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Intellectual Access and Spirituality: The Twin Urgencies of Responsible American Education

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**Intellectual Access and Spirituality:
The Twin Urgencies of Responsible American Education**

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Honors in Educational Studies.

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Abstract

America is increasingly, and perhaps overwhelmingly, becoming a society characterized by political divisiveness. At its most extreme form, Hannah Arendt argues such a division can make us vulnerable to a loneliness that destroys our confidence and leaves us dependent on ideologies. A renewed sense of spirituality and intellect are prime candidates for helping us develop a healthy relationship with ourselves that can help counteract this loneliness. Not only that, but fully accessing our intellectual and spiritual sides can give us the confidence to tackle democratic republican citizenship the way Thomas Jefferson envisioned it. Here, Jacques Rancière helps us to construct a model of intellectual access that makes intellect *essential*, *inclusive*, and *intuition adjacent*. William James then contributes, along with Hanan A. Alexander, to a broader understanding of spirituality that opens up new worlds of spiritual access for students. Together, these two forms of access make up an intellectuospiritual approach to education that can help inform how we think about teacher professionalism, the relationship between private and public, and the potential for spirituality within schools.

Key terms: intellect, spirituality, democratic republic, education, America

Introduction

I am a firm believer in the powerful lessons we can learn from children. Largely untouched by many of the practical concerns of the ‘adult world,’ many people have marveled at the appalling potency and simplicity of youthful idealism. Anyone who has spent much time around children has, no doubt, witnessed their joyous resiliency, creative curiosity, insightful wisdom, and profound passion, even among those who have suffered horrendous abuse. The internet is full of impassioned calls for love and justice from our youngest citizens. It is a wonder, in some ways, that few people would cite children among their role models. Our perceived age and experience might cloud our judgement in that vein, though it is certainly valid to admire the ability of adults to understand the pragmatic side of important issues. One area, however, where children provide an especially insightful example is their innate educational practices. Linguistic experts from around the world have praised the ability of the young to immerse themselves in a language and playfully master it. Parents joke, routinely, that their toddler’s favorite response to them is “oh...why?” Educational theorists have discussed these interesting observations in several influential arguments, but none have quite captured their bare essence the way Jacques Rancière has.

Looking at educational institutions in his native France, Rancière sees something entirely different from our natural trial-and-error educational processes. He sees teachers telling, assigning, structuring, and saying “hold on.” Across the Western world, the current educational best-case scenario often involves spending our first five years on earth in this playful world of inquisition, only to be ripped from that routine and placed in the care of teachers who spoon-feed us like helpless dependents. Some people experience this hard right turn sooner, having even this natural and critical opportunity for developing agency stolen from them by circumstance. This

transition from active and joyful learning to passive and rigid schooling is often subtle, but its implications are anything but meek. Not only does it impact children's self-esteem and development of healthy relationships, but it also alters how they view truth and knowledge. Because of these implications, the academic shift when we enter school and the approach to intelligence that informs it are as important to educational discourse as any questions we currently face.

Beginning with intelligence, it is important to note that the quest for knowledge serves as a pillar of American life. The way we approach intelligence guides the bulk of our political, commercial, and educational actions. This is because each of those spheres is inherently social and interpersonal, and our understanding of intelligence informs the expectations we carry into these social interactions. When we assume, for example, that humans are limited in their ability to search for and use knowledge, we have reason to look for those limits in the people we engage with. That expectation, then, can quickly become a reason to try to exploit others and find advantageous positions over them. It might even lead us to assume that those around us are similarly driven to look for advantages, making us cynical in our relationships. These tendencies towards exploitation and distrust can be summed up in the old-fashioned term 'gamesmanship,' where one player always looks to exploit the flaws of their opponent. The jump to gamesmanship is not inevitable, but it becomes so much easier when we carry these assumptions. Few people would think they could exploit an equal or someone with similarly great potential for growth and knowledge. Instead, we would turn to hard-fought persuasion and mutual discourse, which are much healthier options, particularly in the context of a democracy.

Our ideas about human intelligence impact education in a similar manner. We approach teaching in a way that depends, at least in part, on what we assume about a student's intelligence.

With the absolute best intentions at heart, we often subject ‘more capable’ students to less handholding, while we usher off ‘less capable’ students into private sessions and extra lessons. The differences become increasingly noticeable as we progress through the years of their education. In most cases, students are gradually treated more like capable adult intellectuals as they age. In the meantime, however, teachers withhold certain pieces of information and types of problems from students because the students are just ‘not ready’ to deal with them yet. All of these decisions are guided by certain assumptions about the capabilities of individual students and those in their age bracket. Rarely, particularly in our current educational climate, are students given free rein to try and fail. These questions are not limited to educational and social contexts, either. Even our private lives and the way we understand our identities, a large component of early education, are guided by these definitions of intelligence. In the truest sense, our ideas about human intelligence shape everything that we think is possible for our lives, for the lives of those around us, and for our system of government. This is how a quaint philosophy about the word intelligence quickly balloons into a vital educational and societal concern.

For these and many other reasons, intelligence is one of the most consequential paradoxes in American life. I call it a paradox, because, despite how deeply engrained intelligence is in our lives and society at large, we withhold parts of it from our youngest citizens for nearly their entire childhood and adolescence. This, I should add, is wholly different from concerns about a child’s innocence and exposure to certain content, something I will say more about later on. It is, seemingly, an approach to our children that is completely incompatible with our American ideals. But first, we should talk about what exactly we mean by intelligence. An expansive and useful idea, it can loosely be defined as the ability to demonstrate mental excellence and is commonly connected to both IQ tests and, more recently, Howard Gardner’s multiple

intelligences.¹ This definition is complicated, however, by the fact that we often place three distinct terms within its umbrella: intelligence, intellect, and smarts. If *intelligence* is the excellent use of our reasoned minds, *intellect* involves that same excellence but within the constraints of a discipline-specific tradition.² Intellect, in this frame, is intelligence plus accountability to a larger community. Often, this gets connected with academic work, where academic communities serve as the anchor, but academics are not the only place people can use their intellect. In contrast to intellect, the only things keeping intelligence from becoming pure subjectivism are the conditions of logic that both it and intellect require. Additionally, the fact that intelligence has become a more all-encompassing term while intellectual pursuits have stayed more in the realm of academia makes this distinction even clearer. More people would claim that they aim to be intelligent than intellectual, even though this, arguably, should not be the case.

It is also important to remember that the external world, especially in the context of schools, deeply impacts how we understand our intellect and identity. These external forces, however, are not the only limiting factors. There is something to be said for the fact that we, at times, impose restrictions on ourselves. This self-restraint likely comes, at least in part, from the assumptions we internalize from the society around us. If I live in a culture that constantly discusses the limits of human intellect and talent, I might inevitably start to apply that logic to how I understand myself. For those who believe they are on the lower end of the intellectual spectrum, non-intellectual and non-rational outlets become a crucial alternative to the world of

¹ Gardner's ideas, while incredibly popular and useful in other contexts, do not help reach the goals I hope to accomplish here. Too often, the compartmentalized intelligences Gardner championed are used as excuses to focus on singular areas of life and skill development at the expense of others. I am more interested in pushing people to be well-rounded and embrace growth in all areas.

² We can define *reason*, for the sake of fully fleshing out these terms, as structured thinking anchored to observable evidence. This is especially relevant for William James and Jacques Rancière, who discuss the need for our theories to be grounded in the tangible and recognizable reality around us.

intellect. These internalized assumptions, in short, impact our self-view as much as our view of others. This is especially true when we reflect on our intellectual qualities. Reason and deliberation are crucial human abilities, but we also tend to ignore them in certain circumstances, either because of our perceived inabilities or other, more positive motivations. Think especially about superstitious sports fans who refuse to wash their game day outfits during a win-streak; think about the countless unfounded fears people have about flying in a plane, or, on a different level, think of religious people across our world who base many actions on faith and tradition.

The idea of *smarts* emerges in this window and creates a new distinction. As a pragmatic quality akin to common sense, smarts differentiates itself from intelligence and intellect by its lack of concern for reason. A smart person can cleverly navigate their context but is not necessarily bound to logic or the contours of a larger rational community. It is the most attractive refuge, in many cases, for people who might feel excluded from intellect and intelligence. Smarts, intelligence, and intellect, therefore, form a series of concentric circles, with the quality of smartness being the most all-encompassing and imposing the least restrictions. Because of this relative freedom, smarts is often far and away the most accessible form of mental excellence. People can develop smarts entirely through their individual efforts and do not need to rely on cultural and educational gatekeepers in order to achieve. Within the context of a larger society, the relative inclusiveness of smarts also makes intellect and intelligence appear more exclusive and elitist. This elitism, in turn, can engender a good deal of justified animosity towards the world of intellect in particular. Historian Richard Hofstadter argues that *anti-intellectualism*, rather than being a pure ideology, is a persistent thread within American history that has always been a part of our civic and cultural life. In this sense, he is not defining anti-intellectuals³ by a

³ “Anti-intellectuals” is itself a term that Hofstadter would likely regard as useless or meaningless, because there is no identifiable set of qualities that would make someone an “anti-intellectual.”

set of distinct qualities, but as a category of diverse responses to the presentation of intellectualism throughout history.⁴

One of these responses comes from recognizing that pure reliance on cautious reason would remove many of the dynamic and interesting qualities of life. We would, for example, have no cause to value the fantastical imaginations and pure innocence of children as much as we do. The value of creativity and spontaneity seems undeniable, but there are deeper reasons for abandoning our intellectual focus. Intellect, after all, leaves plenty of room for creativity and spontaneity. Faith, on the other hand, is much less compatible with the, often proof-laden, world of science and reason. William James ventures into issues of faith in his lecture “The Will to Believe,” a plea to consider the place in our lives for non-rational belief, a more substantive companion of anti-intellectualism.⁵ Moving beyond the naïve idea that faith and intellectual pursuits ought to hold each other at arm’s length, James reminds us of the potential for a stunning interplay between the two, something we rarely consider in the context of schools.

Historians and political thinkers like Hofstadter add to the complexity of this image by reminding us of the complex legacy of intellectualism, specifically within the foundational American Protestant Christian tradition. Together with Hofstadter, James pushes us to consider that something more significant than hierarchy and apathy inspires our intellectual restraint. As a natural extension of this argument, religious motivations become a key issue for schools that hope to more fully realize intellectual access for all students. Still, it is hard to argue for a change in how we approach intellect when a large portion of the population feels cut off from intellect and would rather focus on other concerns. Instead of being satisfied with the chasm between

⁴ Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*. (New York City: Vintage Books, 1962).

⁵ William James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, (Urbana: Project Gutenberg, 2009). These two (non-reason and anti-intellectualism) do less direct interaction than coincidental collaboration.

religion and intellectualism, then, we should seek to marry the two and move forward together with our eyes on expanding educational access in all areas.

As I mentioned, the process of freeing themselves from the rules of reason allows smarts and anti-intellectualism to bind well to the essential human element of *faith*. Here faith, especially as James outlines it, runs directly counter to the world of reason because it allows us to view claims as true without clear evidence or justification. While James would argue that we all have faith in something, there are many people who, more than the rest of us, hold up faith as the driving force in their life.⁶ By bringing these people and this key component of human life to our attention, anti-intellectualism highlights the centrality of faith in American life and introduces faithful access as a second key consideration for modern American school reform. The United States may be secular by the letter of the law, but Hofstadter confirms the undeniable fact that non-rational principles, like religion and custom, hold a special place in the hearts of most, if not all, Americans.⁷ It is remarkable and unacceptable, given the sheer magnitude of faith in American society, that school reform efforts fail to take religion and faith seriously.

All of this, no doubt, is complicated by our fixation on a separation between the institutions of Church and State. This belief is almost a prerequisite for being American. It is so firmly entrenched in our public lives, especially the world of schools, that most of us consider it a doctrine. Robert Nash, however, challenges the notion that this legal separation excludes religion from the educational sphere. He argues that the separation between church and state “is actually a low, rather than a high, wall,” suggesting that schools might have the ability to truly

⁶ James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, 2009. It is worth noting, for the sake of full disclosure, that I would consider myself one of those people who lets faith guide my life more than a prototypical intellectual might. I would also confess a degree of anti-intellectual sympathies, especially concerning the stereotyped “east coast elite.”

⁷ Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, 1962.

engage, in non-discriminatory ways, with religious and spiritual issues.⁸ Nash sits as part of a larger argument about the need for enhanced religious pluralism in schools, public and private alike. Among the active voices in this discourse are Katherine Simon, Robert Kunzman, Nel Noddings, and Walter Feinberg, each of whom brings an important element to the table but ultimately fall short of aligning themselves with the question of access Rancière raises.

Suzanne Rosenblith, for her part, adds to this discourse as she expands on the ideas of Robert Wuthnow about the importance of a more reflective and demanding form of pluralism.⁹ This reflective pluralism is an important step towards civic virtue, but it falls flat still without a substantive understanding of how spiritual issues fit within our schools. Here, Hanan A. Alexander offers us this much-needed substance, dreaming up a more dynamic and holistic understanding of spirituality, one that schools could take pride in helping their students develop.¹⁰ Fully realizing the intellectual equality Rancière, Jefferson, and others dream up, in many ways, requires this type of grappling with spirituality. To ignore spiritual needs and fall into the classic and underwhelming idea of religious neutrality could be devastating for any serious hope at improving educational access, as well as religious and political coexistence.

The concept of *spirituality*, then, serves as a natural entry point for conversations about people's faith. Going beyond a religious or mystical framework, Alexander broadens our understanding of spirituality to include any identity that gives us a larger context of belief, community, and transcendence in answering life's big questions. This, naturally, includes religious traditions and faith-based communities, but can also include other communities and

⁸ Robert J. Nash, "A letter to secondary teachers: Teaching about religious pluralism in the public schools," in *Educating citizens for global awareness* by Nel Noddings (New York City: Teachers College Press, 2005). 99.

⁹ Suzanne Rosenblith, "Beyond coexistence: Toward a more reflective religious pluralism," *Theory and Research in Education* 6 (2008): 107-121. Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

¹⁰ Hanan A. Alexander, *Reclaiming Goodness: Education and the Spiritual Quest* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001).

group-belongings.¹¹ Philosophy, for example, often provides people with a community and defined customs in their efforts to reach for transcendent truth. Though they both exist in the context of groups, a spiritual person sets themselves apart from an intellectual person by their willingness to accept conclusions on faith alone. In many contexts, then, spirituality is viewed as an antagonist to the intellectual life, but it does not need to be that way. Intellectual and spiritual exercises might actually serve as complements to each other, rather than enemies. The vision of education I synthesize here looks to build on this potential marriage, especially considering how damaging the divide between them has been within American society. As part of this, building on the legacy and ideas of many great thinkers, I suggest that we begin to think of well-rounded people not as intellectuals or as spirituals, but as *intellectuospirituals*.

American psychologist and philosopher William James speaks to conversations about both sides of the coin: intellectual availability and spiritual cultivation. When combined with Rancière, James helps provide an alternative to restrictive and hierarchical schooling. In the process, he relies on a novel concept of truth,¹² while Rancière rests on a firm belief in the power of all people to express and verify their thoughts.¹³ When brought into conversation with Alexander, however, James points more strongly to the need for a holistic understanding of spirituality. The goal of school reform, in the first case, is to increase *intellectual access* for students and help them have confidence in their ability for intellect. The goal of the second is to reconcile the relationship between intellect and spirituality, increase *spiritual access* for students, and, in the process, open up a national dialogue that makes the goals of the first case possible.

¹¹ Alexander, *Reclaiming Goodness*, 2001.

¹² William James, *Pragmatism* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1991).

¹³ Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

This, as I have said, works on the assumption that efforts to increase intellectual access cannot move forward without recentering on what it means to be *intellectuospiritual*.

The fake news era and its attacks on truth add a particularly strong urgency to these ideas. On both sides of the political spectrum, we are abandoning traditional avenues of information, standards of dialogue, and sources of authority. While healthy skepticism about our news sources, our customs, and our authority figures can provide important balance, we seem to have crossed a line into disillusionment and disorder. I hardly need to say it, but when two people from opposing political orientation can no longer agree on a common set of assumptions, productive discourse between the two sides quickly breaks down. For Hannah Arendt, this change in our discursive viability might be a result of an American mass culture that is ripe for loneliness and totalitarian domination. Intense personalization, sharp detachment from transcendent group affinities, and the aches of technological isolation all characterize our modern lifestyle. These phenomena, recognizable as products of either modernization or “suburbanization,”¹⁴ make all of us particularly vulnerable to these lonely and ideological vices, even if totalitarianism is not an inevitable consequence.¹⁵

Because these habits are baked into our cultural atmosphere, we all fall victim to them at various points, regardless of our efforts to resist them. At the same time that modernity is pushing us into an increasingly isolated existence and leaving a spiritual void, it is also pulling us to continue pushing for the innovation and intellectual development that have characterized much of the modern era. Despite this, our drive for intellect, evident in the Space Race, the rich history of American inventors, and the pride we take in our robust, though flawed, public and

¹⁴ I liken this to suburbs because many modern suburbs, including those that I grew up in and around, cultivate very impersonal neighborly associations and an emphasis on superficiality and/or isolation.

¹⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. (Orlando: Harcourt Inc., 1976).

higher education systems, is not uniformly available. Some people are held at arms-length from intellect because of a hierarchical and limiting culture, while others are denied even the basic components of satisfactory education. This inequality of access has important implications for the society we hope to build and maintain, especially one that is built on unfulfilled notions of equality.

The legacy of the Western intellectual tradition, which takes on a distinct flavor in the United States, provides a rich but underutilized conceptual basis for understanding the relationship between intellect and government. Those in the global West, like those in the global East, have tried to define this interplay for a long time and with varying concern for people's daily lives. Our founding generation, standing on the shoulders of Western giants, looked to synthesize and perpetuate that intellectual legacy by creating a new approach to intellect in government: what is now often described as the great American experiment. Imperfectly realized ideals of freedom, human rights, political participation, and equality find themselves woven into this American fabric. Above all of them hang the two counterbalanced forces of our 'democratic republic': *democracy* and *republicanism*. These overlapping concerns provide a sturdy frame around our ideals, but one we often neglect as we lose a genuine understanding of our founding virtues and wade further into the abyss of lonely modernism.

One could even go so far as to argue that the ideas that once created a dynamic body of revolutionary principles and counter-cultural action have become stale as our culture has gradually crystallized and institutionalized them. Think, for instance, about the way Americans often approach voting. The power to vote was bestowed upon us by our founding generation like a political sacrament but over time we have eroded them to the point of being a mindless obligation. Our jury duty process provides another example. Thomas Jefferson regarded jury

duty as a fundamental check on our judicial branch and a vitalizing opportunity for civic participation.¹⁶ Years of complacency and selfishness, however, have turned this beautiful process of judicial involvement into a chore we try to escape. Even the prospect of deciding on school tax levies, which is a crucial component of any thriving public education system, has become a dry, party-line exercise, detached from community account. There is something to be said for having simple, recognizable civic values. Overly complex or obscure definitions of citizenship are much more likely to alienate people. We can, however, become too simplistic, effortless, and stale in how we approach citizenship, a concern that the United States exemplifies. Not to mention, stability and universality alone are insufficient tools for preserving the true nature of our nation and for inspiring political involvement.

In fact, America is much more than a set of rigid beliefs, established once and declared valid forever. The country we love is a vibrant and pluralistic community bound together by a radical, action-based philosophy of self-government. It is a nuanced and two-part statement that government works best when its power sits in the hands of the people under the presumption of equality. Left stagnant and neglected, however, that principle of equality leaves the door open for an emptiness and relativism that misconstrues our liberties and ignores our political duties. Under the same conditions, uncritical versions of liberty can rationalize hierarchy and abandon ideas about equality for the sake of personal advancement. We need to do more, then, to reaffirm and reengage with those elements of democracy and republicanism that so many of our country's citizens hold dear.

A revised history curriculum would be a fantastic first step, but these issues run much deeper. Our founders fled the obstinate grip of a tired monarchy over two hundred years ago, but

¹⁶ Brian W. Dotts, "Beyond the Schoolhouse Door: Educating the Political Animal in Jefferson's Little Republics," *Democracy & Education*, 23 (2015), p. 7.

children often mimic their parents. Can anyone honestly argue that we are immune from this same monarchy-like power-hoarding? In more ways than one, it often seems like it is knocking on our doorstep. Of course, modern America is not a monarchy in structure, but the way we maintain our values is anything but democratic. When I talk about maintaining our values, I am reflecting on the fact that monarchical government relies on unsubstantiated and absolute power in the hands of one person or family. This lack of justification and qualification does not just apply to the power structures, however. It also applies to the value systems within that state. If our democratic republic is going to be different than the monarchy we ran away from, it needs to do something different. We need to rely on a democratic and republican maintenance of our values. This is a key point of distinction. Values, like governmental power, are shaped through argumentation, changing discourse, and popular legitimization. Democratic republics can only be permanently sustained through democratic and republican care of our collective values. In other words, if we want to avoid falling back into the pit of tyranny, we should avoid the easy temptation to cultivate an uncritical attitude towards our value systems. Tyranny over our values might well be the first step to tyranny in our governmental systems. Instead, we should be urgent in maintaining and reevaluating both our principles and how well we live up to those standards.

In light of all of this, the problem facing American education is, ultimately, two-pronged, and I hope to tackle each issue in turn. American education needs to fight two simultaneous urges: first, the urge to assume unequal intellectual access, and second, the urge to ignore spirituality. Both are questions of access, a principle that has driven the discourse surrounding American education for many years. My argument, as I have stated, is that equal access to intellectual and spiritual development is crucial for cultivating healthy, productive, and accountable citizens and, consequently, a healthy society. Neither of these access questions is a

simple task, but the authors I have mentioned above suggest a useful framework for approaching this difficulty. My argument will proceed in four parts. First, I will look to further clarify the foundational elements of an American democratic republic and gesture towards where we have fallen short. The viability of an American government depends on a shared assumption that all citizens are capable of civic intellect. In practice, we have often been much more likely to assume a large portion of our population is incapable of fulfilling their duties. Thinking about founding principles, there is a strong case to be made that a revitalization of our values is in order. That process begins with our definitions of intellect, the history of which I will also briefly introduce in this section. Even further, though, Arendt suggests there is a tangible danger in our current approach. It is not a stretch, considering Arendt's ideas about totalitarianism, to say that modern American culture contains all the ingredients that would make us vulnerable to the destruction of our democracy. Her ideas, I hope, will add important context and urgency to my brief analysis of where we stand relative to the ideas of our founders and how those ideas bring us into questions of educational access.

I will then look to lay out the critique Rancière levels against widespread, though unpopular, pedagogies. In his work, Rancière finds a restrictive, tiered philosophy of intellect that saturates not only French society but arguably the larger Western world.¹⁷ Any system that assumes humans have different mental potential, he argues, opens itself up to the clutches of tyranny and hinders the progress of democracy, because it withholds access from those who are 'less capable'.¹⁸ Hofstadter provides a prime example of these assumptions as he describes 'life adjustment' curricula, a predecessor of modern home economics classes, and their theory that

¹⁷ I should note that Rancière's work recounts the ideas of Joseph Jacotot, and France is the context of their criticism, not the explicit target.

¹⁸ Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, 1991. Rancière is not explicit in any emphasis on democracy, but the values underlying his ideas are consistent with those that are commonly ascribed to American democracy.

some students could not handle academic work.¹⁹ This, however, is just one instance of difference-based, spoon-fed pedagogies, which Rancière calls ‘*explicative*,’ that have dragged down American education and society. Rectifying the corruption within our intellectualizing institutions, Rancière argues, will require a great measure of intentional action and restructuring how we understand education. This is the first great philosophical challenge facing American public schools, but through an approach that emphasizes the *essential*, *inclusive*, and *intuitive* qualities of intellect, Rancière begins to sketch out a possible alternative.

With this view of intellectual access established, I will transition to the second great challenge: the importance of spiritual access within any school reform attempts. Building on Alexander’s ideas about what it means to approach spirituality holistically, I will argue that we can greatly expand how we understand the spiritual realms of our lives. Already a large player in American life, further increasing the scope of spiritual concerns should make it even more necessary that all public institutions, especially schools, do more than just nod to those concerns. Yes, the integration of spirituality and intellectual development faces a staunch roadblock in the ‘Separation of Church and State,’ but Alexander and Nash urge us to recognize this as a challenge rather than an impossibility.²⁰ The stakes are simply too high. Religious home- and private-schooling are waging a war of attrition against our public schools in many corners of the country precisely because educators have too often failed to take religious concerns seriously. Rectifying our total ignorance of human spirituality will not be a miracle cure, but it will open up the ocean of dammed-up possibilities hiding on either side of the divide.

