The Place of Identity Formation in the Education of Children

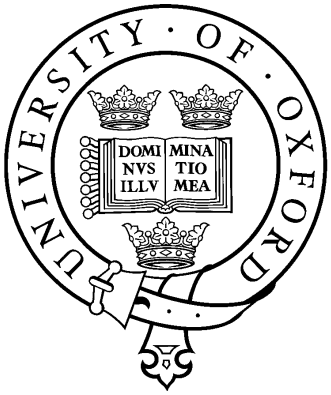

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Table of Contents

Brief Abstract

The place of identity formation in the education of children is a question that concerns parents, educators, and scholars across the academic fields of political philosophy, developmental psychology, identity studies, educational philosophy, and theological ethics, among others. It is an example of the kind of issue of public concern to which Christian ethics has a great deal to offer, both in methodology and substance. This dissertation uses the framework of James Davison Hunter's "faithful presence" to engage in an interdisciplinary consideration of this question, resulting in practical recommendations as well as a lens of analysis through which to consider why this question is so vexing to modern liberal democracies.

The structure of the dissertation is to first map the question of the place of identity formation in the education of children, next to establish the dominant approaches to the question in the United States of America, and finally to outline an alternative. In Chapter One, we consider that basic anthropological assumptions are needed to approach this question, and look to Karl Barth's theology of baptism. Chapters Two and Three address two dominant errant approaches, which we group under the provocative titles, "The Heresies of Nature" and "The Heresies of Nurture." Key interlocutors include John Dewey, Lawrence Kohlberg, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Danielle Allen, and Patrick Deneen. Chapter Four outlines an alternative approach, built on the thought of Nicholas Wolterstorff and significant engagement with Alasdair MacIntyre's theory of the relationship between a social practice and a virtue. The final chapter contains the conclusion that, considered well, the place of identity formation in the education of children leads us to consider a life of learning through the framework of a virtue, which we call always learning.

Long Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to take up a timely question—The Place of Identity Formation in the Education of Children—and critically consider the dominant approaches and proposed answers in the United States today. This driving question is an example of the kind of issue of public concern to which Christian ethics has a great deal to offer, both in methodology and substance. We use the framework of James Davison Hunter's "faithful presence" to engage in an interdisciplinary consideration of this question—reviewing key literatures in political philosophy, developmental psychology, identity studies, educational philosophy, and theological ethics, among others—resulting in practical recommendations as well as a lens of analysis through which to consider why this question is so vexing to modern liberal democracies.

It should not be surprising that the place of identity formation in the education of children is in need of careful conceptual clarification. Truly democratic schooling, where all children participate, is an accomplishment of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It was not until seventy years ago that schools were legally desegregated in the United States. Even so, in these same years it is also demographically clear that Americans are living in dense communities of like-resourced and like-minded neighbours, and the research seems to show that communities are continuing to trend in this direction. We must add to this picture a world in which Americans are engaged in global media technologies that complexify the very ideas of distance and difference. Research is also showing that children gather in person in schools and increasingly not many other places; participation in civic and religious organisations is decreasing. The pressures on schools are proportionately increasing. Very few of America's schools actually embody the full diversity of our national landscape, let alone the global landscape, and all trend forecasting leads us to the conclusion that they are not going to any time soon. Parents reasonably experience this as a tension in the upbringing of their children. They desire for their children to grow into responsible, successful, and just neighbours, colleagues, and citizens. Research is telling them that diversities of thought and experience will lead their children towards creative thinking and inclusive practices, which ultimately will lead to their happiness and prosperity in a digitally mediated economy in a global world. And yet, most of the school options in front of them do not, and perhaps cannot, represent anything like the full diversity of the American experience, not to mention the world. Parents and scholars are aware that there is a great deal at stake in the moral, civic, and institutional imaginations that are being formed in our schools, and we intuit that there is something like the moral identity of the child to which we should be paying more explicit attention, but resources are scattered to address these concerns, not least between practitioners and scholars on one axis, and across disciplines on another.

As America's schools were being established and participation expanded in the middle of the

nineteenth century, it was believed that *education* itself could overcome the limitations of *formation*, and that the practices of education—of expanding our understanding and imagination—could reinforce the idea of a shared humanity. The questions of humanity and diversity were particularly poignant as African Americans sought dignity after enslavement and women fought for mutuality and suffrage. As emancipation and suffrage intersected the rise of mass schooling historically, the place of identity formation in the education of children was answered in a variety of ways. From "separate but equal" to practices of "busing," Americans have never settled on how to conceive of this tension between education and formation. Today, we find calls for education in global declarations of human rights, but there is increasing contestation about how education, as a social practice, could achieve something like the common aims of humanity, however we define them. Formation is a more hidden concern, to our detriment. While the idea that children are formed in the communities, traditions, and institutions of which they are a part might seem common sense, the tension of these particular and private formations with the collective and civic lives of children in America needs further refinement. All of this leads to a scenario in which the anxieties of liberalism—and more specifically the anxieties of pluralism—are playing out in our local schools between families, educators, and political forces.

The idea of identity present in this dissertation is that people are particularistic. We come from somewhere, are formed by certain traditions and communities, and it is through these particularities that we find our shared humanity, not in spite of them. It is relevant throughout our study that the methodology of the dissertation and its content mirror one another. This is a project in Christian ethics and the author leads a non-sectarian school. Calls for Christian ethics, and moral reasoning more broadly, to work in close proximity to the practice of the topics at hand, including from Oliver O'Donovan, Michael Banner, Luke Bretherton, and James Davison Hunter, among others, form the backdrop of our approach. This project begins by looking to the Christian practice of baptism for basic anthropological assumptions to ground a critical assessment of the literatures that shape the conceptual and lived experiences of the place of identity formation in the education of children today. The majority of the dissertation is taken up in this project of critical assessment.

Chapter One operates within the space of theological ethics to understand how basic anthropological assumptions can intersect with questions of identity. We follow a key insight from theologian Jennifer Herdt in looking to Karl Barth to help shape an approach to our question. Barth becomes our unlikely model anthropologist who is a helpful guide because of—not in spite of—his fervent rejection of separating general insights from their theological sources. We proceed confidently in following Barth, ensuring that the logic of Chapter One is not from general principles towards an understanding of God but instead from an understanding of ourselves in relation to God towards general principles that help to make sense of our lives in the world. This movement is critical to the use of Barth's thinking on baptism as foundational to the critiques that follow in Chapters Two and Three. Through

consideration of Barth on baptism, we name two basic anthropological assumptions: The Possibility of Human Transformation and The Possibility of Human Potential. The first regards the Christian proclamation that we are not only what we have been born or formed to be, but instead the opportunity for Christian transformation—for redemption—is always available to a person. The promise of the Holy Spirit is the promise that redemptive transformation is possible. The second considers a Christian approach to human growth, and it contains the notion that the Christian journey is shaped by its character, not its destination. Human potential is surprising; something new is possible in the world. This is not a simple picture of progress. Chapter One considers these basic anthropological assumptions alongside an important critique within identity studies that concerns essentialism. Barth's approach helps us identify a theologically sophisticated framework that can speak meaningfully with scholars of identity studies, such as Kwame Anthony Appiah, charting a path forward.

Chapters Two and Three navigate dominant public discourses shaping the place of identity formation in the education of children. With the provocative titles, "The Heresies of Nature" and "The Heresies of Nurture," these chapters engage critically with scholars from a range of fields from educational philosophy to identity studies and political philosophy to developmental psychology. Between the two chapters, we name four temptations towards heresy: The Inevitability of Democracy, The Neutrality of Development, All Diversity is the Same, and The Public - Private Divide. These two chapters amount to a reckoning with the literatures and practices that publicly shape our sense of the place of identity formation in the education of children. This is a question that no one discipline subsumes, though several have tried, and therefore our interdisciplinary assessment is necessary, illustrative, and precise, if not exhaustive. By acknowledging clusters of thought that make their own basic assumptions, anthropological and otherwise, we are able to consider those assumptions relative to the possibilities of human transformation and potential.

Having assessed the state of the conversation, Chapter Four offers a proposal for a different way to consider the place of identity formation in the education of children. Instead of seeing education as a project with an outcome that includes the identity of the child, we propose to see education as a social practice that cultivates a virtue. We then see two places that this approach maintains for the relevance of the identity of the child, one is within the learning itself and the other relates to how virtue becomes relevant inside of a person's moral identity. While it may be tempting to conclude that there is limited space for identity formation in the education of children when education and formation are understood as related but distinct concepts, we make a more nuanced and careful determination that all of the public hand wringing over identity formation and education makes very reasonable sense as there is a place for identity formation in the education of children. It is a bit different, however, than we might first consider, and it relates to the deepest layers of how we come to understand ourselves and our

neighbours. Two concluding thought experiments in Chapter Four begin to make our insights relevant to public discussion.

To the best of my knowledge, my driving question has not been asked by a Christian ethicist with the level of sophistication that I take it to deserve. There is a great deal of work around the formation of Christian practice and identity. There is also a great deal of work around explicitly Christian schools and schooling. Wolterstorff's work gets close to the questions that drive this dissertation through his body of writing around education—*Educating for Responsible Action* (1980), *Educating for Life* (2002), *Educating for Shalom* (2004), and *Religion in the University* (2019)—but, he takes as a starting point that Christians should educate their children in explicitly Christian schools, without finally considering the complexities of identity formation, and therefore my question is slightly different. Further, this dissertation engages with twentieth and twenty-first century thinkers across the fields of political philosophy, developmental psychology, sociology, identity studies, educational philosophy, and theological ethics. In this way, it both seeks to provide a set of considerations for a better way to approach the lived realities of current citizens and to forge a conversation across literatures that rarely intersect as comprehensively as I seek to do here. It is often the case that some of these literatures speak to each other in part, but to see this full range is rarer. The philosophy of education engages so fundamentally with developmental psychology, that the insights at this intersection are generally taken for granted. The engagement between political philosophy and theological ethics is well established. The link between educational philosophy and political philosophy is more interesting, because there is a regular occurrence of political philosophers engaging in questions of educational philosophy as a kind of test case for the workability of a political philosophy, which is a phenomenon that supports the working logic of this dissertation.

The conclusions of this dissertation are relevant to theorists and practitioners of education in America today. However, the landscape of schools is, and likely will continue to be, changing dramatically as technologies such as Artificial Intelligence and its "tutors" intersect with the disruptions of global conflict and the aftermath of many schools closing their doors for a time during the COVID-19 pandemic. Detailed engagement with these futures is outside of the scope of this dissertation, however, there are clear implications for a number of questions: how new technologies will overcome the well studied siloing effects of the internet; what stories we will tell our children about the nature of their understanding relative to the learnings of machines; how technologies will disrupt schools, especially those already resource constrained and in need of help; and how universities and centres of knowledge creation will evolve, inevitably transforming all that is downstream, institutionally speaking. We are in need of a clear understanding of the place of identity formation in the education of children in order to navigate the pressures and opportunities of our educational institutions humanely and intentionally.

Introduction

There is a stunning, well-known passage by nineteenth century American scholar W.E.B. Du Bois in a section of *The Souls of Black Folks* called, "On the Training of Black Men," that unfolds:

> I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not. Across the colour-line I move arm in arm with Balzac and Dumas, where smiling men and welcoming women glide in gilded halls. From out the caves of evening that swing between the strong-limbed earth and the tracery of the stars, I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what soul I will, and they come all graciously with no scorn nor condescension. So, wed with Truth, I dwell above the Veil. Is this the life you grudge us, O knightly America? Is this the life you long to change into the dull red hideousness of Georgia? Are you so afraid lest peering from this Pisgah, between Philistine and Amalekite, we sight the Promised Land?[1]

The sheer power of belief in *education* displayed in this passage should give us pause. Do we believe in 2025 that education can take any one of us "above the Veil"? If we actually listen to ourselves across disciplines and divisions, we may be faced with the conclusion that we have lost faith in the very vision that rendered this passage so completely damning. A belief in education is a belief in emergence, of the possibility of something new and beautiful emerging into the world. It is the possibility of transcendence and the hope that the future need not be determined by the past. It is a belief in human transformation and human potential. These hopes are rooted in the disciplined work of learning and of teaching and of the moral imagination. Do we believe in the ability to imagine a future different from the present, and do we trust one another with that work?

This dissertation is an unpacking of contemporary debates surrounding education and identity formation, and its home territory, so to speak, is the United States of America. Is this an American problem? I leave it to the readers to decide, and I make no claims herein, but I will say simply that I have my doubts. We educators operate in a global forum of information, disinformation, simple ideation, and profound real-time experience. To be a student in the twenty-first century is to navigate the spaces between social media, artificial intelligence, global calls for the protection of the youth to their studies, and regimes stripping education from whole classes of people, often girls. In the dissertation, we take as a methodological point of entry that it is often helpful, when considering such a question as education in the context of a democratic society, to look to those who have most at stake in the answers, children first and foremost, and to consider the experience of those who, in the history

[1] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903, 1944; Chicago: Dover Publications, 2016) 67.

of schooling in the United States, have been excluded. Education is a surprisingly consistent practice of liberal democracies. In this dissertation we get curious about why that is, what shape education has taken in the United States of America, and how the place of identity formation in the education of children is relevant to contemporary debates about diversity and solidarity. We will be operating throughout at two levels: the lived experience of educators and families navigating the place of identity formation in the education of their children and also how this question is a lens for greater debates.

Today, the question of whether or not we believe in education with Du Bois is obscured by a battleground between "woke indoctrination" and "the Benedict Option."[2] Any number of individuals could be seen as exemplifying the poles of a divide on full public display. On one side, consider the 1619 Project, an initiative of *The New York Times*, which was established to contend that 1619, the year enslaved Africans were first brought to the now United States, is the appropriate place to begin considering American history. The journalist credited with beginning that project is Nikole Hannah-Jones and, in a book that spun out of the newspaper initiative, she writes, "White Americans desire to be free of a past they do not want to remember, while Black Americans remain bound to a past they cannot forget."[3] Initiatives like Hannah-Jones's have been received as pointed additions of Black history and have been met by counter-projects, for example reinforcing the shared history of 1776, when the country was officially founded. Clearly taking a position against public intellectuals like Hannah-Jones, Governor Ron DeSantis of Florida has declared "Florida is where woke goes to die," with "woke" being the shorthand pejorative for the interventions of Black history and other themes of identity studies into the public lexicon.[4] The work of this dissertation is not immediately political—to take sides and *solve* for the place of identity formation in the education of children. It is instead to cast light on this entrenched public debate through careful listening and engagement. Where proposals are

[2] Famously, Martin Luther King, Jr. used the metaphor of education as a battleground (14 March 1964) in accepting the John Dewey Award from the United Federation of Teachers. Today, this is an area of ongoing public discourse and research. See J. Cameron Anglum and Anita Manion, "Perceptions of US Public Schools' Political Leanings and the Federal Role in Education," Brookings Institution (17 June 2025): < https://www.brookings.edu/articles/perceptions-of-us-public-schools-political-leanings-and-the-federal-role-in-education>. Nicholas Wolterstorff, a thinker whose work shapes a great deal of this dissertation, puts it this way: "Education unavoidably touches religious issues. This is why education is such a battlefield among us. Partly it's a battlefield because of its importance…. Partly it's a battlefield because we really don't understand very well how human beings learn, so we have our disputes about that. But these together are not enough to account for the battlefield that education is among us. It becomes for us a battlefield because in pointing toward a certain way of being in the world it touches religious issues, and we in our pluralistic societies disagree on religious issue, disagree profoundly." "Teaching for Tomorrow Today" in *Educating for Life: Reflections on Christian Teaching and Learning* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002) 93.

[3] Nikole Hannah-Jones, *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story* (New York: The New York Times, 2021) xxxi.

[4] Matt Dixon and Gary Fineout, "'Where Woke Goes to Die': Desantis, with eye toward 2024, launches second term," *Politico* (3 January 2023): <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/01/03/desantis-2024-second-term-00076160>. Governor DeSantis has also taken issue with an Advanced Placement curriculum in African American Studies. In more discrete issues, book banning is on the rise and has led to a sustained initiative by the American Library Association on banned and challenged books called "Freed Between the Lines."

made, they are for dramatically expanded institutional imaginations on these issues. On all sides, we essentialise the identities of "the other" and dismiss accordingly. At stake are the moral imaginations of our children; we allow the culture wars to obscure this deeper issue to our detriment. Moral inarticulacy about the place of identity formation in the education of our children, we will argue, limits our institutional imaginations and fuels the anxieties of parents, practitioners, and policymakers.

One of the arguments of this dissertation will be that while identities are forged in private, they do not therefore benefit from privacy. What the field of identity studies makes very hard to miss is that identity is relevant to matters of public concern. This dissertation is grounded in a particular viewpoint and is an exercise in Chistian ethics. We take as a starting point that "each person's sense of self is bound to be shaped by his or her own background, beginning with family but spreading out in many directions—to nationality, which binds us to place; to gender, which connects each of us with roughly half the species; and to such categories as class, sexuality, race, and religion, which all transcend our local affiliations."[5] Our subject matter demands extensive interdisciplinarity and clarification of concepts. Scholars and practitioners are addressing the questions at hand from the various perspectives of developmental psychology, political theory, identity studies, and elsewhere. We seek to navigate a path through these literatures within the constraints of the broad arena of Christian orthodoxy, and establishing those constraints is the important work of the following chapter. In this Introduction, we will consider the education of children in relation to the concepts of schools, identity, and formation, doing so within an understanding of the contemporary pluralistic context of schools. We will then outline our critique, stating clearly why the chapters that follow take the shape that they do, under the headings of "The Heresies of Nature" and "The Heresies of Nurture."

Du Bois operated as a scholar during the rise of mandatory schooling across the United States in the aftermath of the country's Civil War and the increased inclusion of Black Americans into every arena of public life. Du Bois was himself born and lived in Massachusetts, where his inclusion in American society was less legally constrained as an African American. His scholarly contributions and his personal story demonstrate a hypothesis that will be considered in this dissertation, which regards the place of identity formation in the education of children. Namely, understanding identity formation is necessary for understanding the education of children, but identity formation is not a goal of education because education is not a project such that identity formation could be an outcome. Instead, education is best understood as a practice, a social practice, and a deeply human one, and as such lends itself to the cultivation of virtue. When conceived in this way, the place of identity formation in the education of children becomes twofold. First, we recognise that as the identities of children are formed, they lead to privileged cognitive access in what is something of the miracle of

[5] Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Lies that Bind: Rethinking Identity* (London: Profile Books, 2019) xii-xiii.

human particularity and individuality. When we accept this, we make good sense of the ways that diversities of thought and experience contribute to comprehensive human understanding. Second, the virtues which come to define a child's upbringing themselves pertain to the moral identity of that child, and so even when we allow our deep diversity and the various pluralities of humanity to find themselves meaningfully within educational practices and institutions, we can still find our way to shared sources of moral identity, shared virtue, through our shared practices of education. In Du Bois's compelling vision, and his life, we are able to accept that his humanity does not overtake his particularity as an African American man and that his insights born out of the intersectionalities of his identity in fact add to our shared human understanding. His story helps to demonstrate that the place of identity formation in the education of children is a lens through which to make sense of wider political debates. It is also an acute felt issue for families trying to raise children today, and we accordingly move next to the question of our own context.

Why Context Matters

Identity formation happens in time and space, and as our argument turns to an interdisciplinary assessment of the fields surrounding educational philosophy and practice, it is important to acknowledge the specific ways that context matters in the twenty-first century United States. Where the term diversity can describe the realities of our global individual lives, often mediated through digital media, the term pluralism more closely captures the deep levels of difference that pertain to our values and perspectives and those communities that form us. Pluralism is never simply about the individual. The parameters of our context that are most relevant to the place of identity formation in the education of children can be summarised in three veins, all having to do with pluralism. Given the prevalence of conversations about "DEI" and education publicly, this insistence that the real context is at deeper levels of pluralism will be important to continuously clarify and defend.

The first thing to say about pluralism in America today is that it is pervasive. One of the scholars we will engage with in the following chapters is Harvard Political Scientist Danielle Allen. In the summer of 2017, Allen commented on what has now been seen as one of the early and largest white nationalist rallies in the United States in the twenty-first century.[6] Regarding this event, Allen wrote an opinion piece in *The Washington Post* titled, "Charlottesville is not the continuation of an old fight. It is something new." In it she claims,

> The simple fact of the matter is that the world has never built a multiethnic

[6] Estimates say that one thousand men and women descended on Charlottesville for what they called "Unite the Right"—a gathering of the alt-right, Nazis, white supremacists, white nationalists, and others. The national and international media were present, and many public figures wrote and spoke in media outlets across the country.

> democracy in which no particular ethnic group is in the majority and where political equality, social equality and economies that empower all have been achieved. We are engaged in a fight over whether to work together to build such a world. And even those who are, in principle, willing to build that world are fighting with one another, for instance, over issues such as how the compelling state interest in nondiscrimination, confirmed by the Supreme Court decades ago, interacts with rights of association and speech. *This fight is different than our earlier ones because this time everyone begins from the psychological position of fearing to be a member of a vulnerable minority.* Experiences of uncertainty, anxiety and endangerment are widely spread.[7]

The fact of pluralism, as John Rawls called it, is well established in Western countries as a defining feature of contemporary societies.[8] Here, Allen points to something a little different. In America today, Allen claims, we have pluralism *with no majority*. It is one thing to live in a community—or a country—where majorities exercise constraint on their power monopolies for the sake of justice. It is something else conceptually when each majority consensus is a tentative compromise between groups of minorities. Allen is specifically talking about race and ethnicity in her statements; but it is a clear extension that pluralism and fracture are as pervasive culturally as the statistics on America becoming majority minority portend.[9] The more important point from her remarks is about the psychology of minority status. By her telling, we should not be surprised to see "experiences of uncertainty, anxiety, and endangerment" with increasing frequency. In cultural sociologist James Davison Hunter's formulation, "pluralism today—at least in America—exists without a dominant culture, at least not one of overwhelming credibility or one that is beyond challenge."[10]

The second thing to say about pluralism in America is that it is deep. There is no hidden public culture that magically binds those who otherwise experience the pervasive minority consciousness that was just outlined. Differences can be shallow but when they are deep, they have civic consequences. As Hunter puts this, "Pluralism in its most basic expression is nothing more than the simultaneous presence of multiple cultures and those who inhabit those cultures."[11] By way of example, consider

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[7] Danielle Allen, "Charlottesville is not the continuation of an old fight. It is something new," *The Washington Post* (13 September 2017). Emphasis added.
[8] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism, Expanded Edition* (1993; New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).
[9] "Majority minority" is a phrase used to describe the situation in which the groups comprising the minority have more members than the majority group and is commonly used by pollsters in the United States. Currently, the phrase is being used to denote that non-white children outnumber white children in America, according to U.S. Census Bureau data. See Sandra L. Colby and Jennifer M. Ortman, "Projections of the Size and Composition of the U.S. Population: 2015 to 2060," U.S. Census Bureau (2015): <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2015/demo/p25-1143.html>.
[10] James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 201.
[11] Ibid., 200.

this admonition of a Christian conservative journalist with a substantial following:

> Rather than letting their children spend forty hours a week learning 'facts' with a few hours of worldview education slapped on top, [Christian] parents need to pull them from public schools and provide them with an education that is rightly ordered—that is, one based on the premise that there is a God-given, unified structure to reality and that it is discoverable. They need to teach them Scripture and history. And they should not stop after twelfth grade—a Christian plan for higher education is also needed.[12]

When framed in this way, it is clear that the author, Rod Dreher, is illustrating a version of what John Rawls called a "comprehensive doctrine."[13] When faced with competing comprehensive doctrines, communities like the Christian community to whom Dreher addresses himself, can choose isolationism or more aggressive forms of public engagement, as we will spend more time considering in Chapter One.[14] Either choice has civic consequences. An important question for political theory here takes on an acute form in the context of America's schools: where do our children come to understand the pluralism of *deep* difference?

The third thing to say about pluralism in America is that it is *ours*. In her book *Good Neighbors: The Democracy of Everyday Life in America*, political philosopher Nancy Rosenblum tells us that "invocations of good neighbor can be facile, sentimental, self-flattery, or wishful thinking. But when it is sober and reflective we recognize good neighbor as a significant element of personal and collective identity, and as the deep substrate of democracy in America."[15] When our shared sense of political destiny and will run thin, she reminds us, the most basic instincts of living with those unlike us in peace form a "deep substrate" upon which to build and rebuild.[16] She gives this shared civic imagination the name, "good neighbor," and she says, "the democracy of everyday life is not only a regulative ideal, but also…a set of implicit expectations, dispositions, and practices that actually shape our interactions as neighbors and give them meaning."[17] Children are not yet active, voting citizens, but they are neighbours, and "neighbour," is an appropriate term for a public self that is not immediately political. This self is not simply private (as in the family), nor immediately political (as a citizen), nor constrained imaginatively to the market (as a worker or demonstrator). As neighbours,

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[12] Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option* (New York: Random House, 2017) 146.
[13] Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 59. Rawls may not think that Dreher is here demonstrating a "reasonable comprehensive doctrine", but that is a slightly different matter.
[14] See Hunter, *To Change the World.* We will return to this in Chapter One.
[15] Nancy Rosenblum, *Good Neighbors: The Democracy of Everyday Life in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016) 8.
[16] Rosenblum's vision could be critiqued as an overly isolated view of neighbourliness. Her imagination for neighbour extends no further than one's literal front door. My focus on civil society and schools will extend and challenge the boundaries of neighbour interactions. It will do so in keeping with the Christian theological tradition that "neighbour" is an important concept in political anthropology.
[17] Rosenblum, *Good Neighbors*, 13.

pluralism becomes a shared embodied reality. Civil society names the space where we come together in various permutations. We engage in social practices and we forge a common ethos, which will be as expansive or constrained as any given social group's cultural resources allow. In the United States, schools exist as one of these civic spaces.

In the following chapters, we will engage in an intellectual historical analysis of the place of identity formation in the education of children that will put pressure on the question of diversity. There are also pressures on pluralism. Consider William Galston, especially his book, *Anti-Pluralism: The Populist Threat to Liberal Democracy* (2018), and Patrick Deneen, especially in *Regime Change: Toward a Postliberal Future* (2023). The critical space between these two projects represents well what Nancy Rosenblum has called "the permanent cycle of liberal anxiety" and helps to make clear why context matters to the place of identity formation in the education of children.[18]

In the foreword to his book, *Anti-Pluralism*, William Galston is credited with being "one of the most astute political observers writing today."[19] The latest in a series of publications on liberalism, *Anti-Pluralism* argues that "Liberal Democracy is fragile, constantly threatened, always in need of repair." The populist threat, he argues, "is the populists' understanding of 'the people' as homogeneous and unitary, which leans against the pluralism that characterizes all free societies in modernity." He goes on later, "Although populist movements sometimes erode or even overturn democratic regimes, they are not necessarily antidemocratic. But populism is always anti-pluralist. In this key respect, it represents a challenge to liberal democracy, which stands or falls with the recognition and protection of pluralism."[20] There is of course more to this book, but its diagnosis of pluralism as the hinge point for Rosenblum's "permanent cycle of liberal anxiety" is a clear and helpful one.

In contrast to this, consider the work of Patrick Deneen. In *Why Liberalism Failed* (2018), Deneen argues that the institutions of liberalism are exhausted and increasingly incoherent because they are self-cannibalising. Consider his take on "liberalism's educational system" that he sees "at once claiming merely to respect the natural autonomy of individuals and actively catechizing this 'normless' norm."[21] What is his concern here? Deneen recognises that institutions do formative work and that the constraints of institutional participation form the character and virtue of the individuals participating. His concern—if that is not too mild a term for his critique—is summarised thus: "The

[18] Nancy Rosenblum, *Membership & Morals* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998) 10.
[19] William Galston, *Anti-Pluralism: The Populist Threat to Liberal Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), as written in the foreword by Series Editors James Davison Hunter and John M. Owen IV.
[20] Ibid., 1, 5, 127. This basic claim, that liberal democracies were born out of pluralistic instincts, is shared by a writer to whom we will return to throughout the dissertation, Nicholas Wolterstorff, in a very short section of his *Justice in Love* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015) 236-8.
[21] Patrick Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018) 84.

ancient claim that man is a political animal, and must through the exercise and practice of virtue learned in communities achieve a form of local and communal self-limitation—a condition properly understood as liberty—cannot be denied forever without cost."[22] It seems that he is concerned that we no longer participate in formative social institutions, or put more precisely, that the social institutions in which we participate are no longer formative. Further, Deneen's concern is that the state filled a void of more local social spaces, and that even schools themselves betrayed their civic potential by deluding themselves into the "normless norm."[23] This is Deneen's claim of "Liberalism as Anticulture," which is the title of his third chapter. As he goes further, "The more insistent the invocation of 'pluralism' or 'diversity' or, in the retail world, 'choice,' the more assuredly the destruction of actual cultures is advancing."[24]

This line of reasoning began in *Democratic Faith* (2005), a book about the sources of liberal democracy and the impact of liberalism on individuals, and continued in *Regime Change* (2023). In these books, Deneen's summation of liberal pluralism is that it is a damning thinning of American society which undermines the possibility of civic virtue and a thriving future. The resources that built our democracy, he claims, are exhausted and the rebuilding of our civic resources will require a reemergence of locally embodied, mutually constitutive communities. While in *Why Liberalism Failed*, it seemed obvious to Deneen that "the achievements of liberalism must be acknowledged, and the desire to 'return' to a preliberal age must be eschewed," between that book's publication and *Regime Change*'s publication, we find a turn to identity, and that "aristopopulism will advance in the Western nations through forthright acknowledgement and renewal of the Christian roots of our civilization."[25] Deneen surely conveys the anxieties of liberalism and his robust treatment of questions adjacent to those of this dissertation will make him a helpful interlocutor as we consider the place of identity formation in the education of children.

What Galston and Deneen agree upon, in the words of our parameters, is that pluralism is pervasive and deep. Where they diverge is on the idea that pluralism is *ours*, that is, that there are ways to make sense of overlapping civic spaces which, taken in total, could tie society together. One way to understand what underlies this particular divergence is a contested reading of the work of Catholic philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre and the literature at the intersection of virtue and tradition.

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[22] Ibid., 42.
[23] Consider Deneen on the scale of the alarm: "In schools, norms of modesty, comportment, and academic honesty are replaced by widespread lawlessness and cheating (along with increasing surveillance of youth), while in the fraught realm of coming-of-age, courtship norms are replaced by 'hookup' and utilitarian sexual encounters…. Children are increasingly viewed as a limitation upon individual freedom, which contributes to liberalism's commitment to abortion on demand, while overall birth rates decline across the developed world." Ibid., 39.
[24] Ibid., 89.
[25] Patrick Deneen, *Regime Change: Toward a Postliberal Future* (New York: Sentinel, 2023) 182.

Theologian Jennifer Herdt summarises the considerations well in an article called "Reclaiming Dialogical Humanism."[26] This article was written after the publication of her broader work on the topic, *Forming Humanity: Redeeming the German Bildung Tradition*, which we will engage with more deeply in Chapter One. Acknowledging Susan Moller Okin and Jeffery Stout's critiques of MacIntyre's early work relative to what Stout calls an ambivalence between "a tradition dedicated to a very narrow conception of how traditions ought ideally to operate and a tradition dedicated to the project of loosening up that conception democratically and dialogically," Herdt claims that MacIntyre's last work on this topic, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, "refuses a false forced choice between these two conceptions."[27] MacIntyre's work on tradition has been impactful in the field of moral inquiry, including Christian ethics, shaping debates about tradition and virtue over forty years. It is the instincts of MacIntyre, philosopher Charles Taylor, James Davison Hunter, and others who are interested in diversity at this level of culture and tradition that shapes our own approach to why context matters to the place of identity formation in the education of children. Without allowing the details of this debate to overtake this early reference to it, we acknowledge that, following Christian philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff and his theory of "dialogic pluralism," we err on the side of the second conception.[28] The argument of this dissertation does not benefit from requiring timeless formulations of traditions and virtues that make the seeing of pluralism as *ours* nearly impossible, as Deneen does. The specific definitional work of virtue in this dissertation will come more clearly into view at the end of Chapter One, and we will return to Deneen's concerns in Chapter Three before finally engaging with them in the Conclusion.

James Davison Hunter frames this level of discourse as democracy and solidarity, and it is here that context matters most.[29] It may have been the case historically that basic anthropological claims and discussions of identity could align more simply as the formative institutions in the life of the child were more closely aligned together and smaller in number. This, however, would be "a very narrow

[26] Jennifer A. Herdt, "Reclaiming Dialogical Humanism," *Political Theology* 22.7 (2021) 605-6. Herdt's argument was written more comprehensively in *Forming Humanity*, a volume we will return to. In that book and this article, Herdt acknowledges that this debate is an old one and is the basis for her own scholarly interest in exploring the German Bildung tradition alongside of her earlier work in *Putting on Virtue*, which deals with the Thomistic Aristotelian tradition. Jennifer A. Herdt, *Forming Humanity: Redeeming the German Bildung Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019); and *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).
[27] Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) 136; and Herdt, "Reclaiming Dialogical Humanism," 605.
[28] Critics of the presence of virtue language in conversations about identity formation often stress the imposition of majority defined virtues against marginalised communities. Herdt points to Paul Gilroy's work as one who can help to navigate an expensive literature on these concerns. We here err on the need to use the language of the virtues while at the same time embracing necessarily Stout's "opening up." That Alasdair MacIntyre also acknowledges the broader deployment of the virtues is significant, since he has been the most consequential theorist on these topics through the latter half of the twentieth century and the first quarter of the twenty-first.
[29] James Davison Hunter, *Democracy and Solidarity: On the Cultural Roots of America's Political Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2024).

conception of how traditions ought ideally to operate," in the words of Stout. Working with children in America today reveals a different, and ever changing, context. Families are rarely isolated, and we no longer live in dense networks of kinship, of extended families. We do, however, cohere in all kinds of civic spaces, not least schools.

Education and Schools

There are several key distinctions that will help with the practical work of parsing through the place of identity formation in the education of children. The first is a distinction between education and schools. As an ethicist, and in particular an ethicist working out of the Christian tradition, we accept that as representatives of the most vulnerable among us, children deserve robust moral inquiry. As those in whom we seek to cultivate the best version of ourselves, focusing on children also can reveal what we value. Children are brought together in schools to learn. Even in our diversity, certain insights into what "we" agree children should learn come out through systematic engagement with school curriculum, leadership, culture, and form. Schools are an institutional space uniquely filled by the young at precisely the moment and for precisely the reason of becoming the best version of "ourselves" and knowing whether and to what degree it is possible to raise "our" children gives us important insights into "the democracy of everyday life."[30] To what degree can we agree upon a shared concept for the common good, the shared good life, and a shared concept of human flourishing? Methodologically, a shared commitment to the future of our children is a lens into this.

The methodological use of schools as a lens for thinking about societies in general and democracies in particular is a well-established and fruitful line of inquiry. In this, the dissertation is in good company. By way of a defence of the methodology, we can simply state that modern Western philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Dewey, John Stewart Mill, Hannah Arendt, John Rawls, Martha Nussbaum, Amy Gutmann, and Danielle Allen have all turned to philosophy of education in the task of political philosophy, and they are not alone.[31] Perhaps this is because what holds schools together as a category is their taking language and the pursuit of what is true as central to their task.[32] While

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[30] Rosenblum, *Good Neighbors*.

[31] Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Emile* (1762; New York: Basic, 1979); John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (1915; New York: Free Press, 1997); John Stewart Mill, *On Liberty* (1859; New York: Bantam, 1993); Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); and Daniel Allen, *Education and Equality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

[32] I build here on work done by Joshua J. Yates, while at the University of Virginia, whose Moral Ecology Framework includes the idea of areas of common life that we institutionalise in human communities. One of these he refers to as "The True," and it is here that educational institutions nest within his wider framework of

the cognitive aspects of what it means to be human may not be the only sources of knowledge creation and acquisition, they certainly are important to education. This helps to make clear that not all learning happens in schools. Scholars are ever attentive to the reality that schools are but one, albeit extremely important, place for us to consider identity formation in the education of children. There is something that creates an honesty to our theorising when we ask ourselves to consider the practical implications of those theories on the lived experiences of our children.

The great majority of children go to our schools. We send them there intentionally, for nine months out of the year, for over six hours a day, five days a week (on average), beginning no later than the age of eight and continuing to at least the age of sixteen.[33] Even given the complexities of seeing individual schools as properly representative of the American population, which we will unpack in Chapter Three, they are the closest that most of our children get to living their lives in public. To side-step complexities, scholars and practitioners have tried to claim that schools are something less than meaning-making communities. There have been arguments that schools are for productivity, civic alignment, or civic contribution. These are all correct as derivative purposes, but to focus on any of these is to obscure the more fundamental reality that the moral imaginations of our children are formed as they grow up, and the great majority of our children attend schools.

Schools are civic spaces. In the United States, schools are not simply part of the federal government, though some wish they were. They are also not simply private institutions, though others wish they were. They represent that piece of American infrastructure that is legally protected by the first amendment, freedom of association.[34] Part of what it means for schools to be part of civil society is that they have their own freedoms. The tradition of "independent education," available from preschool through university, has been a constant in the American experiment. As of 1979, the United States has a federal Department of Education, but schools are by and large tied to state governments, not the federal government.[35] Our laws reflect that schools are necessary for the civic life of the country and this civic life is played out in local communities.

Among the pressures on schools in America today is that they are both blamed as the cause of, and championed as the solution to, a vast swath of social ills. John Dewey explains why in his 1915 book,

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the common good. Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture, "Human Ecology Framework" <https://iasculture.org/research/thriving-cities-lab/human-ecology-framework>.

[33] Laws vary by state in the United States.

[34] The First Amendment does not include reference to "freedom of association" but it has been upheld by the Supreme Court as a justified interpretation of "freedom of assembly" and "freedom of speech", both of which are explicitly stated in the United States Bill of Rights.

[35] This dissertation will have implications for the debate over the relationship between public schools and private schools in the United States, but in neither case is there centralised federal control over schools. The Tenth Amendment to the United States Constitution allows the control of education to reside with individual states, and States differ in their regulations.

Democracy and Education. In that book, Dewey names what is perhaps the root cause of America's obsession (even if a reasonable obsession) with education:

> The continuity of any experience, through renewing of the social group, is a literal fact. Education, in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life. Every one of the constituent elements of a social group, in a modern city as in a savage tribe, is born immature, helpless, without language, beliefs, ideas, or social standards. Each individual, each unit who is the carrier of the life-experience of his group, in time passes away. Yet the life of the group goes on.[36]

Dewey makes clear for us that education is about "conscious social reproduction" and everything a society may want to reproduce, or not reproduce, becomes fair game in the debate over education's purposes.[37] We return to Dewey in Chapter Two.

Take the example of sociologist Robert Putnam's 2015 book, *Our Kids*, which we will return to in Chapter Three.[38] Putnam's topic is inequality in America and the abundant evidence of a widening and deepening opportunity and economic gap that is coming to define America at the start of the twenty-first century. He takes Dewey's sociological assertion as basic fact and builds his methodological case upon it: Education in schools is how societies reproduce themselves, and if education happens in schools, and schools are reproducing inequality, then such will it be. Education is the cause and solution of this particular social ill. The same could be said of character formation or global competitiveness, and the list goes on.[39] Putnam could have chosen any number of filters through which to see inequality in America. He chose the lens of children and the schools in which they are educated.

Contemporary schools shape our institutional imaginations about the place of identity formation in the education of children. While it is true that the most literal place for identity formation in the education of children is our schools, schools are themselves always going to represent the institutional imperfections of our educational ambitions. This dissertation is primarily interested in the place of identity formation in the education of children, not the place of identity formation in the schools that we currently have and as currently conceived. Thought experiments in Chapter Four will help to highlight this distinction.

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[36] Dewey, *Democracy and Education,* 2.
[37] Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 14.
[38] Robert Putnam, *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015).
[39] It is important to note here that Dewey does not conflate education with schools, and the difference between the social practice of education and the institutions of education will be a persistent and important distinction in this dissertation.

Education and Formation

A second conceptual distinction is between education and formation. Identity and schools might not be so perplexing a topic if we did not mean more by *education* than the word itself suggests. Echoing Dewey, philosopher of identity Kwame Anthony Appiah wrote in *The Ethics of Identity*: "There is no democratic society that does not take education—the French term *formation* is the argument in a word—with utmost seriousness, and none that does not contend with the prospect of educative soul making."[40] "Educative soul making" is a loaded and provocative phrase. As Wolterstorff, with whom we will engage extensively in Chapter Four, has written on multiple occasions, behind every philosophy of education is a picture of humanity. We are struck that human *formation* into families and communities is related but distinctive from Du Bois's call. We find ourselves in a tension between the developmental psychologists who describe the acts of human care and embedding that ground the child's existence and a more sacred definition, demonstrating what Phillip Rieff described as the connection between the sacred order and the social order.[41] Education is the more capacious term than formation, as it is used colloquially, but the two terms are regularly conflated, generally with formation being folded under education (as Dewey conflated them in the extended quotation above). Though we rarely acknowledge it directly, there is a conceptual space between education and formation, with each having a distinct and important role but neither fully contained within the other, and one of the basic distinctions in this dissertation is the relationship between the two and the importance of that relationship to questions of identity.

Consider developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner on formation. Bronfenbrenner's work is known as "Ecological Systems Theory," and, as we will discover further in Chapter Four, it argues that the institutions closest (what he calls "proximate") to the developing child play the most foundational role in that child's development. These institutions include the family, neighbourhood, and childcare, as examples. The formative institutions in the child's life then essentially lose impact the further outward from the core they fall. Religious organisations generally fall closer in than political organisations and so forth. Bronfenbrenner's *Making Human Beings Human* is the classic text on this, but there is an obvious logic that causes it to show up in less detailed fashion. Consider theologian Karl Barth's description of "Near and Distant Neighbours." As Barth makes sense of God's creation of humanity, he begins with the relationship between "Parents and Children" and then moves to what he calls near neighbours and eventually to distant neighbours. What is clear and intuitive about Barth's framework is that it subsumes everyone in the shared encounter and framework of "neighbour," a strong moral category in Christian theology, while still leaving space for

[40] Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005) 199.
[41] Philip Rieff, *My Life Among the Deathworks: Illustrations of the Aesthetics of Authority* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006.)

the phenomenology of strong local affiliation and weaker distant affiliation. The moral categorisation is the same, while the claim on the individual's formation remains differentiated based upon proximate impact. These two visions invite us to see the various formations at work in the life of the child.[42]

Formation reminds us that we are called into a world that is known, loved, and stewarded by others. It is a term about communities that pass along their very best to their youngest members. As we use the term, everything to which we have direct experiential access counts as a part of the formative work of learning. This means that the educational communities of which we are a part are as important as all of the hype fears. Formation is the way that individuals begin to form cognitive maps of the world. It is the space in which what is intellectually possible and what is experientially real in one's life come together and mutually reinforce. It is that mutual reinforcement that ultimately leads to the confidence of what we would want to call "knowledge" or "wisdom," as opposed to just "information."

While education is a master category within which formation is often subsumed, sometimes, education has a special meaning that is less dependent on formation. In keeping with Rousseau and the romantic tradition, education is sometimes preserved for a way of talking about the creativity of humanity. Thinking on this axis is about human nature, potential, and limitations. It is about being called out of the self into what is new and uncharted. While these ideas predate Christianity, and can be found in Plato and Aristotle among others, Chapter One will argue that Christians care deeply that this unique understanding of education, as distinct from mere formation, is maintained. Understood in this special sense, education is about the ways that who we are comes to intersect with who we are not, what we do not know, and what we cannot learn through direct experience. The human capacity to explore that which we are not is extraordinary. Calculus, for example, or the distance between planets. Education can give us the groundwork of language, it is at play whenever we encounter history, as a place that we cannot ever experience firsthand. We can be educated about the lives, experiences, and capabilities of others. What we cannot learn through life together, we can learn through empathy, curiosity, and the like. When referring to this understanding, we will use the phrase: *education in the special sense*. While this dissertation considers broadly the place of identity formation in the education of children, also of interest is the place of identity formation in the *education-in-the-special-sense* of children.

Consider, as a way to capture the distinction between education and formation, the legal rise and fall of "separate but equal" schools in the United States. After the abolition of slavery, the common

[42] Martha Nussbaum claims that a similar understanding existed with the Stoic philosophers and lays out a complementary understanding in *Cultivating Humanity*, 60-1.

practice became the establishment of schools that were separately attended based upon race. This was handled in the American courts and, as has been the case throughout U.S. history, the majority decisions that are written and published by the Supreme Court have within them careful public and political reasoning that demonstrates for Americans how to think well about nuances.

There are two court cases that are famously linked to school segregation. The first was not technically about schools, but in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), the justices, with Justice Henry Brown writing, made the case that "Legislation is powerless to eradicate racial instincts, or to abolish distinctions based upon physical differences, and the attempt to do so can only result in accentuating the difficulties of the present situation." Therefore, "it was held that the powers of the committee extended to the establishment of separate schools for children of different ages, sexes and colors." The judicial thinking in *Plessy v. Ferguson* established the precedent that became known as "equal but separate accommodations" and resulted practically in a racially divided education system.[43]

By contrast, the second case directly related to the segregation of schools was *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). What changed between these two cases is generally framed as general public indignation over continued racial segregation and the disenfranchisement of Black Americans. It is well argued that the civic imagination had shifted. There is a secondary recognition, however, when the cases are read closely, that makes our point about the distinction between education and formation. In this second ruling, Justice Earl Warren wrote a unanimous majority opinion stating,

> Our decision, therefore, cannot turn on merely a comparison of these tangible factors in the Negro and white schools involved in each of the cases. We must look instead to the effect of segregation itself on public education…. In approaching this problem, we cannot turn the clock back to 1868…or even to 1896…. Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments…. Today it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment…. To separate [Black students] from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a

[43] Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537 (1896) states, "So far, then, as a conflict with the fourteenth amendment is concerned, the case reduces itself to the question whether the statute of Louisiana is a reasonable regulation, and with respect to this there must necessarily be a large discretion on the part of the legislature. In determining the question of reasonableness, it is at liberty to act with reference to the established usages, customs, and traditions of the people, and with a view to the promotion of their comfort, and the preservation of the public peace and good order. Gauged by this standard, we cannot say that a law which authorizes or even requires the separation of the two races in public conveyances is unreasonable, or more obnoxious to the fourteenth amendment than the acts of congress requiring separate schools for colored children in the District of Columbia, the constitutionality of which does not seem to have been questioned, or the corresponding acts of state legislatures."

> feeling of inferiority as to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone. [44]

In sum, the Court's position changed over sixty years regarding the implications of the formative aspects of education on the civic imagination of children. Without a distinction between education and formation at the conceptual level, we can miss exactly what changed. As the influence of schools expanded in the United States, the implications of the formation happening in those schools grew more acutely relevant to the tasks of education so conceived.

Education and Identity

Where the formation of identity was a backdrop to educational philosophy at the end of the nineteenth century, it has moved towards the foreground over the course of the twentieth century and is in place as a key concept in the first quarter of the twenty-first century. This is what the comparison between *Plessy* and *Brown* made clear. Diversity and pluralism have come to define the twenty-first century American experience and the rise of the term *identity* is clearly attendant. As we said at the start, there are any number of public examples of how questions of identity and questions of education are intersecting with dramatic political impact. This makes sense, because formation is about identity.

For the project broadly, we can summarise the key insights about education and identity, to be explored throughout the dissertation, as follows. Both have to do with a theory of identity that, while boundaried, is porous. We largely follow philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, though our divergences become clearer in Chapter One.

First, we will need to consider that identity is not private, if by private we mean that it is protected by privacy. The literature on identity as a borderline is helpful on this. Identity is never an end in itself; it is a means of encounter. This is important, because we live in a time where it is tempting to see the

[44] Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954). Warren makes this move explicitly by outlining the dramatic transformation in public education during the timespan 1868 when the 14th Amendment was passed and in 1954 when he is writing: "An additional reason for the inconclusive nature of the Amendment's history with respect to segregated schools is the status of public education at that time. In the South, the movement toward free common schools, supported by general taxation, had not yet taken hold. Education of white children was largely in the hands of private groups. Education of Negroes was almost nonexistent, and practically all of the race were illiterate. In fact, any education of Negroes was forbidden by law in some states. Today, in contrast, many Negroes have achieved outstanding success in the arts and sciences, as well as in the business and professional world. It is true that public school education at the time of the Amendment had advanced further in the North, but the effect of the Amendment on Northern States was generally ignored in the congressional debates. Even in the North, the conditions of public education did not approximate those existing today. The curriculum was usually rudimentary; ungraded schools were common in rural areas; the school term was but three months a year in many states, and compulsory school attendance was virtually unknown. As a consequence, it is not surprising that there should be so little in the history of the Fourteenth Amendment relating to its intended effect on public education."

creation of identities as reifications of the self. We can consider as an alternative that identity is the line—so thin it may not exist at all—between the formative space of the communities that shape us and the external reference points that help us know we have hit a boundary.[45] Identities are then understood to be a means towards knowledge, experience, and wisdom. Wolterstorff claims that education is the social practice of fact finding and interpretation. If this is true, then identities are not tangential to the learning process, instead they allow for full participation in the learning process. Without identities, there is no learning. We have to know who we are and where we come from in order to encounter what is outside of ourselves and outside of our realm of understanding and interpretation. So, identities not only give us a bearing on ourselves, but they give us a point of reference against which that which is outside of ourselves can be received.

Also, that which forms us is formed by us, and human agency should not be underestimated. It is the term that captures our capacity to act back upon the systems in which we are embedded and to remove us from those systems. Without agency, identities would become ends in themselves. They would signify a determinism of the person, to be what they were *given* to be, perhaps still utterly unique and unrepeatable, but determined nevertheless.[46] But determinism is not the story of humans in community. Instead that story is consistently the phenomenon of individuals in tension with their communities. Together, these insights amount to an individual navigating their sociality at the intersection of what is known and what is unknown; what is given and what is yet to be interpreted and named. If identities were ends, or if formation happened with no retributive institutional transformation, then there would be no social space, no civic space, and no ecology. You would have only a metaphor of being hewn from stone, not a metaphor of participating in a delicate ecosystem.

Second, identities are neither simple nor essentialist. There was a breakthrough moment in understanding identity when Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality." This was not because the legal paper Crenshaw was writing suddenly shed light on other disciplines, but instead because intersectionality so clearly captured the reality that in the twenty-first century, identities are not simple (if they ever were). Instead, identities function at the intersections of identifiers that themselves are contextually situated. For Crenshaw, the initial question was about why being a Black woman did not seem to be a simple conflation of being a woman and being Black in America. Instead, evidence seemed to suggest that there was something additive about being Black and a woman that

[45] Work on identity as boundary is extensive. For an overview of the literature, see Michele Lamont and Virag Molnar, "The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences" in The Annual Review of Sociology 28 (2002) 167–95. Of particular importance for our framework is Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989*)* and subsequent *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992*)*. Lamont and Molnar classify this contribution under the place of boundary relative to identity and communities. Given that we see education as a social practice engaged in through the institutions of teaching and learning, it makes sense that our primary sources for identity would relate to identity and community.
[46] Robert Sapolsky, *Determined* (New York: Penguin Press, 2023).

was not the simple sum of these two realities. To complexify the matter further, identity does not lend itself to essentialism. The feminist movement has for over one hundred years been making this argument, with the simple question of "which women are we talking about" making its continual mark in the literature. As Appiah will remind us, through an extended consideration of his work in Chapter One, even as these identifiers obscure as much as they illuminate, they are "the lies that bind" giving shape and sometimes purpose to the tasks of formation.

The Identities of Children

As we consider the place of identity formation in the education of children, it will be helpful to force ourselves to ask the question, What is at stake?, as Justice Warren did. We answer this question through the concept of the *moral identity* and its relationship to the *moral imagination*. In using the terms in these ways, we are building upon an insight made by Andrew Perrin in his 2006 book, *Citizen Speak*, where he writes that the premise of his work is, "what you decide to do (or not do) is based largely on what you can imagine doing."[47] Insofar as what one can imagine doing (moral imagination) is tied to how one reflects on what one means to do (moral identity), and insofar as what one imagines comes to be reflexively based on one's encounters, we can begin to see how education is tied to formation, education and formation to imagination, and imagination to moral identity.

Moral identity theory has emerged in the past fifty years, and its ability to synthesise philosophical interests with psychological insights is compelling, or so we will unpack in Chapter Four. Following Augusto Blasi, moral identity theory rests on the insight that individuals try to stay true to how they understand themselves as moral agents. It is a statement about moral motivation that mirrors interest in moral development. It will become relevant in Chapter Four that one's moral identity can be specified by virtues. This is not a claim without nuance, and we consider such at that later moment. Throughout the dissertation, we will spend a great deal of time considering identity as it is framed in current literature more closely adjacent to educational theory and practice, but we do so with these

[47] Andrew Perrin, *Citizen Speak* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) 2. Perrin uses the term "democratic imagination" and it exists somewhere between what we call civic imagination and institutional imagination, and takes as a starting point the answer to the first moral question, which is seeing a fellow citizen in encounter. Chapter Two will make clear why we do not follow Perrin in simply using the term "democratic imagination." Danielle Allen relies on the term "imagination" in *Talking to Strangers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) and there she has in mind what we are here calling civic imagination though also errs towards the moral imagination. This is why on pg. 20 she talks about imagining the citizenry as a "wholeness" not a "oneness." See especially pages 3, 5, 16-17, 20. Martha Nussbaum similarly favours the civic imagination with what she calls the "narrative imagination" in *Cultivating Humanity* (page 10). She also offers an invitation to what we would call the moral imagination (page 14) and in her work on *Poetic Justice*, her position is something across our three differentiations and is more focused on how the imagination is itself cultivated. Differentiating the three modifiers remains of help for our purposes. Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (New York: Beacon, 1997).

deeper philosophical moves in mind. It is this intervention, linking education and formation to imagination and moral identity, that sits in the background of future chapters that otherwise foreground the literature on education and identity on its own terms.

Several key distinctions will help orient us as to how the term imagination operates here and how it relates to various literatures on identity and public life. In the dissertation, we will use imagination with three modifiers: *moral* imagination, *civic* imagination, and *institutional* imagination. The way to understand these in our usage is as nested concepts, with moral imagination being the largest nest, civic imagination being a subset of moral imagination, and institutional imagination being a subset of civic imagination. They work in this way: When I encounter someone, I am faced with three layers of questions. I may not ask them all, but they are distinct from one another. At a fundamental level, I ask a version of the question: "What is this being?", and I make basic anthropological assumptions. I answer with things like: this is a human, or this is a person, or this is a child. At this level of naming, there are all sorts of assumptions wrapped up in the names we give and use. This is the level of the moral imagination: what do I see in front of me? Civic imagination is related but asks about how I relate to this thing in front of me. How do I relate to this person? Of course this is a moral question, but it is a specific kind of moral question, and a subset of the larger category of all moral questions. Finally, I ask myself what forms support these relations that I intend with this person. This is an institutional question, and it is a subset of the larger civic question. This is a question of my institutional imagination.[48]

Anxieties about the place of identity formation in the education of children emerge at this point. As adults, we want the moral identities of children to be coherent, that is operable, and also good. These are two distinct things. First, we want children to be *capable* of moral action. We want them to have the coherence necessary for integrity between what they mean to do and what they do. Second, adults want that moral identity not just to be coherent but to be *good*. On this point, conversations within the educational literature and critics tend to be about the traditions of goodness (or rightness or justness) into which children are born, in their families. We want integrity within the child's moral identity and also integrity with the moral imagination of a *tradition*.[49]

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[48] Benedict Anderson's classic text *Imagined Communities* (Verso, 1983) is in the background to our use of imagination as a social and political concept, especially as referenced in Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity*, where Appiah writes, "*Imagined*, as Benedict Anderson would insist, doesn't mean unreal: nothing could be more powerful than the human imagination" (242).

[49] Consider leading scholar on virtue ethics, Talbot Brewer, on this: "The virtues order the human psyche so that its distinguishing capacity for *logos*—that is, for thought and speech—is actualized according to its own internal standards rather than serving, and ultimately being dissipated by, and array of alien psychological drives." Talbot Brewer, *The Retrieval of Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 198, and again "The virtues are not possessed, if by possession we mean something that one might possibly be wholly without. The are structural constituents of selves, in whose utter absence we cannot bring into view a self but only a chaotic array of drives." Ibid.,199.

