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Reinterpreting the Right to an Open Future:
From Autonomy to Authenticity

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Abstract

This paper reinterprets a child's right to an open future as based on values other than autonomy. The paper identifies two goods that parents sometimes undermine when shaping their children's values: authenticity and identification. It argues that these can be recognized as primary goods by both liberals and by fundamentalists. The paper then shows how we might re-conceptualize the right to an open future as protecting authenticity and identification rather than autonomy.

As a running example, the paper considers ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel who deny their sons secular education beyond an elementary school level. If their sons do not remain religious as adults, they cannot easily survive in secular world. The fundamentalist parents think they had no duty to facilitate their child's secular future. They see no reason to protect their child's autonomy (which they do not value) or to prepare their child for a life that conflicts with their values. This paper provides one response to their concerns. Following a political-liberal project of seeking overlapping consensus, it tries to base demands that children be prepared for varied futures on values that reasonable fundamentalists can embrace.

Reinterpreting the Right to an Open Future: From Autonomy to Authenticity

Scott Altman [11/28/16]*

Parents' discretion to shape their children's values is limited both by society's interests in the people those children will become and by the children's own interests. Although there is much debate about whether parents have a right to shape their children's values, this paper presumes that there is such so that it can focus on how the state may limit parental rights in order to protect children's interests.¹ Consider an example based on a current dispute:

Talmud to Tech: Ultra-Orthodox parents in Israel send their son to a school that does not teach secular subjects beyond an elementary-school level. The parents reject secular education because they see it as a waste of time. Ultra-Orthodox men in Israel often do not work, but instead spend their time studying religious texts (supported financially by their wives and by the state). The parents also regard secular education as part of a broader threat posed by contact with outside influences – influences that might tempt people away from their religious commitments. When their son does not remain ultra-Orthodox, his poor education makes it difficult to enter the workforce and to create a secular life.²

This example illustrates a potential conflict between children's and parents' interests.

The parents wanted their son to remain religious and prepared him well for a religious life. The son objects that his parents failed to prepare him for the secular life he wants. Whether the

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¹ I have argued elsewhere that parents have a right to shape their children's values, subject of course to opposing rights of children and of society. Scott Altman, Parental Control Rights, in **Philosophical Foundations of Children's and Family Law**, Lucinda Ferguson & Elizabeth Brake, Eds, (forthcoming 2017). The claim that parents have even a prima facie right to direct their children's upbringing is, of course, controversial See, e.g., Colin Macleod, Conceptions of Parental Autonomy, 25 **Pol. & Soc.** 117 (1997).

² This example is based on a class action suit in Israel against the government for allowing such schools to exist. For details on the law suit in Israel, see In Case of Second-rate ultra-Orthodox Education, the State Blames the Victims, <http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-1.721448>.

parents owed their son preparation for a secular life might be thought to depend on a child's right to autonomy or to an open future.

The fundamentalist parents would likely object to this approach, claiming that they have no reason to protect autonomy (which they do not value) and that they need not prepare their child for a life that conflicts with their values. This paper provides a response to their concerns.³ Following a Rawlsian project of seeking overlapping consensus, it tries to show that the fundamentalist parents are in fact being asked to protect goods that are consistent with their values and that do not depend on autonomy.

The paper identifies two goods that parents sometimes undermine when shaping their children's values: authenticity and identification. It argues that these can be recognized as primary goods by both liberals and fundamentalists. The paper then shows how we might re-conceptualize the right to an open future as protecting authenticity and identification rather than autonomy.

I. Liberalism and Value Inculcation

Scholars have long debated whether and how parents may try to shape their children's values. Some writers would severely constrain such efforts, except when necessary to help children develop a sense of justice.⁴ More moderate writers allow that children benefit from deep engagement with their parents' views, and from the experience of commitment and community that comes from this engagement. According to these writers, parents may try to

³ In a companion paper, I offer a second reply: reasonable cooperation in a pluralist society requires respect for the anticipated values of one's grown children. See Altman, Taking Precautions when Shaping a Child's Values (draft).

⁴ Matthew Clayton, Justice and Legitimacy (2006). For a critique, see Dennis Arjo, Public Reason and Child Rearing: What's a Liberal Parent to do? 48 J. Phil. of Ed. 370. (2014). Some authors also argue that the state must refrain from shaping children's values. See Brighouse, Education and Liberal Legitimacy, 108 Ethics 719 (1998).

influence their children's values, but must take steps to protect their children's autonomy. For example, parents must expose their children to alternative views, must teach them to keep an open mind, and must take measures to prevent indoctrination or brainwashing.⁵ Writers who urge such autonomy-protecting limits worry that children unduly sheltered from external views, or withdrawn too early from education, may grow up to lack rational autonomy.⁶

Reconciling parents' right to inculcate values with children's right to autonomy is usually treated as a task for applied ethics. But the topic also implicates political philosophy by raising questions about the appropriate role of government. Writers who embrace political liberalism believe that the state must remain neutral as to visions of a good life, including being neutral as to whether rational autonomy is a better way to live than deferential embrace of religious law or traditional values.⁷ The neutrality required here is neutrality of justification – the state cannot rely on the superiority of an autonomous life as a reason for regulation – not neutrality of effect. On this view, parents cannot be compelled to protect their children's autonomy merely because it believes that autonomous lives are better lives.