¹⁹ Hofstadter, 1962. This is very similar to the academic tracking that we see in today’s schools.

²⁰ Nash, “A letter to secondary teachers,” 2005, 99. Here, he means the law creates minimal expectations (i.e., the absence of state-sponsored religion) rather than a stern ban on all religious and spiritual interaction.

To meet these two pressing challenges, I will look, in the end, to synthesize the intellectuospiritual philosophy that emerges in the discourse between these various authors. In the process, I will discuss three potential implications for this approach: discursive teaching, private-public balance, and sanctuary schools. As these implications make clear, an intellectuospiritual would have both personal and societal benefits. On a personal level, opening up the intellectual and spiritual possibilities within our mandatory schooling efforts will allow students more room to develop their identities and relationships with the world around them. By further taking seriously the potential and interests in each student, we ought to be better able to offer students the resources they need to become the people they aim to be. Taken together across the millions of American persons, this becomes the societal benefit. The proper functioning of a democratic republic is reliant on the efforts of dynamic, well-adjusted, and accountable citizens. Citizens with increased intellectual confidence and an enlarged sense of spiritual validation will almost certainly provide more useful and thorough efforts and therefore, better serve our ideals. If the goal of American education is to preserve and fulfill our ideals, preparing citizens for self-government, then the responses these authors suggest are a vital piece of how we should progress in our educational approaches.

Chapter 1: The American Democratic Republican

Society has a way of shaping every educational effort that crosses its path. Whether we view those efforts as preparation for citizenship, independent efforts contextualized by citizenship, or something else entirely, schools cannot justify avoiding their surroundings. For American education, this means grappling with our political identity as a democratic republic. These two ideas, democracy and republicanism hang over every inch of American life, maintaining their assumptions and demands. It goes without saying, then, that understanding the nature of democratic republics is essential to any criticisms and proposals connected to American education. James Carpenter and others argue that one of the best vehicles for developing this understanding is the writings of our founding generation, such as Thomas Jefferson. In characterizing Jefferson's opinions on education, for example, Carpenter notes that we often focus on his democratic ideals and ignore the strong republican undercurrents that formed his thinking. Situating Jefferson in the context of the American Revolution, he emphasizes that an aversion to aristocracy often moved Jefferson towards republicanism. Carpenter urges us to avoid looking only at Jefferson's democratic ideas, emphasizing the importance of viewing both democracy and republicanism in tandem.²¹ The same can be said about American society as a whole. In our efforts to plant our feet firmly in democracy, we sometimes forget the important role of our republican identity.

This may, in part, be because democracy is so familiar to most Americans. Briefly described, it is a process of governing defined by the direct consent and influence of the governed through the vessel of elections. Traced back to ancient Athens, it often relies on ideas

²¹ James Carpenter, "Thomas Jefferson and the Ideology of Democratic Schooling," *Democracy & Education 21* (2013), pp. 2, 4, 6. Jefferson's stated interest in education makes him ideal for my purposes here. It is also interesting to think about the effects of both negative aversion and positive pull in relation to republicanism. Additionally, the nuance of thought in our founding generation is part of what made them so admirable.

of equality like those “self-evident” truths stated in The Declaration of Independence and marches hand-in-hand with historical efforts to expand the voting franchise towards its fullest extent.²² We often take the idea of innate human equality as the democratic rationale for popular sovereignty and the expansion of voting rights. Our equal status in nature suggests that we ought to have equal opportunity to influence the shape of our collective governance. Interestingly, however, despite widespread embrace of the term, Americans of different political stripes have fought and feared the actual principles of democracy as far back as the founding generation.²³ Jefferson himself was attacked for being ‘too democratic’ throughout his political career due to his support for significantly expanded voting rights among white men and for the widespread establishment of democratic institutions.²⁴ This is just to mention that democracy, while often viewed lovingly in modern discourse, is not always met with such appreciation in practice, particularly by those who benefit from its malfunctions. This also highlights the importance of remembering the second part of our national identity and the complementary services it offers.

The distinguishing features of a republic, in contrast to those of democracy, might be more foreign to most citizens, as they were to me before conducting this research. Carpenter, nodding to Jefferson, looks to define the American ideal of republicanism in juxtaposition with “monarchies and rigid aristocracies”. Where these other forms of government turn to their leaders to secure the rights of citizens, the new American republic is an endeavor to regard “the people as the guardians of liberty”. From this perspective, the distinctive republican emphasis is on “the protection of individual liberty” through the efforts of each governed person.²⁵ This

²² *The Declaration of Independence*, 1779, 1848.

²³ Dotts, “Beyond the Schoolhouse Door,” 2015, p. 5. More recently, various voter suppression tactics provide a prime example of how the fear of democratic ideals manifests itself in our political lives.

²⁴ Johann Neem, “Is Jefferson a Founding Father of Democratic Education?” *Democracy & Education*, 21 (2013), p. 1. It can be truly appalling to think of a time where the franchise was limited even within the dominant White-male demographic bracket. That sense of shock, I think, is a testament to our democratic sympathies.

²⁵ Carpenter, “Thomas Jefferson and the Ideology of Democratic Schooling,” 2013, pp. 3, 6.

connection with effort also brings ideas like hard work and accountability into play as crucial components of republican government. Adding to this picture, M. Andrew Holowchak summarizes Jefferson's republicanism through concern for "equal and exact justice to all men; peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations; jealous care of the right of election by the people; honest payment of debts; and freedom of religion, of presses, and of persons."²⁶ Clearly, republicanism, like democracy, is an intricate concept and one that is hard to pin down. One way of beginning to differentiate republicanism from democracy, however, is through emphasizing its explicit focus on liberty, where democracy focuses on equality.

As he tries to further clarify this distinction, Carpenter looks at how each idea manifests itself in the realm of education. "*Democratic schooling*," he argues, aims to "prepare students to be active citizens" through the mechanics of political participation and collective decision-making. Put another way, its primary emphasis is on cultivating the skills and interpersonal qualities that make up an ideal democratic citizen. Where "*republican education*" differs is in its "efforts to prepare students to be good citizens" as opposed to "active" ones. Good citizenship, Carpenter argues, is commonly defined through knowledge of political processes and fulfillment of civic duties.²⁷ Despite being distinct, good citizenship and active citizenship might often be inseparable, and Johann Neem argues just that: few people would want just good citizens or just active citizens.²⁸ Even if the distinction is overly simplistic, it presents a useful framework where democracy focuses more on action and republicanism focuses more on goodness. Understood in this way, democracy concerns itself more with the principles of discourse and collective

²⁶ M. Andrew Holowchak, "Jefferson and Democratic Education," *Democracy & Education*, 22 (2014), p. 2. Some elements within this list may be more recognizable to the modern Republican than others.

²⁷ Carpenter, 2013, p. 2. The relationship between equality and activity is of interest here and worth further exploration. In addition, this definition of good citizenship runs much closer to how we might instinctively define effective citizenship today.

²⁸ Neem, "Is Jefferson a Founding Father," 2013, p. 1.

participation under the assumption of equality, while republicanism looks to derive duty and obligation from the power and liberty bestowed on the people. This is the distinction Carpenter looks to situate Jefferson within, and it is the framework most useful for thinking about a revitalized American education system.

Though democracy often seems to be a subset of republicanism, the two do not necessarily reach the same conclusions. Carpenter notes that Jefferson’s republicanism leaned towards a fear of centralized governmental institutions and a desire to maintain localized control.²⁹ A popular democracy, where all citizens voted for a small number of distant and centralized officials, would embody this fear. Discussing the deficiencies of a popular democratic model, Jefferson claims that classically understood democracy is “the only pure republic, but impracticable beyond the limits of a town.”³⁰ Larger cities, states, and countries, he suggests, contain too much complexity to effectively rest their governance on a simple poll of citizens. Popular democracy might be democratic in nature, but, at least for Jefferson, it would be far from the republican ideal. Some level of representation is needed to allow individuals to elect people from their community who can come together in the context of the larger country. In this model, individual citizens should keep their democratic influence but refocus the majority of their concern on the local scale instead of the national one.

That said, even our modern representative democracy might be too centralized and disconnected to match up with the republican ideal. Dotts reminds us that Jefferson and other members of our founding generation believed “that public officials will forget their attachment to the people as they move further away from the wards” and from local concerns.³¹ As we groan

²⁹ Carpenter, 2013, p. 9.

³⁰ Thomas Jefferson, “To Isaac H. Tiffany,” in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, Volume 10: 1 May 1816 to 18 January 1817*, ed. J. Jefferson Looney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 349.

³¹ Dotts, 2015, p. 7. Felt proximity has only become more of a challenge as our country has grown.

about the detachment of recent presidents and federal legislators—some so far removed that they famously could not recall the price of common groceries—the fear of distance rings all too true. For this reason, among others, republicanism concerns itself primarily with movement away from centralized power structures. This movement, however, does not necessarily get us to our democratic ideals. Feudalism, while an extreme example, was a highly decentralized form of state government that contained no democratic elements. Similarly, democracy concerns itself with each citizen having representation and voice in shaping the government, but this concern does not always result in the republican ideal. Democracy and republicanism, approached in this manner, represent two distinct forces that can be brought together to create a democratic republic. Discussing American government as fundamentally one or the other would risk missing an important part of what helped make the American experiment so unique and revolutionary.

With this loose understanding of democracy and republicanism in place, we can turn to think about our political present and how well our understandings of education and intellect embody these principles. Democracy, in this context, demands that we move towards recognition of all people as equal partners in our collective self-governance. By granting each person a vote of equal value in our electoral processes, we establish this partnership. In the context of intellect, it dares us to argue that our equality in creation also means equal ability to access intellectual life. If we argue, as we do, that all humans are created equal, we must be referring to equality of something, after all. That something is not physical appearance, genetic makeup, or particular circumstance. It must, then, be some intangible worth that gets its meaning from an equally distant claim about our potential. The one thing that ties us together as equals at birth is our potentiality, our status as a blank slate ready to be filled out. Differences emerge over time, but we begin with this recognition of equal capacity. This can extend, under democratic principles,

to our potential for intellect. To argue that some of us were created with inferior intellectual capacity would contradict the stated beliefs of our founders. American democracy, in other words, requires that we think about equality in this way. To strive for anything less is to be satisfied with failure and incompleteness.

What Jacques Rancière provides, in contrast to the dominant American narratives, are alternative conceptions that invigorate equality, liberty, and truth, central components of intellectual life. Think, first, about the democratic ideal of equality. In the American sense, equality shows up in our capacity for qualities like intellect. This alone does nothing for us, however, if it is just an idle quality of our birth. Rancière proposes a shift in approach where the idea of equality moves from an abstract aim of our actions to an assumption that underlies those actions. In other words, equality is not the box we aim to build, but the wood we build with. This change would give us both an excuse and a reason to start treating each other as equals immediately, instead of waiting for some distant utopian future.³² It moves us beyond the simple, though significant, step of recognizing equality as something that can only exist in action. This approach of thinking about equality as something that needs routine attention and operates best as an assumption turns our static idea of ‘equality under the law’ on its head. It borrows the idea that we should hold equality as an assumption in our actions but rejects the notion that we could ever do that institutionally. Systems, Rancière suggests, can never cultivate an equal view of others for us, and to expect that cultivation neglects our responsibilities to each other. We need to

³² Kristin Ross, “Introduction,” in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. xix. Such a shift makes equality actionable in ways that other visions might not.

actively take up the mantle of equality in each moment of our lives, he argues, and make a conscious decision to carry that assumed equality into our interpersonal lives.³³

If democracy finds room for this dynamic new understanding of equality, then a turn to republicanism sets our sights on liberty. Republicanism demands that we place the power to affect change and the intellectual ability needed to exercise this power in the hands of the people. For a republican society to meet its proper function, it needs to trust governed and equip them to secure their liberty. It is from this perspective that Jefferson derives the need for a public education that can cultivate responsible and effective republican citizens.³⁴ To ensure the survival of a nation that rests its hope in the people, the state should be sure that at least some people are “rendered by liberal education worthy to receive, and able to guard the sacred deposit of the rights and liberties of their fellow citizens.”³⁵ For a republican government, preparing citizens to use and protect their liberties is a vital activity. We cannot orient our efforts and hold our government accountable without the tools a public education provides. Here, the equality-drenched assumption that we are all capable of a high level of intellect frees up the self-confidence we need to take up our individual roles and safeguard our liberties against corruption and overreach. Democracy and republicanism, at this moment, come to bear on the same idea from distinct perspectives. Democracy pushes us to believe in a less limiting view of intellect on the basis of equality while republicanism does so on the basis of liberty. Instead of focusing on these beliefs themselves, as we are conditioned to do, it seems important to focus, as William

³³ Rancière, 1991. Expecting systematic cultivation is, I would argue, a Republican sin and a form of civic laziness. The emphasis here, then, is on the local, the personal, and the interpersonal.

³⁴ Carpenter, 2013, p. 6.

³⁵ Thomas Jefferson, “79. A Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge,” in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Volume 2: January 1777 to June 1779*, ed. Julian P. Boyd (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), p. 527.

James might, on how they reconstruct intellect through their tension, on the practical and pragmatic consequences.

If we do this, we might find that the two ideas are necessarily intertwined. In order to operate under a democratic assumption of equality, we need to lean on Rancière's new conception of liberty, as he argues that only liberated people can see and hold that assumption.³⁶ Liberty, far from negative, constitutionalized freedoms,³⁷ is a single and twofold process. All it requires is for us to recognize our partnership in the equality of intellect between humans and the discourse that becomes possible through that equality. The first step in liberty, therefore, is recognizing our ability to be equal to others. False ideas of either superiority or inferiority destroy any possibility of fruitful discourse with our neighbors. Though it might seem like a liberated state, the superior or inferior person has lost the ability to access a large portion of human possibilities. Put differently, without confidence in our equality, our liberty becomes a feeble and insecure brand of individualism. This is the first step towards liberty, but it also contains the second within its process. The act of establishing this confidence requires respecting the equal capacity of others since equality demands some other person to whom we can be equal. In this way, the singular process of recognizing equality completes liberty for both us and those around us.

It seems, then that the republican view of liberty draws on the democratic ideal of inherent equality, and therefore cannot exist with singular consequences. Importantly, we need to remember that our government does not liberate us. We free ourselves and, in the process, free others with whom we come into contact. These are the mechanics of Rancière's vision for liberated equality and they are at the foundation of a Jeffersonian democratic republic. The

³⁶ Jefferson, "79. A Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge," 1951, p. 527.

³⁷ Maxine Greene's discussions of liberty and freedom are particularly interesting readings on this topic.

particular medium of self-liberation that Rancière has in mind is the realization that we are all on equal footing when it comes to intellectual capacity, the understanding that no one has grounds to claim greater fitness for intellectual achievement. Such a realization frees us to reach for the fullest extent of our potential, instead of some imaginary limitation placed on us externally. Of course, I would not need to say any of this, nor would Rancière, if these ideas were already normalized in our world. Looking back at American history, we find just the opposite: ideas of superiority and inferiority often go hand-in-hand with any discussion of intellect. Before we move forward, it is worth taking some time to look at this historical American relationship with intellect and how it has shaped the discourse we occupy today.

The American Intellect

Like great art, many consequential ideas are best understood in the context of opposites or alternatives. Contrast is a powerful tool in revealing the finer details of an object of focus. Intellect is no exception. Jacques Rancière has much to say about what intellectual possibility looks like, but fully comprehending American intellect requires a more particular view, a more contextualized view. Richard Hofstadter recognized this fact when he sought to provide a detailed account of anti-intellectualism throughout American history. While I will turn to his discussions of religious and educational anti-intellectualism later, the political responses to intellect are relevant here because they add crucial insights to this chapter's discussion of a new political intellectualism. The challenges and skepticism of anti-intellectualism must be addressed if we have any hope of bringing forward a richer appreciation of intellect.

Beginning in an age where politicians were expected to be well-rounded, intellectual gentlemen, Hofstadter notes a radical shift across time in how we have shaped and developed

American politicians. It was the era of Jefferson, he argues, that first saw a political figure being attacked for their intellect and interest in higher ideas. The founding generation had been able to avoid this form of division primarily because of the lack of interest in specialization and expertise within American culture. As these expert forces grew and class divisions became more salient, however, even the founding generation could not escape the charges that intellect was a hindrance for a politician. To have intellect was to be specialized and to have a diminished ability to relate to generalists, a term that described the majority of Americans at the time. The conflation of populism and anti-rationalism around this time also laid a political foundation for anti-intellectualism that operated in much the same way as its religious counterpart: through the medium of class conflict. This medium, Hofstadter notes, inspired William Manning to criticize education in America, with its colleges primarily serving the rich and its grammar schools primarily serving the poor.³⁸

In addition to this educational divide, the harmful consequences of commodifying expert work were driving forces in the distaste for college and 'higher' professions. The moment that expert professionalism became closely linked with rising service fees, those who could hardly afford to pay those fees had reason for frustration. Many, no doubt, felt they were being priced out of bare necessities without much, if any, say in the matter. At the same time as these discontents were rising, the development of American democracy was throwing fuel on the populist fire. So long as Manning's observations about the disparate access to high levels of

³⁸ Hofstadter, 1962, p. 152. The line of attack on intellectual politicians has continued into the modern political landscape as well, with Hofstadter arguing there has never been a time in American history where expertise has existed and not been a source of ridicule or division. Intellectualism, then, is often divided on the basis of class and used as a line of demarcation.

education rang true, popular democracy would always be a system that communicated a preference for intuition over reason.³⁹

This is because of the nature of decision-making in a democratic state. When your government claims to run on the will of the majority, some characteristics of the majority will, understandably, take on a higher status than those of the minority. Why would a country willfully deny its citizens something that it knew they needed to create an effective democracy? In the absence of a better answer, it might be natural to assume that no country would do something like that, and, therefore, that our country must prefer letting intuition outshine reason in the sphere of governance. For those of us with the benefit of a broader perspective, we might recognize that the failure to provide adequate education does not necessarily mean that we prioritize common sense and intuition. Many Americans, however, have seemed to lack this important perspective across history and are naturally drawn to the conclusion laid out above, and for good reason.

The two classes of educational opportunity in America, as mentioned, drove those who were unable to access collegiate education towards what we might call common sense or intuition. This, in turn, led to the rise of politicians who fed off of this intuition-driven America. Andrew Jackson, for example, benefitted from the first major popular shift away from intellect and abstract knowledge. Hofstadter notes that Jackson was widely viewed as a practical, effective leader who was relatable for many common people across the country. His rise, alongside that of Davy Crockett, the nearly deified congressman from Tennessee, helped bring practically oriented, common-sense decision making into the national spotlight. These people were admired for their ability to “keep touch with the common people and yet move comfortably

³⁹ Hofstadter, 1962, p. 153.

and function intelligently” in the political world. In other words, they were relatable and acted with recognizable smarts. In time, they became the perfect point of reference for anyone who believed that intuition and non-academic knowledge could get someone just as far as academic knowledge. Such a shift in the confidence of the common man made it increasingly hard to justify the existing educational structures across America, particularly those of higher education. Over time, the creation and maintenance of an elite class of intellectuals, by way of colleges, paved the way for a distaste towards academics that might not have existed otherwise.⁴⁰ Intellect, too, fell out of favor as those who bore its name became political targets.

As Hofstadter wades into the nineteenth century, the political reformist movement and its head-on engagement with burgeoning political machines become the primary driver of his interest. These reformers, working in response to the increasingly unruly political appointment system in America, rallied around an interest in “improvement of the civil service.”⁴¹ This improvement, they argued, was the keystone issue for restoring America’s founding glory. It also pitted them directly against the political machines that had come to define American government, which relied on the existing system of patronage appointments and quasi-bureaucratic manipulation.

The primary concern of reformers, the need for renewed competence standards, was especially controversial for the established organizations. As reformers operationalized efforts for increased civil servant competence, a natural progression was the consideration of civil-service exams. For many established politicians, however, the use of merit-based assessment reeked of academia and threatened to push the common man back to the fringe. Despite

⁴⁰ Hofstadter, 1962, p. 161.

⁴¹ Hofstadter, 1962, p. 179. This is a topic that seemingly does not receive nearly as much attention in modern days.

hesitancy, Hofstadter reminds us that these two ideas, accessibility and assessment, were and are far from mutually exclusive. Even during the reformist days, the tests proved themselves to be within reach for the common person and the proportion of college-graduates among those who matriculated through this exam was pedestrian.⁴² Still, many held to the belief that tests inevitably create accessibility issues.

Though they were factually inaccurate, there is an argument to be made that those who doubted the accessibility of the tests were right. Hofstadter describes a reform movement that was interested in making it harder for unqualified, unfit people to take up positions of political power.⁴³ These changes would make it harder for certain people to take on roles as civil servants, but those accessibility limits would not necessarily fall along lines of socioeconomic class. Underprepared and poorly conditioned candidates rise out of every socioeconomic bracket. Because of this and despite the weak construction of assessment critiques, concerns about merit-based systems do point to a valid issue with the use of civil service exams. Access to education, depending on how the service exams are constructed, could create a clear advantage for certain people, especially those who were college-educated. This concern carries through into modern debates about education reform as well. Meritocratic systems are dangerous when the educational opportunities that surround them are distributed unequally. The straightforward response to this problem, and the component that political reformers seemed to ignore, is equalization of educational opportunity, however that might come about. More expressly, it is an equalization of intellectual and spiritual access.

Issues of competence and standards were not the only source of division during the reform movements, however. A second key component of this clash was the complicating effect

⁴² Hofstadter, 1962.

⁴³ Hofstadter, 1962.

of gender, specifically masculinity. Professional politicians succeeded in arguing that reformers and the values connected to them embodied femininity. The backdrop of the American Civil War also helped them in these efforts. By using a tactic that persists to this day and has roots at least as old as Ancient Greece, the political machine manipulated the glory associated with military service. Reformers, too often, avoided military service during times of conflict as they studied in college and benefited from the wealth of their families. This avoidance of the dirty work required to maintain unity and national defense did not sit well with many. Soon the familiar term ‘free-rider’ became a common refutation of reformers and their ideas.⁴⁴

This strategy might be an inevitable consequence of living in any society that involves militarized self-defense, as it continues to have a hold on our political and moral judgments to this day. The effects do not stop with military service either. Participation in a classically valued sport such as football, basketball, or soccer also commands a certain respect and characterization, and rightfully so.⁴⁵ Athletics and military service have traditionally been valued in society for a reason, and there is a strong argument to be made that those people who have not participated in either are lacking something crucial in their character development. That said, there is no escaping the recklessly gendered notions that have surrounded these ideas, nor the harmful consequences they have created by further defacing the reputation of intellect.

These are just two of the many legitimate threads that have distinctly characterized the political image of academics and highly educated people in America. As with any rule, of course, there are exceptions. Theodore Roosevelt, for example, used an outdoorsman reputation and his military service to bolster his public persona, despite hailing from the often-ridiculed academic class. In Roosevelt, academics not only find hope for acceptance and success in American

⁴⁴ Hofstadter, 1962.

⁴⁵ Hofstadter, 1962.

politics but also a distinct message about the gender-soaked criticisms they face. Hofstadter calls specifically on a quote from Roosevelt's speech to an audience of Harvard students in which he urged the young men not to "let those who stand for evil have all the virile qualities."⁴⁶ While we should take issue with the assumed binary and the rigid ideas about gender that this quote points to, the larger message is an important one: academics often falter in American culture because they fail to be well-rounded and popularly accessible. Whether it is neglecting the 'masculine' qualities that make one relatable and sociable or ignoring important components of Alexander's holistic conception of spirituality, academics must strive to avoid falling into narrow stereotypes.

As Hofstadter transitions into his discussion of the early twentieth century, the beginnings of the Progressive era introduce an important pattern of reform. Most prominently revealed by "the Wisconsin Idea" near the beginning of the century, this pattern of progressive reform starts with a demand for change that is quickly followed by a coupling of experts with the ideas they present. In time, however, those who are upset with the costs of the reforms begin to attack the experts responsible for the various programs, leading to a change in power, though this change does not often lead to the elimination of the reform policies themselves.⁴⁷ While these patterns might be interesting to political scientists and theorists, they also present key insight into how intellectuals are often regarded by American society. They rise during times of crisis, living and dying by their association with the solutions they present. When they are pushed back into down spells, however, the ideas they have spearheaded often do not receive the same chastisement that their creators do. This attitude, no doubt, applies to intellect as much as it does to intellectuals. We view it as more of a temporary or useful tool than a fundamental component of our lives as well-rounded people. It is an instrument to be had rather than a quality to embrace.

