must be available for children to begin to formulate even the modest plans and goals that occupy their lives as they grow and mature, and to form the bases of decisions, deliberate action, and self-understanding. Lacking an extensive knowledge of such matters themselves, children naturally look to those who seem much better situated: they have no choice but to depend on the beliefs and values of the adults charged with raising and educating them. They depend, in other words, on their parents and others to provide them with a sense of how the world works and should be navigated, and a sense of what is allowed and what isn’t, how they ought and ought not to treat others, and so on. But here too we enter areas of persistent, and in a liberal society presumably ineliminable, controversy as just what we need to adequately understand the world and our place in it are matters that divide adherents of different CDs. What are seen as beliefs and values adequate for children to understand their world and their place in it will seem, from the perspectives of others, woefully thin or misguided or pernicious.

Hopefully the implications of these observations are clear. Clayton would have parents raise their children within the constraints of Rawls' Public Reason. But by doing this Clayton is implicitly assuming that what remains once anything controversial is bracketed will be adequate for the day-to-day needs and concerns of children trying to make sense of and navigate their world. He is assuming, in other words, that children *qua children* have no intrinsic need of or right to religious beliefs and practices, the authoritative texts or teachings of a faith, or the rituals, ceremonies and rites of passage they ground. Perhaps he is right about this—it is no part of my argument to say otherwise. Still, this effectively begs the question against CDs that recognise epistemic and moral resources that go beyond those of Public Reason. For many an upbringing *à la* Clayton will be badly impoverished because adopting Public Reason as a limit on parental authority will have the effect of forcing children to live entirely within a highly restricted range of beliefs and values and practices, namely those that are appropriate to the political culture of a liberal democracy. Such restriction can make sense only in the context of a more comprehensive set of beliefs. Clayton is assuming the truth of a comprehensive doctrine, namely liberalism as a full-blown comprehensive account of a good life, in making his case. Despite his intentions, his is a comprehensive, not a political, liberalism.

If I am right, Clayton cannot succeed in drawing limits on legitimate parenting that should be acceptable to all regardless of the CD they live by. This conclusion should not be too surprising. Public reason is introduced by Rawls in order to provide a mode of discourse regarding strictly political issues. The questions it is claimed to be adequate to address concern the exercise of state power. At no point does or could Rawls assert that the resources of Public Reason—'presently accepted general beliefs and forms of reasoning found in common sense, and the methods and conclusions of science when these are not controversial' (Rawls, 1996, p. 224)—are adequate for answering more fundamental questions about life, or for making everyday practical and moral decisions. To do so would be to decide against any CD that asserts our need for richer epistemic and moral resources by denying the relevant metaphysical and religious commitments. This isn't a problem for Rawls because he can plausibly maintain that whatever we personally believe is needed to plumb the deeper questions posed by our lives, we can agree that we can all get by with Public Reasons for strictly political questions. This safely leaves the remainder to each individual to sort out for herself using whatever resources she finds important. Leaving these matters to private citizens is perfectly appropriate because we don't take those sorts of thing to be the province of the state.

This is where the striking disanalogies between the state and parents become most apparent. There really is nothing in parenting comparable to the kind of private/public divide that this version of liberalism appeals to—parents can't 'mind their own business' when it comes to the formation of their children's beliefs and desires because anything they do, any child rearing or educative strategy they adopt, will influence and shape those

beliefs not only in future but also during the entire course of childhood as well.¹⁴ The parent who remains within the dictates of PR will be effectively and deliberately denying her child epistemic and moral resources that are essential, according to some comprehensive doctrine or other, to proper development. In so doing, she will be adopting a comprehensive doctrine. The ideal of an upbringing that is neutral between comprehensive doctrines proves to be impossible to realise.

VI CONCLUSION

I will conclude with some suggestions as to where the failure of Clayton's project leaves would-be liberal parents.

Clayton's position that '[t]he ideals that guide parents must not . . . be secular or religious ideals that are disputed by reasonable persons' is a comparatively extreme one, as he acknowledges (Clayton, 2006, p. 95). However, liberal discomfort with child rearing that assumes, and so tends a child towards, a particular world-view is a recurring theme in much of the philosophical literature on parenting. Positions close to Clayton's have been embraced in some recent work,¹⁵ but even among those do not object to parents' attempts to pass on their religious beliefs, many concede no more than pragmatic tolerance of the practice while denying that parents have any right to it.¹⁶ What these arguments have in common is a reliance on formal or procedural defences of more liberal parenting rather than a forthright defence of its moral superiority. In a way this is understandable—an appeal to liberalism as an ideology risks putting liberal parenting on the same footing as illiberal parenting rooted in religious beliefs as they too will be instilling beliefs that they, the parents, believe are right on the strength of their own convictions.