Finally, the schools in which our children learn almost always exist in our institutional imaginations downstream of higher education and so the structures that demand entrance into colleges and universities shape to an outsized effect the structures, practices, and even questions that we face in schools. We consider those who learn in universities, however, to be adults and largely formed. We will accordingly interact in only a limited way with the literature on higher education. It is those just before these ages that are of greatest interest to this dissertation, those for whom their sense of self is coming into view, but that self and the society around it still considers it largely malleable. In this way there is no fixed developmental age range of the child that limits the dissertation, but there is a general interest in those who are nearing the realisation of themselves as adults. The identities of children are commonly understood as in direct relation to the communities with whom they find sources of self-understanding and connection. While personal, even children's identities are by this definition necessarily intersectional and complex.

The question is begged, what do we consider the basic anthropological building blocks of each of us as humans? What are the assumptions that we often take for granted regarding our determinism or emergence? How would we consider those assumptions as relevant in the institutions and practices that shape the learning and growth of children into their older selves?

The Problem and its Proposed Solutions

What is keeping us from an institutional imagination that could ease the tensions in education and help our schools contribute substantively as civic spaces? This dissertation argues that the dominant contemporary approaches to the place of identity formation in the education of children are imprecise, unboundaried, and fail to appreciate the core distinction between formation and education. We can see now that the word *formation* does just as much work in the formulation of *identity formation* as does the word *identity*. We can also see that our key question pertains to the *education* of children, both in the general sense and in the special sense.

When scholars at work today attend to our question, they do so with a particular moral imagination of the human child and the adult that child will become. Two chapters of this dissertation will include the work of unpacking the intellectual sources of that moral imagination, because too often it operates uncritically in the background. We will attend to those two sources as coherently as possible under the category headings of *nature* and *nurture*. The nature versus nurture debate is a public articulation of an ongoing scientific research area about whether human biological predispositions overcome the formative human communities that give us shape. Put another way, the question of whether biology or

culture dominates in questions of human formation has shaped discussion amongst developmental psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists for at least one hundred years, or since the disciplines themselves took clear shape towards the end of the nineteenth century. As soon as scholars began truly studying children, the question arose of who those children would become, determined by their biology (enhanced as DNA became understood) and by the families, neighbourhoods, and communities within which they grow up. Within themselves, the debates of nature and nurture are nuanced with almost no one arguing that either nature or nurture is totalising. Debates generally function in significant shades of grey.

This dissertation is interested in what happens in the temptations at either end of the debate regarding nature and nurture. One reason for this interest is that these are the temptations that can keep us out of the difficult work of understanding individual humans, and the communities they represent, in their complexity. Another reason has to do with how these basic assumptions of what it means to be a person relate to the basic assumptions of what it means to be a person outside of the disciplines we outlined above. On either side of the nature versus nurture debate are essentialisms that distract us from nuance and from the particularities of real human beings in time, space, and context. The problem is that on both axes, if we are not careful, we end up with mere characterisations of identities that are otherwise meaningful loci of formation and community. What if one's basic beliefs about the world, for example, do not allow a worldview where nature and nurture are the two poles of a bipolar debate and where polarisation is inevitable?

A Different Lens

Our approach to the place of identity formation in education is as a Christian ethicist working from a *faithful presence* lens. The diagnostic work of the first half of this chapter should establish for the reader that the dissertation is taking a particular perspective on the way a Christian ethicist might approach a topic as complex as that addressed here. There are essentially two approaches to Christian ethics. The first prioritises getting theological principles precise by engagement within the Christian theological tradition and fundamentally with other theologians. This is sometimes called Theological ethics to clarify it as an approach that is distinct from Christian ethics. This dissertation falls in the second space of Christian ethics, which is to take theological concepts out into the world for pluralistic engagement in public discussion. In doing so, the theologian is humbled by the vast expertise that is outside of the work of theology but also deeply curious and receptive to what happens when a theologically informed perspective comes into conversation with the work of social theorists, psychologists, philosophers, political theorists, historians, and so on. This curiosity does not take the form of what the medievals called *curiositas*, a distraction from the work of understanding the world

given to us by God, but instead through what they called *docilitas*, a genuinely open posture to enter the world as a learner, chastened continuously by knowledge of God's excellencies to ever believe that we have arrived at all knowledge. It is in Chapter Four that this mode of inquiry and embeddedness in other literatures bears both conceptual and practical fruit. We will begin Chapter One with a deep engagement with the idea of faithful presence and its proponent, James Davison Hunter.

One of the frameworks of faithful presence is the use of *affirmation* and *antithesis* as a narrative way to engage with dominant alternative understandings. In Christian theology, there is a name for when ideas are taken to their extremes thereby taking what was an interesting line of inquiry and making it disinformative. That term is *heresy*, and it gives precision to our work of antithesis in the coming chapters. What is interesting about this term is that we almost immediately think of heresy as the content of heretics, but this would be a particularly ironic outcome given the critique of essentialisms that shapes the following chapter. We will not talk about heretics in this dissertation. Instead, heresy is a category that puts a rhetorical fine point to the issues at hand. This term likely evokes some scepticism. Why frame the matter with such a critical, indeed potentially controversial term? The answer is that Christians are lucky to have such a term and tradition. While historically misused to be sure, the term itself, and the idea it captures, helps to clarify what is at stake when temptations of thinking draw one away from important positions within Christian orthodoxy. In this dissertation, we approach the place of identity formation in the education of children between the temptations of nature and the temptations of nurture, and we clarify what is at stake when these temptations pull too far away from the joint Christian proclamations of *human transformation* and *human potential*, both of which are defined in Chapter One. The critique of the dissertation is not a matter of either/or; it is a matter of maintaining orthodox beliefs in the human person—in this case the human child as learner—while navigating the realms of expertise that do not take as their foundational starting point Christian theological orthodoxy.

It is the practice of baptism, our grounding concept in Chapter One, that most clearly reminds Christians of the power of education in the special sense. As this remembering happens, Christians may be relieved of the anxieties of liberalism, because we never thought our children belonged to us in the first place. We believe that we mentor and steward a child who is God's. Christians want to remain intentional about the goodness of our child's coherent moral identity, but, with a more precise and nuanced understanding of the place of identity formation in the education of children, we can reclaim some of the romantic notion of the child and have less anxiety about formation. Karl Barth's understanding of the individualism, which welcomes the formative communities and practices surrounding the child but ultimately results in a vision of open formation, shapes our engagement with a theology of baptism. There are many and varied directions that a theological consideration of

baptism in a project of Christian could proceed. In the methodology of faithful presence, we are looking for the most faithful, insightful, and comprehensible resources to bring to bear on a topic of public concern. This methodology helps to shape our particular way of engaging with Barth's thinking and putting it into conversation with contemporary thinking on identity studies.

What does it look like to take formation seriously without forgetting that ultimately God is going to remain faithful to us and our children? It means remembering two quite simple but profound insights: the possibility of human transformation and the possibility of human potential. Human transformation is the promise that any insight into who we are can ultimately be called into greater and greater alignment with God's redemptive purposes in the world. Human potential dignifies the child, who is not a future agent in God's economy, but instead of great potential significance even now. Potential is not neutral development, it is the complex growth of pilgrimage. These insights lead to a vision of communities, including churches and schools, that are sufficiently formative without succumbing to over-essentialisations. Nicholas Wolterstorff will be seen as a wide-ranging Christian thinker who exemplifies instincts towards what we will call *open formation*, and his thought forms the basis of our own constructive proposals in Chapter Four.

The Dissertation in Outline

In Chapter One we begin with a deeper consideration of methodology. The dissertation is written from the vantage point of, and with justification to, practicing Christian ethics in close proximity to the field of study in question. In this case, the author is an educator in the United States, working with teenagers between the ages of fourteen and nineteen. This approach was theorised by James Davison Hunter in his book, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* through the framework of "faithful presence." Chapter One begins with methodological considerations at the intersection of Christianity and culture, with due reference to H. Richard Niebuhr's classic text on this genre.[50]

Next, a framework is set regarding the basic anthropological assumptions that exist within discussions of the place of identity formation in the education of children. We spend considerable time in Chapter One engaging with theologian Karl Barth and the basic anthropological assumptions that underpin his understanding of baptism. Barth is an interesting thought partner given his strong dismissal of Natural Theology, but this is what makes his insights of great value to the shape of the dissertation's argument

[50] Hunter, *To Change the World*. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (1951; New York: Harper Collins, 2001).

taken as a whole. There are different areas of Barth's thinking which could be useful in this approach, but it is his theory of baptism, found in *Church Dogmatics IV*, "The Doctrine of Reconciliation," taken alongside of a knowledge of his "Doctrine of Creation" in *Church Dogmatics III*, that helps us see clearly the basic anthropological assumptions Barth makes when considering the person who comes to baptism. We discover in Barth's thinking two such assumptions: the possibility of human transformation and the possibility of human potential.

Chapter One also includes important work on the relationship between anthropology, identity, and essentialism. Barth helps to imagine a set of basic anthropological assumptions that demonstrate the kind of position on such claims that contemporary theorist Kwame Anthony Appiah calls for in his corpus, especially in *The Ethics of Identity* and *The Lies that Bind*. In this chapter, we therefore see the need for basic anthropological assumptions, commit ourselves to two, and consider the interlocutors with our approach even as we commit ourselves to it.

In Chapters Two and Three, we begin to map the fields that pertain most directly and practically to the question of the place of identity formation in the education of children. Through a critical survey of developmental psychology, political theory, and the philosophy of education, we name the temptations of thought that pull away from our basic anthropological commitments. In purposeful rhetorical provocation, we frame these as heresies not because we are looking for heretics but instead because this is a helpful concept in Christian thinking that defines when one's thought has left the contours of Christian orthodoxy.[51]

Chapter Two we call "The Heresies of Nature" and we name two such temptations: The Inevitability of Democracy and The Neutrality of Development. For the first, we provide an extended engagement with the foundational thinker in American democratic education, John Dewey. *Democracy and Education* is the foundational text, and in conversation with Dewey, we find both a deeply compelling case for education and also a foundational belief that humans are naturally democratic. We follow Dewey's insights through a late twentieth century text by Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, to see a much more contemporary articulation of a similar concept. For The Neutrality of Development, we consider the development of developmental psychology, seeing a particular zenith with Lawrence Kohlberg and tracking a parallel critique in Carol Gilligan. We then take a step back and look at The Neutrality of Development as a temptation of thought even as historically in the United States the segregation and then desegregation of schools was a fundamental lived experience for American families. W.E.B. Du Bois is a scholar whose thought reappears at this phase.

[51] Alister McGrath's *Heresy: A History of Defending the Truth* (New York: HarperOne, 2009) is a more recent comprehensive treatment of the idea of heresy, and helpfully shows that in Christian thinking concepts are deemed heretical because they are subversive or destructive of Christian faith.

Chapter Three we call “The Heresies of Nurture” and again we name two temptations in this mode: All Diversity is the Same and The Public - Private Divide. For the first we engage with a movement in the literature from backgrounding the question of the identity of children to foregrounding this in matters of the theory and practice of education. In our engagement with the question of diversity and education, we complexify our sense of the lived reality of diversity for our students phenomenologically, differentiate again between diversity and pluralism, and find ourselves critically curious that diversity is seen as a good where pluralism is a problem. From this starting point, we turn to a consideration of the relationship between pluralism and privacy, and we engage with Hannah Arendt, developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner, and contemporary scholar Danielle Allen on the public - private divide as it pertains to the place of identity formation in the education of children.

Having cleared conceptual ground through Chapters Two and Three, Chapter Four engages in a more constructive mode to clarify the place of identity formation in the education of children. To accomplish this, Nicholas Wolterstorff’s work in *Religion in the University* becomes the central text. Chapters Two and Three can be seen together as ways that education becomes a project when we fail to keep centrally in view the possibility of human transformation and the possibility of human potential. When we keep these basic anthropological assumptions centralised, a different perspective is opened up. Wolterstorff invites us to instead see education as a social practice, in the mode of Alasdair MacIntyre’s thinking on this subject. When we consider education as a shared social practice, we are able to identify a virtue that promotes its excellence, and we give this virtue a name, *always learning*. We close Chapter Four with a pair of thought experiments so that the practical implications of this project become clear.

Conclusion

We turn now in Chapter One to understanding the parameters within which Chapters Two and Three will find accountability. Our task is not to define once and for all a theology of education, though our work has implications for that project, which we will lay out in our concluding chapter. The aim of the coming chapters is to understand where the contemporary discourse errs by pulling us away from the broad arena of Christian orthodoxy. In doing so, we name the temptations towards heresy and hope that this work can provide counsel for Christians navigating educational systems as educators, parents, students, and policymakers.

How close to Du Bois’s “promised land” do we find ourselves in the twenty-first century in the

United States? While access to education has greatly increased, equity continues to plague. Surely Du Bois's vision, however, goes beyond this simple question of participation and begs us to consider our understanding of education and of the children who navigate our places of learning, schools or otherwise. The deep and prevailing belief of this work is that an overlapping public consensus around the practices of education is not only possible but is currently in use. For all of the contestation, schools are already places of rare social cohesion; the great majority of American families send their children to the country's public schools, and this includes people of deep religious commitment. Christian participation in public and private schools requires thoughtful and nuanced reflection about the priorities and opportunities of any given child at any given time in any given school. To navigate this well, Christians need resources to understand their own tradition while also understanding the forces at play in the institutions among which they have educational choice. To mention that educational choice is itself a profound privilege in the United States should not go without saying. What we are looking for is not a middle ground between nature and nurture, as though these are poles on a linear spectrum. It is this picture itself that we are engaged in disrupting. We are instead seeking an understanding of education as a social practice, where, within parameters, we can recognise the places of principled alignment with our neighbours on shared virtue.

Chapter One: Transformation and Potential

Introduction

In the briefest of books amidst a capacious corpus, Peter L. Berger, a German-born sociologist with an American career, dabbles in theology. A novice-work, he claims, *A Rumor of Angels* is a follow-up to a tome, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. It seems that Berger was uncomfortable with the way in which that larger work left the question of religious practice, and so *A Rumor of Angels* has the subtitle, *Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural*. Berger declares himself to be a Christian, but adds that he has "not yet found the heresy into which [his] theological views would comfortably fit."[1] Approaching the question of religious practice as a historically minded social theorist, Berger offers his take on "Theological Possibilities: Starting with Man" and begins the chapter of that name as follows:

> If anthropology is understood here in a very broad sense, as any systematic inquiry into the constitution and condition of man, it will be clear that any kind of theology will have to include an anthropological dimension. After all, theological propositions only very rarely deal with the divine in and of itself, but rather in its relations to and significance for man… The real question, then, is not so much whether theology relates to anthropology—it can hardly help doing so—but what kind of relation there will be.[2]

Writing in 1968, Berger goes on to acknowledge that theological Neo-orthodoxy in the mode of Karl Barth would have a difficult time accepting this statement, but as we will see in the chapter that follows here, even Barth understood that certain basic anthropological assumptions were present in theological reflection. Barth would agree with Berger's insistence, moreover, that "a certain balance of brashness and modesty, in about equal measures, is a virtue when it comes to anthropological inquiry."[3]

This chapter begins our substantive journey into a critique of essentialism and a preference for a tentativeness, a penultimateness, to questions of anthropology. We accept the necessity to engage with questions of humanity—*brashly* we could say—while at the same time understanding that modesty in claims about what it means to be a person, or a person with a certain identity, has merit. For Berger, modesty is played out in history, as assumptions about what it means to be a person later prove

[1] Peter L. Berger, *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1970) ix.
[2] Ibid., 49.
[3] Ibid., 74.

themselves historically situated, and also humbly, whereby we eschew the idea that our understandings of humanity are improving, progressing, or some such ideal. Essentialised notions of the individual or the community are our particular concern due to the ways that identity has become foregrounded in the education of children over the course of the twentieth century.

We begin brashly. To be a Christian is to consider (at least) two things possible in the human condition. The first concerns the possibility of transformation. Conversion of any kind requires a belief in human transformation. We are not simply that which we have been born to be. We can carry our pasts into a new and different future, seeking and achieving sometimes radical change. The basic premise that, for example, a child may be born into a secular home and later decide to become a Christian—and a *real* Christian, not some lesser version—can be found in the teaching of Jesus himself. (We need look no further than the story of the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4.) We can disagree as to the degree of transformation possible or the conditions necessary for that transformation. We can be attuned to maladies that withhold transformation from us, such as mental illnesses or addictions. There is a reason that we consider addictions, for example, maladies and not deficiencies of character. That reason is that we consider a healthy person to be capable of overcoming temptations and to choose transformation. Consider the opposite for the Christian story. What would it mean to read the Bible in good faith and take away from the narrative that only those born into the Christian story can find a home in the church? Even the question of whether transformation is possible without divine intervention does not foreclose that the Christian narrative requires human transformation is possible on this earth.

The second is the consideration of human potential. This is the idea that while transformation does not have to be considered great nor linear and certainly not totalising, it can be directional, of a certain character. We call this human potential and find it akin to notions of sanctification or pilgrimage. For our purposes, the difference between human potential and *growth* or *development* is that as we use the phrase, human potential has the possibility of surprise. Some may want to think of this as the possibility of human creativity, but that term evokes the arts and beauty in a way that may be misleading or confusing for the argument here. Instead, human potential is related to both integrity and innovation. Integrity has to do with the capacity to remain true to the self. Innovation pertains to the capacity to orient that self in the world.

To consider human transformation and human potential in detail, we will follow the thinking of Karl Barth on baptism. Considering baptism makes a second point clear. What we have been outlining as basic anthropological assumptions might not sound uniquely Christian. One might be tempted to immediately, and rightly, acknowledge that many people and many traditions would agree with our early formulations of these ideas. What matters for this dissertation is that, as we are about to see,

Christians have sources inside of our tradition for these humanistic ideals and particular formulations of them. Other traditions, religious and secular, may very well have sources for these beliefs as well. That is not for this dissertation to argue. What will become clear in the following chapters is that the work of engagement between thinkers operating out of different moral imaginations is harder without the moral articulacy found from deep reflection on why one believes the basic anthropological assumptions that one does. As we said in the introduction, the Christian tradition has a word for where thinking diverges from Christian orthodoxy; that word is heresy.

Our humility is awakened when we begin to consider how much we can define outside of these initial statements. It is at this point that Barth becomes a helpful sojourner, and the reason has to do with his caution against anthropological overstatement. This caution is one of our beacons in the following two chapters. The task of the remainder of this chapter is to situate the caution both theologically and in a broader dialogue about essentialism in contemporary conversations of identity.

The chapter begins with a fuller explanation of our methodology of Christian ethics. Considering what has been called "Christian ethics as counsel," we will outline a lens and approach advocated by Christian social theorist James Davison Hunter in his 2010 book, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World*. We then immediately deploy this methodology as we engage with Jennifer Herdt's work, especially *Forming Humanity*, to unpack the important way that restraint itself is a deeply theological intellectual position.[4] We put this restraint in the context of a contemporary theorist of identity studies, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and find in his thought compelling philosophical justifications against essentialising the individual. This thinking sets up a transition, and through a prolonged engagement with Barth's thinking about baptism, we consider that it is when we allow that there is mystery in the world, not to mention disappointment, that we can perhaps let go of the essentialisms that find their way into the heresies of nature and the heresies of nurture. We delve into a Barthian understanding of human transformation and human potential as basic anthropological insights that can cast light on the contemporary debate surrounding the place of identity formation in the education of children.

Christian Ethics as Counsel[5]

[4] Jennifer A. Herdt, *Forming Humanity: Redeeming the German Bildung Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019).

[5] I am indebted to friend and colleague Philip Lorish for this nomenclature that found voice in his unpublished dissertation at the University of Virginia in Religious Studies and in subsequent writing and speaking, especially while he was with the New City Commons Foundation and its research initiative, "Vocation and the Common Good" (2014-2018).

The place of identity formation in the education of children is a broad topic that is not exclusively, nor particularly, theological. It is not framed from a theological vantage point. It does not lead the reader towards a question about God or the supernatural more broadly in anything like a direct way. It is, moreover, a topic that underlies a great deal of decisions parents and educators (broadly construed) make daily. It is a fraught question with contested approaches, by both scholars and those not experts on the topic. As such, it is well suited for Christian ethics insofar as Christian ethics provides counsel for how to approach an important, difficult, contemporary question.

Christian ethics as counsel was recently ennobled through the work of Michael Banner and his book, *The Ethics of Everyday Life: Moral Theology, Social Anthropology, and the Imagination of the Human* (2014). As Banner describes the problem,

> How can the Christian imagination of human life come into conversation with or engage these other moral imaginaries of the human?... The conversation I am envisaging can only begin and proceed if we not only conceive a moral theology somewhat different from the standard, textbook kind, but also review and reconfigure its relationship with moral philosophy and social anthropology. This is just because the complex set of relations, misrelations, and non-relations between these disciplines serve, so I suggest, to discourage—even to disable—the sort of conversation about the human which those credal moments themselves invite and ethical seriousness itself demands.[6]

In this way, this chapter and the following three can be seen as an extended conversation, rooted in sympathetic listening to a variety of disciplines, and focused on the moral imagination at work under the surface of those discussions. In support of this methodology, Oliver O'Donovan makes a related claim in *The Disappearance of Ethics* when he states, "Ethics defends the reflection that makes moral reasoning fruitful." He goes on, "Ethics reflects on the living of human life…from the point of view of agents who ask deliberative and evaluative questions about their practical undertakings…. In doing so it will often make use of descriptions supplied by more empirical sciences and subject them to forms of rationality tested by theology, philosophy, and law."[7] This dissertation seeks "the Christian imagination of the human" as Banner says, and to be an exercise in the "proper discipline of Ethics," as O'Donovan calls for.[8]

Engaging directly with public ethical quandaries is not a few phenomena for Christians. This point was perhaps made clearest by H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*. Described by James M. Gustafson as "an ideal-typical study," *Christ and Culture* catalogues the ways that Christians tend to

[6] Michael Banner, *The Ethics of Everyday* Life (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 3.
[7] Oliver O'Donovan *The Disappearance of Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024) 3.
[8] Banner, *The Ethics of Everyday Life*, 23 and elsewhere, and O'Donovan, *The Disappearance of Ethics*, 4.

interface with the communities in which they live.[9] There are five such ways, according to Niebuhr, and they shape the chapters of the volume: "Christ Against Culture," "The Christ of Culture," "Christ Above Culture," "Christ and Culture in Paradox," and "Christ the Transformer of Culture." Published in 1951, Niebuhr begins Chapter 1: "The Enduring Problem,"

> A many-sided debate about the relations of Christianity and civilization is being carried on in our time. Historians and theologians, statesmen and churchmen, Catholics and Protestants, Christians and anti-Christians participate in it. It is carried on publicly by opposing parties and privately in the conflicts of conscience. Sometimes it is concentrated on special issues, such as those of the place of Christian faith in general education or of Christian ethics in economic life. Sometimes it deals with broad questions of the church's responsibility for social order or of the need for a new separation of Christ's followers from the world. The debate is as confused as it is many-sided.[10]

He goes on, "in this situation it is helpful to remember that the question of Christianity and civilization is by no means a new one; that Christian perplexity in this area has been perennial, and that the problem has been an enduring one through all the Christian centuries." The specifics of Niebuhr's categorisations have been the subject of substantial debate since its publication, the scope of which is not essential to our argument.[11] Instead, Niebuhr's work helps to make obvious our methodology, because he takes as a starting point that the intellectual resources of the day—which for us include developmental psychology, political theory, sociology, philosophy of education, and so on—and the theological dispositions of Christians interplay in the answers to pressing social questions that one should expect to find.

Christian ethics as counsel not only has the helpful advocate of Michael Banner, but it also has the intellectual resources of James Davison Hunter from the field of sociology, and it is his call to "faithful presence" that shapes our approach most explicitly. Hunter wrote *To Change the World*, he tells us in its Preface, out of friendship. An academic *and* personal project, Hunter's purpose is to answer two related questions: "How is religious faith possible in the late modern world?" and "How do believers live out their faith under the conditions of the late modern world?"[12] Hunter begins from a basic anthropological assumption, "in the Christian view…human begins are…world-makers."[13] He argues that this entails an obligation for Christians to have a sophisticated understanding of culture

[9] James M. Gustafson, "Preface: An Appreciative Interpretation" in H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (1951; New York: Harper Collins, 2001).
[10] Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 1.
[11] The most definitive critique came from Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon in *Resident Aliens* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989).
[12] James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) ix.
[13] Ibid., 3.

and a deep curiosity about institutions (what we have already laid out as an institutional imagination). "The Problem of Power" becomes the transitional logic of Hunter's proposal from a diagnosis of contemporary society and Christianity's engagement to it towards his proposal of faithful presence. Hunter acknowledges pluralism, and makes the claim, "the question of how societies hold together gains new poignancy in a world like ours…. What remains to bind together [society]? The answer, in large part, is power."[14] It is through a "rethinking" of power that Hunter uses sociological resources to understand "Jesus and 'Social' Power."[15] His conclusion,

> One of the consequences of framing discussions of power in political terms is that it removes the discussion from the power that operates in everyday life. It is perhaps an unintentional strategy of avoidance of what most people deal with day in and day out. Discussions of political power focus attention on those people and structures with whom the average person has little to do. The "kingdoms of this world" referred to in Luke 4:5 include politics and economics, of course, but they also include every sphere of social authority and influence that form the dominant realities of everyday life for most people.[16]

In sum, social power is unavoidable in everyday life, and Hunter suggests that social power can be faithful and aligned to the model and teaching of Jesus. This he calls faithful presence.

In the introduction, we said that pluralism is pervasive, deep, and ours. Faithful presence is the argument for why a Christian would make that last statement—*ours*—and what response would be provoked. Hunter does not shy away from "tensions with the world" but he does call for "affirmation and antithesis."[17] The order is important for Hunter. Before critique is offered, affirmation is a moment of more than appreciation; it is a deeply caring attention to the good that is being done in the world and a careful parsing out of that good. There are no "straw man" arguments here. By contrast, "antithesis is rooted in a recognition of the totality of the fall" but "does not require a stance that is antimodern or premodern but rather a commitment to the modern world in that it envisions it differently."[18] The work of antithesis is to imagine in concrete forms those places in common life that will serve Christians and their neighbours in deeply good ways and then to either shore those places up or build them. To do the work of antithesis, one must be willing to state clearly what one is against in the current logics and why, at the same time looking for points of commonality and connection.

In the pursuit of faithful presence, the Christian ethicist finds herself seeking the most faithful, insightful, and comprehensible resources to bring to bear on a topic of public concern. Hunter's

[14] Ibid., 101.
[15] Ibid., 187ff.
[16] Ibid., 193.
[17] Ibid., 230-31.
[18] Ibid., 234-5.

admonition to "presence and place" means that wherever possible, the concrete and known are preferred to the overly abstracted.[19] These parameters give shape to Christian ethics as counsel, and such is the approach that follows. We acknowledge with Niebuhr that there are a multiplicity of ways theology could presently be brought to bear on the place of identity formation in the education of children, and following Hunter the question is approached from the standpoint of deep sympathy and knowledge of the matters at hand. Faithful presence invites the interdisciplinary approach we will take, and the combination of brashness and modesty. Hunter was, in this way, a very good student of Berger.[20]

Anthropology, Identity, and Essentialism

Any study of education begins with the understanding of the child that we bring, and this dissertation brings a set of *basic anthropological assumptions* from Christian theology. In doing so, we are self-consciously resisting a comprehensive statement in philosophical anthropology.[21] This is an exercise in restraint, not because a comprehensive theology of education or theology of the child are not important projects, but because a faithful presence approach requires precise language and deployment of concepts that can function in the roles of affirmation and antithesis.

We will begin even this theologically focused chapter with a first consideration of *affirmation*. To understand why and how antiessentialism relates to the anthropological restraint that drives our approach, we turn to the work of leading scholar on this issue, Kwame Anthony Appiah. The issue of essentialism is a debate within identity studies. In *The Lies that Bind: Rethinking Identity* (2019), Appiah explores the many ways that identity comes to be in the twenty-first century. The categories in which he operates include gender, religion, politics, race, class, and culture. Through these categorisations, Appiah argues that essentialism—which he argues is a now unhelpful nineteenth-century intellectual construct—is out of touch with the twenty-first century experience. Essentialism is the idea that the categorisations of identity define the experience of the identified and not the other way around, whether at the level of the individual or the level of their communities. (If we recall the distinction we made in the introduction between diversity and pluralism, we can make the further claim that essentialism can operate with regards to either.) Appiah's book is not about children or the institutions of learning. It is about the ways that individuals navigate our shared space through these

[19] Ibid., 238.
[20] Peter Berger was Hunter's dissertation advisor.
[21] There is a substantial literature that fits inside of the label of philosophical anthropology. Two well-known such contributions to Christian ethics are Alasdair MacIntyre's *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago: Open Court, 1999) and Christian Smith's *Moral, Believing Animals: Human Personhood and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

necessary but limited things we call *identities*.

Appiah's claim, chapter after chapter, is that the identities we come to inhabit are dialogical and emergent. He argues this categorically across categorisations, and there is a narrative arc to the chapters of the book that brings each chapter to rest in the same fashion. Take his argument concerning religious identity or what he calls "creed." As elsewhere, Appiah's own personal narrative factors into his work. He was raised by a white, English, Anglican mother and a black, Ghanaian, Methodist father. Appiah argues, "one reason their marriage worked, I think, was that they were each sustained by their slightly different variants of the Christian faith," which makes sense to Appiah because he writes further, "religion is not, in the first instance, a matter of belief. Every religion can be said to have three dimensions. Sure, there is a body of belief. But there's also what you do—call that practice. And then there's who you do it with—call that community or fellowship."[22] Whether or not one agrees with Appiah's definition of religion, his move is to take our unthinking instincts around a topic of identity, in this instance creed, and complexify them. The concept of religion is then considered through different traditions—Jewish, Muslim, Hindu—and then Appiah introduces what we might call a cross section. In this case, he chooses sexuality. His purpose is not to definitely argue for or against particular Christian wrestlings with human sexuality, but instead to demonstrate that such wrestlings exist, across belief, practice, and community, and, importantly, across time. That these wrestlings exist does not diminish religion, but it does contextualise *fundamentalism*, which would be a form of essentialism in the context of creed. He writes, "once you recognise these perplexities, some of the things people regularly say about religious identities should appear in a new light."[23] This is the shape of his argument: to tell stories about identifiers that place them inside of time and across space such that the thing itself—"christian"—means both more and other than when one began reading the chapter.

Appiah's overarching argument is, while identities are held corporately and conveyed through *formation*, as individuals we act back upon these corporate identity carriers—what Hunter calls culture—perhaps as much as they act on us as individuals.[24] He is eager for his readers to take up the projects of culture building, of civic life as a shared project. The argument against essentialism is not that identities are not real or impactful, nor that we do not speak out of those identities all of the time, but that to do so is to give essential status to something that is inevitably fragile in its construction. The fragility is not because the categorisation fails to be enduring. He shows this simply and powerfully through the questions of race in the United States, where the impact of racialisation has

[22] Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Lies that Bind: Rethinking Identity* (London: Profile Books, 2019) 36.
[23] Ibid., 57-8.
[24] Appiah does not actually quantify the dialectic. He does not say that the individual has *as much* impact on the collective. The dialectic is there, chapter after chapter, but it remains unexplored and unspecified.

persistent economic and cultural impact even though government, science, and civic imagination has moved away from the mistaken essentialisms of nineteenth-century racial theory. Instead, communities that form identities are fragile because those communities are themselves constituted by the very individuals who form the collectivity. Without this fragility, we would be talking about social determinism, without the possibility of human agency, and Appiah spent the entirety of a different book, *The Ethics of Authenticity,* arguing against this outcome.

Appiah does not speak on behalf of Christianity, though he identifies with a Christian upbringing, but his work does align with an important question that we will consider at the end of this chapter, under the heading of "Closed versus Open Formation." First, we need to turn to Barth to consider theologically the restraint and fragility that we saw modelled in Appiah's approach. As we leave Appiah's work for now, let us consider the matter of his title, *The Lies That Bind*. Appiah does not describe his title definitively, but when we read it on face value, we can see two intentions. Is it that our identities are lies that bind us in a life without freedom? That would be a strong interpretation of the title, with evidence in its favour but perhaps extreme. Is it possibly a more measured interpretation? Our identities are (white) lies that bind us to one another, in communities? There are political and social implications for either interpretation.

Karl Barth as Model Anthropologist

In the Introduction, we used the phrase "broad arena of Christian orthodoxy" to describe how we are looking for concepts and frameworks to cast light on the contemporary public discourse surrounding the place of identity formation in the education of children. These theological thoughts and frameworks can give parameters to the Christian's moral imagination as we engage in philosophical exchange with theorists at the intersection of identity formation and education. It is interesting to consider this, because the Christian moral imagination, of course, assumes a piece of identity. While to be a Christian is likely many states with many variations, it includes a moral imagination formed by the orthodoxies and orthopraxies of the Christian life. Christians have no less intersectional identities than anyone else, but the consideration of what it means to have *Christian* as among those identifiers that give shape to the Christian means, as a Christian, one is searching and seeking to remain inside of Christian orthodoxy. This is why we shape the current chapter as we do and why Karl Barth is an interesting conversation partner.

As we begin to consider Barth's work, it will be helpful to acknowledge where he falls within intellectual history relative to identity studies and the insights from developmental psychology on children. Barth's *Church Dogmatics* was written over a thirty-year timeframe, and the chapters that

address our concerns were concentrated in the decade between 1945 and 1955. For context, we can remember that Du Bois wrote *The Souls of Black Folks* in 1903, Simone de Beauvoir wrote *The Second Sex* in 1949, Jean Piaget first theorised cognitive development through stages in 1936, and Lawrence Kohlberg's moral development theory was first outlined in 1958. Also, the background of the German Nazi regime is paramount, with the attendant atrocities of essentialising the race of the Jewish people and the Holocaust. Barth was not especially an expert on any of these topics, except, as a German citizen and critic, the latter.[25] His proposal theologically is to insist that before any other area or source of knowledge, Jesus is himself considered in his life, witness, and teaching.

In a recent study by Jennifer Herdt, *Forming Humanity*, she happens upon Barth as a model anthropologist for the ways that he engages critically with a movement in German intellectual history that preceded his own context. The purpose of that book is to explore the idea of Bildung in eighteenth and nineteenth century thinkers. Herdt's exploration of Barth supports our own approach of seeking basic anthropological assumptions as a way to navigate questions of identity, or, for her project, humanity.

Herdt's book is sympathetic to the projects of formation that the word Bildung evokes. The subtitle gives away this sympathy: *Redeeming the German Bildung Tradition*. From the beginning of the project, it is clear that Herdt understands the difficulties of the context. She writes, "nearly every major thinker and artist working in the German context from the 1770's through the 1830's and beyond might well fall within the scope of a study of the Bildung tradition so understood." She is most focused on "thinkers whose reflections on aesthetic and ethical formation, and on 'humanity' as its telos."[26] Chapter by chapter, Herdt tells the story of a tradition that is surrounded in and through by the Church, but that at every turn is asking about a formation that is ultimately closed from God. From J. G. Herder to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Herdt tells the story of formation becoming closed in two ways. First, it is closed in history. Second, it is closed by humanistic perfectionism.

Humanity as its telos is an important starting point for us, and one can see why Barth's strongly Christo-centric theology becomes an ally in Herdt's critique. Among the things that went awry for the Bildung theorists, Herdt argues, was the leaving behind of transcendence, of the space between ultimate reconciliation and the penultimate reconciliations of humanity to God. By her telling, Barth's critique of the Bildung tradition rightly recognizes that the tradition leaves humanity utterly alone in the most secularist ways. We hear resonances though not references to Nietzsche's Übermensch as

[25] Barth was one of the authors of the Barmen Declaration of the "Confessing Church" (1934) which asserts God's independent revelation over above the German national church.
[26] Herdt, *Forming Humanity,* 6.

Herdt agrees with Barth that the first great error of the Bildung tradition is its desire to see history as its own end and history as progress. History is believed to be pointing towards the proper unfolding of humanity. Herdt writes, "Barth thus sets an eschatological limit to the project of Bildung: a limit against which all of our efforts to form humanity must be judged to fall short, but against which these efforts can also be forgiven for having fallen short. Indeed, it is only in the context of this gift that relieves us of the burden of our failures that the task can be taken up again and again."[27] Transcendence is a true variable in understandings of human formation and identity. For Christians, the concept of salvation history, which takes up human history into the longer story of God, means human formation begins in this world, but it is *open* to a future that is both deeply unknown and that the Christian trusts to be good.

The second error in the tradition is described through Herdt's careful reading of Barth's structure. Barth's anthropological commitments are always penultimate and open. We hear God in our neighbours cries as well as their triumphs. It is when the tradition fails to remain a learning tradition and instead rests in humanistic perfectionism that Barth takes issue.[28] What both of these concerns, in content and structure, point to is the straying in the Bildung tradition from both structural and personal sin—from the penultimacy of the human condition and the confessions and insecurities that go along with this Christian foundation. God's otherness requires that we do not lose sight of our frailty, own particularities and intersectionalities. His perfect otherness instead invites us to keep eyes and ears open to our own unfolding in light of the unfolding of others. While Herdt does not spend time on the structural sins of our history, she describes them in her compelling conclusion, calling us to look to the margins of society for God's voice.[29]

Herdt's use of Barth invites us to consider that, for Christians, perhaps the question is not one of identity or not identity; formation or not formation; but instead it is a matter of a penultimate

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[27] Ibid., 16.

[28] Interestingly, Barth finds an advocate for this concern in Immanuel Kant. Pursuing this line of inquiry further would take us too far afield, but it should be said that, with the interpretive work that Herdt begins and that is present in this project, further study could find surprising allies.

[29] One concern with Herdt's argument is that a call to the margins would be stronger with a more direct acknowledgement that judgement often takes critique. Herdt has a closing section where she shares a concern for a tradition of critique that does not resolve itself quickly into judgement, confession, and a return to God. Why the impatience? The willingness to linger in critique while judgements are formed, though perhaps uncomfortable, is itself a form of the courage to sit in suffering with those at the margins. If it is indeed in the suffering that we are reminded of the limitations of our return to God this side of the eschaton, then traditions of critique invite us to linger longer than comfortable. As Hannah Arendt makes clear to us, judgement is the first political endeavour of humanity. Herdt also sees this. The *vita active*—the political life—begins when judgement is ready. But it is perhaps this very thing that is the difficulty. When we are faced with only the passive *vita contemplativa*, alone in our minds before God, or the *vita activa*, where judgements are made and drive us in political action, we find no space to dwell in the discomfort of our neighbours. Where do we sit together and learn, and perhaps mourn, and play, and rejoice? How is the first political act to judge rather than to perceive? If we can see that perception comes first, how would we ensure that this perception is itself active—a space of always learning.

understanding of identity and of a weaker vision of formation. When one's anthropological commitments are themselves penultimate, identity cannot help but also be so. Appiah argued a similar concept; identity is dialogical and emergent, meaning that the formations attendant to identity have an openness to them, both in history and assuming the likelihood of imperfection and error. Herdt writes in summary, "Christian formation has at its best been a formation that *opens* persons up to others, rather than *closing* them down into reassuring and nostalgic enclaves."[30] What was it precisely in Barth that gave Herdt this insight and what would allow us to move, through affirmation and antithesis, into our own public encounter with questions of the place of identity formation in the education of children?

As we move towards Barth's theological framework of emergence and dialogic, restraint and fragility, we acknowledge two things. First, it is important to acknowledge Barth's noted concern about using anthropological categories to understand God. Just as Herdt resisted this matter, it is also far from our work here. The logic of insight is *from* God's revelation and relationship with humanity *to* our daily lives and the attendant implications. Barth is a model anthropologist because the content of his finding, what we will call the possibility of human transformation and the possibility of human potential, reinforces the restraint of his assertions. Second, Barth would not have liked to be thought of as an anthropologist insofar as that meant removing concepts of humanity from their theological foundations in the life and witness of Jesus Christ. In response to this potential issue, we can remember the very broad way that Berger outlined anthropology in our opening quote of this chapter. Barth had no choice but to reckon with the deeply human problem that to reflect in the world is to reflect *as* a human and once one has acknowledged this, one would do well to acknowledge that metacognition—that beautiful possibility of self-reflection—needs some sort of name and *anthropology* seems apposite. In this, we align not only with Herdt but with Jeffrey Stout's interpretation of Barth's thinking, as outlined in *The Flight from Authority*, when he writes concerning Barth's approach, "We cannot reason our way to faith, but actual faith does create a context of reasons within which theology as a rational endeavor can be undertaken."[31] Stout goes on to describe the confidence of Barth's starting point in the revelation of Jesus Christ and in scripture, but the tentativeness with which Barth's extensive systematic works then unfold, another description of brashness and modesty. It is this description of Barth as natural theologian that Stanley Hauerwas attempted in his 2001 Gifford Lectures, published as *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* (2001).[32] What we find in Herdt's, Stout's, and Hauerwas's confidence

[30] Jennifer A. Herdt, "Reclaiming Dialogical Humanism," *Political Theology* 22.7 (2021) 608. Emphasis added.
[31] Jeffrey Stout, *The Flight From Authority: Religion, Morality, and the Quest for Autonomy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) 144.
[32] Helpfully, Hauerwas defines "natural theology" as "how Christian convictions work to describe all that is as God's good creation" in *With the Grain of the Universe* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001) 142. Hauerwas goes on, "I believe that Barth's extraordinary achievement not only helps Christians recover a confidence in Christian

in Barth is an acknowledgement that it is the Christian's interpretation of the world that becomes reframed, theologically framed, when things like basic anthropological assumptions are cast inside of Christian orthodoxy, as we seek to do in this chapter.[33]

Considering Children

Karl Barth did not spend a great deal of writing theologically about children, but, when he did, his reflections are illuminating. Barth's contributions to a theory of childhood come intermittently throughout *Church Dogmatics*, and are concentrated in III.4, "The Doctrine of Creation," in a section called "Parents and Children." We find that children are to respect their parents, honouring their Father and Mother as the command of God requires, but though parents have a special relationship with children, they are not to act in lieu of God, but instead with the understanding that God is already at work in the lives of children. Barth dignifies children and their agency at the same time that he errs towards having them be baptised and formally welcomed into the church as adults. He describes children as potential mentors of those older than them at the same time that he recognises that generally things go the other way. In a recent book on Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Ryan Huber introduces the idea of a "theology of formation" and it is grounded on the insight that theologies of formation recognise that anthropologies take christological questioning.[34] This is relevant to understanding Barth on children. Huber's is an antiessentialist insight, because it asks us to recognise that any piece of an individual's identity, that is, any "identifier," while taken up by the individual, should not be done so uncritically, even when we are considering children. For Barth, and similarly for Bonhoeffer, this included when that identifier was "Christian." Children are first and always children of God, not children of the church nor children of their parents.

Baptism is the sacrament and church practice where the insight that children are first God's is clearest. This is not to claim that baptism is uncontested in the Christian tradition. It is to acknowledge that baptism is one of the earliest and most widely practised sacraments of Christianity. Jesus himself was baptised.[35] The sacrament of baptism is in this way an insight and a commitment that we do not arrive empty, but we are able to transcend what has been given to us. We are called by God beyond the

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speech, but also exemplifies how Christian language works." (142–3) The methodology of this dissertation is built on such an insight.

[33] I have argued elsewhere that Hauerwas's ultimate claim in this work, that "Barth never quite brings himself to explain how our human agency is involved in the Spirit's work" is not quite right and instead the difference between Barth and Hauerwas has to do with the latter engaged in an over-realised ecclesiology. Emily Raudenbush Gum, "The Role of the Church in Karl Barth's Understanding of Character Formation: A Critical Assessment" (MPhil Dissertation Submitted Trinity 2014, University of Oxford.)

[34] Ryan Huber, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Ethics of Formation* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020.)

[35] A reality that makes it clear that baptism as a practice preceded Christianity.

human families and communities into which we are born, called to the edge of our childhood formation and to journey past. The sacrament of baptism also takes us to a place where we reach the edge of what is given and step out in faith to journey with God, a pilgrimage into what is not yet known. This is a very particular understanding of human potential. In these ways, we see that our humanity is not given to us as a project to complete but as a set of practices to pursue, with virtues shedding light on the best path, not leaving behind one thing except what keeps us from a future God has ensured.

Barth's treatment of children is unique in a few ways, and the first is in his conceptualisation of original sin. This is an important insight brought to light in William Werpehowski's article, "Reading Karl Barth on Children," in *The Child in Christian Thought*.[36] Werpehowski writes, "on this point, we find, at once, a contrast to Augustine and others in the Christian tradition. Barth rejects outright hereditary transmission of sin as an 'extremely unfortunate and mistaken' doctrine that would rule out a human agent's responsibility for the evil he or she does or becomes."[37] This does not mean, as Werpehowski says later, that children are not "needy beginners." It is the opposite; they are singularly ready for the calling of God through the church and the corresponding dignity of responsibility. This is tied to Barth's ambivalence and ultimately his rejection of child baptism. On one hand, the child does not need the community to speak for her. God's grace is sufficient for that. On the other, even the young child is uniquely responsible to God and dependent on God's call for that child's future life. This particularity of Barth's thinking will become relevant when we shortly consider in detail the possibility of human transformation.

Second, Barth is interested in formation in very circumscribed ways, because, for Barth, even the child is already an individual. Writing explicitly in response to concerns of "secular individualism," Barth nevertheless argues strongly that "the *particula veri* of 'individualism' is not curtailed but genuinely assured and honoured when we understand the election of the 'individual' as the *telos* of the election of the community."[38] He goes on, "men have an 'individuality' in relation to the human group: the family, the nation, the state, society, the total complex of human nature and history."[39] Barth reinforces this focus on the individual in *Church Dogmatics* III.2, under the heading "Man as Soul and Body." Here, Barth offers his own "basic anthropological insight," writing, "Man exists because he has spirit. That he has spirit means that he is grounded, constituted, and maintained by

[36] William Werpehowski, "Reading Karl Barth on Children" in Marcia J. Bunge, ed., *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 386-405.
[37] Ibid., 390-1. Werpehowski also points to John Webster's *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998) on this issue.
[38] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.2, Ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2010) 311. This is in the section called "The Election of the Individual" 306-506.
[39] Ibid., 313.

God as the soul of his body."[40] We see an alignment here with the structure of Barth's treatment of baptism in *Church Dogmatics*, where "Baptism with Water" follows "Baptism with the Holy Spirit." Barth scholar John Webster states this well, "Barth's sharp separation of Spirit-baptism from water-baptism clearly rests on this distinction, and is made, as we have seen, in order to enable him to develop an account of the human person as agent."[41] According to Barth, what children need most is their relationship with God, through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, not formation in their families or churches.[42] He may also need that formation, but always secondarily.

The connection between these two points is that the child is called, at God's pleasure and timing, for what Barth calls *vocation*. This is an invitation always open and available, at any age. It is when writing about vocation that Barth turns most regularly to notions of responsibility and "correspondence," by which he means the Christian living in sympathy with God's intentions and call. Importantly for the possibility of human potential, this is Barth's description of "sanctification."[43] Vocation is the specific, individual life to which God has called a given person. Baptism is not a general movement by God to the impoverished child, according to Barth, but instead the unique way in which each individual "has spirit."

There is a danger that has been present throughout western history which is to immediately ask what kind of adult the child needs to become and focus on the child—the *tabula rasa* as Locke said—through this vision of the adult. Sometimes, we can see in Barth's writings a temptation to this classically western way of thinking. On one hand, he advocates against the baptism of children because he has an understanding that the child reaches an "age of discretion," at which time the child is ready for decisions such as baptism. On the other, he has moments such as *Church Dogmatics* §76, which he calls, "The Children and their Father," and where Barth outlines how to pray, and elsewhere when he says, "being God's children is our true being," and in each of these we see a profound ennobling of the idea of the child and a permanence to childhood and its attendant openness and humility that is important to understanding the possibility of human transformation and the possibility of human potential.[44] Discipleship and the life of vocation, both of which for Barth rely on continued dependence on God, mean that there is no obvious vision of mature adulthood to which the child is necessarily unfolding, even while Barth can acknowledge that biological maturation is real to the

[40] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III.2, Ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2010) 344.
[41] John Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 167.
[42] According to an early article on Barth and baptism, Barth's thinking evolved significantly about baptism, and those who knew him were surprised by the conclusions reached in Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.4 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2010). Herbert Hartwell, "Karl Barth on Baptism" (Scottish Journal of Theology 22, 1969).
[43] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III.4 Ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2010) 474.
[44] Karl Barth, *The Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 73.

human condition. It is why his theology of Creation in *Church Dogmatics III* reads unlike other theologians whose Doctrine of Creation is less Christocentric. Barth eschewed a rigid end to the humility of childhood while still accepting that human capacity can unfold in partnership with God.

Barth's theology of baptism is where many of these ideas collide and coalesce, and the following sections look further into this theology to arrive at two very straightforward insights. The claim is that these seemingly straightforward insights carry faithful, insightful, and comprehensible implications for how we understand the place of identity formation in the education of children. Ultimately, it is these connections between original sin, individuality, and vocation that will lead us to the open formation we will consider in concluding this chapter.

The Possibility of Human Transformation

Christians proclaim that they are reconciled to God in Jesus Christ. This basic premise of Christianity forms the heart of the sacrament of baptism, a moment in time before which one was not baptised and after which one is. Whether salvation is tied to this precise moment is a matter of longstanding theological debate, but the practice itself can be found in the earliest writings of the churches. Christianity is a religion of converts, and the Christian identity is an identity of the transformed. What came before conversion, as Augustine framed so famously in *Confessions*, must be scrutinised through the eyes of faith, as the Christian begins her pilgrimage with God. By acknowledging that Jesus himself was baptised, we see that the practice is not uniquely Christian, therefore, to specify, in the Christian tradition, baptism rests on two premises regarding a person. The first premise is that redemption is possible. We are not determined in our nature, by our biology, but instead humans have the capacity to die to self and rise to life. The second premise is that sanctification is possible, that is, we have the capacity to leave behind our sinful nature and live into a redeemed life in fellowship with God. That is, in the Christian story, the human is neither stuck where they come from nor stuck where they are going. They have agency to change their story both leaving behind what from their past should not be carried into the present and by altering the trajectory of where they are headed.

To consider one step deeper the possibility of human transformation, we can turn more fully to what Barth wrote about baptism in *Church Dogmatics* IV.4, "The Doctrine of Reconciliation." The section begins with "Baptism in the Holy Spirit" and proceeds to "Baptism with Water." The former we will explore as the possibility of human transformation and the latter as the possibility of human potential. Barth's framework here establishes that it is God's act first, through the Holy Spirit, to call the Christian to baptism, and the human's act second to respond to God's act, thereby beginning the life of vocation. In *Church Dogmatics*, it is IV.4 that seeks to work out the great "yes" of God towards

mankind, in Jesus Christ, for the life of humanity, for the life of the Christian. In God's great "yes" to life over death and over separation from God, the possibility of new birth in human life is present. Barth writes, "There are no closed doors to the salvation history which is mighty as a Word of universal salvation, to the living Jesus Christ who makes Himself present to all men in all ages, to His 'Peace be with you' (Jn. 20:19)."[45] In Barth's telling, it is very clearly established that God's "yes" lays the foundation for the possibility of transformation for all of humanity. There are not humans for whom the possibility of transformation is withheld, even while there may be actual humans who do not embrace this possibility.[46]

Barth's theology is so overwhelmingly emphatic on the agency of God in salvation that it took theological wrestling for him to frame the ways in which human transformation is possible. Elsewhere he tries to make sense of what he calls, "The Falsehood of Man" as an "evasion."[47] Consider him at length on the possibility of the human response to God:

> His awakening is an event on earth and in time. It has, therefore, a historical dimension. The narrower and wider social circles in which he lives are deeply implicated in it. It does not in any sense lack creaturely factors of every kind. Taking place wholly and utterly on the earthly and creaturely level, it does not merely have an aspect which is wholly and utterly creaturely, but is in itself wholly and utterly creaturely by nature. But, while all this is true, it has its origin and goal in God. It belongs to the order of that action which is specifically divine. It is a subordinate moment in the act of majesty in which the Word became flesh and Jesus Christ rose again from the dead. On this aspect—its true and proper aspect—it is a mystery and a miracle. That is to say, the jolt by which man is wakened and at which he wakens, his awakening itself as the act in which this takes place and he rises, is not the work of one of the creaturely factors, co-efficients and agencies which are there at work and can be seen, but of the will and act of God who uses these factors and Himself makes them co-efficients and agencies for this purpose, setting them in motion as such in the meaning and direction which He has appointed. We are thus forced to say that this awakening is both wholly creaturely and wholly divine.[48]

What makes the Christian resource for a belief in transformation distinctively Christian is this understanding that it is God's movement towards humanity that makes humanity's movement towards

[45] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.4 Ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2010) 25.
[46] The charge of universalism against Barth's theology is well known and can remain in the background here.
[47] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.3.1 Ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2010) 434.
[48] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.2, Ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2010) par. 66., 556-557.

God possible. We quoted earlier Barth writing, "Man exists because he has spirit." This is an important phrase for Oliver O'Donovan in what he calls the "justification of agency," which he specifies as "cooperative agency."[49] Whatever other beliefs Christians dispute together, the notion that God acts in the Holy Spirit, having acted in the world through Jesus Christ, unites the Christian community. As Barth writes, "The Christian Church counts on the fact that there is such a thing as the awakening of man to conversion."[50]

Human transformation is, for Barth, not simply incremental. It is not the case that humans need only a slight alteration in order to develop towards God's intentions.

> The sleep from which man is awakened according to Scripture consists in treading a wrong path on which he is himself perverted, and can never be anything else. The awakening from sleep, and the rising which follows, is far more than a vertical standing up. It makes no odds whether we go this false path erect or stooping. As Scripture sees it, waking and rising from sleep is turning round and going in the opposite direction. That God awakens us to this is the problem set for the Church, and therefore for us, by Holy Scripture. It cannot be exchanged for the (in themselves) very interesting problems of improvement or reformation or more noble effort in our further progress along the same path. It is not a question of improvement but alteration. It is not a question of a reformed or ennobled life, but a new one. And the alteration and renewal mean conversion.[51]

"New birth!"[52] What is remarkable about the Christian tradition on this question is the totality with which conversion opens up a new future for the converted. This vision of the conversion of the whole person and the whole life is a key element of the Christian understanding of humanity, that we are able, with God, to turn away from what is behind and set an intentional course towards what is ahead.

The logic of human transformation has within it the assumption that each person comes from somewhere. Barth's rejection of infant baptism reinforces his usefulness as a conversation partner in this regard. This is clearest in Barth's theology of creation, where he describes the child as embedded in a family and in a network of near and distant neighbours. It is a simple thought, but it carries a great deal of importance as it grounds the possibility of human transformation in what feels very much like a reality we all recognise. Consider Barth on this,

> The command of God wills that a man should really move out from his beginning

[49] O'Donovan, *The Disappearance of Ethics*, 127ff esp 132.
[50] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.2, par. 66. 557-8.
[51] Ibid., 560.
[52] Ibid., 563.

> and therefore seek a wider field…. The command of God certainly does not require any man to be a cosmopolitan, quite apart from the fact that none of us can really manage to be so. There is not the slightest doubt, however, that where the command of God is sounded and heard the concepts home, motherland and people, while they must retain their original sense, will prove capable of extension.[53]

"Capable of extension" is a remarkably kind approach to dignifying the communities and people who give each of us a sense of groundedness and care while at the same time resisting the essentialisms of identity. The vision here is that we retain our individuality and our particularity. The plurality of human existence is ennobled and drawn into its future with God.

Here is where Barth's rejection of a strong doctrine of original sin has its most impact. In Barth's framework, Jesus Christ is the forsaken person so that humanity is ready for the life of redemption already accomplished in Jesus. Remember that what Barth called his own "basic anthropological insight" is that each human "is grounded, constituted, and maintained by God as the soul of his body."[54] Through transformation, we each now have "a new character," but it is a character such that "for all his identity with himself, he is also different from himself."[55] While this phrasing is imprecise, it nonetheless captures the crucial insight, again, that baptism in the Holy Spirit is about stepping into the life that was already constituted for the individual but was as of yet evaded. It is both a true transformation and the maintenance of the individual from birth, through second awakening, and into vocation.[56]

To summarise, human transformation is available for all individuals as the free gift of God through baptism in the Holy Spirit, which does not lead to an incrementalist view of human development but instead a vision of conversion. It is a vision of new life. That to make this basic anthropological insight, Barth turned to a foundational church practice helps to highlight its importance. Barth's theology lends itself to the agency of God and the very distant second movement of humanity in response to God's great and authoritative act in salvation history through Jesus Christ, yet even still, Barth finds himself with a vision of human transformation that is presented to him through scripture and tradition in the sacrament of baptism. There is a moment before which one is not a Christian and

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[53] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III.4, 293.
[54] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III.2, 344.
[55] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.4, 3.
[56] Nicholas Wolterstorff does not engage with Barth directly on many occasions, but one such place is "Barth on evil," an essay originally published in 1996 and republished in *Inquiring about God: Selected Essays*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 255–282. What is relevant about this connection is that Wolterstorff established Barth as a quite unique and novel thinker on evil and sin within the core of Christian theologians. A fruitful line of further inquiry would be to make connections between Barth and Wolterstorff on the idea of open formation using their comparative understandings of evil, sin, and *das Nichtige*.

after which one is. That this moment is possible for all humans is the basic anthropological insight of human transformation given to us in baptism. Humans do not just have the possibility of change or development; they have the possibility of transformation.