⁴⁶ Hofstadter, 1962, p. 194.

⁴⁷ Hofstadter, 1962, p. 99.

Our challenge, then, is figuring out how to restore intellect as a central component of American identity, how to move it from a detached object to an intimate essential. Doing so, as Hofstadter demonstrates, requires us to grapple with our history of inaccessible educational institutions, our longstanding love for intuition and custom, and the narrow, gendered reputation that intellect has carried for many years. Such a process will be slow, arduous, and require a patient dive into the intricacies of everyday American life. The potential benefits, however, are numerous and wonderful. Not only does the process itself involve a great deal of focused respect for our neighbors and our history, but its results promise to make good on the American promise of a marketplace of ideas, an equalized space of public discourse where we can collectively share and struggle with the pain and beauty of human life. If American intellect has been an exclusive luxury, this new understanding offers to spill out the contents for all to enjoy, leaning on their autonomy and equality as true democratic republicans.

An Irony of Confidence

With history as our guide, we can begin to understand the whole of the American intellectual life that we are hoping to change. American intellect is flawed, as Hofstadter shows, because we view it as *instrumental*, *exclusive*, and *antagonistic to intuition*. This being the case, Jacques Rancière's proposed alternative must seek to be *essential*, *inclusive*, and *intuitive*. The next chapter will explore these ideas in greater detail, but before wading into those particulars we should think for a few moments about why this alternative is necessary in the first place. The source of our urgency here is the ironic nature of American confidence. Remember that a key moment in Hofstadter's analysis of our history was the rise of populist movements that placed great authority in the hands of intuition. Those trends run back at least as far as the eighteenth

century in this country and have led to an ingrained love for the instinctual. You might even hear Americans cite this as one of the crowning achievements of our democratic republic: the barrier to influencing our institutions is, in theory, incredibly low. Intuition, if we choose, can hold equal power to reason and intellect. In many respects, this is a boon for us. It allows us to be more in touch with our emotions and provides fuller access to institutions. The danger, however, is that it can also be used as an excuse to neglect our intellectual development.

In an era where the speed of life pushes us to take a lot for granted, Rancière makes a careful distinction between two easily confused ideas about intellect. As he tells it, equality of intellect is always present as capacity, but the fulfillment of that capacity is neither reliably inevitable nor capable of ever being so. In other words, we can take for granted our equal capacity, but not our equal achievement. By immortalizing the power of intuition, however, we have started to take our equal achievement for granted. Part of the beauty of Rancière's ideas about equality, liberty, and truth is that they are processes. They can never exist unless we actively bring them to fruition in a given situation, constructing them through our interactions with each other. Claudia Ruitenberg argues that Rancière defines democracy itself as a process, as it is "never in place, but always *enters*". This idea that democracy and other qualities must enter demands that we continuously work to see those qualities embodied in our actions.⁴⁸ Equality, taken as a static principle, only requires stating our beliefs and making a passing effort to structure institutions around those beliefs. It fosters faulty confidence in the permanence of our equal achievement.

Equality as a process, in contrast, brings those ideas into action. They are never fulfilled once and for all. They must always exist in moments and actions. This understanding of our

⁴⁸ Claudia Ruitenberg, "What if Democracy Really Matters?" *Journal of Educational Controversy* 3 (2008), p. 5. Someone could (and should) write an entire book on what it means for democracy to enter.

ideals, as mentioned, places on us a demand for hard work and intentionality. It also suggests that these ideals cannot be adequately captured in written or institutionalized form. This echoes Socrates's often cited reason for never writing his ideas down and places a similar call to action on us. A society, being built on the need to distinguish people for role assignment and the need to hold certain steady principles, cannot host truth, equality, or freedom in these living forms. Ruitenberg notes that Rancière operates from a belief that membership in a society is "based on assumptions of inequality."⁴⁹ That assumption is a necessary step in determining hierarchical roles within a society. Therefore, a thriving vision of equality and democracy cannot belong to the society itself. Rather, dynamic principles are the sole property of each human person, as Jefferson argued the procurement of liberty is.⁵⁰ To say otherwise, Jefferson and Rancière argue, would wrest a great deal of power from each of us and would betray our republican ideals.

Surrendering ownership of our principles to a government would leave us wholly reliant on society in a way that would cripple us, especially considering the modern manifestations of human government. This surrender was precisely what Jefferson feared when he pushed for a continued "revolutionary spirit." It is a sign, in many respects, of a lack of confidence in our abilities. Among Jefferson's greatest concerns was the possibility that we would gradually lose sight of our individual and influential role in shaping governance, either because of neglect or insecurity. Our abandonment of personal response-ability, he worried, willingly submits us to the possibility of an oppressive community structure.⁵¹ Here, I say 'response-ability' to emphasize that we often fail to have confidence in our ability to respond. Responsibility has become

⁴⁹ Ruitenberg, "What if Democracy Really Matters?" 2008, p. 4.

⁵⁰ Rancière, 1991, p. 102. Jefferson, "79. A Bill for the More General," 1951, p. 527.

⁵¹ Dotts, 2015, p. 3.

synonymous with obligations, and while we have fallen short on that front too, our lack of perceived response-ability receives far less attention.

Hannah Arendt, speaking more generally to the human condition, argues something very similar. A particular danger exists in democracy, she suggests while writing about the qualities of totalitarian movements. This danger is the underappreciated anguish of a voiceless democratic citizen. After observing the rise of Nazism and other totalitarian efforts, she notes how they expose the tendency of modern democracies to be satisfied with both a minority rule and the “silent approbation and tolerance of the indifferent and inarticulate sections of the people.”⁵² The discourse may scream that a state is a democracy even as our lived experiences show otherwise. The resulting dissonance, she later argues, contributes to the development of a loneliness that can be devastating and make people vulnerable to the trappings of ideology and totalitarian fear. The fundamental danger of these ideologies is not that they build bad convictions, but that they “destroy the capacity to form any” convictions with any real confidence or authority.⁵³ Ideology then becomes the natural enemy of the form of intellect we are trying to build, as it shatters the confidence of people in their ability to engage with intellectual processes.

Despite the well-documented concerns of Arendt and others, however, American cultural tendencies have continued to trend towards loneliness and ideological vulnerability. Americans, by and large no longer think themselves capable of their self-governance, even as they exude self-confidence and bluster about their excellence. The moment a national, or even local, crisis arises in any facet of our lives, the knee-jerk response is to demand action from our government. Rarely, if ever, do the majority of Americans place demands on themselves or take ownership of solving the issue. We have lost that fundamental American faith in our ability to ‘meet the

⁵² Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 1976, p. 312.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 468.

moment.’ The same can be said for slower attempts to bring about change and improvement. Though there are exceptions, to be American generally means subscribing to a belief in our elected governing body as our saving grace. Even those who look beyond government for change still operate under the assumption that such efforts are exceptional in some way. We laud their efforts because it seems somehow remarkable that a ‘common’ citizen could make an impact without going through their government. This dependence on our government would not be inherently harmful except that our predominant view of that government rests power overwhelmingly in the hands of politicians, either in Washington D.C. or our state’s capital, who have increasingly preyed on our loneliness, our ideological vulnerabilities, and our lack of confidence in all corners of the political spectrum.

In this process of becoming more dependent, our prevailing notion of citizenship in America has become a stagnant one: ‘if I stay informed and vote each cycle, I have done my civic duty.’ Outside of a singular event of political action, the archetypical American relies entirely on elected representatives to do the work of maintaining our democratic republic. We have fallen far from Jefferson’s vision for us and increasingly close to Arendt’s totalitarian warnings. Jefferson yearned for a republic where every person could view themselves as “a participator in the government of affairs not merely at an election, one day in the year, but every day.”⁵⁴ Speaking in a time of very exclusive white-male citizenship, he writes of a passion in which a person would “let the heart be torn out of his body sooner than his power be wrested from him by a Caesar or a Bonaparte.”⁵⁵ The serious and important omissions from his definition of citizenship aside, it is hard to find that ferocious passion and confidence among us today. The

⁵⁴ Thomas Jefferson, “To Joseph C. Cabell,” in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, Retirement Series, Volume 9: 1 September 1815 to 30 April 1816*, ed. J. Jefferson Looney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 437.

⁵⁵ Jefferson, “To Joseph C. Cabell,” 2012, p. 437.

ground does not shake with our collective, momentous action like Jefferson recalls in Revolutionary New England.⁵⁶ We scarcely even *recognize* our vital role in preserving democratic and republican principles, let alone that we are “the ultimate line of defense” against tyranny.⁵⁷ Suzanna Sherry notes this phenomenon as she laments that “everyone now has rights, but no one has responsibilities.”⁵⁸ I would take her already bold claim a step further: no one even wants responsibilities, at least in the civic realm. Why have we fallen into such dispassion? Rancière would posit, and Jefferson would likely agree, that we have lost sight of our responsibility, our capacity to affect change and, therefore, have no reason to strive for passionate action. Despite being one of the more brazen actors on the international stage, the American people generally have a self-efficacy problem.

Recognizing our schools as both a cause and consequence of this tendency away from passion, it becomes obvious in any given civics-education classroom. The idea of ‘American equality’ that we learn is a God-given or naturally endowed state of being, assumed absolutely and requiring no further maintenance if we hope to enjoy it. ‘American freedom’ is etched in parchment and tucked away in our nation’s capital, only invoked and wheeled out when its limits are in question. ‘American truth,’ especially in our schools, is absolute, digestible, and reproducible in recognizable forms. Widely accepted criticism of standardized testing, by educators and politicians of both ideological stripes, points to our tendency to fixate on concepts that can be measured, broken down into sections, and routinely covered in classrooms. This is not to say our existence contains no absolute, digestible, and reproducible truths, but rather to point out that stale absolutism is the unmistakable quality of modern American education. Some

⁵⁶ Jefferson, 2012, p. 437.

⁵⁷ Carpenter, 2013, p. 6.

⁵⁸ Suzanna Sherry, “Responsible Republicanism: Educating for Citizenship,” *The University of Chicago Law Review* 62 (1995), p. 148.

exceptions exist, but by and large the ideas laid out above are identifiable and dominant narratives in our country. Together they paint and frame a distinct way of life and manner of discourse that is said to represent the American democratic republic. In actuality, however, it falls far short of that mark.

Having discussed, in the first section of this chapter, the new understandings of liberty and equality that Rancière brings forth, the final element serves to connect all of these endeavors within education. This element, truth, though desirable in absolute form, becomes much more useful in active and discursive forms. A conception of absolute truth allows for unequal intellectual capacity because it leaves room for the assumption that some of us hold understandings that other people may never be able to reach, which immediately sets the stage for exploitation and hierarchy. It does not require this assumption, but it does permit it. Discursive truth, in contrast, finds no room for it. To engage with truth in discussion, the two parties must have equal capacity for understanding and must be free to make use of those capacities. We enter a discussion, centered around our working truths and interpretations, as liberated equals. Absolute truth, therefore, hardly lends itself to this discourse, especially when one side is professed to be absolutely incorrect. On the other hand, discursive truth, as it helps to facilitate communication, does not rule out the absolute. James and Rancière see the two as compatible, with working truths laying within our reach and the absolute form of truth existing beyond our comprehension but existing just the same.⁵⁹ This understanding of truth, I will argue, only offends those who consider themselves infallible, and, in doing so, presume to be divine. A democratic republic, as a form of government reliant on our ability to converse about issues from diverse perspectives and to draw information from other parties, draws infinitely greater

⁵⁹ James, *Pragmatism*, 1991, p. 98.

strengths from those forms of truth which lend themselves to debate and exchange than from those that end discussion promptly and swiftly.

None of this is to condemn the dominant American narratives on intelligence, truth, freedom, and equality, but simply to show that they are insufficient for fully realizing our ideal democratic republic. Rancière doubts altogether the tangibility of this ideal but, even still, recognizes that a dynamic understanding of equality, freedom, and truth provides our best chance at reaching it. Their stale and stagnant counterparts, inked in the foundations of American society and trusted to hold us up, will inevitably fail us so long as we place them in that role. These lofty human ideals long to come out and dance between the abstract and the practical, like James's metaphor of the fish moving between concrete water and abstract air.⁶⁰ Allowing them to do so, however, is a process that requires each of us to energetically believe in our capacities and see them to fruition. It requires us to build and sustain a confidence in our response-abilities and our intellectual capacities. There are no shortcuts on the road to democracy or to republicanism. They are won through a daily, relentless, hard-fought defense of their ideals and components. Rancière and James beg us to wake from our collective slumber, our impatient waiting for institution-led deliverance, and to accept the work laid before us by our founders. As we will see ahead, they challenge us with a new vision of intellect, one that aims to be *essential*, *inclusive*, and *intuitive*, working towards the ultimate goal of fulfilling the democratic republican promise.

⁶⁰ James, 1991.

Chapter 2: Finding Intellectual Access

As the last chapter showed, discussing terms like intellect, particularly in the context of American life, pushes us to recognize that these issues are far from one-dimensional. Even an idea as seemingly simple as knowledge, which serves as part of the foundation for intellect, can take on several forms. Twentieth-century American philosopher William James, in his lecture series entitled *Pragmatism*, argues that we can have knowledge in roughly two spheres of our ever-complicated lives: the *abstract* and the *concrete*. Similar to theory and practice, these broader terms can also correspond to principles and events, respectively. As humans living in physical bodies, we exist in the concrete world but, at the same time, remain captivated by the abstract and take meaning from it. James argues that the realm of the abstract, despite our typical sense of the word, originates in and depends on its relationship to the concrete. No person has ever sat around imagining what a dog might be like and then gone out to look for specific instances to compare to that concept. Instead, we see dogs and use those concrete instances to fuel our understanding of what it means that something is a dog. Our process of creating abstraction, in other words, is motivated by our concrete needs and fueled by our concrete observations. James imagines us as fish, swimming in the water of our day-to-day but drawing vibrantly from the atmosphere above the surface.⁶¹

This ‘pragmatic’ method of pulling pockets of abstract atmosphere down into the concrete water helps create a richer relationship between the two. Without this process of close connection, the concrete and abstract would only interact at the point where we distinguish them: the surface. By breaching this distinction and stretching the ways they interact, we can unlock a new level of practical and abstracting power in ourselves. Throughout his lectures, James paints

⁶¹ James, 1991, p. 57.

stunning portraits of truth and knowledge, two terms that are instrumental in any vision of intellect. He takes a special interest in how opposing ideas, such as free will and determinism, can be constructive through the tensions they create.⁶²

Across the Atlantic Ocean, the French-Algerian philosopher Jacques Rancière, in his work *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, reaches back to the work of Joseph Jacotot to promote an equally stunning vision of intellect, marked by radical equality. He argues that *distinction*, within the concept of intellect, is a destructive force rather than an enlightening one. When you distinguish free will and determinism from each other, to use James's example, you create the possibility that one perspective might take and exploit a superior position to the other. Instead, Rancière might prefer having the two terms work in concert under an umbrella of 'complex agency.' Following this example, we are better served to view intellect as a unified force, a force that is available to all of us without distinction, even if it manifests in several different ways. We can see clear differences, he argues, in how we achieve intellect, but not in our capabilities.⁶³ For Rancière, this view of intellect relies on the new understandings of liberty and equality alluded to earlier. His dogged support of human equality and ultimate directive to fight for that ideal in the thick of inherently unequal institutions both borrows from and complements James's potent pragmatic attitude and accessible conception of truth.

Having established that intellect and its opponents have played an important part in American history and governance, Rancière's critique of Western attitudes becomes especially useful. In place of the limiting, exclusive, and lifeless intellectual life that has come to define American culture, Rancière and James offer up a lively alternative, one that is deeply tied to a more sustainable and effective education for democratic republican citizenship. This vision,

⁶² James, 1991, p. 52.

⁶³ Rancière, 1991, p. 25, 27.

revolving around a fundamental assumption of intellectual access, offloads both the obligations and influences of teachers. Instead, it places both responsibility and response-ability in the hands of students, as burgeoning democratic republican citizens. In doing so, Rancière and James create an understanding of intellect that holds three important qualities. It is *essential*, it is *inclusive*, and it is *intuitive*.

“All People Think;” It’s Essential

The two philosophers begin by recognizing the same fact: all people think. For James, this means that all people possess and maintain an attitude toward the universe and its content.⁶⁴ In other words, all people ponder their surroundings. Our attitudes include both the emotional components of our dispositions and the philosophical qualities of our unique worldview. James’s claim here provides a simple but striking reminder that each of us has a personal philosophy about life and that we are bound together by that fact. Rancière recognizes our unique attitudes as well. He notices their existence most clearly when he focuses on our equally shared human capacities for *reflection* and *articulation*.⁶⁵ We are all, he argues, capable of both turning our thoughts inward and expressing our opinions outward. He compares the combination of these actions to poetic translation of our experiences. Borrowing Descartes’s famous phrase, he argues that we think because we are. Instead of Descartes’s assertion that our ability to think, specifically to doubt, proves our existence, Rancière argues that our existence as humans guarantees that we are thinking beings.⁶⁶ To be human is to think and reflect and dream even if

⁶⁴ James, 1991, p. 5.

⁶⁵ Rancière, 1991.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 36, 64.

those processes might look different for different people. Thought is an essential aspect of our lives as humans, and it follows, James and Rancière argue, that intellect is as well.

Having built up this assumption that all people are thinking people, James moves to define the components of our individual philosophies. He starts by arguing that we all take interest in and try to balance abstract and concrete ideas in our pursuits of truth.⁶⁷ James's background as a psychologist, as recounted by Jack Barbalet, sheds some light on this innate human interest. His psychological theory of experience argued that "percepts are ontologically and epistemologically prior to concepts."⁶⁸ Put another way, he argues that our observations precede the principles we pull from them. This creates a firm interest in both what we perceive and what we abstract from those perceptions. More than that, James argues that all knowledge originates in the concrete. We are interested in the rain as we experience it in a given storm and as we can draw conclusions about the general makeup and consequences of rain, but our concrete interest in a particular storm must come first. If nothing that we think about originates in our brain, then we can always trace our ideas back to some concrete observation of the physical world or some other part of our sensory reality. This seems obvious, but we are often tempted to believe the opposite: that the abstract things we hold in our heads lead us to explore the concrete. James acknowledges that this directional action might be true in isolation. There are instances where our thoughts lead us to move into the concrete world, like when we are searching for a place to eat lunch. If we step back, however, we will always find a concrete concern that preceded that 'initial' abstraction, like the hunger that pushes us to search for food.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ James, 1991, p. 8.

⁶⁸ Jack Barbalet, "William James: Pragmatism, Social Psychology and Emotions," *European Journal of Social Theory* 7 (2004), p. 341.

⁶⁹ Barbalet, "William James," 2004.

Rancière might take James's commentary about the abstract and the concrete as a distinguishing act, dividing us into two camps: *rationalists* and *empiricists*. James, using those terms in his work, acknowledges that schools of philosophy have often been split along these lines. Rationalists take pleasure in the purest principles they can generalize from gritty realities, while empiricists find beauty in the grittiness itself, in its various and useful forms. However, if we are true to ourselves, James confesses, we do not find either of these extreme approaches satisfying. The rational approach asks us to disconnect from the world we occupy in a way that resembles Plato's actor in the "Allegory of the Cave." A rationalist will too often draw their ideas from the "muddy particulars" of life only to turn around and demean those "muddy" origins,⁷⁰ similar to how Plato's actor looks down on the life inside the cave once freed from it.

The empirical approach, in contrast, looks at each passing moment with fresh, unprejudiced eyes. It resembles a fearless and curious child-like state. This may sound spectacular, but it comes at a cost. Without the ability to draw and sustain generalized conclusions and to recognize patterns, we lose both our sense of stability and the larger context of our living. We might be left, in this case, to resort to blindly wandering from moment to moment. Because of the flaws in both approaches, James argues that we crave something between the haughty abstract and the brutish empirical extremes. That middle ground is essential for our lives as well-rounded people and can be found through James's intellectual pragmatism. This introductory stance lays out the pattern that James follows throughout the rest of his lectures, one which is also recognizable in the works of his peer John Dewey: the process of reframing a stagnant dichotomy as a fruitful tension. Let us linger on that for a second longer. This approach echoes James's later description of the pragmatic method, which aims to focus on

⁷⁰ James, 1991, p. 8, 101.

the practical implications of ideas rather than a cross-section of their qualities within a particular moment,⁷¹ but it does much more for us in an American context.

A large portion of American discourse is unmistakably defined by the process of searching for sides and dichotomies in an argument. Feeding on our innate human tribal tendencies, we are often driven to find like minds and kindred souls we can fight alongside. We saw and will see this pattern repeatedly in Hofstadter's account of our historical priorities and attitudes. Wherever an issue meriting discussion exists within our country, we have become adept at identifying the two distinct poles surrounding that issue. These poles dominate our news cycle, frame our approach to problem-solving, and provide us with political identities. Often lost between the poles, though not lost on many people, is an entire spectrum of nuance. We recognize the presence of alternative solutions, but the narrative of polarity is often effective in pushing us to extremes. Our mutually exclusive two-party system is the standard-bearer of this American polarity. Many people find both parties unsavory in some way and recognize the possibility for compromise but are pressured into aligning with one of the flawed sides each election cycle.

What James offers here is a chance to reframe our discourse in a way that gravitates towards the empty space between the poles. The dominant American political narrative might be comparable to two magnets with a field of pull between them and the objects of focus being the magnets or the extremes themselves. In this case, it is not our intellect that serves a crucial role. Intellect exists in the space between poles, in the world of nuance, complicated answers, and collaboration. Instead, polarity draws on simple ideas and ideologies, those states of mind that Arendt warns against and politicians feast on. James's narrative, in contrast, more resembles a

⁷¹ James, 1991, p. 7, 23.

vehicle rounding a corner as it is pulled on in either direction by centripetal or centrifugal forces. If the car, James's object of focus, moved wholly towards either of the forces pulling on it, it would veer off the road. If instead, the vehicle relies on both forces and the tension between them, it can chart a course that gets it through the curve safely. This is not to say that our goal should always be to meet in the middle on controversial issues. However, if we can reframe these conversations and focus on the legitimate human concerns that underlie each side, instead of their extreme ideas, we can and should always find room for compromise. We would not seek a compromise that meets a potential shoplifter in the middle on their criminal plans, but we should look to work with the human concerns motivating the desire to steal. Maintaining this course of action requires that we prioritize our intellectual activities, even on a basic level. In particular, James's pragmatic method helps reframe our focus so that we can see the path between instead of simply seeing the two extremes. In doing so, we not only have a better chance of finding a true solution, but we also enter into a discourse that includes both extreme forces in a type of competitive cooperation.

Where James establishes his pragmatic method in response to the phrase 'all people think,' Rancière takes a different approach as he zeroes in on the first word: all. His inspiration, Jacotot, was challenged to reconsider his entire approach to education when his Flemish-speaking students learned French under his nose without their instructor having even an ounce of Flemish language experience. The students, left alone with French and Flemish copies of the book *Télémaque*, were able to translate the French language and use elements of it without any substantive help from their instructor. Instead of relying on the traditional teacher-student dynamic, which Rancière calls 'explication,' these students embodied and stretched the idea that all people think. They engaged with their intellectual abilities using a process, referred to in

instructive form as “universal teaching,” that should be familiar to any parent. It is the same process children use to learn their native language, grappling for meaning by piecing together patterns within their immersive experiences.⁷² Repeated exposure to certain words and their accompanying actions allows children to develop language skills through a gradual and deliberate process, which Jacotot’s students emulated. If these students could make great strides towards learning French through their natural learning processes and a simple text, Jacotot wondered what obstacles prevent this process under normal conditions.