⁵ David Archard, Children, Multiculturalism and Education 151 in **Moral and Political Status of Children** (Archard & MacLeod eds. 2002); Robert Noggle, Special Agents: Children's Autonomy and Parental Authority 114 in *Id.*

⁶ The claim that strict religions offer training inconsistent with rational autonomy has itself been criticized as mistaken. E.g. Shelley Burt, In defense of Yoder: Parental Authority and the Public Schools in *NOMOS XXXVIII* at 412, 416-17 (arguing that religions do teach critical reasoning, but often reject radical skepticism).

⁷ A Rawlsian account of political liberalism can be distinguished from various perfectionist views sometimes called autonomy liberalism or ethical liberalism. See John Rawls, **Political Liberalism** 199-200 (1993) (requiring that children be taught their constitutional and civic rights, but that they need not be educated in the values of autonomy or individuality). Although Rawls is reasonably clear that liberalism cannot insist on the value of autonomy, he admits that in practice, liberalism may require institutions that happen to encourage autonomy. This is so both because training to participate in political society may require skills affiliated with autonomy and because development of the two moral powers (a sense of justice and a capacity to have a conception of the good) may demand some qualities related to autonomy. See also Jonathan Quong, **Liberalism without Perfection** (2011).

This demand for neutrality about autonomy is controversial.⁸ Even writers who generally support neutrality often reject it in this context. Some think autonomy necessary for democratic legitimacy or membership in the moral community.⁹ Others think that demands for neutrality do not apply to childrearing.¹⁰ And still others think autonomy indirectly valuable even to people whose conceptions of the good do not include living an autonomous life.¹¹

This paper does not enter these debates. Rather, it accepts (without defending) a very strict version of political-liberalism, a version that demands state neutrality about autonomy. I.e. the state cannot presume that a person's life is better just because it is self-directed or because a person rationally reflects on her values. Children may grow up to reject their parents' values or religion. But the state may not insist that children be taught to make this choice rationally or intelligently. Nor may the state urge children to understand themselves as needing to make a choice. Insisting on these would presume that choosing the life you lead or critically examining your values are themselves parts of the good.

⁸ It is denied by many perfectionist liberals. See, e.g., Joseph Raz, **The Morality of Freedom** 390 (1986); Amy Gutmann, **Democratic Education** 34 (1999). A Kantian version of this argument can be found in Tamar Schapiro, What is a Child? 109 **Ethics** 715 (1999). It is also denied by writers who question the distinction between political liberalism and perfectionist liberalism. See, Eamonn Callan, Political Liberalism and Political Education, 58 **Rev. of Politics** 5 (1996); Brighouse, **Ethics** at 739; Clayton, **Justice and Liberal Legitimacy in Upbringing** 24-27 (arguing that anti-perfectionist (but not political) liberalism need not shy away from promoting autonomy).

⁹ For arguments that society may insist that children be taught skills in rational autonomy so that they can participate as good citizens, see Stephen Macedo, **Diversity and Distrust** 129 (2000); Stephen Macedo, Liberal Civic Education and Religious Fundamentalism: The Case of God v. John Rawls?, 105 **Ethics** 468, 477 n39 (1995); Amy Gutman, **Democratic Education** 30-31 (1987). The opposing view is stated in William Galston, **Liberal Purposes, Goods, Virtues, and Diversity in the liberal State** (1991) at 253.

¹⁰ Brighouse, 108 **Ethics** 719, 738 (1998).

¹¹ One argument in this direction comes from Eamonn Callan, Autonomy, Childrearing, and Good Lives 133 in **Moral and Political Status of Children** (arguing that autonomy training is necessary to avoid ethical servility – the state of failing to recognize oneself as an independent person and bearer of equal rights). For a reply, see Melissa Moschella, **To Whom do Children Belong** 124 (2016). A second argument for this conclusion states that autonomy is indirectly useful as a means for correcting errors in one's vision of the good. See Richard Arneson & Ian Shapiro, Democratic Autonomy and Religious Freedom: A Critique of Wisconsin v. Yoder 365, 399 in **NOMOS XXXVIII** (1996). See also Clayton at 106; Brighouse, 108 **Ethics** at 729-30; Ian MacMullen, **Faith in Schools** 106 (2016).

Many readers will find this assumption unattractive. The point of making it is to explore one of political liberalism's core goals: to see whether those with opposing conceptions of the good can reach agreement on principles of cooperation. In this spirit, the paper aims to include reasonable fundamentalists in this project by asking whether those who do not value autonomy can agree with those who do about children's rights.¹² Even with this strict assumption, I will argue, political liberalism provides grounds for criticizing and constraining some parenting choices that shelter children and shape their values.

