
Wrongful Influence in Educational Contexts

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Summary

When and why are coercion, indoctrination, manipulation, deception, and bullshit morally wrongful modes of influence in the context of educating children? Answering this question requires identifying what valid claims different parties have against one another regarding how children are influenced. Most prominently among these, it requires discerning what claims children have regarding whether and how they and their peers are influenced, and against whom they have these claims. The claims they have are grounded in the weighty interests they each equally have in their wellbeing, prospective autonomy, and being regarded with equal concern and respect. Plausibly children have valid claims regarding the content and means of influence they themselves are subjected to. For instance, considerations of concern and respect for children confer duties on others enable them to know important information and develop important skills. Children also plausibly have valid claims to be free from certain means of influence, including indoctrination. This is because indoctrinatory practices threaten to diminish both their capacity to reason soundly, thereby constituting a wrongful harm, and their opportunities to form judgements and choices in response to relevant evidence and reasons, thereby constituting a wrong of disrespect.

Keywords: influence, coercion, indoctrination, manipulation, nudge, deception, bullshit, perfectionism, anti-perfectionism, punishment

Subjects: Curriculum and Pedagogy, Educational Politics and Policy, Educational Purposes and Ideals, Educational Theories and Philosophies, Education and Society

Introduction

Philosophy of education is replete with lively debates about what dispositions schools and teachers may permissibly aim to cultivate in their students, what they may require students to do, and what means they may employ to realize these aims. Addressing the following questions will help to get us to the heart of how influence in educational contexts can be wrongful.¹ What valid claims (i.e., demands for what is owed to them) do children have regarding whether and how they themselves are influenced? What claims do they have regarding whether and how one another are influenced? Against whom do they have these claims (i.e., who ought to provide, provide for, or otherwise ensure these claims are satisfied)? What claims might the wider community have against children regarding whether and how

they are influenced? What claims might specific individuals have against children regarding whether and how they are influenced?² I address each question in turn. Some preliminary distinctions are useful for interpreting and answering these questions.

Preliminary Distinctions

Means and Respects of Influence

We should distinguish between the *means by which* and *respects in which* students can be influenced. While the *means by which* students can be influenced can be grouped in various ways, it will do to provide an incomplete, indicative list that cuts across ways of grouping them.³ We can be influenced by: orders, advice, testimony, proofs, and nudges. With regards to *respects in which* students can be influenced, we should further distinguish between *formative* and *behavioral* respects in which they can be influenced (though we should note that these are not mutually exclusive):

Whereas behavioural influences make a difference to what people do, formative influences make a difference to those of their mental characteristics in virtue of which they are what they are: their beliefs and desires for instance or, more generally, their dispositions.

(Tillson, 2019, p. 51)

Content: Formative and Behavioral Attributes and Modes

Formative and behavioral influence have content. The content of a formative influence is the particular cognitive, conative, affective, and behavioral dispositions that influence promotes or tends to promote, including beliefs (that Paris is the capital of France), abilities (to use search engines), and habits of mind (imagine being in another person's shoes), and action (looking both ways before crossing the road).⁴ The content of a behavioral influence is the particular behavioral event that influence promotes or tends to promote (not running in the corridor, or listening to the teacher, for instance). Following the four-category ontology in Lowe (2007), it is useful to refer to the content of influence as *formative* and *behavioral attributes*, and the instantiations of this content, the particular tokens of the type, as *formative* and *behavioral modes*. The influence or non-influence of a teacher might, by design or by accident, produce, maintain, or fail to budge the particular modes of an individual. The point of drawing the distinction between *means by* and *respects in which* students can be influenced is that teachers can promote desirable modes using impermissible means (as a cruel instructor might punish students who make errors).

Acts and Omissions

It is useful to distinguish acts from omissions. Both acts and failures to act can be wrongful. Suppose a teacher can easily explain to their student how to overcome a debilitating problem. It is plausibly right for them to help and wrong for them to refuse help. Equally it could be wrong for them to make a student who needs no explanation worse off by confusing them, and right for them to refrain from doing so. Influence is, to borrow an expression from Gilbert Ryle

(2000), an “achievement verb” (pp. 49–53). To have an influence is to make a difference to at least one person’s formative or behavioral modes. However, we should not let the grammar lead us away from the interesting moral phenomena which include failures to influence (such as lessons not learned) and risked influences that do not obtain (including modelled behavior, that nobody apes).

Wrongs and Enforceable Duties

Where our moral reason to do something is decisive, we are under a moral duty to do that thing, and it would be morally wrong not to do it. Usually, our moral duties override non-moral reasons for contrary actions. The graver the wrong, the more stringent our duty. Sometimes second and third parties are permitted or even obliged to ensure that we conform with our moral duties (i.e., to ensure we act in the right way, even if in practice this means we do not act for the right reasons). Call this, “enforcement.” Enforcement, such as of moral duties, is one reason for exercising coercive behavioral influence. For this reason, it requires discussion in considering what kinds of behavioral influences are permissible in schools. Equally, however, we are also interested in the enforcement of moral duties that apply to behavioral and formative influence. For instance, in many countries, corporal punishment is illegal in schools in no small part because it is thought to be a morally wrongful means of influence. Indeed, in such countries, while a teacher might legally be physically restrained from or prosecuted for implementing corporal punishment, they may not be corporally punished for corporal punishment for the very reason that it is thought to be a morally wrongful means of influence.⁵

Ideal and Non-Ideal Theory

Finally, we should form our views about what decisions and policies different agents or sets of agents ought morally to do in light of their available evidence about morally relevant features of their scenario. These features might include background injustices, facts about human nature, and facts about how other agents are likely to respond to their decisions.⁶ This is because what may be morally required of us varies across circumstances. For instance, our duties of rescue can only obtain in circumstances where someone needs rescue and where we can provide it, and they can be trumped by personal costs, refusal of the rescued party, and by sufficiently bad side effects. Some choice scenarios are more ideal (there are fewer and less severe background injustices) and some less so (there are more and more severe background injustices). The discussion in each section ranges across actors and circumstances, and different (sets of) actors have different sets of options within such scenarios. I consider what any actor has moral reason to do, and in which circumstances these reasons generate or fail to generate duties.