Inclusivity Through Equality and Truth

Jacotot and Rancière trace this obstruction of students’ natural learning processes back to the traditional teacher-student relationship, one that they consider to be fundamentally unequal. Teachers, regarded as people with superior intellect, engage in a constant practice of creating and filling an “abyss of ignorance” within their student’s knowledge.⁷³ The exercise of education, in this model, relies on showing the student the gap in their knowledge and then filling it, but never showing the student that they can fill it in on their own. It is almost like a form of charity or the old adage of giving someone a fish without teaching them how to fish. It is, in other words, exclusive in the most basic manner. To some extent, this is understandable, because if students learned that they were capable of bridging these gaps on their own, the authority of their teachers might suddenly become baseless and arbitrary. It is hard to think of anything more threatening to modern teachers and schools than a loss of authority, so they often work to maintain the hierarchical structure. Yes, students might one day rise to the intellectual level of their teacher, but not so long as they hold the title of ‘student.’ Two people may even have equal access to

⁷² Rancière, 1991, p. 10.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 21.

intellect, as Rancière later claims, but if one person is designated as the teacher of the other, somehow the two are no longer equals. This form of teaching requires us to hold onto the assumption that the student has inferior capacities, otherwise it is hard to justify the stepwise explanation and handholding. People usually avoid overzealous support and explanation when we are with our intellectual equals.

This analysis of an oppressive system, like that which Rancière provides, welcomes comparison to the works of Paulo Freire, especially his argument in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. While establishing the problems of modern society, Freire and Rancière key in on the same issue: a hierarchical and oppressive social structure. This structure strips both the ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ classes of their humanity and holds the ‘lower’ class entirely out of the realm of influence.⁷⁴ One can see these problems magnified, in an American context, within the well-documented presence of staggering economic inequality and class divisions, though they certainly exist elsewhere too. These issues are recognizable to all of us regardless of how we think we should respond to them. For both Freire and Rancière, the exclusion created by these power dynamics is the most troubling part.

By trying to will a more inclusive and open system into existence, Freire and Rancière both present a bold and dynamic vision for the ‘lower’ class as they work to overcome these structures, one that centers on processes of reflection and action, which Freire calls “praxis.”⁷⁵ It is through working to realize our own humanity and recovering our “ontological” efforts that the subjugated classes can develop a more humanizing form of government.⁷⁶ In the process of laying out this reclamation of humanness, Freire uses vivid vocabulary and understanding of

⁷⁴ Paulo Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York City: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 1970).

⁷⁵ Freire, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1970, p. 51.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 66.

human complexities that add richness and character to this, already radical, perspective on communal living. For example, his differentiation between “occupation” as a form of work and “preoccupation” as work with a reflective component is intensely useful when thinking about our relation to labor.⁷⁷ Freire also holds up the term “educational projects” to refer to efforts, like Rancière’s, which occur outside the formal schooling system.⁷⁸ Between praxis, occupation, preoccupation, and educational projects, he expands the ways we can think and talk about these issues above and beyond the plain language Rancière often defaults to.

Freire and Rancière do not agree in all parts of their arguments, however. The most significant difference between Freire’s and Rancière work is the tendency for Freire to push for structural change, while Rancière turns away from structural concerns. Because of this, Rancière’s work fits more comfortably into the framework of a democratic republic. A close look shows Rancière’s ideas leaning much closer to Jefferson’s republicanism than Freire’s do. For Freire, hope lies in our ability to overturn oppressive systems and replace them with better institutions, evident in his use of the phrase “new regime.”⁷⁹ His solutions exist more within the framework of institutional turnover, where one system is called on to replace another, much like the American Revolution. Rancière, on the other hand, is more cynical and rests his hope in our ability to create and sustain change outside of the system, claiming that systems themselves always breed inequality.

Todd May further extends this when he claims that Rancière’s argument about equality “allows us to think [of] anarchism in a positive fashion” without going so far as to set up a structure like Marxism.⁸⁰ Far from our typical picture of anarchy, Rancière’s ideas do borrow

⁷⁷ Freire, 1970, p. 53.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 54.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 57.

⁸⁰ Todd May, “Jacques Rancière and the Ethics of Equality,” *SubStance*, 36 (2007), p. 22.

from the same cynicism toward institutions and faith in people that anarchism often implies. In this sense, his approach is more sympathetic to the less extreme republican ideal that power should rest in the hands of the people, instead of the government itself. While Freire's institutional turnover looks to re-humanize everyone in the society, it makes no promises for a democratic republic as the new structure. Rancière, even though he rejects all structures, seeks out a radical form of democratic republican government by advocating for a complete focus on giving power to the citizens and expanding the inclusivity of our foundational concepts. Because they share the same theoretical basis and concerns, however, Freire's beautiful language and complex understanding of the condition of the oppressed can help clarify and strengthen our understanding of the arguments Rancière lays out.

This shared argument starts with the idea that inequality is established early in our lives and permeates the actions and interactions that compose our society. Education is not the sole executor of this oppression. Exclusion is an integral part of our social order from early in our lives. Students raised under this belief in superior and inferior intellects are bound to go on to create a larger world that recognizes the same superiority. Even while they are students, they often look at those behind them in school as their inferiors.⁸¹ This is often the first in a pervasive pattern of hierarchical perception that pits young against old, 'blue-collar' workers against 'white-collar' workers, and countless other groups against each other, all jockeying for the superior position. When we enter a situation as people and engage with our natural learning processes, however, we can all find equal access to the world of intellect. It is only when this innate learning method is pulled out of its natural form, divided, and sorted into neat categories that we see differences emerge.

⁸¹ Rancière, 1991, p. 22.

If we take our inherent thoughtfulness, then, and combine it with this renewed recognition of our natural learning processes, Rancière finds solid ground for the democratic hypothesis that all people have equal ability to access intellect. Put differently, if we all think and can make progress towards our intellectual potential by using our thoughts, then our capacities for improved intellect would logically be equivalent. The main tool for convincing us otherwise, in Rancière's eyes, is the term 'difference'.⁸² Claims about differences often combine with our desire to compare various worth to quickly turn a distinction into a statement of hierarchy. Even the simplest acknowledgement of difference provides the proponents of explication with "enough to exalt all the thrones of the hierarchy of intellect," as the human tendency to turn difference into inequality takes over.⁸³ These thrones, which place limits on intellectual accessibility, are deeply unsatisfying for Rancière and push him to commit wholeheartedly to the democratic principle of equal potential.

Distinct differences do indeed exist in some people, including developmental, expressive, receptive, and intellectual disabilities. None of these, however, justify refusing to recognize their ability to access intellect, for two reasons. The first draws support from the 'social model of disability' prevalent in the discourse of multiple fields, such as psychology and sociology. Broadly understood, this model argues that the disabling force in a person's life is not their impairments, but the social forces that assume impairments create inferiority.⁸⁴ People do not 'have' disabilities but rather are disabled by the societal belief that their differences make them inferior in some way. It is almost like a self-fulfilling prophecy that a society forces onto a person through a given cultural belief. As a model, this approach to disability stands on equal

⁸² Rancière, 1991, p. 24, 27.

⁸³ Ibid, p. 24.

⁸⁴ Goering, Sara, "Rethinking disability: the social model of disability and chronic disease," *Current Reviews in Musculoskeletal Medicine* 8 (2015), p. 135.

ground with the current approach, often called the medical model, which is also scientifically developed. For this reason, we can very easily justify shifting our beliefs to align with the social model, since it carries as much proof and scientific weight as the beliefs we currently hold. Accepting this perspective, there is no inconsistency in extending assumptions of intellectual accessibility to all people, since any perceived and substantial differences are not innate, but rather found in society. The language of ‘model’ is also helpful for understanding what Rancière is trying to accomplish here with intellect. He is not looking for some empirical fact about intellect, but rather developing a model or approach to thinking about intellect.

That said, the second reason we should, without hesitation, include disabled people among the ranks of humans with intellectual access comes from a similar idea. This idea is the justifiable assumption that our understanding of intellect is incomplete. Humans have worked for generations to develop a firm definition of intellect and to measure it in precise ways, but we are far from completing that definition. If we assume that the human brain is both limited in its range of comprehension and imperfect in its ability to grasp the whole scope of wisdom, we should know that we will never have a full and absolute picture of intellect. With possible discoveries about human intellect always on the horizon, it is fruitless to make definitive and restrictive statements about someone’s ability to access intellect. In the absence of any tangible and recognizable proof, what reason do we have for differentiating between our intellectual capacities and those of disabled people? It seems fair to say that the benefits of Rancière’s principle of equality should be extended equally to all human beings, without exceptions being drawn from our provisional claims about the differences between us.

James is not as fervent as Rancière in his support of this equality, but his continued development of pragmatics does offer glimpses of universally accessible modes of thinking that

pave the way for inclusive visions of intellect. Any approach to truth-seeking carries a view of truth within it, and James's definition of truth bears a striking resemblance to Rancière's universal teaching and learning. Truth takes on its meaning, he claims, when "*we can assimilate, validate, corroborate, and verify*" it.⁸⁵ In practice, this works a lot like the scientific method. A static truth is as useless to a pragmatist as it is to a scientist. We must be able to meet two requirements in our truth-seeking: (1) matching up our truth candidates with a verifiable "sensible terminus" and (2) reconciling them with our existing body of truth.⁸⁶ Scientists meet similar criteria when they provide detailed accounts of their findings and situate their conclusions within the existing scientific literature. We would probably suspect that a scientist who omitted part of their data was manipulating their results, and we would call that same scientist foolish if they looked to overturn a prevailing belief based on the results of a singular study. Left unchecked, those practices would unravel the reliability and credibility of scientific study.

Similarly, the new truths we find in our truth-seeking efforts "must derange common sense and previous belief as little as possible," otherwise they threaten the integrity of our concept of truth.⁸⁷ Conservatism and stability are valuable precisely because they provide an anchor, a tether that keeps us from drifting aimlessly through different iterations of truth. When we allow a new truth to disturb this stability, beyond a certain point, we also lose the predictability and reliability that make our truths meaningful. In addition to this need for verification and reconciliation, our truths must 'work' for us in achieving some end beyond

⁸⁵ James, 1991, p. 88.

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 95.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 95.

themselves, often achievement of our basic needs.⁸⁸ They become dynamic both by continually fulfilling the burden of proof and by being useful.

For Rancière, our natural learning process could not be more accessible and straightforward. It is a simple exercise of “comparing two facts,” verifying one using the other.⁸⁹ In the case of Jacotot’s students, the two facts were: first, the words of the first sentence of *Tèlèmaque*, and second, that those ideas were written on the page.⁹⁰ With knowledge of the content of the first sentence and of its location in the French text, students could begin the process of comparing facts. They might naturally begin by comparing the word ‘Calypso’ to the first word written on the page. From there they could proceed through the rest of the text, using processes of induction and deduction, creating abstractions and applying them to decipher the grammatical construction and to find the parallel words between the two translations. James argues that we find truths in much the same way: by comparing the fledgling truth with our existing truths. It is a process of trial-and-error reminiscent of our curious younger selves or the ridiculed but effective ‘guess-and-check’ method in mathematics. In this moment, the two philosophers come together to create a vision of natural learning as an active process of making truths through verification.⁹¹ James comes to this idea with a focus on the process itself, while Rancière emphasizes our equal ability to make use of it. One lays the simple but awe-inducing mechanical foundation, while the other dreams up grandiose structures to lay on top of it.

⁸⁸ James, 1991.

⁸⁹ Rancière, 1991, p. 22.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 22.

⁹¹ James, 1991, p. 29, 89.

Intuition and The Power of 'Calypso'

The assumed importance of discourse and language in human life drives both James's and Rancière's 'truth-making' processes. We are thinking beings, but our "thought must be spoken, manifested in works, communicated to other thinking beings."⁹² The expression of our ideas is as important as verifying them because without moving our thoughts beyond our heads, through some form of communication or action, the concept of thought barely has meaning. The intuitive and the practical functions of communication are important partners of our intellectual processes. It is not the mechanics of that communication, however, that make a difference here. Discussing Jacotot's arguments about languages, Rancière summarizes a belief that "all languages [are] equally arbitrary."⁹³ James argues something similar, saying that our names for various concepts are meaningless.⁹⁴ This idea that our language is arbitrary is logical and inoffensive to most people, but Rancière reminds us that it does not sit well with others, especially those who value our historical customs and view the concept of randomness as an attack on those customs. He is quick to suggest that "only the lazy are afraid of the idea of arbitrariness," but this rebuke of 'the lazy' goes a step too far.⁹⁵ The fear that arbitrariness leads to relativism and confusion is both genuine and valuable. Yes, operating in an arbitrary realm does demand a good deal of work from us, but that does not automatically mean that everyone who opposes arbitrariness does it out of laziness. Here, Rancière mistakenly conflates an aversion to work and an aversion to subjectivity. Some people, guided by their justifiable fears, are just cautious of a tendency to slip away from tradition and values, and those considerations should be both present and validated in any discussion of arbitrariness.

⁹² Rancière, 1991, p. 62.

⁹³ Ibid, p. 60.

⁹⁴ James, 1991, p. 94.

⁹⁵ Rancière, 1991, p. 62.

That the words we form and the ways we combine them are arbitrary, however, does not take away from the influence that the more general concept of language and expression carries. It would be a mistake to think that the arbitrary nature of individual languages means that we should not have expressive communication. In fact, we would be hard-pressed to imagine a world where we were unable to converse with one another. Such a life would be isolating and lonesome. Even setting the solitude of a language-less world aside, there is another issue with a world devoid of communicative interaction. Rancière proposes that “there is only one power, that of saying and speaking.”⁹⁶ Lacking the ability to speak—or, in the broader sense, to communicate—with one another leaves us powerless and frustrated. On an even deeper level, the loss of the ability to express our thoughts takes away a fundamental part of our humanity. It denies us the chance to engage with ourselves, our world, and other people in meaningful ways, one of the core activities of human existence and a primary tool for meeting some of our basic needs.

Rancière’s claim here is built on a well-regarded, though contestable, assumption that humans are both social and political animals, using political in the broadest sense. He views our social needs, described as “the desire to understand and to be understood,” as the single driving force in all of our ‘truth-making’ efforts.⁹⁷ We get this chance to understand others and to have our own experiences validated through social activities and communication. For this analysis, I consider Rancière and James’s socially inclined human to be a reasonable and agreeable theory. Therefore, I agree that discourse plays a crucial role in human existence. In part, this becomes crucial because it opens up important room for our intuitive and expressive selves to enter the equation. Up until this point in the discussion, our understanding of intellect has been essential

⁹⁶ Rancière, 1991, p. 26.

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 63.

and inclusive but has not made room for those parts of our lives that are not fully rational. It is true that Rancière's proposed intellect will never have time for expressed ideas that are not logically verifiable, but the central role of language in his approach opens the door for connections with the non-rational that will become important for our later discussion of the spiritual components of human life.

Through this discussion of language, specifically the language within *Tèlèmaque*, Rancière lays the groundwork for his revisions to our theory of intellect. The grandiose statement he borrows from Jacotot claims that “everything is in everything.”⁹⁸ We can understand this either as a broad statement about the potential in objects to teach us about the world or as a targeted statement literally telling us that the entirety of human intellectual potential exists in the word ‘everything’ itself. More in line with the second interpretation, Rancière presents Jacotot's belief that “the power of intellect that is in any human manifestation” can be found in the word ‘Calypso’.⁹⁹ In other words, a single word can show us the full picture of our human potential to access intellect. The same intellectual qualities that write magnificent opuses and make life-altering scientific discoveries are present when we engage with the word ‘Calypso.’ In this case, ‘Calypso’ is a stand-in for any word or human communication. The content matters much less than the processes that act on that content.

The effects of these claims are twofold. First, the idea that everything is contained in everything else simultaneously expands and shrinks our understanding of what ‘everything’ means. Everything now includes the innate complexity of even the most mundane objects, which we often take for granted. At the same time, however, we can see the entirety of everything represented in this finite object as well. To take Rancière's, slightly less abstract, example of

⁹⁸ Rancière, 1991, p. 41.

⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 27.

intellect, this approach tells us that we can find the totality of human intellect in one small object of human intellect, like the word ‘Calypso.’ Thinking like this can inject immense possibility into the smallest fragment of our intellectual history, even while it appears to reduce that history to a simple process.

That process, the second effect of Rancière’s claim, is built on the assumption that speaking about the ‘truth’ is impossible.¹⁰⁰ This is the same contention James makes: that absolute truth lies beyond the reach of our imperfect human minds.¹⁰¹ The impossibility of grasping truth, then, redefines our process of articulation. Instead of something that says the truth, our conversation “translates” our lived experiences and “invites others to do the same.”¹⁰² In this view, we cannot comprehend or express the pure image in front of us, but instead of letting that discourage us, we opt for the closest approximation we can manage: our translations of that reality. “Everything is in everything” because all of our great works are equally distant from the true nature of what we are trying to describe.¹⁰³ These two effects, the expanded power of a word and the redefinition of communication processes, craft a remarkable conception of language and grant that conception a vital role in human existence, both intellectually and, as we will see, spiritually.

That prominent new role Rancière and James assign to language, as the facilitator of all human thoughts, solidifies it as the medium for any human cognition or communication. We see this especially as James argues both that “all human thinking gets discursified” and that “all truth thus gets verbally built out” for our equal access.¹⁰⁴ An active and social view of truth means that

¹⁰⁰ Rancière, 1991, p. 65.

¹⁰¹ James, 1991, p. 98.

¹⁰² Rancière, 1991, p. 65.

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 41.

¹⁰⁴ James, 1991, p. 94.

our discourse facilitates the process of our thoughts and subsequent construction of truth. In this vision, our languages become much more than accessories to our thoughts and experiences. Though they remain tools, their presence in our lives becomes indispensable. They not only help us express and organize our lived experiences in repeatable ways, but they also provide the essential link between ourselves and those around us. Language frees us from both James's isolation of disorganization and Arendt's isolation of loneliness.

For James, language also makes it possible for us to verify truths that we cannot directly locate with our immediate senses. As obvious as this may sound, systems of communication provide a vital and underappreciated service when they let us develop and consistently apply abstract concepts. Without the "consistency, stability, and flowing human intercourse" that language provides us, we would only be left with those truths we could access through our senses at a given time, those found in our current environment.¹⁰⁵ Between this, and the powers Rancière assigned to language, it is clear that language education serves a vital role in the revised view of intellect he and James and offer.

Language was, no doubt, important to those who preceded both James and Rancière, but arguably not to the same extent. The hardline rationalist and empiricist perspectives James opposes each seem to miss a crucial element of the power communication can hold. Rationalists miss out on the ability of language to tie itself to both practical action and subjective forms. They can become arbitrarily preoccupied with certain forms of communication and miss out on the need for the kinds of interaction that spur activity. They might also fully reject anything that does not claim to be absolutely true, ignoring a large portion of human ideas in the process.

Empiricists, in contrast, miss the consistent and stabilizing elements of language that allow for

¹⁰⁵ James, 1991, p. 95.

cleaner exchange of ideas and for understandings to be built up over time.¹⁰⁶ When this happens, they might lose sight of their context and become both redundant and inefficient. By adopting rationalism and empiricism together, under the heading of pragmatism, James hopes to offset the weaknesses of both approaches and bring their strengths into harmony with one another.

Similarly, the explicative teachers Rancière opposes also rely on language in their methods and do so in a variety of creative ways, but they neglect one of communication's most crucial roles. All explicative uses of language are aimed at sustaining the hierarchy that explication depends on. Explicators might recognize a large portion of the beauty that language has to offer the human spirit, but they will always miss one crucial component: the ability of language to free us and recognize our autonomy. Because they are obsessed with the status quo, in other words, they refuse to engage with the kinds of language that liberate people. The liberating capacities of language are substantial in both form and influence, as we see through any number of literary genres and notable works, but explication denies us the chance to utilize those capacities.

It is true that Rancière does something similar when he ignores the hierarchical capabilities of language, but he does this in a way that allows him to pull the benefits of those capabilities—such as order and respect—without adopting their restrictive characteristics. Because he finds alternative ways to achieve the same benefits, it is much less concerning that Rancière limits the forms of language he is engaging with. With that exception stated, the type of discourse James and Rancière set forth seeks to recognize all of the capacities found in the use of language, including those of liberation, actionability, and stability, which other approaches neglect. By bringing a larger share of our discursive power together, and redefining elements of

¹⁰⁶ James, 1991.

it more fully, they allow us to come much closer to a complete understanding and use of that power than we might have before.

Freeing Our Intellect

The existing beliefs Rancière seeks to challenge are built on a familiar circular argument that argues superior people do better in areas of intellect because they are smarter. In different words, he argues, this logic can be reduced to ‘they are smarter because they are smarter’. At a basic level, this approach is incredibly exclusive. Rancière acknowledges that if, somehow, we could measure intellect through looking at brain size, a pseudoscience that has been thoroughly debunked, then we would have real evidence for intellectual superiority. However, this superiority would be self-evident, like the difference between humans and animals. It would not need to be reasserted or taught to us. Since we have not found intellectual distinctions with definitive physical or scientific foundations, any superiority we claim to have must be based on unprovable reasoning. You cannot prove something in the absence of physical evidence. You can take it on faith, but you cannot prove it. Accordingly, because the foundation for traditional practice is built on such unproven claims and circular logic, Rancière reasons he can and should present an equally unproven claim or model for consideration. He argues that some people produce poorer quality of work simply because they have worked more poorly.¹⁰⁷ This is a key consequence of his proposed vision of intellect, and it is one that binds itself tightly to a well-functioning democratic republic.

Stated differently, intellect is not an innate quality but is instead determined by our effort levels. Recognizing our equality of intellect at birth and our subsequent intellectual

¹⁰⁷ Rancière, 1991, p. 47, 50.

differentiation as we progress in age, Rancière proposes that the differences are attributable to the amount of successful work we apply in accessing our intellectual capacities. This focus on effort instead of innate intellectual fitness presents a host of personal and societal implications worth pursuing. The most immediate consequence is the increased emphasis on our agency and work ethic in the pursuit of intellect. Though circumstances play a substantial role in our ability to achieve, the effort that we apply is often the ultimate operative force in our successes. From this model an entire field of possibilities begins to open up, laying the foundation for a radically different society built around the responsibility to actively realize our potential.

Rancière's proclamation of our autonomy also aligns with James's tendency to favor those ideas that invite "promise" and possibility.¹⁰⁸ In one of his lectures, he describes several concepts, among them free will and spiritualism, that he argues offer more possibility than their alternatives. Spiritualism, for example, allows us to escape the inevitable consequences of materialism, the belief that the physical world is all that exists. Those consequences include the grim materialistic idea that the entire material world will collapse into nothing on some distant date. Spiritualism, however, presents the brighter possibility of some afterlife or some rescue from inevitable death. A belief in free will, similarly, gives us the chance to think beyond a predetermined course for our lives and to act with the thought that our actions can make a difference in our lives. Rancière's focus on effort and recognition of agency is desirable for this same reason. By focusing on possibility, it "holds up improvement as at least possible" and justifies continually striving for that improvement.¹⁰⁹ If we suppose that our access to intellect is fixed at different levels, then we have no reason to push ourselves to surpass those levels. This, then, becomes an issue of motivation and the intricate relationship between what we view as

¹⁰⁸ James, 1991, p. 54.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 54.

possible and what we are inspired to accomplish. In short, Rancière's understanding of intellect is a valuable tool for any view of humanity, such as a democratic republic, where full growth and excellence are worthwhile aims. To expect innately different capacities puts a firm cap on possibility to the detriment of our human tenacity.

It is equally important to recognize that the world that Rancière constructs is not a meritocratic ideal, where all are rewarded in equal portion for their efforts. Effort is the operative force, but what he offers is far from a simple one-to-one equation where effort given equals outcome achieved. Our recognition, in line with Rancière, that effort plays a crucial role in accessing intellect does not necessarily mean that effort translates to intellect in equal proportion for all people. Different circumstances and contexts may well mean that two people reach different intellectual levels despite exerting the same level of effort. Put another way, the clear differences in how close we come to our intellectual potential could be a result of any combination of effort and circumstance. The key, here, is the new assumption that innate talent does not play an influential role. Our unequal expressions of intellect, for Rancière, cannot be a result of different capacities for intellect,¹¹⁰ but they can be the consequence of various effort levels or circumstances.

I cannot do full justice to the intricacies of the meritocratic ideal, or meritocratic myth, in American society within this space, but it is sufficient to make this distinction. Rancière is concerned with recognizing equal access to intellect within others and the implications of such an assumption on how we educate and interact with each other. He does not conclude, nor will I, that effort is the sole determiner of our intellect. The degree of involvement that circumstance has here is up for debate. These questions of circumstance are of great importance as we

¹¹⁰ Rancière, 1991.

continue with this great American experiment and seek to fully understand the struggles and realities facing our fellow citizens. What is relevant for Rancière and for my discussion here, however, is understanding the possibilities we create when we start from an assumption of human potential, instead of human differences and limitations.