For readers who are unsympathetic to this sort of neutrality, I offer another justification for not presuming the value of autonomy: its fragility has been overstated in the literature on childrearing. The skills needed to lead a self-directed life (including the ability to become moderately self-reflective, or to conform one's actions to one's values) are not hard to attain or easy to suppress. They arise naturally for most people during adolescence. And even if these skills turn out not to arise naturally, but instead requires effort and practice, it is unclear that failure to learn these skills as a child disadvantages those who seek to develop the skills as adults in the way that failure to learn a foreign language as a child does.¹³ The main aspect of autonomy that parents can suppress is the desire (as opposed to the ability) to engage in critical self-reflection. If making self-reflection unattractive is a culpable parenting decision, it is

¹² By reasonable fundamentalist I mean a person who believes that God's revealed word must be strictly obeyed (the fundamentalist part), but that people who do not share this faith are entitled to respect, and that part of this respect includes finding reasonable terms of cooperation in governing matters of joint concern. Reasonable terms of cooperation are those that can be justified using public values that can be accepted by all. There is a significant worry here about whether we can regard most fundamentalist sects as reasonable given their attitudes toward gender equality. The issue is relevant even to the education of boys, since the decision to prioritize religious study for me relies on unequal distribution of both paid and unpaid work to women. As well, there are some reasons to doubt that many ultra-Orthodox communities in Israel count as reasonable under a Rawlsian framework because they can be seen as not cooperating fairly with other citizens. For example, they do not serve in the military and design their lives to draw heavily on public assistance

¹³ See Moschella at 129.

one that can be attributed to many parents, not only among fundamentalists, but also among those of us who devote our free time to consumption or to entertainment. An account of autonomy that requires being inclined toward critical self-reflection may simply be too demanding. If I am right in thinking that parents cannot easily undermine the capacity for autonomy, focusing on harms unrelated to this capacity may allow us better to see a set of other under-discussed harms.

II. The Right to an Open Future

Children's rights can best be understood by first considering how parental decisions about value inculcation resemble decisions about risk. Rational people planning for uncertain futures regularly invest in goods that might be helpful or might be harmful. For example, some homeowners store extra gasoline for a generator in case of a power outage, even though that gasoline would prove dangerous in case of fire. Parents face similar uncertainty. They must make decisions about their children's future before knowing what their children will eventually need or want. The Talmud to Tech parents believed that foregoing secular education would free up time that their child could use for religious study, even though doing so put him at risk of failure should he want a secular life. A purely religious education – like gasoline for a generator – would be useful in one possible future and harmful in another.

I have argued elsewhere that because parenting and safety choices are similar, parents should shape their children's values in a way that resembles choices responsible people make in assessing risk.¹⁴ On this way of thinking, the Talmud to Tech parents needed to consider how likely their child was to become secular and whether the child would be worse off (from his

¹⁴ See Altman, Taking Precautions, *supra*.

own perspective) if he grew up to be secular and lacked secular education than he would be if he grew up to be religious and lacked a childhood devoted primarily to religious texts.

Treating value inculcation as risk imposition can clarify children's rights. Joel Feinberg famously suggested that children have the right to an open future.¹⁵ The idea is that parents must protect the future autonomy of the adults their children will become. In its strongest form, the right entitles children to as many valuable options in adulthood as their parents can feasibly provide.

This maximizing interpretation -- providing as many options as feasible -- was criticized for being indeterminate (how do you count options), incoherent (all choices both foreclose some options and create others) and undesirable (a childhood spent preserving options for the future would be exhausting, unpleasant, and pointless).¹⁶ Parenting by preserving all future options resembles the behavior of hoarders, who cannot dispose of any item because it might someday be useful.

In response, some authors proposed a more modest version of the right to an open future: parents should help children reach adulthood with a meaningful variety of options.¹⁷ Although this interpretation is appealing, it too faces a problem. Whether a set of options is meaningfully varied might depend on a person's values and preferences. As one critic put it:

Presumably Feinberg is thinking in this way. An Amish child is prepared by his Amish parents for one future only, that of an Amish farmer, whereas the non-Amish child has open to him a wide range of futures: as a farmer, scientist, teacher, race car driver, doctor, and so on But . . . from the point of view of the Amish parent all the various career options mentioned above have little variety among them: They are all ways of living in the world, pursuing money, prestige, and professional satisfaction, focusing on worldly rewards rather than on living in harmony with

¹⁵ Joel Feinberg, The Child's Right to an Open Future 124 in **Whose Child** (Aiken & LaFollette Eds, 1980).

¹⁶ Claudia Mills, The Child's Right to an Open Future, 34 **J. Soc. Phil.** 499 (2003).

¹⁷ Joseph Raz, **The Morality of Freedom** at 373; Archard, Autonomy and Education at 156 ; Miama Lotz, Feinberg, Mills, and the Child's Right to an Open Future, 37 **J. Social. Phil.** 537, 547 (2006)

God. The Amish parents could well reply that they are giving their children options: to be a corn farmer, or a soybean farmer, or a fruit farmer, or to work in various support occupations, such as blacksmith or leather worker.¹⁸

This imprecision in what it means for options to be varied was thought to deprive the idea of varied options of any power to guide behavior. But if we think of parenting as risk imposition, variation in what choices will matter to someone in the future might offer a different lesson. If children need to reach adulthood with meaningfully varied options, but parents cannot know in advance what options will count as varied for their child, then they should take precautions so that available options will seem varied under multiple perspectives the child might foreseeably adopt.

What might it mean for parents to provide meaningfully varied options without knowing about a child's future? The answer depends on two questions: what values must parents foresee?; and what options must parents preserve or create?