With these distinctions in mind, we can address in turn each of our opening questions from the introduction. Plausibly children have valid claims regarding the content and means of influence they themselves are subjected to. That is, they have claims to be shaped to have certain behavioral and formative modes and to not have others, as well as claims to reach those modes by certain means and not by others. Children also plausibly have valid claims regarding their peers’ shaping. Let us consider their claims regarding their own shaping.

Children's Claims Regarding the Content of Their Influence

Desirable Formative Modes

In sufficiently large and prosperous societies, some candidate formative modes that children plausibly have claims to include capacities for economic productivity, personal autonomy, democratic competence, healthy personal relations, regarding others as moral equals, and personal fulfilment (Brighouse et al., 2018). At this level of abstraction, things are unlikely to generate wide disagreement: each capacity is widely thought instrumental to or partly constitutive of flourishing lives in defensible political contexts, as well as being compatible with or conducive to developing and maintaining such a context. Moreover, they can be so viewed on a wide range of conceptions of what the good life consists of: no conception is given a superior or inferior status in promoting these capacities.⁷ Capacities for democratic competence and personal autonomy might have limited use in places like North Korea, and teachers and parents have weighty reasons of personal risk not to promote them there, but the claims children have to them equally ground massive regime reformation and their underdevelopment is wrongful at the regime level of decision making and regrettable if permissible at the level of citizens.⁸

Wider disagreement arises when further detail of the capacities is sought, and when other capacities are mooted. Matters of wide dispute include whether children have claims to (or claims to be free from) being shaped to endorse and pursue a particular conception of flourishing. In particular, it is disputed as to what claims children have regarding whether they are shaped to endorse and pursue that conception of flourishing which is best warranted by the evidence, or which their family or community happens to endorse. The permissibility of cultivating formative and behavioral modes enjoined by moral and political views which happen to divide the community are also debated.⁹ Such views include ones about whether eating meat, homosexual intercourse, abortion, and euthanasia are morally permissible, whether we should love our countries, and what forms of partiality are permissible and to what degree.

Strategic Versus Anti-Perfectionist Non-Promotion

There can be pragmatic and principled reasons to either exclude matters which happen to divide the community from the curriculum, or to take a non-promotional approach to their evaluation where they are taught.¹⁰ A pragmatic (i.e., non-ideal) reason for their omission or non-promotional treatment might be that such education ensures minimal conflict and maximal cooperation among members of the community (i.e., that it ensures the least unjust state of affairs). A more principled reason is that the fact of disagreement can dissolve permissions and obligations for promoting particular formative and behavioral modes. According to "anti-perfectionists" like Matthew Clayton, equal respect requires institutions which exercise coercive control over individuals who cannot emancipate themselves, not to coerce or encourage their charges to pursue, endorse, or reject any particular conceptions of the good or encourage them to endorse or reject any views about the nature of the world that they may reasonably reject. Reasonable rejection is a political rather than epistemic notion. Views that we can reasonably reject are those that we can reject while remaining committed to some minimal moral standard, such as to the values of freedom, equality, and fair

cooperation. This view is most fully developed and defended concerning matters of education and upbringing in the work of Matthew Clayton (2006) and, Clayton and Stevens (2018, 2019). In their interpretation of Rawls' Public Reason constraint, Clayton and Stevens (2018) argued that schools ought to restrict their promotion of true beliefs and disabuse of false beliefs to (a) those that enable them to satisfy their enforceable duties, or (b) those that are not matters of dispute among politically reasonable people.

Guided and Constrained by Weighty Interests

How might we rationally resolve disagreements about which formative and behavioral modes schools may promote? The claims we have are grounded in the weighty interests we each equally have in our wellbeing, autonomy, and being regarded with equal concern and respect. However, actions are not rendered right or wrong by whether these interests are maximized. Instead, these interests can constrain the extent to which we may or must promote these same interests. For instance, were it to maximize the realization of these interests to lie to a citizenry about its history, it could still be wrongful to lie to people who have interests in governing their lives in light of accurate and relevant information.¹¹

There are puzzles about how concern for wellbeing and respect for autonomy relate to one another.¹² Some think that an individual's claim to autonomy derives from its efficiency in securing their personal wellbeing, and that "a liberal state has no business either endorsing or rejecting the position that autonomy has intrinsic prudential value" (MacMullen, 2015, p. 95). Others hold that autonomy is the very value that limits the liberal state's business endorsing or rejecting conceptions of the good. Respect for autonomy is something that liberal states either comply with or violate: they can either act out of concern, or restrain themselves from doing so, in order not to violate claims to self-rule.¹³ This case may be bolstered by appealing to the widely held judgement that it is impermissible for doctors to enhance our wellbeing through medical treatment, even in ways that will save our lives, if we refuse treatment, and the state has no business in enforcing such treatment.¹⁴ Concordantly, others think that autonomy is valuable independently of wellbeing, even if that value is conditional on the moral permissibility of our autonomous choices or can be trumped by sufficiently disastrous self-regarding choices.

