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Liberal Education and Self-Fulfilment

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Abstract. Liberal education is a value-loaded notion which raises questions regarding the conditions and limits of promoting self-fulfilment within a broader conception of justice. The communitarian critique of rights-based liberalism reveals a tension between, on one hand, the maximizing, normative conception of liberal education and, on the other, the limited mandate of social and political institutions to foster its achievement. The aim of this paper is to argue against a minimalist conception of liberal education, as it seems to derive from rights-based liberalism, especially political liberalism. Drawing on the writings of John Rawls and Michael Oakeshott, some insights into the purposes of liberal education are identified and discussed. Nevertheless, although both authors suggest that self-fulfilment, as it could be promoted by liberal education, is an ideal worth cultivating, their vantage points do not help clarify the conceptual framework in which self-fulfilment could be coherently addressed. The last section of the paper attempts to argue in favour of interpreting liberal education within the conceptual framework of aspiration-fulfilment and capacity-fulfilment, as it was developed by Alan Gewirth.

Key words: liberal education, communitarianism, Rawls, Oakeshott.

In his book, *Liberalism, Communitarianism and Education*, Patrick Keeney argued that rights-based liberalism cannot accommodate a meaningful conception of liberal education (Keeney 2007, 4), mainly because its defence of individual freedom presupposes neutralism among various conceptions of the good, and an ethics that fails to acknowledge cultural particularism, as well as the role of community in individual development. Drawing mostly on the works of Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor, Keeney endorses the communitarian critique of liberalism and argues that abstract (asocial) individualism, the idea that all human needs, including those related to cooperation, could be translated into rights, and the separation of moral concepts from political considerations are not compatible with the ideal of a liberal education. The latter would entail with necessity a hierarchy of standards regarding what makes a good life, and, consequently, human flourishing and well-being could be properly addressed only within a fuller account of community and history. Moreover, since moral agency cannot be separated from the shared values which depend on one's being a part of a historically and politically determined community, human flourishing, which is essential for liberal education, would also need a common conception of public virtue.

Therefore, liberal education, understood as "unavoidably a normative enterprise, one which is concerned with enabling individuals to lead the best possible lives" (Keeney 2007, 7), would be much impoverished if its implications had to be articulated within – especially – political liberalism. Against a minimalistic interpretation of liberal education, Keeney argues that such an education should serve the cultivation both of a private and a public self, avoiding the extremes of, on one hand, reclusiveness from the community, selfishness and narcissism and, on the other, subordinating one's intellectual, moral,

emotional and imaginative development to civic and political values expressed by a conception of social justice divorced from both a unifying conception of the good and broader considerations regarding political order. Following MacIntyre, Keeney maintains that liberal education needs to interpret "the self in the narrative mode" (2007, 149), and the philosophy that would best respond to this interpretation would be an analytical-empirical one, providing a comprehensive account of cognitive, moral, emotional and civil development of individuals.

Consequently, the liberal project would not be complete if it confined itself to offering, as in the case of Rawls, a theory of justice which spells out the civil and political liberties that should be exercised within a certain pattern of socio-economic rules and accepting the priority of the right over the good. What is at stake in the communitarian critique of liberalism is the possibility of reflecting on justice by suspending considerations about the highest human ends and the contingent (cultural, historical) nature of various conceptions of the goods, among which neutrality would not apply. In the case of liberal education,

> [e]ducators must be prepared to state that some ways of living are better, nobler, higher, more fulfilling, more estimable, or more meaningful. […] Underlying a liberal education is the demand that we acknowledge something outside ourselves whose value is immune to the whims and inklings of our own consciousness, but which stands independent of these and offers criteria by which they can be judged. Any such hierarchy is, of course, notoriously difficult and contentious, and, of course, the idea of a hierarchy of values resistant to human willing is entirely alien to the liberal temperament. Yet, a liberal education can only proceed by recognizing that that which is truly valuable in human life is not entirely arbitrary, a mere adjunct of the personal will. (Keeney 2007, 11)

Keeney gives, indeed, an overview of what has come to be called the communitarian critique of liberalism, and he dedicates a part of his analysis to Rawls's theory of justice, in the attempt to identify the sensitive spots that would run counter to a comprehensive ideal of liberal education. Nevertheless, the focus on the concept of the person and the two circumstances of the social contract that are specific to Rawlsian theory, the Original Position and the Veil of Ignorance are not, in my view, sufficient to argue for the incompatibility between political liberalism and the ideal of liberal education. In fact, education was not a topic neglected by Rawls, and even if he did not develop a theory of the moral agent with the aim of spelling out precise moral duties in the sphere of education, education was acknowledged an important role both in structuring individuals' opportunities and in enabling them to participate with full equal rights in social cooperation.