Parents cannot anticipate every goal, preference, or value their children might come to embrace. But some outcomes are more likely than others. In a diverse society, children are sometimes influenced by ideas that the parents reject. Ultra-orthodox parents must therefore anticipate that their children might become secular (or simply less religiously observant).¹⁹

What options must parents preserve or create?²⁰ People sometimes treat options as if they are either open or closed. But options are more complex; they can be made more difficult,

¹⁸ Mills *supra* at 500. The same point is raised by Arenson & Shapiro in **NOMOS XXXVIII** at 392.

¹⁹ It might be thought that so few fundamentalist children abandon their parents' faith that risk assessment would permit such parents to deny their children secular education. I address this argument in some detail in another article. See Altman, [Taking Precautions when Shaping a Child's Values](#). In fact, the rate of defection from fundamentalist sects is not tiny. In Israel, about 6% of ultra-Orthodox Jews leave the group as adults. The number of the US is not readily available, but is thought to be somewhat higher.

²⁰ There is some debate over whether the right to an open future is a positive right – to have opportunities created – or a negative right – not to have opportunities impeded. Joseph Millum, [The Foundation of the Child's](#)

or less appealing, or simply less likely to be chosen – all to greater or lesser extent. For example, in the Talmud to Tech case, the claim is not that former ultra-Orthodox Jews cannot seek remedial training and ultimately find work in a secular world. Rather, the claim is that the burden of doing so is very large, which makes their options unreasonably limited.

Providing children with varied options is not only about education. Options can be made psychologically difficult even when they are practically available. For example, a child raised by white supremacist parents might grow up to reject his upbringing, but to be so frightened by people of color as to be unable to sustain friendships or collegial relations with them.²¹ Or a child raised in a rigid home may come to yearn for a life of spontaneity, but be unable to enact the life she wants. Depending on the psychological challenges involved in making these transitions and on the importance of the options, one might think these children deprived of a reasonable set of options.

Finally, an open future might be thought to include some of the intellectual capacities connected to rational autonomy: the capacity to act on one's commitments, the ability to subject one's views and commitments to scrutiny, and a capacity to change those views that do not survive scrutiny. The argument is not that these capacities are inherently good, or even instrumentally good, for all people. Rather it is that they are important for people who come to value these capacities, and that parents should foresee that their children might come to do so.

Right to an Open Future, 45 *J. Soc. Phil.* 522 (2014). My argument does not presume a positive duty generally. It merely constrains risk imposing behavior.

²¹ For an example of a child overcoming this problem, see, The white flight of Derek Black, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/the-white-flight-of-derek-black/2016/10/15/ed5f906a-8f3b-11e6-a6a3-d50061aa9fae_story.html.

III. Autonomy to Authenticity

So far, I have suggested that parents' efforts to shape their children's values might leave the children without meaningfully varied options. But authors who advocate for meaningfully varied options usually do so based on the importance of autonomy. This paper proceeds on the assumption that the state may not justify its actions based on the value of autonomy. So on what basis can a duty to provide meaningfully varied options be justified?

Meaningfully varied options often matter because they allow people to have activities that reflect their values. This is a core human good, sometimes called authenticity, sometimes called integrity,²² and sometimes called expressive liberty.²³ None of these terms is ideal, since each can refer to a range of ideas.²⁴ But for lack of a better term I will call the match between one's values and one's activities authenticity.

Although having projects that reflect one's values is important, authenticity does not require that all my activities reflects my values. Some people work at tedious jobs, but find meaning in family or religion or art. A successful life does not require connection between every activity and one's values. Rather, having some activities that reflect your values is important and having activities that violate one's values is harmful.

²² See Melissa Moschella, **To Whom do Children Belong** 49-56. Moschella notes that she is following Finnis, but that Finnis actually uses the term "outer authenticity" when describing the same idea. Ronald Dworkin refers to ethical integrity – though his idea requires reflection and an open mind. See Ronald Dworkin, Foundations of Liberal Equality, 268 in **Equal Freedom**, S. Darwall (ed.) (1995).

²³ See William Galson, **Liberal Pluralism** 101-102 (2002).

²⁴ There are several related characteristics that, while important, I do not mean to incorporate. The first is that the values we believe to be ours actually are the values that should be attributed to us – i.e. that we not be deluded about our own characteristics. See Geoffrey Sayre-McCord and Michael Smith, Desires...and beliefs...of one's own 129 in **Rational and Social Agency: The Philosophy of Michael Bratman** (2014, Vargas & Yaffee eds). The second is that our values correspond with the values we believe we ought to have. A third is our values are much the same as they would be were we to think carefully and be fully informed. A fourth is that our values did not come to be our values through coercion, deceit, or deprivation.

The absence of varied options can make authenticity more difficult; if the options we have do not match the values we come to embrace, we cannot easily have projects and activities that reflect our values. Varied options are not strictly necessary for authenticity. But authenticity can be difficult if our main options conflict with our values – such as a person who lives in a fundamentalist community, where religious observance is expected of all, but who does not believe in God or in the value of ritual.

Not everyone needs meaningfully varied options to live authentically. If I have only one option, but it happens to fit my values and preferences well, then options are not necessary unless I happen also to value autonomy. Alternatively, if I want nothing more than to follow God’s will, and I believe that God’s plan is revealed by the opportunities provided in life, I may place no value at all on having options. Additionally, sometimes people can change their values to match their available activities. For example, if I value music above all things, but suddenly lose my hearing, I may be unable to find satisfying activities that reflect this value. But I may find new things to value, such as dance or literature. In other cases, finding new values is not plausible. If I am committed to a life serving those in need, but am somehow precluding from doing so, I cannot simply choose to be committed instead to greed and consumption.