The Possibility of Human Potential

Barth calls baptism an act of "obedience and hope" and both are important to his understanding of human potential.[57] If baptism has already given us a distinctively Christian understanding of human transformation that is for all humans and has great possibilities, then we now turn to the journey, the story, within which baptism places us. This is found in the second part of Barth's treatment of baptism, "Baptism with Water." Barth calls it the "subjective" component, and this is important. When we take Barth's "basic anthropological insight," his rejection of a strong notion of original sin, and his nuance with regards to transformation, we arrive at a picture of the Christian life that for the individual has a gracious continuity to it, built on the continuity of God's faithfulness.

The metaphor of the pilgrim allows us to resist the essentialisms of asking what it means to *be* human and instead ask what it looks and feels like to *become* human. This is Barth's great contribution in this work, because we see in Jesus Christ the true humanity in which we are called through baptism to participate. Barth calls this "the real sanctification of real man."[58] Baptism is not the end of the story, leaving us redeemed but lonely, but instead is the picking up of a shared narrative of the shared human life that God always intended. What is of particular interest to us is the nature of this life, which is seen not by its end but in its character. We are interested with Barth in what it means to be on a shared path but not defined by a revealed end. It is this journey of awakening to God's intended and redeemed story to which Barth gives the name *freedom*. Freedom for Barth is the best way to understand true humanity, and it is this freedom that gives us a proper sense of human potential.

Obedience is the first point of reference for the possibility of human potential, because it connotes another of Barth's great anthropological commitments, which is that freedom happens within the context of constraints. Barth most directly lays this out through his theology of creation which is organised around the "commands" within which God organises the relationship of humanity to God, one another, and the world. This takes place in *Church Dogmatics* III.4. We see, however, throughout *Church Dogmatics*, Barth working out conceptually what it is that humans receive from their created natures. He says it well in relation to human rationality:

[57] Ibid., 134 but repeated in multiple locations.
[58] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.2, 556.

> The fact that man comes to himself, to rationality, is, however, only an inevitable side effect of the incomparably greater thing which is primary, essential and decisive, namely, that in the work of the Holy Spirit done in him, in the recognition that the history of Jesus Christ is his own salvation history—that is the goal of its manifestation—he is liberated to run to the God whom he previously sought to evade, to be faithful to the God to whom he was previously unfaithful. It is not enough that the history of Jesus Christ should be objectively revealed to all men, in His resurrection from the dead, as the history of the one man who was faithful to God in virtue of God's faithfulness.[59]

Man comes to himself. It is a vision of living into the humanity we have been given only as that humanity finds itself on a journey far greater and far more important than the development the self was on previously.

In obedience to our nature, we not only have rationality, but we also have work. Barth writes, "Works are primarily the acts and fruits of human operation in contrast to the processes and products of organic nature. The term refers to history in the strict sense. As man exists as such, he works."[60] When we look to Barth to help us understand the possibility of human potential, we see that work itself is part of the human story. This work can be redeemed as Christians and the church offer a "provisional representation of the universal scope (concealed as yet) of the person and work of Jesus Christ," but at a basic level, work in the world will continue and is part of "history in the strict sense" even as humanity is limited in what this work will accomplish without redemption.[61] In *Church Dogmatics* III.4, Barth titles the section containing his teaching on vocation, which is how work is framed comprehensively, "Freedom in Limitation," making our point about obedience even clearer.

Finally, in obedience we have relationships. For Barth, this is framed in *Church Dogmatics* III.4 as "Man and Woman," "Parents and Children," and "Near and Distant Neighbours." Here Barth recognises that parents and children have a spiritual quality to them, and age and biology themselves do not fix the relationship of who is the mentor and who is the mentee. We wish that Barth spent more time considering children as an aspect of "Near and Distant Neighbours," which is when Barth begins to consider social and cultural binds between humans.[62] Here, it is simply clear that human relationality is given as a reality and constraint.

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[59] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.4, 29.
[60] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.2, 584.
[61] Ibid., 623.
[62] Barth also assumes a context of pluralism as we defined it in the introduction in "Near and Distant Neighbours," *Church Dogmatics* III.4, 285ff.

One question that arises for the possibility of human potential is the degree to which Barth allows for formation, as defined in the Introduction. Consider this statement: "The Christian life cannot be inherited as blood, gifts, characteristics and inclinations are inherited. No Christian environment, however genuine or sincere, can transfer this life."[63] It is important that this is written as a component of "Baptism with Water," especially in the section that is exploring infant baptism, because the community of the church is explicitly present at this stage of Barth's treatment. It comes after Barth writes, parents "have a duty to give [children] Christian instruction, i.e. to lead, attract, and bring them to Christian faith." He calls these the "Christian presuppositions of the problem what is to become of children."[64] Regarding formation, Barth's treatment of children is illuminating, not because it is faultless but because it helps to make sense of his moral imagination of human potential. Obedience, even for children, does not imagine a world closed from God or void of God's direct agency and action. Remember that Barth assumes God's special grace over children before they are ready to be baptised. This openness does not, however, mean that formation in families and the church are not essential. Barth takes it as a point of absurdity that baptism with water could occur on one's own and outside of the special role of the Christian community. [65] Barth so takes these formations for granted that he can be frustratingly slim in affirming these roles substantively.

Taken as a whole, what we find is that baptism does not take us out of our pasts but takes our pasts, our stories, our formations, into life with God. We need our humanity as it was given to us in creation, but obedience to that humanity is a mere start. In this way, Barth's work can make sense of what we will consider in the next chapters as mere development or growth, but in recognising that in baptism we also find *hope*, Barth opens for us a consideration of human potential that, while constrained, is not without surprise.

Hope is required for our framing of the possibility of human potential, because hope is what points beyond the expected towards the surprising. Barth calls this "an uninterrupted and unequivocally positive expectation of the future."[66] We do not use the word hope to correspond to what we expect; we hope for what is beyond our grasp. Consider this quote from Barth: "It is a matter…of their attaining a goal which has not yet been attained but to which their existence, the work for which they are fitted, is directed *as to an eschaton*, so that they must allow themselves to be shaped accordingly."[67] The notion of the Christian eschaton is an expectation beyond human history for a

[63] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.4, 184.
[64] Ibid., 176.
[65] Remember also that every section of *Church Dogmatics* speaks to the implications of that section for the Christian Community before the Christian individual.
[66] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.3.2, Ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2010) 910.
[67] Emphasis added Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.2, 624.

consummation of all things in and to God. It draws Christians beyond home in the immanent both with God's breaking into human history in Jesus Christ and in the ultimate conclusion of history. Hope in the Christian story takes this shape. It surprises. It carries forward. Barth clearly calls out "mature" and "perfect" as misunderstandings of this journey, instead pointing to the shape of the journey itself, which is life alongside of God's shaping and forming the history in which we live and participate.[68] Elsewhere he calls this journey "unequivocally and uninterruptedly light and good and salvation."[69] Baptism with water is this human act of obedience and hope.

We are chastened to remember, alongside this possibility of something new and inbreaking in the human experience, that human potential is not human progress nor development in the way those terms are generally used to denote a consistent forward pattern.

> It is to be noted that the men in relationship to whom the good work of God has this particular form are sinners like the rest—possibly to a lesser degree, possibly to a greater, but still sinners. They are not differentiated from others by the fact that they are not transgressors in the judgement of God, or that even their good works are not full of transgression. They are differentiated only (but genuinely) by the fact…that they are sanctified in and by the Holy One; that they are called to His discipleship; that they are awakened to conversion by His Holy Spirit; and that they are engaged in conversion. To the extent that they are this, and exist as such, their works are taken into service by God and are good works, quite irrespective of what they might be apart from this relationship in the eyes of men and above all in the eyes of God, and quite irrespective of the fact that even as good works they are full of transgression.[70]

The possibility of human potential given to us in Barth's Christian theology is a potential that is tentative and even messy. It is a potential that requires hope and is benefited by it.

"He now lives with a new character."[71] Hope not only surprises and carries forward, but it *forms*. As Barth describes, it establishes a *new character*. While this was the territory of the possibility of human transformation, we see that the possibility of human potential takes a shared turn as we consider that obedience and hope not only determine the present but shape the possibilities of the future. Baptism is the recognition of this transformation. We arrive then at an understanding of human potential, tied to a vision of human transformation, that is distinctively Christian, meant for all humans, and not incremental at the same time that it is grounded in constraint and eschews linearity; it is characterised

[68] Ibid., 624.
[69] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III.3, 908.
[70] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.2, 592-3.
[71] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.4, 3.

by surprise.

Closed versus Open Formation

The issue of formation lingers. Does Barth not give us too individualistic an interpretation of human transformation and human potential to make sense of the place of identity formation in the education of children? Stanley Hauerwas is a well-known critic of Barth on this point, writing in *Character and the Christian Life*, "The antagonising thing about Barth's ethics, therefore, is not that he failed to appreciate the importance of the idea of character, but that he really does not integrate it into the main images he uses to explicate the nature of the Christian life."[72] Following Hauerwas, theorists of character and virtue tend to look elsewhere for their sources. In this regard, Herdt's *Forming Humanity* is self-consciously surprised to find in Barth, "an unlikely source of assistance."[73] It is true that for Barth it is of great significance that for both baptism with the Holy Spirit and baptism with water, and thereby for human transformation and human potential, God calls "the individual" in a concrete, personal sense and not general humanity. In defence of Barth's contributions on formation, we can consider his approach a strong inclination towards *open formation*, as opposed to a formation that is more deterministic and closed.

Barth's position in intellectual history relative to questions of the individual and identity is one starting point for understanding his insistence on an open understanding of formation. Barth is writing in the aftermath of Nazi Germany and sees the need to "recall and accept anew the norm" of "the estimation of the individual."[74] Not unaware of the scholarly concern around "secular individualism," Barth nonetheless maintains that Christians should maintain "the conviction that the beginning and end of all the ways of God, and even the essence of all divine truth, are to be recognised and honoured in individual human beings."[75] As such, "men have an 'individuality' in relation to the human group."[76] And he concludes, "From this point of view, the Christian concept of election is more fundamentally 'individualistic' than anything produced by secular individualism."[77] Barth is not unaware of the dangers of his view. He calls this heretical danger "playing the 'individual' over against God."[78] And yet, he is consistent in his deference to baptism with the Holy Spirit, the encounter of the individual with God, as primary over baptism with water.

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[72] Stanley Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life* (San Antonio: Trinity University) 176.
[73] Herdt, *Forming Humanity,* 14.
[74] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.2, 306.
[75] Ibid., 308.
[76] Ibid., 313.
[77] Ibid., 314.
[78] Ibid., 317.

Barth does, however, turn from baptism with the Holy Spirit *to* baptism with water, so we must ask ourselves, in this turn do we find a strong enough vision of the formative role of Christian practice and community? Here, Herdt's interpretation of Barth's work becomes significant and, again, reminds us, "Christian formation has at its best been a formation that *opens* persons up to others, rather than *closing* them down into reassuring and nostalgic enclaves."[79] In sympathy with Appiah's concerns against essentialism, Herdt here describes that communities can also be sources of essentialisation, even the church. We come then to an important supplement to our thinking about identity formation thus far. According to Appiah, we are seeking to avoid essentialisms in identity formation because they are bad scholarship and they divide more than they unite. He acknowledges that the communities which shape us do great good, including binding us to those fellowships across time and space and making sense of aspects of human life that make less sense when identity is constituted in individuality. For Appiah, we are seeking a penultimate, or tentative, understanding of identity because, while we want communities to help shape the possibility of our life plans, we do not want those communities to constrain those life plans. Millian freedom is what Appiah has in mind.

Barth has a different way of framing why we avoid the essentialisms of community in identity, but his conclusions parallel those of Appiah. The reason for Barth is not that we are free from the Millian possibility of other's impositions, but that God is free in salvation history. (Barth also believes that this constitutes human freedom but secondarily.) Consider the following from Barth:

> We have also to accustom ourselves to the thought that on all the ways on which Christendom journeys we shall be constantly faced, not only by the limit of its creatureliness and sinfulness, but also by the fact that, as in respect of its outward extension, so also on its inward growth, there is a limit which it cannot and should not pass because it is not ordained to give a perfect but only a provisional and therefore imperfect representation of the new humanity, God having reserved the definitive and perfect representation for His kingdom which comes in the final manifestation. The community of the *sancti* has to respect this limit of its relationship to the *sancta*.[80]

We find here a similarity to Appiah's insight that identities always exist in history, but for Barth, history is in the context of salvation history and, with this time horizon, the expectations for our humanity indeed take a certain penultimate form. Importantly, Barth references the penultimateness of the *community* in this quote. Formation is only as excellent as its source, and for Barth, the church, and all human institutions, will always be approximations of their *telos*. We find a synergy between

[79] Herdt, "Reclaiming Dialogical Humanism," 608.
[80] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.2, 649.

Appiah and Barth on what we might call the preference for thinking about *open formation* over *closed formation*, a concept also in alignment with Herdt's findings.

There is a related concept to open formation that will become important to our thinking about education and formation in Chapter Four, and it concerns virtue. To return to Hauerwas, in the same section of *Character and the Christian Life*, he claims that Barth "treats the Christian life primarily in terms of events and acts," and these "cannot contribute in a theologically significant way to the development of ourselves as men of character."[81] Can virtue itself be a concept that bridges this gap and allows nonessentialised communities to be formative *enough*? Moral identity, we said in the Introduction, is the way that the moral imagination becomes coherent in the life of a child, and it can be described through its component parts, through virtues.

In Chapter Four, we turn to Nicholas Wolterstorff as an exemplar of thinking about open formation and education, and we follow his logic towards virtue. Consider Wolterstorff's definition of virtue as "habituated skills in assessing priorities among the actual and potential preferables in one's life and acting accordingly."[82] This is a definition that allows an alignment between virtue and open formation. Or, for a concrete example, consider how Wolterstorff's *Justice in Love* connects this thinking to the contemporary conversation about moral identity. *Justice in Love* is a theologically rich philosophical book. It is meant as a rebuttal to those who believe that the Christian call to love supersedes a call to justice. According to Wolterstorff, there is no such conceptual challenge. To be just is to love and true love is just. A concrete example of the way that the possibility of human transformation shapes the moral imagination comes in a section on repentance and forgiveness. Wolterstorff makes the claim that in concrete cases of wrongdoer and victim, when the wrongdoer "offers the victim his repentance" he does so with the "hope" that his *moral identity* can be reconstituted and reestablished.[83] When the victim is able to forgive, this movement of "supererogatory grace" *allows* the wrongdoer a moral future that person otherwise *merely* hopes for. These instincts towards open formation, while not fully theorised as such, can be seen as the backdrop to Wolterstorff's understanding of "dialogic pluralism," a concept that requires we accept the *deep* and *pervasive* nature of pluralism, but that we very much embrace the possibility that it is *ours*.

We live in a pluralistic age, where it is increasingly the case that our lives are varied and interspersed with a wide variety of actors with whom we share civic spaces. As O'Donovan described this, "The differentiated nature of the virtues reflects the differentiated character of the world and its events." His point is to complexify the idea that there is one "uniform public morality" instead arguing, "The

[81] Hauerwas, *Character and the Christian Life*, 173.
[82] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015) 8.
[83] Ibid., 188.

reason we do not all develop the same virtues is that we do not all suffer the same things."[84] Could it not be the case that the regular, if episodically framed, practices of Christian life are sufficient for the consideration of character, or our preferred concept, moral identity? Should we not see Christianity as itself a set of practices, among many in an individual's life, and trust God with the moral sense that makes?

We will return to a discussion of virtue in Chapter Four. Between here and there, we will encounter temptations to see education as more than a social practice—as instead the project of "humanity." As we do, we will recall Herdt's insights, and Barth's critique of the German Bildung tradition. Herdt writes of "Barth's insistence on dialogical encounter with our fellow human beings…. We are not so much achieving ourselves as receiving ourselves from one another, and insofar as we grant that consummation can only be eschatological and hence beyond our ability to secure."[85] For Barth, open formation is directly tied to the freedom of God to call us into the future as He may, with whom He may. As we participate in this new life with God, through the Holy Spirit, we are reformed into the life God calls us to participate in.

Conclusion: What is education without transformation and potential?

We began this chapter by acknowledging that we are looking for faithful, insightful, and comprehensible resources to bring to bear on a topic of public concern—the place of identity formation in the education of children—and that the concepts we are seeking will take a combination of modesty and brashness as they form the basis of our moral imaginations with regards to these children. As such, we called them basic anthropological assumptions. We conclude this chapter returning to our basic anthropological assumptions, having situated them inside of the discourse of identity and then identity in America. To say that essentialisms tend quickly towards heresies is not to neglect the importance of identity in the education of children. Quite the opposite. By joining with Appiah in clarifying what is of concern with essentialisms, we open up space for identity to play its rightful role in the education of children, acknowledging the various sources and histories that shape us even at our youngest ages while at the same time holding that those shapings are never the end of the story. As Appiah writes, "in sum, identities come, first, with labels and ideas about why and to

[84] Oliver O'Donovan, *Finding and Seeking*: *Ethics as Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014) 95. Wolterstorff describes a similar definition of virtue in *Justice in Love* when he writes, "the fact that modern utilitarians have talked about virtue is purely contingent; they can and should. The virtues would be different, however. The virtues necessary and appropriate for living as a modern utilitarian are not those praised and cultivated by the ancient eudaimonists." (9) O'Donovan says of this, "it is a point too little noticed in Ethics that the very language we use to name our virtues changes constantly. Each age creates a vocabulary of virtues (and vices) corresponding to the distinctiveness of its experience." *Finding and Seeking*, 92.
[85] Herdt, *Forming Humanity*, 246, 251.

whom they should be applied. Second, your identity shapes your thoughts about how you should behave; and third, it affects the way other people treat you. Finally, all these dimensions of identity are contestable, always up for dispute: who's in, what they're like, how they should behave and be treated."[86] These excursions into debates around essentialism are critical to the future success of our argument because the temptation towards debates of what a person *is* and what the nature of the human life *is* abound in the literatures we are about to engage. We get off track when we fail to remember that we live in the penultimate. Why exactly is human transformation possible? Towards what end does our potential lead? These are questions in time, not outside of time, but their answers are shaped by our conception of time. "[Baptism's] *telos* is transcendent, not immanent."[87] They are questions inside of the transformation and the pilgrimage, not outside of it. What this frees up for us are important recognitions about the practices of education.

A question could be asked how the possibility of human transformation and the possibility of human potential relate to the distinction we made between education and formation. The answer will need to be explored in the coming pages, but we can say here that without these possibilities, framed with the nuance and insights that, however modest, we have ensured, there is a temptation towards a more closed vision of formation and to see education as a project with identity as an outcome. In these temptations, children become merely future adults. The logics of baptism even in their most basic formulations push against this and instead invite us to see anew how what we believe about children tells us a great deal about what we believe about humanity.

In Chapter Four, we will return to a constructive argument for what a philosophy of education would entail when the critiques that are about to unfold in Chapters Two and Three are clear. What we will consider there will be what education is or means when these insights that Christians receive by contemplating baptism are foregrounded. It is interesting to consider that the possibility of human transformation and the possibility of human potential are insights that may be available in other traditions. As they have been outlined, it is reasonable to imagine that an overlapping consensus could exist. This possibility will not be taken up until our concluding chapter, and it will be tentative, but it is important to acknowledge that just because an insight arises from Christian sources that does not necessarily mean that it is an exclusive insight. The mode of an exchange that seeks an overlapping consensus would be dialogical, and so we foreground here that what is advocated for in Chapter Four will follow an insight by philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff on the possibility of "dialogical pluralism." To preview: dialogical pluralism rests on an insight that Wolterstorff borrows from MacIntyre that education is a social practice. When MacIntyre and "social practice" exist in the same

[86] Appiah, *The Lies That Bind*, 12.
[87] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV.4, 69.

sentence, the reader should expect the word "virtue" to follow, and so it does. When overlapping consensus leads to shared social practices, in MacIntyre's imagination, shared virtues logically follow. We will seek to define a shared virtue in Chapter Four that corresponds to the social practice of education.

Why not move towards consensus earlier in the dissertation? The possibility of overlapping consensus is an idea of hard-fought intellectual honesty. It requires the same "brashness and humility" that set us on the anthropological work of this chapter, as Berger admonished. In the context of education and the United States, intellectual honesty, affirmation and antithesis, requires a careful engagement with those who have gotten us to today, and a recognition of who has been left out of American education (remember Du Bois) and on what terms. There has been a transformation when thinking about the civic purpose of education from a focus on the content of education to a focus on the structure and practices of schools. This transformation came about due to the historical reality in the United States of first the segregation and then the desegregation of schools. The history of diversity and inclusion in schools in the United States is the history of the civic imagination cultivated in our schools.

Christian ethics as counsel invites us to participate as Christians in the entirety of our lives and vocations. The affirmation and antithesis assumed for faithful presence will be deeply knowledgeable about the state of public affairs and clear on the faithful, insightful, and comprehensible theological insights most relevant to those. In our case, we will ask, if we do not have Barth's specific Christian counsel, what happens in conversations about education? A few things: We struggle to make sense of the distinction between education in the general and in the special sense. We struggle with essentialisations that cannot coexist and by our account are malformations. We miss the distinction between education and formation thereby making public contestations impossible to understand. We end up with proposals for sometimes radical isolation when care and neighbourliness are what is called for. We ignore children and have debates about higher education when in fact *children* are where our biggest concerns lie. In short, we fail to parse out carefully, in affirmation and antithesis, the voice of the Christian in a present and pressing matter of public concern, for Christians and for the most vulnerable among us—children and especially those for whom identity has been a barrier to their education not a point of access. "Listening to those on the margins was a matter of urgency, of life and death, in Barth's day and now."[88]

[88] Herdt, *Forming Humanity*, 250-1.

Chapter Two: The Heresies of Nature

Introduction

In 2009, James Davison Hunter argued in an article that it is not possible for us to agree on pathways and strategies for children when we have lost a shared sense of the adult, the goal, the final result of education itself. He titled this article, "Whither Adulthood?" and its main claim is summarised as follows:

> Maturity, in other words, was a social status and thus represented a higher place than childhood in the social and cultural hierarchy. It was a matter of honor that conferred respect and admiration, and therefore, it was something to be prized… The characteristics that have made adulthood recognizable and desirable have been deinstitutionalized. Adulthood is a destination one cannot quite locate, the passage to which is no longer clear.[1]

In this short article, Hunter spends considerable time looking at the relationship between adulthood, rites of passage, and education. While his point is to complexify our understanding of the child's path to adulthood, making it clear that categories of "childhood" are themselves historically situated, fairly new, and in contrast to narratives of maturation and leadership, it is the logic of his framing that we want to dwell on briefly.

There is a tempting logic to the idea that we need to understand the shared goal of education—the adult—in order to be able to properly theorise education. Education in this way has an obvious teleological structure. It is ends bound. One of the questions that this chapter seeks to complexify, however, is what exactly this basic statement illuminates. Our concern is that it assumes quite a bit about human development and human dignity and their relation to one another. Further, we do indeed find ourselves at a loss with an image of an adult that can help to drive the goal of education in the complex world of the middle of the twenty-first century. We live in a diverse and pluralistic time and that rightly means that there are many visions of an adult and no single shared vision.[2] The contestations around education begin to make sense.

It is not the logic of ends as such that proves to be the challenge, as this chapter will begin to make

[1] James Davison Hunter, "Whither Adulthood," *The Hedgehog Review* (Spring 2009).
[2] Hunter acknowledges this at the close of his earlier book, *The Death of Character*, which is a study in how the diversification of our moral imaginations means that there is no shared goal—character—towards which we can compellingly collaborate for the formation of children. James Davison Hunter, *The Death of Character: Moral Education in an Age without Good and Evil* (New York: Basic, 2000).

clear. Instead, it is the idea that a shared vision of the adult and that adult's responsibilities will create clarity for the *project* of education. If adulthood, a state, is the goal of controlled processes of human development, as this chapter will argue that education is generally framed, then rightfully speaking it hits its mark when adulthood is *achieved*.[3] This achievement can be named many things but historically it was related to the capacity for governance, which unfolded towards the capacity for self-governance in the United States and other democracies. It is this framing of education as a *project,* towards a presumed outcome, that needs to be questioned in light of the Christian story of humanity that baptism tells—of human transformation, human potential, and open formation. While it is an abiding temptation to conceive of education as a social project, this chapter will lay out the arguments for why it is ultimately problematic. To do this, we will consider how the moral logic of developmentalism and a strong teleological approach to the purposes of education share a set of essentialist problematics that make it difficult to make sense of the emergent qualities of the child. Children are both embedded and becoming, but when we get overly confident in exactly what children are becoming, we can find that we have replaced tentative anthropological insights with stronger, essentialising identity commitments. In this chapter, the displacement of concern is that we replace the anthropological insight of *human potential* with a stronger identity claim of *Homo democraticus* or perhaps even *Homo Americus*.

In the previous chapter, we considered a parallel critique between Appiah and Barth that essentialism is an incongruous framework for questions of identity. This does not mean that we do not operate with basic anthropological assumptions, but it does mean that we always do so with an attendant modesty as to their outworking. We argued that essentialism in this usage is the idea that the categorisations of identity define the experience of the identified and not the other way around. When we look at essentialisms in relation to children and education, they can lead to a temptation to see the very real formative aspects of education as entailing that education is a *closed* project with identity as an outcome. Modesty checks this instinct and instead asks us to look for a different way in which education participates in the identity formation of children.

This chapter is the first of two to set parameters around the place of identity formation in the education of children. In this chapter we do three things after we frame the problem of the heresies of nature. First, we lay out what we call Heresy 1: The Inevitability of Democracy. Second, we address Heresy 2: The Neutrality of Development. Third, we offer a critical engagement of these two heresies tracking a shift within education from having essentialist commitments to identity in the background

[3] Carl Jung was important to understanding life through its "stages" which he thought to be childhood, puberty, young adulthood, middle age, and old age. We will not directly engage with and critique Jung here, but his position demonstrates precisely our narrative that in childhood all sorts of problems are created that need to be solved in adulthood, thereby leaving one with the idea that childhood generally goes wrong and needs to be controlled and ultimately fixed later in life.

of the field to having essentialist commitments about identity in the foreground of the field. Framed in this way, we can begin to see the issue: temptations to essentialism abound. The Inevitability of Democracy is the idea that educated people become democratic people, with a vision of the engaged adult citizen shaping this understanding of human development. Its most straightforward modern proponent is John Dewey and it has continued resonance, however wavering, today.[4] The Neutrality of Development is the idea that there is a singular vision of humanity towards which healthy development unfolds. While few thoughtful theorists would claim this explicitly, the field of education can lend itself towards forgetfulness of the complexities, setbacks, and intersections of human development. Taken in their extreme forms, these two temptations to heresy leave scant room for the kind of surprise that our framing of human potential carries within it, not to mention the basic insight of baptism that we each face moments of transformation, as we encounter our own failures, limitations, and the opportunity to learn, grow, and, in God's grace, move on.

A further problem with the normative ideal of the adult is the temptation to forget that the adult came from somewhere. The adult was neither inevitable morally speaking nor was the somewhere from whence they came neutral, whatever that would mean in the context of human particularity. Theorists find ways to try to control the utter complexity, contingency, and emergence of humanity in the individual form of this person or that person, these people, and so on. We hide these theories inside of a field called "education" because by definition that makes the emergence of the child a project towards an outcome. There are two directions from which critiques of the idea of "the adult" emerged in the United States over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, both of which will be considered in this chapter. The order in which we will address them is the critique from the perspective of gender and then the critique from the perspective of race, in particular of African Americans. Both critiques help to establish the shape of the following chapter on The Heresies of Nurture.

Nature, Teleology, and the Question of Identity

We frame our concerns under the title The Heresies of Nature for provocation. Remember that we are wholly uninterested in the idea of a heretic, itself an essentialist claim with social and political outcomes but fairly uninteresting when human transformation and human potential are one's basic anthropological commitments. Heresy, instead, is a way to frame the work of antithesis, where we can identify temptations that pull us from the moral imagination we mean to have. As such, the heresies of

[4] There are also ancient versions of this idea that educated people become democratic people, but the social dynamics of past cultures should help us question any straightforward historical line, as the Neutrality of Development makes clear.

nature become those ways of thinking that, often left unconsidered, shape what then become our practices and activities away from those that would be more aligned to what we actually believe and find important for commitment. This chapter is working to foreground two such temptations and to see what kind of an impact they have at the intersection of identity formation and education. Let's consider this further.

Children are emerging selves. Their emergent quality has proven a known challenge for theorists operating at the intersection of identity formation and what we generally think of as education, having to do with the transfer of knowledge from one generation to the next. Consider what we think we can take at face value about education: there is knowledge in the world; people speak about it with one another; adults share this knowledge with children in stages over time; children build on previous knowledge with new knowledge; all children can and should receive the same knowledge; it is possible to assess all children's knowledge; deviation from the standard reception of knowledge is a disability; there is a threshold of sufficient knowledge acquisition which we, as a society, take to be essential for being a responsible citizen and contributing member of society; as children are becoming adults they transition from receiving knowledge to creating knowledge; the creation of knowledge happens in "higher" education. Theorists of education rightly complexify each of these simplifications with bodies of literature. Is education only about knowledge? Is it not also about cultivating good people? How would we get all students equal access to this knowledge? How should we train adults to deliver knowledge? What tests properly ensure sufficient reception of this knowledge? Is the future productivity of working adults well suited by what we traditionally think of as knowledge, fixed in disciplines of knowledge? And so on. We know well the debates regarding whether education is about knowledge at all.

This chapter aims to demonstrate that an overly constrained teleology in thinking about education wrongly invites us to see education as a project for the making of adults. We consider this problematic insofar as it insufficiently attends to children as not only diverse, not only representative of a plurality of communities but also as already worthy of a vision of formation that is open, emergent, and nonlinear. Consider commonplace notions of the dominance of "nature" in debates of "nature or nurture" in the development of children. What comes to mind is the notion that our genetics and epigenetics constrain formation and so strongly overpower anything our communities could instil that we are determined from conception to be the outcome our bodies unfold. Somewhere deep inside of that story is a belief about the human brain and how inputs into our brains unfold over our lifetimes. A belief in human potential and transformation in this image can seem quaint and unscientific.

Why do we think about education through this basic framework in the greater European tradition? The answer has something to do with the earliest writers about organised education, Aristotle, and other

Greek "schools of thought." Consider Aristotle, whose basic intellectual framework is that all things are unfolding towards their proper ends. Remember that for Aristotle, this left humanity inside of classes, divided into categorisations of capability, with their growth trajectories limited by these outcomes such as they are understood. In a related fashion, let us consider the old logic of education and governance. The history of education is a history of equipping future rulers. The shift which we should not lose sight of is, if education is for those who rule, then self-governance expands this universally. Questions pertaining to the scope of citizenship follow. Education cannot answer this question, its logic can only follow. In our contemporary framing, it took Hannah Arendt's response to this in *The Human Condition* to expose its limitations on education and equality, as Danielle Allen has recently argued in her book by that title.[5] Knowing that an Aristotelian picture of the world separated classes of humans and established labour, work, and action to each separately, with action the political realm of rational deliberation and judgement. Arendt reorganised this logic and claimed instead that the human condition of labour, work, and action pertain to each person. Teleology is a logic of unfolding towards an end. Arendt asks us to at least make sure that we are looking towards multiple ends and that those ends are not based on yet another marker of identity, class.

While errant in their extreme forms, it can be understandable why The Inevitability of Democracy and The Neutrality of Development map onto our expectations surrounding education. The reason is that education *is* fundamentally ends oriented; it intersects the formation and development of children. There are no arguments for education that fail this structure. Even when education is deontologically stated by the United Nations, for example, a moral vision of the thriving adult comes into play. Consider the "Convention on the Rights of the Child," which includes, "Children's education should help them fully develop their personalities, talents, and abilities. It should teach them to understand their own rights, and to respect other people's rights, cultures, and differences. It should help them to live peacefully and protect the environment."[6] Even here we are talking about a vision of the good adult, with peace and sustainability smuggled into an otherwise capacities driven understanding. This is why, as a point of affirmation of the current state of discourse, we are and have to be talking about diversity in education. Education is about the development of the self amidst options available to the child in the world of adults.

Even if understandable in form, this chapter critiques the implications of these two temptations towards heresy when considering the place of identity formation in the education of children. Both can tempt us to see education as a project with a shared identity as its intended outcome. Again, as a point of affirmation, not only theology but theory and history also encourage us to resist these

[5] Danielle Allen, *Education and Equality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).
[6] UNICEF, "Convention on the Rights of the Child," <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text-childrens-version>.

temptations. By operating as a question of identity, not essentialist anthropological claims, we can see that children need identities to navigate the world, but they do not need schools to see those identities as a project.

One of the things this lends us to consider is that, as we proceed, we need to keep a question in mind about the dignity of children, in themselves, as humans, and not as potential humans. One of the compelling moments in Hunter's "Whither Adulthood" is the historical clarification that through a great deal of western history there was a very brief window of very young childhood, until about the age of six or seven, after which there was responsibility. Children were not protected in this model—this much is historically clear—but it did mean that children of educational age were respected and their agency was not seen as a future reality but instead as a present condition. The implications of Barth's rejection of a strong notion of original sin continue to linger on this point.

This chapter will unfold as follows: First, we will consider the teleological form of education and its relationship to human development in further detail. Then, we will consider at length the way that The Inevitability of Democracy emerged from theorists of education, beginning with John Dewey and ultimately critiqued but furthered by Amy Gutmann. Further, we will turn to The Neutrality of Development and consider the unfolding of the field of developmental psychology, even as very early critiques emerged inside of the fields of education in the middle of the nineteenth century that questioned *neutrality*. The critiques were largely fuelled by practical political considerations as, on the one hand, women fought for access to education, and, on the other, black families, and their allies, put pressure on educational systems that were established for white students. Questions of race and education in the United States are well studied and, when combined with feminist critiques of the last quarter of the nineteenth century, The Neutrality of Development, while important to name, has been continually shown to be problematic for reasons that we will again see here. Finally, the chapter concludes with a critical engagement with Danielle Allen to further clarify places of affirmation and antithesis on the state of public discussion.

We turn now to the two substantive halves of this chapter, and we will take them in order historically even though there is a conceptual logic in the other direction. The reason for this is that we dare not delay any further in acknowledging the key figure who holds dominance over this work, even over one hundred years on, American Pragmatist Philosopher John Dewey. The place of identity formation in the education of children is impossible to consider without understanding Dewey's *Democracy and Education* and his metaphysical commitment to the inevitability of democracy. We begin here and turn thereafter to an engagement with later thinkers emerging from developmental psychology, such as Lawrence Kohlberg, on the idea of the neutrality of development.

Heresy 1: The Inevitability of Democracy

Nature as the Historic Unfolding of Democracy

There are ideas operating in the backs of our minds in the United States when we consider children and education and, one of them, this section will argue, is the inevitability of democracy, by which we mean that properly educated children become democratic adults. In the American tradition, John Dewey's telling of the American Pragmatist tradition makes this most plain. The history of education in the United States does not begin with Dewey, but his career spans the early stages of the expansion of education from an elite pursuit to a universal right (though before the languages of "rights" would be tied to it). As such, it marks a moment in time where education was more than a wealthy white man's pursuit but before the pressures of universal schooling came fully into view. It is also a moment where industrialisation sufficiently transformed labour and family in America such that the desirability of schools could be taken for granted.

What is striking about Dewey's master work on the topic of democracy and education is that Dewey believed that education itself could do the work of democracy. In this way, he is absolutely quintessential of the modern liberal tradition. Dewey does not believe that democracy needs to be taught. Instead, he holds to the inevitability of classically liberal thought when the mind is trained and open. In this understanding, he builds on the best and worst aspects of the Western tradition, and he establishes the drive that progressive education—and whatever one claims falls under this banner—is coequal with the democratic and democratising instincts. It's a hubris that no longer persists unmasked.

John Dewey's *Democracy and Education*

When Dewey wrote *Democracy and Education*, compulsory education was just fully taking root in the United States, and he was a pioneer in the academic study of pedagogy and psychology as necessary components to the methods of education. Teachers College, Columbia University, the first graduate school of education, where Dewey spent much of his career, was founded in 1887. It was only in 1917 that Mississippi became the last state in the United States to pass a compulsory education law. Private education, something many take for granted as a core component of the American educational landscape, was protected through *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* (1925) when the Supreme Court ruled that Oregon could not require all students to attend public schools. What we now think of as the structure of education in the United States—eight years of lower school plus four years of high

school—was the creation of the National Education Association in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Dewey saw "education as a freeing of individual capacity in a progressive growth directed to social aims."[7] He understood democracy to be larger than a political system. It was humanity's innate capacity.

It can be difficult to fully appreciate the way in which it seems obvious for Dewey that society and secular democracy were one and the same and would arrive in due course through the inevitability of human development and evolution. He is clear on this matter from the beginning of this project. In the "Preface" of 1915, he writes, "As will appear from the book itself, the philosophy stated in this book connects the growth of democracy with the development of the experimental method in the sciences, evolutionary ideas in the biological sciences, and the industrial reorganization, and is concerned to point out the changes in subject matter and method of education indicated by these developments."[8] For education in the United States of America, perhaps *the* foundational text is Dewey's *Democracy and Education*. Published in 1916, Dewey promotes the idea of what we now call "progressive" education, which prioritises student-led inquiry towards individual student growth. The text is wide ranging and includes Dewey's vision of what it means to be a person and to thrive. Here, our interest is in Dewey's understanding of education and the purpose of schools. It is this intersection between education and the institution of the school that reveals most clearly the claim that for Dewey, education itself does the work of democracy. In the twenty-first century, it is difficult to separate out a sense of the democratic from the democratic governments that oversee us. But for Dewey, this was not the case. Dewey thought of democracy as a way of life, and as a mindframe.[9]

Dewey and the institution of the school

First, for Dewey, within the internal logic of the institutions of education lies an assumed antithesis between the education that calls out and defines the individual and the formation that embeds and contextualises that individual within their closest communities. He writes, "It suffices to say that in general the school has been the institution which exhibited with greatest clearness the assumed

[7] John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (1916; New York: Free Press, 1944) 98.
[8] Ibid., Preface.
[9] Liberal education has been a topic of sincere interest, mainly in higher education, as the place of the humanities has been called into question. Intellectual freedom of tenured professors rises to the level of legal action in universities across the United States and Europe. The question is even more pointed when speaking about the mandatory education of children. What would intellectual freedom mean for the thirteen-year-old? It's this question of the civic purpose of education at these impressionable ages that helps to keep our question grounded in that tension between the needs and desires of the government and communities and the possibilities inherent in the lives of individuals as they are raised up through schools.

antithesis between purely individualistic methods of learning and social action, and between freedom and social control."[10] "The experimental method," Dewey goes on,

> is new as a scientific resource—as a systematised means of making knowledge, though as old as life as a practical device. Hence it is not surprising that men have not recognized its full scope. For the most part, its significance is regarded as belonging to certain technical and merely physical matters. It will doubtless take a long time to secure the perception that it holds equally as the forming and testing of ideas in social and moral matters. Men still want the crutch of dogma, of beliefs fixed by authority, to relieve them of the trouble of thinking and the responsibility of directing their activity by thought.[11]

Often in the literature, the concepts of education and formation are intertwined and merged. When the idea of formation is merged into the idea of education, we find ourselves in an almost entirely individualistic world, where the future of humanity is somehow imprinted within the individual, waiting to be called out. "Progressive" education tends to fall into this category. It is as though the individual emerged from nowhere, and, in ignoring the sources from which we find ourselves, the individual is able to conjure a future without a dependency on the past. The opposite comes when we merge education into the idea of formation. In this picture, essentially nothing new is possible in the world. This is traditionalism at its most oppressive, as though there is nothing left to learn in the world, and everything that is worth knowing has been found. Dewey's description of education on first pass sounds very much like the first, most progressive, and least formative version of education.

Dewey's aversion to formation gets clearest when he is writing about habit. He writes, "Habit means that an individual undergoes a modification through an experience, which modification forms a predisposition to easier and more effective action in a like direction in the future."[12] This seems like a correct description of a standard component of human life, but Dewey finds this deeply problematic when it comes to learning and claims that habits of thought stand in the way of the kind of learning that will drive human learning towards liberal ends. His disagreement with habit seems to be that it is at odds with knowledge, that these are opposed human modes. The concern is that habit will keep us from the openness that drives us to necessary and relevant progressive knowing.[13] Accordingly, schools are deeply problematic for Dewey because they are institutions where something like formation of habit would be a necessary goal. By Dewey's telling, schools seem to, if anything, get in

[10] Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 301.
[11] Ibid., 338-9.
[12] Ibid., 339.
[13] In Chapter Four we will return to Nicholas Wolterstorff who will be seen to take great issue with this way of seeing the relationship between formation and learning. This is the opposite of what Wolterstorff thinks. For Wolterstorff, if by habit we mean formation, then there is no knowing outside of habit. This does not trap humanity but instead does something more like limit our capacity for revolution.

the way of the true growth of individuals. Dewey recognises that the school is a locus of teaching and learning, which is an exchange based on maturation. The goal of this exchange is to help the individual arrive at "thinking," with free thought the ideal form of the democratic citizen.

Relatedly, given its length, Dewey's *Democracy and Education* has surprisingly little to say about teachers. It contains a great deal of reflection on learning but much less on teaching. His position is emblematic of a subtle distinction with a pronounced effect. In Dewey's vision, institutions of learning are, at best, a necessary evil. The pejorative he gives to them is that of "scholasticism." Since one may want to see the traditions of scholasticism as among the most formative in world history, it will be helpful to pinpoint exactly what it is that Dewey has in mind by making the term a slight. Dewey states that "a technical definition of education" is captured as such: "It is that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience."[14] From his chapter, "Theories of Knowledge," what emerges is a relationship between pure thought and thought in action (or practical thought). As he outlines it, the difference has to do with whether the habits that one forms in "scholastic" education hinder one's ability to receive life as a series of new experiences which demand that knowledge is put into action. Ultimately, Dewey sets up the way he wants to frame the purposes and tasks of education against this "scholastic" format, and he seems to do so because of the way that scholasticism, in his mind, imposes tradition through habit without leaving open the possibility of new knowledge and thereby action.

To understand Dewey's criticisms of "scholasticism," let us look at the related term in this book, "habit." What seems clear is that Dewey's frustrations with habit are overstated given his otherwise balanced perspective on the relationship between acquired knowledge and its openness to new experiences. Of habit he writes,

> The function of knowledge is to make one experience freely available in other experiences. The word 'freely' marks the difference between the principle of knowledge and that of habit. Habit means that an individual undergoes a modification through an experience, which modification forms a predisposition to easier and more effective action in a like direction in the future. Thus it also has the function of making one experience available in subsequent experiences. Within certain limits, it performs this function successfully. But habit, apart from knowledge, does not make allowance for change of conditions, for novelty.

[14] Dewey, *Democracy and Education,*76.

> Prevision of change is not part of its scope, for habit assumes the essential likeness of the new situation with the old.[15]

Under these terms, habit is indeed exclusionary of learning. What would it mean to learn, even a received idea, with no capacity to attach this information to the present? His concern seems to be with a severe conservatism whose primary function is to constrain one's present experiences into misapplied frameworks.

What would this mean of schools? His frameworks for education are in reference to an institutional reality that it is difficult to imagine from our context over one hundred years on. Instead, his contempt for the role of authority needs to be conditioned to his context. As he describes education in the "scholastic method," he says, "it includes making distinctions, definitions, divisions, and classifications for the mere sake of making them—with no objective in experience."[16] He goes on, "the doctrine of formal discipline in education is the natural counterpart of the scholastic method."[17] It is difficult not to see all of the "isms" at play in his account of this hard-line, conservative scholasticism. It is an oppressive system that he has in mind, where references are to the past. By contrast, when he introduces the "pragmatic" as a way of framing his theory of knowledge in *Democracy and Education*, it is a modest theory that asks only for knowledge to be open, to be allowed to have what we today might call an *emergent* quality to it.

We see the opposite of this closed, conservative, scholastic model by the three functions of the ideal school, which, he says, are: "(1) simplifying and ordering the factors of the disposition it is wished to develop; (2) purifying and idealizing the existing social customs; (3) creating a wider and better balanced environment than that by which the young would be likely, if left to themselves, to be influenced."[18] To summarise, clarifying values, clarifying virtues, and access to learning. The context of this quote is important, because the situation in which Dewey leaves us is equally anathema to modern sentiment as we may find his definitions of scholasticism. As Dewey reflects on the school as a "social function," he is concerned with the difference between the kind of society he is interested in—democracy—and, by contrast, the "savages."[19] Dewey's use of the term "savage" throughout

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[15] Ibid., 340.
[16] Ibid., 342.
[17] Ibid., 342-3.
[18] Ibid., 22.
[19] Ibid., 20. One direct example of this is on page 47. Dewey writes: "As a society becomes more enlightened, it realizes that it is responsible *not* to transmit and conserve the whole of its existing achievements, but only such as make for a better future society. The school is its chief agency for the accomplishments of this end." The opposite of "savage" for Dewey is civilised. What he is against, he says, is "a savage tribe" which has been able to "live on a desert plane" and his counterexample is the "civilized people" who bring irrigation and imports nonnative plants and animals to this landscape "that will flourish." As a twenty-first century reader, it is difficult not to read this as simply misguided, dated thinking. This is all by way of Dewey explaining why education must overcome habituation, because habit, according to Dewey, is at the forefront of the "social customs" that

Democracy and Education betrays him to his own context of one hundred years ago. Leaving the myriad concerns with this description of the "savage" aside, among the interesting challenges that he is identifying is that of the requirement of institutions of education to transform in the face of social transformation.

How do the structures and practices of schools open or limit the learning required from one generation to another? Dewey argues that democracy is not a tradition that is passed from one generation to the next. Decidedly not. Democracy is instead the outcome of a life of learning that is the capacity of all civilised people. If anything, the institutions of learning get in the way of the inevitable outcome of democracy, if we would only trust in the innate capacities of children.

Learning as social progress

If our first insight into Dewey's thought on education and democracy has to do with the assumed antithesis between schools and true learning, our second way of capturing Dewey's insights regards the way that education can prepare the democratic individual for the work of social progress. Democracy follows individual growth, and Dewey's vision of education is a vision of individual growth. "[T]he educational process," he writes, "has no end beyond itself; it is its own end...the educational process is one of continual reorganizing, reconstructing, transforming."[20] "Growth" is an important term, because it makes clear that the agency for education belongs to, and is one with, the learner. Education does not happen to a child, but it happens instead *with* a child. It is also not limited to knowledge by way of the disciplines. As he writes elsewhere, "the wholeness characteristic of philosophy is a power to learn, or to extract meaning, from even the unpleasant vicissitudes of experience and to embody what is learned in an ability to go on learning."[21] So, education is a capacious category, having both a seriousness to it and a pervasiveness. One takes away the idea that education is *naturally* a driving factor in all of life. There is almost a religious sense to its impact.

Growth happens as individuals explore the world. The content of education in Dewey's vision is boundless. The idea of a fixed curriculum would no doubt baffle him. It is the exploration itself that is the goal. He sees this as absolutely necessary to the timeframe in which he lives and works. His position is decidedly *progressive*. As he describes his society, what he sees is that all signs point to a future that has not yet been imagined and therefore cannot be contained in what is already known

need "purifying and idealizing." A more sustained engagement with Dewey on this section would highlight many, significant concerns.

[20] Ibid., 50.

[21] Ibid., 325.

about the world. That old type of learning—*scholasticism*—may have been suited to a conservative world. Consider how he describes the role of *reason*. "'Reason' is just the ability to bring the subject matter of prior experience to bear to perceive the significance of the subject matter of a new experience. A person is reasonable in the degree in which he is habitually open to seeing an event which immediately strikes his senses not as an isolated thing but in its connection with the common experience of mankind."[22] The content of knowledge is quite literally the ability to make sense of an ever-changing world. It cannot be fixed or static. This point becomes clearest when we consider that the life of learning Dewey describes is not only available to those under eighteen. This book is not about children necessarily, and Dewey does not devote time in this substantial book to making a distinction between the learning of adults and children.

Dewey does recognise that the purposes of formal schooling will align to a society's intentions for the young and so in a telling section of the chapter, called "The Democratic Conception in Education," he begins to call out the specifically democratic intentions of education, and he begins by describing democracy as a way of life, which is "more than a form of government."[23] Dewey describes democracy instead as a "mode of associated living." This mode is sustained by education but not directly. Instead, it is education properly understood that forms the conditions of this mode of associated living, and that is a kind of life of learning centred around thinking well. Education helps us to think. In the chapter, "Thinking in Education," Dewey correctly points out that one mind cannot convey a direct thought to another mind. Instead, education is the context through which teachers introduce what is foreign to their students in ways that cultivate the student grappling with those ideas for the student's own self, thinking through and wrestling with those ideas, and ultimately taking them into oneself or not. Dewey contrasts this with knowledge, which "is science" in the sense that knowledge is about what has been established, while thinking is about what is to come in the future.[24] It is about novelty and curiosity and fuels the moral imagination.

Therefore, it is not the institutions of education that welcome students into the democratic world forming them into citizens. Instead, it is education itself that does this work. Dewey's concern with "connections" between lived experience and received information leads him to the conclusion that the received knowledge seemingly happening in education in America at the turn of the twentieth century was in fact limiting the learning that was required for citizens in a democracy.

> In an analogous way, since democracy stands in principle for free interchange, for social continuity, it must develop a theory of knowledge which sees in knowledge the method by which one experience is made available in giving

[22] Ibid., 343.
[23] Ibid., 87.
[24] Ibid., 326.

> direction and meaning to another. The recent advances in physiology, biology, and the logic of the experimental sciences supply the specific intellectual instrumentalities demanded to work out and formulate such a theory. Their educational equivalent is the connection of the acquisition of knowledge in the schools with activities, or occupations, carried on in a medium of associated life.[25]

Growth is related to the human capacity to "think," which he differentiates from the capacity to "know." "Knowledge is humanistic in quality not because it is about human products in the past, but because of what it does in liberating human intelligence and human sympathy. Any subject matter which accomplishes this result is humane, and any subject matter which does not accomplish it is not even educational."[26]

Dewey's understanding of the civic purpose of education is summarised in the final pages of *Education and Democracy* when he writes, "the measure of the worth of the administration, curriculum, and methods of instruction of the school is the extent to which they are animated by a social spirit."[27] The hubris of his time was that there is only one way to be social, and that education in democracy is a format that lends humans towards their natural end as democratic citizens. It is Aristotelian only insofar as it considers the natural ends of humanity, but it obscures his underlying picture of the human person, which we will address in the second half of this chapter. This is most clear when Dewey tries to use the word "social" as though it is a perfectly neutral term.[28] This begins in the very first pages of the book, where he says that "education, in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life."[29] He is quite clear that his progressivism has "social aims."

Conclusion

The inevitability of democracy for Dewey is not institutional; it is anathema to habit formation; and it is far more than the perpetuation of a tradition; it is a way of social life. Humans achieve democracy by living into their "social aims" and education is the process by which they do so. It is an open-mindedness and an exploration of the world that does not assume the answers of the past will remain the answers of the future.

[25] Ibid., 344-5.
[26] Ibid., 230.
[27] Ibid., 358.
[28] The current usage of the term "pro-social" is akin to this.
[29] Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 2.

As we look for areas of affirmation of Dewey's work here, we can see beautifully that Dewey's picture of the child powerfully contains potential and emergence. The child is not bound to the past but instead is open to the future through what we would call education in the special sense. Indeed, the child is almost pure potential for Dewey, containing capacities that we might argue are more hidden from the adult, whose life might look more *scholastic* to Dewey than truly characterised by open learning. That the child contains capacities which we might lament are hidden from many adults is a significant part of our claim that his is a picture of the inevitability of democracy. For Dewey, the cry is clear: If only we would leave our children free to demonstrate true democracy! If only we would leave teachers in schools free to pursue social progress as only children make possible!

Dewey's critique of scholasticism, however, can't help but leave us wanting to state a few areas of concern. Human potential as we are coming to understand it is not characterised by linear progress towards an end, leaving our communities forsaken, but instead it is characterised not by its end but by its character, which takes the histories of the individual into the future. Further, that character is not linear, without setbacks, but instead is faithful in its way.

Further, to transform is to come from somewhere. Transformation is far from at odds with tradition and identity. Instead, its logic is dependent on the logic of rootedness. All children emerge from networks of families, neighbours, and friends that establish the child's earliest sense of meaning and of self. Transformation is the claim that these earliest establishments can indeed be changed. It is not the claim that they do not exist. Its logic depends on the process of the identity formation of the child. What does Dewey's vision of education make of a child's identity? For Dewey, the inevitability of democracy involves a backgrounding of identity which leaves no room for habit, learning from the past, understanding where one comes from and what one believes. He assumes these things do not matter to the unfolding of democracy. This obfuscation of identity ultimately undermines his otherwise powerful vision of education in the special sense and the humanity already present and potent in the child.

Dewey's educational philosophy amounts to a backgrounding of the identity being formed and a foregrounding of the civic capacity being cultivated into a civic imagination. One clear problem with this is that when you fully background identity, you can end up ignoring the complexities of identity in a way that subjugates minority identities in favour of majority identities. There is evidence of this in Dewey, as we saw when he prioritised "civilised" people over "savages"—clearly essentialised categories—but we would be remiss to claim that he was blind to it. Consider the following: "A progressive society counts individual variations as precious since it finds in them the means of its own growth. Hence a democratic society must, in consistency with its ideal, allow for intellectual freedom

and the play of diverse gifts and interests in its educational measures."[30] We might call this an awareness of human particularity without yet being able to state something closer to the good of diversity. Dewey certainly does not have a compelling vision of pluralism as a good, and his secularism and immanent frame are present throughout.

We can say then, what Dewey gives us is a powerful democratic self, a truly emergent and hopeful vision of the potential of the child. It is just not clear what is inevitable; to truly attend to the education of the child surely we cannot presume that all the communities that form us are irrelevant or bad, even if chastened by the possibility of transformation we do not assume that they are all perfectly good. Instead, it seems we need a commitment, perhaps an overlapping one but a commitment all the same to the encumbered nature of the child. To explore this further, we can look to where Dewey's thought was carried forward into contemporary discussion.

The Anxieties of Keeping Democracy as Education's Inevitable End

Dewey's belief in the democratic inevitability of the perfectly educated child is complexified but ultimately shared by scholars into the end of the twentieth century, and we will consider at length one such project, Amy Gutmann's *Democratic Education*. Gutmann is a political scientist who led the University of Pennsylvania for eighteen years before becoming a United States Ambassador. In her work, we can begin to see the impact of a recognition that pluralism is our context, and if education is to have the civic purpose Dewey so hopes for, then it should have a civic purpose in this context. Of course, there are many contexts to education today. One could turn to inequalities of experience or outcome, basic safety concerns in the face of mass shootings, technological innovation, digital schools, or artificial intelligence, to name but a few contexts that form the background of this dissertation. For Gutmann, pluralism was the clearest historic pressure on the inevitability of democracy, and her corpus demonstrates this area of focus and expertise.[31] In these ways, Gutmann's work corrects what we saw in Dewey as a backgrounding of identity. Even still, our concern with Gutmann will ultimately be similar; for all of her attendance to the social, religious, familial context of the child, she ultimately maintains a primary belief in the democratic potential of the child, indeed, its inevitability.

[30] Ibid., 305.
[31] See, for example, Amy Gutmann, with Dennis Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Gutmann, *Identity in Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Gutmann, with Anthony Appiah, *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); and Gutmann, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996).