Finally, it is worth noting that ideas about human limitations have historically worked hand-in-hand with the idea that humanity is a *will* that serves an *intellect*. That is to say that our cognition leads the way through processes of thinking followed by our effortful actions. This view often assumes that humans are inherently rational and that we put our passions to work for our reason. Rancière and Jacotot reverse the order of this concept when they argue that “*man is a will served by an intellect.*”¹¹¹ They recognize the common assumption that our intellect dictates how we will act. This assumption might come from the seemingly obvious observation that our brain controls all of our muscle movements and physical processes. James, drawing again on his psychological roots, would be sure to remind us that sensations and environment play a key role in this process of connecting thought and action. Our brain might send the signal to our muscles, but the environment around us is what sprung our brain into action. This is similar to his previous assertion that our perceptions come before the concepts we make out of them.¹¹²

Barbalet notes that James’s theory of emotion was revolutionary because it recognized that our physical stimuli-responses sometimes come before our emotional responses.¹¹³ By taking this stance, James points out that our actions often come before our thoughts about those actions, meaning we are hardly always a *will* that follows the orders of an *intellect*. Sometimes we act and our intellect is left to adapt to those emotional or instinctual responses, like when we

¹¹¹ Rancière, 1991, p. 52.

¹¹² Barbalet, 2004.

¹¹³ Ibid, p. 350.

rashly respond to the hurtful comments of a close friend. If we assume that our intellect is the only factor that dictates our actions, we overlook the key role that emotion and will play in defining how we use that intellect in the first place.

This is where the intuitive and spiritual find shelter in Rancière's and James's intellect. It is also where James differs from Freud, Barbalet remarks, because he regards the emotional components of our brain as vital contributors to both truth and knowledge, where Freud viewed emotions as untamed urges. Instead of being distrustful of our gut reactions and feelings, James embraces them as partners in our truth-seeking processes, something I will explore more fully in the next chapter.¹¹⁴ For those who embrace the role of custom and tradition in our societies, this recognition of the value of emotion and intuition is fantastic news. It sets the stage for us to place more value on our traditions when they provide comfort, familiarity, and other positive emotional responses, even if those traditions contradict reason. In a sense, James aims to temper the dominance of reason in determining our actions, both personal and collective.

James's psychology and philosophy bring our focus to these emotional and impassioned origins and suppose that it is our intellect that serves our wants and our actions. The lack of will or lack of attention, by extension, would then partly account for differences in how our intellect expresses itself. When we attend to our equal capacity and allow our desires to reflect confidence in that equality, we are much more likely to realize our intellectual possibilities.¹¹⁵ Democratic theorists dream of a reality where citizens of their republic proudly see and exercise their capacities for intellect and civic participation. Belief in our capabilities makes us much more likely to see ourselves as worthy partners in the democratic government we occupy. Thomas Jefferson, echoing the republican idea that power should rest in the hands of the people, argued

¹¹⁴ Barbalet, 2004, p. 351.

¹¹⁵ Rancière, 1991.

that we should educate people to protect the freedoms and powers of their neighbors from the wandering eyes of tyranny.¹¹⁶ Here, Rancière and James offer a potential route to achieving this goal. In a truly republican sense, the onus is ultimately on each citizen to engage in this process of liberating themselves from a perceived hierarchy through simple recognition of their intellectual access. Particularly in an American setting, however, this shift cannot be effective without an accompanying focus on the intuitive and spiritual.

¹¹⁶ Jefferson, 1951, p. 527.

Chapter 3: Religious Obstacles and Spiritual Opportunities

How many times have we been exposed to the proposition that the United States exists within a framework of Christian ideals? Between the large fundamentalist Christian population we house, our history of having prayer and Christian references in the public sphere, and the dominance of Christian traditions and holidays in our culture, it is easy to see why someone might come to that conclusion. While the sentiment may be off-putting to many, it is hard to deny that there is a kernel of truth within it. Many of our founders were self-described deists rather than Christians, but Christian values influenced their thinking just the same and have played a crucial role in the movements of the American public for its entire existence. This is clear despite the continued pushback of secularism and religious neutrality. If we peek beyond this question of our Christian context, however, we might find a larger concern.

Americans, whether we recognize it or not, are as affected by the pull of tradition, intuition, and spirit as any other part of the world, and arguably more than some. While we are not classically superstitious or pagan, large swathes of the public in this country build their identity on protecting our customs, as people have in every nation since the dawn of time. Our intuitive and non-rational selves vary from sports fanatic superstitions all the way up to the robust religious communities that have played a large role in our history. If we are interested in a comprehensive picture of American life, we cannot afford to gloss over the role these ideas have played in our lives and cultures. Reason has never been the sole force in dictating our decision-making processes, nor should it ever be. Creativity and spontaneity, among many other vital elements of our lives, require a degree of non-rationality that we can't find in reason alone.

These issues become even more salient, Robert Nash reminds us, when we consider the decrease of religiosity within our society. Nash describes America as a country that is pridefully

committed to “sterile hedonism and competitive individualism” yet secretly drowning in substance abuse and poor mental health.¹¹⁷ We may not understand the situation as dire, but that does not make it any less the case. Like Arendt, he sees the crippling loneliness that hangs over us like a thick fog. For him, the solution is a return towards the spiritual, taking pains to do so thoughtfully and in concert with intellect. Modernism and Enlightenment ideas, Alexander agrees, leave us spiritually barren and grasping for the sense of purpose we feel we are missing.¹¹⁸ Because of this longing, it is not simply the undereducated among us that are liable to turn to fundamentalist tendencies. It is the hopeless person in general, whether they are made hopeless by a lack of educational prospects or a nebulous, purposeless world. Simply put, our world, particularly in an enlightenment lens, too often leaves us with more questions than answers.

One way we attempt to reach answers to these questions, historically, is through creating and maintaining faith-based perspectives, which consist of many interconnected non-rational beliefs. Using an analogy to the scientific method, James refers to these larger systems as our religious hypotheses and argues that they find their experimental testing ground in “the active faith of individuals.”¹¹⁹ Much like how a scientist’s individual work serves as a testament to various theories and approaches, our individual faith work testifies to the validity of the larger religions or spiritualities that contextualize them. Where previously we might have seen a clear dichotomy between science, as a field of knowledge built on proof, and faith, as a blatant apathy to proof, James now finds fertile ground in their coordinated efforts. Because we long for stability and predictability, he argues, we are absolutists by nature, but we should remain

¹¹⁷ Nash, 2005, p. 98.

¹¹⁸ Alexander, 2001.

¹¹⁹ James, 2009, p. xii.

experimentalists at the same time.¹²⁰ Many modern and historical societies have shown their ability to prioritize empiricism, while others have mastered dogmatism and the absolute, but few have found a healthy balance. We need to do so, however, in order to further intellectualize an American society that is so tangled up in the absolutes that religion and spirituality offer.

Considering the more dogmatic group, we also need to think about the implications of faith-based societies for Rancière and James's arguments about hierarchy and laziness as limiting factors in our educational world. At first, James and Hofstadter appear to be presenting an entirely distinct explanation for why some people might choose to fall back on faith and custom at the expense of intellect. Diving deeper, however, shows more agreement between the two analyses, though Hofstadter and James bring important complexity to the table. Rancière suggests a framework where our pedagogical methods combine with a culture of idleness to stifle the intellectual development of students through an exclusive understanding of intelligence. The burden then falls on society, as a collective of people, to flatten the intellectual hierarchy and do the work to overcome any lingering intellectual gap.

In a similar manner, Hofstadter recalls how religious American people have frequently fallen into one of two camps: the "disinherited class" or the "possessing class."¹²¹ The possessors, often rich with clergy and religious study, mirror Rancière's explicative instructor as they try to set themselves apart from the disinherited. Those people, locked out of the intellectual discourse, might then embrace a perspective shift where their lack of knowledge is reframed as a preference for faith.¹²² In order to avoid being dismissive of this very real belief, we need to recognize that faith and a limited focus on intellect serve a positive role for these people. Before

¹²⁰ James, 2009, p. 14-15.

¹²¹ Hofstadter, 1962, p. 56.

¹²² Ibid.

we can move to a view of spirituality that is hospitable for them, however, we should take additional time to explore Hofstadter's account of American spiritual history.

One of the most pivotal moments early in Hofstadter's work is his diagnosis of the toxic relationship between fundamentalist Christian parents and institutions of education. Not only is this relationship central to the spiritual past of our country, but it is particularly relevant for the vision of education detailed here. If America is suffering from an injurious political and spiritual impasse, this relationship is the bleeding wound. Its history is long and complex but can be summarized by saying that a legacy of tumultuous interactions and tensions have created a situation in which it is challenging for fundamentalist parents to trust the educational institutions in their communities. As fundamentalism becomes increasingly taboo and the subject of ridicule in our society, these people find themselves being pushed to the periphery. It is beyond unrealistic, then, to expect a community that has been left behind or secluded from the reasonable discourse of our country to concede their children to schools that might turn them against their very homes and traditions. The threat, real or imagined, of such utter destruction of families and communities rightfully brings about visceral concerns and a desire to act in protection of their institutions.¹²³ Parents in this position know, for example, that they cannot win rational arguments in response to the questions brought forward by schools, primarily because their religious beliefs do not depend on rationality. With no one present to represent faithful perspectives in schools or bridge the divide between parents and teachers, communities are sometimes left with a choice between watching their children abandon family tradition or finding alternative means of holding their child's loyalty.

¹²³ Hofstadter, 1962, pp. 126-127.

We cannot pin this response entirely on education and intellectualism, but there is certainly a pressing need for schools to better address issues of faith in their classrooms. An assembly line that turns children into uprooted critical thinkers is an inevitable enemy for rooted communities. On the other hand, a school that deepened local loyalties alongside a liberal, questioning attitude could be a welcomed friend. Friendship between schools and their communities may seem like a superficial idea, but it is incredibly important in the context of a large, spread-out democratic republic. Alexander aims to address this same core issue as he outlines a vision of “intelligent spirituality.”¹²⁴ His work brings us through a brief history of rising modernist thought as well as romantic and postmodernist responses. Ultimately, in the spirit of James’s pragmatic method, he concludes that we need to recognize, as should sound familiar at this point, “that each has important contributions to make to living a good life.”¹²⁵ Overcorrection towards reason or towards faith is an unsatisfactory solution. What we are left with is a complicated goal of reconciliation. There is no better place, though, to achieve this reconnection between spirituality and rationalism than the two realms that play the strongest formative role in a person’s life: their family and their school. The interrelation between these two areas is a prime example of the closer, inter-personal associations that we need to focus on in order to fix the larger divides we long to overcome.

Put simply, the stakes underlying this fragmented relationship are twofold. The exit of Evangelicals, the most powerful religious fundamentalists in America,¹²⁶ from the intellectual community leaves our education system devoid of a spiritual essence. Not only that, but it leaves our faith-based institutions devoid of rigor and popular respectability. Of all the ways in which

¹²⁴ Alexander, 2001, p. 24.

¹²⁵ Ibid, p. 22.

¹²⁶ Because Hofstadter focuses his analysis primarily on evangelical Christianity, I will also limit my focus to that community, as most of my historical knowledge on these issues is centered on that community.

America is a country divided, perhaps none is more consequential than this. Hofstadter, quoting Sidney E. Mead, laments the “hard choice” Americans have been presented with “between being intelligent according to the standards prevailing in their intellectual centers, and being religious according to the standards prevailing in their denominations.”¹²⁷ In lockstep with each other, Alexander adds, schools have abandoned religion and religions have abandoned schools. Part of this is due to a drastic shift in the locus of emotional concerns. Modernism and the secularism that followed it created a form of public discourse in which our rational capacity crowded out our emotional capacity.¹²⁸ Some revivalists and evangelical leaders, in contrast, took the opposite approach. Hofstadter notes that many of them abandoned their strongest outward emotional expressions with the increasing wave of modernism, but a vocal portion held on to the utility of plain speech, tradition, and emotional relatability. This strong-willed set of evangelicals did us a great service in their stubbornness. To understand exactly why that is and to begin to bridge the divide, we need to follow Hofstadter’s lead and sympathetically work through what he describes as the “one-hundred per cent mindset.”¹²⁹

For most of us, the idea of compromise and nuance is a welcome gift, one that helps us balance the various concerns that arise in our lives. The “modern political mind” is recognizable in many democratic states and draws its inspiration from Lockean principles such as the marketplace of ideas.¹³⁰ How should we react, however, when the marketplace stacks the cards against our products and services? How can religious people be expected to make a profit, the profit of national recognition, if they are disproportionately excluded from the tools needed to compete? This loose analogy is essentially representative of the situation modern political

¹²⁷ Hofstadter, 1962, p. 119.

¹²⁸ Alexander, 2001, p. 17.

¹²⁹ Hofstadter, 1962, p. 118.

¹³⁰ Hofstadter, 1962, p. 134. Alexander, 2001, p. 16.

thought places on religious institutions. The thorough separation between religion and intellect has asked faithful people to translate their interests into a different, seemingly incompatible language. The resulting unevenness of the playing field has led embittered religious people, like Billy Graham and his predecessors, to reject the opportunity to compete, almost out of spite. Though they have their similarities, this move separates him from early revivalists who used emotionality and spiritual appeal as a tool to supplement intellect. Instead, Graham and his contemporaries found a way to circumvent the marketplace of ideas by way of emotional appeal and relatability. Part and parcel of this evasion was a full-scale embrace of an all or nothing mentality. Utilitarian laypeople, used to being unconditionally excluded and ridiculed as ‘the other’ by intellectuals and elites, were drawn to the black-and-white, nuance-free moral world on which Graham and others capitalized. This, as mentioned, represented a clear departure from the early days of evangelism, which made peace with intellectual rationalism and set its sights on combatting “religious apathy.”¹³¹ In many ways, however, weaponization of the ‘simple’ and ‘clear cut’ is a fully justified response to the encroachment of modernism and absolute rationalism.

If this one hundred per cent mentality, with its high-stakes moral absolutism, was created by the divide between rationalism and spirituality, as Alexander and Hofstadter suggest, then the path forward is likely to reconcile those two poles once again. Eliminate the need for religious people to circumvent rational forms of discourse, and we just might be able to bring them into the fold once again. In doing so, we also might address Rancière’s concerns about the institutionalization of a ‘superior intellectual class’ in America. This hierarchy, far from the difference between steps on an Olympic podium, currently resembles a stark chasm with a good

¹³¹ Hofstadter, 1962, pp. 117-120.

number of Americans standing on either side. We may often perceive that intellectual elites, especially those on the east coast, stand a head above those in the middle of the country. The election of Donald Trump and the events that have followed, about which I will say little else, should stand as proof to us, however, that rationalists and spiritualists are not too dissimilar in the level of influence they can leverage over our political and cultural landscape. Our first step in response to this realization ought to be recognition that we stand as a nation divided on issues of reason and faith, but not divided in the power available to those groups. From that recognition, we should be able to move closer to the fulfillment of an educational and political system built on assumptions of equal intellectual capacity.

More than just reconciling the dangerous split between spirituality and rationalism, however, this path forward also promises to instill a much richer sense of the responsible democratic republicanism of which Jefferson dreamed. Hofstadter and Alexander lay down strong evidence that our country has suffered from a serious abdication of responsibility. Rationalists have neglected their duty to nurture the spiritual side of their fellow citizens, and spiritualists have neglected their duty to develop the rational side. The result is a stratified society that permeates our political, educational, and cultural demographic definitions. The stereotypical fundamentalist, ignorant, largely rural, conservatives of our current moment are put in contrast with the stereotypical tolerant, liberally educated, largely urban liberals. This leads us to a scaled-up version of the one hundred per cent mindset that Hofstadter describes, with each side of the division believing they have moral, educational, and political superiority over the other. Our political gridlock and all of the accompanying ideological trappings pull themselves roughly from the same origins as our educational, cultural, and spiritual divisions. This is not to oversimplify, but rather to serve as a reminder that the many distinct divisions we often find in

our society may not be as distinguishable from each other as we think. If we want to move forward as a country in which some semblance of unity is possible, failure to recognize our spiritual wounds alongside our well-established political wounds is not an option.

Before we can address these wounds, however, it is important that we firmly establish the rational and non-rational as equally worthy players in our lives and decision-making. This is far from a common assumption. Often, we prioritize one over the other, depending on the circumstance, identity, or role. James notes how scientists are often quick to outwardly reject immutable absolutes.¹³² Modern religious leaders, on the other hand, might be much more reliant on non-rational, spiritual claims. This distinction seems clear, but in his retelling of American Protestant history, Hofstadter argues that “the truth is more complex.” Religious leaders have often gone to great lengths to promote academic and educational endeavors, so long as they do so in a religious framework. The American Massachusetts Bay community proves an interesting case study for Hofstadter as he uncovers their conflicted historical relationship with reason-based education. The famed educational brands of Oxford, Harvard, and Cambridge all share tangents with life in this community, alongside the often-ridiculed Salem Witch Trials. In essence, this conflict is a microcosm of the larger trends of American Protestant history, filled with its highly educated clergy and its boisterous lay preachers. Rationality and non-rationality find themselves in a delicate dance across communities and eras like the New England Puritans and the American Great Awakening.¹³³

Perhaps the most interesting part of Hofstadter’s analysis, however, comes as he describes the spread of Protestant revivalism, a particularly potent blend of spiritualism and non-rationality, in America. Firmly subscribing to a Rancière-esque belief that all humans are equally

¹³² James, 2009, p. 13.

¹³³ Hofstadter, 1962, pp. 59-69.

worthy of being heard, he asks his reader to imagine life as an undereducated frontiersperson. In the absence of opportunities to pursue book learning and all of its benefits, certainly we might turn to the same fanaticism and spiritual reliance that characterized many descriptions of religious revivalism. Faith, as we have seen, might become a response to the lack of intellectual access and a means of breaking “the hold of the establishments.”¹³⁴ Such responses are inextricably tied, Hofstadter notes, to early democratic movements within the United States, as they hold the common goal of increasing access to representation in various communities and institutions. In this sense, Rancière and the American revivalists are responding to the same realities and pushing a progressive agenda towards a truer and flatter democracy.

The revivalists, however, backed themselves into a problematic corner when they discarded not only the hierarchy of religious authority but also the tools which make for insightful religious study. It is one thing to attack the elite, educated class in your religious community and to free yourself from the oppression that class leverages against you. It is entirely another to, as my father always says, throw the baby out with the bathwater and abandon the important tools of reason and intellect that the elite class previously hoarded. All too often movements like the protestant Christian revivals have done just that: casting off anything that was even touched by the old guard in the name of a new order. Nor is this approach unique to them, as many modern educational thinkers have advocated for abandoning certain methods of thinking purely because of their ties to oppressive classes. For religious communities, however, Hofstadter argues that this concern points to a central tension in both religious and more general forms of education: whether one should work towards “a historically correct and rational understanding” or towards working up “a proper sense of inner conviction.”¹³⁵

¹³⁴ Hofstadter, 1962, pp. 74-79.

¹³⁵ Hofstadter, 1962, pp. 69-74.

In a sense, this distinction gets to the heart of one of James's key arguments about the place we ought to leave for faith in our lives. A balance is in order, he argues, between positions "of believing too little or of believing too much."¹³⁶ We would be foolish to think that we could ever avoid taking some things on faith. We may be among the most rational and intellectually flexible people on the planet but set back on our reflexes we would still "dogmatize like infallible popes."¹³⁷ The barest example of this is our trust in the very fact that truth exists in any definable quality. Such a conclusion cannot be definitively proven, at least by our current standards and with our current knowledge, so we must take it on faith.¹³⁸ Accordingly, we would be foolish to try to argue that faith has no place in our lives, even if the place it occupies is smaller for some than others. The key questions become what place it ought to occupy and how we balance it with the space we set aside for reason. These are questions we have run from for too long, particularly in the world of education, and they are crucial in our efforts to rethink spirituality in a way that is compatible with any form of intellectual emphasis.

Reflecting further on the partnership between rationality and spirituality, William James reminds us that they live in tight connection with one another.¹³⁹ Those who follow his logic might even go so far as to say that no person can truly hold one quality without the other. Here the very idea that one might want to be purely intuitive or rational seems to make no sense. We would be missing a fundamental part of our humanity. In this light, the arguments of Alexander and Hofstadter take on new life. Alexander's connection with James's ideas is especially noteworthy as his three components of spirituality, subjective, objective, and collective, interact neatly with the ways in which James seeks to understand human knowledge. Additionally, both

¹³⁶ James, 2009, p. xi.

¹³⁷ Ibid, pp. 13-14.

¹³⁸ Ibid, p. 12.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

Alexander and James argue that we ought to strive for a harmonious, holistic conception of human existence that strongly balances each component. This conception, they continue, finds grounding in the larger activity of creating a medium for ethical dialogue and collective life, particularly in a democratic focus. Despite this, societies around the world, particularly American society, still fall into the two dangerous vices: either focusing singularly on the individual elements rather than the embodied whole or denying the expansive inclusivity of both spiritual and intellectual life. Before we can move to discuss a form of education that seeks to act on and cultivate equal intellectual and spiritual access, though, we need to take some time to understand what it means to take a broader vision of spirituality.

Expanding Spirituality

William James, throughout his life and writings, thinks along these lines when he urges us to consider the faithful and spiritual together with the rational. As a philosopher who writes extensively about the importance of belief and religious experiences, James's life work is a testament to the significance of both of these human qualities. His ideas take on a new richness against the continuing backdrop of intellectual division that we developed in the previous sections. Hofstadter's work, in particular, highlights the importance of understanding religious and spiritual anti-intellectualism if we ever hope to achieve the intellectual possibilities that authors like Rancière propose. Unless we grapple with the concerns of fundamentalists and evangelicals, non-rationality and its more hostile manifestation, anti-intellectualism, will make it impossible to reach a vision of greater intellectual access. By that, I mean that it will be incredibly difficult to make any progress while part of society rejects the value of what we are trying to make accessible. This means, as I have suggested, that we need to reconcile intellectual

and spiritual pursuits, in search of a more holistic conception of life and human development both for the sake of pragmatic inclusion and well-rounded growth.

A number of noteworthy educational thinkers have sought to tackle these same questions, each with their own scope and perspective. Their thoughts are important to mention here both because I am approaching these problems from an interdisciplinary educational theory angle and because few arenas in our life are more concerned with human development and life than our schools. Though there are certainly others who have also made insightful additions to this conversation, I will enter the discourse here by focusing on three authors in particular: Katherine Simon, Robert Kunzman, and Nel Noddings. Each finds, as I have, their own reasoning and inspiration for discussing spiritual and existential issues in the context of schooling. Kunzman, for example, recognizes that religiously motivated people within America have more fully recognized their political power in recent years.¹⁴⁰ No longer do they think their convictions should be shelved in the private world and never touched in public conversation. In this context, it is better to bring them into the fold, starting as early as their public-school experiences, than to leave them to their own devices in secluded, though robust, corners of the country.

Simon recognizes something similar in the false choice that has been set up for us between scientific knowledge and a form of “highly-politicized” spiritual connection.¹⁴¹ People, in other words, are told they can either subscribe to the world of academia or to a distorted version of traditional religions. The exclusivity of academia and distortion of these religions keeps us from being able to grasp both in tandem. In this context, and drawing on the ideas of Michael Novak, Noddings reminds us of the idea that intelligent believers (i.e., intelligent

¹⁴⁰ Robert Kunzman, *Grappling with the Good: Talking about Religion and Morality in Public Schools*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).

¹⁴¹ Katherine G. Simon, *Moral Questions in the Classroom: How to Get Kids to Think Deeply about Real Life and their School Work*. (London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 11.

religious adherents) may have more in common with intelligent unbelievers than they do with unintelligent believers.¹⁴² There is untapped potential, she might agree, in the possibility of bringing the world of believers and the secular world into closer contact within the framework of intelligence or intellect. To do so, Noddings presents a broader understanding of rationality that works well with James's rationality and, I argue, Alexander's expanded spirituality. This 'new' rationality "recognizes the longing of the heart and soul and provides for them."¹⁴³ Increased self-knowledge, both in the individual-self and the group-self, is crucial to Noddings's conception of intelligence. In fact, she argues, if someone is not consistently "thinking through the questions that arise regularly in life," they would be hard-pressed to claim intelligence.¹⁴⁴

These concerns are not merely religious, as I have argued. David Purpel, who serves as an important source of thinking for both Kunzman and Simon, receives a central placement in Kunzman's argument as he claims that "no set of issues is as explosive, controversial, emotional, and threatening as moral and religious disputes" but "none is more vital."¹⁴⁵ Because of this inevitability, these questions have a central role to play in education, though Kunzman sees the current climate of detachment and empty tolerance as entirely unsatisfactory. This is, at least in part, because students who have grown up with richer and more substantive ethical and religious frameworks will inevitably find the hollow moral teachings of school to be a less attractive alternative.¹⁴⁶ Citing Robert Wuthnow, he notes the American move away from loving our spiritual or religious place and towards a posture of spiritual seeking that consumes religion and turns it into "a kind of optional garment: often useful, handily accessorized, and readily changed

¹⁴² Nel Noddings. *Educating for Intelligent Belief or Unbelief*. (New York City: Teachers College Press, 1994). Importantly, Noddings recognizes that belief is a Christian construct, but argues that all religions and even education itself (as I mention shortly) relies on that same concept of belief.