Respect for children whose autonomy is still in prospect can be understood in two significantly different ways. It can be understood as an end state, the achievement of which imposes duties of developmental assistance as well as desistance from actions that would arrest its development (Feinberg, 1992). In addition to an end state of this kind, it can be understood as a prerequisite for certain forms of treatment (Clayton, 2006). For example, we may think that, even if they gave their permission and (counterfactually) it would not harm them, children should not have sex until they reach some threshold of autonomy since autonomous consent is a condition of permissible sex.¹⁵

The distinction between end state and prerequisite manifests in debates about whether some parties may sometimes permissibly shape children in ways which are a matter of actual and politically reasonable disagreement (conditions satisfied by a large range of comprehensive doctrines). By contrast with anti-perfectionists, perfectionists think that there is no principled, rather than merely feasibility-based, reason that the state and other coercive institutions whose rule we cannot opt ourselves out of (e.g., minors from their families, or children from

schools), may not shape children in ways which are most responsive to the available evidence and argument about what a flourishing life consists of. Indeed, they may think that failure to do so shows a lack of concern for their subjects' wellbeing.

This perfectionist streak does not secure what many hope it to, namely moral permission for political authorities (and parents) to err without interference in shaping their young citizens (and children) according to views that they mistakenly think track the good. Perfectionism generates permission (together with injunctions against interference and claims to resources) for political authorities and parents to shape young citizens and children in line with their views of the good, just insofar as being so shaped does in fact contribute sufficiently to their wellbeing. This may be so even if the political authorities or parents are somewhat mistaken about how this shaping contributes to their wellbeing or what else might so contribute. For instance, they might be permitted to initiate children into any one of several incompatible conceptions of the good, so long as each of those were judged sufficiently good by a more expansive and correct conception of the good.

Pairing the Epistemic and Momentousness Criteria

In *Children, Religion, and the Ethics of Influence*, Tillson (2019) argued that for each formative attribute (e.g., belief, disposition or attitude), influencers have the options of ignoring it, promoting it, demoting it, or drawing attention to it as something worthy of consideration to rationally adopt—that is, “floating” it. Some formative attributes are irrational to adopt, some are irrational not to adopt, and some are neither. For each prospective formative or behavioral attribute, Tillson argued that it ought to be promoted, floated, or demoted respectively, according to the following three sets of criteria, and where none of these apply, it might be fairly ignored:

1. *Promoted*: (a) It is momentous (i.e., it makes a significant difference if one fails to have it); (b) it might well not be adopted without intervention; (c) failing to have it is irrational.
2. *Floated*: (a) It is momentous; (b) it might well not be understood and rationally evaluated without intervention; (c) neither having nor failing to have it is irrational.
3. *Demoted*: (a) It is momentous; (b) it might well be adopted without intervention; (c) having it is irrational.

These criteria offer a pairing of the epistemic and momentousness criteria for curriculum inclusion and promotional (or non-promotional) teaching (for discussions of the epistemic criterion, see Dearden, 1981, and Hand, 2008; for its pairing with the momentousness criterion, see Tillson, 2014, 2017, 2020). On the epistemic criterion, public education should align students' credence with credibility. On the momentousness criterion, public education ought to include content that it is costly for children to lack the correct view about, where they are otherwise unlikely to have it. Importantly, what we have decisive (epistemic) reason to believe may not be the truth (the evidence may be misleading). In such circumstances we cannot know that we are being misled and should follow the evidence, believing—provisionally—what it tells us to. While it might be regrettable that we are taught falsehoods in this way, it

is not wrongful that we are. Indeed, to be taught what just so happens to be the truth despite everything the evidence suggests could be the result of negligence, wrongful indifference, or malice.

Generally, we enhance individuals' as well as their community's occurrent and prospective wellbeing by aligning the formative modes that they have with the ones they have most reason to have. In the epistemic case, usually they have most reason, all things considered, to believe what they have most epistemic reason to believe. Believing the truth (as that is best tracked by the state of existing evidence and argument) is both instrumental to and partly constitutive of wellbeing, as well as instrumental to and partly constitutive of satisfying our moral duties. In the behavior case, we often have overriding moral reason to act or refrain from certain courses of action. There are also non-moral reasons for having formative attributes, ones rooted in living a fulfilling life, such as being able to appreciate beauty or to identify and pursue goals which give our lives meaning.

Some formative attributes or bundles of modes are quite comprehensive and fundamental, forming the basis of further modes that will be adopted. Our reasons to ensure that these align with the state of reasons we have for forming formative modes are strengthened in proportion with their fundamentality and comprehensiveness. Furthermore, while children have no duty to perfect themselves, they do have autonomy-based claims to invent themselves. They cannot do this in ignorance, however. They also have concern-based claims to realistic opportunities to internalize the implications of the best evidence and arguments about meaning and wellbeing. If their lives are meaningless because they chose as well as they could without being properly informed, by being confused by exposure to irrelevant information, say, then they could not truly consent to the life they undertook, and did not have a realistic chance of an autonomously chosen *or* meaningful life (see Tillson, 2020).