The second section of the paper is dedicated to discussing Rawls's views on education, and it suggests that, since the association between self-fulfilment and self-respect is necessarily mediated by education, the latter would have to play a significant part in the theory of justice, and there may be a case for including some educational institutions in the basic structure. Considering the priority that Rawls ascribes to self-

respect, it is perhaps plausible to argue that a philosophy of education that would be consistent with this requirement would have to aspire at the full development of one's sense of secure worth and confidence in one's life plans.

The third section of the paper is meant to complement the account of education that could be reconstructed from Rawls with Oakeshott's perspective on liberal education as aiming at a balance between cultivating a public self and a private one. Oakeshott is in this respect a particular thinker, as, despite the often metaphorical and politically polemical nature of his writings, the necessity of integrating one's personal development within the inheritance of human achievements is a valuable intuition that could justify a more comprehensive account of liberal education.

Nevertheless, neither Rawls, nor Oakeshott provide a consistent framework for discussing liberal education in its relation to self-fulfilment. Their vantage points lead to a deliberate partiality in this respect. For Rawls, political liberalism should not aim at fulfilling the goals of comprehensive liberalism, and therefore his theory of justice is not compatible with perfectionist ideals. For Oakeshott, liberal education is discussed within the context of his arguments against rationalism in politics, and, thus, considerations about the content of moral duties with regard to liberal education in an institutional framework are not discussed.

Therefore, the last part of the paper attempts at unifying the insights taken from the two authors within a consistent conceptual framework that centres on the ideal of self-fulfilment, drawing on Alan Gewirth's distinction between aspiration-fulfilment and capacity-fulfilment.

I. RAWLS, POLITICAL EDUCATION AND SELF-RESPECT

Although Rawls did not develop a framework conception of liberal education and its role in relation to *justice as fairness*, some of the insights he gave with regard to the aims of moral education, as well as the distributive impact of education on the worst-off open the path to a philosophy of education centred on the notions of civic participation and self-respect.

From the perspective of civic participation, Rawls emphasizes the role of education in cultivating the moral virtues allowing citizens to take part in social cooperation with equal rights and contribute to the creation of social goods, which are to be distributed according to the principles of justice. Therefore, an important mission of education would be to inculcate a conception of the individuals as free and equal, and develop their loyalty to political justice (Rawls 2001, 56). It is thus, Rawls believed, that individuals would be motivated to voluntarily support the principles of justice, which, in a context of a variety of conceptions of the good, diversity of individual endowments and the often diverging aims to which pursuit of one's self-interest leads, would still guarantee the stability of a public conception of justice. In addition, individuals' capacity for tolerance

would be developed, allowing them to pursue their own life plans with full respect of others' rights (1999, 192-93).

What educational content would then best comply with the aims of *justice as fairness*? Rawls indicates the basic features of civic education, consisting in knowledge of one's rights and liberties, learning to distinguish between judgments grounded in reason and judgments grounded in authority, developing political virtues and the capacity of being an economically independent and self-supporting member of society. Doubtless, such content pertains to a limited philosophy of education, as one of the main tenets of political liberalism, as opposed to comprehensive liberalism, is not to cultivate particular (superior) values associated to human aims which should be left within the private sphere of life. Therefore, duties in education are to be formulated with the primary aim of developing future citizens (2001, 165-167).

This view of education engaged the attention of scholars interested in uncovering an implicit Rawlsian philosophy of education. It has been argued by some that education is mostly derivative for Rawls, in the sense that it would matter only to the extent that it can lead to the formation of a just society. As a result, the conception on education that could be reconstructed from his writings was deemed to be a thin (Weber 2008) or exclusively political one (Costa 2004), all the more so considering that it seems to give priority to political and judicial institutions over the role of schools in educating citizens (Costa 2011).