¹⁴³ Noddings, *Educating for Intelligent Belief*, 1994, p. xiv

¹⁴⁴ Noddings, 1994., p. xiv

¹⁴⁵ Kunzman, *Grappling with the Good*, 2006, p. 10.

¹⁴⁶ Kunzman, 2006, p. 46.

to suit one's personal tastes."¹⁴⁷ Similar logic prompts Noddings to argue that schools have a major role in developing an understanding of intelligent belief (or unbelief). Students need to have a strong, justified sense of the complexity within their religious framework or lack thereof and how that fits into their lives. Not only, she argues, is the idea of belief and what we should believe in central to education, but it is also important for students to have a degree of religious familiarity within the larger frame of cultural literacy.¹⁴⁸

Towards the end of establishing her own concern with this central tension in modern education, Simon brings our focus towards some concrete examples of how we have developed moral and existential education over the years. Beginning with an approach that seeks to teach commonly agreed upon values like respect and honesty, she agrees with the importance of having stable virtues. Especially in the context of a democracy, however, those values must be up for deliberation, and students need to be able to develop ownership of them. On the opposite extreme, an approach that considers all values as equally valid and focuses more on the process of deliberation runs into its own problems. By not holding up any evaluative criteria, this strategy falls into a relativistic camp that leaves students ill-equipped to make any decisions on their own. Similarly, she finds the psychologically rooted perspective of cognitive developmentalists to be too detached from the concrete realities and commitments students find in their lives.¹⁴⁹

After careful review, Simon finds herself agreeing most with the ethic of care, an approach set forth by Noddings that aims to reorganize the curriculum around an understanding

¹⁴⁷ Kunzman, 2006, p. 54.

¹⁴⁸ Noddings, 1994.

¹⁴⁹ Simon, *Moral Questions in the Classroom*, 2001. She calls the first approach a "virtues approach" and the second "values clarification." Additionally, the need for values deliberation is similar to what I argued previously about the nature of democratic values. Finally, her disagreement with cognitive developmentalists comes from their use of hypotheticals that do little to help students connect their real lives to the questions at hand.

of morality that is more inclusive of feminist perspectives and values. This approach, in simple terms, prioritizes respect and caring for others, two components that Simon, Kunzman, and Noddings can all agree on. Despite this, Simon regards Noddings's restructuring of the school as a little too radical. She would prefer, as I would, to operate within the existing organization of a school and its curriculum. This discussion of the urgencies of the issue and previous approaches leads Simon to her own suggestion: "a schoolwide inquiry into values."¹⁵⁰ Here, school communities would come together to construct an open and flexible strategy for addressing moral and existential issues, recognizing the inevitability both of having some prescriptions and of critical deliberation. Simon and I disagree in a number of smaller areas, particularly the use of the terms spiritual¹⁵¹ and the intensity of our response to the critiques made by church and state separatists.¹⁵² That said, our central arguments do not disagree; we have entirely different focuses. Simon is interested in considering how schools should approach moral and existential issues that inevitably arise in the classroom. Those questions are certainly important, but I am more interested in further mapping out the breathing room schools and students have in making spiritual space in their education.

Noddings, then, brings us a little closer to where I hope to go. She proposes a philosophy of education that includes religious and spiritual understanding among its priorities. Students, she argues, need to understand how religious perspectives play a role in certain controversial conversations and question-based dialogues throughout human life. In the process, she carves out space for meaningful connections in the humanities as well as math and science, pointing out that

¹⁵⁰ Simon, 2001. This, as Simon presents it, stands in contrast to a classroom-wide inquiry into values or even one conducted in people's departments or groups of teachers.

¹⁵¹ Simon thinks that the idea of spirituality is too loaded to use the way I have, but I think we need to lean into this historical misconception if we want to have any hope of correcting it.

¹⁵² Simon also tends to agree with the hesitancy of these separatists, while I wholeheartedly disagree with their unwillingness to engage with challenging questions about incorporating spirituality into schools.

bringing these connections into the curriculum suggests to students that all humans struggle with these questions and that their struggles are important.¹⁵³ These questions, ultimately, can become the “organizational backbone” of a dynamic and intensely interesting curriculum.¹⁵⁴ Again, however, they are not merely relevant for religious students. Everyone can benefit from this kind of approach, she claims, because both intelligent belief and intelligent unbelief require a clear sense of the God or gods at play. This goal of developing an intelligent belief or unbelief among students is certainly admirable and worthwhile; however, Noddings is not entirely clear about who should be driving the proverbial bus in these efforts. At various points in her discussion, she talks about how students need to know some things and might be interested in others. In keeping with Rancière’s respect for student agency and intellectual competency, I aim to take a stronger stance against the potential for hierarchical teaching that Noddings leaves on the table. This, in addition to Simon’s well-founded concern about the radical nature of redesigning school structures, leads me to differentiate my view from Noddings’s, though much of what she adds to the discourse remains helpful for my discussion.

This leaves me with the picture that Kunzman brings forth, which I think, while still different in important ways, comes the closest of the three to establishing a place for spirituality within education. His proposal, almost a marriage between Noddings’s and Simon’s, looks to develop a form of “ethical dialogue” that emphasizes understanding, empathy, and perspective-taking. At the same time, however, he brings in a concern for fallibilism, civic virtues, and tight integration of the religiously motivated, each of which will be central for me in the sections that follow. His approach is seriously limited in one important way that Noddings’s is not: he

¹⁵³ Noddings, 1994. Of particular interest, she argues students should learn about the existential and theological questions posed by mathematicians like Descartes, Euler, and Pascal).

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 8.

presents this approach almost exclusively in the context of controversial discussions. In this respect, as I mentioned, it is important to hold onto the qualities of a more expansive perspective like that which Noddings provides. His approach, however, comes to bear on an important process of interpersonal respect that is more textured than what Noddings offers in her work on intelligent belief. Bringing in Stephen Darwall's conception of two-fold respect, Kunzman notes that we often have a shallow understanding of both the evaluative "appraisal respect" and the ever-important "recognition respect."¹⁵⁵

In turning to a brand of recognition respect that simply looks to emphasize our similarities and promote bland tolerance, he argues that we actually fall back into "a *lack* of respect," as we essentially say: "I don't care enough to do the hard work of understanding why you believe what you do, so I'll just put up with it."¹⁵⁶ This is strikingly similar to the ideas of Wuthnow and Rosenblith, whom he draws on and whom I will mention later, as he looks to establish a form of pluralism that is much more demanding than our current approach. His 'ethical dialogue' can help us to overcome this unsatisfying approach to addressing spiritual diversity in the classroom because it emphasizes, in ways that Noddings and Simon do not, the importance of rootedness. This idea of being rooted, an important one for Arendt as well, is central to a fully developed respect for the depth of religious perspectives. Kunzman notes, as I will further explain shortly, that the current lack of value placed on rootedness "provokes many conservative religious families to turn elsewhere for their children's education."¹⁵⁷ We must, he stresses, find ways to keep religious students in the fold within public education and engage them in healthy forms of ethical dialogue with their peers.

¹⁵⁵ Kunzman, 2006. He adds Loren Lomasky's understanding of people deserving recognition respect for their status as project-pursuers in this section as well. This serves as an additional helpful detail.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 40.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 54.

This approach sums up my concerns and interests in tackling these issues of spiritual access. However, Kunzman, Simon, and Noddings all stop short in one key dimension that is crucial for my argument. It can be summed up best by considering Simon's invocation of Robert Maynard Hutchins, who argued that schools, families, and religious organizations each house exclusive control of a distinct sphere of human life.¹⁵⁸ Where Simon's response is somewhat diplomatic in walking the line between too much overlap and too little, I think we ought to lean into the potential overlap here, fully in defiance of Hutchins' analysis. Both properly exploring the spiritual space within public education and fully embracing the role of public schools as part of a vibrant public require demand that we loosen our unfounded but understandable fears about public schools and religious organizations interacting. That said, I will by no means argue that religious leaders need to have a seat at the decision-making table. My interest is more in making sure that we do not kill collaborative momentum, as we have for so long, before it even has time to develop. The substantive shape for these potential connections is beyond the scope of my work here but deserves sustained attention as we press forward in our American experiment.

There are other approaches to integrating religion into schools that are more steeped in religious instruction. Walter Feinberg and Richard Layton, for example, center their analysis on instruction that 'teaches about religion' rather than 'teaching religion'. In the process, they note the benefits of approaching the Bible from both a humanistic and literacy perspective, exploring the potential alternatives that exist within each of those frames. Not only can the Bible provide a rich network of stories for literature studies, but comprehensive religious surveys can help us learn how to interact better with the religious others we are bound to encounter in our lives. Twin processes of "interruption" of students' religious inertia and "detachment" from their

¹⁵⁸ Simon, 2001.

commitment allow students to deepen their intellectual engagement with religious texts like the Bible. Feinberg and Layton also note the potential and problems inherent in partnership between schools and their communities on religious matters. In many ways, this is closer to the vision of intellectuospirituality I am interested in, though its narrow application to religion courses makes it more detached and less fruitful than the three authors mentioned above.¹⁵⁹

As those authors suggest, bridging the divide between the secular public-school world and the spiritual realms of life demands that we first broaden our understanding of what it means to be spiritual. This may be difficult for both religious and secular groups to accept, but the plain truth, as many have argued, is that no human being lives outside the range of a wide-reaching conception of spirituality. This spirituality, best understood as a form of transcendence-based affinity, is what enables us to look beyond the naked empiricism and sensationalism that thinkers like John Dewey and William James found so flawed. A full understanding of what this looks like, however, will warrant more detail and attention than I can fully accomplish here, and even then, it certainly is not without its critics. The separation of church and state, for example, stands as an imposing barrier to an intellectuospiritual marriage, especially in schools. Here, Nash and the three authors above point to a fruitful solution, arguing that this separation still leaves room for these kinds of discussion in schools.¹⁶⁰ This, combined with the aforementioned works of Suzanne Rosenblith and Robert Wuthnow on the need for a more reflective and demanding form of pluralism, sets the stage wonderfully for Alexander to enter the conversation. My chosen author for this crucial holistic spirituality, Alexander offers an image that eloquently combines the objective, subjective, and collective spiritual worlds.

¹⁵⁹ Walter Feinberg and Richard A. Layton, *For the Civic Good*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014). That said, Feinberg and Layton still contribute incredibly important insights to the dialogue I am entering.

¹⁶⁰ Nash, 2005, p. 99.

Towards a New American Spiritual Life

Early in his work, Alexander draws on the Biblical story of the Israelites wandering in the desert searching for the promised land in order to help us frame the spiritual dilemma swallowing modern American culture. Like the Israelites, we are a people without a home, “searching for values and visions in the moral desert of modernity.”¹⁶¹ This sentiment will likely raise suspicion or dismissal from many religious people who feel very at home within their religious traditions. As Alexander moves into his description of the three shapes of spirituality, however, he crafts a clear and holistic conception of spirituality that most, if not all, modern religious traditions certainly fall short of.¹⁶² The target he sets is high, but all the better to propel us forward in our efforts to achieve spiritual excellence.

Before moving into the specifics of his insightful spiritual framework, he takes time to lay down a particular and crucial set of conditions for us to bear in mind as we strive for this more holistic spiritualism. Drawing on Karl Popper’s idea of “the open society,” he offers up “critical intelligence, free will, and fallibility” as key preconditions of productive ethical deliberation.¹⁶³ The ability of people within a society to actively explore reason, to make autonomous decisions, and to fall short of right action are all keys in both human learning and properly conceived human government. To be uncritically accepting, deterministic, or to carry an air of infallibility would destroy the possibility of ethical deliberation: the natural medium of ethical affairs in a democracy.

Moving, as I have, in the context of a Judeo-Christian frame, Alexander even goes so far as to argue that these three capacities are what bring Adam and Eve closer to God in the Garden

¹⁶¹ Alexander, 2001, p. 51.

¹⁶² Ibid, pp. 26, 52.

¹⁶³ Ibid, pp. 37, 44-47.

of Eden. God, he argues, is our role model when He (to adopt Alexander's gendered notion of God) falls short in His autonomous actions. By saying this, Alexander leaves us with a puzzling contradiction between the common conception of God as perfect and this new idea of God as fallible. Can God be perfectly fallible? Such a question may seem to stray far from educational issues, but Alexander holds up our fallibility as, arguably, the most important requirement of education and learning.¹⁶⁴ Our philosophies about fallibility, religiously informed or not, are vital to the ability to partake in the world of education. Without fallibility, we would be "incapable of benefiting from the opportunity to learn from [our] mistakes."¹⁶⁵ This speaks to the vision of God that Alexander works with throughout the text. For him, God of the Old Testament is perfectly fallible, however we might conceive of that, and leads us by example in straying from principle and ultimately returning to the right path.

An interesting consequence of this view is that teaching and parenting become almost sacramental because they see us taking on the role that God occupies in our lives: someone who models learning in the face of mistakes and eternally works towards principle.¹⁶⁶ Those who disagree with Alexander on this point are likely to find the rest of his argument hard to follow, and, therefore, it is important to spend some time here thinking through this basic assumption. One possible justification for this perfect fallibility he seems to work with is that it provides a clear and coherent explanation for the shift from an often vengeful and righteous God to a loving and merciful God. What Alexander is trying to do here is thread a needle between the Biblical evidence that God is inconsistent (in human terms) and the bedrock belief that God is perfect and consistent. Neither, if we are honest with ourselves, is a disputable claim within common

¹⁶⁴ Alexander, 2001, pp. 47-48.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 47.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 10.

Biblical understandings of who God is, but the two seem wholly incompatible. One way to quickly write off of this tension would be to remind that God defies human understanding, and, therefore, He can be both inconsistent and consistent, or can be consistent in His inconsistencies.

This stated belief that God is simply beyond our ability to sketch out is certainly a palatable argument for many, but for the rest, Alexander's coexistence between perfection and fallibility offers a more nuanced alternative. God is still distinct from humans, either because He always learns from His mistakes or because His mistakes are always done with the purest intentions, but God is also fallible. If God's fallibility was a stand-alone fact, leaving room for the idea that He is indistinct from humanity, then Alexander would be doing some form of damage to the Biblical representation of God. By assuming both fallibility and distinction, however, he seems to remain faithful to that representation. One mistake made by both academics and fundamentalists, Alexander might argue, is to oversimplify the Biblical body of knowledge about God. Fundamentalists and academics alike might suggest that, because God is presented as being apart from learning, those who aspire to emulate the essence of God ought to reject learning as it is traditionally understood. Another way of saying this is that untested absolutes are the language of religion and tested conclusions are the language of the academic. Here, Alexander looks to crash through this dividing line between untested absolutes and tested conclusions with his conception of God.

With this loose but definitive stance on the nature of God in place, we can move to discuss Alexander's holistic view of spirituality and the three forms on which it feeds. These forms line up somewhat like the ends and middle of a continuum, though Alexander argues that we can and should hold tight to each of them.¹⁶⁷ Despite what modern discourse might tell us,

¹⁶⁷ Alexander, 2001.

these forms of spirituality do not map neatly onto the two sides of the dividing line. Academics and ‘liberals’ do not neatly fall within the subjectivist category any more than fundamentalists and ‘conservatives’ neatly fall into the objectivist category. Rather, each side draws heavily but imperfectly from all three forms of spirituality. My hope here, in further developing an understanding of spirituality recognizable within all of us, is to think through how both sides can more fully recover each of the three spiritual forms and draw nearer to each other in the process.

Beginning with the subjective form of spirituality, Alexander starts with a key distinction: those who believe in “transcendental subjectivism” are markedly different than those who believe in “radical subjectivism.”¹⁶⁸ The first argues that our subjective experiences can help us climb closer to a transcendent truth or being, while the more radical form tells us that all that exists in our spiritual life is subjective experience. This differentiation is important to remember, because subjectivism, like many philosophies, is often attacked by targeting the more radical component and lumping the moderate perspectives in with this criticism. Alexander finds the more moderate, transcendental perspective more appealing, especially as it manifests through the spiritual ideas of Thomas Merton and Hasidic Judaism. Each holds out a mystical, emotion-driven conception of connection with the divine, but becomes transcendent when it argues that we should seek to transcend those subjective emotions to connect with the absolute.¹⁶⁹

Merton leans on the self-oriented process of “contemplation.” Taking up a posture of reflection, he argues, can lead us to overcome the ‘false self’ that we often idealize and “to discover [our true selves] in discovering God.”¹⁷⁰ Similarly, for Hasidic Jews and those who follow the traditions of Lurianic myths, our spiritual life involves fine-tuning our personal Torah.

¹⁶⁸ Alexander, 2001, p. 56.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 57.

This subjective understanding then serves as our working version until the day we return to God and unite our Torah with His. Both approaches urge humans to grapple with their deeply personal and intuitive perspectives in the hopes of using them to move beyond the subjective. The transcendental approach distinguishes itself from the radical approach in that way: viewing subjectivism as an instrument rather than an end. This distinction, Alexander notes, is key to keeping subjectivism from turning into the narcissistic idol that its opponents often fear.¹⁷¹

Of course, the countervailing forces of objectivism and collectivism also help anchor us and protect against radical subjectivity, but before shifting to focus on collective spirituality, it seems important to briefly recap those key elements of transcendental subjectivism which are worth holding to most tightly. First and foremost is the room such an approach leaves for intuition and emotion within a person's life. For those who are turned away by the dry, unfeeling realities of institutionalized religion and academia, subjectivism offers a reprieve. In its quest to legitimize spirituality, it does not ask people to employ reason or logic. It softly reminds us that our gut and heart are enough. This message should not stand entirely by itself and allow people total release from reason and proof, but it does offer us an important service by allowing some emancipation. Additionally, the subjective spirituality Alexander outlines here makes for a potentially fruitful connection between post-modern thought and the spiritual realm. Alexander notes that academia and religious people have each embraced subjectivism to varying degrees, but rarely are the two brought into concert with each other, likely in large part because subjectivism is viewed as reprehensible by some religious orthodoxy.¹⁷² If, guided by Alexander's ideas, we can promote an embrace of transcendental subjectivism within institutions

¹⁷¹ Alexander, 2001.

¹⁷² Ibid.

of intellect and spirituality, we might better be able to bring these communities together and find space for emotion and individual experiences within our educational efforts.

An important partner, as mentioned, in this endeavor is the collective spirituality that Alexander outlines in his next chapter, widening the scope from individual experiences to those of larger bodies of people. This is where the organizing power of religious communities comes into the picture. As much as spirituality and intellectual endeavors are individual experiences, they are undeniably formed, in large part, by the groups where they develop. No two religious or areligious communities develop spirituality in the same way, just as no two neighborhoods build the same cultural understandings and tastes. Community is important for us, Alexander argues, because of the solidarity it provides and the reassurance that our ideas line up with those of other people we respect.¹⁷³ As strongly as we might believe in certain tenets, customs, or spiritual truths, we still need some measure of communication with others to verify the strength of those commitments. Humans, as I mentioned earlier, are deeply social. Much like how transcendental subjectivism looks to find ground between the individual and the absolute, collectivism affords us the opportunity to find overlap between ourselves and others. There is certainly safety in numbers, but there is a self-confidence to be gained as well.

Just like the radical and moderate form of subjectivism, however, collectivism also contains different strains. Radical collectivism looks a lot like cultural relativism, a familiar source of controversy in American discourse. It proposes to us that all cultural norms are equally valid and make up the body of what we can consider to be truth. According to this theory, there is no transcendent set of understandings we can access or grow closer to in informing our connection with truth. Because of this, it leaves little to no room for interaction with an

¹⁷³ Alexander, 2001, p. 78.

expansive understanding of objective spirituality, something I have held up as important here for a well-rounded spiritual life. The alternative collective approach, transcendentalism, addresses these concerns by telling us that our engagement with the cultures and communities around us serves to bring us closer to a tangible, transcendence. It not only gives us the ability to condemn certain culturally based spiritual practices but also allows us to meaningfully consider collective alternatives and the progress they allow us to make.¹⁷⁴

In other words, a transcendent form of collectivism bridges the divide between community values and objective absolutes. It sits in the middle of the complicated and well-reinforced spiritual and intellectual life that Alexander conceptualizes. Not only can people transcend themselves toward the objective and the collective, but our individual experiences can pull on communities and the objective receives a dose of culture and personalism. This web quickly devolves into meaningless and empty drivel, however, if we fail to notice Alexander's plea for strong grounding in each of the distinct forms. There is no need or time for hollow happy sloganeering and impersonal politeness training. Students need to proudly own their particular individuality and their particular cultural spaces alongside the universal or undeniable. Particularism, for Alexander, provides the bricks which make up the building. They need spackle to hold them together but imagine a building without bricks.¹⁷⁵

Alexander and many others find the particular bricks that make up their spiritual buildings in the world of objective spirituality. Rituals, traditions, holidays, religious services, liturgies, and faith communities provide tangible material with which to construct our individual faith experiences. This is primarily where evangelicals and other fundamentalists often feel the most at home. Even beyond the realm of organized religion, Alexander argues that traditional

¹⁷⁴ Alexander, 2001.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 92.

canons and scientific processes provide this same form of objective content. Like its subjective and collective counterparts, objective spirituality can be broken into radical and moderate strains, with the moderate contributing more to a holistic spirituality. The moderate, or fallible, objective perspective looks to make “a rigorous differentiation” between reality and the ways humans have sought to understand it.¹⁷⁶ The ultimate reality of an apple, in other words, is distinct from the same apple experienced through our human senses. In doing this, fallible objectivism also holds up the assumption that humans are incapable of perfectly encapsulating reality in even our most complex depictions of it.

This fallibility, however, is not an excuse to abandon the often absolutist world of traditions and rituals. Instead, we should lean into those rituals, with a certain perspective. To define this important perspective, Alexander pulls from interpretations of the Judeo-Christian prophet Isaiah who taught that our religious rituals “lead us to take the steps required to repent.”¹⁷⁷ Here, traditions become reminders or the object of our reflection that can push us in our efforts to further develop ourselves. A far cry from the dry understanding of religious ritual most Americans hold, Protestant thinker Paul Tillich adds that “an act of faith...is a finite act with all the limitations of a finite act, and it is an act in which the infinite participates beyond the limitations of a finite act.”¹⁷⁸ This duality strongly resembles William James’s intermingling abstract and concrete. It also breathes new life into the abandoned, but richly productive vision of spiritual tradition that Isaiah put forth many centuries prior. Our acts are naturally grounded in the limits of human circumstances, yet still house immense power to connect us to the infinite and divine.

¹⁷⁶ Alexander, 2001, pp. 111, 122.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 114.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 117.

Jewish existentialism, which Alexander presents following Tillich's work, pulls these ideas further into the educational space, arguing that Jewish educative efforts should take what students have learned and transform it "into a *teaching (Lehre)* that becomes a guidepost for living."¹⁷⁹ Like Isaiah and Tillich, thinkers like Franz Rosenzweig and Parker Palmer push us to take the tangible, seemingly empty routines we find in organized religion and transform them into a personally meaningful "guidepost."¹⁸⁰ Here, perhaps more than anywhere else in Alexander's discussion of spirituality, it becomes clear that schools and other educational institutions have a key role to play. They are crucial in the effort to turn traditions into dynamic educative experiences. Towards the end of his discussion of objectivism, Alexander argues that we need to build new "sanctuaries" in which we can develop and practice this objective spirituality alongside its subjective and collective complements.¹⁸¹ Where better to begin building these centers of community than one of the strongest bastions for community in human life: our schools? Suzanne Rosenblith begins to imagine a similar transformation of our public schools as she analyzes the, often empty, religious pluralism that currently exists within them. Citing the objective, "epistemic" concerns as an important component of the education schools should hope to provide, she reaches towards a deeper form of pluralism, one that places a responsibility on us in addition to toothless tolerance.¹⁸²

Before moving into the ideas of Rosenblith and those of Robert Wuthnow, which will move us into our discussion of how intellectual and spiritual access can coexist within a school, we ought to take a few minutes to reflect on the dangerous, radical side of objective spirituality. In its most recognizable form, radicalism resembles the religious fundamentalism that Hofstadter

¹⁷⁹ Alexander, 2001, p. 119.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 119.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, p. 138.