Children's Claims Regarding Means by Which They are Influenced

Rational Versus Non-Rational Means of Influence

Children plausibly have duty-conferring claims to be free from certain means of influence, at least with respect to some content. In general, influencers can either engage people's rational capacities, or attempt to bypass or subvert them. That is, they can use rational or non-rational means to influence people's behavioral and formative modes. Rational means affect influence by providing valid reasons for instantiating attributes. Centrally they feature an alignment of the influencer's intention to create a particular mode, the influencer's provision of sound reasons for the adoption of the mode, and the influencee's (defeasible) adoption of the mode for the reasons provided. They can include providing credible testimony, giving authoritative instructions, making requests, providing access to relevant resources together with an adequate opportunity to work out their implications, as well as creating and informing subjects about incentive-based reasons such as punishments.

Non-rational means cover all other methods. They include, for instance, modulating the frame within which choices and judgements are made in ways that affect the outcome without changing choice-relevant information. This is what Andres Moles (2015) called "nudging."¹⁶ They also include taking preventative steps in anticipation of potential formative and behavioral modes, by constraining their range of available actions or information. All these

things can in principle be intended by influencers, unintended but foreseen, or unintended and unforeseen (sometimes culpably so). Which means of influence if any do children have duty-conferring claims *to* or duty-conferring claims *to be free from*? We have already namechecked some plausible candidates; lies, deception, bullshit, coercion, manipulation, and indoctrination. These can be wrongful by offending children's interests in wellbeing, autonomy, and equal regard.

Lies, Deception, and Bullshit

Lying is best analyzed as either communicating that one believes a truth-claim that one does not believe (usually with the intention that another party will believe it), or else as "committing oneself" to a truth-claim that one does not believe.¹⁷ On the latter analysis, there need be no prospect or intention that anyone will believe the lie or even that one will be believed to believe the lie. Jessica Keiser (2016) attempted to motivate the latter analysis with the following example of "barefaced lying." To protect his family from reprisals, a witness retracts his sworn statement against a ruthless mob boss, asserting—knowingly totally implausibly—that his sworn statement was fabricated. Doing so commits him legally to the content of his revised statement and destroys his statement's legal probative force even though he has no intention or hope that anybody would believe him to be sincere (see Harris, 2020, for a response). Lying is often wrongful if—as is often the case—the liar may reasonably be expected to sincerely communicate beliefs they have formed with due regard for the available evidence. Sometimes lying may be regarded as disrespectful because it can mislead people who are then unable to make decisions in consideration of relevant facts. Sometimes lying is disrespectful for the additional reason that the liar treats listeners as a mere means for their own advantage.

Lying is hardly invariantly wrong, however. For instance, to avert beatings, students are surely permitted to lie to bullies about the whereabouts of intended victims. In another example, a teacher might be permitted to tell young child that there is no chance at all that they will die in their sleep, to protect their wellbeing. More controversially, in his *Republic* (Book 3, 414e–15c), Plato advocated telling citizens a "Noble Lie" to promote conformity with just laws and submission to a just order they might struggle to understand. The details of the lie were that the original members of the community were born from the same earth (thereby promoting solidarity and reciprocal sympathies), but from different quality metals (thereby promoting appropriate patterns of obedience and authority). Conformity with just laws and obedience of just authorities are desirable, but we must ask whether the same goods can be achieved sufficiently without violating constraints of respect. Indeed, some—for reasons of practical epistemology—worry whether we can ever be sufficiently sure that our current conception of justice is just so as not to hedge our bets against error by retaining an open market of ideas understood free of misinformation in which alternative conceptions can always be given another hearing to persuade us of their quality (Buchanan, 2004). Others think that states may never even honestly and accurately shape their citizens' conceptions of justice, since this would thwart what they take to be precondition of legitimacy—the free and informed consent of the citizenry (Brighouse, 1998).¹⁸

Deception is related to but distinct from lying. If Keiser is right, we can lie without intending to deceive. Less controversially, one can deceive without lying. For instance, I could deceive somebody into thinking it is raining outside by sprinkling myself with water before walking inside. This need not involve expressing a claim I believe to be false. One can also deceive by utilizing assumptions about communication. These assumptions include that we will economically convey all and only our relevant beliefs and that our beliefs will be formed with due diligence (Grice, 1975). If my student asks, “is this a good poem?,” and I answer, “the exam board would not have included it if they did not think so,” I imply that it is a good poem. If it is not a good poem, I will have misled my student. If I did so intentionally, I will have deceived my student and done so without lying. Similar to lying, deception could be wrongful by misleading people and rendering them unable to make decisions in consideration of relevant facts, or by using them as a mere means to one’s advantage. Indeed, ordinarily where we can reasonably expect someone to both *have* all the relevant facts and to *share* those with us, if they withhold any from us, we will reasonably conclude that there is nothing more to know and may form different plans than we would have were we to have the full picture. They may thereby culpably render us unable to make decisions in consideration of all the relevant facts.

Bullshit is a notorious and related form of influence which Harry Frankfurt (1988) famously distinguished from lying. To bullshit means to speak as if one knew what one were talking about, without caring whether what one says is even coherent, let alone true. Where we believe someone’s bullshit, we can again be left unable to make decisions in consideration of relevant facts. We might, for instance, take it that a bullshitter knows what they are talking about and entrust them to act on our behalf when they cannot be so trusted. Teachers should worry about grading their students positively where they cannot understand what they are saying, since it may incentivize them to talk as if they know what they are talking about, when they do not (i.e., incentivize them to bullshit). Indeed, yet more perversely, it may encourage students to *think* they know what they are talking about, when they do not.