Writing essentially two generations after Dewey, Amy Gutmann's *Democratic Education* exemplifies a shift in philosophy from understanding learning itself as the chief civic purpose of education to a model that understands the formative work of schools as at least equally if not more important. These generations were pivotal in our understanding of student cognitive and emotional development, inclusive of Jean Piaget through Lawrence Kohlberg, and *Brown v. Board of Education*, all of which we turn to in the second half of this chapter. As Gutmann wrote in the 1980s, the turn was solidified from Dewey's understanding of learning as itself the civic purpose of schools to what we will unpack here as an understanding that schools are fundamentally places of civic formation. An obvious play on the title of Dewey's classic volume, Gutmann's argument is that to build democratic schools, what she calls "educational authority" needs to be held by the families and communities whose children are in those schools. At the core of her argument in *Democratic Education* is that we decide together, democratically, what forms our education and its funding should take. The focus of Gutmann's work is "the democratic ideal of education" and, alternately, "a democratic theory of education."[32] These she defines as follows: "A democratic theory of education recognizes the importance of empowering citizens to make educational policy and also of constraining their choices among policies in accordance with those principles—of non-repression and nondiscrimination—that preserve the intellectual and social foundations of democratic deliberations."[33] What Gutmann takes for granted again is that democracy and education are mutually reinforcing. That one leads to the other. Like Dewey, her deepest held belief, as we will see, remains, if children can be freed from the collective bickering of their parents, democratically achieved through overlapping consensus, then a democratic future unfolds inevitably.

The polis as primary community

Gutmann's primary anxiety has to do with how a democracy holds itself together amidst meaningful multiculturalism and she nobly requires her theories to work in practice, hence her focus on education. *Democratic Education* is helpfully read next to another of Gutmann's books, *Identity and Democracy*, which is a treatise on the inevitability of identity playing out in public. What that book typifies is a sense that the polis is always the primary identity of any individual. With this, we begin to locate the concern with this heresy, because the inevitability of democracy suffers when a circular reasoning is employed stating that children have inherent democratic potential, therefore education is civically required, because it is the only way to ensure a democratic outcome. Are children really fundamentally democratic? Is that only true if you make Gutmann's first move, which is to insist that

[32] Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) 14.
[33] Ibid., 14.

the democratic community is that child's primary community? When framed in this way, we can see that Gutmann has to make fundamental claims of the nature of the child in order to ensure the democratic outcomes she seeks. It is possible to agree with Gutmann and still want to insist that her basic anthropological assumptions be made plain and contested in a pluralistic discourse. Gutmann assumes the preeminence of *Homo democraticus*. This is her exercise in belief.

How can we make this claim, given that among Gutmann's central arguments is, as a society filled with a multiplicity of local communities, schools should reflect the local conditions? *Democratic Education* takes as its context the divergence of American communities. Schools should be governed democratically, she argues, by the parents whose children are being schooled. The key term that helps her to unpack this is "educational authority" by which she is pointing to those who have the authority to make decisions about what is happening in the schools for particular children. She writes, "A democratic state is therefore committed to allocating educational authority in such a way as to provide its members with an education adequate to participating in democratic politics, to choosing among (a limited range of) good lives, and to sharing in the several sub-communities, such as families, that impart identity to the lives of its citizens."[34] See here that she holds a tension that Dewey did not. Dewey's instincts around identity formation were plagued by nineteenth-century egoism. As Gutmann has rightly diagnosed, we all come from somewhere. That somewhere is held by our families and local communities, and those adults choose how these powers of tradition will make their way into the lives of the next generation.

Gutmann intends in this work to be pushing back against thinking both too much and too little about the role of schools. On the first, she points to the theorists of political socialisation, who see schools as the primary and sometimes only major institutions to make "conscious social reproduction" a reality. On the second, however, she wants to hold space for the place of schools against those who criticise the structural inequalities that persist outside of schools and get replicated in them, without the upward social mobility that the educational idealists once promised.

Gutmann recognises that "the good of children includes not just freedom of choice, but also identification with and participation in the good of their family and the politics of their society."[35] As Gutmann paints the picture, schools are spaces where families of various backgrounds come together for their children to be educated. She writes, "People, quite naturally, value the specific cultural and political orientations of their society and family more than those of others, even if they cannot provide objective reasons for their preferences."[36] By the 1980s, when Gutmann takes up the issue,

[34] Ibid., 42.
[35] Ibid., 43.
[36] Ibid., 43.

particularly in education, schools are no longer segregated, but families nonetheless are asking about the nature of identity in education.

Gutmann makes the strong claim that the democratic interest in primary education is towards "deliberation and democratic character." This is a subheading of a chapter on the "purposes of primary education." What is good about this chapter is its developmental awareness, but it fails to take seriously the nature of pluralism as *deep* that we outlined in the Introduction. Ultimately, Gutmann claims that "governments are more justified in limiting the liberty of children than of adults for the sake of education."[37] How could this make sense? It seems that the only way this could hold with her other claims would be if what she means by this is that governments can prioritise their claim of being the child's primary identity, without suppression, because of what we are calling democratic inevitability. If *Homo democraticus* is *true*, then there is of course no concern with a democratic government's interests in the education of children. Parents somehow failed to self actualise into their proper democratic selves when it was their turn to be educated.

"Pluralism," however, is never defined by an individual but always by a group and groups. Gutmann calls these groups subcommunities, but by including the family as a kind of subcommunity, she misses the role throughout the American story of the religious, cultural, and socially determined collectivities that historically have played a profoundly developmental role in the social identities of Americans. Indeed, the American experiment was never the erasure of these forms of civil society, but the purposeful creation of space to allow them to thrive and build Americans into the thoughtful, diverse community which could sustain a nation. As Danielle Allen argues, equality was the founding American principle, and this principle assumes differences.[38] The principle itself is unnecessary (if not conceptually meaningless) if sameness is the operative category.

The child as future citizen

When we consider this framing of *control* over children, while deep in the western tradition, we can see several problems. Gutmann seems unable to move outside of categories of ownership, which leaves her misframing options when it comes to the cultivation of citizenship. Ultimately, the problem with Gutmann's *Democratic Education* is that it fails to see the world from the perspective of a child and instead only sees the child as, again, a soon-to-be adult.

[37] Ibid., 50.
[38] Danielle Allen, *Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2015).

To see this point, we need to digress deeper into one particular aspect of Gutmann's project, which is when she frames what she calls "civic virtues." These virtues, which are in fact skills not virtues, are outcomes of the project of education that are pertinent to adults. Skills are learned in childhood to be deployed in maturation. Virtues, by contrast and as we will explore further in Chapter Four, are the resulting social outcome available to all who are participating in the social practice of education. Children, adults, and those in various stages betwixt, can benefit from a life of virtue tied to education in ways that the skills Gutmann seeks are only available to some, hopefully most. The irony of this is perhaps best captured by the fact that Gutmann's book has almost nothing to say about the content of education. Education's inevitable democratic ends do not require us to think about the thoughtful cultivation holistically of the democratic child, instead a few civic skills and a process to help parents remain aligned to the process is all that is needed.

Gutmann states that civic virtues are precursors to civic reasoning.[39] Gutmann also juxtaposes civic reasoning to her definition of civic virtue, which she defines as "predispos[ing] children toward some ways of life and away from others." She uses as an example the practices of civic life, which precede civic reasoning, that would help a child "first become the kind of people who are repelled by bigotry, and then they feel the force of the reasons for their repulsion." In her logic, the force of right reason is a developmental democratic inevitability, and, again, whether one agrees with her anthropology or not, it is disingenuous to smuggle it into the argument. "Rational deliberation remains the form of freedom most suitable to a democratic society in which adults must be free to deliberate and disagree but constrained to secure the intellectual grounds for deliberation and disagreement among children."[40] The issue that Gutmann points to is that there are times when the thinking of "subcommunities" is at odds with the thinking of the state, and in these times, the state is obligated to require thinking as citizens, which is rational deliberation.[41] Here Gutmann falls into a well-known argument that the democratic purpose of education is a skill for participation. This argument has a long history and, of course, is tied to the work of Dewey that we just traced, as Gutmann writes, evoking Dewey, that "democratic education supports choice among those ways of life that are compatible with conscious social reproduction."[42] By this, she means that according to the state, the skills of democracy are more basic and necessary than anything "subcommunity" specific, at least according to the state.

[39] Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 42-3.
[40] Ibid., 45.
[41] This section builds off of the work of Jurgen Habermas, and criticisms of his work would find resonance here. We can recall on this point a more detailed version of Patrick Deneen's frustrations with theorists such as Gutmann. We will return to Deneen in Chapter Three and the Conclusion, but note here that it is when scholars are most committed to the inevitability of democracy that critics take the greatest issue. Deneen is exemplary of this.
[42] Ibid., 46.

Interestingly, Gutmann calls this skill a virtue, the "democratic virtue" which is the "ability to deliberate, and hence to participate in conscious social reproduction."[43] Gutmann has taken pains earlier in this chapter to separate what she calls the "state of families" from what she describes as the "strong communitarian view that children are creatures of the state," but she favours the state over the family as the ultimate arbiter of this democratic virtue.[44] Again, we find her to be describing a skill, not a virtue, in these conversations. When she does speak to something more technically recognizable as a virtue, she is instead talking about character. She writes, "To cultivate in children the character that feels the force of right reason is an essential purpose of education in any society."[45] What she calls "nonrepression" is, she says, "compatible with the use of education to inculcate those character traits, such as honesty, religious toleration, and mutual respect for persons, that serve as foundations for rational deliberation of differing ways of life."[46] In these quotations, she is talking about democratic virtue, as we will explore it in Chapter Four, but, again, the issue has to do with the "nonrepression" and the fact that it is characterised as such because of basic anthropological assumptions Gutmann makes below the surface of this project.[47]

Gutmann writes, "On democratic grounds, nondemocratic paternalism towards adults is much more problematic than democratic paternalism towards children. The former undermines the possibility of a genuinely democratic society while the latter does not."[48] Why would this be except in seeing children's dignity only insofar as they are *future* citizens and in seeing children's capacities as civically unimportant until such time. What a disappointing irony and misunderstanding of the capacities of a child. Virtue language should itself protect against this outcome, as there is nothing tying virtue outcomes to maturation, perhaps itself a problem but one of a different kind than that which Gutmann leaves us.

Conclusion

Gutmann's *Democratic Education* is an exercise in multicultural sensitivity amongst families but only insofar as the democratic capacities of the child are left to blossom independently of the family, in the school. The child is seen as a *future* citizen, and as such, not yet contributing to the civic life of the

[43] Ibid., 46.
[44] This is a misuse of the term virtue. What she describes is a skill. We do need a virtue and return to this in Chapter Four.
[45] Ibid., 43.
[46] Ibid., 44.
[47] There is much in this book that is good and useful. Gutmann defines early education as modelling and the building up of rational capacities. Against someone like Lawrence Kohlberg, she holds these as separate concepts; "inculcating character and teaching moral reasoning." Ibid., 51.
[48] Ibid., 59.

country. Gutmann's anxieties are warranted, and some of the work of the following chapters will reflect back on the locus of her project, but the solution she provides for them is frustratingly circular. The justification of the state in the democratic education of children is found in the inevitable democratic identity of children properly educated. What is frustrating about *Democratic Education* is that this argument is stated, not made or justified.

Gutmann's work is exhaustive and attendant to pluralism. There is much to affirm in that where Dewey championed human potential in powerful ways in the life of the child, Guttmann upholds individuality in a way that Barth would likely find acceptable. Gutmann makes space for the life of the church, albeit outside of the school. The inevitability of democracy takes a chastened form in Gutmann.

However, while Gutmann does not take formation for granted, like Dewey, she does see democracy as inevitable when children are constrained towards rational deliberation. This skill she sees as the purpose of education. Now, she calls it a virtue and we believe there is a virtue but it is not rational deliberation. What she gives us is akin to judgement. This is a concern. Barth believed in children, in their potential, and in their being called to rationality, but he neither believed that rationality was the product of natural development nor did he lead us to believe that proper human thinking was the uncontested ground of state schools. Gutmann, by contrast, has become constrained to the school. We could say that her institutional imagination is bound by this social institution. She spends little time on the child themselves and really thinks mostly about their adult form. She has allowed children to be formed by communities, but she is fearful of the directions this formation can take. Her children are too constrained, fearful, and we see a temptation towards a closed formation happening inside of schools. She seems to have in mind between schools and places like churches or families a strong public - private divide, which we will explore further in the next chapter.

Finally, Gutmann spends very little time on the content of education in this book, and that is curious. Is there really no obligation of schools to help children understand themselves, their world, and one another as part of a democratic education? Understanding is an important word here, because it does not mean that all knowledge is reducible to indisputable facts. Instead we need to think about the crucial democratic importance of interpretation. What are others saying and *why*? It's not that she has no awareness of this issue. She points to, "two [preconditions] that Dewey defended as prototypically democratic—the recognition of common interests among citizens, and the related commitment to reconsider our individual interests in light of understanding the interests of others."[49] It is true,

[49] Ibid., 76-7.

however, that in the scope of this work, Gutmann's focus is on how adults can understand themselves to have civic agency over schools, and seemingly what is taught in those schools is irrelevant.

This summarises the challenge of the inevitability of democracy for Gutmann. That inevitability is found in the capabilities of children against any concerns their parents may have. Again, it is not that we are here arguing against that capacity, but it is unclear where the source of Gutmann's democratic optimism lies.

Conclusion

The purpose of this section has been to consider how democracy and education have been seen as mutually reinforcing concepts in the American experiment over the course of the twentieth century. This century was crucial to the instantiation of broad access to education, the systemisation of schools, and an expansion of citizenship, which we will look to understand further in the following section. We looked to John Dewey and Amy Gutmann as our wayfarers, and found that both argue for what we have called the inevitability of democracy, by which we have come to see as the democratic inevitability of the child. Their belief in the child leads Dewey to argue against what he called "scholasticism" and Gutmann towards state paternalisms that further question the dignity of the child as a child.

It is important to state that our purpose here is not to categorically disagree with the idea that children have democratic capabilities naturally within them. It is instead to make it clear that when one makes that claim, one is engaged in questions of anthropology akin to a natural theology. This is where a masked ontological claim needs to be unmasked as a temptation towards heresy; there is a vision of humanity here, a hidden basic anthropological assumption. Inevitability can become a dangerous framework not least because it masks the work of formation. The reason for us to conceptually differentiate between these two terms is for precisely this reason. In Gutmann's *Democratic Education*, for example, a book about ensuring that children emerge from schools democratic enough for public life, the word formation is not used (or at least not purposefully), and yet the concept is clearly available to her and ostensibly what her argument is about. Hence our provocative title.

When Barth turns to consider the Christian Life, and its foundation in baptism, it seems clear that he is substantively against hidden, closed formations, whether these are tempted to happen in schools or churches or elsewhere. Gutmann betrayed a key insight from Dewey on just this point. While Dewey struggled to have a positive position for explicit formation of any kind, at least he was wary of sneaking strong kinds of formation into schools, even if that formation was for democracy itself.

Between Dewey and Gutmann, we see a decreasing trust in education of the special kind but not democracy itself. Why did Dewey think that education itself could do the work of democracy, where Gutmann could effectively be read as giving up on education, simply understood, in favour of the democratic education needed to form a diverse citizenry into a modern, heavily bureaucratic democratic state? The history in between these two thinkers moves from exclusive education and exclusive citizenship to inclusive, in fact mandatory, education and inclusive citizenship. It also moves from a high anthropology to a low anthropology and from a high view of the possibility of human collaboration towards concerns over power and contestation. Historically speaking, between Dewey and Gutmann stand three things: developmental psychology, mandatory schooling, and an inclusive citizenry. The transition becomes one where we can no longer take for granted the democratic inevitability of human development and instead are required to mobilise citizens towards the goods of democracy, in fact to teach them that it is good at all. Nature is seen as the unfolding of democracy with the latent capacities of children just what we all need in order to make the world more democratic. The irony is that even as we get more controlling regarding children and education, we still are asked to believe that children hold capacities that we do not as adults.

The *project* of education becomes driven by what Danielle Allen called, in her book *Talking to Strangers,* "the anxieties of citizenship." We will spend more time with that book later, but it is a helpful point in the transition from Heresy 1: The Inevitability of Democracy to Heresy 2: The Neutrality of Development, because it is a book about those "anxieties of education" since school desegregation and, as we turn from the first to second halves of this chapter, we acknowledge that the question of who is included in the term *citizen* is a question not directly taken up by either Dewey or Gutmann in these works. There is a sense that the identity of the child, their particularities, are either irrelevant or secondary to their identity as future citizen. But, of course, this inevitability is decidedly not the story of the nineteenth century, either for female Americans or for Black Americans or for Americans from other ethnic or racial minorities. The tight connection between education and democracy is meant to overcome these particularities based on a deep and abiding shared humanity. The inevitability of democracy therefore has a counterpart in a second heresy: the neutrality of human development.

Heresy 2: The Neutrality of Development

Nature as the Development of *Man*

This section will cover two well-known critiques of an abiding temptation to see the outcome of human development as something singular. Those critiques parallel the rise of the study of human development, and we will look only at those most related to the question of education in the United States.[50] Dewey set us up well for this section, because we see in him a profound interest in the shared capacities of children but an insufficient curiosity about what is signified by the families, communities, and physical markers of identity that they bring with them, even at their youngest ages. Gutmann differed substantially in this, but still found a shared maturity could drive the vision of a shared democratic education without reference to the actual children, as children, who participated in that work. Both of these ultimately are driven by a second heresy, which we call The Neutrality of Development.

The Neutrality of Development captures the basic instinct to essentialise within the human sciences. "The adult," we are tempted to believe, captures an essence towards which humanity is naturally drawn, the end of which is a peaceful democratic coexistence. If one were to believe this, it would, we state again, be a basic anthropological claim, akin to a statement of natural theology. Where this is the intent, it can make for vigorous philosophical debate. However, in the fields around education, those debates are rarely stated plainly as moral philosophy or questions of philosophical anthropology. Instead, the temptation is to hone to something like the neutrality of development without attending to the basic beliefs about a person that it entails. If education is organised as an institutional imagination, one way to frame this is that civic imagination becomes moral imagination without being clear it is doing so, or to put it another way, the moral imagination is hidden. Debates about what we *really* mean by human potential, or whether we accept the possibility of human transformation, become hidden.

To address The Neutrality of Development, we will look to two loci of critique, in reverse historical order. The first will be a brief review of the field of developmental psychology at the intersection of education and democracy, including the intervention made from feminist studies regarding a concerning trajectory. The second will be a longer review of the ways that studies of race and, in the United States, questions posed by and about the African American experience, paralleled and continued to complexify and plague anything that purported to be neutrality with regards to the question of human development.

The Development of Developmental Psychology

[50] Europe, and Germany in particular, has its own history with this question.

The field of Developmental Psychology emerged through the beginning of the twentieth century, and therefore developmental psychology, as a field, generally postdates John Dewey. It was not until the decades following the bulk of his career that the increasingly mainstream study of psychology itself asked questions about how children come to be and to know. This was the domain of the three leading psychological thinkers of the generation following Dewey: Jean Piaget, B. F. Skinner, and Carl Jung with the first playing the outsized role in the forms of democratic thought that Gutmann engages with in *Democratic Education*. Piaget's career spans the generation following Dewey, and he is best known for organising the developmental stages of human cognition, which culminate, he found, in the ability to reflect on our reflection, summarised in the idea of metacognition. This higher level, abstract reasoning, forms the basis for what we traditionally think of as higher level educational learning and practice, because it is only when metacognition is possible that one is able to move beyond what Dewey described as scholasticism and conceive of new ideas. Piaget was Swiss by birth and worked mainly in Europe. Piaget is best known for his four stages of intellectual development.[51] These stages are understood to map an individual's intellectual capacities and possibilities with regard to the world around them, and as schools standardised approaches for different ages, tools such as these stages helped to manage the expectations for children and organise them into grade levels and curricular goals. B. F. Skinner is known as the father of behaviourist approaches to developmental psychology, famously arguing against notions of free will. Skinner, an American working mainly out of Harvard, knowingly proposed visions of the good life that followed what he saw as scientific simplicity.[52] Carl Jung represents the work of psychoanalysis and diverged from Sigmund Freud on the development of children, specifically postulated a life stage theory, where children develop in a recognisable pattern of maturation: childhood, puberty, young adulthood, middle age, and old age. Following the work of Piaget, Skinner, Jung, and others, and alongside the expansion of mandatory education, psychologists mapped educational practices to a study of how children mature over time, and the field of education became almost entirely devoted to questions of how children learn on their way to adulthood. The Neutrality of Development took prominence.

Lawrence Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory

As the work of developmental psychology progressed into the 1960s, a collection of scholars were taken with the question of whether morality itself could similarly be mapped through stage progression, and then unfurled through a purposeful educational path. Lawrence Kohlberg is the first and best known scholar of this approach. A researcher and professor at the University of Chicago and

[51] Progresses from *sensorimotor* in babies, *preoperational* in toddlers, *concrete operational* in kids, and *formal operational* in teenagers.
[52] B.F. Skinner, *Walden II* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1948, 2005).

then Harvard, Kohlberg largely created the field of "moral development" by asking how *democratic* sensibilities developed in children and young adults. What he argued was that moral development progressed much in the same way as cognitive development and that the highest levels of moral reasoning could be cultivated through "just communities," which he then went on to help found in a handful of schools in the United States. He writes, "The school is no more committed to value neutrality than is the government or the law. The school, like the government, is an institution with a basic function of maintaining and transmitting some, but not all, of the consensual values of society. The most fundamental values of a society are termed moral, and the major moral values in our society are the values of justice."[53]

Kohlberg's approach was laid out most thoroughly in a trilogy called *Essays on Moral Development*, having originally conceived of it in his unpublished dissertation. His framework of moral development is threefold: preconventional, conventional, and postconventional, with six stages broken up evenly between the framework, and they approach a justice model of democratic morality. Kohlberg intentionally built upon Dewey's work and set out to build schools that could support moral development towards a Kantian framework of individualised moral judgement. Requiring a combination of formative practices and cognitive commitments, his approach was directly aimed at using schools to create paradigmatic democratic citizens. In so doing, Kohlberg is credited with reintroducing the cognitivist work of Piaget back into education.

Kohlberg's insights span a lifetime's work, but there is one volume that addresses his philosophical commitments most directly: *The Philosophy of Moral Development* (1981). Published six years before his death, this volume is the first of a planned trilogy, which includes *The Psychology of Moral Development* (1984), and *Education and Moral Development* (unpublished at his death in 1987). Kohlberg begins *The Philosophy of Moral Development* with a strong moral claim about the moral ends of education. He writes, "Following Socrates, Kant, and Piaget, the answer I and my colleagues offer says that the first virtue of a person, school, or society is justice—interpreted in a democratic way as equity or equal respect for all people."[54] Recognising that taking a deontological approach does not answer the teleological question basic to education, Kohlberg goes on to state,

> Democratic justice is an answer to the deontological question, "What are the rights of people, and what duties do these rights entail?" Given the democratic justice answer to the deontological question, we still need to answer the teleological question "What is the purpose of a person's life or of a school or society's existence?" Our answer is John Dewey's answer (and, in a sense,

[53] Lawrence Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development: The Philosophy of Moral Development* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981) 37.
[54] Ibid., xiii.

> Aristotle's): the aim of education and of civic life is intellectual, moral, and personal development.[55]

There are several strong claims here. First, Kohlberg begins with justice. Of course, there are other places one could begin, and there are other definitions of justice one could choose to employ. Second, Kohlberg makes a structural claim about the relationship between deontology and teleology. Third and finally, the claim that Dewey and Aristotle had a shared notion of the good life which is best defined as "personal development," while it clarifies Kohlberg's position, opens a tremendous number of questions.

Kohlberg's solution to what he calls "the Scylla of indoctrination and the Charybdis of 'laid-back' relativism or values clarification" is "progressive interactionism."[56] He claims that "the only way to solve the problems of relativity and indoctrination in value education is to formulate a notion of *moral development* that is justified philosophically and psychologically."[57] We see in Kohlberg, then, an awareness as to the claims that he is making and a commitment to those claims as philosophy. His point is made most clearly here: "Moral thought, then, seems to behave like all other kinds of thought. Progress through the moral levels and stages is characterized by increasing differentiation and increasing integration, and hence is the same kind of progress that scientific theory represents."[58]

Kohlberg identifies "three streams of educational ideology," what he calls "romanticism," "cultural transmission," and "progressivism."[59] He defends the third, defined as the progressivism of John Dewey.[60] It is important to see that within Kohlberg's approach is a claim as to the neutrality of nature. He writes of his approach that it "differs from the indoctrination approaches because it tries to move student's thinking in a direction that is *natural* for the student rather than moving the student in the direction of accepting the teacher's moral assumptions" (emphasis added).[61] Not unlike Gutmann, it is a claim that children are on their way towards a rational democratic end. Like her own circular reasoning, or perhaps following his, since his work predates her own, Kohlberg claims that children naturally mature to democratic adults when perfectly educated, and therefore development is a neutral phenomenon of growth in democratic moral reasoning. To restate, in making such a statement, Kohlberg is making a philosophical claim about the nature of the person, not a scientific claim about something we can only call the neutrality of development.

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[55] Ibid., xiii.
[56] Ibid., 3-4.
[57] Ibid., 6.
[58] Ibid., 26.
[59] Ibid., Chapter 3: "Development as the Aim of Education: The Dewey View," 49ff.
[60] At issue for us, besides understanding his thought well, is whether the distinction between these three is meaningful. Wolterstorff, for example, has argued that "cultural transmission" is not fairly represented and is instead set up as the straw man of Dewey's scholasticism. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Educating for Responsible Action* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).
[61] Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development*, 28.

During his lifetime and since, Kohlberg has been criticised for his approach and findings, but not disregarded nor lacking influence. Moral development theory is a robust area of contemporary research that operates alongside questions of character education, generally taking a more behaviourist approach, and virtue theory, which has had less but increasing influence.

Carol Gilligan's Feminist Intervention

Criticisms came quickly to Kohlberg's "neutral scientific" approach, and the most sweeping came from women writing as feminists. The most well-known critique of Kohlberg's theory came from Carol Gilligan in her book, *In a Different Voice*. Using a feminist critique of his stages, Gilligan argued that the vision of detached moral sentiment Kohlberg was championing was a male vision, and that taken from the perspective of women, and particularly from the perspective of mothers, what Kohlberg dismisses as an early stage of moral development—namely the attachment produced by caregiving—is not obviously a stage that is penultimate and easily passed over.

"The disparity of women's experience and the representation of human development, noted throughout the psychological literature, has generally been seen to signify a problem in women's development," Gilligan wrote, going on, "Instead, failure of women to fit existing models of human growth may point to a problem in the representation, a limitation in the conception of human condition, an omission of certain truths about life."[62] It is a critique premised on the place of identity formation in human development, and one that reminds us that children come from somewhere and are themselves on a journey that is characterised by its approach not its end. Kohlberg's response to Gilligan's critique was to try to demonstrate that scientific inquiry supported the finding that females had similar "justice" outcomes to males. It is a response that remains inside of his paradigm of thought that makes his approach self-referential. Again, being self-referential does not necessarily make an argument wrong, but it often makes that argument's rebuttals miss the mark.

Carol Gilligan concludes *In a Different Voice* with an exploration of "Visions of Maturity."[63] As we have seen with other thinkers, Gilligan wrestles with the legacy of basing moral and psychological thought on the ideal of the independent rational man. She writes,

> The morality of rights is predicated on equality and centered on the understanding of fairness, while the ethic of responsibility relies on the concept

[62] Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1982) 2.
[63] Ibid., this is the title of chapter 6.

> of equity, the recognition of differences in need. While the ethic of rights is a manifestation of equal respect, balancing the claims of other and self, the ethic of responsibility rests on an understanding that gives rise to compassion and care. Thus the counterpoint of identity and intimacy that marks the time between childhood and adulthood is articulated through two different moralities whose complementarity is the discovery of maturity.[64]

She goes on, "by changing the lens of developmental observation from individual achievement to relationships of care, women depict ongoing attachment as the path that leads to maturity. Thus the parameters of development shift toward marking the process of affiliative relationship."[65] Again, here we see the logic of formation take explicit shape as the social or civic purpose of human development. Further, Gilligan sees clearly that this again takes us to questions of the nature of knowledge itself. In a passage that emerges and recedes in the text without further explication, Gilligan writes, "The concept of identity expands to include the experience of interconnection. The moral domain is similarly enlarged by the inclusion of responsibility and care in relationships. And the underlying epistemology correspondingly shifts from the Greek ideal of knowledge as a correspondence between mind and form to the Biblical conception of knowing as a process of human relationship."[66] She calls this idea, tellingly, "A maturity realized through interdependence."[67] We will return to this idea in Chapter Four.

Gilligan was curious where the instincts for care and connection could be found in a moral map such as Kohlberg's that takes the development of children seriously, and her work set off a robust contemporary literature that has been termed "care ethics." One of the preeminent theorists at the intersection of care and education is Nel Noddings, whose approach in books such as *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* and *Educating Moral People* begins to take more seriously the concerns of our critique. Consider Nodding's work an extension of the moral character development work but without the rationalist essentialism that we find in Kohlberg. Noddings' students are deeply embedded relationally but still fundamentally developing towards moral ends. She writes, "Because of its beginning in natural attributes and events, caring may properly be identified with pragmatic naturalism. John Dewey started his ethical thought with the observation that human beings are social animals and desire to communicate. The ethic of care begins with the universal desire to be cared for—to be in positive relation with at least some other beings."[68] A further engagement with care ethics, and Noddings' work in particular, will return in Chapter Four, but for

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[64] Ibid., 164-5.
[65] Ibid., 170.
[66] Ibid., 173.
[67] Ibid., 172.
[68] Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education and Educating Moral People* (New York: Teachers College Press) 21.

our interests in this chapter, we can see simply that an interest in morality and human development is not obliged to a neutrality of the kind that we are finding in Kohlberg. Theorists beyond this author have identified this issue and changed course towards theories that can make better sense of the place of identity formation in the education of children.

When we think about the impact of Kohlberg's work on schools, his "just communities" movement, our concerns would lend themselves to a critique of these schools to the degree that they pass by moral stages that may be perfectly adequate to the moral task of democratic life together, and possibly better attuned to it. Considered from another angle, the critique takes a similar form. Nicholas Wolterstorff does this compellingly. His concern is different than Gilligan and Noddings. Instead of asking whether women's identities are sufficiently represented in Kohlberg's understanding of development, Wolterstorff speaks as a Christian and asks why submission to a moral authority is considered a preliminary stage in Kohlberg's moral development. In Christian ethics, Wolterstorff argues, the strand of thought called "divine command theory" is not obviously developmentally provisional to a more detached and secularised vision of the moral life. He makes this critique through a long engagement with Kohlberg's work in his 1980 book, *Educating for Responsible Action*, by arguing that the structure of Kohlberg's theory is to privilege moral form over moral content and that Kohlberg is not justified in doing so. He concludes, "thus one finds in Kohlberg a classic optimistic view of humanity and a classic liberal trust in the powers of education."[69] This is an apt summary of our concern with Kohlberg.

Conclusion

The question of particularity in human development is not to be denied by our critiques, whether from the perspective of women or those within religious or moral communities that understand the place of identity formation to be more central to the moral development of humanity than Kohlberg's neutrality allows. To take these critiques one step further, it may be that moral pluralism is itself necessary to the democratic way of life and, by imagining a linear moral development upon which all children should conform, Kohlberg was doing something quite dangerous to the experiment of democracy. Certainly Barth's assumptions of pluralism, which drive his own project, point in this direction.

Further, it is the explicit concern of Herdt's *Forming Humanity* that neutral visions of human development miss tremendous nuance in the actual living of lives. Remember that for Barth, the

[69] Wolterstorff, *Educating for Responsible Action*, 89-90.

individual out of connection with God is an "evasion," not a well-ordered rational thinker pursuing their own development. This is in fact the need for transformation as a basic anthropological category. Kohlberg's strict "pragmatic naturalism," as Noddings helpfully owns, leaves the question of transformation at a conceptual disadvantage. Should education be a project of developmental maturation towards a moral maturity that is driven by form alone, not content, then perhaps human transformation is simply irrelevant to questions of education. That seems an unsatisfying conclusion. Instead, it seems more appropriate to question whether there is a *project* of education sufficiently tracking the Truth of The Person such that the end is graspable. Here, we need to wonder why these authors have such a difficult time considering the possibility of moral backsliding, or of any conception of sin. Why not acknowledge that adults don't always get morally better but sometimes lose their way?

The neutrality of development in the mode of developmental psychologists takes the tenor of replacing one set of essentialisms with another. The child is determined, not full of surprise, wonder, setbacks, and so on. It would be interesting to consider an ethics of care that was comfortable foregoing its pragmatic naturalism in favour of an overlapping consensus on the character of the democratic life, perhaps defined by a set of virtues, as a way to overcome these concerns.

Kohlberg can, as framed here, be seen as the end of an intellectual journey where the communities forming the individual fall somewhere with the social control of schools and very much as the backdrop of shared foregrounded work. We saw Gutmann's response to this conceptually which we still found lacking. To grasp what is at stake in the neutrality of development as a heresy of nature, we will turn now to an older critique that takes us back to Du Bois and the question of race.

Human Development Ironically Disembodied

It is helpful to remember that America's schools have not been universally attended nor for most of western human history was education understood to mean that all people were engaged in something like neutral human development. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as increasingly young white boys were finding themselves in school towards increasing years, there were active debates regarding the necessity of education for girls and the inclusion of ethnic and racial minorities in visions of education. Further, as States began to institute public education in the nineteenth century, they had to ask themselves who was to have access to these schools and whether distinctions were made on gender, race, ethnicity, or religion, schools in the United States have been places where independent logics around identity have held sway over the idea of common education. Take as an example the ruling by the Supreme Court in 1925 regarding *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*. The state of

Oregon had attempted to pass a law that required all children to attend public school. Against this, private schools claimed that Oregon was limiting the rights of parents to choose which schools their children attended, including schools run by religious orders. The state also was the cause of school segregation, as states were allowed to run parallel educational systems for white students and black students.

No one understood more concretely the heresy of the neutrality of development than those for whom that "development" was withheld on the grounds of their subhumanity. It is when there are actual embodied people in the frame, for whom human development is meant to signify something compelling, desirable, and good that its limitations can be most easily seen. In this section, we look at both the structure of school segregation and the narratives predating those decisions to consider further the place of identity formation in the education of children and the heresies of nature that tempt us away from a fully compelling vision.

Humans in schools, separate but equal

When the place of identity formation in the education of children is not concretely shaping the schools in which they learn and grow, decisions have historically been made that err towards what we are calling the heresy of the neutrality of development and the result is a set of decisions that ironically disembody the child. Take, for example, debates surrounding a precedent in the United States in the beginning of the twentieth century which stated that students could be segregated into different schools according to their skin colour. While attending at face value to an essentialised understanding of human identity, what school segregation failed to appreciate was that "blackness" and "whiteness" were only simple demarcations in so far as other markers of identity, such as class or ancestry, were subjugated to this identifier. Worse still, the question of human development in a comprehensive sense was simplified to the economic outcomes that different races needed to pursue.

It was not until 1954 that "separate but equal" schooling was struck down by the United States Supreme court in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (Kansas). What is important for us to explore regarding this ruling is how education and formation were understood through this transition and the role that this moment in American history continues to play in the civic imagination of Americans when we consider how identity and education intertwine. In this exploration, we will use the work of Danielle Allen in *Talking to Strangers: Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education*. This book achieves a number of aims but, among them, Allen introduces the concept of "political friendship" as a way to describe the unintended formation that happens when students are in schools together as peers. The civic imagination of who is welcomed as a citizen is dramatically

expanded when two individuals learn together, and this learning together was not possible in a system where children were separated simply by the colour of their skin. Parents in these instances did not have a choice as to how their children were educated, again the state was in control of children's educational opportunities. It was individual families who made the choice to send their children to desegregated schools. As Allen allows the story to unfold, the question of formation for the sake of education is both compelling and harrowing.

The compelling reasons to integrate schools were several, but at the core was a scepticism of the idea that separate schools could ever truly be equal schools with regards to access to the content of education. By the 1950s, schools for black students simply were not meeting the intellectual thresholds that schools for white students were, and this had social and economic implications for black Americans. How does one quantify a different or deficient experience in the humanities? By what metric exactly can one specify the science courses and their outcomes of this school versus that?

The question of form is the most obvious area of discrepancy when we look at schools that are segregated by skin colour. It is important to acknowledge that families in the United States are now ensured the right to a choice of schools based on nondiscriminatory factors. However, what schools cannot do, according to the language of *Brown v. Board*, is to purposely exclude students based solely upon skin colour. While we looked at this ruling in the Introduction, we need to consider it again in detail:

> Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society. It is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities, even service in the armed forces. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms.
>
> We come then to the question presented: does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race, even though the physical facilities and other

> "tangible" factors may be equal, deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does.[70]

As Allen outlines the matter, what is at issue is the way that one's fellow citizens, one's neighbours, are formed in the civic imagination. This is mostly about proximity within schools, it is about learning together, but we can go one step further and argue that this is about whether students learn to share a dialogue with one another or whether they learn that dialogue is to be limited to those who agree with them in attitude and experience.

Segregation in schools not only impacted the civic imaginations of black students. That would happen if schools were fundamentally political spaces. More than this, segregation had the possibility of impacting public identity, by which is meant the very ability to show up as a public actor, whether seen as a political actor or not. Consider an example. Children show up as public figures regularly. They are not yet citizens, and yet they are received as neighbours. The majority statement in *Brown v. Board* acknowledges that "to adjust normally to his environment," a child requires that the colour of her skin is not the most fundamental way in which the child is received in public. In this case, what the school would be dictating is that skin colour is the most fundamental aspect of that individual child's identity. The child could not inhabit a more fundamental identity than that skin colour. But, what if the child received themselves as fundamentally Christian? Or fundamentally Nigerian? Or fundamentally an expert in robotics? In any of these cases, the child's identity could not be actualised as their primary identity in public, because that pride of place had been dictated to the child by the colour of their skin. What happened with schools and "separate but equal" essentially ensured that for the rest of their lives, these black children would primarily and essentially see themselves publicly through their skin colour. It solidified in the American psyche that skin colour, and specifically black skin, was the essential identity of all children who were segregated based upon this fact, one of potentially so many other identity markers for that emerging American.

In *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903), W.E.B. Du Bois lays out an alternative harmonious vision of newly freed—previously enslaved—children in the southern United States finding their way into schools that are set up and taught by travellers from the northern states, who arrived with books and slide rules in hand to give literacy and basic mathematical skills to children who would now have some control over their economic destinies. Du Bois, himself a black man who was born free in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, joined these educators and found himself in rural Tennessee seeking to make a difference in the lives of these children. He quickly transitioned to what we now consider an "HBCU," the Historically Black Colleges and Universities that sprung up to create opportunities at

[70] Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954): <https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/347/483/> (accessed 1/26/22).

the high school and introductory college level for talented students emerging from these country schools and with limited entrances to the universities of the day. For Du Bois, the assumption that education existed for economic betterment and the possibility of upward mobility was clear. By the 1940s and 1950s, this assumption was less clear. The purpose of segregated schools was more precisely to keep black Americans from participating fully in the economic potentiality of a thriving economic whole. Education became misused to *close* the possibilities for advancement out of the professions that were already specified and limited to black Americans. Ultimately, it was this closing of the American civic imagination to any possibility outside of that already predetermined for the African American population that rightfully drove *Brown v. Board*. The ends of education would no longer lead to inequality in a country where education was touted as a force for social cohesion and economic mobility.[71]

Ultimately, school segregation was not problematic because it took seriously the role of identity in the education of children. It was problematic because it essentialised African American children to the colour of their skin and allowed prejudices based on essentialisations and biases to form the civic imaginations of both black and white students. This was possible to justify, before *Brown v. Board*, based on an idea of the neutrality of development that was tempted to separate the educational project of children from their embodied experience of the practice of education in schools. A location—the school—which is meant to foster the meaningful development of children failed to see the actual development of children in all of their complexity and intersectionality, reducing children to units of future economic momentum, and left children ironically disembodied at the same time it was ostensibly structured around their identities.

Neutral relative to what?

> The guiding of thought and the deft coordination of deed is at once the path of honor and humanity.[72]

To conclude this section on the Neutrality of Development, and to understand the path in the United States towards a period of school segregation that diminished students to one aspect of their identity, we will end this chapter with the older debate, which W.E.B. Du Bois, with whom the dissertation began, represents. The end of legal enslavement in the middle of the nineteenth century saw a period

[71] The ultimate insult of segregated schools was twofold: the ends of education were diminished to the possibility of economic empowerment, and, that economic empowerment was a constrained shadow of that seen, on the whole, by these African Americans' white neighbours. Arguments about economic reparations are outside of the scope of this chapter.
[72] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903; Chicago: Dover Publications, 1994) 57.

of history known as "reconstruction."[73] The idea, from reconstruction through the segregation and then desegregation of schools, that schooling for black Americans was fundamentally about access to economic ends, while ultimately a distraction, had merit as an entry point to the education of formerly enslaved men. Du Bois narrativized the tensions at the intersection of economic progress and other narrative values of the education of formerly enslaved Americans. Economic progress was never the only end in discussion, and these other ends form our final critique of the Neutrality of Development.

Du Bois's vision of education was personal not because he had experienced the transition from slavery to freedom—Du Bois was born a free man—but because he taught in a school in rural Tennessee upon graduation from college and before he entered Harvard for graduate school. In his words:

> This was the gift of New England to the freed Negro: not alms, but a friend; not cash, but character. It was not and is not money these seething millions want, but love and sympathy, the pulse of hearts beating with red blood;—a gift which today only their own kindred and race can bring to the masses, but which once saintly souls brought to their favored children in the crusade of the sixties, that finest thing in American history, and one of the few things untainted by sordid greed and cheap vainglory. The teachers in these institutions came not to keep the Negroes in their place, but to raise them out of the defilement of the places where slavery had wallowed them. The colleges they founded were social settlements; homes where the best of the sons of the freedmen came in close and sympathetic touch with the best traditions of New England. They lived and ate together, studied and worked, hoped and harkened in the dawning light. In actual formal content their curriculum was doubtless old-fashioned, but in educational power it was supreme, for it was the act of living souls.[74]

It is difficult to fully capture the power of this chapter, but for our purposes, it must do to acknowledge the recognition of the school as a social settlement as profound. We need to keep in mind that what he is describing were the early days of Atlanta, Fisk, Howard, Wilberforce and Lincoln, Biddle, Shaw, etc. His recognition is that these early days of what we now call the HBCU's is that they were effectively akin to the boarding schools of today. They were small residential communities whose outcome was the equivalent of a high school education, and he differentiates them—again simply in their earliest form—from Harvard, Yale, Oberlin, etc. His description focuses on the interactions of teachers and students and the shared life of the community. He degrades the content of the learning as "old-fashioned" and he is not fundamentally concerned with the structures

[73] School segregation based on race emerged from the history of the enslavement of African Americans in the United States that this dissertation will not restate.
[74] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 62.

of the school. He is certainly uninterested in the ways the school prepares individuals for what Hannah Arendt would later call *labour*—necessary economic output but ultimately not the stuff of humane contributions to society (what Arendt called instead *work*, which we will return to later in the dissertation).

Du Bois describes the tensions between knowledge, culture, generational oppression, the physical structures, and socioeconomic impediments to the individual schools themselves, and he understood the economic implications of the transitions taking place in the United States. Du Bois wrote, "The tendency is here, born of slavery and quickened to renewed life by the crazy imperialism of the day, to regard human beings as among the material resources of a land to be trained with an eye single to future dividends." But, he continues, "Race-prejudices, which keep brown and black men in their 'places,' we are coming to regard as useful allies with such a theory, no matter how much they may dull the ambition and sicken the hearts of struggling human beings. And above all, we daily hear that an education that encourages aspiration, that sets the loftiest of ideals and seeks as an end culture and character rather than breadwinning, is the privilege of white men and the danger and delusion of black."[75] *Culture* and *character* are not terms that lend themselves to neutral portrayal the way that economic viability can.

To return to our opening contention, that the place of identity formation in the education of children invites us to consider education as a practice, not as a project, is made forcefully by Du Bois, who invites us to see as clearly as we are able the power of education as a social practice. This power cannot be imagined when we think only of education as a transfer of information. It begins to make sense when we believe that education is the work of wisdom and the moral imagination. The emergent quality of education, its inherently dialogical nature, the open-ended nature of its impact, is lost when formation stifles education, when the institutional takes too final a form. Du Bois describes this as the role of education to "develop men" and writes:

> Above our modern socialism, and out of the worship of the mass, must persist and evolve that higher individualism which the centers of culture protect; there must come a loftier respect for the sovereign human soul that seeks to know itself and the world about it; that seeks a freedom for expansion and self-development; that will love and hate and labor in its own way, untrammeled alike by old and new. Such souls aforetime have inspired and guided worlds, and if we be not wholly bewitched by our Rhine-gold, they shall again. Herein the longing of black men must have respect: the rich and bitter depth of their experience, the unknown treasures of their inner life, the strange renderings of nature they see,

[75] Ibid., 58–9.

> may give the world new points of view and make their loving, living, and doing precious to all human hearts. And to themselves in these the days that try their souls, the chance to sour in the dim blue air above the smoke is to their finer spirits boon and guerdon for what they lose on earth by being black.[76]

For newly free black men and women in the American south in the latter half of the nineteenth century, what was at stake in the forms of education was painfully, viscerally apparent. To be seen, to have this once hidden human knowing unveiled and honoured, by white and black neighbours in these places of education—this was an image of education that recognized dramatically what is at stake. The way Du Bois tells it, those educators who came from New England brought what they knew, open and ready for the knowing and living that was only possible from the freed men themselves.

Whether by being reduced to one aspect of their identity or by being reduced to an economic potentiality, what the history of education following the abolition of slavery in the United States demonstrates is a essentialising of the very humans that were meant to benefit from the human development of our schools. As Du Bois states poignantly, it is when character and culture are removed from education that we are left with the imaginative space that ultimately precipitated into school segregation and a legacy of "separate but equal" that continues to stunt our institutional imaginations as regards our schools.

As a closing thought on this topic, consider "The American Dream," a well studied ideal, which in its simplest form represents the possibility of upward social mobility amidst a context defined by freedom from constraint.[77] When slavery in the United States was pronounced illegal, the American Dream was extended to formerly enslaved Americans and the question was raised as to how to make mobility structurally and practically possible. While grounded in economic potential, there were conversations early in reconstruction about establishing enough civic knowledge in order for black men to vote, thereby enfranchising these men in practices of democracy. It was latent in the public institutional imagination that there is something more than civic knowledge needed to join one's neighbours in a shared civic life. Think, for example, of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. What institution helped to ensure the broadly humanistic vision that King spoke so forcefully through his public addresses? Or think of the poets of the Harlem Renaissance a generation earlier. These thought leaders provided an imaginative space within which a shared civic identity—properly held by white and black Americans—could come into view. That shared civic identity could not exist without the participation of both sides of the segregated experience. It was truly the coming together of different life experiences through different racial communities that was at the heart of King's "I Have a Dream"

[76] Ibid., 66–7.
[77] The notion of the "American Dream" is well studied and a critical engagement with this ideal is not warranted for our discussion.

speech where he writes so compellingly that he desires a future where individuals are judged "not by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character."[78] This idea—the content of their character—is an interesting one because character is formed through communities, and it is the *character* of an American citizenship that is so obviously missing when education is reduced to "neutral" economic factors or even to technical knowledge of the working of government.

Conclusion

This title of the last section was, Neutral relative to what? It is an important question to look at explicitly—neutral to ourselves, one another, God? The story we just told of the essentialisations of race in education based on assumptions about economics begs for a different way of conceiving of vocation. The irony of work becoming a great leveller of human development is that for Barth, as an exemplar of this in a theologian, vocation is precisely what is *not* neutral, it is the unique calling of God into human potential for the sake of individual and collective thriving. Remember that vocation was an important component as we considered Barth's understanding of children. To restate, the child is called, at God's pleasure and timing, and this is an invitation always open and available, at any age. On this point Herdt is once again helpful. In the conclusion of *Forming Humanity*, she takes issue with Du Bois to the degree that he "valorises" race, that is, essentialises race, over against individuality. (It is difficult to read the Souls of Black Folks with the lens of education and substantiate this as a universal claim for this work, but that argument is not critical to further here.) Herdt errs with Appiah and Luke Bretherton, she claims, towards honouring particularity "while refusing to allow particular communities to become ends in themselves."[79] We said in Chapter Two that essentialisms can operate at the level of the individual or at the level of the community, and it is holding a dialogic tension between the two that allows neither to dehumanise. We see that instinct of great necessity here. There could be a temptation by writers of any race to see identity as a construct that limits vocation based on structural injustice. Barth's response to this, as told by Herdt, is "listening for the Word of God on the margins."[80] When we do so, we begin very quickly to look for a dialogic understanding of humanity that is not, from any viewpoint, "neutral."

The temptation towards heresy in the Neutrality of Development is a temptation to see the complexities of identity as either irrelevant or subultimate to the processes of human development.

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[78] Martin Luther King, "I Have a Dream," March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, 28 August 1963, Lincoln Memorial, Washington D.C.
[79] Jennifer A. Herdt, *Forming Humanity: Redeeming the German Bildung Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 238. For a complementary account, see Luke Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness: Christian Witness Amid Moral Diversity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2006).
[80] Ibid., 246.

While, on one hand, this makes good logical sense insofar as science reminds us of the vast similarities genetically and otherwise of humanity, claims that do not acknowledge or prioritise particularity in the development of children become basic ontological claims, relevant to the field of philosophy first and foremost. Ultimately, the Neutrality of Development is an image of human maturation with an end in mind that fails to map onto anything but the *ubermensch*, unhelpful at best and dangerous at worst. When development is attached to the idea of *moral* development, as Kohlberg pursued, we must ask ourselves: is morality more inevitable than democracy? We fail to take development on its own terms when we make it essentialist and not deeply complex. By our account of the possibility of human transformation, even feminist theorists, long the champions of human particularity, fail insofar as they do not accept that particularity includes not only great surprise and wonder but also sadness, brokenness, and loss. When the pluralism of human ends and the complexity of the path get left to the side, we become blind to the actual challenges children face as they live into our project driven educational systems.

Conclusion

This chapter has questioned what we provocatively called the heresies of nature in order to engage with theories that fall prey to the inevitability of democracy and the neutrality of development without careful attention to the reality that both of these require basic anthropological commitments almost always left unstated. They require commitments to understandings of the child, that child's contexts, and the structures that we put in place to promote the child's development into a mature adult. They also require that we accept the logic of maturation as driven towards ends that can be known and named. We took issue with many of these theoretical moves and with the logic they instil in schools that education is a project towards a fixed end—the mature adult—instead of a practice defined by its character, within which all can participate even now.

When engaging with John Dewey's *Democracy and Education*, we encountered a genuine interest in the emergence of the child. We found that what children are for us is assurance that something new and good is possible in the world. However, whether through naïveté or idealism, Dewey's dismissal of the formative civic role of schools can be seen in the ways that his philosophy of education fails to meaningfully adjust the structures of American schooling in the years of segregation. The cognitive focus on citizenship as a mindset and a capacity meant that separate but equal made civic sense. As Du Bois reflected on with present experience and Allen reflected on from the distance of most of a century, this backgrounding of formation and foregrounding of education had a disproportionately negative impact on non-white and female students.

The shift from understanding schools as incidental to conscious social reproduction to schools as the central institutional player in conscious social reproduction over the course of one hundred years, during which education became universally mandated and suffrage became inclusive, reveals a profound transformation in our civic imaginations. For Dewey, insofar as schools are formative institutions, they get in the way of education, as schools are backward-facing bearers of tradition, and education is the democratic progress away from tradition. By contrast, for Gutmann, what we saw is that schools are the only hope for democratic conscious social reproduction. They are the venues through which the state ensures that democratic skills and knowledge are held by all citizens. Schools can no longer take for granted that the teaching of liberal thought will itself form children into heirs of the liberal democratic tradition. Instead, it is only through a new democratic scholasticism that the tradition of democracy can itself be passed on. The belief in education as the natural unfolding of the child has been lost and the teleological logics of schooling make it a project.

Operating in a parallel thought process to the inevitability of democracy, we saw the unfolding of a vision of the neutrality of development. This unfolding followed the emergence of developmental psychology as a field of inquiry beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century and into the middle of the twentieth century. The villain of that story for us was Lawrence Kohlberg, who took the logic of Piaget's developmental stages and updated them to include moral development. Feminists acted quickly, following Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*, to question the moral story of Kohlberg's findings and complexify the picture of the morally mature man whom Kohlberg's theory posited. Gilligan spoke for a varied network of theorists who questioned Kohlberg's lack of theoretical responsiveness to the place of particularity in the concept of moral maturity. Added to this critique was the older logic asking about the nature of race, and in particular African ancestry in the United States, relative to the outworking of educational practices. From these two narratives, we critiqued the idea that development is blind to human identity while also making clear that reductionisms to singular identifiers also tend towards dehumanisations.

Where in these visions, we asked, is the emergent child, already loved by God, already called into a life of vocation? For Dewey, the concept of secular progress stifled a true possibility of human potential. We see this again in Gutmann and what turns out to be a closed project of identity in schools. For Kohlberg, not only was his civic imagination problematic for feminist thinkers and scholars of race, but more basically he could leave no space for human transformation. Children simply unfold in stages or are hopelessly stuck in their moral ineptitude. The wonder and newness of children, and the promise that they are not neutral, blank slates for the projects of adults, are missing from the thinkers in this chapter, or at least underdeveloped. On the other hand, Christian baptism reminds us that the communities around children are not immaterial; children are not neutral. This is true not only of the church, but also of our families and friends. Gutmann tried to make sense of these

various formations, but struggled to give them enough dignity in a vision of the inevitability of the emerging democratic self.

One of the implications of the rise of schooling in this country is that where education was in the foreground and formation in the background of debates regarding learning in the nineteenth century and through the beginning of the twentieth, today, we need to be and are foregrounding conversations about formation and allowing debates around education to fall into the background. So, what is education as preparation for action? As Gutmann synthesises, Dewey identified two preconditions for this: "the recognition of common interests among citizens, and the related commitment to reconsider our individual interests in light of understanding the interests of others."[81] In light of Chapter Two, we need to consider these preconditions anew. The recognition of common interests among citizens takes an expanded meaning in light of universal schooling and inclusive suffrage. But, it is Dewey's second charge that requires renewed capacities in the twenty-first century, because before the fallibility that he calls for comes that work of *understanding* the interests of others. For this understanding, we need to move beyond the conceptual frameworks that we have explored thus far and engage with a new set of questions under the heading we will call the heresies of nurture.

[81] Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 76-77.

Chapter Three: The Heresies of Nurture

Introduction

In her book *Good Neighbors: The Democracy of Everyday Life in America*, political philosopher Nancy Rosenblum tells us that "invocations of good neighbor can be facile, sentimental, self-flattery, or wishful thinking. But when it is sober and reflective we recognize good neighbor as a significant element of personal and collective identity, and as the deep substrate of democracy in America."[1] When our shared sense of political will and destiny run thin, she reminds us, the most basic instincts of living with those unlike us in peace form a "deep substrate" upon which to build and rebuild. She gives this shared civic imagination the name *good neighbour*, and she says, "the democracy of everyday life is not only a regulative ideal, but also…a set of implicit expectations, dispositions, and practices that actually shape our interactions as neighbors and give them meaning."[2]

As we begin this next chapter, again provocatively titled The Heresies of Nurture, let us start with a consideration of the term neighbour and what it stands for with regards to the two temptations towards heresy that we will address shortly: All Diversity is the Same and The Public - Private Divide. As Rosenblum deploys it, "neighbour" is a wonderfully neutral term that is an appropriate description of the public self engaged in civil society.[3] This self is not simply private (as in the family), nor immediately political (as a citizen), nor constrained imaginatively to the market (as a worker or demonstrator). As neighbours, pluralism becomes a shared embodied reality, and civil society names the space where we come together in various permutations. We engage in social practices, and we forge a common ethos. This chapter will not engage extensively in the literature around civil society, but it will again begin to signal what kind of ethos—of virtue—can be forged in schools when we imagine schools as civic spaces.

There is a kinship between Rosenblum's notion of the neighbour and Danielle Allen's notion of political friendship. In both instances, there is a discomfort with the formality of the idea that schools fundamentally form citizens. Instead, both authors are searching for a notion that leaves more availability for the public relevance of pieces of identity more often held as private. For Rosenblum, that neighbourliness includes a strong instinct to "live and let live" does not entail that neighbours are unknown to one another in their particularity. Indeed, it is in their particularity that her notions of

[1] Nancy Rosenblum, *Good Neighbors* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016) 8.
[2] Ibid., 13.
[3] Rosenblum does no theological work on the concept of neighbour, but it has a robust Christian usage of which she is not unaware.

neighbour make the most sense. For Allen, political friendship is a substratum upon which future citizenship can be built. Without the ability to see those unlike oneself as warranting dialogue and engagement, citizenship in the future will be impossible. These kinships have immediate public salience in the present state of the United States, with its political polarisation and two-party system that by definition divides the country into "us" and "them."