Although not always necessary, meaningfully varied choices are, for many people, instrumentally important for authenticity.²⁵ Providing children with reasonably varied options is thus a sensible precaution because such options are likely to be important for a child to live

²⁵ For an argument that rational deliberation is useful for, but not necessary to, authenticity, see Colin Macleod, Shaping Children’s Convictions, 1 **Theory & Research in Ed.** 315, 321-22 & n.10 (2003).

authentically. The harm imposed in Talmud to Tech can be understood as making authenticity difficult by imposing a large barrier to pursuing a secular life.

To be effective, the good of authenticity requires a second good, often called identification. If the values and desires we have strike us as foreign, as not our own, we are less likely to find satisfaction in the connection between our projects and our values, since we will be alienated from both.²⁶ I do not mean by identification with a value that the value must be consciously affirmed, that the value must be the object of higher-order beliefs, or that the value must have survived critical scrutiny. I mean only that you experience the value as your own – or at least that do not experience it as foreign.²⁷

So far, I have advanced the following main points. When parents aim to shape their children's values, they sometimes impose significant risks. If value inculcation fails, the child may be ill equipped to pursue a life that conforms to her values or may find her values to be alien. On this understanding, we can reformulate the right to an open future. Varied options are not necessarily an aid to a self-directed life of autonomy. They might instead be useful for an authentic and identified life. Because parents can anticipate that varied options might be

²⁶ These terms are notoriously disputed. See, e.g., Harry Frankfurt, Identification and Wholeheartedness 159 in **The Importance of What we Care About** (1988); Gary Watson, Free Agency, 73 **J. of Phil.** 205 (1975); Michael Bratman, A Desire of One's Own, 100 **J. of Phil.** 221 (2003). Frankfurt seems to equate alienation with a failure of identification. But others have suggested that alienation is an unpleasant experience, perhaps due to a conflict between self-image and actions or feelings. Non-identification is not necessarily accompanied by this feeling. E.g. Timothy Schroeder and Nony Arpaly, Alienation and Externality 29 **Canadian J. of Phil.** 371, 381 (1999). For another argument that living well requires identification (also called accepting ideas from the inside out), see Brighouse **Ethics** at 730 n19. Brighouse does not specify whether identification requires endorsement. Cf. Felicitas Kraemer, Me, Myself and My Brain Implant: Deep Brain Stimulation Raises Questions of Personal Authenticity and Alienation, 6 **Neuroethics** 483 (2013).

²⁷ The question of how a desire or value can belong to us if it also strikes us as foreign has been much discussed. On one account, the desire might belong to us because it is robust – that is persistent and not easily disturbed. See Sayre-McCord and Smith, Desires...and beliefs...of one's own supra. Another account suggests that values belong to us insofar as they accurately describe us. We feel alienation, on this account, when a value or desire that is truly ours also conflicts with our self-image. See Schroeder and Arpaly, supra.

necessary for their child to live authentically, they have reason to provide such options. The point of this reformulation is to provide a basis for children's rights that can be accepted both by liberals and by fundamentalists.

The strategy of emphasizing authenticity and identification only works if it meets two conditions. First, these ideals must actually be acceptable to reasonable people with varied conceptions of the good. In particular, they must not secretly import contested elements of autonomy. Second, they must be sufficiently appealing to count as primary goods – things that make a life go better on any account of a good life.

The modest versions of authenticity and identification outlined above do not depend on valorizing autonomy. One need not value a self-directed life or critical examination of one's values to see a benefit in having activities that match one's values and experiencing those values as one's own.

This claim might seem suspicious for several reasons. I employ authenticity and identification to argue for the importance of varied options, at least for most people. Surely an argument that aims to protect options must be an argument that favors autonomy. But this observation misunderstands autonomy's core virtue, which is self-direction. Not every argument for options is an argument for self-direction. For example, a totalitarian state might allow citizens choose their careers because doing so maximizes overall productivity. They are protecting choice, but not in the service of a self-directed life. Similarly, some religions emphasize the importance of temptation because avoiding evil leads one to God. Choice is central to this view of human good. But choice is not valorized because self-direction is inherently valuable. Choice is important because it allows one to choose God.

Authenticity and identification are similar to these examples; choice is a useful means to produce an authentic and identified life. But these lives are better because they are authentic and identified, not because they are chosen. And they are authentic because values match actions, not because either values or actions are chosen.

Perhaps this will not persuade everyone. My argument endorses authenticity and identification without explaining how these outcomes arise. Surely, they arise out of individual agency. People cause their activities to match their values, if not through critical examination of their values, then by selecting their activities (or by changing their values). This must count as autonomy. And people cannot come to identify with specific values except by an act of will, such as endorsing the value as their own.