In addition, the representation of the basic structure as "somewhat vague" (Rawls 1999, 8), in the sense that it does not allow us to extract a complete set of institutions which are to be governed by the principles of justice, is likely to raise questions about the status of schools, universities, as well as other less formal institutions that educate individuals. For instance, one may argue that if the main criterion of inclusion into the basic structure is the degree to which a particular institution influences one's life prospects, and if the family is a part of the basic structure, then all formal educational institutions related to the distribution of goods and advantages likely to generate inequalities should also be considered as part of the basic structure.

This interpretation can be supported also by the criterion proposed by Freeman, namely that what distinguishes institutions of the basic structure from the rest is, primarily, neither their influence on one's life prospects, nor the fact that they presuppose the application of formal, often coercive, rules, but rather that they are essential for productive social cooperation. (Freeman 2007, 101-102.) The correlation between education, welfare and social positions of advantage, as well as the essential contribution of education in providing the "common currency of political and social life" (Walzer 1983, 206) would also add to the plausibility of including educational institutions in the basic structure, because of their undeniable impact on associational life and distribution of resources.

Nevertheless, Rawls proposes a hierarchy, in which the main reason for which education matters is related to civic participation and the goods that derive from it:

> the value of education should not be assessed solely in terms of economic efficiency and social welfare. Equally if not more important is the role of education in enabling a person to enjoy the culture of his society and to take part in its affairs, and in this way to provide for each individual a secure sense of his own worth. (1999, 87)

Due to this fundamental mission, educational institutions, the goods they distribute and, consequently, the paths they open to individuals, are of interest for both Fair Equality of Opportunity and the Difference Principle. Although Rawls does not elaborate on the issue of the moral duties deriving from the application of the two principles, he does state explicitly that "Chances to acquire cultural knowledge and skills should not depend upon one's class position", and, in this respect, the duty of the educational system would be "to even out class barriers." (1999, 63)

In addition, given the impact of different natural endowments on educational performance, and, further, on access to positions of advantage and the capacity of pursuing one's life plan, inequalities in the distribution of resources are justified if they are to the benefit of the less advantaged by the natural lottery, thus increasing their prospects of reaping benefits from education (1999, 86).

In the absence of a more elaborate account of educational duties, the interpretation of Rawls's views on education as suggesting a minimalistic (thin or exclusively political) conception would at first glance be warranted.

Nevertheless, there is, I believe, a valuable intuition on the goals of education that can be taken from Rawls, and this consists in the necessary correlation between education and the cultivation of self-respect, which he considered to be "perhaps the most important primary good." (1999, 386)

Self-respect entails not only a public affirmation of civic and moral equality, but rather, as the last part of *A Theory of Justice* shows, it turns out to be a complex good, which could not be properly secured in the absence of a commitment to the ideas of human dignity and also personal (not only social) self-fulfilment. The circumstances that consolidate self-respect, i.e. confidence in one's abilities, as well as validation of one's life plans, formulated according to one's desires, ideals, and capacities, may suggest that individual development should be encouraged in a broader sense than that implied by the good of civic participation. Even if the orchestra metaphor expresses the voluntarily accepted complementarity of developing talents and using them for the greater good of the social union (1999, 459n; 2001, 76), self-fulfilment, as a prerequisite for self-respect, would also entail the possibility of developing and refining the talents one views as most important for one's identity and secure sense of self-worth. This may be the case even if there is no "market" for such talents, in the sense that they are not, at a particular stage of social development, enough valued, or their impact on social cooperation may be marginal.

Therefore, if the social conditions that undermine self-respect should be avoided "at any cost" (Rawls 1999, 386), one may question whether being a part of an association or community that allows us to develop those talents that matter most to us would be sufficient

for securing self-respect. Moreover, even if we agree that the standard of perfection is unsuited within a political conception of justice, assuming that some talents are more strongly correlated with education than others, yet essential for one's self-fulfilment, it may be difficult in some cases to avoid reference to an absolute level of achievement in a particular form of education. This would perhaps indicate a tension between, on one hand, developing one's talents which do not directly qualify as excellences from which other will also benefit, and, on the other, the explicit characterization of justice as fairness as not seeking "to cultivate the distinctive virtues and values of the liberalisms of autonomy and individuality" (Rawls 2001, 157).