To understand the relationship between these notions and the common idea of nurture, another developmental psychologist can prove helpful. Urie Bronfenbrenner's professional work spans from the middle of the twentieth century into the early years of the twenty-first. Bronfenbrenner's own story is one of trying to make sense of the communities that shaped him. Born in Russia, Bronfenbrenner emigrated to the United States as a young child. The formative years of his life set him up to ask about the various overlapping communities that gave shape to his identity. His notion of a "bioecological theory of human development" situated the person inside of rings of formative communities and institutions, and his work was specifically oriented towards the lived experience of children, including children raised in what would be considered suboptimal conditions. He is the founder of a well-known and well-regarded federal educational initiative called "Head Start" which supports children from birth to age five. Bronfenbrenner's work named the lived experience of the impact of rings of formative institutions on the development of the child, like the rings of a tree, with those closest in more directly impacting the health and vibrancy of the child, and those further out having less direct impact. As Bronfenbrenner argued, when the family, in the most proximal zone of development for the child, was unable to support the healthy development of the child, the child would be unable to thrive and other social services would need to be brought in for support.

When we consider these three scholars taken together, we can see that nurture names the lived reality of the impacts that others have on the development of the self. This is precisely relevant to our overarching question about the place of identity formation in the education of children. In the last chapter, we looked at ways that scholars struggled to make sense of the particularities of children in the understanding of their growth as citizens. In this chapter, we see the ways that this was corrected for through theories that embed the child within social networks. As with the theorists in the last chapter, there is a tremendous amount to learn from this discourse, however there are also temptations towards misunderstanding and misdiagnosis of solutions when nurture prioritises closed formation over emergence. Education in the special sense is eclipsed when emergence disappears from view.

The chapter proceeds first with a consideration of the relationship between pluralism and privacy. The heresies of nurture tempt us towards seeing the child as simply or reducibly the identity formation of that child relative to their surroundings. The heresies of nurture can also tempt us towards an overly realised divide between the public and private. Before venturing further into the chapter, we will

spend some time demonstrating how these two are related and the challenges this causes.

We then will consider Heresy 1: All Diversity is the Same. In this section, we will map the increasing place of "diversity" in conversations about education and seek to clarify further the distinctions between diversity and pluralism that were begun in the introduction. We will also put pressure on the conceptual default that all diversity is the same. The point to be made is less that all diversity is *not* the same and more that it is a strange premise to treat all diversity *as* the same. When all distinction and individuality is addressed under the banner of "diversity" something about human particularity is lost.

Finally, this chapter will address Heresy 2: The Public - Private Divide. The public/private distinction is an extensive literature, and this section does not attempt to settle a fundamental political debate. However, when seen within the context of this chapter, it becomes clear that children do not fit neatly into this distinction and further the question of the place of identity formation in the education of children makes the idea of a divide between the two all but nonsensical. It is, we will argue, a heresy of nurture to persist with anything akin to a conception of public and private as a divide when trying to make sense of the relationships between various parties in the education of children, including the idea that family interests are private and schools are public institutions or that moral imaginations are simply formed in private. As we will see in Chapter Four, this needs to be complexified if we are going to honour children, those who care for them, and learn from our basic anthropological assumptions.

Pluralism and Privacy

Among the issues that will be raised in this chapter is that of when identity formation begins to sound like a mechanism, which all children undergo, whereby again we find that education sounds like a project through which identity is forged. In such a scenario "diversity" becomes the catalogue of identifiers through which an identity is specified, and the further problem is that this is seen to happen in the *public* sphere of schools. But identities, while publicly seen, are not simply publicly forged. Indeed, it is difficult to think of anything more private than one's sense of self. So, identities find themselves in the public discourse for at least all of the reasons that were rehearsed in the previous chapter, and, at the same time, identity formation is among those factors that belongs to the person herself. As James Baldwin mused in his 1963 essay "A Talk to Teachers": "The purpose of education, really, is to create in a person the ability to look at the world for himself, to make his own decisions, to say to himself this is black or this is white, to decide for himself whether there is a God in heaven or not. To ask questions of the universe, and then learn to live with those questions, is the way he

achieves his own identity."[4] The best way to make sense of these tensions is to accept that while identity is forged in *private*, it is not the beneficiary of *privacy*.

We began to make a claim in the last chapter that the study of education in the United States is a history of the foregrounding of identity over time, of taking the pluralism of America from the private to the public. At the same time, schools are not simply part of the federal government, though some wish they were. They are also not simply private institutions, though others wish they were. They represent that piece of American infrastructure that is legally protected by the first amendment, freedom of association.[5] Therefore we ask, what does it mean for schools to be institutions that bridge the gap between private and public, that while intimate in the lives of families are not places of privacy? Moreover, what can we learn from looking to schools as paradigmatic examples of civic spaces in this way? Consider Rosenblum further:

> Neighbor and citizen are not coextensive. But neither are the zones rigorously separate. There are both continuities and discontinuities in the contours of our experiences as neighbor and citizen and the meaning they hold for us. I show just how nuanced interactions are between the democracy of everyday life and formal democratic principles, public spaces and institutions, and civic virtues. The important point is this: something is lost if the democracy of everyday life is overlooked or seen as valuable only insofar as it instantiates public democratic principles and practices. Good neighbor is both supplement and corrective to how we think about democracy in America.[6]

It is not a stretch to see that before children are citizens, they are neighbours. How do they come to be particular neighbours?

Why the foregrounding of identity in education over time? Diversity and identity are relevant to education in two ways. On one hand, they are relevant to ensure access. If we return once again to the quote of Du Bois, first published in 1903, that opened this dissertation, we are reminded that Du Bois gave voice to the question of identity in education. As he moves "across the color-line," this man powerfully asks how racial identity matters for learning, and he finds that it matters only as a means of exclusion, based upon fear, of what will happen when, in this case, black men are given "sight [of] the Promised Land." Other identifiers could be replaced for blackness here. Dorothy Sayers, for example, in an essay titled, "Are Women Human?" (1938) writes, "when the pioneers of university training for women demanded that women should be

[4] James Baldwin, "A Talk to Teachers" (New York: Saturday Review, 1963).
[5] The First Amendment does not include reference to "freedom of association" but it has been upheld by the Supreme Court as a justified interpretation of "freedom of assembly" and "freedom of speech," both of which are explicitly stated in the United States Bill of Rights.
[6] Rosenblum, *Good Neighbors*, 14.

admitted to the universities, the cry went up at once: 'Why should women want to know about Aristotle?' The answer," she says, "is NOT that *all* women would be better for knowing…but simply: 'What women want as a class is irrelevant. *I* want to know about Aristotle.'"[7] Again, we see the matter of identity arise on the issue of exclusion from access to learning. More examples would be easily forthcoming from the history of educational movements from ancient times to the present, with access to education a clear issue at the intersection of identity and learning, whether we consider school segregation, religious ideology, or so on. On the other hand, while identity is clearly at play in questions of exclusions to learning, what about on issues of learning itself? What role does identity play more constructively? The majority of this answer will come in the next chapter, but here we can again consider the logic of having a vision of "the adult" in mind when we theorise the purposes of education. As Sayers reminds us, the important question at hand is actually, which adult? This one or that? So questions about our vision and values of "the adult" cannot be left unattended when we speak of the purposes of education, and indeed we find that they are not neglected, but instead find themselves into the core of educational debates.

In this milieu, the place of identity formation in the education of children begs the question of how much privacy families are warranted in the raising of their children. Put in this way, which is a common framing, it is a question that assumes pluralistic confrontation. We should remember, though, that we concluded the last chapter resisting this confrontation, having found that essentialisms can operate at the level of the individual or at the level of the community, and it is holding a dialogic tension between the two that allows neither to dehumanise. It is a point on which Barth is very clear and writes directly. He is considering the relationship between individuals and "the idea of the social mass, and…the national people," Communism and Fascism, and he writes, "on the basis of the divine election, there can be no possible tension between the 'individual' and the 'community.' There need, therefore, be no compromise between them."[8] Divine election is the theological concept that precedes baptism, where baptism is a response to the choice that God has made to be for humanity, in our "uniqueness and individuality."[9] It matters a very great deal as we turn from Chapters Two and Three to Chapter Four that understand in a more nuanced way this tension between pluralism and privacy, and the place of identity between. If the previous chapter wrestled with the difficulty of remembering that the child emerges from somewhere, this chapter wrestles with the temptations to fix the child in that somewhere and struggles to see real transformation from those sources. Again, the chapter shares the form of two heresies, the first Heresy 1: All Diversity is the Same; and the second Heresy 2: The

[7] Dorothy Sayers, *Are Women Human?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) 26.
[8] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.2, Ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2010) 312-3.
[9] Ibid., 312.

Public - Private Divide.

Heresy 1: All Diversity is the Same

Diversity and Education

The term "diversity" has become ubiquitous in conversations regarding educational institutions, and this chapter will now engage with this phenomenon at length. Beginning at the most global in scope, the United Nations document, "Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all," speaks about "cultural, linguistic, and ethnic diversity."[10] The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's "Learning Compass" states that "as schools, workplaces and communities become more ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse, it will be more important than ever to emphasise the inter-relatedness of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values."[11] The United States Department of Education at one time stated prominently on their website, "A growing body of research shows that diversity in schools and communities can be a powerful lever leading to positive outcomes in school and in life. Racial and socioeconomic diversity benefits communities, schools, and children from all backgrounds."[12] Finally, at the level of individual educational institutions, Harvard University's 2018 statement on "Pursuing Excellence on a Foundation of Inclusion" states that "academic excellence requires diversity and inclusion."[13] The University of Oxford references the "key commitments on equality and diversity" in its 2017/18 Strategic Plan, one of which is, "We believe that a diverse staff and student body strengthens our research and enhances our students' learning."[14] At a parochial level, my own small independent secondary school has a statement that reads, "Community is at the heart of our approach to both social justice and academic excellence, with individual diversity integral to the strength of that community."[15] While these references are themselves contextualised to their sources, all speak to the

[10] UNESCO, "Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all," United Nations Digital Library, 2016: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245656> (accessed 29 July 2019).
[11] OECD, "OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030 Concept Note: Attitudes and Values for 2030": <http://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/attitudes-and-values/Attitudes_and_Values_for_2030_concept_note.pdf> (accessed 29 July 2019).
[12] U.S. Department of Education, "Diversity and Opportunity": <https://www.ed.gov/diversity-opportunity> (accessed 29 July 2019). Diversity and Education, sometimes shorthanded as "DEI" has become a politically partisan issue in the United States, with Democratic leadership favouring the term DEI and Republican leadership looking to limit or ban its use, as a generalisation.
[13] Harvard University Presidential Task Force on Inclusion and Belonging, "Pursuing Excellence on a Foundation of Inclusion" (Harvard University, 2018) <inclusionandbelongingtaskforce.harvard.edu>, A1.
[14] University of Oxford Equality and Diversity Unit, "2017/18 Equality Report" (29 March 2019) 10.
[15] The Gunnery School working draft of Diversity Statement, summer 2018.

shared language around "diversity," "difference," "equity," and "inclusion" that span from global to local educational institutions in today's scholastic ecosystem. "Diversity" is indeed a ubiquitous term, and one that schools around the globe, quite literally, understand themselves as needing to, at the least, reference, and, at the most, orient around.[16]

Of course, talk of diversity has been a response to the lived experience of communities that are increasingly connected through global transportation and communications. As Director of the Pluralism Project at Harvard University Diana Eck put it simply, "ours is a world of increasing connections."[17] Whether through forced or chosen migration, or Google flying balloons over developing countries to provide internet access to remote villages, the drive towards interconnectedness would now dissipate only by an unlikely world trauma for which no moral person would hope. Thoughtful scholars and practitioners in education and across other fields are asking themselves what the implications of these connections are and should be. This moral question—the question of "should"—drives one out of the *facts* of diversity and the attendant moral response of inclusion and welcome. Instead, it drives us towards more complex moral questions about the components of identity, which of these have moral value, and the intersections of these various components.

Many scholars agree that *pluralism*, as we stated in the Introduction, begins to describe the shift from a morally neutral statement of the facts of diversity and starts to grapple with the morally complex issues of different kinds of diversity and how they relate to moral and political ideals. While diversity is important and pragmatically fraught, it is issues of pluralism that are truly problematic for our current institutional structures of education. When we are able to acknowledge identifiers that have transitioned from simply markers of diversity to more complex intersections, creating pluralism, questions of diversity and education become clearer.

The Experience of Diversity for Students in America Today

According to US Census Bureau projections released in March 2015, America will be a majority-minority country beginning in 2044. "Majority-minority" is a term that relates to the diversification of America's population, and signifies the decreasing self-reported "white" categorisation for race. Statistics like this are used to describe the shifting demographics of America's population, and,

[16] The backlash against "DEI" in the United States under the second President Donald Trump administration only reinforces the point.
[17] Diana Eck, "Globalization and Religious Pluralism" in "The Age of Pluralism," Gifford Lectures 2009: <http://pluralism.org/about/who-we-are/diana-eck/publications-and-media/2009-gifford-lectures/>.

depending on one's political perspective, either the continuous or lamentable immigration history and practices of the United States. Diversification can take less nationally quantifiable forms as public representation and acceptance of a diversity of races and genders in leadership and of genders and sexual identities in digital and local communities. The norm from which such diversification is measured is whiteness, heterosexuality, Christianity, and patriarchy. The degree of the shifts and their impact is widely discussed by scholars, and the intricacies of those debates are not relevant for this dissertation. When one turns to think of the lived experience of students in America, what becomes significant are, one, a discussion of the local versus digital scope of the imagined "diverse communities" and, two, how various demarcations of diversity are grouped as like kinds, in the framing of identity formation.[18] "Diversity" increasingly is given to students as the norm, even while the majority of embodied student experience fails to approach what the statistics seem to portend.

Phenomenologically, the first significant fact of diversity that needs to be outlined, in its relation to educational institutions for children, is the discrepancy between the individual child's local community and the imagined diversification that is represented back to the child, not least through digital technologies.[19] As Bill Bishop described in his 2008 book, *The Big Sort*, Americans are increasingly living in dense communities of like-resourced and like-minded neighbours, and the research on this seems to be continuing to trend in this direction.[20] The impact of this "sorting" on American schools, which are largely defined by neighbourhood, is captured in Robert Putnam's *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*. Not only are students in communities and schools that reflect their own class identities, but, he writes, "fewer and fewer successful people (and even fewer of our children) have much idea how the other half lives."[21] Following the first election of U.S. President Donald Trump, researchers have continued to look at the ideological divides present in neighbourhoods and regions, as political identity also seems to geographically divide more-so than it binds. Putnam writes,

> We have seen throughout this book that growing residential segregation by social class is a key underlying cause of differences in kids' educational experiences. Residential segregation is deeply rooted in growing income inequality, in people's desire to live around people like themselves, and in the financial equity

[18] The term "imagined" here is again used sympathetically to Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (Verso, 1983) especially as that work is related to "sociospatial imagination" in Angel Parham and Danielle Allen, "Achieving Rooted Cosmopolitanism in a Digital Age," in Danielle Allen and Jennifer S. Light, ed., *From Voice to Influence: Understanding Citizenship in a Digital Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).
[19] By imagined here, I of course do not mean imaginary. I mean the community's understood make-up through the imagination that is not one's experience when, in this case, walking into the classrooms of a school building. Also, note that universities are not educational institutions for children.
[20] Richard Florida, "America's 'Big Sort' Is Only Getting Bigger," *Bloomberg* (25 October 2015): <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2016/10/the-big-sort-revisited/504830/>.
[21] Robert Putnam, *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2015) 230.

> that middle-class Americans have embodied in their homes, so efforts to reduce class segregation are fiercely resisted. While some government policies are designed to reduce neighborhood inequality, other policies, such as exclusive zoning regulations and the home mortgage tax deduction, indirectly encourage residential segregation. But efforts to alter such policies, as well as school district boundaries and school siting, are objects of great political contention.[22]

There are many implications of this research. Putnam himself is most interested in the direct societal interventions that would alter the levels of inequality that *Our Kids* details ethnographically. The relevance for our argument is from the student perspective. One area that Putnam does not reflect upon exhaustively is the implication that students, in their lived experience in their classrooms on a daily basis, are, on the whole, *not* experiencing the diversity represented in the national statistical trends towards population diversification. American schools are bound by American neighbourhoods, and those neighbourhoods are as "sorted" as ever. This means that the experience of the majority of students in the United States is not reflective of national statistics relating to diversification. The school communities they attend are instead, by definition, parochial.[23]

While schools themselves may not be individually representative of the full breadth of the diversity of human experience, this local experience must increasingly be contrasted with the ever-present "community" represented to school-age children through technology. The Pew Research Center's Internet and American Life Project keeps ongoing national statistics on the use of technology by various demographic segments of the population, one of which is teens.[24] According to data from 2018, 95% of teens own a smartphone or have regular access to one. Social media is a main factor of smartphone usage. According to 2023 data, 93% of teens use YouTube, 63% use TikTok, 59% use Instagram, 60% use Snapchat, and, perhaps of most statistical significance, 46% describe themselves as online "almost constantly."[25] Robert Putnam has also been a leading scholar of how online communities and digital communities reinforce one another. While he has argued that social media by design is a digital representation of friendships and viewpoints already held in the embodied world, we also know that digital technologies have the power to bring the full diversity of the globe close to lived experience. This is a remarkable transformation for today's youth and has been studied perhaps most compellingly through the prism of new technology, media literacy, and the degree to which

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[22] Ibid., 251.
[23] We have not gone into great detail on the intersections between race and class, as just two identity markers, in neighbourhood representation. For the purposes of this argument, the argument of "American sorting" in neighbourhoods makes the sufficient claim that where schools, as we will see, are conceptually interested in diversity as a category, they are not doing so because of dramatically diversifying schools, on the whole, across all markers of diversity, across the American landscape.
[24] The age range of "teen" for the Pew Research Center is 13–17.
[25] "Teens, Social Media, and Technology" Pew Research Center (11 December 2023): <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2023/12/11/teens-social-media-and-technology-2023/>.

politics, traditionally defined, captures the full range of social implications.

The issue is perhaps best framed by Angel Parham and Danielle Allen in a chapter called, "Achieving Rooted Cosmopolitanism in a Digital Age," in *From Voice to Influence: Understanding Citizenship in a Digital Age*, where they write,

> This experience [being sent an email containing the question, "How many slaves work for you?" and being taken to a website that calculates forty-two slaves across the globe work to provide the goods she uses every day]—and so many others—raise important questions about our responsibility across national borders. They also raise questions about our sociospatial imagination. How do we imagine the globally distributed localities to which we have connections, and the social relations that are overlaid on those geographical conceptions? What stance, to borrow Howard Gardner's term, should we adopt toward others who are socially, culturally, geographically far removed, but with whom we may interact relatively easily, or with whom we may be entangled in relations of structural injustice? And what approach to human interestedness—the fact that each of us is committed in some way to what is her own (her family, her own neighborhood, her own expressive community)—should be embodied in that stance?[26]

It is precisely this "sociospatial imagination" that is at issue in the encounter with diversity among students in America's schools. As students are navigating what Parham and Allen call "multiple nested communities," it is surely of significance when there is a great deal of imaginary distance between the local, "sorted" spaces of our schools and the global, "diverse" spaces of our new media.

Whatever judgement we attribute to this discrepancy between the demographic composition of the majority of American schools and the digital representation of America's communities as increasingly diverse localities, at the phenomenological level, the fact of the discrepancy is a complicating issue that is largely out of the control of any given educational institution, since schools remain overwhelmingly local institutions in America.[27] Globalisation and global communications technologies complexify the lived experience of children and remove from the control of local adults the ability to frame civic questions simply through the means of embodied encounter. Implicit assumptions about the universalisable traits of what it means to be a person persist whether they are made explicit or not. While it may be that these are not new demands, they are certainly now pervasive as all children, with a life experience that we would increasingly consider average, navigate

[26] Angel Parham and Danielle Allen, "Achieving Rooted Cosmopolitanism in a Digital Age," 254.
[27] This is not true of boarding schools and universities, both of which are residential by design and therefore build their own demographic cohort.

the discrepancies between local and digitally mediated communities on a daily basis. In sum, encounter with diversity is pervasive, and even if our communities and institutions sort themselves, as described by Putnam, it is still the case that through our digitally mediated lives, our sense of the demographic make-up of our community is, at best, deeply complicated. Perhaps surprisingly, the response to this complexity within educational institutions has been fairly uniform.

Diversity as a Statement

What we have just said is that the lived experience of diversity for a majority of students in the United States is complicated by the "sorting" happening across American communities and the conflicting experience of being "online together."[28] Beyond the experience of lived encounter with diversity, students are increasingly made aware of diversity through the adoption of policies and programs by educational institutions to address diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.[29] These phenomena are of course highly particularised, but the content of so-called "Diversity Statements," seen most often in institutions of Higher Education, though also prevalent in secondary education, is surprisingly consistent. Public commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion by educational institutions are a product of roughly the past twenty years. What this section will explore is how the moral and civic response to difference is framed. What is at stake here is how individual identity formation encounters diversities-of-like-kind through these statements.

Very little research exists on the phenomena of "Diversity Statements" and yet their ubiquity in educational institutions has almost gone without question.[30] A search on Google reveals that eight of the top nine highest-ranked webpages under this search term are institutions of higher education.[31] All of these webpages offer the mechanics of how to write a Diversity Statement, with little attention given to what they are or why they exist. Ironically, on a topic as morally salient as equity and inclusion, moral and political language are largely replaced by technique.

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[28] Felicia Wu Song, *Virtual Communities: Bowling Alone, Online Together* (Lausanne, Switzerland: Peter Lang, Inc., International Academic Publishers, 2009).

[29] Tracing language is an important but frustrating practice. "Diversity," "equity," and "inclusion" are increasingly seen as a comprehensive and irreducible set of terms, with the shift away from diversity for its own sake and towards more substantive moral and political statements against injustice, inequality, and exclusion and towards "belonging."

[30] Justin P. McBrayer, "Diversity Statements Are the New Faith Statements," *Inside Higher Ed* (22 May 2022): <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2022/05/23/diversity-statements-are-new-faith-statements-opinion>. In his second administration, President Donald Trump focussed on this oversight.

[31] Google search for "diversity statement" on 19 August 2019 listed: Chronicle of Higher Education, American University, University of Nebraska, Vanderbilt University, University of Pennsylvania, University of San Francisco, Yale University, and the University of Notre Dame, along with a blog post that highlighted the diversity statements of prominent global companies such as Google and Stanley Black & Decker. Alongside institutions of higher education, places of business have led the charge in drafting statements of diversity and inclusion. Little has changed since over five years, and a similar outcome was found 6 October 2024.

However, take, as a particularly sophisticated and thoughtful example, this entry from Yale University's Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning:

> A diversity statement is a paragraph or section in institutional, department, or course language that welcomes the range of human representations including race, class, gender, religion, accessibility, and socioeconomic status. Instructors can use the diversity statement to set expectations for civil discourse, encouragement for varying opinions, and standards of behavior both within a course or discipline and during controversial campus events. At root, the diversity statement signals belief that all students have value and bring unique perspectives worthy of consideration. Research into the impact of syllabus diversity statements on classroom behavior remains slim, but the practice is widely accepted and deemed advantageous. Diverse student populations have been shown to connect course material to daily life in different ways, a factor that instructors might recognize when crafting statements. By demonstrating respect for differences in intellectual exchange, diversity statements can show support towards different student practices and students feeling marginalized. These statements signal instructor awareness of potentially volatile campus conversations, and encourage free exchange of earnest dialogue across a range of issues.[32]

This framework is followed by examples of statements and pedagogical practices that would support the manifestation of an "inclusive classroom climate" in order to foster an "awareness of implicit biases."[33]

While Diversity Statements, such as this one, are institution specific, a cursory survey reveals two rather straightforward commonalities. First, the range of identity markers includes race, class, gender, disability, and religion. Second, there is a tension present between the right against discrimination and a more substantive vision of the good of diversity. These are called out in the listing of best practices around Diversity Statements, as can be seen in Brown University's "Diversity and Inclusion Syllabus Statements" guidelines provided by its Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning. As again can be seen in that institution's guidance, the range of identity markers is "including, but not limited to: race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, religion, and

[32] Yale Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning, "Diversity Statements" <https://poorvucenter.yale.edu/DiversityStatements> (accessed 13 August 2019). Again, the statement remained largely unchanged 6 October 2024.
[33] Ibid from 2019. As that statement asserted, "in higher education, implicit bias often refers to unconscious racial or socioeconomic bias towards students."

disability" and there is an explicit acknowledgement that the moral response ranges from "respect" to "value."[34]

The genesis of "Diversity Statements" is difficult to trace. Institutions include them in public documentation as though they have always existed and not as dated memos. In the United States, inclusive practices in education have been an evolving phenomenon since the earliest experiments in publicly funded education. The earliest publicly minded schools, as part of the "Sunday School" movement, were in no way elite. They were instead built on behalf of working-class children and open to all. Through the founding of the Common School era of the early nineteenth century, this consensus broadened, even while school curricula remained explicitly Protestant, in an effort to merge intellectual and religious learning in support of societal cohesion. By the end of the nineteenth century, schools were again transformed as Horace Mann and others evolved America's publicly minded schools away from their sectarian roots. This historical summary, taken from James Davison Hunter's *Death of Character: Moral Education in an Age without Good and Evil*, finds a summation in the closing pages of that book where Hunter writes,

> In our public rhetoric, we say that diversity is not just a social reality but a political ideal, a given of social life and an aspiration of public justice in a democratic polity. Nowhere has the rhetoric of diversity been more enthusiastically received than in the realm of education.[35]

By this account, the arc of America's institutions of education has bent towards diversity and inclusion over its relatively short history. The most transformative moment of this arc must surely be the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which enshrined in law inclusive practices, including education, naming race, colour, religion, sex, and national origin as the categories to be protected. As institutions of education have lived up to their history, as we just outlined through Hunter, it is perhaps to be expected that legal constraint—from exclusion—became a positive vision of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.

Of course, such statements of inclusion and equity also have limits. Let us review three examples: one from a single-sex (or gender) institution of higher education and the others of single-religion

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[34] Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching, "Diversity and Inclusion Syllabus Statements" <https://www.brown.edu/sheridan/teaching-learning-resources/inclusive-teaching/statements>. Take, for example, Harvard University's "Pursuing Excellence on a Foundation of Inclusion." In that document, diversity is defined to include "race, ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, religion and spiritual experience, political viewpoint, socioeconomic and immigration status, geographic origins and language, disability, veteran status, and discipline and scholarly methodology." Harvard University Presidential Task Force on Inclusion and Belonging, "Pursuing Excellence on a Foundation of Inclusion" (Harvard University, 2018) <inclusionandbelongingtaskforce.harvard.edu>, A3.

[35] James Davison Hunter, *The Death of Character: Moral Education in an Age without Good and Evil* (New York: Basic, 2000) 230.

institutions of higher education. Educational institutions that were founded with identity markers as part of their mission are a complex alternative to what is otherwise increasingly standardised.

In the United States, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were founded beginning in the mid-nineteenth century in order to graduate black men and women. Spelman College, for example, was founded in 1881 and, according to their mission statement, exists to educate "women of African descent." Spelman does not promote a diversity statement of the kind described above, but they have taken the lead in two areas that foster the same vision of inclusion: global education and transgender students.[36] Regarding the first, part of Spelman's mission is to equip students to "engage the many cultures of the world." While this is not seen as needing to include or educate those many cultures, Spelman has received accolades for "creating equitable access to global education." On another matter, Spelman has been inclusive with regards to transgender students. In 2017, they adopted a policy that states,

> Spelman College, a Historically Black College whose mission is to serve high-achieving Black women, will consider for admission women students including students who consistently live and self-identify as women, regardless of their gender assignment at birth. Spelman does not admit male students, including students who self-identify and live consistently as men, regardless of gender assignment at birth. If a woman is admitted and transitions to male while a student at Spelman, the College will permit that student to continue to matriculate at and graduate from Spelman.

Here we see the limits of diversity and inclusion for mission-driven reasons. Spelman has limited the scope of its inclusivity, expanding that radius wherever it is able to do so in mission-appropriate ways.

As another point of comparison, consider two universities whose mission includes direct reference to the Christian religion. The mission of Evangelical Christian school, Wheaton College, states: "Wheaton College serves Jesus Christ and advances His Kingdom through excellence in liberal arts and graduate programs that educate the whole person to build the church and benefit society worldwide."[37] To ensure adherence to the mission, Wheaton requires that students affirm a "Community Covenant" (related to the Statement of Faith, signed by all faculty). By contrast, Georgetown University, which was founded by the Jesuit monastic order, states: "Georgetown

[36] "Diversity Abroad Names Spelman College as 2018 Excellence in Diversity and Inclusion in International Education Award Recipient": <https://www.spelman.edu/about-us/news-and-events/news-releases/2018/02/02/diversity-abroad-names-spelman-college-as-2018-excellence-in-diversity-inclusion-in-international-education-award-recepient> and <https://www.spelman.edu/about-us/office-of-the-president/letters-to-the-community/2017/09/05/spelman-admissions-and-enrollment-policy-update> (both accessed 15 August 2019).
[37] "The Mission of Wheaton College": <https://www.wheaton.edu/about-wheaton/why-wheaton/mission/> (first accessed 17 November 2019).

College is committed to the Jesuit traditions of an integrated education and of productive research in the liberal arts, including fine arts, humanities, languages, sciences, and social sciences. The College seeks to expand the imagination, foster the life of the spirit, cultivate lifelong learning, encourage service to God and humanity, and promote respect for diversity in an age of global community."[38] The commitment by Georgetown is to be a "Catholic and Jesuit, student-centered research university."[39] Both schools include in their identity specific religious references. In practice, Georgetown includes a "global community" in its mission statement, while recently, Wheaton has included "ethnic diversity" as central to its task. President of Wheaton, Philip Ryken, for example, has talked about "developing cross-cultural skills" which he frames theologically as necessary to help cultivate "healthy multicultural relationships within the multicultural body of Christ," which he goes on to specify as the "cultures and ethnic groups of the world."[40] There are theological differences that underpin the differences in these schools, which are only an example of the full range of religiously affiliated universities, but in their own ways they highlight the complexity of religion as an identity marker.

What the examples of Spelman, Georgetown, and Wheaton help us to see is, on the one hand, the practice of active reflection on diversity, equity, and inclusion finds its way even into institutions that take as central to their institutional identity certain practices of exclusion. The moral energy towards just equity and inclusion does not stop at their door.

So far, all of the examples produced have been in institutions of higher education. In part, this is not surprising because of the way in which colleges and universities symbolically lead the academic ecosystem in the United States. There are also, however, tensions with what we have described as the lived experience of the students—children—of most interest to this dissertation. What is the experience of the school students referenced in the previous section? Since *Brown v. Board of Education*, there is of course a profound interest in racial inclusivity in K-12 schools in America. Since the end of legal school segregation in 1954, the practice of school integration has been fraught as the social-sorting trends we saw outlined in Putnam's *Our Kids* have complicated the story. Whether "busing" initiatives or the present mixed success of magnet and charter schools in America's cities, there has been no logistically and socially easy way to embody the principles at the heart of *Brown v. Board*.[41] The moral commitment to the principle, however, has also risen, fallen, and

[38]"Mission Statement and History": <https://college.georgetown.edu/about/mission-statement-and-history/> (first accessed 17/11/19).
[39] "University Mission Statement": <https://governance.georgetown.edu/mission-statement/> (first accessed 16/8/19).
[40] Philip Ryken, "Life at Wheaton": <https://www.wheaton.edu/life-at-wheaton/kingdom-diversity/president-rykens-diversity-talk/> (accessed 15/9/19).
[41] "Busing" is the phenomena of driving black and white students out of their neighbourhoods for the sake of the racial integration of student populations. It was upheld by the Supreme Court in 1971, Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education. See Matthew F. Delmont, *Why Busing Failed: Race, Media, and the National Resistance to School Desegregation* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016).

expanded as the identity categories at stake have shifted from race and ethnicity to include religion, sex, and national origin. Schools look to both the practices and teachings of universities (not least in Departments of Education) to help ground their own educational responses. The precedent being set at the higher education level is increasingly clear.

Diversity statements are not morally neutral. To restate plainly, the question of difference in education is being met with a twofold moral response: a rejection of the injustices of exclusion and oppression and an embrace of diversity as a substantive social good. The moral response to diversity and the political response to diversity are fraught matters in the history of the United States. Where moral courage has faltered, the government has mandated through law the end of various discriminations and inequalities in education, especially through the Civil Rights Act of 1964. These pieces of legislation, as is the case with all laws, provide boundaries of what is illicit. Given the parameters of the Civil Rights Act and *Brown v. Board*, educational institutions have experimented with social practices that would exemplify the moral commitments seemingly exemplified in those political frameworks. Diversity statements are the latest iteration in this process. They are moral statements about what the encounter of difference in students *should* be.

The (Insufficient) Normative Response to Diversity

As modelled in Diversity Statements, the moral response to diversity in America's schools is, perhaps surprisingly, uniform. First, there is a claim that diversity is a good. This claim can be implicit, explicit, or qualified. Take, as an example of this first claim, Harvard University's, "Pursuing Excellence on a Foundation of Inclusion," which states that "all...differences are of great potential value." Similarly in the University of Oxford's 2017/2018 Equality Report, reference is made to the Strategic Plan adopted by the University for the period 2018–2023, which includes the statement, "We believe that a diverse staff and student body strengthens our research and enhances our students' learning."[42] Second, the range of identity markers that define what it means to encounter diversity includes race, class, gender, disability, and religion. The moral foes are exclusion and oppression, and they also clearly state a commitment against discrimination. It is important to be clear. This is not an argument that these are the *wrong* moral responses. It is a statement that they are *uniform* moral responses and that when *moral identity* is itself included in the list, we question the sufficiency of uniformity and see how ironic and insufficient that is. That Diversity statements tend to group moral identity alongside other markers of differentiation is well exemplified in a passing statement in the Oxford 2017/18 Equality Report, which makes reference to analysing results "by sexual orientation

[42] University of Oxford Equality and Diversity Unit, "2017/18 Equality Report" (29 March 2019) 10.

and religion or belief." The point here is not that there is anything wrong in making sure that individuals are not discriminated against based on these categories, but that in so doing, there is no further statement about what attending properly to these differences as different kinds of identifiers might look like.[43] Finally, all types of difference are subject to the same moral response, whether that is the minimal stance against injustice or whether the statement includes a more substantive vision of the good of diversity. When the divides between one's daily embodied and digital experiences are added to this picture, we see that a unified normative response is insufficient to the task of a complex, highly locally particularistic phenomenon. It is when these facts of diversity need to be interpreted that the issue arises. What do these facts *mean*? Meaning is generally ascribed along one of two axes: rectifying injustice in the form of discrimination and inequality and positive outcomes of diverse thinking as measured on utilitarian matrices.

We find ourselves concerned that a technical, blanket response is insufficient to the complexity of human identity formation. Are there not different kinds of differences? It is an obvious statement that to get to diversity, one needs to proceed through particularity, but it is precisely this basic logical fact that is so difficult to reckon with in the practice of education. Some particularities are those individuals are born with, such as one's race, but others are inherited through culture, habit, and practice. These are more challenging to account for in the institutions of education, because they require formational institutions to instil and further their cause. Whether they like it or not, schools are themselves civic spaces, constructing reality for children and constructed of the full diverse array of American identities.

The literature surrounding "intersectionality" helps to identify precisely what is wrong with a unified response to diversity in educational institutions. To return to Crenshaw's "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," we see that argument looked at the outcomes of legal cases where black women were being treated as a uniform category.[44] What she found was that the simple binarity of, in this case, male or female, black or white, failed to understand the "multidimensionality of Black women's experience with the single-axis analysis that distorts these experiences."[45] In the context of her argument, it is important to acknowledge that an awareness of intersectionality was necessary to alleviate discrimination that could only be identified at the intersection of two or more identifiers. For our purposes, it is her methodology, and its demonstrated anthropological claim, that is most pertinent. Crenshaw and others have greatly complexified the ways that identity composition is

[43] Ibid., 14.
[44] Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," in *The University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989): 139-168.
[45] Ibid., 139.

understood and studied. Their argument, in brief, is that individual markers of diversity (e.g. Asian, Transgender, Buddhist), while real, fail to make sense of the added complexity of multiple, intersecting markers of diversity.[46] The world is no longer separated simply between the majority and the minority but instead is an ever-fracturing kaleidoscope of highly individualised experience and identity. Every individual has some identifiers that convey power and privilege and others that portend oppressions.

This shift is significant because while whiteness, heterosexuality, Christianity, and patriarchy are either/or categories, and intersectionality can account for the cross-references among them, it is as identity is specified down to the irreducible individual that the moral response begins to take shape. While one may experience themself as shaped by and participating in communities beyond the self, diversity and the attendant moral response of acceptance and inclusion, fundamentally operates at the level of the individual. On this awareness of the dignity of individuality, there is much to affirm.

Herein is the second significant issue. Above we saw the discrepancy between the individual citizen's local community and the imagined diversification that is represented back to the citizen through digital technologies. Diversity is pervasive in the lives of all who are addicted to their smartphones and social media, which is presently a significant and growing majority. Also, diversity is increasingly experienced as indexed to the individual, as opposed to the group. This has a "thinning" quality to it, where mediating, meaning-making communities are obscured from view. To give this concern due weight, we will discuss it under the following section on the public – private divide. We will also spend time in the next chapter exploring how schools themselves function as mediating, meaning-making communities, and how, to properly understand their power in this role, diversity needs to be understood as deeper, especially when discussing those we consider children, than literatures properly complexifying these topics seem to allow.

In sum, the basic claims surrounding diversity in institutions of education today are that all kinds of differences are essentially the same, whether race, class, gender, disability, or religion. Further, the implicit claim is that all kinds of differences are experienced as the same. Not only are these claims ironic, given that the topic is particularisation, but we can fail to actually view the individual phenomenologically, in their lived experience, through the haze of these categorisations. As a technical "solution" offered by Human Resources or Teaching and Learning Departments, Diversity Statements overly simplify at a moment when it is complexification that is most needed.

[46] The original study was interested in the experience of black women. In "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," the word burden here is important, because the original argument was not about the benefits of diversity, which I will say more about below, but about the ways that multiple, intersecting diversity markers compile and complexify the injustices experienced from those markers.

Concluding Thoughts on Diversity in Education

What we have just argued is, among secondary school students, the embodied experience of diversity in America is more attenuated and complicated, especially when intersected with the digital lives of today's teenagers, than may at first seem obvious from conversations about diversity and education in America. Further, we looked at the emerging phenomena of "Diversity Statements" as orienting documents that are reductionistic and focused on technique, by design. While these statements are undertheorised in the research, they have been a lived reality across the educational landscape. Even institutions that limit categories of inclusion by way of their institutional mission statement have found themselves seeking to measure up against standards of diversity, equity, and inclusion. While we have not said a great deal as of yet as to the benefits of this moral and political institutional level setting, what we have recognised is that there is an ironic levelling out across the diversity of identity markers. The research itself, highlighted through the concept of "intersectionality" pushes against this levelling, as the lived experience of multidimensionality emerges through each individual's life. The challenge lies in the turn from the overcoming of exclusion and bigotry towards the positive moral frameworks of inclusion and the benefits of diversity. The obvious questions are: benefits for whom and what is the substance of these benefits? There are compelling answers to these questions, but those answers may themselves be morally particularistic, and it is for that reason that understanding whether moral particularity itself can be meaningfully included as yet one more identifier is the task of the remainder of this chapter.

The Complexity of Moral Identity in Education

One step toward a more nuanced approach to diversity in education would be the recognition that all aspects of diversity may not be of the same kind. When faced with the possibility of inequity and exclusion, it makes good sense that all kinds of diversity markers are addressed. The concept of intersectionality makes this conclusively clear and the supporting research bears it out. Various markers of one's unique and individualised identity can be used in concert to exclude or ignore an individual. When multiple categories of discrimination intersect with one another, individuals are not linearly hampered but exponentially so. The moral mandate of justice, and overcoming injustice, for the sake of inclusion of morally equal individuals is a point aligned to the values of the United States.

However, does the same moral logic hold for positive categories, those having to do with the "value" of diversity? Value is a positive moral category. It is not the absence of an injustice but the presence

of a good. When we shift our lens from the exclusion of injustices towards the substantive shared goods of diversity, we must ask ourselves about the communities in which those substantive goods are defined and shared, and how we relate to the pluralism of those communities. To see this we will consider that diversity and pluralism are not synonyms in the context of education, and while diversity may be popularly embraced as a good, pluralism is still seen as a problem.

Diversity and Pluralism are not Synonyms

Given the possibility of encountering the full range of human experience through global, digital communications technologies, it is perhaps understandable why the response would be to group all identifiers of diversity into one kind of thing, "diversity," and then to respond first and foremost through the lens of ensuring liberty and justice. Though understandable, this can obscure the *depth* of difference faced in America's communities, and instead treat all identifiers as essentially of the same kind. This ironic, flattening of diversity obscures more than it illuminates. It is this collation of diversity markers that can be problematic as it relates to schools, and it is for this reason that a second, distinct term is needed. As we outlined in the Introduction, pluralism is deep, pervasive, and ours. In this section, we will further explore how pluralism is related to the moral responses exemplified in work on diversity and education. Here again, we find that there are two issues at stake in pluralism.

First, quite simply, pluralism is never oriented towards nor defined simply by the individual. When two individuals face one another, and they recognise differences between them, this is characterised as the diversity of humanity, not pluralism. It is when those two individuals represent definable social groups in their encounter that the term "pluralism" is appropriate. By this definition, one would say that the dialogue between a Christian priest and a Muslim imam would signify pluralistic engagement not because these two individuals are different—for the sake of the thought experiment, perhaps they are biological brothers—but because in their encounter they represent traditions, which have been passed along through social networks. While these groups may not always have political rights, they certainly exercise social power, not least over the young. The implication of this is that something is lost in our understanding when pluralism of this kind is a category subsumed under the master-category of diversity. This means that not all forms of difference can be addressed by beginning the conversation with the diversity of individuals. When we do so, the particularity of formative groups can be obscured and therefore nuance lost.

Whether through the lens of social psychology or political theory, the role of ecosystems, or civil society, on the formation of the young is hard to ignore. To illustrate this from the perspective of political philosophy, we can return to the work of William Galston in his books *Liberal Pluralism*,

The Practice of Liberal Pluralism, and *Anti-Pluralism*. Through these works, Galston argues, among other things, that the families, religious institutions, and local communities that shape our daily experience throughout life, but perhaps most clearly early on as our civic imaginations are shaped, should be given the benefit-of-the-doubt that they are contributing to the common weal. The key relevant concept in Galston's work is "political pluralism," which "understands human life as consisting of a multiplicity of spheres, some overlapping, with distinct natures and inner norms." "Each sphere" he goes on to say, "enjoys a limited, but real, autonomy. Political pluralism rejects any account of political community that creates a unidimensional hierarchical ordering among these spheres of life. Rather, different forms of association and activity are complexly interrelated. There may be local or partial hierarchies among subsets of spheres in specific contexts, but there are no comprehensive lexical orderings among categories of human life."[47] The assumption of what he calls *political pluralism*, *value pluralism*, and *expressive liberty* all have the interaction between the individual and the group as a key politically and morally salient feature. The particularities of the individual matter greatly, but education, or any other social practice, understood only from the perspective of the individual misses the necessary moment of cultural embedding that happens whether to the good or ill of that individual. To the degree that diversity obscures the social spheres that help to shape our identities, it is insufficient in its grasp of the civic context within which education functions.

Second, and related, pluralism always has a political and moral connotation, because pluralism is about a civic reality: coexistence. As we previewed in the Introduction, pluralism is not simply descriptive; the framework begins to be socially constructive. As Eck has described this, "Diversity is a fact of our communities. Pluralism is a response to diversity, an engagement with it."[48] The concern of scholars such as Galston is that a negative cycle is created when we fail to rightly acknowledge the institutional power and importance of the communities in which pluralistic identities are formed. Where facts can in theory be politically and morally neutral, human responses to those facts are never neutral in the same way. More will be said about this below, but the leading moral and political response to questions of diversity has been fundamentally about justice, and particularly rectifying injustices, which have taken the shape of exclusions. In the United States, this response has been mixed in its extension to social groups, and here I have religious groups particularly in mind. The simple point here is that it is not immediately clear that the moral and political response to pluralism would have the same starting point as diversity, and so again not all forms of difference are well addressed by beginning the conversation with the diversity of individuals.

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[47] William A. Galston, *The Practice of Liberal Pluralism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 40.
[48] Diana Eck, "Globalization and Religious Pluralism" in "The Age of Pluralism," Gifford Lectures 2009: <http://pluralism.org/about/who-we-are/diana-eck/publications-and-media/2009-gifford-lectures/>.

In this second way, the term is situated within the extensive post-colonialist literature on multiculturalism. To return to our engagement with Appiah, we see that in his 2005 book, *The Ethics of Identity*, he argues that the appropriate inheritance of poststructuralist criticisms of identity formation is, what he calls, "rooted cosmopolitanism." *The Ethics of Identity* begins, interestingly, with the question of the education of John Stuart Mill. As is well known, Mill was educated at home by his father, James Mill, who himself was a "disciple" (as Appiah calls him) of Jeremy Bentham. As told by Appiah, Mill's intentional isolation through childhood had the effect of a perhaps singular capacity to reflect on "diversity," "the irreducibly plural nature of human values," and "his effort to elaborate a notion of well-being that was at once individualist and profoundly social."[49]

Perhaps the most important claim of *The Ethics of Identity* is that Americans are hyper focused on diversity at the level of individuality precisely because cultural diversity is "thinning."[50] Why does this matter for Appiah? At root for Appiah is an anthropological claim that "we are a social species."[51] As he sees clearly, what is at stake here is an implicit claim about maturation. He writes, the "tension between the present autonomy of parents and the interests (or, we could say, the future autonomy) of the child" is a given.[52] It cannot be done away with in a liberal society. All of this amounts to Appiah's central claim, which is that while cosmopolitanism cannot be taken for granted, and must be purposefully cultivated, "a form of cosmopolitanism worth pursuing need not reflexively celebrate human difference; but it cannot be indifferent to the challenge of engaging with it."[53] So, we see here that having traversed the landscape of political philosophy, Appiah both recognizes the reality of partiality and acknowledges that the kind of difference most crucial to explore is what we would call *pluralism*, what he calls the ethical communities that *root* us.[54] The appropriate inheritance of post-colonialist critiques is not, Appiah argues, a reification of cultures but instead an acknowledgment of the ways in which each individual navigates the diversity of identifiers that compose an individual's story. Some of those identifiers, from Appiah's "ethical communities," result ultimately in partialities.

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[49] Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005) 3-4. Appiah's dependence on John Stuart Mill, especially *On Liberty*, is such he could write that "none before him—and, I am inclined to add, none since—charted out the terrain as clearly and as carefully as he did. We may cultivate a different garden, but we do so on soil that he fenced in and terraced." (4)
[50] Ibid., 117.
[51] Ibid., 237.
[52] Ibid., 203.
[53] Ibid., 222.
[54] Appiah uses the terms moral and ethical to make a carefully nuanced point in this section. That argument is that the *moral* attends to the individual as a human being and grounds cosmopolitanism whereas the *ethical* attends to thick communities and grounds particular instances and practices of behaviour. By this logic, Appiah might say that the moral undergirds a concern with diversity, equity, and inclusion, indexed to the individual as a human being and this sits in a hierarchy above ethical claims that would particularise individuals into moral communities. To this extent, this dissertation would be in agreement with the rhetorical instinct behind this differentiation. While certainly a critical point for making sense of how "rooted cosmopolitanism" would function for a person's moral identity, this particular distinction of language will not be replicated in our argument. Throughout the dissertation, "moral" and "ethical" will be used interchangeably.

What Appiah makes clear is that *diversity* pertains to individuals, but other terminology is needed to discuss the ways in which individuals are rooted in meaning-making communities. Further, the turn from diversity to pluralism is immediately moral, when defined as the adjudication between *rooted*, ethical partiality and *cosmopolitan*, moral claims.

Is pluralism equally as pervasive as the diversity outlined in the previous section? This is the wrong question. Whatever the breadth of difference that exists across social institutions in any given polity or locality, the more pressing issue is that the difference we call pluralism is *deep*. As both Galston and Appiah show, it is ideological by definition. Appiah, for example, devotes the chapter in *The Ethics of Identity* on the civic purposes of education to what he calls, "soul making." This is a profound acknowledgement that there are deep, teleological questions that are related both to public character and to active citizenship. In a historical moment where the political polarisation of the American population is so widely accepted as given, it is the disparity between ideological and social positions deeply held, by individuals and groups, that is of interest under the category of pluralism.

Diversity as a Good but Pluralism as a Problem

As we have just described it, a surprising tension is building between the inheritors of multiculturalism and the advocates for the *good of diversity* in education. While claims that individuals should not face exclusion and inequity based upon their particular identity have thankfully become obvious in education, we still struggle to ground claims that pluralism, in all of its forms, is good for practices of education. To add to the complexity, it is when we take most seriously the institutions of education themselves that we must take note of the reality that certain types of diversity, deep diversity—pluralism—must be allowed to be cultivated in order to be perpetuated. As Galston writes in *Anti-Pluralism*, "In principle, not just individuals but also peoples stand in a relation of equality to one another, and these two kinds of equality can collide in practice."[55] Where are civic imaginations forged if not in our educational institutions? And what are educational institutions that do not acknowledge their impact on the cultivation of civic imaginations?

What do we find when we take as a starting point the lived experience of the teenage, secondary-school student? Except for the niche experience of students in the roughly three hundred boarding schools in the United States, we find students in public and independent day schools that reflect their local communities. These communities are overwhelmingly *sorted* to group demographic regularities

[55] William Galston, *Anti-Pluralism: The Populist Threat to Liberal Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018) 132.

based upon the choices of individual family units. We find that students experience the dichotomy between their local community-informed school and the global presence of nearly constant digital access through smartphones and other devices. Their "sociospatial imagination" is bifurcated, and we are left with the conclusion that, phenomenologically, diversity is complicated.

Here we need to reengage with the thought of Patrick Deneen, who we first encountered in the Introduction. There are substantial issues with his conclusions and proposals, and of those we will be appropriately critical at the right moment. As a matter of affirmation, first, and in line with our method of refusing to criticise "straw man" arguments, we can consider his critique of the material of this chapter, because his diagnosis has points of merit, and establishing precisely where he goes astray helps to clarify the distinctiveness of our proposal in Chapter Four.

As we said in the Introduction, Deneen's summation of liberal pluralism is that it is a damning thinning of American society, which undermines the possibility of civic virtue and a thriving future. He believes that families and other forms of local community are the solution, but liberal societies, especially the United States, do not value these spaces of solidarity and formation. (Problematically, he does not address those forms of local life, such as schools, which we consider here.) If liberalism is a response to pluralism, Deneen argues, then it went astray precisely in allowing our moral imaginations to lose their bearings. Consider a litany of his concerns, all from *Regime Change*[56]:

> The advance of liberty has meant the gradual, and then accelerating, weakening, redefining, or overthrowing of many formative institutions and practices of human life, whether family, the community, a vast array of associations, schools and universities, architecture, the arts, and even churches. (5)
>
> Without denying the reality of seriousness of racism as a scourge in Western nations and particularly the United States, comprehensive and effective proposals to redress historic injustices would have to include considering how the demise of formative social institutions and family life have harmed the working classes, regardless of race. (10)
>
> The main locus through which today's elite exercises control is not primarily through the exercise of governmental and public power, but "private" or semiprivate entities such as universities, corporations, media, and artistic centers of power. (28)

[56] Patrick Deneen, *Regime Change: Toward a Postliberal Future* (New York: Sentinel, 2023).

> Members of this new class [of elites] are vocally disdainful of older systems of elitism, particularly ones that were based upon hierarchical ordering…. Claims about the virtues of 'noblesse oblige' are dismissed as hypocritical self-delusion, shrouding deep, systemic and pervasive inequalities behind self-flattering veils of solicitude. (32)

> Contemporary commitments to equality that focus especially on the inclusion of historically marginalized groups, and that generally exclude considerations of class, permit an extraordinary lack of curiosity about the complicity of elites in a system that increasingly resembles the old aristocracy in perpetuating generational class differentiation. (43)

On these points, Deneen's critique must be given voice. His concern that socioeconomically marginalised Americans deserve respect, not to mention acknowledgement, should be well taken, and his insight that public power is being exercised with profound effect outside of elected political channels seems to appropriately track narratives of the rise of the 1% and 0.1%.[57] Deneen goes on to diagnose, we must admit rightly, that often the lists of identifiers are "ascriptive" features such as race, gender, or disability, and his point is that they do not include class. His concern as regards "identity studies" is, "The more insistent the invocation of 'pluralism' or 'diversity' or, in the retail world, 'choice,' the more assuredly the destruction of actual cultures is advancing."[58] It is not perfectly clear whether Deneen feels protective of the individuals formed by cultures or the cultures themselves, but the outcome is a critique of the antiessentialism we found in Appiah in Chapter One. Deneen would like to see stronger essentialism, it seems, because he believes it is more respectful of cultures and it is more effective at the formation of individual moral identity. His concerns must be heard on these charges, because the solutions he offers are robust in their institutional imagination. He seeks very deliberately to move conservative thinkers in the United States towards his proposed outcome of Aristopopulism.[59] In all of these ways, *Regime Change* picks up where *Why Liberalism Failed* ends. In the closing chapter of *Why Liberalism Failed*, Deneen writes, "No serious effort to conceive a humane postliberal alternative is likely to emerge from the rear-guard defenders of a declining regime."[60] *Regime Change* begins from the presumption that there are "rear-guard defenders" keeping the United States from our greatest future and is a masterwork in the frustrations

[57] For an example of this argument, see Derek Thompson, "The Rise (and Rise and Rise) of the 0.01 Percent in America," *The Atlantic Online* (13 February 2014).
[58] Deneen, *Regime Chage*, 89.
[59] The frustrations with Deneen we raise are shared by Alex Zakaras in a review essay, "The Crisis of Liberal Modernity and the Conservative Restoration," *American Political Thought: A Journal of Ideas, Institutions, and Culture* 14.3 (Summer 2025), especially 442, when he writes, "I find it difficult to explain Deneen's…sustained lack of interest in the most cogent and reflective liberal thinkers writing today."
[60] Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed,* 182.

attendant to the notion that diversity is a good while pluralism is a problem.

Our disagreements with *Regime Change*, however, begin to make clear why the next temptation to heresy, The Public – Private Divide, is so important for consideration. Consider three. First, *Regime Change* is a book that ironically becomes a rallying call for identity politics relative to class. Instead of a turn to resist all forms of essentialisation, as was outlined from Karl Barth's work, Deneen simply finds a new identity marker to take prominence. Second, where Deneen rightly identifies that class is a missing category in many statements of diversity, equity, and inclusion, he also fails to recognise that religion, and sometimes belief, are included. Why he has this blindness is unclear, but, related to this, Deneen addresses only institutions of higher education in *Regime Change*. In so doing, he misses the lines of argumentation present in someone like Danielle Allen's work (*Education and Equality*) or to a lesser degree Appiah's, where we have found helpful allies. Our criticism on this point is that we need deeper wells to hold together across differentiations in moral identity than the tools so far of diversity and inclusion allow. Third and finally, the elite universities to which Deneen addresses his most scathing attacks are more diverse than ever, including socioeconomically.[61] Yet, Deneen paints a picture throughout *Regime Change* of the disdain of the elites for their socioeconomically disadvantaged fellow citizens. In doing so, Deneen casts aspersions on these first generation or second-generation college students without asking himself: Do these upwardly mobile Americans really disdain their grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, and cousins who may not have gone the path of elite education? If that research has been done, proving that well educated Americans are more dismissive and hateful of the families that raised them than less educated Americans, then Deneen should produce it. To the degree that Deneen is illustrative of a school of thought recognising that pluralism is a problem and proposing a solution, we can acknowledge his concern but desire an alternative path forward. We seek that path in the next chapter, and will consider its implications for Deneen in our concluding chapter.

Conclusion

There is an odd pressure that has been hoisted onto schools to become civic spaces that manage the increased diversification of the population of the United States, including our online lived experiences. This is of concern because schools are full of notoriously underpaid teachers, which is to say, we have not caught up in the public valuation of teachers with the increased expectations.