Manipulation

Manipulation is not a particular mechanism, but attitude. It seeks to persuade people in the most effective way, irrespective of whatever that is. Often this involves bypassing or subverting their rational capacities. Sometimes it involves fully engaging them. Consider the following case. Mark likes to exercise control over his students so that they participate in his school plays. He uses whatever methods are most affective to steer his students to do what he wants. Often, he bypasses and subverts his students’ reason by willfully withholding information, drawing attention from salient considerations toward irrelevant ones, and giving fallacious arguments. Sometimes, however, it is the best reasons that are most efficacious. While Mark has never tried to influence his student Mike before, Mark suddenly wants Mike to be in his school play. Mark’s most promising strategy is to fully engage Mike’s reason: to let him know that there is a role that is perfect for Mike—that he would enjoy and do the best job of. Mark tells Mike, Mike auditions, and gets the role. Mark still wrongfully manipulates Mike on account of his wrongful attitude, despite fully engaging Mike’s reason. What Mark should have done was something almost identical, something differentiated only by alternative attitude.

Indoctrination

Indoctrination is well characterized as the sustained engagement in practices that increase the likelihood of subjects' formative and behavioral modes becoming resistant to revision in the face of compelling countervailing reasons. Call this "intransigence." Using such practices is often blameworthy; for instance, when they are employed maliciously, negligently, or indifferently. If not so employed, such practices may be merely regrettable rather than blameworthy. Some theorists restrict "indoctrination" to cover only the inculcation, intended inculcation or practices likely to inculcate *beliefs* such that they will be held intransigently. They do not want to extend the term to capture the inculcation, intended inculcation or practices likely to inculcate other formative modes.¹⁹ However, it seems that whatever is objectionable or regrettable in the case of beliefs is equally objectionable or regrettable in the case of other formative modes. Since these practices threaten to diminish our capacity to reason soundly, they often constitute a wrongful harm. Additionally, however, by undermining our opportunities to form judgements and choices in response to relevant evidence and reasons, they can constitute a wrong of disrespect.

While it is generally wrong to bypass or subvert people's rational capacities in effecting formative and behavioral influence, there is no absolute constraint. For instance, where rational moral persuasion is of another is impossible, provided one has moral knowledge, the use of moral indoctrination might be obligatory. Consider the legion crimes which continue to be perpetrated in the name of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and its Salafi form of jihadism. So as to end further such atrocities, if any security force had the means to convert ISIL's members to reject their extremist worldview by using non-rational methods, where no sufficiently timely and efficacious rational alternative were available, they would plausibly be morally obliged to use them. Since some children do grow up to do morally impermissible things, it might be thought that it would have been better if they had been indoctrinated into more morally acceptable outlooks. Indeed, very plausibly, schemes of punishment and nudging and the like which supplement moral reasons should be established to help ensure that people act consistently with moral requirements.

Coercion

Allen W. Wood (2014) provided an attractive analysis of coercion according to which "I am coerced to do something when I either do not choose to do it or if, when I choose to do it, I do it because I have no acceptable alternative" (p. 21), and it is someone else that ensures I have no acceptable alternatives. Some alternatives are unacceptable because "they threaten an evil so extreme I can't or won't consider them (being shot, letting my family starve), while others might be unacceptable for moral or legal reasons" (Wood, 2014, p. 23). While coercion is wrongful when used to constrain morally permissible options, it is not wrongful per se. For instance, sometimes it may be justly used to enforce our duties and prevent wrongful behavior. Even still, it can be wrongful even when used to constrain morally impermissible options. As Moles (2015) explained,

[Sometimes] attempting to enforce a duty might violate the duty (or the value) it aims to enforce. Another reason for nonenforceability may be that enforcing one duty involves the violation of a different duty (or the value that a duty is supposed to serve), which over rides the first duty. (pp. 660-661)

For instance, sending a Charlie home for failing to engage properly in learning activities may further undermine Charlie's prospects of learning, or sending Charlie home to prevent him from interfering with Gene's education may violate a duty to provide Charlie with an adequate education.

Coercive and Paternalistic Schooling

There are strict constraints on the uses of punishment, hard treatment more generally, and blame to affect formative and behavioral influence. For instance, liability for punishment and blame turns on whether one has done wrong. Additionally, in the case of children, liability is restricted by children's limited capacity to have known and been able to do better. However, some think that being subject to (some) punishment and harsher forms of expressive blame can augment our knowledge and understanding of moral requirements and so have a role in moral formation. Victor Tadros (2019) argued that responsible wrongdoers incur enforceable duties to protect others from similar wrongs at some personal cost. They can discharge this duty by submitting to hard treatment designed to deter others from similar wrongdoing. However, children may not be punished for such reasons of general deterrence since they lack the appropriate degree of culpability to incur protective duties. Instead, children—whose autonomy is nascent—may justly be subjected to such punishments as are in their own interests without the autonomy-grounded right that adults have to decline that benefit.²⁰

Schooling is typically coercive. As Clayton and Halliday (2017) explained, "This is true in the sense that children are legally required to attend school in the first place, will generally have to accept what choices their parents make as to which school this is and will generally be told what to do by their teachers in the course of the typical school day" (p. 292). Why is compulsory schooling of children permissible, rather than wrongful kidnap for part of the day? It seems that we cannot permissibly compel adults to be schooled. One thought is that compulsory education can be warranted on some occasions for adults rather than just as a prerequisite for an optional endeavor (such as having to learn how to drive before being permitted to drive). For instance, adults might be required to listen to victims of their crimes explain how they were affected by their actions. However, this liability is limited to specific circumstances, whereas children are liable to be compelled to attend schooling irrespective of their actions.