Acknowledging that self-fulfilment plays an important part in developing a secure sense of one's worth, as well as confidence in the capacity to transform one's life according to one's most valued ideals may lead to a maximizing conception in which the pursuit for self-fulfilment is equated with that for a good life (Gewirth 1998, 3). This would presuppose either that the development of the private self should be in harmony with that of the public self or that the private self would trump the public one, which may lead to equating self-fulfilment with self-aggrandizement. A conception of liberal education that would live up to these standards would, therefore, also be a maximizing one, and should aspire at allowing "the unimpeded and unconstrained development of mind, not harnessed to utilitarian or vocational ends." (Peters 1976, 46-47)

II. LIBERAL EDUCATION AND THE "CONVERSATION OF MANKIND"

A particular defence of liberal education, also in the sense that it is phrased in a different language than that which the analytically-oriented debate in philosophy and ethics of education has established, comes from Michael Oakeshott. As a thinker reclaimed by both the liberal and the conservative traditions, his writings on education are difficult to include in a specific category, and it is equally problematic to extract a comprehensive view on the ethical foundation of liberal education, since the arguments he advances are closely connected with his general opposition against rationalism in politics.

Nevertheless, his views on education reveal a commitment to the ideal of self-fulfilment, which is predicated on a strong connection between freedom, as essentially constitutive of human existence, and the capacity of genuine learning to help individuals reach intellectual and moral emancipation (Oakeshott 2001, 3). Therefore, one of his main concerns was to distinguish the kind of education conducive to self-fulfilment from particular forms of training aimed at equipping individuals with various skills, but incapable of fostering self-understanding and the development of a comprehensive worldview.

Oakeshott's defence of liberal education is inseparable from his criticism of rationalism, both as an intellectual style and as a social ideology which became "the most remarkable intellectual fashion of post-Renaissance Europe" (1991, 5). Rationalism, he argued, is a glorification of partial knowledge, the one which can be acquired and assessed

only by the use of an instrumental reason thriving on rules and theories, and aiming to identify what it actually artificially constructs: coherence, uniformity and homogeneity in the interpretation of reality. Consequently, practical knowledge, experience and traditions are disregarded as irrelevant, as their complexity and inherent contradictions cannot be summarized in rules, nor can they be compatible with universalist and perfectionist models.

However, such models do not stand for either an accurate interpretation, or the source of human activity, as the abstractions they advance – "ideals and purposes" – are, in fact, "only abridgements of our knowledge of how to engage in this or that activity." (Oakeshott 2001, 105) Here Oakeshott defends the foundational role of tradition and informal norms of conduct, developed and refined gradually over generations, such as, for example, in the establishment of a political culture or major institutions such as universities. Never in the course of history did ideology alone initiate action, rather, he argued, it has always been a post-factum (yet, often vigorous and inspiring in its simplicity) commentary on already existing norms, practices and beliefs.

Education is no exception in this sense, and, as a practice and distinct manner of human activity, it does not need an ideology to guide it or to subordinate it to external aims. In fact, it is here that, in Oakeshott's view, the domination of rationalism, which extended over our entire social and political life, has most seriously threatened the idea of a genuine liberal education, that is, education "liberated from the distracting business of satisfying contingent wants" (2001, 3).

Learning and being human are, in his view, inseparable, as self-understanding is a prerequisite to one's understanding of and contributing to the legacy of civilization; it is only thus that the multi-dimensionality of the self (intellectual, moral, emotional, imaginative, civil) could be adequately addressed. This may seem to raise the bar quite high, and one may question the perhaps elusive nature of an education defined as "initiation into the moral and intellectual habits and achievements of his society, an entry into the partnership between present and past, a sharing of concrete knowledge" (Oakeshott 1991, 38). As familiar and attractive as a metaphor, the intellectual adventure of self-discovery and the emancipation from the parochialism and contingencies of everyday existence would require an amount of resources that liberal societies may not make available for most of their members. This would be all the more so, as Oakeshott rejects the idea that well established manners of human activity, inseparable from a conservative set of practices and institutions, should be judged by the metric of abstract principles, among which solidarity, welfare or social efficiency.

The case in point is his defence of the University against the criticism regarding its social mission, and the related idea that such an institution which best exemplifies "the pursuit of learning" should justify its existence by something else than the very practices and values which have been constitutive of it. In Oakeshott's view, universities have established themselves as a space free from outer interferences, where scholars and students have been wholeheartedly engaged in the discovery of knowledge, interpretation of civilization and building their own identity. The particular trait of the University is

that it is a community whose aim, the pursuit of learning, is self-sufficient. The benefits brought by its fulfilment accrue to individuals as multidimensional selves, and not only as beings prepared to exploit the resources of the world with more skill and more efficiency.