[61] Harvard reports a rise of first-generation college students from 7% in the class of 2019 to 20.5% in the class of 2028. Richard D. Kahlenberg, "The Results are In: Harvard Doesn't Need Racial Preferences to Be Diverse" in *The Harvard Crimson* (12 September 2024): <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2024/9/12/kahlenberg-harvard-admissions> (accessed 25 July 2025).

Instead, schools' best attempts at meeting their students where they are has become a political contestation over "DEI." Remember that schools are filled with local communities of children and, in this way, are very unlike institutions of higher education.

Despite their best attempts, it is also clear that when we treat all diversity as the same in places of education, we find ourselves unable to map theory onto the actual lived experiences of children who do not experience their identities through essentialised categorisations but instead experience their identities at the intersections of lived communities and experiences that form the utterly unique perspectives that lead to the possibilities of human potential. The work of diversity in education has been critical for naming exclusions and overcoming biases. The work to understand what human particularity, attached to the actual communities that give that particularity content and shape, contributes to the social practices of teaching and learning as well as the practices of knowledge creation—which are distinct practices from one another much of the time—is ahead of us. Understanding well the place of identity formation in the education of children helps us to do this work.

For those operating within the practice of education, a very practical consideration also starts to coalesce. Perhaps the argument of this dissertation has not yet been written, and we have not properly conceptualised the place of identity formation in the education of children, because of a reasonable fear that if we do we will not have anything to hold our communal commitment to education together. Education is one of the rare areas of social cohesion, with broad overlapping moral consensus in its goodness and necessity. Voices of concern are right to sound the alarm, if we cannot agree on the purpose of higher education or the way that critical theory supports education as a common practice across difference or education as a means of generating access for migrants to our various countries, then what does hold together the expansive bureaucracies of education except for the mutual benefit of childcare such that adults can work. Amidst a great deal of diversity, the idea that "the citizen"— as though we agreed on what that is, or "the productive adult," or "the knowledgeable adult"—could hold together our institutional imaginations for the common purpose of education only begs the questions of identity and formation, of who decides these parameters, and of how education holds together, truly, amidst the pluralism we have just described.

The concrete matter of pluralism and privacy now comes to the fore, and we turn to a persistent component of the western civic imagination: the public – private divide.

Heresy 2: The Public - Private Divide

The remainder of this chapter is taken up with the final consideration of the temptations towards heresy that keep us from understanding well the place of identity formation in the education of children. Where the beginning of this chapter complexified and clarified understanding diversity as itself a diverse phenomenon, the following section argues that the reason the place of identity formation in the education of children eludes us is related to our propensity to consider children at the nexus of a public - private divide, unclear of the roles related to the identity formation of children. (In this section, we will be arguing that the public – private divide should be replaced with a public/private distinction, and this punctuation is used accordingly.)

The idea of the public/private distinction can be found as early as Greek thought on the functioning of the city-state. In order to engage with it as an idea, it is less important to weigh definitions (some of which we will do in conversation with Hannah Arendt following) and more important to acknowledge that in the United States psyche we all operate with some sense of the privacy of the home and the liberty of individuals relative to the state. Whether this is a reasoned and nuanced opinion on family - economics - and government, or an instinctual scepticism of the encroachment of government on personal matters, or alternatively a desire for government to provide more distributed resources, or an illogical amalgam of thinking, that there is a distinction between our private lives and our public lives is well agreed upon. The place of children in that distinction is a matter of considerable contestation.

In the last chapter, we began this work through our engagement with Amy Gutmann. We found, while she provided a helpful corrective that mediated between families and the state with relation to education, her work succumbed to the "inevitability of democracy" without making her basic anthropological commitments obvious for critical debate. Further, we saw that by grouping the family with other social collectivities, Gutmann did not go far enough in complexifying the social dynamics at work around the child. Further, we recognised Deneen's concerns for the social weakening of families and their impact in liberal societies. Here, we take one step back from Gutmann's and Deneen's work and begin with an engagement with Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition*. What Arendt's work demonstrates is twofold. One, it is possible to outline basic anthropological commitments in a way that welcomes debate and conversation and opens pathways for further exploration. In Chapter One, we discussed the idea of *open formation* which we find akin to this. Two, divisions between public and private happen *inside of* a person not *to* a person.[62]

[62] In taking this direction, of engaging with Arendt, we are not pursuing another scholarly path available on this topic. When theologians tend to talk about the public – private divide, they do so relative to the public relevance of one's faith. Wolterstorff is particularly important on this but it is in many ways the defining trait of Stanley Hauerwas to reject the public – private divide. We are approaching the topic from a different angle and the payoffs are, we believe, substantial in doing so.

It will also be important to engage with developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner to understand further how that field models the identity formation of children. We will see in Bronfenbrenner's work that there is a clear model that parallels a vision of the public/private distinction. While we cannot find definitively why this is the case, we can situate it in historical context and wonder alongside of his *bioecological model* what is at stake in our moral imaginations of how identity formation unfolds relative to our individuality and our collective embeddednesses.

Finally, this section will look to Danielle Allen's work to complexify our public/private distinctions in favour of asking ourselves how the moral imagination of the child is formed. When scholars like Allen and Parham open up spaces to consider anew how the moral and civic imagination of the individual child comes to move from what is near and known to what is far and foreign, we find ourselves back to theories of education. Education prepares one for knowing, even before deliberation or judgement. Where a political end might require judgement, the more primary civic purpose is a social purpose and, in the midst of a plural and pluralising landscape, it is knowing amidst alternatives, of interpreting between alternatives. It is the work of building wisdom, before building judgement.

An instinctual recourse to thinking of the world as broken between public and private misses a great modern achievement, which is that communities can live together, organised around common identities, that are not immediately politically salient. Their purpose is to live a good life in community. Minority communities help us to see this throughout the history of the United States. It is a problem to focus on the individual as a political judger before being a social knower. Social knowledge is shared knowledge, interpreted in communities, and held by individuals who are formed as social beings. The civic purpose of education is a precursor to its political purpose, as it helps individuals to learn to—over time and in developmentally appropriate ways—hold the tension between received information and the necessity of interpretation. With this, we will be prepared to turn to Chapter Four, where we offer a constructive path forward.

Hannah Arendt on the Public - Private Divide

In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt establishes basic anthropological assumptions and, in doing so, she complexifies what we might popularly think of as the public - private divide. Further, she establishes *natality* as equally fundamental as mortality. Both of these contentions are of relevance to the place of identity formation in the education of children, even though hers is not a book about education. Of most importance, however, is Arendt's contention that the public/private distinction is not a divide in the institutions of the world but a way of thinking about the individual who operates in

the pluralism of the world.

The structure of this book is in her contention that *labour*, *work*, and *action* are aspects of the human condition that pertain to each individual. In doing so, she affirms the structure of ancient Greek thought regarding the spheres of human life. However, she makes an important modification. For Greek thought, labour, work, and action are spheres within which one might find themselves. Women and children were in the home along with the enslaved. Work was left to the philosophers, artists, and poets of the era. Action was the place of landholding men for whom the political sphere was accessible. Arendt contends that instead each individual navigates among labour, work, and action, with labour relating to the necessities of life such as food, shelter, and procreation; work relating to meaning-making in the world in its many forms; and action relating to our public lives as self-governors. The public/private distinction is not a divide at all for Arendt, it is a demarcation within the identity of the individual.

The Human Condition begins with a chapter called "The Public and Private Realm." Her argument unfolds in ancient Greece and alongside of Aristotle's definition of man as *zoon politikon*. Tracing the translation of this through Christian thinkers, she tells us that "the profound misunderstanding expressed in the Latin translation of 'political' as 'social' is perhaps nowhere clearer than in a discussion in which Thomas Aquinas compares the nature of household rule with political rule."[63] The political, Arendt tells us, is composed of equals. This is its great distinction from home, where inequalities were standard and expected, and from society, where "conformism" is expected. "The realm of the *polis*, on the contrary, was the sphere of freedom, and if there was a relationship between the two spheres, it was a matter of course that the mastering of the necessities of life in the household was the condition for freedom in the *polis*."[64]

What is of greatest interest on the question of the public/private for Arendt are the ways that reducing the public to the social has minimised the possibilities of a truly political realm of equals. Of the social, or "society," she writes, "The emergence of society…from the shadowy interior of the household into the light of the public sphere, has not only blurred the old borderline between private and political, it has changed almost beyond recognition the meaning of the two terms and their significance for the life of the individual and the citizen."[65] We hear resonances of Deneen's concerns. Further, it is the encroachment of the social from the private onto the public that Arendt has in mind. Arendt's argument is not that the public and private do not exist in their ideal forms. It is that we have so shifted the definition of the public in the direction of the social that the public, as she defines it, no

[63] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, 1998) 27.
[64] Ibid., 30-1.
[65] Ibid., 38.

longer exists and the emergence of the private through the social casts away the distinctions of public/private that we generally imagine.

Regarding natality, this is, for Arendt, the energy of the properly political. It is the possibility of something new being available in the world and offered to the future of mankind as distinct from all that came before. In this, natality sounds a great deal like the possibility of human potential. *The Human Condition* says remarkably little about children. It is focused on the world of adults. But, in a piece called "The Crisis in Education" (1954) Arendt addresses children in schools. The following excerpts can sound exceedingly conservative on their own, and it is only alongside her critique of the social as a bastardisation of the public that her writing proves coherent with her wider work. Consider the following:

> The more completely modern society discards the distinction between what is private and what is public, between what can thrive only in concealment and what needs to be shown to all in the full light of the public world, the more, that is, it introduces between the private and the public a social sphere in which the private is made public and vice versa, the harder it makes things for its children, who by nature require the security of concealment in order to mature undisturbed.

She ends this piece,

> Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable. And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world.[66]

Through these two extended quotations, we can see Arendt struggling to allow the child to remain in the sphere of private care, emerging towards self-expression but obviously not yet aligned in the public as an equal. We both need the natality of the child, and we need that natality to form as the individuality of him or herself before being thrust onto the public stage. For Arendt, school's should err towards being private spaces.

On this point, Arendt's helpful distinctions begin to break down in her own work, and this was seen almost immediately by Ralph Ellison, author of *Invisible Man*. Allen makes much of a back and forth

[66] Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (1961, London: Viking Press, 2016).

on this topic in *Talking to Strangers*.[67] The issue, as we stated at the start of this chapter, has to do with the fact that while identities might be private, they do not benefit from privacy. Helpfully, Ellison's critique of Arendt has to do with her inability to recognise in the actions of Black parents sending their children into desegregated schools in Little Rock, Arkansas, that sacrifice is a moral ideal. Where Arendt strayed, according to Allen (following Ellison) is in misunderstanding the children cannot be privately protected from the formative initiations into public life through social rituals. "Whereas Arendt developed a political theory that might protect children from politics, by transforming politics into an epic arena for full-grown warriors only, Ellison has a more tragic vision: rituals to solidify social order inevitably involve children in politics, however much one might wish the case otherwise."[68]

What we see through these conceptual moves is that the human condition is not the condition of humanity in the abstract, like Barth she saw it is the condition of the individual. In each individual is the possibility of care (of the self and others including children), creative self-expression, and a public voice whereby we connect as equal citizens. The temptation to see public - private as a divide that characterises our institutions, Arendt might see as a problem of our understanding of the social over against the private. This would make the clearest sense of her writing on education, and offer the most generous interpretation of her writing on that subject, which otherwise can seem out of keeping with her wider work. That temptation we would call a temptation towards the heresy of nurture, prioritising the externalities of the world. With Ellison's correction, Arendt's framing of public/private as a distinction in the self makes much more sense of something like human transformation and a strong Barthian notion of vocation than a public – private divide. Indeed, it helps to clarify how open formation might be institutionally imagined. A world of a strict public – private divide with rigid boundaries begs for an understanding of the closed formation children receive in private before making their way morally into public life. The insights of scholars of race in America, like Ellison, are critical on this point. Barth, too, can only be read as resisting rigidity and the privacy it would entail.

Urie Bronfenbrenner on the Mechanics of Formation

The field of developmental psychology itself has a major scholar that wrestled with these questions and offers some refinement to a public/private distinction. We return here to the thinking of psychologist of formation is Urie Bronfenbrenner, best understood through *Making Human Beings*

[67] Danielle Allen, *Talking to Strangers* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) Chapter Three.
[68] Ibid., 28.

Human: Bioecological Perspectives on Human Development. Published in 2005, this volume brings together a career's worth of contributions, beginning in 1970, and including his watershed contribution: *The Ecology of Human Development* (1979). In brief, the great claim of this work is that "*all* the levels of organisation involved in human life are linked integratively in the constitution of the course of individual ontogeny."[69] Bronfenbrenner can be seen as a corrective to an overly individualised, privatised, or closed understanding of identity formation, towards what we have called open formation. We can see in Bronfenbrenner an eagerness to hold in tension the work of the self and the context that this work happens within, that is, the public and private institutions that surround the child as human development and formation is happening. Bronfenbrenner leaves extensive conceptual space for what Arendt calls "society," but in doing so does not offer a critique of where that leaves the child. While his is a description of the mechanisms of formation, we will see that through his lifetime this turned into constructive political and social institution building.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development was founded on a critique of the differentiations between theory and practice in the understanding of childhood development. Instead, he argued, children could only be understood insofar as they were seen in their actual context. This makes sense given his insight that "to a greater extent than any other species, human beings create the environments that shape the course of human development. Their actions influence the multiple physical and cultural tiers of the ecology that shapes them, and this agency makes humans—for better or worse—active producers of their own development."[70] The reciprocity, or dialectic, between individuals and their formative institutions is the core of Bronfenbrenner's claim. Not only are there multiple layers of influence on the individual, but that individual exerts agency over those layers in uneven measure. The model is *bio*ecological because it synthesises other layers of developmental influence into and around the ecology of the child. The main point, however, is that the systems and layers of influence outside of the individual give the child their sense of reality and of right and wrong. Consider the following:

> Over the life course, human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate external environment. To be effective, the interaction must occur on a fairly regular basis over extended periods of *time*. Such enduring forms of interaction in the immediate environment are referred to as *proximal processes*. Examples of such processes include feeding or comforting a baby; playing with a young child; child-child activities; group or solitary play; reading, learning new

[69] Urie Bronfenbrenner, *Making Human Beings Human: Bioecological Perspectives in Human Development* (New York: Sage Publications, 2005) xiv.
[70] Ibid., xxvii.

> skills; athletic activities; problem solving; caring for others; making plans; performing complex tasks; and acquiring new knowledge and know-how. For the younger generation, participation in such interactive processes over time generates the ability, motivation, knowledge, and skill to engage in such activities both with others and for one's own. For example, through progressively more complex interaction with their parents, children increasingly become agents of their own development, to be sure only in part. In sum, *proximal processes* are posited as the primary engines of development.[71]

There are two things to be aware of. First, identifying the "immediate external environment" gives definition to the culture within which a child is formed. Second, this transforms "over the life course" as "human development takes place through progressively more complex reciprocal interaction[s]." Further, these interactions need to ideally be based on "*mutual emotional attachment*."[72] The most obvious place of formation is in the sphere that Bronfenbrenner calls the "microsystem." This is best understood as the family. Beyond the microsystem are the mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. These are like the rings of a tree. The mesosystem are the institutions close at hand but outside of the spheres of direct and habitual engagement. In many modern families, the extended family of cousins and grandparents, living in different states and seen a few times a year, would fall in the mesosytem. The exosystem are the institutions and associations that surround but do not directly impact the child. An example of this would be a parent's place of work. Finally, the macrosystem operates at the cultural level. There is an impact on individuals, but only as mediated through the other layers of the ecology. Taken as a whole, this is the ecological approach to human development. The approach asks us to see children as nested within overlapping interests and experiences, some mutually reinforcing and some competing, but nothing that reinforces the idea of a public – private divide.

The term that helps Bronfenbrenner explain the implications of the ecological approach to development is "culture," and he writes, "Human beings are not only a culture-producing species, they are also culture produced: that is, the psychological characteristics of the species are a joint, interactive function of the biological characteristics and potentials of an active organism, on the one hand, and, on the other, of the forms of psychological functioning and possible courses of development existing in a given culture at a particular point in its history."[73] For Bronfenbrenner, it is biology plus culture that forms the possibilities of individual identification. We are formed by those nearest at hand; we develop in a reciprocal dialogical tension with those communities. This is the framework of formation.

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[71] Ibid., 6. Italics original.
[72] Ibid., 9. Italics original.
[73] Ibid., 123.

Bronfenbrenner's own biography and professional path are of interest here.[74] Born in Russia, Urie Bronfenbrenner and his family moved to the United States when he was six years old. After study at Cornell, Harvard, and the University of Michigan, he spent his career at Cornell University, and his work and testimony to the United States government helped to create and form the Head Start program. The human ecology approach acknowledges the impact of the formal and informal structures that surround the development of each person, and, for Bronfenbrenner, the approach reinforced the importance of political and social policies that support the healthy development of children. The Head Start program does two things for low-income families: it supports strong and healthy family units and it provides supplemental early learning programming.[75] According to Head Start, the program has worked with thirty-six million children since it was founded in 1965. The approach of Head Start directly maps onto what we may expect from an ecological approach to the meritocratic instinct supporting children to have access to opportunities not native to their families of origin. If we consider the timeline in the previous chapter, however, we can see that it is institutions like Head Start, combined with the challenges of racial segregation and the exploding workforce as the feminist movement opened pathways to women in work, that ultimately led to the prominence of schools as institutions of formation. Schools have become the crucial locus between the formation of the family and the formation of the community. Bronfenbrenner's work helped to make that so in a purposeful way, and beginning at the very earliest years of a child's life was part of an intentional approach to help every child have a "head start" towards their full potential, developmentally speaking.

Through Bronfenbrenner, we are given a way to imagine the mechanics of a public/private distinction and we can begin to see a way that Arendt's assertion that this distinction happens within the individual, not outside of the individual, could take place. Where the heresies of nature make great import of what is happening inside of the individual, the heresies of nurture offer a temptation to prioritise what is happening outside of the individual, including their context. This is a temptation that aligns to the concerns we have with All Diversity is the Same. Where Arendt made the claim that the public realm was to be understood as a place where public selves are in relation to one another, Bronfenbrenner systematises what Arendt referred to as the problematic of "society" and demonstrates how identities are born out through the "systems" surrounding the child. If there is a danger of thought, here, it would be a prioritisation of formation over emergence, but in this Bronfenbrenner is a good scientist, and he does not foreclose the possibility of God addressing the child as itself a formative act. Bronfrenbrenner also does not give us a language to talk about the connective tissue morally speaking between the internal life of the individual and the external public

[74] Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research, "Urie Bronfenbrenner": <https://bctr.cornell.edu/about-us/urie-bronfenbrenner>.
[75] Office of Head Start: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ohs/about/head-start>.

world; he is not a theorist of moral identity exactly. However, his theory would lend itself to considering virtue language as that which ties the private life to these various formations. We will lean into this opening as we consider virtue again in Chapter Four.

Danielle Allen on the Formation of a Child's Imagination

Finally, we turn to the again to the work of Danielle Allen, a leading thinker on the relationship between diversity, education, and civic virtue. Allen, both a Classicist and Political Theorist, is the James Bryant Conant University Professor at Harvard University, Director of Harvard's Edmond J. Safra Center for Ethics, and was the Co-Chair of the Harvard University Presidential Task Force on Inclusion and Belonging (2016-2018). There is arguably no scholar in the United States more comprehensively thoughtful on the topics that animate this dissertation. Understanding her position, as a benchmark, will give shape to our final chapter. Allen's contribution on the issue of the heresies of nurture, and in particular on the public/private distinction, will be directly related to the question of education. Piecing together work from several books, we can see how the civic imagination of the child becomes of interest for Allen as a way to talk about what Arendt referred to as the internality of the public/private distinction and what we saw in Bronfenbrenner as the mechanism of formation.

Allen is a prolific author and practitioner at the intersection of education and equality, beginning with her 2004 book, *Talking to Strangers,* which we considered previously. Since then, her book contributions have included two edited volumes, *Education, Justice, and Democracy* (with Rob Reich) and *From Voice to Influence: Understanding Citizenship in a Digital Age* (with Jennifer S. Light), her 2016 book, *Education and Equality*, which was first given as Stanford's Tanner Lecture in 2014, and in 2023 *Justice by Means of Democracy*. As we saw in our discussion of Diversity Statements, if diversity is the challenge, then equality is the moral vision at the heart of the response. One of Allen's recent contributions to the discourse—she is still a very active author—is around the term "egalitarian participatory democracy."[76] We get to this "democratic eudaimonism" through the "humanistic baseline," of which she has just sketched the basic outline in *Education and Equality* (2016). In this section, we will survey Allen's writings to further define how the identities of children are formed in the realm of education.

Education is a particularly interesting locus for understanding Allen's work, because Allen understands that institutions of education straddle the private/public in challenging ways. While Allen

[76] Danielle Allen and Jennifer S. Light, eds. *From Voice to Influence: Understanding Citizenship in a Digital Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015) 4ff.

does not make the distinction between diversity and pluralism in the way described above, her arguments amount to an agreement that complexity lies most acutely at the level of pluralism. Take, for example, her contribution to the edited volume, *From Voice to Influence*: "Reconceiving Public Spheres: The Flow Dynamics Model."[77] Her main conversation partner in that work is Jürgen Habermas, and her concern with Habermas is that his spatial imagery limits his civic and institutional imagination. To speak of the "public sphere," as he has done beginning with his earliest work, is to have "excessively rigid distinctions between public and private" and miss "the empirical realities that lie behind the well-worn critiques concerning exclusion...and the value of diverse discourse types, from rhetoric to humour to 'dark speech'," Allen writes.[78] In short, identity makes its way into public. By contrast, egalitarian participatory democracy is, first of all, participatory as opposed to, Habermas's preferred framework, deliberative. As Allen defines it, this means it is forged through practices of building democracy together and these are not reducible to deliberative practices in public spaces. This new spatial vision of citizenship participation is important to questions of identity and diversity because it allows space to the loci of thick diversity—the pluralism of civil society—to figure prominently and meaningfully in a vision of deliberation that is not limited to the "public." As she explains this channel of civic life, "expressive discourse can flow through a variety of different kinds of community—formal or informal associations; familial, ethnic or social networks; educational, vocational, and professional institutions or organisations; and so on. As anthropologists and social historians have long explained, both ceremonial expression and everyday talk constitute the community, establish and maintain its norms, and provide means of contestation."[79] While she is clear that "in this model, identity, opinion, belief, preference, and subjectivity formation occur at the level of the individual" this is "commonly through engagement in social and relational processes that are, in their essence, discursive."[80] We can see the way her work helps to build ties between our findings from Arendt and Bronfenbrenner. Allen goes on, "this model uses 'discourse' as the term to identify the fundamentally linguistic, and therefore cultural, aspect of all political life."[81] The sum total of this is that culture is forged in thick communities that are not "public" in the sense of Habermas. This acknowledgement and defence of the pluralism in which identity is forged supports the conclusion that identities are the places where diversity becomes socially operative. Allen is suggesting that this pluralism is properly public in as much as it is part of a "discourse-flow" model. Again, to give her a summative space:

> The focus on flows of discourse makes it easier to see directly how the intellectual and ethical frameworks that give content to our identities and guide

[77] Ibid., 178–207.
[78] Ibid., 181.
[79] Ibid., 184. She goes on to talk about these thick communities, which are not private but not quite public, as "relationships of solidarity and community."
[80] Ibid., 188.
[81] Ibid., 192.

> our discursive contributions directly shape the decisions that structure our shared life. By showing how we humans build our worlds out of talk, these categories clarify the stakes that the quality of our discourse has. These categories also raise questions about the relation between identity formation and expression, and about why some expressive acts become influential at the structural level of a whole polity while other expressive acts serve mainly to help constitute and reconstitute particular discourse communities at subnational or transnational levels.[82]

Where above we spoke of the sociospatial tension between the particularities of locally, "sorted," communities and a digitally-mediated cosmopolitanism, Allen helpfully specifies the critique in the context of Habermas's "deliberative democracy" and arrives at a similarly sympathetic focus on formative, pluralistic communities.

Among our questions is how these formative, pluralistic communities shape the institutions of education within which children participate. Here, Allen's starting place is, as ever, impeccable. Her 2004 book, *Talking to Strangers*, traces what she calls in the subtitle, the "anxieties of citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education." As we acknowledged above, the undefended presence of Diversity Statements in educational institutions emerges out of a decades-long practice of responding to the end of segregation in America's schools, if not an even more longstanding history. Allen's task in *Talking to Strangers* is to explore the concept of trust, or more acutely distrust, as it relates to education and citizenship. When she writes in the Prologue that "the central feature of democratic politics is therefore not its broad definition of citizenship or its ultimate dependence on majority rule, but rather its commitment to preserving the allegiance of all citizens, including electoral minorities, *despite* majority rule," we see why inclusive, equitable practices impacting diverse individuals is of interest to her as a theorist and proponent of democratic self-governance. The foundation Allen finds is "reciprocity" between "political friends."[83] Building on Aristotle, Allen argues that the basic factor of reciprocity between friends is *equality*, and, at the level of the individual, a vision of citizens who "commit themselves to pursuing liberty and equality simultaneously, and to resisting accounts of politics that insist that commitment to one requires short-changing the other."[84] Building, as she does, on the history of distrust of the racial "other" in America's short past, it makes sense that Allen is searching for a shared political anthropology, much like the Diversity Statements we saw above, that takes equity and inclusion to be building blocks upon which to see that our diversity can be our strength, itself a good that teaches those who are otherwise strangers to interact "self-confidently."[85]

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[82] Ibid., 202.
[83] Danielle Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, see especially chapters 8 and 9.
[84] Ibid., 138-139.
[85] Ibid., 165.

This argument and instinct finds practical expression in the statement of a Harvard Inclusion and Belonging Task Force, of which she was a co-chair. When theory moves to practice, we begin to see in that document how expressions of difference begin to thin out, as differences including "race, ethnicity, gender, sexual identity, religion and spiritual experience, political viewpoint, socioeconomic and immigration status, geographic origins and language, disability, veteran status, and discipline and scholarly methodology" are said to have "great potential value to an academic community that seeks to maximize its knowledge resources in pursuit of academic excellence" without a defence as to why this is the case.[86] Again we are left wondering in what way each of these kinds of diversity is the same, with an equal amount of "potential value," even as we can acknowledge the democratic benefits of advancing such a claim, given Allen's work in *Talking to Strangers*.

Allen is philosophically honest that at issue does seem to be the quest for shared basic anthropological assumptions, first explored and pursued in *Talking to Strangers*, which finds new voice for Allen in *Education and Equality*. As she rightly asserts, to begin with the normative ideal of equality, is to beg the question: "to be equal is to have an equivalent degree of some specific quality or attribute in comparison to someone else. To talk about equality, one must always begin by asking, 'Equal to whom and in what respect?'"[87] The substance of equality is just that, substantive, and cannot be principally defined as an absence, even though, as we have seen, this seems to be exactly what Diversity Statements take as their task. As Allen rightly sees, the absence of exclusion and inequality does not specify the substance of political identity. For this, she needs a vision of the good life, which she gets through sustained engagement with Arendt's *The Human Condition*, and ultimately a vision of moral identity. She writes, "against Plato, a democratic answer to the question of the kind of education that would achieve full human flourishing starts from a different view of human nature—namely, that despite the differences among us, we are all capable of doing multiple jobs, at the very least those of performing our own particular excellence and also of acting politically as citizens."[88] This "democratic account of human flourishing" has the goal of "participatory readiness."[89] For now, it is sufficient to say that this dissertation is in agreement with the realisation that to truly account for the "great potential value" of diversity, a political anthropology is needed that can account both for diversity, and for pluralism, including moral and ethical pluralism. Points of disagreement will become relevant in the following chapter.

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[86] The Task Force met from 2016–2018 and released their final report, "Pursuing Excellence on a Foundation of Inclusion," in March 2018: <https://inclusionandbelongingtaskforce.harvard.edu/files/inclusion/files/harvard_inclusion_belonging_task_force_final_report_full_web_180327.pdf> pg. 3 (accessed 14/6/19).
[87] Allen, *Education and Equality,* 2.
[88] Ibid., 15.
[89] Ibid., Chapter 2.

In sum, what we see in Danielle Allen's thought is a divide between the individual, conceived in her diversity and equality and the pluralistic network of communities that have formed her. In Allen's thought, theories of education and equality pertain to the first rather than the second.[90] However, if education is precisely the point of transition between these two realities, with human ordered growth and development the key, then we must take account of these formative educational communities as seriously as we account for the individual navigating them. That means, while scholars have done well to conceive of the centrality of diversity to education, we must now account equally well for pluralism, which may drive our practices and policies towards slightly different outcomes. Allen begins to open up the complexities of pluralism for education, but they, as of yet, do not find full expression in her most comprehensive thinking in *Education and Equality*. Allen accounts conceptually for the pluralistic network of educational institutions in *From Voice to Influence* while at the same time choosing not to fully grapple with it in the context of *Education and Equality*. This oversight leads to a conceptual gap. Where all of the conceptual components seem to exist in Allen's work to engage with the deep pluralism that defines the United States, she instead defaults back to relegating these issues to private civic institutions, and without the characteristic deep thinking that she has given to other topics. Interestingly, the term "pluralism" is not to be found in the Harvard Inclusion and Belonging statement that Allen co-chaired. As of yet, she has not accounted for the ways in which the deepest levels of difference are able to find expression within educational institutions.

Conclusion

In this section, we have engaged with three authors who together complexify the idea that children are the product of the private sphere, not least because the very idea of *the school* makes this basic concept nearly impossible to conceptualise. We started with Arendt because of her contention that the distinction between the public and private is not one outside of the individual, but instead one to be seen as inside of the human condition. We contend, alongside of the work of Ellison, that she did not think clearly enough about the child and allow this to force a richer sympathetic consideration of "society," but she nonetheless had the important insight that natality—the ontology of the new one—

[90] Tommie Shelby makes a similar critique of Allen's work in his response (Tommie Shelby, "Justification, Learning, and Human Flourishing," in Danielle Allen, *Education and Equality,* 251-61). To this, Allen replies, "Based on my argument, a reader could determine that human capacities consist of those components of human functioning that permit us to labor effectively; politick efficaciously and judiciously; love wisely and in a way that is fulfilling; and praise, play, and celebrate meaningfully. But meaningful to whom, you might ask? And fulfilling for whom? Meaningfully and in a way that is fulfilling to ourselves as we ourselves judge, I would answer. But this is not enough of an answer to the question that Shelby has raised about just what I mean by the development of human capacities and whether my meaning closes down human possibilities around a single conception of the good or provides liberal protections for the diversity of conceptions of the good that populate our worlds." Danielle Allen, "Response to Commentators," in Danielle Allen, *Education and Equality,* 100.

does considerable political work as a basic anthropological insight. As a counterpoint to Arendt, we considered the research of Urie Bronfenbrenner, who embedded the child in "systems" of culture that impact that child's development and we called this the mechanics of formation. Bronfenbrenner's interest in the external left very little space for the realm of the private, and indeed it seems, if Arendt saw the sphere of the private as encompassing "society," then Bronfenbrenner saw "society" as encompassing the private. We gained from Bronfenbrenner a clearer sense of why the public - private divide lacks clear boundaries but not the care of a philosopher in understanding what is at stake publicly should that be true. In Danielle Allen, what is at stake becomes clearer, as she recognises that the individual's moral imagination plays a profound role in their public engagement, and that moral imagination is forged through the process of the identity formation of the child. Allen challenges the idea that children arrive at the public sphere ready to deliberate and instead asks us to consider that children are already engaged in public participation at young ages in life. In so doing, Allen reinforces Arendt's claim that the public/private distinction is inside of the human condition, not an imposition on the individual. Allen invites us to consider the child's moral, civic, and institutional imagination as that child navigates questions of liberty, equality, and diversity through that child's education.

In sum, the public – private divide, simply put, misinforms our institutional imaginations. The public/private are better thought of as a distinction. This is the issue upon which our divergence with Deneen is clearest. To preview a more substantive turn in the next chapter to the thought of Nicholas Wolterstorff, by Wolterstorff's reading of the history of European and then American political culture, the public was established in the imagination as divided from the private in order to protect the private sphere, and this remains a crucial demarcation into the future.[91] By Deneen's telling, this divide has proven to cannibalise the goods of private culture, and is therefore in need of replacement by a postliberal future. In both cases, what our investigation into the place of identity formation in the education of children has illuminated is that the distinction between public and private is fragile. We ignore that fragility and its impact on our institutional imaginations to our detriment.

[91] Wolterstorff briefly engages with this topic at the end of *Justice in Love*, but it can be seen behind his work on public reason and the deployment of religious concepts into public discourse. Consider the following, in a section where he says he "must sketch out, ever so briefly, [his] own understanding of liberal democracy": "The fact that the polity of liberal democracy is not the highest institutional expression of a religio-moral community united by a shared vision of God and the good, but instead an association of such communities, has been the source of much lament in recent years by communitarians and traditionalists. It is said that liberal democracy has no moral basis, that it is nothing more than a *modus vivendi*. But liberal democracy is not a mere *modus vivendi*. It's true that, in the nature of the case, its moral basis is not the vision of God and the good shared by one particular community within the citizenry; if that is the sort of moral basis one is looking for, then liberal democracy will indeed appear as an amoral arrangement of convenience. The moral basis of liberal democracy is the moral basis of this particular *association* of such communities. Liberal democracy is no more without a moral basis than is any other political structure. What the critics ought to be saying is not that liberal democracy lacks a moral basis but that they disagree with its moral basis—disagree, for example, with the assumption that citizens have natural rights against the state." Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015) 236–7.

Conclusion

This chapter's purpose was to consider how we conceive of the child relative to the institutions that surround that child, keeping in mind the outsized influence of schools. We began by considering the idea of children as neighbours, and by considering the important civic impact that *the good neighbour* has had in the American experiment. Where the temptations of nature led us to see the child as only a future adult, the temptations of nurture lead us to see the child as simply a product of their environment. Whether that environment is a world in which "diversity" represents a varied but flattened sense of particularity or a world in which the child is a product of their culture without the attendant privacy historically given to families, actual children are highly individuated and almost always surprising. Arendt captured this best through the use of the term *natality* as a political concept.

We considered the argument at length that diversity and pluralism are not the same thing, and further, that it is not the case that diversity is descriptive while pluralism is normative. Both have a descriptive and a normative quality that are better divided through the dialectical relationship of individual and community, where diverse individuals crossect a plurality of formative communities, one of which is the school. We considered the way that diversity is being considered in educational institutions and offered a critique of the ironic idea that diversity is being treated as the same through "statements" of diversity. When we find ourselves seeing identity as a project amongst a set of identifiers, we are erring towards a proliferation of essentialisms instead of towards a world of individuals, in their particularity, who remain open to the world in all of its complexities and their place in that world. It can both be true that attending to diversity has been essential to ensuring that schools are places for all children and also true that attending to diversity as we currently seem to be in educational institutions will ultimately flatten out children's identities into projects to be undertaken in the quest for adulthood. Insofar as this is the case, the sense of open formation that we outlined in Chapter One is lost.

The second heresy of nurture we engaged with was the public - private divide. We did so not because the topic is manageable in half a chapter, but because it is essential for us to contend with the question of the place of identity formation in the education of children in the institutional spaces as they are conceived by scholars, who are often not experts in childhood. Arendt, for example, gives a great deal of consideration to what is at stake when we mischaracterise the public/private distinction from just that, a distinction within the individual, to a public - private divide in the world that gets absorbed by her greatest concern "society." When we consider that the public/private distinction could be cultivated in the child's moral imagination, which is the adjustment that Allen helps us to make, space is opened up for imagining the child through their development. Arendt does not give us the practical

solution, but she does give us a framework to help get there. Bronfenbrenner clarifies the systems at work between the child and their formative communities, elucidating but also making the temptations towards heresy quite clear. So, we did not do away with the public/private distinction nor did we solve the question of its impact on the life of the child, but we did see how this distinction operates behind the questions that we face in considering the place of identity formation in the education of children.

Writing about the understanding of baptism in one of Barth's peers, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Oliver O'Donovan again states precisely what is at stake in the heresies of nurture and temptations to closed formation, whether through identifiers—given or chosen—or communities, even Deneen's desired historic vision of western Christian civilisation. O'Donovan writes, "In baptism we see an individual act that grounds an identity…. In other words, we have to break imaginatively with the hard, encrusted individual identity that starts out by making bargains with others equally hard and encrusted, and we must discover that from the beginning our identities were expansive, questioning, in search of answers and growth that only the social presences of other identities could give."[92] Concern with "hard, encrusted" notions of identity formation seems a well-stated concern that Barth would share at the intersection of considering what is possible for the individual, expressed in baptism, and the identifiers, whether given or chosen, that we find ourselves bearing. We have already quoted Barth on his concerns with the masses overtaking the particularity and uniqueness of the individual. We are clear that this does not mean that children are not embedded, in the beautiful way that Bronfenbrenner describes, but that embedding is not the individual's *grounding*, as O'Donovan puts it. This mirrors Barth's basic anthropological insight: we are soul and body and we have spirit. We *have* spirit because it is given to us, by God, not within ourselves. Let's return to vocation here, because for the Christian, moral identity is vocation insofar as vocation is participation in God's life in the world. This means open formation, because it means that all other formative spaces are subject to God. It should not go without saying that when we are sustained inside of a vision of open formation, we receive education in the special sense, not just the general sense. Education in the special sense becomes more clearly tied to the life of the child and that child's potential. It also becomes tied to the life of transformation, where we can see not only our own limitations but also the sacrifices of others. We remember that for Barth, baptism is about obedience and hope, responding to the identity God has already given us as those "with whom God wants to be friends" and for whom God has offered to walk the pilgrimage of life together.[93] It should also not go without saying that other traditions may have a way to similarly arrive at open formation. That would be welcome.

[92] Oliver O'Donovan, *The Disappearance of Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024) 142.
[93] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015) 155, where Wolterstorff is building on the quote "The will for fellowship [is God's] very being" in Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.2, 25.

Chapter Four: The Place of Identity Formation in the Education of Children

Introduction

The argument to this point has occasionally indicated that virtue is a way to specify the place of identity formation in the education of children—removing from education the possibility of being a project but honouring its formative work as a practice. Some may wonder whether this is a subtle intervention without a pronounced effect. The second half of this chapter will try to demonstrate that when we remove from our schools what we called in the Introduction *the anxieties of liberalism*, our institutional imaginations open up. The impact comes, therefore, not in setting up straw men—"DEI" as an example—and creating parallel institutions to those with whom we disagree, but in the careful work of affirmation and antithesis and the embodied—or as Hunter says *incarnational*—work that follows.

We can begin this work by returning to a third Supreme Court case with an impact on our topic. As in the Introduction, we can read the majority decision in this case as a way to see the Court intentionally shaping the civic and institutional imagination on a topic of public importance. Since *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*, moral identity has been explicitly a topic of federal insight regarding educational access and exclusion. In the Introduction, we saw that it was precisely this for the transformation from *Plessy v. Ferguson* to *Brown v. Board*. *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* was a case in 1925 that ruled against the State of Oregon, as Oregon tried to mandate that all children needed to attend public schools.[1] In doing so, the ruling acknowledged: "Systematic religious instruction and moral training according to the tenets of the Roman Catholic Church are also regularly provided [in and by the school run by the Society of Sisters]." That is, explicit attention to moral identity is inseparable from schooling. The ruling goes on:

> No question is raised concerning the power of the State reasonably to regulate all schools, to inspect, supervise and examine them, their teachers and pupils; to require that all children of proper age attend some school, that teachers shall be of good moral character and patriotic disposition, that certain studies plainly essential to good citizenship must be taught, and that nothing be taught which is manifestly inimical to the public welfare.

[1] Pierce v. Society of Sisters, 268 U.S. 510 (1925)

However, “The child is not the mere creature of the State; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for additional obligations.” In this ruling, we see the acknowledgement that schools are morally formative, the context of pluralism (even in 1925), and the assumption that parents may not all agree with one another nor the state as to the sources and shape of that formation. What arises as most clearly in contestation is what “certain studies plainly essential to good citizenship” might be, and it is on this fine point, not the general point, that current public debates about education and identity become battlegrounds for or against an explicit foregrounding of identity. Meta-questions arise about the tensions between different, and shifting, sources of identity formation, and the role of teachers and mentors in these processes.

The temptations at the extremes of the Heresies of Nature and the Heresies of Nurture obscure rather than help ease the tensions and anxieties that arise. In this chapter, we synthesise our concerns and offer an alternative framework. First, we consider the implications of the affirmations and antitheses we found, returning especially to the question of moral formation through virtue. Second, we consider an argument by Nicholas Wolterstorff that education is better thought of as a *practice*, not a project, and we look at the shape of that practice as a way to consider further the insights of open formation. Third, we frame the outcome of this social practice as a virtue, and we give it a name, *always learning*. Fourth, and finally, we engage in two thought experiments that help us see clearly why it is so challenging to talk about the place of identity formation in the education of children in the United States today and how *always learning* expands our institutional imaginations.

Conclusions of the Possibilities of Human Transformation and Human Potential

As we considered our methodology in Chapter One, and Hunter’s invitation to faithful presence, we said that the work of antithesis is to imagine in concrete forms those places in common life that will serve Christians and their neighbours in deeply good ways and then to either shore those places up or build them. To do the work of antithesis, one must be willing to state clearly what one is against in the current discourse and why, at the same time looking for points of commonality and connection. What we have just argued over the first three chapters of this dissertation has attempted to do just that. The place of identity formation in the education of children, we found, is important as a proxy for contemporary debates on the future of liberal democracy, and there are concerns with how it is being treated in literature and practice.

In Chapter One, we recognised that concerns with the place of identity formation in the education of children should not be surprising insofar as philosophical questions of anthropology are finding

reduced and essentialised counterparts in literatures of identity studies. If we are loose with our understanding of identity in adults, it will be difficult to take the great care required when considering children. Considering children, however, is perhaps exactly what will give us the nuance needed to have conversations that are careful while also practicable as regards our educational practices and schools. It is especially the moral identity of children that is of relevance to the debates surrounding pluralism and education. When Christians consider the formation of children, theologies of baptism often help to refine our thinking. Following Jennifer Herdt, we turned to Karl Barth for insights that would allow for the affirmation and antithesis of faithful presences: faithful, insightful, and comprehensible ways of speaking from theology into this issue of public concern. Barth's insistence on the individual, not separated from their formative communities but not trapped by them; his rejection of a strong notion of original sin; and his reminder to us that vocation is an invitation to partner with God through life, following Him—all three of these understandings of the child gave substance to the possibility of human transformation and the possibility of human potential, which corresponded to Barth's thinking about baptism with the Holy Spirit and baptism with water. We saw the promise of these insights as the search for an open formation, one that trusts the spaces God calls us to form us appropriately and also to trust God directly with that formation.

These two basic anthropological assumptions were used to offer critiques of the current state of affairs regarding the place of identity formation in the education of children. In Chapter Two, we began by telling the story of the Heresies of Nature, a provocative title by design. Our first question was about the teleological nature of human development, and how we imagine the child as future adult. While unavoidable to some degree, we took a moment to complexify this issue. There were two Heresies of Nature under consideration in that chapter: The Inevitability of Democracy and The Neutrality of Human Development. Our findings were several. When we see the child as future citizen, inevitably moving towards democratic life, we are making basic anthropological assumptions without also naming them. This can keep us, on one hand, from seeing the present dignity of the identity formation of the child and, on the other, from imagining a future for that child that is properly open. The discipline of developmental psychology, and, in particular, work on the stages through which children progress, reinforces a temptation to see children as the inevitable unfolding of something at which we adults have either failed or of which we are not capable. Critics from the broad field of identity studies have been fellow travellers, and we looked at feminist theorists and scholars concerned with race for perspective on what is at stake in these heresies.

Chapter Three turned to the Heresies of Nurture: All Diversity is the Same, and The Public - Private Divide. If the Heresies of Nature leave the child without their particularities, the Heresies of Nurture are heresies in so far as they flatten and isolate those particularities. We argued less that all diversity is not the same and more that there is an irony in seeing a world of "identifiers" as all the same. Where

diversity is seen as a good, deeper difference and moral pluralism are still seen as a problem. The larger context is the conflicting ways that we understand the public/private distinction and where exactly it is institutionally that we imagine education is happening. If schools are public, then how can they take seriously the individual's identity formation, which though largely happening in private does have the benefit of privacy? We ended with an engagement with Hannah Arendt that introduced the idea that the public/private distinction happens internally in an individual, not externally to that person, and Danielle Allen reminded us that it is the child's civic imagination that perhaps captures this tension best. In these ways, our basic anthropological assumptions helped to steer a critique that cleared space for a constructive approach to the place of identity formation in the education of children.

Through the lens and critique of *the possibility of human transformation*, we conclude:

A Barthian reading of baptism invites Christians to champion antiessentialist notions of the child's identity formation. This means whether in progressive, liberal, conservative, or fundamentalist directions, Christians should insist on the possibility of human transformation. Children do not have to wait to be adults to have this dignity. In baptism, the promise of transformation is an ever present hope and grace. This even applies to citizens; we can accept that states take a great interest in the growth of their children into citizens without allowing even this to be a final outcome for a child. We identified that there is always a moral imagination behind this civic imagination that needs attention. The possibility of human transformation is part of this moral imagination.

Antiessentialism does not mean that children are identity-neutral in schools. Children do not arrive identityless nor does it make sense to consider them identityless. This is because while identities might be private they do not have the benefit of privacy. The history of race in American schools and the crucial correction that we saw Ellison make to Arendt in Chapter Three reinforces this point. If identity studies offered one key insight into our project, it is this.[2] Much of the focus on identity in the education of children in the United States has been to overcome exclusions, largely because of this insight. It has been to rectify injustice. Du Bois wrote at the very beginning of an era of reconstruction after the abolition of slavery, and both our feminist thinkers and those concerned with race, like Du Bois, carefully remind us that the first question of identity in education is about who is either absent or not fully present. The justice of participation is the first place of identity in the education of children. Further, when we are concerned with the justice of participation for children, the identity of which we are concerned is almost undoubtedly given to, not chosen by, that child. Children represent

[2] This is distinct from the rallying cry of second wave feminists in the 1960s that the personal is political. It is related, but it allows it to remain the case that identity can be publicly relevant while still essentially forged in private. This would be a way to frame a détente between Ellison and Arendt, in keeping with Allen's work.

their communities of formation at the young age that they begin formal schooling. As we said in the last chapter, when we are describing the representations of communities, we are trafficking in the deep difference of neighbours, we are in the sphere of pluralism. It is precisely where pluralism is at stake that the sameness of diversity breaks down. And yet, the justice of participation needs to begin somewhere, and overcoming exclusion is a reasonable first step. Barth acknowledges this in his own basic anthropological insight: we are souls and bodies, and have spirit. Our bodies are not tangential to our humanity, nor are the particularities that come along with them.

Education can participate in transformation when we think of education in the special sense. Nothing is keeping God from using education in the work of transformation. Barth assumes this by using the idea of apprenticeship into the Christian life.[3] Apprenticeship is a very helpful metaphor for open formation and the emergence of the moral identity and can include explicitly Christian education in churches, private schools, and homes. It reminds us that the place of identity formation in children and the place of identity formation in *the education* of children are not the same question. This can be easy to lose sight of for exactly the reason that we ended the last chapter. Consider a criticism of Allen on this point. In *Education and Equality*, she writes:

> While the institutions of formal education arise on the basis of diverse justifications, within these different institutions, the activity of educating and also the techniques developed to pursue teaching and learning are identified by a single end: cultivating human development…. In order for that training to succeed, it must still affect the development of the student qua human being—for that is what it means for any of us to cultivate capacities and abilities.[4]

To this we have learned to say, not quite. The conflation of education and formation in this kind of vision leads to an impoverishment in our institutional imaginations regarding the spaces our children need in order for identity formation to bear fruit, such that our children have a sense of self, a sense of purpose, and a sense of impact in the world. These hopes are not only developmentally appropriate for children, but when we help children to reach them, we find that the purpose of higher education, and the place of identity in higher education, comes more clearly into view as well. These arguments are for a different dissertation, but they help to make clear that if scholars want to ensure the healthy formation of identity in children, schools are but one—albeit extremely important—location.

Transformation is not only relevant to moral transformation but it does include moral transformation. In response to forgiveness—from God or that of others—one's moral identity transforms, and the potential to do so is a very straightforward anthropological insight. Is "DEI" in schools doing morally

[3] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III.4 Ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2010) 243ff.
[4] Danielle Allen, *Education and Equality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016) 11–2.

formative work? Of course it is; and that work is being done deliberately if not always self-consciously. The concern here should not be that moral identity is relevant to education; the concern given our line of reasoning should be when principles of belonging and inclusion become self-evident components of the inevitability or the neutrality of development. Insofar as this is happening, it is actually making our children less morally articulate and less capable of pluralistic engagement. Deneen's interventions on this need to be acceptable. The most difficult layers to our differences are at the level of morally formative communities.

Through the lens and critique of the possibility of human potential, other conclusions emerge.

There are different perspectives on human potential, and a great deal of likely consensus can be reached on this point. Dewey's vision of human potential did not fall far off in its belief in children as extraordinary in their potential. He strayed in his secular fervor that to believe in this potential required disembedding the child from her sources of identity formation. Du Bois's call, which began our Introduction, holds intact for the twenty-first century when we see its insistence on the present dignity of the child, which was also so essential to Barth's vision. Arendt's wrestling with natality as a civic and political concept, ennobling the child, remains a potential guiding framework for the place of identity formation in the education of children, even if one that she failed to fully materialise.

We remember that the possibility of human potential does not need to entail the disembedding of the child from that which makes them unique in the first place. We will address "stewarding particularity" further on in this chapter. Developmental psychologists, from Bronfrenbrenner's ecological approach to Noddings' care ethics, have made this case definitively within educational research. The resources exist to see pluralism as itself a robust and good part of the identity formation happening with children in places of education. Appiah's *rooted cosmopolitanism* has theologically informed kindred souls in work like that of Barth's framework of near and distant neighbours.

Do these images of a person—these basic anthropological assumptions at the level of our moral and civic imaginations—shape our horizons? Of course they do. Barth has been a helpful guide for us in part because his sociopolitical context made it abundantly clear that liberal democracy is not inevitable. What we have also found, however, is that while human development is not best conceived as a neutral unfolding towards a liberal democratic future, and we do need horizons beyond the immanence of contemporary liberalism (Deneen), when those horizons are in place, there is good reason to believe that they will reinforce core concepts in liberalism. This is Wolterstorff's contribution and why we will turn more substantively to his work on the place of identity formation in education shortly.

These conclusions support our search for a place of open formation for the identities of children. These identities are given, cultivated, and forged. Of particular interest for us has been the moral identity of children, and we have understood that the moral identity is closely tied to the moral imagination, which has within it both a civic imagination and an institutional imagination. Jennifer Herdt's question is poignant: "Can we become formed self-formers?"[5] What she ends up finding is a journeying partner in Alasdair MacIntyre, and she leaves us with the opportunity to take up "the virtues, if in a somewhat new and unfamiliar guise."

The Place of Identity Formation in the Education of Children

The Inevitability of Democracy and the Neutrality of Development are not the only ways to conceive of the growth of children. Teleological logics are impossible to do completely away with, and we are left to consider whether there is another path that does not run afoul of our concerns. It is now time to fully consider that there is a teleological logic to a practice, and practices do not form common identities, they form common virtues. They shape ways of living together in the world, in our diversity. To put this another way, what does it now mean for us, one hundred years on, that "certain studies plainly essential to good citizenship must be taught," as *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* stated? It does not mean now, as it did not then, that we are trying to find a neutral unfolding of civic identity. What we are looking for is deeper than this. Danielle Allen's work gets very close to our approach, and we need a final engagement with her thinking before offering a slight correction.

Allen's Turn to Civic Identity

To engage in political friendship, as Danielle Allen named this in *Talking to Strangers*, is to inhabit the virtues of a friend, of a neighbour, in a civic space that is created by two otherwise unrelated individuals coming together. As we saw through our brief engagement with her book, desegregated schools began to be these spaces; they truly embodied the shared civic space that is required for a shared character of American citizenship. This is what was stated so forcefully by Chief Justice Warren in the majority statement of *Brown v. Board*. To restate from earlier, what compelled the desegregation of schools was (and is) that "education…is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment." This thinking is available without the temptations towards heresy found in the previous chapters.

[5] Jennifer A. Herdt, "Reclaiming Dialogical Humanism," *Political Theology* 22.7 (2021) 600.

In contrast to the heresies of nature and nurture, and by way of an affirmation of a different way of thinking already present in the literature, consider the following. In Allen's 2016 book *Education and Equality,* a helpful distinction comes into view. This work was first presented in 2014 as the Tanner Lectures at Stanford University, and its purpose is to engage with what she identifies as a "durable societal obsession with 'education' and 'equality'."[6] Allen argues that the reasons why a government would support education financially and otherwise does not specify the content of education. Content is instead justified by what she calls "participatory readiness" towards a "humanistic baseline." The distinction to which Allen draws our attention is exactly that which we have been making here. As she puts it, "for all of our talk about education and equality, we do not actually talk very much about how education in itself relates to equality, regardless of whether the equality that we have in mind is human, political, social, or connected to economic fairness."[7] Though Allen does not engage directly with Amy Gutmann's work, her book lays out an intrinsic critique that essentially Gutmann has not gone far enough through her emphasis on the content and skills of democratic character. What Allen draws our attention to is what scholars have begun to discuss as the virtues and indeed the tradition of democracy itself.[8]

In what is best seen as a workaround towards a defence of the humanities, Allen *does* ask what is essential to the human condition by interfacing with Hannah Arendt's work of that name. For Arendt, the human condition is premised on three possibilities: labour, work, and action. Labour is the ability to support one's basic needs, including those needs tied to the goods of family, love, and procreation. Work is one's ability to contribute meaningfully to the substance of the world, with a vocational sense of putting one's working hours towards meaningful additions to human culture (broadly understood), and action is about the ability to make one's voice part of the great force of self-governance. So, how do schools engage in "certain studies plainly essential to good citizenship"? Allen rightly helps to draw attention to the reality that education has only been understood as an "autonomous social practice" in recent history.[9] "Only once a social practice is autonomous—conducted through rituals or institutions built for the sake of that practice and no other—can it be said to have a logic and also a structure of action-guiding principles and rules that emerge from that logic."[10] With this logic, which we have been seeking, we could hope and expect Allen to turn further towards a robust consideration of the virtues cultivated in schools. She turns instead in a slightly different direction.

[6]Allen, *Education and Equality,* 1.
[7] Ibid., 3.
[8] Perhaps chief among them is Jeffrey Stout. See Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).
[9] Allen, *Education and Equality,* 5.
[10] Ibid., 5.

In an article written in 2022, "Civic Learning for the 21st Century: Disentangling the 'Thin' and 'Thick' Elements of Civic Identity to Support Civic Education," Allen, together with David Kidd, argues that the moral identity literature supports the idea that civic identity is an appropriate outcome for schools thinking about students in their emerging civic lives. This recognition of the moral identity literature alongside of considerations of the place of identity formation in the education of children is helpful, and we can consider this a contemporary framing of Justice McReynolds' statement in *Pierce*. Overwhelmingly, we are in agreement with this approach, but we will use this article to raise three concerns before turning to our own approach. 1) It gives too large a role to schools. 2) It is not clear how Arendt's clarification that the public/private distinction is inside the self is supported by the notion that civic identity exists and should be formed in schools. 3) The concept of a moral identity, with attendant virtues, does better than the idea of a civic identity and here we begin to wonder if Allen too runs afoul of the inevitability of democracy in her thinking.

To restate, the argument of moral identity, according to researcher Daniel Lapsley, is an attempt to hold together Aristotelian notions of moral virtue with Kantian notions of moral cognition.[11] The basic shape of the argument is that individuals seek to maintain a sense of self, including moral self, in their actions. Individuals avoid acting against the self. This means that a moral identity is operative for the individual as they navigate their lives. Composed of virtues, that moral life spans the various aspects of a person's life, including public and private, and creates the continuity that traditionally in the literature would be called character. When framed in this way, the child is seen to be emerging into a coherent moral self, while engaging in the institutions that most concretely surround the child. The distinction between private and public happens inside of the person, but not at the expense of that person's integrity, because the moral self can and does navigate all aspects of one's life towards a sense of moral cohesion. In this way, the social practice of education as formative of a virtue begins to bear fruit for the identity of the child, understood as that child's emerging moral identity.

It is broadly this literature upon which Allen and Kidd base their article, "Civic Learning for the 21st Century."[12] This article seeks to pull understandings of racial and ethnic identity and questions of civic identity together and names "core attitudes and dispositions of civic identity: efficacy, equitability, and self-protection." We consider this article through the framework of our concerns.