Often children's education is supposed to be in their own interests. However, they are not given the opportunity to forego the benefits it confers, nor are their parents on their behalf. What is called for is an account of permissible paternalistic compulsory schooling for minors. Welfarist views ground the value of autonomy and the right to waive supposed benefits in the instrumentality of autonomy to realizing one's own good. Children, they contend, fail to choose wisely, whereas adults tend to choose wisely, or at least sufficiently wisely such that their life course should broadly be left to their own discretion. They may also contend that intervention in the case of adults tends to do more damage than good, even if they do not choose wisely. Others ground adults' claims to freedom from paternalistic interference in their capacity of autonomous choice—a capacity which children lack.

Children's Claims Regarding Their Peers' Shaping

Children's liability to influence immunity from influence and discretion over how they are influenced are plausibly limited by the claims of *other children*. Children plausibly have claims regarding the formative and behavioral influence that their peers are subjected to. Their cohort will grow up to constitute society's leaders and followers, making decisions about what personal, local, or national policies to enact (including policies of resistance to other policies). Given this, they may have claims that *others* be taught and equipped to choose policies which will *affect them* wisely. For these lessons to be learned, their peers will need to attend school, and engage sufficiently in learning activities when there. Some kinds of influence to ensure attendance and engagement will be necessary. Furthermore, children will have claims to and claims to be free from certain kinds of treatment by their fellow students. Plausible examples include claims to concern and respect: to be free from bullying, theft of personal property, and harm. Again, some kinds of behavioral influence may be useful to bring this about.

Additionally, children may also have claims not to be harmed by the advantageous shaping of others. For instance, a little league coach who spends a disproportionate portion of their time cultivating a particular child's talents might wrong their other students. This argument is made most forcefully by Adam Swift (2002). The motivating thought is that since formatively influencing some well can disadvantage others who are influenced less well, a more equal distribution of either resources or outcomes can be claimed to ensure that harm is not done to others through positional disadvantaging.

We have considered what interests children have regarding how they and their peers are influenced. However, more work needs to be done to show which parties these interests confer duties on.

Against Whom Do Children Have Claims Regarding Their Influence?

Rights, duties, and permissions can be separated out and distributed out among parties. Here is a toy distribution of bundles of rights and duties: we could imagine that teachers have a duty to tell their students the truth, as well as a right to be listened to by their students. Correlatively, we could imagine that students have a duty to listen to their teachers, and a right to be told the truth by their teachers. How should various bundles of duties and permissions to influence and provide for influence be distributed?

Providing Versus Providing For

We should distinguish between *providing* and *providing for* influence.²¹ It might be that due to reasons of competency, parents should not provide a substantial portion of their children's education. However, some might think that they should *provide for* that education, at least were that education or lack of it *only* or *primarily* of benefit to their children. Others might think that even factoring out externalities, the wider community should provide for that education, especially where its costs outstrip parents' wealth. The reasoning here is that the internalities of educational benefits constitute part of what adequate welfare provisions ought to provide for citizens and other inhabitants, such as asylum seekers. This can be motivated by considerations of fairness; it might be thought that fairness requires doing what we can to

eliminate the role of luck—such as the genetic and social lotteries of birth—from children’s chances of flourishing. Putting internal benefits to one side, or regarding them as side effects of external benefits of education (i.e., benefits to those other than the one being educated), it might be thought that the state should provide for education to some level by taxing the general community. It might be thought that each member of the state has reasons of reciprocity to contribute financially to the provision of such an education. The thought goes like this: if you benefit from the state, then morally you ought to contribute to the state’s continued stable functioning and improvement. Education, the argument continues, is an essential part of any state’s continued stable functioning and improvement. Wrongful non-influence might result from the community’s failure to provide and arrange for provision.

Provision in Non-Ideal Circumstances

Provision can also be wrongful by promoting the wrong things. For instance, just as we can do wrong by radicalizing provision, we can do wrong by *providing for* radicalization, or by ordering it, or contributing to systems that provide it. Equally we can do right by providing de-radicalizing content, or by providing for deradicalization, or by ordering it, or contributing to systems that provide it. In non-ideal circumstances it can, however, be morally required to provide for and enable others to do wrong. Suppose there is some organization that is uniquely placed to educate a group of children to an adequate threshold, but they will only do so by at the same time requiring students to participate convincingly in religious worship. While it is wrong of the provider to make this requirement, it may not be wrong for others to *provide for* this wrongful education, if the children simply would not be adequately educated otherwise (see the “Claw Hammer” example in Tadros, 2011, p. 161). Analogously, Harry Brighouse (2006, pp. 77–94) advocated for state financing of faith-promoting schools where this comes with public scrutiny and regulation even where that means that they achieve worse autonomy outcomes than they would in non-faith-promoting schools. The reason is that such financing may enable more children to develop a greater degree of autonomy than would be achieved were parents to send their children to private, faith-promoting schools with less government regulation and public scrutiny. If this is the least unjust outcome that the state can aim for, it might be right that they do so. However, if the government can require attendance of adequately regulated schools, there may be no need to provide for wrongdoing to reduce worse wrongdoing.