I do not agree. In many cases, of course, choice plays a central role in facilitating identification and authenticity. Those who value autonomy will embrace these goals because people who direct their own lives aim, among other things, for authentic and identified lives. But self-direction is only one possible path to identification and authenticity. For those who grow up in fundamentalist communities and who thrive there, the match between values and actions does not require self-direction. And the identification with values does not seem to demand any act of will. Although those who leave fundamentalist communities must actively choose to leave, the good they achieve is produced by alignment of values and actions, not by having chosen in order to create this alignment.

Some fundamentalists might respond that even if authenticity does not mask autonomy, it nonetheless fails to be neutral as to conceptions of the good. This objection might take at least two forms. The first denies that religions generally embrace authenticity as valuable. What

religions regard as valuable will of course vary from one religion to another. But it might be something like: faith in God, willing obedience to God's will, and repentance for sin. Someone who values faith, willing obedience, and repentance, and who acts on those values will have an authentic and identified life. Her actions will match her values. But for the religious person, authenticity is not what makes her actions good. What makes them good is the connection to God.

This is a serious challenge. But I do not think it decisive. I acknowledge that a religious person may place no value on the match between her actions and her beliefs other than believing her actions are the right path to human good, and that good therefore depends on those specific acts. But a reasonable religious person will recognize that everyone has this view about their actions and beliefs. What it means to hold a belief about the good is to believe that acting on those beliefs is good. Recognition of this general fact will allow a religious person to see the general value in authenticity – which is the value of being able to act on one's conception of the good.

A second version of this objection might come from someone who believes that a good life is one lived in conformity with God's commandments. Although sincere belief in God, or in the virtue of obedience, is perhaps beneficial, all that really matters is conformity. To this person, authenticity is no more neutral about the good than is autonomy.

This position likely does not reflect the view of most fundamentalists. But insofar as some embrace it, I do not think political liberalism can accept this conception of the good as reasonable. A conception that identifies human good as obedience, even without belief in the virtue of that obedience, does not fit with some of liberalism's core commitments, such as

freedom of conscience and the power of individuals to form their own conceptions of the good. Indeed it is not consistent with recognizing people as rational.

Having a conception of the good serves no purpose for a rational person unless that conception is connected to her actions. Rationality means trying to act in accordance with one's values and beliefs. A conception of the good that denies the value of authenticity is a conception that is indifferent to whether people act on their beliefs, and is thus indifferent to rationality. This is a conception of the good that fundamentally denies the importance of holding a conception of the good. In this respect, it is not a reasonable form of fundamentalism.

Even if authenticity and identification do not mask any controversial values, are they actually attractive? In some ways, they seem too limited to be basic human goods. Authenticity on my telling is the match between values and actions. This seems to be little more than congruence – a mere mathematical virtue, or worse, the sort of matchy-matchy aesthetic promoted by bad home décor magazines. And identification has been reduced to the absence of alienation – which is just a form of psychological pain. Surely we aim for more than this in life.

These are indeed pale values. They are described this way intentionally so they can fit into multiple controversial views of the good. Within each conception, these values become more attractive. For autonomy-liberals, actions that match one's values are the hallmarks of an examined and self-directed life. For people less interested in examined values, authenticity and identification facilitate finding meaning in life. For those who emphasize good character, the ability to form and sustain commitments to values over time and to act on those values displays

the virtues of fortitude and principled behavior. For some religious people, the match between belief and action form the core of sincerity and commitment in faith. Absent a particular conception of the good, my versions of authenticity and identification are dehydrated values. They become attractive only when immersed in the broth of other ideals. But because they fit centrally into important conceptions without conflicting with any of them, they count as plausible primary goods.

I use the term primary good here loosely – as a good that can be important to any person and harmful to none. But arguably these are primary goods in the sense Rawls uses this word. Rawls identifies the capacity to have a conception of the good as one of two moral powers. Authenticity – the match between one’s actions and one’s values – is what typically happens when a person both has a conception of the good and then acts on that conception. In this sense, it is no accident that authenticity and identification fit within many conceptions of the good, since they are the outcomes of acting successfully on a conception of the good.

Recognizing authenticity and identification as primary goods reveals two ways that parents risk impairing their children when shaping their values. First, children may grow up unable to pursue projects that match their values because their parents have made those projects very hard to pursue. Denying children secular education risks this impairment for adults who want a secular life. Second, children may grow up to be alienated from the values or desires they hold. A child who rejects her parents’ racist teachings, but who continues to be haunted by her own racist feelings, is an example. This example shows the connection between identification and authenticity. The child both finds her values to be foreign (alienation) and, as a result, is unable to sustain the kinds of personal relationships that she believes important (inauthenticity).

Many liberals will balk at this account because it looks only to outcomes and not to process. They will want to know how parents produced a child whose projects match her values.²⁸ What if the child arrived at this state because her upbringing made it hard to do otherwise? For example, perhaps she came to identify with her values as a psychological coping mechanism; identification with available roles seemed psychologically easier than alienation or self-hatred.

How should we evaluate identification with values that arise from suspect origins? Consider a religious adult who was raised in a closed and rigid community. She has no significant doubts about the value of her life. But she came to feel this way because she saw no practical alternatives to the life she leads. Realizing this, she became initially resigned, then content, and ultimately enthusiastic about the life that was available. Assume that her current view turns out to be stable and long-lasting. Can a liberal state condemn her upbringing because it has produced the wrong kinds of identification with her values?