We have at several points raised a concern that scholars are too optimistic about the current structure of our institutions of learning, our schools, to address the place of identity formation in the education

[11] Daniel Lapsley and Paul Stey, *Handbook of Moral and Character Education* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014). We disagree only insofar as education gets reduced to the institution of the school as we conceive of this in America today.
[12] Danielle Allen and David Kidd, "Civic Learning for the 21st Century" (Oxford: Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Education, ed. R. Curran, 2022).

of children, and here we see that concern with Allen. While the article helpfully addresses the difference between "thin" and "thick" sources of civic identity, following Michael Walzer, it gives no sense of how those "thick" sources are being sustained socially and culturally, but only that they are needed. Put succinctly, our concern is that it is not entirely clear how the particularity of children is being stewarded both inside and outside of schools, even if we all agree that stewardship is needed. A stronger acceptance of "thick" sources of civic identity start to push deeper towards questions of moral identity, and our framework will try to do better on this issue.

Further, it is not clear that moving the literature from the moral identity of the child to the civic identity of the child is warranted or helpful. On one hand, when we jump to the language of the civic identity formed in schools, we cease to see that schools are operating in between the private and public, and a reference to that distinction, and the necessity of the private sphere, can be overlooked. By turning too quickly to the civic identity of the child, before reckoning with the development of the child's moral identity, Allen can begin to err towards the inevitability of democracy.

Where this leaves us is with an approach to moral identity that could make sense of why a matter of virtue is relevant to the place of identity formation in the education of children, but does not quite get to this argument. Allen leaves us one step shy of a recognition that virtue describes what holds together the public and the private self. Virtue alone can span the public - private divide and make that divide merely a distinction. Further, the language of virtue ties what is latent in the individual to the life of the collective. It is the first step from the agency and individuality of the individual towards the formation of a life in the community. Social practices and virtues are concepts ready to navigate the anxieties of liberalism relative to the place of identity formation in the education of children.

Open Formation and Virtue

At different moments throughout this dissertation, we have sought to clarify the differences between education and formation. We are interested in the place of identity formation in the *education* of children. We are assuming a level of complexity and institutional and individual fragmentation when it comes to the comprehensive question of the identity formation of children, as we have continually shown. As we named it in the Introduction, education in the special sense is the component of schools that makes those institutions schools. When education is seen as a social practice, formation in virtue can be separated from but relevant to the practice. Open formation—the implication of the possibility of human transformation and human potential—entails that even this relationship will never become closed.

Think about it this way: Ronald Dworkin has a well-known distinction between parameters and limitations.[13] Parameters are the guardrails within which human experience takes place. For Dworkin, this has to do with the possibilities before one in life. Everyone exists with a web of parameters, pertaining to their identity, upbringing, social context, and so on. Limitations operate differently. These are the horizons one is working towards throughout one's life. Parameters are unlikely to be overcome. They signify what is unique and particular to an individual. Limitations are meant to be chased and stretched. Formation pertains to parameters. In the work of formation, parameters are established, defined, and enforced through shared practices and experiences. Limitations pertain to education. Education in the special sense is fundamentally related to the limits of one's sense of self and experience. Education takes one outside of one's range of experiences. It is this work that requires one to stretch beyond what one knows, actively interpreting what is by definition outside of one's own set of parameters. In the contemporary context, this is most accurately, we propose, the answer to the call that "certain studies plainly essential to good citizenship must be taught." We require experiences and encounters with ideas and materiality to remind us that the world is bigger, more complex, and more intimidating than we sometimes remember.

Education in the special sense makes one other thing clear, as is helpfully outlined by Hanan Alexander in his book, *Reimagining Liberal Education*. "The logic of virtues" is "one of aretaic judgements," Alexander writes, "in which excellence is a transcendent quality discovered and illustrated through complex concrete cases…. It does not follow, of course, that we can say nothing abstract or general about virtues. When we do, however, we are putting in discursive terms what we have experienced in concrete cases, rather than determining what to do in a particular case on the basis of a rule."[14] Alexander invites us, in thinking about virtue and the moral identity, to ground both in concrete practices. Virtues pertain to practices, and the concreteness of the practices is what provides the substance and recreatability of the virtue.[15]

When we speak about the virtues in this way, we are logically always talking about the ethical correspondence between the ideals of a community—as exemplified in certain communal practices—and the internal moral integrity of the individual, formed by those practices. By this logic, there is an irony that those engaged in the obviously moral work of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging do not frame their approach in terms of the virtues, and a corresponding irony that those most against the intrusion of the moral work of DEI into schools seem to think that the virtues are somehow dead or

[13] Ronald Dworkin, "Justice and the Good Life" (The Lindley Lecture, The University of Kansas, 1990).
[14] Hanan Alexander, *Reimagining Liberal Education* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015) 172.
[15] When described in this way, we are reminded of Hauerwas's extensive engagement with Barth's work on the question of character. Alexander's framing of virtue as attendant to action, not action to virtue, could do well with Barth's instance on the freedom of God to act and not to be constrained by something like a virtue. God's consistency would then ensure the virtue, and thereby the individual's character.

missing in our schools.[16] We need to be looking for better descriptions of the contemporary virtues—those that do pertain to contemporary practices and that we can find alignment around, pluralistically.

Alexander makes this point on virtue precisely when he writes, "The logic of virtue…is one of discovering transcendent qualities in concrete cases, not applying abstract rules to particular behaviors."[17] This is important for a variety of reasons, but one reason is that it helps to clarify why it is not a good approach to take a timeless virtue from civilizations and cultures that thrived hundreds or thousands of years ago and apply them seamlessly to the contemporary conversation. The virtues that help us navigate pluralism derive from concrete practices, from "concrete cases." If we return to the question of the civic purpose of education, we need to identify, as we have, what the nature of education is, and then what the practices of education are. As we have done this, we have found ourselves needing to continually ask this question in the context of a diverse and pluralistic community. We have also needed to ask this in the context of education today, a set of imperfect practices in constant need of reform.

This is not a novel vision of virtue, but instead is the definition and framing consistently used by those who are actively seeking engagement across differences for the sake of common life. Framed quite straightforwardly by Luke Bretherton, "There is not one catalog of virtues fixed for all time. Different social and historical contexts emphasize different conceptions of what counts as a virtue."[18] This insight aligns with open formation and shows the resonances between open formation and Bretherton's understanding of "hospitality as holiness."[19]

Education as a Social Practice

At the close of Why *Liberalism Failed*, Deneen writes, "What we need today are practices…not a better theory, but better practices."[20] As we have demonstrated, we cannot build common practices if

[16] Remember Deneen's concern: "In schools, norms of modesty, comportment, and academic honesty are replaced by widespread lawlessness and cheating (along with increasing surveillance of youth), while in the fraught realm of coming-of-age, courtship norms are replaced by 'hookup' and utilitarian sexual encounters…. Children are increasingly viewed as a limitation upon individual freedom, which contributes to liberalism's commitment to abortion on demand, while overall birth rates decline across the developed world." Patrick Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018) 39.
[17] Hanan Alexander, *Reimagining Liberal Education*, 175.
[18] Luke Bretherton, *A Primer in Christian Ethics: Christ and the Struggle to Live Well* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023) 198.
[19] Luke Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness: Christian Witness Amid Moral Diversity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2006). Consider the following: "When it comes to moral action and social practices Christians will find themselves enjoying an *ad hoc* commensurability with their neighbours. This *ad hoc* commensurability is grounded in the reality not only of Christians sharing the same moral field as their neighbours, but also of the work of the Spirit breaking the eschatological reality in among all people everywhere." (111)
[20] Ibid., 197.

we have not figured out where we, and the neighbours with whom we build these practices, are coming from. This has been the work of the dissertation to this point. Let us assume that the many thinkers we have sided with throughout are correct, that an open formation is both possible and deeply desirable, and that it aligns with identity and virtue. How would we think about these things in relation to the places education is happening with our children? For this next piece of the argument, we return substantively to Nicholas Wolterstorff, an exemplary thinker on open formation, to aid our institutional imaginations. As we do so, we keep in mind a question: How would his framing of academic learning aid the dominant narratives driving deeply polarised debates about the place of identity formation in the education of children? To imagine well, we need to get the parameters of this correct.

In his Taylor Lectures, given at Yale Divinity School in October of 2001 and later published as *Religion in the University* (2019), Wolterstorff proposes "dialogic pluralism" as the proper ethos corresponding to the pluralism of the modern research university. This concept is also the most recent and culminating idea that Wolterstorff has produced on the philosophy of education, having written about education throughout his career. *Religion in the University* is structured around a concern with the narrative of religion and secularity in American higher education since at least the time of Max Weber, writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, especially the way in which reason and experience parted ways with tradition as justifiable premises upon which to reach justifiable conclusions.[21] Is there room in the university for the "religious voice" as an example of human particularity? To answer this question, Wolterstorff spends the majority of this text unpacking the idea of the religious voice in academic learning, broadly conceived. Though called *Religion in the University*, his focus is on the social horizon of *academic learning*—including "public universities, private universities, research universities, community colleges, teacher-training colleges, liberal arts colleges, professional schools—and that's just the beginning."[22] For the purposes of the argument of this dissertation as a whole, we can see his arguments implications on schools and think of academic learning as akin to education in the special sense. The premise of his argument is that academic learning is best thought of as "a social practice," which forms in a person an ethos, before it is understood as a set of institutions. As this section will argue, the relevance of that work to the argument of this dissertation is the latent proposal that the civic purpose of education is the cultivation of this ethos that Wolterstorff calls "dialogic pluralism," as distinct from the civic purpose being the establishment of a set of institutions—schools, universities, etc.—or even a set of what we might more traditionally call "learning outcomes."

[21] Wolterstorff spends the first of "Religion in the University's" three lectures in conversation with Max Weber's "Wissenschaft als Beruf" (1918), and quotes here are from H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (Translated and edited), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946).
[22] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Religion in the University* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019) 141.

Wolterstorff has written and spoken on education since the early days of his career, with his only published monograph on education, *Educating for Responsible Action*, arriving with Eerdmans in 1980. This book, however, followed fifteen years of essays and public addresses on the topic, and was followed by forty more. These were collected into two edited volumes, *Educating for Life: Reflections on Christian Teaching and Learning* and *Educating for Shalom: Essays on Christian Higher Education*.[23] His topics in those essays range from educational theory and psychology to theologies of education. He speaks practically about discerning and implementing school curricula as well as aspirationally about the ends of education. In many ways, spanning the length of Wolterstorff's professional career, as they do, his essays on education offer a snapshot of the many twists and turns that his academic interests have taken. Highlighting dialogic pluralism and the public or social nature of education makes clear what could otherwise be taken for granted: that Wolterstorff's work on education is similar in function to the role education played for the great philosopher of education, John Dewey. Education is an occasion for Wolterstorff to reflect on social issues and transformations. As such, dialogic pluralism is an idea with broad applicability and importance to all those concerned with pluralism, not just those thinking about education.

Dialogic pluralism functions primarily as a critique for Wolterstorff—a critique of Max Weber—and as a *suggestive* proposal. It is not a robustly defined concept and, as a term, it is not introduced until a mere thirty pages from the end of the lectures. We will show, however, that this idea is a climax not just of the Taylor Lectures but his reflections on education that span nearly four decades. As an example of this, we can see in dialogic pluralism an expansion of questions that were left open in earlier writings, such as many of those that underpin an article first published in 1984 called "Teaching for Tomorrow Today."[24] It functions for him not merely as the conclusion to this particular essay series, but also biographically. It is the only way to make sense of his career in a modern research university as an "inner-worldly ascetic," a term he takes from Weber and with which he personally identifies.

Educating for dialogic pluralism is, then, a defence of the way that Wolterstorff has published and taught over the course of his own career and a vision for how universities can continue to make room

[23] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Educating for Life: Reflections on Christian Teaching and Learning* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002); and *Educating for Shalom: Essays on Christian Higher Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

[24] Wolterstorff, "Teaching for Tomorrow Today," in *Educating for Life*, 91-143. That essay is particularly interesting because, in it, Wolterstorff confronts the absence of an account we have been trying to make through the concept of open formation. He writes of his reflections at that time, "There was a serious difficulty that confronted me, however. I found that none of the research operated with what I could regard as an acceptable understanding of the moral agent. All operated with distorted or partial views." (119) We are unaware of Wolterstorff engaging with more recent research on moral identity theory, but as we have laid out that field, we can imagine an alignment and a solution to some of his earlier challenges.

to hear from those, like Wolterstorff, who consider the religious traditions with which they align as integral to their own identities. Wolterstorff is a Christian, and he argues that this identity matters to the interpretations he brings to the world around him.[25] As he describes it, this is holistically about "the legitimacy and importance of this acceptance of particularity in academic learning."[26]

Dialogic Pluralism in *Religion in the University*

In the final section of *Religion in the University*, "Rethinking Religion in the University," Wolterstorff brings his line of reasoning to a suggestive climax. Academic learning is best thought of as a social practice, he argues, and the ethos of that social practice is dialogic pluralism. In making this claim, Wolterstorff could be seen to be correcting the truncated pictures both of academic learning and of vocation that Weber employed in "Wissenschaft als Beruf." Contrary to a reductive rationalism or empiricism with a fixed conclusion that characterise Weber's vision of *Wissenschaft*, Wolterstorff expands the task of learning to be an interpretive enterprise, with multiple inputs and an open-ended trajectory. Contrary to a vision of the isolated individual engaged in her or his *Beruf* in parallel to others on the same track, Wolterstorff asks us to see academic learning as a vocation and a rich social practice, itself a tradition, with a goal and ethos appropriate to the task. Dialogic pluralism is that ethos.

The purpose of this section is to understand the ethos of dialogic pluralism by situating it within the idea of academic learning as a social practice. Before turning to that task, however, it will be helpful to establish the scope of Wolterstorff's intention in *Religion in the University* and therefore where dialogic pluralism emerges from as a concluding concept. The purpose of the lectures as a whole is to discern whether there is a place in the university, particularly the secular university, for the "religious voice," as Wolterstorff calls it.[27] He does not mean to inquire whether universities should have religious studies or theology departments, but instead whether Christians who engage in the study of history, literature, physics, economics, and so on, can allow insights from their religious identities to inform their academic work. As we have said, to answer this question, Wolterstorff engages with Max

[25] The critiques of this claim are stated well in a review of Wolterstorff's book by Jaclyn Rekis, who writes, "What is perhaps most surprising, and bold, is Wolterstorff's ability to liken religious voices to other diverse perspectives as all-encompassing orientations to the world that we are now engaging with in the academy…These areas of study reflect how different character identities can offer privileged access to aspects of our social reality from which we all can learn. It would rightly seem unjust to leave religious orientations out of this mix." However, Rekis goes on to ask whether Wolterstorff's religious voice has privileged cognitive access given that it does not emerge as a marginalised identifier. Given Wolterstorff's own description of this phenomenon, which we will explore in due course, we will proceed cautiously that Rekis's critique can be overcome. Jaclyn Rekis, "Book Review for Religion in the University," *Political Theology* 21.8 (2020): 750-52.
[26] Wolterstorff, *Religion in the University*, 50.
[27] Ibid., 140.

Weber's essay, "Wissenschaft als Beruf." The particulars of Weber's argument will become relevant over the course of the coming pages, but, in short, Weber's lasting contribution from that essay is to make plain the isolation he thinks academic inquiry *should* have from any influence beyond reason and experience.[28] Religion is the prime example of an unwelcome influence as it acts as a form of unjustified authoritative tradition.

By contrast, Wolterstorff's position is that not only can religion impact the study undertaken by religious individuals but it does so necessarily. The idea of "neutral" scholarship is a myth that has been revealed as such through paradigm shifting work in the humanities and sciences of the last fifty or so years. In particular, Wolterstorff turns to Thomas Kuhn and Hans-Georg Gadamer.[29] From Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Wolterstorff parts ways with the perspective that reason and experience are the only reliable foundations upon which to fashion academic conclusions. Instead, other factors are accepted as the means by which the best interpretation is chosen from the available alternatives, which generally fall under the social scientific idea of perspectivalism. From Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, Wolterstorff appropriates the idea that tradition is a fundamental building block of interpretation. Not only is tradition relevant to academic learning, but religious belief, as a certain mode of dependence upon tradition, is, under certain conditions, justified belief, as Wolterstorff spent a significant portion of his own academic career defending.[30] The conclusion that Wolterstorff draws from these discussions is that all academic inquiry is "interpretation." This means that the formation one received through one's life is not only relevant to academic learning but necessary for that academic learning to result in conclusions, since the conclusions drawn are interpretations that rely upon one's previous identity formation. Wolterstorff writes, "One enters the academy as who one is—formed as one has been formed, making no attempt to become what one cannot become even for the time being, viz., The Human Being Itself."[31] Having reached this conclusion about particularity, Wolterstorff goes on to ask what the nature of academic inquiry could be if it is not neutral fact-finding and description, if it is not "disenchanted." Wolterstorff's proposal is that the academic enterprise, which finds its culmination in the universities, is best understood as a "social practice" where fact finding and interpretation are engaged in as a paired endeavour.

[28] This is not to talk of Weber's desire. He shows a clear longing for the days of integrity between belief and reason. It is to call out the way in which the isolated social spheres conceptually demand disintegration from one another for the sake of their own internal consistency and rule following.
[29] Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962); Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Bloomsbury, 1960, 1975).
[30] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976).
[31] Wolterstorff, *Religion in the University*, 128.

Building on Alasdair MacIntyre's work in *After Virtue*, Wolterstorff proposes that academic inquiry is a "social practice," and as such a moral field with an "ethos."[32] The ethos he proposes is not "neutrality"—an impossibility—but instead dialogic pluralism.[33] Wolterstorff identifies four components of a social practice. These will provide the structure for the rest of this section, through which it will be possible to see what kind of social practice academic learning is and, as a segue to the second half of this chapter, what virtue aligns to it.[34] As Wolterstorff states, the four are: 1) Participants in the social practice seek a good that they could not otherwise achieve. 2) "Criteria for competence" in the practice exist, and these are aligned with the goods sought. 3) The goods sought and criteria for competence of a social practice change across time through a contestation of those who carry these goals and criteria into the future. 4) A social practice is a tradition carried by individuals from one moment to the next and one generation to the next through teachers who function as exemplars.[35]

The Good Sought

Academic learning is a social practice, and this means that it has a goal in mind, a good that determines the quality of the means employed and the limits to the change one would expect. It is this good that defines the tradition this given social practice is aimed at maintaining. Wolterstorff has in mind MacIntyre's view of "internal goods." MacIntyre writes,

> It is characteristic of what I have called *external goods* that when achieved they are always some individual's property and possession. Moreover characteristically they are such that the more someone has of them, the less there is for other people. This is sometimes necessarily the case, as with power and fame, and sometimes the case by reason of contingent circumstance as with money. External goods are therefore characteristically objects of competition in which there must be losers as well as winners. *Internal goods* are indeed the outcome of competition to excel, but it is characteristic of

[32] For MacIntyre, a social practice is "any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended." Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* 2nd Edition (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) 187.
[33] Wolterstorff, *Religion in the University*, 127.
[34] A full discussion of the relationship between an "ethos" and a "virtue" is not a component of this submission. In brief, MacIntyre's description of a virtue is in keeping with the description of an ethos in Wolterstorff and we proceed with them as interchangeable. It remains interesting that Wolterstorff chooses the word "ethos," but it is used only twice as he writes briefly about dialogic pluralism, so there is not a great amount of material available to interpret as to why he chose "ethos" over "virtue."
[35] Wolterstorff, *Religion in the University*, 131ff.

> them that their achievement is a good for the whole community who participate in the practice.[36]

For our purposes, it is important here that the practice is different from the institution. Academic learning is a practice. Schools, universities, classrooms are institutions. According to MacIntyre, institutions are "concerned with…external goods."[37] There is even a sense in MacIntyre that while institutions and practices depend upon one another, their logics move in two directions, and they undermine one another even while they sustain one another. It is the social practice, and therefore the internal good, that Wolterstorff has in mind.

Wolterstorff clearly recognizes that academic learning is a goal-oriented project. He writes,

> Participants all share one deep goal; namely, to discover the facts in certain domains of reality and to arrive at explanations and hermeneutic understandings that are both faithful to those facts and that satisfy one's values and judgments of significance. Truth suffused with significance: that is the deep shared goal.[38]

We can note two things. First, academic learning requires both fact-finding and interpretation. One without the other ceases to accomplish the goal. Second, as long as either fact-finding or human value judgments change, or there are new individuals to lead to creative variations on the interpretive task, academic learning continues. There is no end in sight, only a trajectory.

It is helpful to remember who Wolterstorff has in view when he proposes his own goal for the modern university. Instead of the Platonic ideal of mathematics and natural science, as Weber understood the goal of the university, Wolterstorff proposes the social practice of interpretation.[39] Wisdom may be a helpful term for capturing this goal, though it is not a term that Wolterstorff uses in this context. What is Wolterstorff contrasting this vision against? As we have said, it is the essay, "Wissenschaft als Beruf," written by Max Weber in 1917. To understand "Wissenschaft als Beruf," Wolterstorff turns to Weber's theory of modernisation more broadly and identifies two of its fundamental components: 1) the differentiation of spheres and 2) the incompatibility of each sphere's value.[40] In this Weberian picture, the good sought within the academy is Wissenschaft, or *academic learning*, and this learning is irrelevant to the religious knowledge that would inform the religious voice. As Wolterstorff sums this up, "one's personal religious convictions are simply irrelevant to one's action within the differentiated spheres of a modernized society."[41] The good sought in Weber's picture, and the one that Wolterstorff sets his good up against, is an individualist, disintegrated picture of human learning

[36] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 190–1. Emphasis mine.
[37] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 194.
[38] Wolterstorff, *Religion in the University*, 128.
[39] Ibid., 122, 124.
[40] Ibid., 7ff.
[41] Ibid., 14.

and truth-knowing. It is simply, "self-clarification and knowledge of interrelated facts."[42] Weber defines his picture of knowledge in contrast to an earlier age, where "wholeness and integrity" characterised the academic learning of what Weber calls the "inner-wordly ascetics."[43] But because of modernity and, in particular, its logical differentiation and incompatibility of spheres, that integrity is gone.

By contrast, the "wholeness and integrity" of an "inner-wordly ascetic" is precisely what Wolterstorff is after. In claiming that academic learning is a social practice, Wolterstorff is not contrasting this with academic learning as a calling. (Far from it. Wolterstorff is seeking to put the agent of the call back into the picture.) His disagreement with Weber is with the nature of *Wissenschaft*. Wolterstorff's explication of Weber focuses on reception of knowledge. The modern mind—in Weber's paradigm—accepts only experience and reason as the basis of scientific knowledge. Further, no knowledge of or from God can result from experience and reason. Wolterstorff spends lectures two and three of this series undermining and expanding this goal of academic learning. The good sought is, instead, not a reductive scientific rationality that disenchants all realms of academic inquiry. The good sought is better understood as "interpretation."[44] What Wolterstorff is doing here is embedding academic learning in the realm of belief formation and thereby complexifying the simplistic Weberian picture of the pure independence of the sphere of *Wissenschaft*. The good sought in academic learning is not isolated from the realm of belief formation but instead is its constant companion.

Wolterstorff makes two moves in relation to "Wissenschaft als Beruf." First, he challenges what he takes to be a falsely reduced understanding of human learning. He expands this to include interpretation. Second, and in relation, he allows the possibility of putting the caller, that is for Wolterstorff, the Christian God, back into the picture of vocation. In Weber, the one who issues the call is gone. Weber's is a picture of a vocation without one to issue the *vocare*.

The implication of Wolterstorff's critique is that institutions within which academic learning takes place are not places for coordination towards truth revealed. They are better imagined as spaces where collaboration and contestation shape the common life of those engaged in the communal work of discerning and refining shared knowledge around areas of common study.[45] The question then presents itself, how is this common life of knowledge creation to be ordered? By what means is the good of wisdom to be pursued?

[42] Weber, "Wissenschaft als Beruf."
[43] Wolterstorff, *Religion in the University*, 15.
[44] Ibid., 122.
[45] This is not an argument about the ontological status of truth but about the epistemological common labour of the scholars who cohabit knowledge generating institutions.

The Means Employed

When Wolterstorff talks about the means of a social practice, he is referring to MacIntyre's understanding of the relationship between technical excellence and moral excellence or virtue. "A virtue," MacIntyre writes, "is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods…. Every practice requires a certain kind of relationship between those who participate in it."[46] Again here neither Wolterstorff nor MacIntyre are denigrating technical excellence. The point is rather that there exists no vacuum of social connectedness within which technical excellence could be pursued without the attendant moral disposition, or virtue, that tells the participants of the practice of how to pursue the goods in question.

To be engaged in a social practice is to participate within a set of agreed-upon means that tend towards the goal in sight. The means of education formed the bulk of Wolterstorff's writing on education throughout the 1960s, 70s, 80s, and 90s, and it is a smaller focus of *Religion in the University*. With this qualification, there are two things to say about means. First, social practices have competencies, and Wolterstorff's emphasis on the goal of education as interpretation should not be understood as a wavering on the skill and seriousness of the pursuit of knowledge. However, competency is not enough. Virtue is also required in the pursuit of interpretation. While competency chastens the scholar to engage seriously in the work at hand, virtue chastens the scholar to be embedded within the social nature of the pursuit of knowledge. Competency with virtue, that is the vision that Wolterstorff holds.

Again Wolterstorff sets his position against that of Weber in "Wissenschaft als Beruf." Weber's pointed insight into the academic work of the modern age was related to his generalised insight about "specialization." He writes,

> In our time, the internal situation, in contrast to the organization of [academic learning] as a vocation, is first of all conditioned by the fact that [academic learning] has entered a phase of specialization previously unknown and that this will forever remain the case. Not only externally, but inwardly, matters stand at a point where the individual can acquire the sure consciousness of achieving something truly perfect in the field of [academic learning] only in case he is a strict specialist.[47]

[46] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 191.
[47] Weber, "Wissenschaft als Beruf."

The concept of vocation gets radically truncated when it is married to Weber's understanding of specialisation. The reason is that competency gets divorced from virtue, or, rather, the virtues of the specialist cannot be integrated with other sources of virtue formation in the life of an individual. To be a scholar, according to Weber, is to eschew all other sources of insight except those that arise strictly from the academic discipline in pursuit. "One can, in principle, master all things by calculation."[48] "Disenchantment" is the term Weber gives to this process of specialisation. The resulting picture is of a world where disintegration between the various influences in one's life is necessary.[49] Calculation is the proper means to the goal that Weber has in mind: specialised academic knowledge. Weber's is a clean—indeed clinical—vision of the way that knowledge creation and transfer comes to be.

Wolterstorff does not doubt the importance of calculation. Speaking of it under the faculty of reason, he writes, "Reasoning is fundamental to our existence; to be human is to reason." Wolterstorff, however, feels no freedom to leave things there. He goes on, "But though reason may often appear king in the realm of learning, close scrutiny shows that, in scholarship and teaching, our capacity for reasoning is always functioning in the service of some particular faith or love, or in the service of some intuition or interpretation of how things are."[50] The challenge to Weber's vision has, as we noted, been made by scholars across the humanities and social sciences since the time of Weber but most particularly in the latter half of the twentieth century. Wolterstorff summarises the challenge when he writes, "Wissenschaft is unavoidably shaped by values that go well beyond that of being faithful to the experienced facts. Many different theories and narratives fit the evidence. We choose the ones that comport with what we value."[51] Therefore, there is a further competency that Wolterstorff has in mind, and it relates to the "dialogic" component of dialogic pluralism. It is "the offering to each other of reasons…for one's own position."[52] Calculation does not lead to academic agreement. The enterprise of academic learning is instead a dialogue of competing interpretations, as anyone engaged in academic pursuit can attest. It is simply not the case that the most competent explanation ascends in institutions of academic learning. Instead, competency must be married to virtue if academic learning is to truly live up to the expectations of academic learning as a vocation.

Instead of the competency of calculation and its attendant virtue, "objectivity," that relate to Weber's goal, Wolterstorff instead proposes "honor and fairness" as related virtues required for academic

[48] Ibid.
[49] Charles Taylor describes the connection between disenchantment and disintegration under the language of "disembedding." See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1989).
[50] Wolterstorff, *Religion in the University*, 118.
[51] Ibid., 43.
[52] Ibid., 128–9.

learning.[53] These are the virtues behind the ethos of dialogic pluralism, as will become clearer in the following subsection and those that attend properly to the goal of interpretation. What is important to see here is that where objectivity is an isolating virtue, honour and fairness are social virtues that highlight the role of the person in academic learning. The robot is objective; the person is fair. The person exercises fairness and pursues honour in the context of a learning community that is organised around a common pursuit, "truth suffused with significance." This, as we will see in the final subsection, is the meaning of academic learning as a tradition.

The Institution Sustained

Dialogic pluralism is the ethos that Wolterstorff proposes for academic learning. Again following MacIntyre, Wolterstorff maintains that a social practice "is both susceptible to changes across time in goals and criteria for competence, and susceptible at a given time to different practitioners employing somewhat different goals and different criteria for competence—and to controversies among those disagreeing practitioners."[54] As MacIntyre explains, "every practice has its own history and a history which is more and other than that of the improvement of the relevant technical skills." These histories are borne by institutions, because, as MacIntyre goes on, "no practices can survive for any length of time unsustained by institutions."[55] This turn to the institutional is complicated, for institutions have "corrupting power" as the bearers of the external goods of the social practice. However, they are also the bearers of the practice into the future, which makes them imperfect but necessary for the possibility of continuity across time, according to MacIntyre.

Dialogic pluralism assumes that pluralism and inclusivity are foundational principles of our cultural moment and, as an ethos it is suited to the messiness of change, and, specifically, the change that arises out of a democratic instinct.[56] Academic learning is not immune from its context, and, according to Wolterstorff, "we are talking about the academic sector within a liberal democracy whose citizens embrace a plurality of comprehensive orientations. More specifically, we are talking about the academic sector within our highly pluralistic *American* liberal democracy."[57] The pursuit of interpretation within *this* community requires what Wolterstorff calls the "crucial step:" in which "the participants do not just *offer* reasons to each other but also *listen* to reasons, listen to them with an

[53] Ibid., 131. He writes, "I myself have no idea what it would be like for a philosopher to be objective; nothing comes to my mind when I try to imagine what that might look like. But I do know what it's like to pay to the other participants in a philosophical dialogue the honor of taking their views seriously and treating them fairly."
[54] Ibid., 125.
[55] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 194.
[56] Wolterstorff, *Religion in the University*, 120. Wolterstorff paraphrases John Rawls's conviction that "in the conditions of freedom, fundamental convictions concerning God, the good, and the right tend to *diverge*."
[57] Ibid., 140.

open mind…. As both speakers and listeners, we engage our fellows in recognition of their cognitive capacities and ours, and of their fallibility and ignorance and ours."[58] Dialogic pluralism then adds epistemological humility to the virtues of honour and fairness. A helpful clarification of this is the way that Wolterstorff claims dialogic pluralism is a parallel concept to what Richard Bernstein has described as "engaged fallibilism."[59]

As with the other components of this social practice, Wolterstorff's intentions here are best understood in relation to Weber's vision of academic learning, which, while aware of change, is far more concerned with progress than with the dialectical vision Wolterstorff proposes. Dialogic pluralism identifies in Weber—as a representative of the scientific mind—a hubris of neutrality. According to Wolterstorff, Weber's vision of the university is one of careful calculation. This is not to say that Weber has a naïve picture of a temporal conclusion to academic pursuit; his vision is of "progress" that "goes on *ad infinitum*."[60] It is the linearity here that Wolterstorff questions. To understand this point, consider the quandary of whether a teacher can learn from a student. Given the principles of dialogic pluralism, the answer is yes, and Wolterstorff says as much. The student likely will bring a perspective to bear on a question that will broaden the teacher's mind and expand the range of possible solutions to a problem. (The student may also bring false knowledge to a question and need their perspective challenged. Dialogic pluralism is not relativism.) The question is more difficult for Weber. There is a point, of course, where a student could surpass her teacher in knowledge, but at that moment the teacher becomes the student and the student becomes the teacher. The hierarchy has flipped, but it remains intact. The reason for the difference is that Weber's logic is not one of a democratic milieu but an aristocratic imposition. He is not shy on this point. He writes, "Democracy should be used only where it is in place. Scientific training, as we are held to practise it in accordance with the tradition of German universities, is the affair of an intellectual aristocracy, and we should not hide this from ourselves."[61] Progress, hierarchy, neutrality, calculation, and objectivity: these are the principles of Weber's *Wissenschaft*.

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[58] Ibid., 130.

[59] What is interesting about the article in which Bernstein introduces this idea is that it is about the American Pragmatist tradition, an intellectual tradition within which Bernstein readily places himself but, in which, to my knowledge, Wolterstorff does not. The article argues that this fallibilism is an ethical claim and writes, "Ultimately the appeal to the regulative ideal of a community of inquirers or interpreters is - as the pragmatists emphasized - an ethical or normative ideal." (16) Wolterstorff makes it clear that he operates out of a Reformed Christian framework, but he does not place dialogic pluralism theologically, nor make as clear of a claim as that of Bernstein that a fundamental claim for humility and civility is being called for out of a tradition. What we pick up and carry into the second half of this chapter and towards the conclusion of this dissertation is a question regarding the ethical claim for education itself. According to Wolterstorff, which we follow, academic learning calls forth the diaologic pluralism he proposes itself. What, however, calls forth our moral commitment to engaging in academic learning at all? Richard J. Bernstein, "Pragmatism, Pluralism and the Healing of Wounds," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 63.3 (November 1989) 5–18.

[60] Weber, "Wissenschaft als Beruf."

[61] Ibid.

The goal of dialogic pluralism is not progress, but understanding; not hierarchy but democracy; not calculation but interpretation; and not objectivity but "a civil conversation."[62] For Wolterstorff, change is expected in academic learning because academic learning is a pluralistic enterprise. While Wolterstorff argues for this conceptually, he also makes this point demonstrably by referring to the way that, over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, particular viewpoints have shaped academic disciplinarity. He writes:

> The most visible change is that there is now a wealth of research and instruction explicitly shaped by the interests, values, convictions, and sensibilities characteristic of particular social, ethnic, racial, and gender identities: feminist epistemology, black sociology, liberation theology, gay literary criticism, Muslim hermeneutics…. I affirm the legitimacy and importance of this acceptance of particularity in academic learning, with its consequent pluralizing of the academy.[63]

This intrusion of particularity into the university is not only an example of the change that *should* be expected in the university, but it is also the framework for future change and as such the demonstrated need for dialogic pluralism. According to Wolterstorff, the ethos of academic learning relates to both its goal and to its experience. It is at this point that the logic of Wolterstorff's argument as a whole in *Religion in the University* comes back into view. Particularity finds its most basic form in comprehensive interpretations, or what John Rawls called "comprehensive perspectives," which are religious and secular. In this picture, religion is just one type of particularity to find a home in the university. All forms of particularity are welcome in the academy, so long as they communicate through the ethos of dialogic pluralism.

The Institution Maintained

In this understanding, traditions combine elements of the past with an openness to future interpretation and revision. It is unclear how one could interpret Weber such that he could conceptually make room for the kinds of revisions that Wolterstorff makes in relation to "Wissenschaft als Beruf," let alone anticipate those changes. From Wolterstorff's perspective, he is maintaining the tradition of academic learning through his writing *Religion in the University* and thereby disagreeing with Weber's understanding of *Wissenschaft* with the spirit of fairness and honour and within the constraints of dialogic pluralism. This disagreement is an example of dialogic pluralism, with Wolterstorff playing the Reformed philosopher and Weber playing the Modern sceptic. Wolterstorff is engaging in the kind of activity that he says is central to the university, and,

[62] Wolterstorff, *Religion in the University*, 131.
[63] Ibid., 49–50.

within the constraints of dialogic pluralism, his contribution can be seen as properly incremental. That he understands his contribution in this way can be seen in the way he describes the work of Kuhn and Gadamer. He writes, "nothing changed in their wake, other than that we have come to understand differently what we were doing all along."[64] Dialogic pluralism encourages incrementality and is also not well suited to revolution. Changed interpretations of the practice itself and the rules attendant are to be expected. They are to be engaged with and sharpened. This is in fact part of the enterprise, the vocation, of the scholar. The scholar does not simply receive a tradition but engages with it, refines it for his time, and passes it on to future generations. "Religion in the University" is an engagement with Weber, a past intellectual leader. It is an example of the receiving of a tradition and pressing it forward.

It is because dialogic pluralism assumes continuity and conversation with the past that it is not well suited to revolution. Indeed, more so than Weber, it includes dialogue with past intellectual leaders with a desire and capacity to welcome those past voices into current debate for the sake of real insight and interpretation.

Conclusion

Such is Wolterstorff's explanation of the ethos of dialogic pluralism as it relates to the social practice of academic learning. In the context of a critical engagement with Max Weber's "Wissenschaft als Beruf," Wolterstorff proposes that the goal of academic learning is better conceived of as interpretation than knowledge of facts. He proposes fairness and honour as the more appropriate virtues to the academic task than objectivity. He adds a competency to the task of academic learning that privileges listening in a democratic posture instead of speaking in an aristocratic tone. Wolterstorff welcomes change in academic learning, not progress, so long as it is incremental and properly attentive to other voices, present and past.

There is a final point to make concerning "Wissenschaft als Beruf" that Wolterstorff does not take up but that clarifies the importance of his contribution to clarity around the purpose of academic learning, especially as it takes institutional shape in schools. Weber's defence of academic learning as a vocation turns into a justification for the lack of public impact that apparently was and definitely still is perceived in relation to the modern research university. Why does the university not answer the questions: "What shall we do and how shall we live?"[65] According to Weber, this is because answers

[64] Ibid., 48.
[65] Weber, "Wissenschaft als Beruf."

to these questions come only from "a prophet or a saviour."[66] The vocation of academic learning bears no public responsibility towards ultimate questions of value and meaning. Wolterstorff closes the gap between academic learning and normative questions. He does this by recognising and naming a public ethos that is uniquely cultivated in the context of academic pursuit. Dialogic pluralism will not answer all questions of purpose and meaning, but it does create a conversation within the bounds of virtue as to how comprehensive interpretations should impact public conversations. Weber may have been too hasty in relegating those with comprehensive interpretations—which by Wolterstorff's account is all of humanity—to the "arms of the old churches" for compassion.[67]

In conclusion, education is well thought of as a social practice, and, when we do consider it, we ask ourselves about the individuals involved in that practice and also what they get from the practice. There are two important contributions of Wolterstorff's work to our question of the place of identity formation in the education of children. The first has to do with the idea of privileged cognitive access and will help us consider what it means to steward particularity in the education of children. The second regards the relationship between dialogic pluralism and virtue.

Stewarding Particularity

By conceiving of education as a social practice, we can continue to see why the particularities of those engaged in the practice together need to be understood and stewarded. As such, we move in the direction of understanding the constructive role of identity formation in the education of children. If understood well, it helps us to begin to see pluralism not as a problem, which we saw in Chapter Three, but as a penultimate good.[68] It is at this point that we begin to see most clearly why the place of identity formation in the education of children is a proxy for the anxieties of liberalism. Stewarding particularity is not a simple idea.

Where exactly are we stewarding particularity in the education of children? Here we return to our previous notion that schools, even what we call private schools in the United States, are best understood to be civic spaces. Arendt offers a helpful metaphor to consider this. She writes,

> To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time.

[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] For a complementary idea, see Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), who is self-consciously building off of the thought of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

> The public realm, as the common world, gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other, so to speak. What makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people involved, or at least not primarily, but the fact that the world between them has lost its power to gather them together, to relate and to separate them.[69]

Though Arendt was not able to see schools through this framework, nevertheless, it frames the opportunity exceedingly well. Schools straddle the public/private distinction, because that distinction happens inside of the developing individual as that individual and their family navigate all of the resources at their disposal for their own development. That we think of the school as the dominant institution in which the child structurally develops has more to say about our constrained imaginations for the web of institutions in which the child exists than about the appropriateness of the school as able to meet this comprehensive preparatory need. More on that shortly.

Privileged Cognitive Access

While we were critical in Chapter Three of the ways that diversity was framed in "statements," when seen in the context we have provided here, it is clearer how much of what can fall under the work of "Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging" in institutions of education is actually aligned to our findings. Individuals are particular, sometimes in ways that are chosen and always in ways that are given. Those championing that such individuality has an impact on our learning and knowing have the preponderance of evidence on this. Our concerns were raised to ensure that the levels of difference we are considering include at the moral level and can make sense of communities, like churches, that consider themselves deep formers of imaginations and identities. (We should note that critics of "DEI" can fail to recognise the ways in which stewarding particularity is good for the likelihood of the critic himself having a hearing.)

The related concept in the work we just unpacked on *Religion in the University* is "privileged cognitive access." In his engagement with Gadamer, Wolterstorff writes,

> The deep import, as I see it, of this part of Gadamer's discussion, is that induction into a cultural tradition, when combined with perceptual and introspective experience and rational intuition, sometimes gives one *privileged cognitive access* to aspects of reality that would otherwise be all but inaccessible—access to what Augustine was saying in *The Confessions*, for example. Thus another component in the Weberian understanding crumbles. The Weberian

[69] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, 1998) 52–3.

> understanding holds that it is not tradition but inner and outer experience, plus rational intuition, that give us direct cognitive access to reality. Too simple! It's true, of course, that tradition sometimes inhibits access to reality. Gadamer's point is that often it enables access.[70]

If one follows Gadamer's logic, Wolterstorff's point here is well made, and it aligns with Arendt's work compellingly. Remember that for Arendt, the metaphor of the table was an acknowledgement that individuals *need* the table to build a common, public life between them. The table holds individuals both together and yet distinct. This is an apt way to understand privileged cognitive access in the life of academic learning. One's identity is welcomed but not subsumed, and it does not consume others.

To restate, Wolterstorff described this when he wrote of "a wealth of research and instruction explicitly shaped by the interests, values, convictions, and sensibilities characteristic of particular social, ethnic, racial, and gender identities: feminist epistemology, black sociology, liberation theology, gay literary criticism, Muslim hermeneutics."[71] The impact of this commitment is made in a different, earlier volume, *Reason within the Bounds of Religion*, where he writes, "Responsible scholarship always bears the mark of its time and place of birth."[72] It is again tied to his understanding of liberal democracy, which he outlines in *Justice in Love*.[73]

Not only does privileged cognitive access make sense of our places of learning as civic spaces, but it also reinforces a way of conceiving of the *good* of diversity in education. We learn most when we are surrounded by those who are able to help us see the world differently than we have previously seen it. When our perspectives are questioned, our interpretations are refined and evolve. Without that perspectivalism, there are truths in the world that we may find ourselves wholly unable to see. Consider Arendt on this point:

> Being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position. This is the meaning of public life, compared to which even the richest and most satisfying family life can offer only the prolongation or multiplication of one's own position with its attending aspects and perspectives…. Only where things can be seen by many in a variety of aspects without changing their identity, so that those who are gathered around them know they see sameness in utter diversity, can worldly reality truly and reliably appear.[74]

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[70] Wolterstorff, *Religion in the University*, 45, ital added.
[71] Ibid., 49–50.
[72] Wolterstorff, *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion*, 134.
[73] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015) 236ff.
[74] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 57.

When places of education can function as constructive civic spaces, akin to Arendt's tables, then the argument for education is an argument for democratic capacity building, in many of the ways that Guttmann described in *Democratic Education*. The impact of this can be considered by a point of contrast. Allen's starting point in *Education and Equality* is that states invest in education for economic reasons, for the future of the workforce, and that this bears itself out almost not at all in the content of education, which is where equality comes more clearly into focus. If our argument here is correct, Allen should be able to see a different argument for why government would invest in education, one closer to that argued in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*. It is not the old reason of economic progress but the deeper reality, which she argued for in *Talking to Strangers*. When particularity is seen as a starting point in the education of children, the civic purpose of schools is students learning to share that particularity with one another in their learning and as they learn, not as a hindrance to that learning or in spite of their learning.

How does one become particular?

This understanding of privileged cognitive access begs a further question: How does one become particular? It is important to acknowledge that minority religious and moral communities feel this question acutely, and it is the opposite anxiety to the insights of intersectionality. The point of the latter is that the burdens of identities-not-chosen can be exponentially, detrimentally impactful. The anxiety of the former is that the benefits of religious and moral communities can be rendered impudent. Both are anxieties about the place of identity formation in the lives of children and deserve hearing. As we consider this, we can also remember that extremely few schools are representative of the diversity of the American population. Most children are in schools with other families who share many common traits. Further, children are arguably far more influenced by the digital media found in their homes than by the diversity or pluralism of their schools. Even so, both Wolterstorff and Arendt struggled on this question, arguing that children's formation in the private realm needed to be prioritised over too public a conception of the school. We have already considered Ellison's correction to Arendt. We can now consider Wolterstorff's concerns.

Wolterstorff was, throughout his career, a strong advocate for Christian day schools, and he argues for them because of his conviction that schools need to be "adequate instruments for training children to live the *whole* Christian way of life."[75] Governments are concerned that children are educated. Christians are concerned that children see the whole comprehensively as given and maintained by

[75] Wolterstorff, *Educating for Life,* 203.

God, as well as and through this becoming educated. While this is not the space to critically engage with his three books on the subject of schooling in their entirety, one important point arises in Wolterstorff's argumentation that seems to align with concerns we raised in Chapter Two.

"Every philosophy of education grows out of an image of man in the world,"[76] wrote Wolterstorff. For his work on the education of children, this means looking at the fundamental claims of the Christian faith, and then from these first principles, deducing claims related to what it means to be a human, and a learning human. This is surprising, because his work in *Religion in the University* instead sets up a structure of first looking at a shared human activity and then asking what we find about what it means to be a person. Further, Wolterstorff begins the book *Educating for Responsible Action* by saying that there is education for knowledge, education for capacity or skill, and education for tendency. (This latter is akin to what we have called formation.) For education to be Christian, it must pursue a Christian conception of what it means to grow into a mature human as intended by God, and this means *responsibility*. Education therefore ceases to be an end in itself and becomes an end towards a moral view of the Christian good life.

Wolterstorff is articulating something reasonable, but to the degree there is a disagreement here with our thinking, it is as he encroaches upon the concerns we raised in Chapter Two. Instead of a Barthian anthropology of the Christian child, fully loved and full of surprising potential, Wolterstorff sometimes errs towards a belief that children are but emerging adults. Given that the end goal of "man in the world" comes first, there is no way otherwise. Formation is the logic that drives the educational process. The conclusion of education is a foregone conclusion, not an emergent conclusion. What Wolterstorff gives us is a slightly truncated philosophy of education, led by a philosophy of formation, without the prominence of education in the special sense.[77]

To the degree that Wolterstorff's concern is that public schools are malformative of the Christian vision of the whole child—and this seems a likely outcome of Wolterstorff's work comprehensively—it becomes relevant that his focus on pluralism in higher education assumes a maturity of the young adult, creating a sense of protection over younger children. His commitment to the rights of parents in their choices then echoes Amy Gutmann. Here the question for Wolterstorff would be, if schools stopped running afoul of the heresies of nature, and did better relative to the heresies of nurture, would schools still pose the threat that Wolterstorff imagines? In the thought

[76] Ibid., 7.
[77] For a substantiation of this depiction, consider an otherwise very aligned essay, "Particular Perspectives: Bias or Access?" which fails to ask the question here: How *exactly* does one become particular? *Educating for Shalom: Essays on Christian Higher Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 226–240.

experiments we turn to now, we recommend that there are other ways to solve for formation than to charge schools, which are important and necessary civic spaces, with being malformative.

Concluding Thoughts and Innovative Alternatives

Both Wolterstorff and Arendt conceptually prioritise the idea of privileged cognitive access but both raise the question of how to consider raising children in such a way that their particular moral imaginations are intact when arriving at schools, such that the world of learning as a social practice bears the maximum fruit in the life of that child. Perhaps the dignity of the child, which our baseline anthropological assumptions brought into view, should lead us to trust the child and her God to navigate institutions that imperfectly attend to the conceptual space between education and formation. On the other hand, perhaps the institutions of education that Wolterstorff and Arendt are questioning deserve critique and need to change.

Scholars who take seriously that schools are civic spaces understand that they function as Durkheimian "social facts," which means that they are impactful on the identity formation of their students. Schools are small teaching and learning ecosystems. They educate as much through what is explicit as by what is implicit—through curriculum and pedagogy as well as through rituals and spaces. To imagine that schools have no role in the work of formation is to act against common sense and the tradition of democratic education in this country. This is not lost on those who work at the intersection of policy and practice, such as historian and educational theorist Ashley Rogers Berner. In her recent book, *No One Way to School: Pluralism and American Public Education*, Berner uses the term "pluralism" in a distinct but related way to our usage in this dissertation.[78] Berner states that "educational pluralism" means "changing the structure of public education so that state governments fund and hold accountable a wide variety of schools, including religious ones, but do not necessarily operate them."[79] In the American educational system at the primary and secondary levels, "school choice" is the popular heading for how one would account institutionally for the levels of difference and particularity that we have started to unpack in our use of the term pluralism. The idea is that schools themselves should be allowed to differentiate based upon their foundational claims and commitments. Innovative educators in the United States have always been permitted, and especially since *Pierce v. Society of Sisters,* to run schools that challenge the status quo. Berner calls for more political will in this direction, supporting the rise of microschooling and the Classical Schools movement, including Christian Classical Education, which are currently expanding movements. Who

[78] Ashley Berner, *No One Way to School: Pluralism and American Public Education* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).
[79] Ibid., 3.

exactly should be paying for this innovation, with the attendant questions of taxes and state versus federal funding, is a lively debate, if outside of our scope. Innovative alternatives are a continuous feature of the American educational landscape. The alternative approach opened up by our line of thinking that follows shortly pushes a little further and in different directions.

To be always learning

The first constructive way to consider the place of identity formation in the education of children, we just argued, was in considering how children become the people who can engage in academic learning with privileged cognitive access. In this section, we look at identity formation from a different angle and consider the virtue that is formed through the social practice of education, understanding that this virtue will, and should, become part of that child's moral identity. We are very straightforwardly looking for a living language of virtue, one that makes sense of learning with our neighbours, who we take as a starting point might see the world differently than we do. We are going to call this virtue *always learning*, and in this section, we will also think about its impact on our institutional imaginations.

As we said in Chapter One, open formation is not a tangential concept to the critique at the heart of our basic anthropological assumptions. Instead, it is the mode of allowing those insights to do their work of casting light on as immensely complex and fraught a topic as the place of identity formation in the education of children. Luke Bretherton's thinking on virtue captures this well: "To posit a definitive and final list of cardinal virtues hollows out the rich diversity of ways responses to God's creative work in history can be embodied. Moreover, differences of structural location and context bring the need for different virtues into view."[80]

Here is a curiosity of the literature of liberalism that we have been considering. When scholars want to make the case that the virtues are absent, they tend to use terms from a dead language or a former time to talk about them. When scholars want to make the case that the virtues are alive, they use contemporary language to talk about them. Here are several examples from scholars whose work we have engaged: William Galston writes, "In addition to skills, democratic leadership requires a strong set of virtues to safeguard it from going astray. One such virtue is what I call democratic humility."[81] From Oliver O'Donovan, "Job's established virtues, which surely scored high on the Aristotelian scale of magnanimity, were of no service in his changed circumstances; they belonged to the role he

[80] Bretherton, *A Primer in Christian Ethics*, 199.
[81] William Galston, *Anti-Pluralism: The Populist Threat to Liberal Democracy* (New Haven Yale University Press 2018) 121.

had lost, not his innermost life as a sufferer. New roles need new virtues, but faith repeats itself, and in repetition acquires the form of 'faithfulness' in the midst of total change."[82] Though Wolterstorff calls "dialogic pluralism" an ethos, of virtue he writes, "The virtues are habituated skills in assessing priorities among the actual and potential preferables in one's life and acting accordingly.... The fact that modern utilitarians have not talked about virtue is purely contingent; they can and should."[83] So, there is a relationship between how aggressively negative one's take on liberalism is framed and whether one talks about the virtues as dead versus, on the other side, liberalism is broken but salvageable, and the virtues are framed as things that still hold liberalism together, but not because they are framed and pursued traditionally in the language of virtue—instead because the logic of virtue described holds for present communities.

The Virtue of Always Learning

In Wolterstorff's telling, there is an ethos that corresponds to academic learning, which he calls dialogic pluralism. As we saw, he sketches a definition of dialogic pluralism and he talks about the virtues of fairness and honour that relate to it. If we follow his argument to its logical conclusion, however, that which corresponds to a social practice is not an ethos but a virtue, and where dialogic pluralism is descriptive of an ethos, always learning can begin to describe an active virtue. This is the virtue of those engaged in education in the special sense, forming a part of their moral identity, and becoming in that way embedded in their character.

What does this virtue entail? Beginning in our earliest years, we are invited to come to understand ourselves and our neighbours as full of potential and in need of the grace of transformation. As we grow and develop, we learn to reflect in increasingly complex ways about our place in the world and how we differ from others. We also come to see that this process develops in overlapping communities which are both created and maintained by us, while also acting on us in sometimes unknowable ways. As we embed within this ecosystem, we receive the world as bigger, more beautiful, and more complicated than ourselves. We learn a sense of responsibility for self and other. We learn to enjoy the novelty and wonder of the world around us. We are inspired to curiosity, and the commitment to both understand the ecosystem and act within it. We become active participants in constructing a coherent moral identity. It is as coherent moral actors that we can engage in the work of

[82] Oliver O'Donovan, *The Disappearance of Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 147-8.
[83] Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice in Love* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015) 8-9.

building community and society with the understanding that being a good neighbour requires practising character in public.[84] This is the virtue of *always learning*.

Always in search of allies outside of Christian ethics, consider a different framing of a similar idea, from the perspective of care ethics. Active interpretation, though not used by any scholars directly, could be described as a faithful insight from the work of Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*, with whom we engaged Chapter Two. In that work, Gilligan argues that responsibility and relationships are an equally legitimate grounding for moral reasoning as the logic of justice. In care ethics there is a moral strategy of equal impact to that of Kantian justice as fairness, but it does not presuppose what (for Gilligan) is a gendered *interpretation* of moral activity. Indeed, this "problem of interpretation" is the catalyst of Gilligan's critique. Describing the research interviews upon which Kohlberg builds his own theory, Gilligan's concern is with "the interviewer's *inability* to understand her [the female interview subject's] response."[85] Why does Gilligan use the term *inability* to describe this failure of imagination instead of *failure* (or the like)? To be unable is to be stymied from the start based on a lack of capacity. To fail is to have the capabilities and for whatever reason, in this instance, not to deploy them. Gilligan is surely purposeful in this description. The problem of interpretation that she identifies is not a lack of goodwill, it is a gap based on the assumptions that the interviewer brought to the research. It is a bias. For Gilligan, that bias is not a crisis but instead a foundation. She calls this "the paradoxical truths of human experience—that we know ourselves as separate only insofar as we live in connection with others, and that we experience relationship only insofar as we differentiate other from self."[86] She continues elsewhere, "The concept of identity expands to include the experience of interconnection. The moral domain is similarly enlarged by the inclusion of responsibility and care in relationships. And the underlying epistemology correspondingly shifts from the Greek ideal of knowledge as a correspondence between mind and form to the Biblical conception of knowing as a process of human relationship."[87]

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[84] I recognise the work of Dr. Jessica Matthews and Peter Becker with whose partnership these ideas were drafted as a working "character statement" for The Frederick Gunn School in August 2018. Some of these ideas were presented at the 2019 Association for Moral Education Conference in Seattle, Washington in a panel called "Moral Education in Independent Schools: Nineteenth Century Origins, Twenty-First Century Challenges." There might be a question at this point as to whether such a virtue is available to all people, at all ages, thinking of the infant who is still acquiring knowledge, the cognitively impaired, or the elderly. It is important that this is a virtue of the student, and while we may say that being a learning person is a great benefit of a good life for most people, it is not required to say that a good life cannot be lived without being a learning person. As a way to consider this distinction, we can remember the histories shared in this dissertation of female and Black Americans being left out of a life of learning, and therefore removed from access to this virtue. Feminist thinkers on virtue theory have been important on this line of thinking, and their contribution is summarised well in Bretherton, *A Primer in Christian Ethics*, 198ff.

[85] Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1982) 29-30.

[86] Ibid., 63.

[87] Ibid., 173.

To be always learning is to be actively engaged in a shared moral imagination through the active willing of a shared interpretation. In this, education in the special sense, and as distinct from our formations, still lands upon the same framework, which is that when we get to the very edge of all that we know and experience directly, we still have the capacity to imagine a shared life together. The commitment to this shared work is in part the shared practice of education, where we step outside of ourselves and our experiences together and try to see the world side by side, actively willing to understand a shared world with our neighbours. We do not just learn alongside of others, we enter their worlds and trust that in doing so, God's abundant activity will be there.