The Moral Relevance of Roles

We have not adequately addressed how bundles of duties and permissions to influence should be distributed. Who owes what to which children? Some base answers to this question on the basis of job descriptions, such as those of teachers, parents, and citizens. Jeff Standley (2020) and David E. Cooper (2008) both premised arguments about what teachers, as distinct from other actors, owe to their students on the role that schools and teachers play as epistemic guardians. Such arguments seem question begging, suggesting that we should ground the role that we want teachers to play in the role that we want teachers to play. An appeal to the definitional nature of teachers as epistemic guardians is not helpful since the question simply shifts to whether we should want teachers at all. Consider how the nature of the role of overseer may entail disciplining and punishing a master’s slaves.

A deeper pair of questions bring us closer to the heart of things:

1. Which roles (characterized by which distinctive, protected permissions, and what degree of discretion) should we have?
2. Why should anyone be obliged to inhabit or attract people to enter the role, or obliged to protect and respond to the permissions associated with it?

Answering these questions gives us an account of what I call the sources of moral responsibility. Given certain aims, we may find that some arrangements and division of labors realizes (i.e., is constrained by and promotes) the values we hold. Children's interests in influence provide a call to action and set constraints. Members of a child's community can wrong a child by failing to contribute their bit towards providing opportunities to develop certain formative and behavioral modes. These modes can be realized by a school system staffed by teachers whose role it is to float, demote, or promote formative and behavioral modes. It is not because certain functions tend to be performed by teachers that teachers should perform them, but because certain compelling claims can be satisfied by teachers that their role can be justified. It will not fall on the wider community to provide the goods that teachers are supposed to (so long as teachers are providing them), but it may fall on the wider community not to undermine the goods that teachers are hired to provide, and perhaps to incentivize sufficiently talented people to become teachers.

Limiting Children's Claims

The claims children have on the wider community are not unlimited. They are limited by the costs to the community and those costs can be high enough to dissolve any obligation it might otherwise have had to provide the good. The claims children may also be limited by other values. For instance, there may be some permission to act in ways which harm others as a side effect. Brighouse and Swift (2014) noted that educating some children more *can* reduce other, less educated children's chances of flourishing by disadvantaging them on the labor market. They noted that some valuable family activities such as parents reading to their children at bedtime can positionally advantage their children relative to other children who were not read to at bedtime. However, this advantaging is permissible as a side effect of realizing important family values. They contrast this with elite private education which is usually intended to provide advantage (rather than disadvantaging others as a side effect) and realizes no plausible family values. Brighouse and Swift also argued parents may initiate their children into their religious faiths, so long as they are able to rationally revise their beliefs later. This is because sharing a faith can enhance the good of close, loving familial bonds. They suggest that this may be achieved by not stifling their own views. However, permitting parents to shape their children's formative modes in the service of this good may go too far. There is a large gap between not stifling the expression of one's own views and sharing experiences, on the one hand, and concertedly cultivating a comprehensive set of epistemically controversial beliefs in another person, on the other hand.

Wider Community and Specific Individuals' Claims

Plausibly third parties have valid claims regarding the content that children are subjected to. For instance, the wider community has valid interests that children will become *contributors to* rather than *dependents of* the state where that is feasible. Furthermore, just as children have claims that their peers will come to obey just laws and comply with moral requirements, so the wider community has these same claims over its developing members. Just as members of the community have reasons of reciprocity to contribute to the state's continued stable functioning and improvement. So too students have an obligation to submit to the kinds of education which constitutes an essential part of any state's continued stable functioning and improvement. Indeed, plausibly the successful execution of our moral and political duties requires a good level of education so as not to damage the interests of others through damaging side effects of ignorant actions.

Conclusion

Identifying wrongful influence (and failures of influence) in the context education is, the article has argued, a matter of identifying which parties are wronged, by which other parties' acts or omissions. Sometimes it is the children who are wronged, sometimes it is their community. Most generally, the wrongs in question consist in providing and providing for the wrong content, in failing to provide or provide for the right content (to the degree that it is owed), in using the wrong means of influence, and failing to use the right ones. Discerning the weightiness of different parties' interests in wellbeing, autonomy, and equal regard, as well as what they "call for" in different circumstances, will help us to determine children's liability to influence, immunity from influence, claims to influence, and discretion over how they are influenced, as well as who it that should be providing and providing for such influences. Plausibly both the wider community and children themselves have valid claims regarding the *content* and *means* of influence that children are subjected to.

Further research is needed regarding the boundaries of the community whose interests matter in deciding the content of education and who has obligations to provide for education. For instance, to what extent do children schooled in different nations have valid claims concerning how one another are schooled and to what extent are these symmetrical with those they have over how other children are schooled within their national boundaries. Further work is needed on the level of coercive micromanagement that can be justified in children's schooling, as well as on the ways in which schools may respond to student wrongdoing. More generally further work is needed to identify defensible and mutually consistent answers to questions about what claims different parties have regarding whether and how children are influenced, and against whom they have these claims.