The "gift of the interval", that is, being detached from the requirements of making decisions in the absence of a well-developed intellectual and moral personality, as well as from the constraints of having to make a living and, therefore, sacrificing one's resources for numerous fragmentary aims, is perhaps the most valuable of the gifts that membership in this community of learned and learners has to offer. Usefulness or easiness in teaching could be only marginal criteria for selecting the subjects that are being learned in a university; in fact, in order to resist formalism and the degeneration of learning into mere training, standardized assimilation of information by patterns and recipes for easy success should be acknowledged as a partial enterprise, one which is not akin in spirit to the knowledge made possible by a university.

Two distinctions underline Oakeshott's argument for the defence of a comprehensive liberal education that is conducive to self-fulfilment.

One is that between technical and practical knowledge. The former, which the ideology of rationalism has extolled as the only knowledge worth cultivating, can be reduced to an array of information organized according to efficient methods, summarized in principles and rules, then codified in books. It is exemplified as textbook knowledge, inevitably partial and subordinated to the aims of accessibility, efficiency and utility. On the other hand, practical knowledge is, according to Oakeshott, an essential complement of technical knowledge, as it provides guidance where rules and principles are incomplete, or their use misplaced.

It is the kind of knowledge that developed from experience, in the context of a variety of human practices, each carrying its history of values, customs and beliefs. Far from being merely a knowledge of skills, and, thus, attributed to activities which could be less intellectualized, it offers interpretative and narrative structures allowing a proper understanding of human practices in their context, that is, inseparable from the civilization having created them. It is illustrative that Oakeshott refers to Machiavelli's *The Prince* as an example of how the two kinds of knowledge should be duly regarded as complementary. Faced with the prospect of a politically inexperienced new ruler, Machiavelli was willing to offer not only a book with rules and examples to help him obtain and maintain power. He also offered his live knowledge of a skilled advisor who, with the benefit of experience, political instinct, and political education, could supplement the obscurity of rules in new or complex circumstances, being aware that in politics there is no "total situation", and, moreover, a principle is "a mere index of concrete behaviour" (Oakeshott 1991, 68-69).

The second distinction refers to two modes of transmitting knowledge – the first, more adequate for technical knowledge, is teaching and learning, in the sense of screening and conveying information of various levels of complexity, often in a verifiable form and also with an outer aim in view. The second mode, essential for liberal education, is imparting and acquiring knowledge, which presupposes a contextualized communication allowing

initiation into the inheritance of human achievements. The two modes of transmitting knowledge should be regarded as complementary, but the processes associated to them, namely training (as acquiring habits or preparing for a profession) and cultivating the mind, in the sense of genuine education, should not be confused.

Various human abilities, Oakeshott maintained, could be understood as a combination of language and literature of human achievements, where literature stands for a summarization of the rules that could be extracted from the practice of a specific skill. On the other hand, since rules are disjunctive, and, when applied, cannot always eliminate the need for choice or interpretation, a more substantive understanding is needed, and this is what is metaphorically designated as "language". Language is associated with broader modes of experiencing and explaining the world, and it provides the unquantifiable "connoisseurship" which helps us distinguish relevance, develop and assess an intellectual style, as well as take pleasure in understanding subtleties of thought and action (Oakeshott 2001, 45-47). For these, literature is not an adequate guide, but rather a companion with a limited mandate.

Liberal education, Oakeshott believed, should be about imparting and acquiring knowledge on the "actual inquiries, utterances and actions in which human beings have expressed their understanding of the human condition" (2001,15). Those who embark on the journey to self-fulfilment learn to be participants in the "conversation of mankind" and encounter, in the course of their intellectual adventure, achievements of human inheritance otherwise doomed to be forgotten or dismissed as useless.