I think that the answer is no. Unless we import controversial views about the value of autonomy, the state must treat this kind of identification as equally valuable to one born of intense self-examination and an open-minded upbringing. But I do think we have reason to condemn as unreasonably risky several of the methods that might have produced this identification – a topic to which I now turn.

Consider three possible outcomes for a child raised by ultra-Orthodox Jews and provided little secular education. First, he can rebel and leave (or want to leave), despite poor preparation for life outside. I have already explained how parents harmed this child. They have

²⁸ Many writers question the value of preferences or values that are formed under problematic circumstances. See, Arneson, [Autonomy and Preference Formation](#) at 43.

made it difficult for him to pursue a life in which his values match his projects. Second, he can remain part of the group, fully committed to its practices (perhaps because he lowered his expectations in response to his poor life-prospects outside the group, or perhaps because he simply regards his religious life as the right way to live). Third, he can stay, without being committed to the life he now leads or desiring any particular other life. Perhaps he identifies with his secular impulses, but cannot rid himself of the intense feeling that departure would be disloyal. Or perhaps he finds his secular impulses to be foreign. In either case, this third child is alienated.²⁹ Parents who take aggressive steps to shape their children's values impose a significant risk that the child will end up in the third category rather than the second. This is a harm beyond the one I identified toward the first child. And it is a particularly serious harm. Or so I will argue.

Before advancing that argument, I should clarify what I have in mind as the harm of alienation in this example. Not everyone who stays in their religion after losing faith in God thereby lives an alienated or inauthentic life. People can find meaning in ritual or in community without embracing all of the community's beliefs. Nor is someone necessarily harmed by suffering a crisis of commitment to once-treasured values. A crisis of this kind can be beneficial. My point is more limited: some people who no longer embrace (but also cannot fully reject) their community's norms suffer significant harm. Their alienation is both personally painful and an impediment to living authentically.

²⁹ One might think that the first and third case are really the same, but that the third version is simply more limited as to options. But this seems to me mistaken. In the first case, the person is acting on a new set of values that he identifies with. In the third case, there may be no new set of animating values, simply alienation from the values that he has. This idea – sometimes labeled estrangement – is discussed in Cheshire Calhoun, [Losing One's Self](#) in **Practical Identity and Narrative Agency** 193, 198 (Atkins and MacKenzie, eds. 2008).

People experience alienation and inauthenticity for many reasons. For example, some academics come to disdain the abstract and isolated nature of their work. They may quit their jobs. Or, if they are timid or have few other options, they may remain in place, but no longer embrace the values that led them to their careers. This is an unhappy outcome. But it is at least an outcome that the academic likely attributes to her own bad choice (of careers) or bad character (for being timid) or bad luck (for not having alternatives).

What if instead she became an academic because she was tricked into choosing this career? Her alienation was made more likely by this trickery (insofar as such methods often wear off). And it is worse when it arises. The academic who chose poorly finds herself pursuing values that are no longer hers, but that she at least can see as having been hers in the past. If she comes to see that she was tricked into embracing those values, then her alienation is increased. In retrospect, she regards herself as never having pursued her own values, but as having been in another's control.

The tricked academic's fate illustrates a distinct wrong parents can commit while shaping their children's values. Some techniques for shaping values have a higher chance that their effects will fade. These tactics raise the chance of producing outcomes one and three rather than outcome two. And when they produce outcome three, the experience of alienation is likely to be especially severe, as its victims will feel themselves not only alienated from their current values, but also as never having held those values as their own at all.

Of course, the case of coming to reject your parents' values differs from the academic who rejects values she chose in the past. No child will look back on her parents' values as those she freely embraced. But she may well regard them as her own values as a child (or simply her

family's values) insofar as she does not regard the methods of inculcation as having been manipulative or coercive.

The parental duty I propose is quite narrow. On my account, parents must take precautions to reduce the risk of their child living an inauthentic and alienated life. This requires that the parent consider whether their value-shaping efforts might make an authentic life unreasonably difficult should those efforts fail. But parents need not provide their children with the easiest possible path toward an authentic and identified life. They need only to reduce the risk of rendering their children disabled, that is making it unreasonably difficult for them to lead authentic and identified lives.³⁰ Allowing a religious child to reach adulthood with the secular education of a small child counts as such a disability. Refusing to pay for college (when student loans are available) or expressing a desire for the child to remain religious does not render the child disabled from pursuing an authentic life. These acts no doubt make the choice to leave a community more difficult. But not every difficulty is a harm.

Why should my argument be limited to disabling harms rather than to all losses. i.e. shouldn't parents be obligated to maximize their children's chance at pursuing projects that match their values by minimizing the expected difficulty of doing so? I see several reasons against this position. First, parents have a right to direct their children's upbringing. This right must be balanced against contrary children's interests. But it will not always be subordinate. This means that parents should sometimes be permitted to make negative expected-value decisions for their children. Second, we usually cannot be confident that some outcome is in

³⁰ Some theories of harm distinguish actions that render a person unable (easily) to pursue meaningful projects from those that merely set back a person's interests. See Judith Thomson, *The Realm of Rights* 264-65 (1990); Seana Shiffrin, *Harm and its Moral Significance*, 18 *Legal Theory* 357 (2012).