¹⁸² Rosenblith, "Beyond coexistence: Toward a more reflective religious pluralism," 2008, pp. 108, 111.

details within the American cultural sphere. While Alexander's descriptions of fundamentalism mostly mirror Hofstadter's, he does introduce two novel forms of objective spirituality that are worthy of our attention, especially in the context of education. The first, "traditionalism," draws on the canonical movements like the 'great books' work of Robert M. Hutchins and others. The idea that truth should be found in the study of a selected set of texts, Alexander argues, often creates a concerning dogmatic reliance on an 'infallible' set of ideas that limits the scope of ethical deliberation. This is not to say that these books and works of art may not have cultural values, but such understandings should fit squarely into the collective rather than objective realm of our lives. Similarly, and secondly, he argues that the practice of "scientism" involves a dogmatic reliance on the principles of reason and scientific methodology as an infallible path to truth.¹⁸³ Alexander borrows from M. Scott Peck to argue that mature scientists recognize "that science may be as subject to dogmatism as any other religion."¹⁸⁴ In fact, any source of knowledge that is taken as solely authoritative and infallible can lead us into these pitfalls. As such, these specific concerns, canonical dogmatism and scientific dogmatism, are key concerns for schools to keep in mind both in general and as they look to dip their toes more into the work of spiritual development.

In some ways, these non-religious forms of objective spirituality may even be more dangerous than religious fundamentalism, since their potential to do harm and produce closed-mindedness is often overlooked and is couched in the higher pursuit of rationalism. The effects of unfettered objectivism remain potent in these areas, however, because each encourages some level of unquestioning acceptance. Unrelenting traditionalists lose a great deal of important insight and deliberative potential because they seek to place infallible limits around the sources

¹⁸³ Alexander, 2001, pp. 122, 125, 128.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 128.

of our knowledge and wisdom. There is value in differentiating between quality and less quality works, but such efforts become harmful when they become a limiting exercise. The same can be said for those who worship science as a pure search for truth, ignoring the fact that its human origins mean that there are human assumptions and biases built into the scientific method. This particular danger speaks to an overlooked component of modernism, which has taught many Americans to place reason and science above all else as sources of knowledge.

To fully appreciate the parallel Alexander is trying to establish, it is important to remember that he includes science and non-religious traditionalism under the umbrella of spirituality. Each, like religion, serves to help us transcend ourselves by way of a group identity and shared practices or beliefs. They are bound by their similar functions and goals. As such, it is important to maintain this well-rounded understanding of spirituality for all people throughout their educational experiences. To give non-religious children a pass from these kinds of reflection and study does damage not only to them but also to their classmates, particularly if this pass perpetuates a new or old spiritual divide in our country. It is no accident that Maria Montessori's fundamental human needs include a discussion of our spiritual needs. It would make little sense to speak of such needs as fundamental if they were not present in all humans, and it would make even less sense to deny some people access to spiritual nourishment in their education on the basis of their religious identity. What is left, then is to puzzle out how these complementary access goals, the intellectual and spiritual, can be realized in an educational setting and to further sketch out the stakes and benefits of such efforts.

Chapter 4: Intellectuospiritual Education

Educational efforts are always met with more demands than they might ever be able to fit into a child's schooling experience. These confines are a natural part of our efforts to grow, develop, and learn in our limited years on Earth. Much has been written, for example, about the problem of teaching history and deciding what to prioritize in the curriculum. All academic disciplines feel the crunch to some degree, even those areas of schooling that are not neatly categorized within disciplines, such as moral and health education. By no means am I looking to add to the already overstuffed list of tasks placed in front of schools and educators. In part, that is why I have tried to frame this argument around two familiar areas of interest that can be tailored to the particulars of a given school's situation. Intellectual and spiritual access are expansive ideas, each of which could easily make up a large portion of our educational careers. I hope, however, we can move past the ideas that the intellectual piece is satisfied by an introduction to scholarship and that the spiritual piece fits neatly within religious survey courses. Certainly, we might want to expose our young citizens to these kinds of experiences, but we should also aim, as I have argued here, for something more substantive and personal.

I am interested, here, in the philosophical shift that has been recommended by many writers, including those I have introduced so far, away from a hierarchical and impersonal education. Such a shift, these authors suggest, squares much more with those ideas we have used to build our democratic and republican ideals. It represents, in some ways, a recalibration that looks to pull our understanding of education back in line with our longstanding values. The effort to do so existed long before my writing this and will certainly need to continue long after it, but this fact should not discourage us. If anything, working through the same questions that bothered

our predecessors and should bother generations to come shows that we are engaging with a worthy exercise.

It is also worth noting that my interpretation of our founding values and the logic that follows from them will not be consistent with everyone's within our pluralistic society. If it did, and we had a continuous set of values from sea to shining sea, I suspect we would have solved many of our lingering problems long ago. If I was not completely confident, however, in the vision of education that I and others have seen through the ideas of these authors, I would have chosen a different interpretation. It seems quite unlikely to me that many would disagree with the argument that we should increase the accessibility of intellectualism and spirituality within our society. That said, there is certainly a lot we can learn from each other and the various perspectives on our nation's values and education that persist, even those that disagree with my argument for increased access.

With those disclaimers out of the way, there are still some lingering questions about how exactly these ambiguous ideals of intellectual and spiritual access might operate within a classroom or schooling community. Here, Rancière, Jefferson, and Alexander offer up at least three components worthy of our consideration. Though these components do not directly overlap or relate to one another, they are in no way contradictory or mutually exclusive. Together they represent a robust start in thinking about the practicability of these forms of access, one we can hopefully build on in our ongoing efforts to improve American education. Additionally, these aspects of intellectuospiritual education begin to answer some of the questions I have yet to satisfactorily address, such as what exactly to make of the separation between Church and State and how to balance the private and public life in this approach to education.

The first aspect, brought out by Rancière's redefinition of intellect, looks at the consequences of a truth that is constructed through discourse. Using analogies to poetry and linguistic translation, this strategy has a lot to say about how students should relate to each other, their instructors, and the content of their education. It advocates for a form of empathetic engagement that could be both practically fruitful and foundational for the formation of healthy educational communities. The second aspect, suggested by both Rancière and Jefferson, is equally crucial for the maintenance of these communities. A complete understanding of how our private and public world map onto our educational efforts allows students and teachers alike to maintain proper boundaries. It also answers some questions about both jurisdiction for curricular and administrative decisions and the educational obligations each of us carries. Among those obligations, Alexander adds, is a full reckoning with the role of religious and spiritual elements within the life of a school. This, along with a renewed sense of the responsibility schools owe to religious and spiritual institutions, represents the third and final aspect I will discuss here. In thinking about this final component, Nash and other authors help to deconstruct the wall between Church and State and redefine our understanding of that important relationship. Together, these three characteristics of intellectuospiritual education begin to open a window into how the ideas I have been playing with here might enter the day-to-day lives of educators and students.

Intellect in Discourse

The latter parts of Rancière's work are among his most ambitious. In them, he describes how our attention and liberty work in tandem with a James-like understanding of truth. Here, attention and liberty serve as the operative and intuitive parts of this vision, and it is worth further exploring the concept of truth they are working with. Remember that James's view of

truth looks at beliefs that serve a purpose in our lives and argues that they can be considered truths as long as they can be traced to verifiable realities.¹⁸⁵ Like Rancière, the trueness of something revolves around how useful it is in our efforts to relate to the world around us as well as its ability to be verified using our senses, historical precedent, and logical reasoning. While focusing on constructed truths, James pushes questions about absolute truth either to the side or beyond our ability to reckon with. For him, human finitude and fallibility are important assumptions. He is not interested in the idea that humans can wrap their minds around the absolute in any meaningful way. Instead, he focuses on how knowledge is founded on our personal store of ‘working truths’.¹⁸⁶

Rancière, as I mentioned, steps in from a similar angle, choosing to compare these working truths to a translation of experiences into poetic forms. In this model, translation becomes the focus of our activity. Rancière argues that we are all poets and that the poetry we make is our attempt to take in and record the ideas, lives, and thoughts of those around us. Just like a painter looking to express their experiences of reality, we make an earnest effort to record what we consider to be true. These expressions are also driven by our desire to have our experiences verified by others around us. Rancière refers to this as our “poetic virtue,” through which we try to “communicate our feelings and see them shared by other feeling beings.”¹⁸⁷ Not only does this communication and validation in the company of others make us feel less alone in our struggles and experiences, but it also serves as an anchor for comparing our perceptions and grounding our stances. It gives us both a home and a community.

¹⁸⁵ Rancière, 1991, p. 88.

¹⁸⁶ James, 1991.

¹⁸⁷ Rancière, 1991, p. 64.

Because of this, poetically constructed truth is a boon for efforts to build educational communities, especially in schools. The assumptions we bring to a process of translation create an atmosphere that is truly collegial and genuine. Contrast this with our current schooling efforts, often defined by cutthroat standardized testing, student comparison, and reward-based motivation. It is not hard to imagine the positive consequences that could result from this simple change in mindset. Not only could the influx of empathetic teachers and classmates improve students' mental health, but the community as a whole will very likely be able to accomplish much more through concerted effort than they ever could in competition with one another. If this sounds overly optimistic, that is because it is built on a view of human nature that assumes we each want to learn, to coexist peacefully, and have our needs met. Quite frankly, assuming anything else sets us up for failure before we even begin.

Educational thought that strikes this optimistic tone is often, rightfully, criticized for being too content with mediocrity and underachievement. These criticisms fall flat, however, for two reasons. The first is that systems based on relative measures of student performance are equally vulnerable to mediocrity. This may feel counterintuitive because we often think that cutthroat, competitive mindsets breed further success, but we should not be so quick to think this is an absolute. If we only care about our children scoring higher on certain metrics than their peers in other classrooms, districts, states, or countries, there is absolutely no floor. Nothing, in other words, is keeping us from a race to the bottom, where we remain on top of the rankings despite the absolute ability and achievement of our students' entering a free-fall. There is a lot to be said for the value of discipline and self-competition but measuring success on relative terms is no guarantee of improved performance. Attacking positive pedagogy because of the potential for

mediocre performance will always fall flat for that reason: alternative approaches have proven no more successful at creating our desired results.

The second point, however, speaks more substantively to the merits of Rancière's optimism. While he makes claims about coexistence, equal access, and collegiality, he never loses sight of the importance of hard work. The process of adequately expressing and verifying our thoughts is an inherently difficult task, one that pushes us well beyond what we currently demand of students in most settings. What is more, his vision exists in a larger societal context that depends on the efforts of people in order to survive. Effort is at a premium, even as he takes a 'soft' approach. Every element of a truly democratic and republican society asks for a relentless pursuit of our best selves. Democratic republicans cannot redistribute blame for their failures, since the response-ability and responsibility both fall squarely on each person's shoulders. Optimism only becomes problematic when accompanied by lower standards, a concern Rancière effectively distances himself from.

In part, this is why the idea of absolute truth is so uninteresting to Rancière. For him, like for James, absolute truth represents something distinct and entirely apart from discourse. Because of this, it also exists apart from the hard work that defines his vision of intellect. This is not to say that absolute truth makes us lazy, but it does demand a lot less from us than the truths that we construct together. Those ideas we work hard to express and the discursive truths they create, then, represent a mere translation of our experiences. Our translations, in turn, become meaningful when others put in the work to 'counter-translate' them.¹⁸⁸ This mere translation is far from insignificant. It is, rather, the closest that our innately imperfect human minds can come to absolute truth. Through translation, we invite these counter-translation processes that both

¹⁸⁸ Rancière, 1991.

develop our empathetic efforts and put them in terms of another person's experiences with reality.

The word translation encapsulates it perfectly. Our attempts to express our experiences with truth are like exchanging conversation through translation into various languages; the translation is never a pure representation of the original message and we inevitably take some creative license to try to understand what the other person meant to say. Our goal, regardless of the license we choose to take, is always trying to understand the experiences of others and the meaning they derive from those experiences. In this sense, our exchanges are not just potentially empathetic, but are inevitably so, because we are always working to consider the context of the other person and how it shapes their interactions with us.

To communicate like this, however, we need to assume that we have equal intellectual access to those who engage with our translations, otherwise they would not be able to understand our expressions. A painter who creates works with inaccessible meaning is bound for a lonely and futile life, assuming, as Rancière does, that we paint to have others understand our perspectives. Similarly, people who believe in 'high art' that requires a refined palette doom themselves to an exclusive and limited social realm. All true art is made for mutual enjoyment and is written in a language we are all able to speak. This mutuality and translation of experience is an innate part of the power art holds in our lives. If we embrace this view, it follows that educators should bring their students to the point where they feel confident echoing Rancière's declaration: "me too, I'm a painter."¹⁸⁹ This simple but potent expression boldly asserts that the speaker and hearer are equally capable of translating their experiences into the field of "intellect"

¹⁸⁹ Rancière, 1991, p. 67.

and counter-translating the works offered by others before them. It is a statement that recognizes our qualifications to partake in exchanges of human experience.

Maxine Greene offers a similar idea when she discusses a form of education that enables us to tap more fully into substantive forms of freedom, a term that we might connect tightly with the ideas of access Rancière provides. In her work, *The Dialectic of Freedom*, she touts the idea of a person's authorship, their freedom to construct a narrative without regard for the confines of predetermined roles or norms. Through interaction with the arts, particularly novels, students can become adept at observing the process of authorship (counter-translation) and thinking about their own authorial efforts (translation).¹⁹⁰ Greene, like Rancière, believes that the ability to grapple with our natality or newness, an idea borrowed from Arendt, will free us from the oppressive forces of the world as we see it. She writes about the need "to name obstacles" and take "action together to overcome" those obstacles.¹⁹¹ Rancière's principal concern, the hierarchical and limiting teacher-student relationship, is a prime example of the status quo Greene is imploring us to surpass. All it takes, it would seem, is a slight shift in how we approach education, focusing more acutely on discussions surrounding authorship in literature. Such activities, however, are not limited to English courses and would not be particularly useful if they were. All disciplines offer us the opportunity to think of their work in terms of how they help us understand our lives and the stagnant structures that exist around us.

Our modern approach to education misses a crucial opportunity to engage students with these opportunities. We communicate to students that they can become confident in their painting and translating abilities once they graduate, but, until that time, they should lack confidence in these abilities and should depend on the teacher to help them translate in bite-sized

¹⁹⁰ Maxine Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom* (New York City: Teachers College Press, 2018).

¹⁹¹ Greene, *The Dialectic of Freedom*, 2018, p. 101.

portions. Students who become too confident in their abilities too quickly, we tell ourselves, are likely to miss key steps along the way and enter the world with an incomplete foundation for adulthood. Therefore, adults are necessary primarily for keeping student confidence low so they can lay this foundation on the students' behalf. We will eventually let students loose on the world and give them their authorial freedom, but only once we think they are ready. There is, no doubt, some merit in this protectionism and its ability to ground students in the reality of their inexperience or counterbalance their overconfidence. There are many times students might be too cavalier in their attempts to take on projects they have not prepared for. In these times, cautious warnings can be important, especially if the student might find themselves in danger due to their bullishness. This caution becomes dangerous, however, when we use a student's lack of experience to justify a limiting and hierarchical view of intellectual access. Our current system has crossed this line and moved from helpful caution that guides student opportunities to an oppressive limitation within those opportunities.

This limiting view is both unhealthy and dehumanizing, and it is far from the only system of education we can construct. In contrast with the explicators and facilitators of traditional instruction, Rancière's ideal instructor occupies two roles: interrogator and verifier.¹⁹² The first role involves demanding responses from students and encouraging them to articulate their experiences. As the word "interrogator" suggests, we can accomplish this most fruitfully by asking the students questions and holding them accountable for answering them fully. These questions should not be simple exam-style questions with cut and dry answers students can memorize. They should, instead, be deeper, more meaningful questions that require the student to provide complex explanations and justifications of an idea they have or agree with.

¹⁹² Rancière, 1991, p. 29.

Teachers do not always need to be the sole questioner, however; students can gain just as much from questioning each other. This model of interrogation brings us back to the fundamental assumption that students are capable of responding as full human beings. In the process of pushing students in this way, the instructor also exposes them to a world beyond the local, which can stretch their curiosities further than they otherwise might reach on their own. Regardless of who is asking the question, the important factor is that the emphasis remains on the student as a complete person at the center of their learning experience. Rancière calls us to insert this respect for students, where before we might have considered them to be objects in the process of human completion. The instructor's role, in the process of interrogation, then becomes the act of a fellow complete person working alongside the student and spurring them on in their efforts to develop more fully.

Working in tandem with interrogation, the verification process looks to further hold students accountable. Here, they are accountable not to the truthfulness of their responses, as the classic use of "verification" might suggest, but to the effort to remain "always searching" and attentive.¹⁹³ The unrelenting desire to learn replaces 'correctness' as the ultimate value in the education process. A student might answer a math question wrong a dozen times but as long as they continue working to get closer to the truth, then they meet the demands of verification. The only punishable offense is inattention or laziness. Students take on a new life within this approach as it asks them to relentlessly reflect on and articulate their observations. No corner of education is beyond their reach in the right circumstances and with the right amount of hard work. The latter point is key. Rancière does not argue that his approach destroys the natural barriers to accessing higher reaches and deeper depths of knowledge. Those necessary

¹⁹³ Rancière, 1991, p. 33.

intermediate steps are very much alive. He recognizes that much of what humans can know is cumulative and that students will need to learn the foundational material before moving to more complicated ideas. Where his approach differs from the current one is its emphasis on dialogue and authorship as well as its removal of the unnatural limitations we often construct when we have a limited view of intellectual access.

In addition to the other shifts in thinking at play here, this model also gets rid of the idea that teachers are a repository of correct answers. Instead of being a knowledge bank, teachers take up a position as fellow humans pushing their students to search for truths and the realities that ground their conclusions. Rancière's teachers retain their professionalism and authority as long as they pride themselves on their ability to expand curiosities, provoke responses, and hold students accountable to constant effort. Their profession becomes one of action, respect for the humans they work alongside, and mastery in the art of nurturing educational relationships. This role, as I mentioned, also represents a stark departure from our traditional conception of teaching, which emphasizes the ability to bestow knowledge, hold students at a distance, and maintain an intellectual boundary between the two parties. As stark as the contrast may be, the distinguishing features of this new professionalism bring us a great deal closer to our democratic and republican ideals than traditional manners of teaching ever could. Additionally, this professional role works in conjunction with Greene's vision of empathetic, narrative, and discourse-based courses to give us a clear sense of the basic values and goals teachers should have for their classrooms.

Personal Methods, Civic Goals

This increased personalism within educational efforts reminds us of the importance of carefully defining the limits of our public and private lives, especially as they relate to schooling. A clearer definition, here, also plays a crucial role in understanding how an education operates within the context of our democratic republican government. Having a grasp of how the private-public relationship informs our obligations, abilities, authorities, and interrelations should be an integral part of American citizenship. The immense task Rancière and James present to us, in working to take ownership of our democratic republic, marks a shift away from how we currently understand citizenship. It is a shift that demands more from us than we are accustomed to giving. Where before we might have deferred certain components of our civic duties to politicians, Rancière echoes Jefferson and calls us to take up these responsibilities ourselves. The onus for sustaining our system of government shifts away from experts or from the state and into our hands. Much of our life, then, becomes a complicated dance between these private obligations and the public responsiveness required by democracy.

The need for this private-public understanding is also found in our preparation for engagement with public life, understood broadly as our education. The discourse begins with the fact that, in a democratic republic, we have the power and the obligation to take advantage of our educational opportunities. We are, as I have been saying, both response-able and responsible. In this sense, our education becomes an individual and private concern. Its methods are personally determined and require our full ownership of the process. Teachers can propose activities that might be helpful, can provide crucial guidance, and can even model those elements of an education that might be most helpful. They cannot, however, complete an education for the student. Democratic republican students, in particular, are solely accountable for choosing what

they will do in their education and for taking the initiative to actually do those things. We endanger our form of government if we hand off this responsibility to others, search for shortcuts, or otherwise try to shirk the necessary preparation for citizenship. Each of us alone can cultivate the dynamic qualities we need to become a useful party in discourse and an effective check against tyrannical government. Rancière and our republican tendencies push us to emancipate ourselves and to recognize our equal capabilities, but emancipation and capability bring with them responsibility and relentless hard work. Put differently, though the methods may be private, freedom in a democratic republic still never means freedom from effort, and educational autonomy is no different.

Those interested in the intellectuospiritual approach that I am discussing in this work should not neglect this important form of educational privacy. It affords students security in the methodological and effortful decisions that they make. No one can or should mandate specific ways they must apply themselves throughout their interactions with schools, except of course when the safety of others is at stake. Even further, we should make an effort to instill this sense of privacy and agency in students early and often. I can remember countless times early in my education where I would finish a project and rush to the teacher to hear what the next errand on the list was. No one should doubt that completing tasks quickly and correctly provided me with a great deal of confidence in my abilities, but without the teacher's next proscribed activity that confidence would have quickly vanished. Not until much later did my athletic experiences and introduction to the process of 'intellectual scholarship' give me the sense that I both could and should take ownership of my own educational processes. I had coaches who would drill into us that perpetual question: 'what are you doing when no one's watching?' Not what are you doing from the list of requirements I have presented. What are you doing by yourself, for yourself, with

no one else caring or holding you accountable? This, to me, is the epitome of an education with private and responsible methods.

The first of Rancière's intellectual engines, expression, can only truly be achieved if students are free to respond however they would like to those things that present questions and curiosity. It should be the verification process, rather than artificial curricular boundaries, that places checks on their free-wheeling expressions. Here, however, the educational process quickly begins to sound flaky and free-spirited and no longer rules out the dangerous possibility of homeschooling or isolated private academies. Even homeschooling and private academies can provide all of the necessary ingredients for an education that respects the private methods of a student and gives them the freedom to explore their intellectual potential. Expression and verification can both occur with as much effectiveness in private tutoring as they can anywhere else. What they lack, however, is an understanding of how important and central a public orientation is to democratic republican education.

At the same time that we recognize a student's freedom and privacy, we also see that the larger public community takes an acute interest in ensuring our preparedness. On a basic level, well-equipped citizens are necessary for its survival. Specifically in the context of a democratic republic, the education of citizens is both a means of preservation and, as a consequence, a public concern. Because of this, any person hoping to partake in the political life of a healthy republic must regard the education of their fellow citizens as equally important to their own. There are no people in the entirety of the human species that are more deserving of their education than any others. This idea seems radical in our modern, consumerist American framework because, plainly stated, it is. We may be accustomed to regard education as a consumer product that we can exploit. We privatize it in all of the wrong ways, aiming to use it

to serve our needs or preserve certain ideological ends. Education, as a marketed product, becomes more of a pointed weapon than a blossoming fuel cell. We become, understandably, protectionist, nativist, and individualistic, but the nature of our republic begs us to avoid that view. Privacy belongs to the students and remains in the methodology. The goals of our education push us to look outward towards the public.

We often take Lincoln's famous idea that a divided house cannot survive to mean two distinct sides in opposition to each other. Pictures of simple political division are so ever-present to us, that I think we miss an equally important interpretation of this idea. A government that relies on the responsibility and efforts of its citizens cannot survive if the citizens do not want to live in community. Our American house cannot afford to be divided into more than three hundred million pieces. Arendt discusses this danger in her analysis of totalitarian tendencies, pointing out that the 'atomization' of a society creates the belief that community is either not possible or not worth the effort it might require.¹⁹⁴ Not only, then, is the education of republican citizens a prerequisite to the health of that republic, but some semblance of public- or civic-mindedness is crucial as well. The goal of this education is primarily the maintenance of our government and community with that community ultimately being a tool for the public good. Our republicanism calls us to recognize our education as a vital tool for perpetuating the public we have established, even as we recognize the equally necessary privacy. The form of citizenship that it supports involves recognizing both our unique educational authority, our privacy, and the civic importance of our education, our public-ness. In this sense, all education in a republic is civic education, not because it directly concerns civic participation, but because the motivating force for that education is the civic good. This is the dual demand we accept in establishing a

¹⁹⁴ Arendt, 1976, p. 578.

democratic republic: (1) sole responsibility for and freedom over our personal growth and (2) dedication of that growth to the good of our neighbors.