There is, indeed, in Oakeshott's writings a sense of nostalgia for an irretrievable past, for the intellectual pilgrimage of self-discovery which has been a legacy of Medieval Europe. The study of ancient cultures, languages, the cultivation of the mind as an aim in itself have had to make concessions to what is transient, partial, evanescent and modern, yet, the most serious "assault" on liberal education has come from attempting to model its content and traditional institutions according to the requirements of relevance and utility:

> But the real assault upon liberal learning comes from another direction; not in the risky undertaking to equip learners for some, often prematurely chosen, profession, but in the belief that "relevance" demands that every learner should be recognized as nothing but a role-performer in a so-called social system and the consequent surrender of learning (which is the concern of individual persons) to "socialization": the doctrine that because the current here and now is very much more uniform than it used to be, education should recognize and promote this uniformity. (Oakeshott 2001, 20)

The insights that Oakeshott's views on education give suggest a maximizing conception which should be, at all costs, promoted and protected from the interference of outer standards captured, for example, by political ideologies or perfectionist models such as those underlying various ethical frameworks. Nevertheless, there is a deliberate partiality in his account of liberal education, which overlooks the content of moral duties associated to self-fulfilment, the status of this ideal among other ideals worth promoting

in a liberal community, as well as the role and limits of institutions in fostering the cultivation of both a private and a public self.

III. CONCLUSIONS: LIBERAL EDUCATION AND CAPACITY-FULFILMENT

Juxtaposing Rawls and Oakeshott may have the merit of illustrating the demanding requirements liberal education would have to meet in the attempt of balancing the cultivation of a public self (participation in a social mechanism of cooperation and, equally important, developing one's identity within the context of an inheritance of human achievements) and that of a private self (maximizing intellectual, moral, aesthetic, emotional development and liberating the individual from outer constraints).

Nevertheless, although both suggest that self-fulfilment, as it could be achieved by liberal education, is an ideal worth cultivating, their vantage points do not help clarify the conceptual framework in which self-fulfilment could be coherently addressed. As a result, on one hand, self-fulfilment would be valuable as a prerequisite for self-respect, which would be ensured within a political conception of justice; on the other hand, self-fulfilment would conflate the development of the public and private self, but in a rather circumstantial manner which does not take into account considerations of social justice and institutions.

A consistent approach on self-fulfilment, likely to illuminate its relation with liberal education, can be found in Alan Gewirth's distinction between aspiration-fulfilment and capacity-fulfilment.

Aspiration-fulfilment responds to the satisfaction of one's deepest desires, and, as a personal ideal that needs to be achieved within a community, it can lead to self-aggrandizement, elitism, and egoism. Moreover, the objects of aspirations are diverse and sometimes conflicting, some neutral, others inimical to various moral frameworks. As such, aspiration-fulfilment is connected with a strong individualism, but not necessarily and exclusively with strong subjectivism.

In fact, as Gewirth shows, there are ways in which "the aspiration to be a certain kind of person cannot be separated from the aspirations toward values that are reflected in such personhood." (1998, 20) Thus, aspirations form parts of individuals' plans of life, and presuppose a self-evaluation, in the sense that one projects one's desires with reference to a certain identity one wishes to develop, and to experiences that are deemed worth having. Often, these are not separated from feasibility concerns, such as whether one's endowments or personal constraints allow the pursuit of one's most valued goals, whether one could be supported in one's endeavours, as well as whether among several desires equally important for the individual, those worthy of effort will have the highest chance of materialization.

Aspiration-fulfilment does not, however, capture the whole meaning of self-fulfilment, which, as a worthy goal of human striving, presupposes an account of an objective good, which can be attained by developing some personal capacities. Capacity-

fulfilment seeks then to respond to the question of how one can make the best of oneself, which entails that one should select some inner powers which are deemed worthy of development because they correspond to a valued and comprehensive conception of personhood. Thus, a ranking of values to determine what capacities count as best is needed, and this is, in Gewirth's view, an inherent ranking which derives from the purposes of the activities to which various capacities are related - "the relative ranking of goods and capacities is to be determined by, and so be proportional to, the purposes of the goods." (1998, 71)

Nevertheless, in order to distinguish what is trivial or immoral from what is morally permissible, such a ranking should take place against the backdrop of a broader conception of morality, such as universalist, personalist or particularist. Therefore, within universalist morality, self-fulfilment as capacity-fulfilment could not be attained in the absence of the rights to freedom and well-being, and according to the Principle of Generic Consistency – "Act in accordance with the generic rights of your recipients as well as of yourself" (Gewirth 1998, 88) – individuals would have to respect communities of rights, which includes their responsibility of political participation.