The Institutional Imagination in Support of Always Learning

Schools shape a student's social world. Our approach has been to get extremely curious about what is happening in those civic spaces and, especially, what moral and intellectual sources have shaped the approaches we are taking to the place of identity formation in the education of children. We found an ideal virtue, which seems ready and willing to be cultivated. Are our schools ready to step further into this opportunity?

There is a burgeoning literature that points to local contexts and civic spaces as the space for the revitalisation of American Democracy. The proposals always coming from a place of critique, and seem to invariably fail to attend to the spaces where gathering *does* happen; that is, where things go "right." Schools are such civic spaces. If they are not good enough, then we can reimagine them and make them better, but we should not lose sight of their enormous moral and civic potential. We said when establishing this dissertation's methodology that in the work of faithful presence, "presence and place" are crucial. As an educator, engaged in Christian ethics, the following thought experiments are shared to illuminate the potential promise of our findings.

As we look to consider an institutional imagination in support of always learning, we can also accept that pluralism puts pressure on a child's moral identity. We can do so acknowledging the anxieties of liberalism that leave parents a little unsure of where, if at all, pluralism begins to be considered a problem. It would seem that pressure is inevitable given the global movement and digital connectivity of people. Parents are left wondering when that pressure starts to be exerted. Some argue that from birth pluralistic engagement is good for the child, some Christians argue that Christian higher education should be in place so that the realities of pluralism are kept at bay as much as possible until the age of twenty-two or so. These possibilities become quickly tied to a family's financial and social capital.

Galston ends *Anti-Pluralism* with the following invitation: "In history's long view, liberal democracy's decisive advantage over other forms of government lies in its capacity for reinvention."[88] Reinvention, we might add, requires an extremely well-tuned institutional imagination, an imagination that is nurtured by always learning. What if given the contours of the twenty-first century—our travel enhanced, digitally mediated, pluralistic world—we took a completely fresh look at our educational institutions and the networks of institutions available for our children? Then, what if we asked ourselves what shape these institutions would take if we began from the possibility of human transformation and the possibility of human potential?

Thought Experiment One: What civic spaces do our kids actually need? What is keeping us from building them?[89]

Having engaged in constructive work on the place of identity formation in the education of children, it is time to consider areas of concern, by way of two thought experiments. The first addresses a growing refrain throughout this dissertation that a truncated institutional imagination is leading to, among other things, the concerns that were raised earlier by Wolterstorff and Arendt concerning how children become the bearers of particularity. Instead of engaging with this question from a critical standpoint, we are going to propose an alternative.

Schooling is the institutional shape that education takes in advanced post-industrial economies. The social practice of learning could theoretically take many institutional forms. While the economic interests in mandating education can help us to understand *why* children have found themselves for increasing lengths of time over the course of their lives inside of school buildings, it cannot describe comprehensively *what* happens inside of these buildings. This is because children are not robots; they are humans. The logic of always learning calls on us to see humans not as reducible to binary logics of, in this case, the transfer of knowledge and skills but instead cultivated so that they can imagine and live into a thriving future. Schools are ecosystems where teaching and learning happens, and the happenings inside of these school buildings are relationships that carry the shape of social practices.[90] That is, there are a set of identifiable shared ends which are pursued by a constellation of appropriate means to reach these goals. There is a teleology engaged in by a plurality.

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[88] Galston, *Anti-Pluralism*, 136.

[89] To provide a sense of how the turn to virtue plays out, consider a moment where Wolterstorff has mentioned education since he delivered the Taylor lectures. In an exchange with Richard Rorty, Wolterstorff is asking what agreement on public disagreements can look like, and he writes, "Here's a more just arrangement: letting people say what they want to say on political issues and letting them argue for their positions as they think best to argue for them, provided they conduct themselves with the requisite virtues." Nicholas Wolterstorff, "An Engagement with Richard Rorty," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 31.1:129–139 (2003) 135.

[90] For more on an ecological approach to education, see Nel Noddings, *Education and Democracy in the 21st Century* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2013), especially Chapter 7: Toward Ecological Cosmopolitanism.

The thought experiment:

As a parent, you want your child formed by the range of cultural institutions that align with the full range of all of the aspects of your identity, and those that as a parent you want to pass along to your child. Perhaps you are a Christian. Therefore, logistics aside, you may want your child to start their day with a technology-free hour of prayer and worship, with your family's closest friends. You then want an hour of neighbourhood-based play, where all of the children with whom your child shares a micro-geography learn the values of citizenship-across-difference as they play games together, not mediated by their phones. Then your child is ready for school, and let's say as a family you are STEM driven, and your child has gotten into a school for STEM-based learning. Your child is there for five hours, with a combination of foundational liberal arts and computer science, maths, laboratory science, and innovation. After this, your child goes to an after-school program, where they have made the regional tennis team. As an excellent athlete, your child spends two hours per day plus extensive travel time on the weekends as part of an elite sports program. Your child is at home for dinner and spends the evening both digitally connected with friends and, hopefully, with the family. In such a vision, the school becomes one of five institutions in a diverse ecosystem where your child's interactions are driven by alignment with your family values and the particularities of this child's capacities, limitations, and excellencies. Church, neighbourhood, school, sports, and family are all institutionally and formatively part of your child's day. The distinction between public and private is blurred as the places of the identity formation of children are meaningfully and intentionally expanded.

Why are we not pursuing this approach to the education and formation of our children? When some critics of contemporary schooling describe the above thought experiment, they narrate a reality in which what keeps us from pursuing this vision is that schools have been emptied of ways to cultivate the transcendental imagination and subsequently are killing the character of our children.[91] This is a helpful critique and description of the problem at hand, but this way of framing the critique leads to a diminished set of solutions.

What if fixing schools is less about moving more character, citizenship, and so on, into our schools and more about specifying the role of the school alongside other formative institutions in the lives of our children? Indeed, what keeps us from the vision we have just laid out may better be understood as a set of challenges around transportation logistics and funding constraints, not a lack of clarity on how

[91] Hanan Alexander, *Reimagining Liberal Education: Affiliation and Inquiry in Democratic Schooling* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); and James Davison Hunter, *The Death of Character: Moral Education in an Age without Good or Evil* (New York: Basic, 2000).

a robust set of child-focused institutions could diversify the ways that our children are formed. As others have argued, the problem is that we have created a lowest-common-denominator schooling model that serves everyone fairly poorly.

Here, we do well to remember that mandatory, mass schooling began as a solution to challenges created by the factory migration of the industrial revolution. Sunday schools gave children the basics of an education alongside of an orderly day without their parents. When our current model, which consists of children leaving home around 8:00am and "going to school" until roughly 4:00pm, was created in the middle of the twentieth-century, it met the needs of increasingly office-based workers and children who were trained to fill those offices in a professional model of vocational tracking. Not only is this no longer the model of work and professions, but the model has all of the problems that are well known. For the students in well-resourced school districts, they are isolated by class, and often race, limiting their civic imaginations based on the parameters of the schools they inhabit.[92] For the students in less-resourced school districts, their access to excellent education is limited, and they have fewer access points to deepen their particular capacities and excellencies. As a country, the United States spends $700 billion dollars on schooling every year for sub-par outcomes, and then we claim that the institutions that *we* have built and manage on behalf of our children are sacrosanct. Not only is this historically false—today's schools were imagined at a certain time, for certain purposes—but the institutions of learning can shift based on different needs of a different political and social time, because what Wolterstorff's engagement with Weber opened up for us is an ability to see that our schools are nothing more or less than the external manifestations of the deeper, internal goods of academic learning.

What is most important for our consideration is that in this vision, schools are no longer the singular places where all of the child's moral, civic, emotional, and intellectual capacities need to be activated. In the example above, the church-based morning practice can lead to the spiritual, moral, and emotional formation for the child. The game- and neighbourhood-based play can do a significant amount of civic formation. The school can have a more tightly-focused emphasis on knowledge, skills, and interpretation. Further, if these institutions are understood to cohere in a teaching and learning ecosystem, there is an obligation for them to participate within a certain set of goals and frameworks that are agreed to, within what Ashley Berner has called institutional pluralism.[93] There is not a trade-off among social-emotional learning, intellectualism, and so on. Different pedagogies pertain to different educational ends. Students are able to pursue their unique interests, capacities, and

[92] The phrase "sociospatial imaginations" is used by Angel Parham and Danielle Allen, "Achieving Rooted Cosmopolitanism in a Digital Age," in *From Voice to Influence: Understanding Citizenship in a Digital Age*, eds. Danielle Allen and Jennifer Light (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).
[93] Ashley Berner, *No One Way to School: Pluralism and American Public Education* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

excellencies. Within what we now consider the school day, families are able to specify the interests and outcomes for their families, and we can even allow that this might be within a state-sanctioned, or state-sponsored, range.

The imaginative experiment of this schooling utopia helps to illustrate an important critique of contemporary thinkers who take the external goods of schools as more fixed than is necessary and offer critiques of practices of formation that obscure a tighter focus on education, of academic learning. Indeed, Wolterstorff falls to this critique in some of his previous writings.[94] Our point is that it is not clear that schools as we know them need to be the institutions that accomplish all of the goals of identity formation in children. This is a substantive distinction that opens up greater avenues for exploration as we consider the place of identity formation in the education of children.[95]

Thought Experiment Two: What if children are not ours nor their own?

This dissertation is an exercise in Christian ethics, and Christians at our best think about children as image bearers, dignified human gifts from God who are *stewarded* into Christian formation through life. Ownership and control are not paradigmatic because children belong to God before they belong to families or states or even churches. This is symbolised in baptism into the community of the church, and since the earliest Christian communities, baptism has been available to the young and not only the mature. The Christian tradition of young baptised children being given godparents further establishes this movement from the family to the church, and this identity is social and corporate while being neither individualistic nor political.

As we explored the Heresies of Nature and the Heresies of Nurture, the image of the child swings widely from having the inevitability of democracy sewn in the individuality of each, sadly seemingly lost through the human process of maturation, to collectivities including a reified "public" state bearing the pressure to engender the correct civic and moral sensibilities into the young so that they, again, do better than our current state of affairs. By this telling, moral progress is not our collective work but instead the work of the young. While we have relieved the burden on ourselves to grow in virtue, we have built an untenable situation for our children.

[94] Take Wolterstorff's first volume as an example. This book was commissioned by a group called Christian Schools International and while otherwise offering helpful critical reflections on prominent pedagogical approaches, never calls into question the basic institutional form of schools except insofar as they are either "Christian" or not. Wolterstorff, *Educating for Responsible Action*.
[95] After the remote working and schooling experiments of the COVID pandemic of 2020-2022, it is not even clear that the current infrastructure continues to support the working lives of America's parent-workers.

A thought experiment:

You are eighteen years old, have completed high school, and are heading for university. There is a mentor who you met through your mosque and who you admire, and she has been mentoring you since you were fifteen and has committed to stay your mentor until you are twenty-five. Though she travels extensively and moves regularly, you stay in touch digitally. She is trusted because she was your mother's cousin's roommate in college, and security is extremely important to your family because you are progressive black Muslim Americans. It's a tremendous commitment of time and care, but all of her colleagues are asked to find ways to make this kind of commitment; it is incentivised at her place of work. A keen painter, you are part of an intergenerational group of artists who meet locally to create artwork together. You attend with your neighbour, who is like an aunt, and her eight-year-old son. A big gamer, your mother founded a company that trolls your chat rooms and flags bad behaviour. You spend a lot of time online, but part of the company your mother built allows the parents of the kids gaming together to chat with one another through a secondary chat infrastructure in the gaming portal. You have built a global network, and a few of the kids will be attending the same university as you are. While you are excited about university, you have been taught in school that learning simply takes new forms after you have your degree, and you can see the networks in the world that foster a life of learning, indeed, many of those networks had moments of interacting with your school. Through teachers, mentors, peers, and children this eighteen-year-old can teach, this person is embedded in a rich web of digitally and locally mediated civic spaces. Who knows what transformations and possibilities the future will hold?

When we take seriously that children are neither ours nor their own, but emergent and deserving of dignity, what we find is that humanity as a cohesive vision begins to take prominence over life stages and lamentations of adulthood. We are able to consider society as a place that needs to work generationally. In doing so, we open up space for taking the child out of the school with their peers and considering that a good deal of formation should be happening in communities that are different ages. Why, for example, do we believe that the formal state-sponsored institutions of education should end at "adulthood"? It seems clear that the virtue of *always learning* would be well cultivated throughout one's life. Why increasingly are so few social spaces intergenerational? Why can't we solve for life stages so that families have the capacity to subsist while the earliest years of bonding are at stake? Perhaps it is the idea that high school is the only rite of passage that exists in our societies that itself needs to be thought of in remarkably open and generous institutional forms. When children are not ours nor their own, they become not only God's but also our neighbours'.

The possibility of human potential makes no distinction in the age of the pilgrim, instead expecting growth in character at every stage of the Christian's life. When we imagine the young as partners in a

life of learning, not only can new institutional forms open up for that work, but we can reintroduce an expectation in the moral growth of those we consider adults and leaders. In the possibilities of human potential and human transformation, there is nothing sacrosanct about the life stage of childhood.

Conclusion

This chapter began with a consideration of the findings of our critiques in Chapters Two and Three. It then argued that what we should be seeking relative to the place of identity formation in the education of children is a virtue that is related to our insight that schools are civic spaces where the participants are engaged in a social practice. In sum, we found three answers to the place of identity formation in the education of children. First, we are reminded that attending to identity in education initially has served to overcome exclusions. Second, identity serves as a means of privileged cognitive access, where our individual particularities, brought to the social practice of academic learning, drives further insight and understanding. Third, as student's moral identities are being formed, the virtue attendant to the social practice of education, always learning, becomes a component of this moral identity. All three of these insights have been articulations of how a commitment to understanding children through the possibilities of transformation and potential give us moral, civic, and institutional imaginations out of entrenched public contestation, and they have helped to lead to thought experiments that demonstrate their promise in practice.

In all these ways, this chapter has sought to be an explicit working out of a faithful presence methodology in Christian ethics resulting in concrete proposals for the place of identity formation in the education of children. The point of faithful presence is to actually help real people by employing insights about what it is that will help people and through one's vocation—including one's particular "presence and place" and one's social power—to enact that help. It requires naming and doing in close proximity.[96] This is interesting, because it turns out that the call for solutions to our liberal woes is consistently for attention to what is happening in particular places and cases. Indeed, if there is one thing that holds the political theorists informing this dissertation, it is this claim. Consider, as a selection: Jeffrey Stout's *Blessed Are the Organized*, Danielle Allen's *Justice By Means of Democracy*, Alasdair MacIntyre's *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, James Davison Hunter's *Democracy and Solidarity*, Patrick Deneen's *Regime Change*, Luke Bretherton's *Christianity & Contemporary Politics*, Nancy Rosenblum's *Membership and Morals*.[97] When we attend to particular

[96] As we stated in the introduction, it therefore becomes methodologically significant that the author of this dissertation is not only trained to think theologically, but also trained to lead a school, and does both.
[97] Jeffrey Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Danielle Allen, *Justice by Means of Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2023), Alasdair MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning, and*

places and cases, we need to be open to what we will discover, and for the place of identity formation in the education of children, we found ourselves in want of a virtue to name well what is in fact binding communities together in the social practice of education, amidst the divisions and frustrations.

As MacIntyre wrote on the definition of virtue, "a virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods…. Every practice requires a certain kind of relationship between those who participate in it."[98] The social practice of academic learning, understood through the lens of dialogic pluralism, opens up to us this virtue, always learning. Consider the child who leaves the school well formed to be always learning. This child encounters other institutional spaces expecting to engage in a social practice that has a civic horizon. Moral articulacy about the civic purpose of education has helped this child become morally literate across civic spaces. The child wants to know how this virtue of always learning relates to the virtues of game playing, of being a neighbour, and of religious practice. Further, the child is always learning, and as such engages in these other formative spaces with open thinking, wonder, and curiosity. The child is able to engage in each of these other practices while making judgments about what is happening in those spaces. This virtue has not stifled the child's civic imagination; quite the opposite, it has been unlocked. In so doing, we now trust the child, and their future adult self, to contribute and participate in the civic life of the polity. We have allowed schools to prove formative in the lives of citizens, not by giving them civic identities but by giving them a virtue appropriate to the act of education and allowing it to become constitutive of their moral identity.

We also made the proposal that maybe schools should be doing less, and we should conceive of other formative institutions for children that do not get amalgamated into one institutional space. The benefit of thinking in this way is that it maps onto the pluralism of our time and allows parents and communities to prioritise accordingly. There are schools that are totalising by design. I lead one of them, an independent boarding school. But even when students live at school with their teachers, we give them extensive time away from school. We operate for 30 weeks out of 52 in the year. Where this leaves us is that what we are suffering from in the United States is a stagnant institutional imagination, and the societal change around us is demanding better. We are beleaguered by anti-institutionalism on one side and entrenched commitment to the failing institutions we already have on

Narrative (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); James Davison Hunter, *Democracy and Solidarity: On the Cultural Roots of America's Political Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2024); Patrick Deneen, *Regime Change: Towards a Postliberal Future* (New York: Sentinel, 2023); Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); and Nancy Rosenblum, *Membership & Morals* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

[98] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 191.

the other. Can we not see that there is a third way, where new institutions are formed and old institutions are transformed in order to meet the needs of our children?

Children span the public/private distinction. Our moral identities hold this distinction together. "Excellence itself," Arendt writes,

> *Arete* as the Greeks, *virtus* as the Romans would have called it, has always been assigned to the public realm where one could excel, could distinguish oneself from all others. Every activity performed in public can attain an excellence never matched in privacy; for excellence, by definition, the presence of others is always required, and this presence needs the formality of the public, constituted by one's peers, it cannot be the casual, familiar presence of one's equals or inferiors.[99]

The excellence that transcends the formation of the child and the public/private distinction is best understood as a virtue, and when we see schools as civic spaces engaged in a practice, we can see just how helpful of an idea it is that the social practice of learning delivers a civically relevant virtue: to be *always learning*. Whatever else schools, in their particularities, believe themselves to be doing, they can be delivering on this virtue, either explicitly or implicitly, well or poorly.

[99] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 48-9.

Conclusion

Schools are as powerful as many fear. In America today, they are the meaning-making communities that most single handedly form the moral imaginations of our children. The only communities that rival them are families, friendships, and digital spaces. As an educator watching the rise of the latter, the present begs for us to transform our educational institutions so that they are continually legitimated as public and civic spaces where shared values and virtues are forged. The argument of the previous chapters is that in order for this call to be met successfully and humanely in our pluralistic society, we need to ensure that our understanding of the place of identity formation in the education of children is nuanced and defensible. In this concluding chapter, we will consider once more what is at stake in this line of inquiry, how our argument has unfolded, and the implications of this work for further study.

The anxieties of liberalism, a phrase that has helped us summarise how scholars and average Americans are encountering pluralism, are as present in our schools as anywhere else, and this is most clearly seen in the clash of hopes and fears surrounding the place of identity formation in the education of children. When a Christian ethicist takes note of such a public clash, the methodology of faithful presence invites a careful leaning in. How does Christ speak into this question? What is the church's witness here? Are there any theologically informed practitioners available to help imagine alternatives? The work of faithful presence is affirmation and antithesis, neither of which is possible without principled, nuanced listening to the issues.

This dissertation has pointed to a hard truth: identity formation is essential to the education of children. It cannot be ignored or neutralised. However, by making a distinction between education and formation, we can also appreciate education in the special sense and see how identity formation functions there. All education attends to the people engaged in their learning. This is the insight of privileged cognitive access, and it requires that we treat children, even at the earliest ages, as those who are formed by intersections of deeply rooted traditions and communities, each of which has basic philosophical commitments, not least basic anthropological commitments. When the school is seen as representative of one of these communities—for example the longstanding tradition of religious schools in America—we have the conceptual framework both to accept this intrusion of particularity and, at the same time, recognise that to live in the United States is to be pluralist, and the formation of our children can faithfully reflect this reality, as we sought to demonstrate in the thought experiments of Chapter Four. When we look to identity formation in the education of children, we recognise that to engage in a shared social practice is to accept a shared virtue as the correlate to that practice. We gave

that virtue a name—*always learning*—and by doing so, we demonstrate that while a strong shared civic identity may elude our schools, this shared virtue can become present in the moral identities of all who engage in the practice. Rosenblum called such things the "deep substrate of democracy in America," and it is hard to conceive of a more proper description.[1]

The following sections will re-engage with the argument of the dissertation to outline its structure and findings. Having done so, questions remain, and we will briefly consider four areas for implications that will help to make clear the unique contributions of the dissertation. These four are: the implications for Christians and the task of faithful presence, a comprehensive theology of education, the present theory and practice of education, and the field of virtue ethics. As this conclusion acknowledged at the start, American children increasingly live highly digital lives mediated by technologies, not least the emergence of Artificial Intelligence. This dissertation will therefore conclude with both a recognition of and a set of questions relative to what is likely the next wave of contestation, the education of children in the digital age.

Educating Children

We began the Introduction with an admonition from W.E.B. Du Bois that captures uniquely the context of these issues in the United States of America. Education is deeply related to the moral, civic, and institutional imagination of Americans: "From out the caves of evening that swing between the strong-limbed earth and the tracery of the stars, I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what soul I will, and they come all graciously with no scorn nor condescension. So, wed with Truth, I dwell above the Veil."[2] It may be true that this imagery stokes the imagination without need for further comment, and yet: it evokes Hannah Arendt's insistence that natality is the fundamental human condition and her final attempt to relate the *vita activa* to the *vita contemplativa* in her posthumous book, *The Life of the Mind*.[3] Natality for Arendt in *The Human Condition* is very simply the statement that something new in the world is possible—human action. It captures the political importance of the child in the very essence of children standing for something in the future. Natality means something different than progress. It means something more closely related to hope. That hope is what we hear in the Du Bois quote above. *I summon…they come all graciously…so wed…I dwell*. There is no tentativeness to this image; it is written as a promise that movement from *the caves of evening* to *above the Veil* is a birthright for each child.

[1] Nancy Rosenblum, *Good Neighbors: The Democracy of Everyday Life in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016) 8.
[2] W.E.B. Du Bois, "Of the Training of Black Men" in *The Souls of Black Folks* (Chicago: Dover Publications, 1903, 1994, 2016) 67.
[3] Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 1978).

Building on Du Bois's invitation, Chapter One wrestled with the question of what it means to have a sense of who these children *are* whom we educate. What basic or essentialised anthropological assumptions are given to us through philosophies and traditions? Through an engagement with Karl Barth, Jennifer Herdt, and Kwame Anthony Appiah, we identified the temptation of essentialism, whether in the form of an overstated human perfectionism, missing eschatological horizon, or reification of identifiers and the communities that carry them. Following Barth, our unlikely anthropologist, we looked to his understanding of Christian baptism and found two basic anthropological assumptions that were faithful, insightful, and comprehensible and could speak publicly into the place of identity formation in the education of children. A different dissertation could have attempted a claim that human transformation and potential are deeply shared and obvious ways to consider the child, and make a neutral humanistic argument in this way. By instead grounding our understanding of these in baptism with the Holy Spirt and baptism with water, they are able to more precisely do the work of careful antithesis in the sweeping critiques of Chapter Two and Chapter Three and more faithfully embody the very intrusion of particularity for which this dissertation makes conceptual space. When we consider the true anxieties of liberalism as challenges of deep difference, we understand that any solutions we can imagine must pertain to an accurate description of the nature of the problem, and solutions of collegial debate are different from solutions requiring overlapping consensus and perhaps even concession for the sake of a greater outcome. Our conclusions include that children are not to be seen as later of dignity but instead presently of dignity. This dignity is tied to the present emergent quality of the child and their always being called by God, already of value to God and this world. Understanding the present dignity of children allows their particularity more space in the arguments of Chapters Two through Four.

Through Barth and Herdt, we also arrived at the idea of open formation, which helped to make clear how transformation and potential alter and relativise stronger notions of a more closed vision of formation, or at least temptations in that direction. Potential was grounded in the joint structures of "obedience" and "hope," which allowed us to acknowledge our embeddedness in all kinds of formative communities and civic spaces without seeing these only negatively, weighing us down. Hope never leaves us where we are but points towards God's coordinated intentions of welcoming us into His work in the world; this is the idea of vocation. Transformation is built on our individuality and the unique call of God, personally, welcoming us into our future. God is faithful and transformation also helped to begin to clarify why moral identity theory supports this vision. Barth is famously known for his critique of Natural Theology; he found sweeping claims about the nature of a person, in particular, at odds with the disclosure of humanity in the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. He makes for our case, therefore, the model anthropologist, because he is tentative in his claims and open handed. In conversation with Appiah, we were able to link Barth's work to the contemporary

discourse of identity studies, and, in conversation with Herdt, identify a vision of identity formation in children that remains open to the world as brought to us by our neighbours and by God. These insights are foundational to the lived realities of pluralism in the United States today.

The Temptations of Education as a Project

In Chapters Two and Three, our argument confronts a cluster of working logics at the intersection of education, political theory, and developmental psychology that we call The Heresies of Nature and The Heresies of Nurture. The overarching concern of these chapters was treating children as the perfectibility of humanity already understood. We gave this idea the shorthand—education as project—and believe that it obscures the place of identity formation in the education of children. By maintaining fidelity to the possibility of human transformation and the possibility of human potential, we steered a course through what we called four temptations towards heresy: The Inevitability of Democracy, The Neutrality of Development, All Diversity is the Same, and The Public - Private Divide. Together, these chapters accomplished the creation of space, within the various discourses surrounding the place of identity formation in the education of children, for the proposals of Chapter Four.

Perhaps, we considered first, there is no place for identity formation in the education of children. We began by taking issue with the temptation to think about democracy as inevitable, if we could only make children perfect future citizens. The virtue of this line of reasoning, for which John Dewey was our guide, is its absolute belief in education in many of the ways this dissertation also seeks a deep belief in education in the special sense. However, education is fully trusted to ensure a peaceful democracy in all of those enlightened. While so powerfully articulated by Dewey's *Democracy and Education*, this is not a line of reasoning that is his alone, and we considered Amy Gutmann's claims in *Democratic Education* to be representative of the anxieties of trying to make Dewey's framework operable into the twenty-first century. Where Dewey trusted children and our democratic future inside of them, Gutmann sees the formation of citizens in schools to be a project aligned to the child's inevitable democratic reasoning. Our concern was less that Dewey and Gutmann share flawed reasoning and more that they share a deep philosophical commitment, indeed an ontological commitment to the nature of a person, without claiming it as such or operating at the level of pluralistic contestation. As we wrote in Chapter Two, there is a sense that the identity of the child, their particularities, are either irrelevant or secondary to their identity as future citizens.

A complexification for Dewey's and Gutmann's ontological claims arises from its relationship to the perspective that "future citizen" allows for an inevitable unfolding of human development. The idea

that human development is a neutral project has been extraordinarily problematic, as scholars who operated in the earliest forms of identity studies—feminism and race theory—have been arguing in parallel almost from the very start. We considered the field of developmental psychology, and Lawrence Kohlberg in particular, as exemplary of a claim that "the healthy human" becomes a democratic moral reasoner. The feminist concern with such a claim is that "the healthy human" was defined in terms that erred towards a man, not a woman. From the perspective of the Black American experience, the disembodiment of "the healthy human" allowed for practices of "separate but equal" schooling that undermined the very democratic political community apparently unfolding. The inevitability of democracy and the neutrality of development are not always operative as the explicit argumentation of scholars thinking about children and education, but when they operate in the background, largely unstated, they rightly raise the irritation and sometimes ire of those seeking clarity around the place of identity formation in the education of children.

That there should be, and inevitably is, a place for identity formation in the education of children has become more clearly stated in recent decades. We began our consideration in Chapter Three with an exploration of the idea that all diversity is the same. Our concern was very simply that there is a deep irony in taking something as particularistic as identity and engaging with it through broad, totalising terms and conclusions, like "diversity." Not only is diversity not experienced as a universally identifiable phenomenon for students in schools in America, but when treated as a category for which one should have "a statement," or set of procedures, we end up with an insufficient normative response to the experiences of diversity among children in schools. We sought a different framework to allow for a broader response to the place of identity formation in the education of children. Considering pluralism reminds us that when we are talking about diversity in children, we are referring to the communities and traditions that form and inform them and their families. Further, where the broad field of education has accepted diversity as a good, pluralism is still largely seen as a problem.

The final component of this line of reasoning was to ask why we struggle to consider pluralism and children, and this led us to the public/private distinction and the idea of privacy. Alongside Hannah Arendt, we considered that one reason pluralism has been so difficult for schools is that schools are seen as public where the identity formation to which pluralism points is typically considered private or personal. This was reinforced by another developmental psychologist, Urie Bronfenbrenner, who offered a visualisation of how spheres of proximal development emanate from the individual and act back on that individual and her formation. Through Arendt and Bronfenbrenner, we consider a revision to the classical way of defining the public - private divide to instead see that the public/private distinction takes place inside of the individual. What this section in its totality revealed is a shift in frame from considering identity, and especially moral identity, as a project of schools for

the perpetuation of the democratic state and instead allowed Angel Parham and Danielle Allen's idea of the "sociospatial imagination" to remind us that it is the child's moral, civic, and institutional imagination that is being shaped most comprehensively in the schools of the United States today. Understanding the place of identity formation in the education of children requires that we consider what kind of civic space we are talking about and how it relates to other places in which we live and learn together.

The Promise of Education as a Practice

The conclusion of this line of reasoning is that when we have in our expectations that education is a project, with adult humanity as the outcome, we mischaracterise the place of identity formation in the education of children. Identity formation becomes itself part of the project. To consider this differently, Chapter Four introduced the argument that instead of considering education to be a project we should recognise that education is a practice, a social practice, and that this opens up for us lines of exploration which could overcome impasses in the philosophy and institutions of education today.

If we are going to consider the place of identity formation in the education of children, we need to accept that schools, as we conceive of them today, are but one possible institutional form for that education. This is especially true if we accept that education and formation are conceptually distinct. If we expand our institutional imaginations, then the temptations towards misunderstanding and misapplying the place of identity formation in the education of children can be shifted away from debates inside of our schools towards a public discourse about all of the spaces that are forming our children—indeed with the rise of child-facing technologies, these debates are and will shift whether we are ready with appropriate intellectual frameworks or not.

It was Nicholas Wolterstorff who shared a form of this insight as he engaged with Alasdair MacIntyre's theory of a social practice in his own *Religion in the University*. An extended engagement with that book revealed to us that a social practice is engaged in by people oriented towards a shared good and there is a means to achieve that good. In doing so, an institution is conceived and that institution is maintained as the practice is shared and perpetuated by an expanding group of people. Wolterstorff's is a powerful articulation of open formation. Institution here might be a building with walls and a roof but, more directly, institution here refers to this ritualised form of human interaction. The concepts of civic space and moral imagination move more closely together. In this formulation, the place of identity formation, as a practice, is engaged in by a host of particular teachers and students. Far from being a distraction from the task at hand, the particularity of those engaged is now basic to the institution itself.

We named two ways in which identity formation intersects this understanding of education as a practice. The first is the idea of privileged cognitive access, which is to say, what can be learned and understood is not *Information* but always *information x perspective*. The positionality of those engaged in the learning has direct relevance to the outcome of the learning. Wolterstorff referred to this as fact finding and interpretation, never the first without also the second. We discipline the latter with the former. The second is the idea that when one engages in a social practice, one benefits from the attendant virtue. We took this one step further through an exploration of the moral identity literature to understand that the virtues of an individual cohere in a sense of moral selfhood. The place of identity formation is therefore both in the learning and by the practice of the learning.

Having recognised the presence of a virtue, we went so far as to give it a name and engaged in two thought experiments to consider the applications of our argument. To be *always learning* is to understand yourself and the story you bring to the learning process, to see the truths of the world as worthy of understanding, to engage deeply and fairly in the work of understanding, and to state your findings with the understanding of others in mind. The recognition and naming of this virtue is directly relevant to the question of this dissertation, and our two thought experiments of Chapter Four contextualised the implications of our argument today; we will not restate them here.

Implications for Christians and the Task of Faithful Presence

Given all of these complexities, the place of identity formation in the education of children is understandably fraught for today's parents who simply want to ensure that their children have a coherent moral identity to lead good lives, in the infinite variety of ways that individual families uniquely frame that idea of goodness. The place of identity formation in the education of children is a morally weighted question, and any approach that obscures the moral identity from view is less helpful than it ought to be. This is in part why it is so important to make clear that the critique of this dissertation emerges out of a particular point of view and is an extension of the argument contained herein. The author is a theologian, trained in the legacies of Karl Barth, and deeply formed through studies of baptism and Christian formation. The form of Christian ethics undertaken here comes out of this learning; faithful presence is a practice in pluralistic engagement, whereby studying, listening, and with critical engagement, a question pressing in the public realm is given an answer that, while rooted in particularity, is meant to be understandable in the public realm. We take up the discourse of other disciplines and engage with that discourse on its own terms. As such, this is a deeply human enterprise, not recreateable by artificial, digital information bearers. Rooted in a particular set of biologically situated, limited, and fallible interpretations, we make interdisciplinary connections and

navigate concerns as only a human mind can. In this way, the dissertation is built out of the model of learning it recommends. The most direct reason for this methodology is the belief that it is the most intellectually responsible modality within which a Christian thinker can engage in public discourse regarding topics of concern that are, by definition, pluralistic in their character.

There is a secondary reason as well, and it has to do with the desire to honour the tremendous resources that Christians have invested in educational endeavours throughout western history. Christians, explicitly as Christian work, have established schools and universities in a variety of iterations and towards various ends beginning at least as early as the first monastic communities. In so doing, Christians took up a mode that predated their existence, and they made it very much their own. The tradition of education in the name of Christianity is far outside of the scope of this dissertation. However, when we look at the basic assumptions that were laid out here, assumptions about what is possible in the life of a person, it is imperative that we allow ourselves to ask where these basic assumptions came from and what we make of them, whether the reader considers themselves informed or aligned to the Christian tradition or not. This is because, of course, in the twenty-first century, we find ourselves looking at an overlapping consensus in public life to educate our children and we find ourselves in want of a shared (enough) understanding of these children to make sense of the approaches we are taking and the forms we support.

There is a parallel contemporary approach to our question that our framework seeks to resist and, to see it clearly, we can return a final time to Patrick Deneen's work. That temptation is to reinforce the public – private divide as a way, it seems, to sidestep the deeper complexities of the place of identity formation in the education of children and the requirement of all parents, including Christians, to responsibly reconcile themselves to those complexities. Reinforcing the divide coheres with a tendency we named in Chapter Three for Deneen to essentialise identity, albeit through the lens of class and religion. We hide our identities in private and try to guard their privacy. We somehow think we are making our deep selves off limits, hiding our children in private spaces. As we have argued, that is not possible, and it is not necessary.

Without claiming that MacIntyre was a more comprehensive thinker on the topic of children and schools than he was, we can point to a general concept he has regarding "sociological self-knowledge" to refine this point.[4] "To have sociological self-knowledge," he writes, "is to *know* who

[4] For a careful exposition of MacIntyre's thinking relative to education, see Joseph Dunne, *What's the Good of Education?: A Philosophy of Persons in Practices* (London: Bloomsbury, 2025). There are many points of alignment between our own project and this book, including: a resistance to thinking about education as a project with a set of outcomes, the problem of treating children as if they were already adults or only deserving of dignity as future adults, an impoverishment in imaging the child without a transcendent horizon, etc. Perhaps most helpful, Dunne writes of *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* that it is best read "as an essay in Bildung: a

you and those around you are in terms of your and their roles and relationships to each other, to the common goods of family, workplace, and school, and to the structures through which power and money are distributed."[5] In short, to act in public requires that we pay careful attention to those with whom we share life, acknowledging the impact this will have back on ourselves, and our places of formation and transformation.

Given the project we have just undertaken, what seems evident is that Deneen has failed to ask himself how modern moral identities are formed, and relatedly has failed to listen substantively to scholars of identity. His work does not yet attend to the complexities of children, further highlighting his blindness to what is actually happening in schools. His work is dismissive of open formation. Correspondingly, a review of the indexes in *Democratic Faith*, *Why Liberalism Failed*, and *Regime Change* shows no sustained engagement with any prominent thinkers in identity studies or developmental psychology.[6] He jumps from Hobbes to Dewey and Mill, but Dewey and Mill did not jump over the thinking of women and Black scholars.[7] MacIntyre argues that it takes listening well to see points of convergence and divergence. As we listened in this dissertation, we found the temptations to a public – private divide to be critical to thinking well about the place of identity formation in the education of children, and, insofar as this divide is operable behind Deneen's more constructive proposals in *Regime Change*, he is led in unhelpful directions. Again, in a way that we see as related, Deneen is not able to identify any positive spaces where a set of virtues is being forged in our social institutions. Deneen's posture ends up sounding more like what Hunter calls Defensive Against or Purity From but, without careful attention and listening, Faithful Presence is outside of his institutional imagination.

To the degree that Deneen believes he is following MacIntyre, we can point to him for direction to MacIntyre's storytelling as an alternative to his own. There is a wonderful if esoteric section of *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* in a chapter called "NeoAristotelianism developed in contemporary Thomistic terms" on fishermen in Denmark. The story MacIntyre tells is of a collective set of families that financially band together instead of being purchased by an external conglomerate. What is striking are the questions not asked of those who built this alternative social model. Nothing in the story claims that these community members shared the same comprehensive moral values or worshiped or looked alike. For MacIntyre what was instead salient was that they had a common need

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kind of Thomist staging of the drama of a formative, self-constituting process, beset with successive negations, in which an unmistakable teleology is reconciled with a historicist open-endedness and embrace of contingency" (66).

[5] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* 2nd Edition (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) 211.

[6] Alex Zakaras makes a similar point in his review essay, "The Crisis of Liberal Modernity and the Conservative Restoration," *American Political Thought: A Journal of Ideas, Institutions, and Culture* 14.3 (Summer 2025) 440.

[7] Patrick Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018) 36-7.

at the intersection of what Arendt would call their labour, work, and action. In response, their "fragile success…was possible only because of qualities of mind and character especially in those who provided the community with leadership and the Guild with an articulate voice: prudence increasingly informed by economic and political know how, justice in the allocation of shares and in the structure of the Guild, courage in taking the right risks in the right way, and temperateness in not being seduced by the promises of the market."[8] Virtues were forged by common action and reciprocally necessary to its success. As Deneen put this himself, what we need are better practices, and we might add to this, not anxieties.

More sustained engagement with Deneen's corpus would be required to say more, but our findings show that Deneen fails to provide a nuanced understanding of the place of identity formation in the education of children. If he had, he may have been more sympathetic in his temperament in *Why Liberalism Failed*. Instead, *Regime Change* reinforces his less intellectually defensible anxieties. There is a different approach: faithful presence. In further study, Hunter's understanding of power, for example, should be put into critical dialogue with Deneen's. What is likely to be found is that Hunter's is a more patient vision. Christians are called to faithfulness in the character of the possibility of human potential and believe in God's power relative to the transformations needed in the world. Again, as we argued in Chapter One, and Bretherton, Banner, Hunter, and others make clear, failing to attend to local stories, and listening to those we believe in advance that we disagree with, leaves us without constructive pathways towards points of overlapping consensus.

Implications for Theology

When we take a step back from the practical implications of the place of identity formation in the education of children, other more theoretical implications arise for the field of theology. Of particular interest are questions about the ways that theologians and Christian scholars are engaged in interdisciplinary work.

Regarding the theology of education, the most significant implication of this project has to do with the distinction between education and formation and our contention that as these are separated from one another, careful attention can be paid to each individually. If we take only Wolterstorff as an example of this, we can see through much of his writing that while he is interested in the distinction we make, there is no direct point at which he theorises it in such a way that its implications could make plain why his commitment to specifically Christian institutions of learning do or do not cohere with his

[8] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 180.

other commitments. As we began to demonstrate in Chapter Four, Wolterstorff's vision of the child may be the chief component of this difference between his thought and that laid out here. The possibility of human transformation and the possibility of human potential already pertaining to the child and that child's dignity are significant components of this dissertation's argument, and each could warrant a dissertation of its own. A theology of education that accomplishes what we have in mind may well consider itself a theology of imagination, or make use of any number of the terms we have sought to use here, to make the case that education and formation need some conceptual space between the two.

Further, there are implications of our extended dialogue with theorists of developmental psychology and identity studies for how theologians approach questions of formation. Theologian Ryan Huber, who was first introduced in Chapter One, has recently and helpfully argued that Dietrich Bonhoeffer is best understood as an "ethicist of formation," and that this ethical stance can be "a valuable third way between Thomistic virtue ethics and character ethics."[9] While this is an interesting intervention, we are curious whether virtue, as used in this dissertation, might make the distinction less necessary.

Of particular concern, Huber's book, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Ethics of Formation*, can read as though the early influences on Bonhoeffer's thinking, from sociologists and psychologists, are less relevant to his thinking than his theological reference points. Even when Huber is unpacking Bonhoeffer's own vocation as an educator, he fails to ask how non-theological sources informed Bonhoeffer's own formation, considering how he was also building on the sociological insights from his upbringing and earliest intellectual explorations. Huber also never makes the distinctions we are making here between the ideas of formation and education, and in fact conflates the ideas in unhelpful ways.[10] Even given these critiques, however, the insight that Bonhoeffer should be understood as an ethicist of formation—as well as giving a name to an *ethics of formation* as a viable mode of ethical engagement—are both welcome contributions along the lines of the wider argument of this dissertation. Ultimately, the biggest issue with Huber's account is that it puts Bonhoeffer into conversation with contemporary ethicists instead of into conversation with himself. Bonhoeffer's earlier writings in *Sanctorum Communio* and *Act and Being* reveal an intellectually astute and sociologically and psychologically sophisticated thinker who understands the immense formative

[9] Ryan Huber, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Ethics of Formation* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2020) 1. What Huber fails to attend to is what Bonhoeffer is doing in *Life Together* through the work he did in *Sanctorum Communio*. The claim here is that trying to read *Life Together*, *Discipleship*, or *Ethics* without the foundations of the earlier text leads to a misunderstanding and devaluation of the role of the community in the work of formation. Instead, formation into the person of Jesus Christ is seen ironically as an individual's quest, not as the shared life of a community seeking faithfulness and thereby engaging in the dialectics of formation that we have been exploring here. Huber does briefly make reference to *Sanctorum Communio* (see page 38, for example) but though he sees the connection to the community of the church, he spends almost no time trying to unpack this aspect.

[10] Ibid., especially Chapter 4.

influence of intentional communities oriented around common life and transformation.

For both Wolterstorff and Huber, it is a closer listening to fields outside of theology, especially developmental psychology, that would ultimately sharpen their thinking and interventions. This demonstrates a more general point about the dependence of ethical thinking on cross disciplinary learning, an endeavour for which *always learning* will be well suited.

Implications for the Theory and Practice of Education

This section of the conclusion could be expansive, and we have hinted at implications for the theory and practice of education throughout the dissertation. Instead of re-examining those previous moments, this section looks at two considerations: one regards the role of basic anthropological assumptions in observational research and the second is at the intersection of open formation and theorists of culture. At stake are what other assumptions academic fields are making that theologians should question and contest.

The first area for further consideration in the philosophy and practice of education has to do with how basic anthropological assumptions work at the level of observational research. This question is raised well in Ian Leslie's 2014 book, *Curious: The Desire to Know and Why Your Future Depends On It*.[11] As his popular take on the contemporary movements in the psychological development of babies, in particular their epistemic curiosity, unfolds, the story he tells is of the human child's "innate desire to know." "Right from the beginning, curiosity is a joint venture."[12] He is drawing on current research from the Centre for Brain and Cognitive Development, Birkbeck College, University of London, and in particular a team of researchers named Katarina Begus (now Harvard University), Teodora Gliga, and Victoria Southgate. The question these scholars have pursued has to do with the role of infant-driven curiosity, the response of their caregivers to this curiosity, and how this maps onto long-term learning outcomes.[13]

The possibilities of human transformation and potential increased our sensitivity to consider the dignity of the child as learner from her earliest moments. Unlike others in their field, Begus et al. brought a similar perspective to the research and the topic at hand and, in assuming that from the very earliest moments humans are driven by learning, these researchers came to show that early-infant

[11] Ian Leslie, *Curious: The Desire to Know and Why Your Future Depends On It* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), especially chapter two.
[12] Ibid., 24.
[13] Katarina Begus, Teodora Gliga, and Victoria Southgate, "Infants Learn What They Want to Learn: Responding to Infant Pointing Leads to Superior Learning," *PloS One* 9.10 (2014).

gesturing has a similar significance to interest-driven knowledge acquisition. From the earliest months of infants' engagement with the world, they are seeking to be understood, and thereby to understand, in a reciprocal manner with all that would offer knowledge and understanding, primarily through relationships. Research is therefore beginning to support that the innate desire to know, to learn, to be explained to, and to be responded to through meaningful social relationships, exists from the earliest moments and months of human development. Not even language is needed for curiosity to properly begin to drive human learning. Of note here is how research *emanates from* basic anthropological commitments. How might future clinical research support and question our basic anthropological assumptions of human transformation and human potential, when these are taken as the starting point?

The second area for consideration is at the intersection of our work on open formation and theorists of culture. The research threads of this work intersect extremely practical modes of reflection on school culture. This dissertation does not engage with the literature around the culture of schools even though the research in this area is increasingly understood, especially at the earliest years, to play a crucial role in childhood development. We look instead at a deeper debate about how culture functions with regards to moral development, albeit a moral development that is not Kohlbergian.

James Davison Hunter frames this line of inquiry well in his 2000 book *The Death of Character*.[14] Hunter is interested in the shape of education as it emerges over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and he argues that while character education has been central to that quest since the beginning, character requires that we conceive of schools as places of formation and that we acknowledge the content of character as an essentially shared project. His book is titled the *death* of character because, as he argues, the moral pluralism of the twentieth century does not lend itself to the project of character.

Operating out of a different strain of thought, David B. Wong offers a framework that could be more fruitful to seeing schools as places of formation, especially in the piece "Cultural Pluralism and Moral Identity."[15] Wong, a philosopher at Duke University, is best known for his work on multiculturalism and the creation of a defence of cultural relativism that does not degrade into what he calls "unrestricted moral relativism."[16] In short, within his "naturalistic theory of morality," one should expect to find a range of moral expressions that correspond to a range of cultural expressions. However, given that the forms of common life that have led to the range of cultural expressions are all forms of common life among humans, we should expect, and in fact do find, that the spectrum of

[14] James Davison Hunter, *Death of Character: Moral Education in an Age without Good and Evil* (New York: Basic, 2000).
[15] David B. Wong, *Personality, Identity, and Character* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
[16] Ibid., 80.

multiculturalism and therefore the moral range of humanity is in fact limited. As he explains, this is "a naturalism that treats morality not as something just there, independently of human choice, but as arising from the decisions and actions of human beings striving to structure their lives together in response to the constraints imposed by their environments and by their own natural motivational propensities."[17] What ties this all together for Wong is something essentially human, which he calls our "social nature." For Wong, then, morality is very straightforwardly a subset of culture, where culture is defined as a range of properly *human* action and practice. Further, culture is not best understood as "thick" or "thin," though that is a conceptually plausible approach, and one that Hunter favours. "Thick" conceptions of culture are understood to be required to actually do the work of formation we are discussing with regards to learning. Wong identifies that both postmodern critics and cosmopolitans offer strong critiques for this essentialist conception of culture, though for different reasons. In response to this, Wong proposes "a thicker notion of culture that is not naive" to the critiques of essentialism.[18] He does this by proposing a "conversational model of culture" in which cultures can be "rich and vibrant" without being "thick."[19] How does this relate to open formation? "The conversational concept of culture helps to explain how moral agents can be both situated and autonomous in the relevant senses."[20] This is a conception of culture that might allow for the pluralism of schools we have been describing throughout the dissertation.

Coming out of this approach is a relevant critique to the work we undertook in conversation with Appiah, who is acknowledged to be and claims himself the identity of the cosmopolitan. Of cosmopolitanism, Wong writes:

> To present the cosmopolitan as typical of the general human condition, however, is mistaken. The cosmopolitan is rooted in a particular kind of culture that can be found in particular social strata of cities such as San Francisco, Paris, London, Mumbai, and Hong Kong. This kind of culture values consumption of the best the world has to offer, valorizes an international outlook and multilingual fluency (presupposing the material conditions to gain such fluency), and employs "techniques" abstracted from philosophies and religions, the overall teaching of which are inconsistent with certain features (e.g., consumption of fine things) of cosmopolitan lifestyles.[21]

Wong's critique of cosmopolitanism helps to answer an unresolved issue with Appiah's *Lies that Bind* (notably written after this article by Wong). While Appiah acknowledges the necessity of these ties,

[17] Ibid., 82.
[18] Ibid., 90.
[19] Ibid., 94-5.
[20] Ibid., 100.
[21] Ibid., 96.

he never quite tells us why they are good. What are they good *for*? As a consummate cosmopolitan, the one thing that Appiah does not have the life experience to appreciate—among the many life anecdotes of *The Lies that Bind*—is a culture that is neither cosmopolitan nor particularly liberal but still inside of the bounds of the naturalistic range of human cultures and therefore moralities, which Wong is seeking to make room for.

In order to speak about virtues, character, ethics, morality, etc. in schools, scholars need to continue asking the questions of those contained in this section: about how we conceive of a human and about the nature of culture and community. This work is necessary not only for proper understanding, but even more importantly so that our practices in school align with what we can jointly conceive to be acceptable. In both of these areas, theologians can continue to put pressure on, or prioritise, theories that make sense alongside of Christian insights, like the possibility of human transformation and the possibility of human potential.

Implications for Virtue Ethics

The argument of this dissertation includes a proposal that the social practice of education results in the virtue of always learning. We have engaged at various places with the field of virtue ethics, and in this concluding section we will point to the most relevant implications for further consideration. The first is a return to a concern raised in Chapter Two—that when we use the language of virtue we are in fact considering virtues and not something better conceived of as a skill. Related to this is a question for further exploration about the relationship among always learning, critical thinking, and practical wisdom. The second is a final consideration of virtue, moral identity, and open formation and where lines of new inquiry and research open up.

Tal Brewer makes an important distinction between habituation and virtue, related to the importance of *internal goods*.[22] Internal goods are the substance to which habituation points and for which the virtue becomes the name for the fidelity between that good and the habit. The challenge with habituation without language of internal goods is that the goods are lost and replaced with skills. Using this insight, we need to beware the misuse of the term virtue. Consider the following. In *Democratic Education*, Amy Gutmann proposes that "a democratic state of education tries to teach…what might best be called *democratic* virtue: the ability to deliberate and hence to participate in conscious social reproduction." Gutmann defines this virtue as an "ability to deliberate." She

[22] Talbot Brewer, "Why Virtues Are Not Habits: Aristotle on Awakening to the Good," unpublished paper presented at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture (University of Virginia), 25 October 2024.

explains this further under the heading "Deliberation and Democratic Character," and she writes, "Although inculcating character and teaching moral reasoning by no means exhaust the purposes of primary education in a democracy, together they constitute its core political purpose: the development of 'deliberative,' or what I shall interchangeably call 'democratic,' character. Deliberation is connected, both by definition and practice, with the development of democracy."[23] It is the word "inculcate" in relation to character that begins to raise alarm, especially when tied to teaching, because, again, education is not a project. It is when we consider, again, that education is best thought of as a practice that the differences between deliberation as critical thinking and always learning come forward. Virtues happen in relation: to practices, to people, in community. Skills are more likely capacities or competencies that are latent in the individual and can be deployed by people *to* community. It is the relationality of always learning that helps it to function as a virtue relevant to learning in pluralistic environments. Further, there is an open question for further study as to what the relationship between always learning and practical wisdom might be, how these relate to deliberation as critical thinking, and where such an engagement might itself lead to overlapping consensus in the practices of education.

We give Peter Berger, with whom we engaged briefly in Chapter One, the final description of the problem with talk of virtues that is most relevant to this dissertation, and it comes out of the sociology of knowledge. As Berger considered this in his 1969 volume, *A Rumor of Angels*, the problem is this: everyone exists in a context. Berger spends some time unpacking this in relation to the theological work of Rudolf Bultmann. Berger's critique of Bultmann is what he describes as a double standard: "The past out of which the tradition comes, is relativized in terms of this or that socio-historical analysis. The present, however, remains strangely immune from relativization…in the sociology of knowledge [this] is an extraordinarily one-sided way of looking at things. What was good for the first century is good for the twentieth."[24] Berger goes on to claim that this is not relativism, as some may fear. Instead,

> One redeeming feature of sociological perspective is that relativizing analysis, in being pushed to its final consequence, bends back upon itself. The relativizers are relativized, the debunkers are debunked—indeed, relativization itself is somehow liquidated. What follows is not, as some of the early sociologists of knowledge feared, a total paralysis of thought. Rather, it is a new freedom and flexibility in asking questions of truth.[25]

[23] Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) 51-2.
[24] Peter L. Berger, *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural* (New York: Knopf Double Publishing, 1970) 41.
[25] Ibid., 42.

Berger's overall point here is that every individual exists within a plausibility structure. "Pluralism" is the condition in modern societies of competing "world views." There are compelling reasons not to engage in "world view" debates but, whatever the term of choice, the point here is that there are competing narratives of meaning and moral order within which we make sense of our moral lives and, perhaps more importantly, our children are formed in the context of conceptual competition. The term virtue points to a relationship among individuals, institutions, and ideals that has perhaps not yet been theorised clearly enough. Open formation and moral identity, of particular interest, are fruitful lines of inquiry, especially as Christian ethicists, scholars, and practitioners continue in the theory and practice of virtue ethics.

In Closing: The Digital Lives of Children

As we close this dissertation, clearer now on its contributions and implications, it is appropriate to recognise that there are other forces beyond pluralism at work disrupting the institutional spaces within which our students learn. Most pressingly, there are appropriate questions about whether the individuation possible through artificial intelligence (AI) will dramatically transform the need for traditional classrooms. Whether or not a total disruption to schools is caused by AI, it is already the case that there are two modes in which diversity presents itself in our world: locally and digitally. There has been a presumption throughout this dissertation that there are important ways in which education needs to be a localised, social practice, with physical presence as a central hallmark. However, the more complex backdrop of the digital encounters that frame the social lives of our children cannot be forgotten. Whether in the realm of online schools or learning support platforms or more generalised cultural backdrop of YouTube, TikTok, and global media, the debates about diversity and multiculturalism and the creation, ownership, or accessibility of digital access and content, the frame in education cannot be fully appreciated with only a local appreciation for increasingly diverse populations. While this dissertation has maintained a focus on the United States, given the digital lives of children, it would be surprising if the insights of this dissertation were not relevant to other localities. These remain areas for further study, but these areas must also unfold in time and space, which cannot be rushed, and cannot be observed before they have happened. On any number of topics, we will be forced to act as educators even while our understanding is being made clear.

In Chapter Four, we wrote that children are not robots; they are humans. Humans are not reducible to binary logics of, in this case, the transfer of knowledge and skills but instead are cultivated so that they can imagine and live into a thriving future. If this is correct, then schools need to be understood as ecosystems where teaching and learning happens. They are ecological institutions, and the

happenings inside of these school buildings are relationships. Perhaps at a basic level, then, there is a call within this dissertation not to leave our kids on their own as they navigate the newest digital social spaces in their tribes. Every evidence points to families needing support in this challenge. Teachers who take the place of identity formation in the education of children seriously will see themselves as mentors and coaches and will build trust with students as their foundational competency. As our second thought experiment cautioned, this support of our children and families cannot only be the work of teachers. There is an incredible burden being placed on educators to solve any number of social ills alongside their tasks of teaching content and skills, and educators need support, recognition, and partnership if the hoped-for outcomes for our children are to be attainable. The methodology of faithful presence can be leaned upon as these new technologies shape our children's experiences, where with careful, interdisciplinary listening and a trust in God's faithfulness, we are able to encounter future challenges with obedience and hope.

We began this dissertation with a statement of belief in education itself, a call to the moral imagination that sees the shared pursuit of understanding as among those things that can most straightforwardly hold together a humanism attendant to particularity. *Homo discens* is a hopeful formulation that is oriented towards the future without a naive commitment to the inevitability of progress as it assumes great difficulty and great satisfaction in the building of life together. As we said at the start, this is a dissertation whose content and process mirror one another. It was written out of human particularity, about human particularity, and with a sincere hope that its implications aid in a conversation of overlapping consensus about the opportunities for educating our students in an age of profound transformation.

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