If we were to argue, instead, that the goals of our education are private, we would be inviting selfishness into a system of governance that relies on interdependence. A republic could not very easily find a direction that serves the public good if each person was only concerned with their own interests. Several elements of our society already mirror this paranoid market orientation to some degree. A level of social orientation and interest in affairs beyond our selves is crucial for accomplishing a well-rounded image of public wellbeing and democratic republican education. This is not to say that a citizen cannot be *self-full*¹⁹⁵—concerned with both our self and the public in a non-exclusive manner—but rather to point out that the success of our community relies on our willingness to mind the public interest. The noticeable American tendency towards isolationism and self-reliance, here, is an unhealthy outgrowth of responsibility. A republic demands citizens that are responsible, but not to the extreme that they neglect the very communal world over which the republic hangs. This is the reason a deeply personal form of education like that which Rancière promotes cannot primarily serve private goals in a democratic republic. We should still reach for our personal aspirations, but they remain secondary or incidental to those necessary for the public good. It is this, too, that counteracts some of the apprehensions we might have with student freedom. Seemingly the sole requirement for them in their education, though there may be others as well, is that they ultimately make use of their freedom for the public good, rather than their own narrow interests. More often than not, in a well-run republic, the two will coincide.

¹⁹⁵ The difference between being selfish and self-full is, in and of itself, a very worthy topic for further discussion and investigation, particularly in a society with strong individualistic tendencies like our own.

The methodology, unlike the orientation, must remain private, or else we risk lapsing into the explicative forms of education Rancière so opposes. Just as an explicative teacher cannot wield their expertise without taking something away from the student, a system of public education cannot hang experts or uniform practices over local communities without implicitly attacking the authority that locality holds. The way the public can express its concern for education is by allowing it to run through localized authorities and providing resources that are supportive instead of mandated. Dotts reminds us that Jefferson's concept of 'state-sponsored' education "meant only that government would help fund education without determining the curriculum."¹⁹⁶ This is the heart of the democratic-republican tension as it concerns education: finding a healthy middle-ground between public overreach and private isolationism. Not surprisingly, it mirrors the polarized political friction in modern American life, but with one key difference: increased recognition of the need for responsibility. In turning to James, we find a solution that rests within the political tension, encapsulated in an education of private methods and public goals. Tangibly this might resemble a robust system of public schools, controlled locally, and deferring to the agency of people, a system that in some ways resembles Jefferson's vision for education.

By laying out a vision of intellect that frees us to see equal accessibility and to take up our civic burdens, Rancière and James inform educational thinking both on this, institutional level and on the interpersonal level mentioned previously. Our freedom to take ownership of the educational processes welcomes an institutional system that simultaneously demands local autonomy over the mechanics and deliberative deference to public goals. At the interpersonal level, it challenges us to cultivate a cultural atmosphere that deconstructs capacity-based

¹⁹⁶ Dotts, 2015, p. 5.

hierarchies and regards all humans as equally endowed with potential. It pushes teachers into a new professional role, one that provides authority justified by something more than fictitious superiority. Most importantly, it reimagines what is possible for students, both in their personal growth and in their ability to take up an active role in society. This educational vision, as it frees us to see the possibilities that rest within us, paves the way for a society that is more empathetic and truer to its democratic and republican ideals. It challenges us to move from the isolationist pseudo-republic we have developed toward the authentically communal democratic republic that our founding generation dreamed we might create. This grand vision of education is short on details but ripe with actionable ideas, particularly in connection with this private-public definition.

Schools as Sanctuaries

The final aspect I will discuss presents itself as an important extension of this struggle to define the private-public. Keeping with James's and Alexander's ideas about the importance of the spiritual in shaping complete people, we are left with questions about the specific role schools can and should play in connecting with the spiritual. For Alexander, this role appears most fruitfully as a dynamic embrace of spiritual questions and development. What is often taken as a deeply personal element of our lives, religious and spiritual identity, is perhaps better understood along the private-public lines previously mentioned. Namely, our spiritual development is entirely within our scope of control but should be maintained with an eye toward the public good. Students, in other words, should be free to pursue their spiritual growth however they might like but need to do so with unselfish and publicly oriented motives. Our civic obligations do not stop at the Church or Mosque doors any more than our religious obligations

stop at the school doors. This approach to thinking about spirituality within an educational setting has one immediate benefit: it actually squares perfectly with the idea that schools should not tip the scales on religious questions. Arguing that students remain in control of the processes and content of their education greatly minimizes the possibility of indoctrination or religious biases. Instead, the teachers and students enter the religiously neutral educational space as particular human beings engaging together openly with what their religious and spiritual lives mean to them and how they connect with the other educational content at hand.

This is not the sole mechanism at play in an education of this form, however. Alexander describes a substantive role that schools might be able to have in the religious and spiritual development of students. The process of turning customs and rituals into ‘guideposts for living’ offers these educational communities a chance to connect with the religious organizations that often exist wholly outside of the world of schooling. Schools must work within and for their communities, and to pretend that religious institutions are not a part of that community is both reckless and irresponsible. By working indiscriminately with all religious and spiritual communities, they might also hope to avoid the charge that they are violating the sacred separation between churches and the state. To be clear, I am not arguing here that schools should begin holding religious services in their buildings, nor am I advocating for some vacuous and bland spiritual ‘winter concert’ approach. There are no specific actions or programs, in fact, that need to occur to meet the requirement of this intellectuospiritual approach. Rather schools need to be open to potential ways teachers and students might engage with the religious and spiritual life in their community.

There are opportunities here for schools to help make the traditions and customs that are so valuable to many Americans, in and outside of their religious lives, meaningful and

educationally relevant. Where students are currently trained to compartmentalize their lives and view their religious experience as divorced from the world of education, this alternative approach might open up new and important connections. This is especially the case for history courses, which frequently feel the pressure to handle inevitable religious topics with care. It is not limited, however, to discussions about the role of the Catholic church in our political history, for example. Students might be able to think with critical reflection about the discipline that fasting instills, the economic and moral principles behind charity and frugality, the role that images and names play in shaping our discourse, and the rhetorical strategies common in religious ceremonies. If we begin to think, as Alexander argues we should, of schools as spiritual sanctuaries, we come closer to an understanding that learning is both sacred and intensely relevant. We can connect even non-religious customs like the pledge of allegiance or fourth of July fireworks to deeper sources of meaning and purpose. In a world that seems more disconnected and arbitrary by the day for many people, these are worthy, though admittedly challenging, goals.

An additional challenge arises in these efforts, felt more sharply here than in any other part of our lives, about what to make of the different sects, denominations, and other religious organizations that make up the body of learners that might coexist within a school. This diversity immediately calls to mind the often-cited idea of pluralism. America has grown to be a country that must constantly face the concerns that come with housing diverse religious, ethnic, ideological, and cultural identities. It is a problem that we are better served leaning into than leaning away from, particularly on issues as historically divisive as race and religion. In the process of embracing the spiritual and religious development of their students, educational communities are uniquely situated to act as a public sphere where these kinds of tensions can be

addressed. The knee-jerk response may well be to apply a thick humanist gloss to the entirety of our situation and to espouse the idea that ‘we are all one’ or that ‘we are more alike than we are different.’ With a reminder of our human commonality in place, we might expect a greater degree of conflict resolution and good grace towards one another.

For Suzanne Rosenblith, though, it is dangerous to have this expression of similarity as our sole focus.¹⁹⁷ We are, in fact, quite different in many substantive ways. To ignore this fact is to invalidate a large portion of what brings someone their identity. Robert Wuthnow, working from the same ideas as Rosenblith, extends a comparison between religious pluralism and interreligious couples that helps demonstrate this point. He argues that couples where each person holds a distinct set of beliefs will struggle to find a healthy, balanced relationship if they simply gloss over the important areas of difference in their beliefs. It is akin to slapping duct tape on a leaking pipe instead of working to permanently mend it. Instead, they need to “negotiate with one another over an extended period of time” to work out compromises and draw important lines in the sand.¹⁹⁸ Without beginning from a firm sense of the contours and priorities of the other, people in these relationships cannot expect to find harmony in the face of life’s challenging questions. Many of us can probably remember being in or observing relationships that lacked this principled compromise. They quickly take a toll on both people and place a severe strain on the relationship itself. In time, the people involved are left with a choice between beginning to take seriously the work they had previously neglected or ending the relationship, with the only other option being remaining in near-constant and painful disagreement.

In essence, this half-developed interreligious relationship is what we have collectively been accepting in our national relationships. Rosenblith, partly building on Wuthnow’s ideas,

¹⁹⁷ Rosenblith, 2008, p. 112.

¹⁹⁸ Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity*, 2007, p. 304.

recognizes that educational institutions need to operate in the same manner a healthy couple might: keying in on important differences instead of glossing them over.¹⁹⁹ She and Wuthnow make a distinction between religious pluralism that tries to instill empty tolerance and that which is interpersonal and relational.²⁰⁰ This is where Rosenblith invokes Wunthow's concept of "reflective pluralism" as an alternative to the emptier forms of pluralism that dominate many schools.²⁰¹ Reflective pluralism, as alluded to before, moves us to pair our wishy-washy tolerance with a strong sense of responsibility in how we truly respect others.²⁰² Much like Jefferson's ideas concerning freedom and responsibility, it argues that we show respect through an active process.²⁰³ A form of respect that merely looks to coexist with others falls short because it refuses to acknowledge the real, substantive differences that shape our unique ways of life.²⁰⁴ How, in good conscience, can you claim to fully respect someone if you have never taken the time to work through and understand the core of their personal beliefs? Yet, all too often, this is what we do with one another on several different fronts. It is in this discussion that Wunthow and Rosenblith present a needle-threading solution to the problems Alexander poses about pluralistic attitudes, especially in the context of religion.

Within the newly anointed sanctuary schools, students must take the time to learn about the particulars of their peers, as fellow human beings. Beyond the traditional religious survey course, they need to ask those questions that spark their curiosity and probe the differences between the various traditions their classmates hold. Not only does this further hone the critical, reflective, expressive, and empathetic skills of young students, but it will offer the chance to

¹⁹⁹ Rosenblith, 2008.

²⁰⁰ Rosenblith, 2008. Wuthnow, 2007, p. 304.

²⁰¹ Rosenblith, 2008, p. 116.

²⁰² Rosenblith, 2008. Wuthnow, 2007.

²⁰³ Wuthnow, 2007.

²⁰⁴ Rosenblith, 2008.

build more robust community as well. Some parents may worry that this kind of questioning might lead their children away from the faith they were raised on. This may well be a valid concern, but it is not without an answer and is, in any case, a price to be paid for living in a society like America. We must, once and for all, rid ourselves of the illusion that life in our country comes free of charge and sacrifice. Democratic republican citizens are not called to be willfully ignorant of the costs needed to maintain our way of life but rather to understand and shoulder a portion of those burdens dutifully and willingly.

That said, the concern of these parents does raise the important point that we should take care to ensure that students do not take their native traditions lightly. Certainly, there needs to be freedom for children and adults to leave their traditions for those they feel more closely aligned with, but our democratic republic will be weakened if we allow ourselves to develop a ‘quitters attitude’. Too often religious differences have been grounds, particularly within the Christian church, to break off and start a new sect or a new institution instead of putting in the diligent work to correct the issues within the existing framework. No one should be asked to remain somewhere where they feel unsafe, but steps must also be taken to push for change from within rather than demanding it from without. In part, by beginning to tackle religious issues within a unified public institution like our schools, we are modeling this very practice for students to evaluate and emulate. If we continue running away from these difficult tasks and reforms, our students will take notice and may never do anything but run in their own lives.

Ultimately, the ideas Rosenblith and Wuthnow present concerning reflective pluralism do the double work of placing a serious demand on both multiculturalism and religious institutions. They see our tendency to avoid complicated issues by either isolating ourselves or oversimplifying, and thus cheapening, significant religious and spiritual bodies. In response, they

call multiculturalists to ground themselves in the concrete, objective ideas that bring a fullness and uniqueness to various religions. They acknowledge the messiness this approach will probably bring about, but enduring the mess is a necessary step if we ever want to move beyond superficial forms of respect. On the other hand, they call religious groups to more fully embrace the need for pluralism and multiculturalist sentiments.²⁰⁵ They do so knowing full well the challenging implications this might have for deeply held convictions. For each side, reaching for this harmony demands a good deal of work and a willingness to sit in the messiness, or even danger, of adopting reflective pluralistic principles. In an American context, however, this responsible form of pluralism is the most feasible and productive response to an increasingly diverse nation. It offers us the opportunity to truly strive for a realization of the American experiment, the cohesive body of factions our founding generation dreamed we might be. More than that, it is a necessary step, in tandem with the other aspects discussed here, if we hope to strive for a culture and educational system that increases our perceived intellectual and spiritual access.

²⁰⁵ Rosenblith, 2008. Wuthnow, 2007.

Conclusion

We began, if you recall, with some brief thoughts about the nature of life in a democratic republic, where people are given the responsibility to guard the liberties and futures of their society. Thinkers from Jefferson, and even before, down through the present day have emphasized the important consequences this way of organizing has for our systems of education. The most important of these is that we must learn how to be autonomous thinkers within a larger body and tradition. In short, we must learn to be intellectuals. We are not, however, called to be the kinds of intellectuals we are used to thinking about: well-off professor-types living mostly on our country's coasts and spending most of their days in libraries. That definition, in addition to being grossly oversimplified, has helped create numerous divisions in our political, cultural, and educational worlds over the years. Understanding intellect in that way excludes the lion's share of our population from the act of being intellectual and, in the process, paints it as a luxury. In essence, we have developed a model that is anything but the necessity our government suggests it should be. To begin to see intellect as both necessary and popularly accessible, then, we need to strip it down to its barest elements, elements most fully captured by the two-step formula Rancière describes. This simple process, expression and verification, is one that interrupts the feelings of hierarchy and exclusivity that often accompany the idea of intellect. It opens the floodgates, in a way, to a fuller democratic republican society, one occupied by fully capable and well-rounded citizens.

It does so, as Arendt helps us understand, by replacing the pseudo-confidence that dominates American discourse with a genuine belief in our self-efficacy. Arendt discusses the danger of people who do not think they are capable of keeping themselves company in their

ideas, who turn to ideologies and cable news platforms to guide their actions.²⁰⁶ A quick survey of your close friends and acquaintances might reveal many people in our country, and the larger world, who would clearly recognize the centrality of both confidence and insecurity in educational experiences. Whether it is your nephew throwing up his hands because he will never be able to solve these darn math problems or the countless multitudes who claim they are ‘just not artistic people,’ much has been said about the close connection between our schooling and confidence. The crisis of confidence is as real in America as it has ever been, and it goes beyond the lack of trust we have for our media. This crisis cuts to the heart of our identities. Throughout the process of writing this work, I had numerous conversations with close friends and family who expressed a belief that they could ‘never write that much’ or that ‘those kinds of readings are just too philosophical for me.’ To the unsympathetic reformer, these remarks might sound like whining or excuses for laziness. The task before us, however, is not to shame ourselves into thinking that we can accomplish great feats. Instead, we need to show both the beauty and approachability of those feats, particularly the greatest feat many in the Western world can conceive: democratic republicanism.

This is where Rancière and James found us. A synthesis of their ideas, supported no doubt by many others, revealed an intellect that is *essential*, *inclusive*, and *intuitive*. The first described to us how fundamental acts of intellect are in our daily lives. Each of us, from the moment of our birth, is reliant on the same educational process of stating and validating ideas. It is how we learn our native language from our caregivers and create impressive works of scholarship, as well as everything in between. Because of this, it is a process we all are capable of engaging with. Not only that, but each of us is capable of engaging to an equal extent and with

²⁰⁶ Arendt, 1976.

an equal effect. This is the second quality, and it is where equality and, less evidently, liberty become crucial forces. We are liberated, Rancière argues, by the equality and confidence that a welcoming sense of intellect can provide for us. Only, however, by making room for and embracing intuitive processes, like those that often go hand in hand with the artistic qualities of language, can we fully tap into the potential available to us in this intellect. Americans, as I have argued, and people in general, find as much meaning in customs, traditions, and gut feelings as they do in cold-hard reason. Intuition, then, becomes the third key quality of the rich intellectual life Rancière is trying to establish.

This is also where spiritual issues fully entered our line of thinking. Built around non-rational qualities like faith and tradition, our spiritual and religious traditions not only need to find room in our intellectual pursuits but in the larger body of work in schools. To enable this, Alexander provides us with an expanded understanding of what spiritual life involves, broadening the term to encompass both religious and non-religious forms of transcendent community and individual activities. This kind of understanding flies in the face of the role spirituality has traditionally played in America, that of a narrow set of occasionally fundamentalist religious organizations barred from interfering with the business of the state. While compartmentalizing our public and spiritual lives might often be the healthiest decision for our culture, we should also understand that there are important ways we can and need to develop holistic collaboration as well, something we have been avoiding for far too long.

Here is where educational questions really take hold and push us towards an intellectuospiritual understanding of what we can achieve if we take our founding values and obligations seriously. An education system that prioritizes intellectual and spiritual access, found through the synthesis of many great works and ideas provides us with that chance to return to our

roots. Though this approach does not provide any concrete steps, I have explored three central ideas connected to the life of schools that begin to nod towards practical application. The first focused on the development of intellect through discourse both with a student's peers and with their teachers. Drawing, in many ways, on the same ideas that have inspired thinkers like Maxine Greene, this approach to truth-seeking and personal development aims to teach us through empathetic and active engagement with each other's stories. It is seemingly Arendtian in its focus on other people as particular beings from whom we can learn. This shift may not seem radical, but it becomes more drastic when we consider the often cutthroat competition that makes up much of American education. Where we currently have an impersonal and isolating form of interpersonal competition, the ideas explored here, through the lens of intellectuospiritualism, offer us the chance to find a deeply connected collegiality in our growth and development.

This, of course, sets up the need for clearer distinctions between the public and private world, as does any effort that brings humans into closer contact with each other. By establishing a proposal for education that has inherently personal methods and inherently civic goals, intellectuospiritualism helps us define the contours of this private-public relationship. The ultimate say in educational decisions belongs to the individual student, but their public orientation ensures that they cannot simply pick whatever is most convenient for their ease or personal preferences. We can take this to say that no curricular decisions should be made for the students or we can see it as merely meaning that we should make more room for student curiosities in the curriculum. The main problem with the latter, I would argue, is that we have been trying to do something to this effect for the better part of a century. It may, indeed, be time for a more radical approach, one that trusts students to make informed decisions about what they study, using their interests as a guide. With any luck, a trusting philosophy that values

responsibility in this way might begin to permeate the wider culture and bring us closer to our democratic republican ideals.

The final discussion, which I connected with this private-public relationship, concerned the idea that schools can be regarded as sanctuaries, places where students can actively engage with and explore their faiths and spiritualities. Our present desire to keep the divine out of the schoolhouse may come from good intentions and strong reasoning, but there is no denying that it has firmly separated our religious or spiritual lives from our educational lives, to the detriment of each. It is rare, nowadays, to find anything other than a dry survey course within the context of religious organizations. Mainstream religious instruction, undeniably an important partner to larger educational projects for those who subscribe to religious beliefs, currently does little to reinforce the importance of empathy, mutual respect, critical thinking, and intellect more generally. This is to say nothing of the state of spiritual instruction, which often feels more like a scattershot than any sort of serious endeavor. By bringing schools and the religious-spiritual world into closer connection, we might be able to capture more of the rigor that is so important in educational projects. Our efforts to view schools more as sanctuaries, however, require a special form of pluralism, like the one offered up by Rosenblith and Wuthnow. This pluralism places more demands on us than the traditional, soft idea of pluralism. It asks us, in short, to truly do our due diligence in understanding what makes someone tick. By doing this, it creates an intersection between the private and public that blends discursive truth together with the intensely meaningful activities of our spiritual and religious lives.

These potential extensions of an intellectuospiritual approach are far from its only offerings, but they do begin to give a sense of how we can run with these ideas. Far from an entirely novel way of understanding education, it is my hope that through these reflections on a

number of well-regarded authors and ideas I have presented a convincing case that spiritual and intellectual inaccessibility are serious issues in American education. Our children deserve to train and develop themselves in an educational community that instills confidence in their abilities and recognizes every area of their life as a potential source of growth. A well-known neuroscience misconception argues that we only make use of ten percent of our brain. Though this idea is false, if we continue to proceed with a limited understanding of intellect that makes use of only ten percent of our collective intellectual power, we may turn this into a reality.

Combine this with the countless missed opportunities we allow when we exclude religion and spirituality from our educational conversations and a stark picture emerges. American education is underachieving in ways that have been previously identified but have seemingly escaped our focus. This mediocrity is driven by a political right that pushes for standardized tests, laughs at the idea that curiosity should drive learning, and fights for the ability to opt out of our public educational communities. It comes, in equal measure, from a political left that imposes an educational restraining order on religious questions, champions relativistic notions, and compromises high standards for student comfort. I am not looking to paint our political affinities with a broad brush, but rather to gesture to the ideas each side of the political aisle has contributed to the detriment of our national intellectuospiritual health. The path to overcoming our mediocrity is not found through leaning to one side or the other. Doing that would, once again, leave too much on the table and handicap our children. Instead, the path forward comes through embracing a Jamesian pragmatism that constructs new understandings of responsibility, response-ability, liberty, equality, and truth in education, remembering, at the same time, James's commitment to the importance of religion.

As to whether we can actually achieve these dreams in our public schooling system, it seems important to note, as Hofstadter does, that these tensions have existed for a long time and likely will not find a simple resolution in the near future. Presenting what I have done here as anything more than a synthesis of great ideas about education, flavored with my personal preferences and academic affinities, would be irresponsible. I will leave the development of practical models of schooling to those who have dedicated their lives to teaching and curricular development. They are better suited to deal with the complexities that result from the straightforward but, no doubt, challenging philosophy recapped here. It is my hope, in dipping my toes into the river of discourse that has existed on these issues for generations, that this river will continue to rage with all the passions and muses we are capable of bringing to the table. Any less would be a disservice to ourselves, our children, and future generations, not to mention the countless thinkers who have dedicated themselves to getting to this point.

Our individual obligations are not limited to those interested in studying educational ideas, however. What stands before us all has likely always stood before us in varying degrees of plainness: the reality that we have work to do to fully realize our democratic and republican ideals. The arguments laid forth by James and Rancière call us to reengage with this reality, especially as we stand in divisive and hostile times. How better to bridge the divides that slow our responses to global pandemics and racial tensions than to reconceptualize our view of discourse and our view of each other. The authors I have engaged with here provide a next step in that direction, but they would be among the first to acknowledge that there is, and will always be, more work to be done. That is part of the beauty of this process and of the great American experiment. It will never be perfect, nor will it ever be complete, but it will always offer us the opportunity to realize a better world for ourselves and those around us. By no means will we be

able to make great strides in becoming more democratic, liberated, and considerate of each other overnight, but we can and should resolve to do the work, nonetheless. We are privileged to belong to an intellectual and cultural tradition that openly recognizes our ability to constantly be at work. People across the world protest, fight, and die for the ideals that shape a democratic republic, ideals that our founding generation laid on the table for us to pick up and run with.

The path forward is, as I have said, simple but challenging. On an individual level, it begins with enacting this view of equal intellectual and spiritual capacity in our personal interactions and relationships. Constant awareness of those hierarchical phrases, jokes, and comments that can sneak into our conversations is crucial. So too are our efforts to reform our places of business, our religious institutions, our local political landscapes, and, most critically, our schools. The tendency to look for and to exploit opportunities for advancement above others is arguably an innate human instinct. The principles of a democratic republic, however, ask us to fight those instincts at the same time we are fighting our urge to pass our political power onto representatives and institutions. These smaller-scale efforts, combined with continuing theoretical and practical work reflecting on our democratic and republican efforts, are crucial in working to bring our country closer to the best society it can possibly be. The accountability and deliberative discourse we can open up through these processes will not only bring us closer to that ideal but will reestablish a trend of reflective hard work that our founding generation looked to set in motion years ago. It will renew and reengage the ceaseless American activities that at one point made our system of governance the envy of the world. What is left for each of us is to realize the possibility and to take action.

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