It is within this conceptual framework that Gewirth proposes to interpret self-respect as a moral virtue activated in a universalist morality which is grounded in reason (as the best epistemic capacity) and human dignity. Self-respect is an indispensable ingredient for capacity-fulfilment and it cannot be separated from the duties to others, as captured by the PGC, which implies a mutuality of "affirmative consideration" of those needs and interests that can be translated into generic rights (1998, 94). Moreover, in order to protect self-respect, it is necessary to establish whether individuals' autonomous control of their aspirations, as part of capacity-fulfilment, is affected by unjustified limitations.

It is not only socio-economic inequalities that qualify as such limitations, but also inequality or insufficiency in education is likely to have a negative impact on self-respect. In Gewirth's analysis one may find an argument that complements the Rawlsian account of self-respect, and gives more weight to education as a general tool of aspiration-fulfilment, as a preliminary step to capacity-fulfilment.

Education, Gewirth argues, is an example of "additive well-being", which means "having the general abilities and conditions needed for increasing one's level of purpose-fulfilment and one's capabilities for particular actions" (1998, 80). Not only does it provide, as Walzer suggested, a common language (or "currency") of social and political life, but it is a prerequisite for achieving self-respect.

Nevertheless, despite agreeing on the impact of various conditionings (social, political, familial, economic) on the extent to which one manages to develop one's self-respect, Gewirth rejects Rawlsian determinism exemplified by the rejection of desert as a legitimate criterion of distribution. Accepting Rawls's thesis, that not only endowments and socio-economic status at initial stages of life, but also motivation depends on luck (familial and social circumstances), would exclude the role of individual choice and

control from the account of self-fulfilment, thus discarding "A realistic sense of personal responsibility." (Gewirth 1998)

By contrast, liberal education presupposes a worthy ideal of responding to individual choice and autonomy, which, in turn, it should help better develop. If personal responsibility should be ignored, either because it is engulfed in numerous pervasive contingencies that affect one's development at all stages, or because it exists, but it is too vague to be given a part in a distributive conception of justice, the ideal of liberal education as responsive to self-fulfilment would be relegated to the status of a private enterprise.

Yet, following Gewirth, this should not be the case, since education does not only act as a strong determinant of one's actions, including those whereby one ranks the values that allow oneself to attain one's best, but primarily as "laying foundations for autonomous action, so that once these foundations are laid it is then within the person's power to choose to act in one way rather than in another." (1998, 193) Consequently, education allows fostering self-respect by enabling people to "participate intelligently in a morally justified political system" (1998, 97) but also by familiarizing them with a broader set of values and criteria for selecting among them.

Given that evolving into one's best version is a process in which one's initial preference structure is corrected, refined and adjusted so that it should be compatible with respecting and protecting others' generic rights, education should acquaint individuals also, for instance, with aesthetic values, to allow them to develop an appreciation for culture.

This component of liberal education, which for Rawls qualified as an aspect of human perfection, "to be pursued within the limits of the principle of free association" (Rawls 1999, 289), was crucial for Oakeshott, and in this consists the particular nature of his approach, that of including (though metaphorically) one's self-fulfilment into the inheritance of human achievements which exemplify others' self-fulfilment.

For Gewirth, cultural values are also an important part of self-fulfilment, even if their status is more ambiguous than of those of values pertaining to universalist or personalist moralities. The development of one's intellectual style and the capacity of cultural appreciation may have a major impact on one's self-fulfilment, but they should be acknowledged as being dependent on a particularist morality, and as implying giving preference to the interests of some. Nevertheless, both freedom and well-being are part of the development of cultural virtues, and a responsive liberal education would have to achieve some compatibility between the values stemming from particularist morality and those of personalist and universalist morality. A consequence of this constraint would be imposing limits on the content of cultural products and practices violating other's rights and interests that need to be protected, irrespective of the aesthetic or moral well-being they generate for some individuals.

Liberal education aimed at promoting self-fulfilment would, therefore, have to be integrated into a human rights framework, where education should play a central part in ensuring people exercise their freedom and develop their well-being, on the condition of reasonableness which entails accepting that other individuals have the same generic rights.

Therefore, a conception of liberal education as an object of human rights and as a means to formulating purposes and developing capacities that create the good life envisaged by the self, could not be a minimalistic one. To conclude, even if, as self-fulfilment is a perfectionist ideal, and it is disputable whether the concerted action of individuals and institutions can help attain self-fulfilment, a comprehensive conception of liberal education should aim to maximize its development in all its relevant components.

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