expectation bad unless it is quite severely bad. When the expected outcome is not clearly harmful (because we lack information or because of incommensurability) parents should be entitled to discretion. Third, some parenting choices – such the one in Talmud to Tech – require parents to facilitate outcomes that they regard as morally objectionable. Parents have reasonable claims not be compelled to be complicit in such outcomes. Those claims must be subordinated to children’s rights when there is no other way to prevent serious harm. But when these harms become less serious, the right of non-complicity may dominate.³¹

The duty is also narrow because for most people, there is more than one path toward authenticity. Recognizing this allows me to avoid the maximizing problem that plagued Feinberg’s right to an open future. Parents cannot know all of the things a child might grow up to want and so cannot prepare their children well for every possible life. Failure to offer French horn lessons might be disabling to a career as a French horn player. But foreclosing a single career is not the same as precluding an authentic life. A person whose core values include musical excellence can find more than one possible path to act on those values. The single career goal of performing on the French horn for a living is simply not the only way to authenticity. For that reason, narrowly defined options will rarely be essential to an authentic life. Parents thus need not preserve all feasible options in order to protect authenticity.

IV. Objections and Conclusion

Before concluding, I want to address two objections. First, my argument focuses on risks that parents impose when they try to shape their children’s values but do not fully succeed.

³¹ More detailed discussions about incommensurability and about complicity can be found in Altman, [Taking Precautions](#)

These failures can arise when children want lives other than the ones their parents prepared them for, or when the children experience as foreign the values instilled by their parents. Does this mean that infallible permanent brainwashing would not wrong children, and that the only ills of parental manipulations stem from the chance that they fail?

The term brainwashing is controversial. If it means causing cognitive impairment, then nothing I have said justifies brainwashing. But if brainwashing means entrenching a person's values and desires using manipulative techniques, then on the political-liberal account presumed in this paper, I see no basis for government intervention against infallible, permanent, brainwashing of children – unless the content of that brainwashing is unreasonable, or is inconsistent with the cooperation needed in the moral community or for civic participation. At the same time, I do not think this objection has much practical bite, as the idea of infallible permanent brainwashing is a fantasy.³² I acknowledge, however, that because my theory relies on risk assessment, it may sometimes permit parents to use techniques that some people describe as brainwashing. This would depend on the likelihood of failure and the severity of associate harms.

A second objection is that my argument mirrors the theory sometimes mocked as “self-justifying paternalism.” The idea is that any paternalistic act might be warranted if we could be reasonably sure of its later ratification. This argument is called self-justifying because it seems

³² There remains significant dispute over whether brainwashing is a sensible description for efforts to recruit or retain members in a religion or other group. See Benjamin Zablocki, Toward a Demystified and Disinterested Scientific Theory of Brainwashing 194-201 in **Misunderstanding Cults: Searching for Objectivity in a Controversial Field** (Zablocki & Robins eds. 2001); James Richardson, The active vs. Passive Convert: Paradigm Conflict in Conversion/Recruitment Research, 24 **J. for the Scientific Study of Religion** 163 (1985); Marc Galanter, **Cults: Faith, Healing, and Coercion** (2d ed. 1999). Whatever view one takes of this dispute, it is clear that no religious group has found a fool-proof means of recruitment or retention.

to bless any practice that can indoctrinate someone into believing in its validity, no matter how awful the practice.³³

Although my argument has in common with this sort of paternalism the validation of an intervention if the person can be expected to value the outcome, it differs significantly in its approach. People ridicule self-justifying paternalism because the alleged consent involved does not seem real, and because it makes a mockery of autonomy by finding autonomy in subservience. I am not relying on the approval of adults to their parents' indoctrination as a justification, or on any theory of autonomy. Rather, I am asking whether the parents harmed the later adult by making authenticity or identification difficult – a question of harm rather than consent. Indeed, in many cases where there is not retroactive approval, there is also not any real harm. For example, secular adults may disapprove of their parents for forcing them to pray every day as children. But unless they suffer some serious setback to their adult lives, I do not think they have grounds to complain. Resenting the fact that your parents forced you to pray is not the same as being unable to identify with values that you hold, or being unable to pursue meaningful projects. One is a mere regret; the other is a disability.

This paper set out to examine how parents' efforts to shape their children's values are limited by children's interests. It took as a constraint the assumption that autonomy cannot be privileged over other ways of life, a constraint intended to allow common ground between liberals and reasonable fundamentalists.

³³ See David Archard, Self-Justifying Paternalism, 27 *J. Value Inq.* 341 (1993); David Archard, **Children: Rights and Childhood** 54 (1993); Arjo, supra at 375.

The paper treated parental efforts to shape children's values as comparable to other acts that impose risks. If things work out as the parent hopes, the parents' value-shaping effort will benefit the child. But if the future works out differently, those same efforts may harm the child. For this reason, parents should be guided by a kind of risk assessment that considers expected value.

The paper explained how this way of thinking might allow us to reformulate a child's right to an open future. This reformulation transforms the right into one that is based not on autonomy, but on the values of authenticity and identification, values that can be embraced both by liberals and by reasonable fundamentalists. On this account, an open future is one with sufficiently varied options for someone to live an authentic and identified life. Parents have reason, when weighing expected benefits, to ask about the likely effects of their actions on authenticity and identification under several plausible guesses about their child's future.