Links to Digital Materials

International Network of Philosophers of Education [<https://inpe.info/>](https://inpe.info/)

Pedagogies of punishment [<http://www.pedagogiesofpunishment.com/>](http://www.pedagogiesofpunishment.com/) project website

Philosophy of Education Society, North America [<http://www.philosophyofeducation.org/>](http://www.philosophyofeducation.org/)

Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia <<http://www.pesa.org.au/>>

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Notes

1. Education is well characterized as the sustained, intentional production of learning outcomes and shaping of character by means others than these, as well as any learning and shaping achieved. These seem to boil down to testimony, planned discovery, demonstration, habituation, as well as the structures used to ensure these take place. Indeed, the production learning outcomes often requires students' deference to and obedience of teachers (i.e., that students will follow instructions). Some try to moralize education by saying that it shapes the recipient for their own good and does so in permissible ways (Peters, 1966). But we should not have to solve problems of benefit and moral permissibility just to be sure we are talking about education. The same argument tells against negatively moralizing the concepts of indoctrination, manipulation and the like.
2. To frame the matter in this way is to think of it in terms of what we owe to one another. It will leave out the morally better or worse, beyond what is owed.
3. *Means by which* students can be influenced can be categorized by influencer intentions (i.e., to communicate), by the likely or actual outcomes (i.e., that a subject believes that content expressed), and by mechanisms that tend to produce these outcomes (i.e., asserting some content in a serious tone), and may be intentionally utilized for that reason.
4. We may distinguish between the adoption of content that an influence causes or makes more probable and that which is made more appropriate. For example, it is not appropriate for someone to punch you if you ask them for money they owe you, but some irascible debtor might be more likely to punch you if you do ask them.

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5. Sometimes it can be permissible to treat people in the way they have wrongfully treated others. For instance, if I were to imprison people for the purpose of re-education, it might be permissible to imprison and re-educate me not to do that sort of thing. Such conduct may only be practiced by a limited range of parties (i.e., agents of state) for some limited range of reasons.
 6. As a goal, some theorists, like G. A. Cohen (2001), wonder what people should do if they all, or almost all, behaved ideally.
 7. Some suggest that ultra conservative ways of life are offended against, but they can be pursued by freely associating adults. They simply cannot coerce children into those ways of life.
 8. It is conceivable that an unjust regime be designed such that each member of a regime has reasons of personal safety that defeat moral reasons to destroy the regime, but that duties to support regime change kick in at some point when some number of parties have gone above and beyond their moral duties in effecting regime change.
 9. I follow the trend of distinguishing the moral (roughly, what we owe to each other), ethical (what a flourishing or good life consists in) and political morality (morality constraining and guiding coercive community regulation and coordination).
 10. Promotional education with respect to some formative or behavioral mode consists in sustained activities which (whether explicitly or not) make that mode an appropriate or likely response. Typically, this will be intentional. Non-promotional education with respect to some mode consists in sustained activities which do not make some outcome more likely or appropriate.
 11. See Gutmann (1982) for a comparison of consequentialist and non-consequentialist approaches to determining justice in educational provision. See Chapter IX, "Ethics," of Nagel (1986) for a convincing defense of non-consequentialism.
 12. There are also puzzles about why people should warrant equal concern and respect when they seem to have no properties equally. Here are two potential responses. First, all persons are equally persons. Second, while not all human beings warrant equal respect for autonomy since not all human beings are or could become autonomous, respect for autonomy ought to kick in equally for all parties above a certain low threshold of sufficient relevant properties. For a helpful overview and plausible account of children's moral status, see Jaworska and Tannenbaum (2019).
 13. If the idea motivating the view is that the intrinsic value of autonomy is a matter of reasonable dispute, so too are the instrumentalist views which tend to support it: that autonomy is conducive to people realizing a wide range of conceptions of the good (e.g., according to MacMullen, 2015, people are better able to live in ways which fit with their natural and permissible dispositions).
 14. I say refuse since there may be a plausible presumption of consent in some basic cases, such as life-saving treatment.
 15. This generates a puzzle: some individuals may not reach a threshold of autonomy at which they are able to give their consent, and yet it would seem cruel to deny such persons to engage in mutually regarding sexual activity.
 16. Thaler and Sunstein (2008) use the term for a motelier range of properties.
 17. It is important that we express a truth-claim we take to be false because if I know someone believes the opposite of whatever I say and I want to mislead them, my best strategy is not to lie but to tell the truth.
 18. By way of contrast, some contend that informed consent (at least in any morally relevant sense) is compatible with intentional persuasion by means of honest, and accurate testimony and sound argument. Yet others contend that informed consent is simply not essential to legitimate government (see Clayton, 2006).
 19. For instance, Peters (1966) remarked that "whatever else 'indoctrination' means, it obviously has something to do with doctrines" (p. 41).

20. It may seem strange to think that punishing just one of two children who participated equally in a wrong would benefit the one punished, but some punishments may be genuinely helpful, if they do not, for instance, generate a long-term stigma and conduce to better behavior. Furthermore, a question of distributive justice could arise insofar as one gives just one of the two parties the benefit of the punishment.

21. The Irish constitution requires that “The State shall provide for free primary education and shall endeavour to supplement and give reasonable aid to private and corporate educational initiative, and, when the public good requires it, provide other educational facilities or institutions with due regard, however, for the rights of parents, especially in the matter of religious and moral formation” (42.4). “The State shall, however, as guardian of the common good, require in view of actual conditions that the children receive a certain minimum education, moral, intellectual and social” (42.3). The state purportedly *provides for* religious schooling in line with parental wishes so long as some standards are met. In actual conditions the vast majority of schools are catholic and so parents can have any school they wish for so long as it is catholic.

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