Though my arguments here have been critical, the conclusion that liberal parents will be enrolling their children in the comprehensive doctrine of liberalism seems to me one liberals ought to embrace. If the fundamental flaw in Clayton's account was his attempt to render the family too much like the state, it should not be a surprise that a political conception of liberalism is an inappropriate guide to the ethics of parenting. It is only by investing too much in Rawls' deliberately narrow political philosophy that anyone would think that Public Reason could possibly be up to the task of answering all the questions children need answered. What liberal parents should do is to assert that the strategy of allowing their children to decide religious questions and the like for themselves is a positive good, not because it is consistent with a formal or procedural restraint on parenting, but because liberals believe a life spent figuring such things out for oneself is a better life than one in which such things are decided by others. This would force such parents to concede that on a certain level of abstraction their child rearing is on par with that of other parents who deliberately instil certain beliefs and values in their children because they, the parents, believe these beliefs and values to be true and good. So be it. The idea that liberal parenting can be defended without defending liberal values is a mistake.

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NOTES

1. How to accommodate the liberal emphasis on autonomy with the reality of children's dependence on adults is a major focus of a great deal of recent philosophical work on children. See for example, Brighouse, 2006; Gutmann, 1980; O'Neill, 1988; and the work collected in Archard and Macleod, 2002.
2. See Gutmann, 1980 for an example.
3. See, for example, Nussbaum, 1999. Nussbaum includes a discussion subtitled 'Parents and Children' in Chapter 2. The bulk of the discussion however is on relations between the state and parents on the matter of education, not that between parents and children per se. Similarly Chapter 4, which focuses on 'the family', is primarily an analysis of relations between spouses. The unique challenges to liberal thought presented by children and questions of parental authority are never addressed in much detail. For doubts that liberal political theory has a whole lot to say to parents see Ramaekers and Suissa, 2012, Chapter 5. I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing me towards this book.
4. Rawls, 1996.
5. Clayton is not entirely consistent in this, and at a critical point he does seem to argue that relations between parents and children are comparable to those between adults. I address this below.
6. The centrality of his use of Liberal Paternalism is stressed by Clayton in his response to Jeffery Morgan's review of *Justice and Legitimacy in Upbringing*. There Morgan argues, following Robert Noggle, that parents can rightfully do what they think is right with small children, adjusting their parenting as their child's clear interests and preferences emerge with age. Clayton rightfully responds that this ignores his argument that parents can and must do better by way of a consideration of beliefs and values the child may some day come to endorse. Though an adequate response to Morgan's reading of him, Clayton does not offer any further defence or explanation of his version of Liberal Paternalism. See Morgan, 2009 and Clayton, 2009.
7. As David Archard has noted, there are other ways to evaluate the hypothetical—we might try to discern what a child would believe and value as the child they are if they knew more, were more rational, etc. See Archard, 2004 and 2010. I do not think this approach fares any better than the one taken by Clayton that I criticise below for the reasons Archard outlines.
8. Clayton phrases the issue in terms of a guardian who would evaluate the relevant counterfactuals and then act on the child's behalf accordingly. It is not clear, however, just how appealing to a guardian adds anything to the basic picture, so I have ignored that for present purposes.
9. See Archard, 2004 as well as Archard, 2010. These points are also made by Shelly Burt in Burt, 2003.
10. This would seem to follow from Clayton's analogy between the state and parents. I can reject a religious law even if it works to advantage of my own faith out of belief in religious freedom. So too, on Clayton's view an adult who endorses the values of liberal democracy should wish to have been brought up in a neutral way, even if they currently endorse the beliefs they were brought up on.
11. In fact, it is contradicted by Clayton himself, who openly admits this aspect of his treatment of legitimate parenting flies in the face of widely accepted practices.
12. In this respect they are comparable to the 'basic goods' identified by Rawls in his political philosophy. See Gutmann, 1980, for an elaboration of this point.
13. Clayton anticipates something close to this point by considering the claim that by the lights of many failing to baptise a child is harmful because 'her sins are not washed away' (Clayton, 2006, p. 111). Hence, Clayton supposes the objection would go, from the perspective of the parents the enormous good of baptism outweighs the lesser good of autonomy. In response, Clayton argues that if we concede this in regard to children, we would have to concede it in regard to adults and allow, he seems to be suggesting, coerced baptisms of adults. In general, he argues, 'the appeal to

transcendent values to defeat the requirements of autonomy, if sound, defeats the appeal to public reason in the case of adult relations as well as the relation between adult and child' (ibid.). Consequently, such a move is unavailable to anyone who recognises the value of autonomy. This way of framing the issue is, I think, revealingly askew. I'm not sure what Clayton means by invoking 'transcendent values'. The point about baptism should be that from the perspective of an individual parent it is a fundamental good that is required for her child's wellbeing. That we don't presume to make choices about these kinds of goods for other adults is as irrelevant here as it would be if we were looking at educational choices parents make on behalf of their children.

14. This point is made by Claudia Mills in her criticisms of Joel Feinberg's idea of a child's right to an 'open future'. See Feinberg, 1980; and Mills, 2003.
15. See for example Morgan, 2006; and Hannan and Vernon, 2008.
16. See for example Montague, 2000 and Vopat, 2009.

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