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Populism and Parental Choice

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Civility is breaking out in a body contested sector of the culture war. For thirty years armies of authors have savaged one another over whether society should assure have-not families free access to all schools. The claims made for and against subsidized school choice have been extravagant, which is good reason to welcome the publication of serious and balanced works—four of which I will consider in the course of my argument—from mainstream intellectuals. These voices, though tentative and discordant, all respond to the insight emergent among the urban poor and working class—that parental choice is an issue of civil rights and basic justice.

To appreciate the four books under discussion (there are others deserving attention) requires first an orienting bit of ideological history, telling how we got here, and then some idea of where the discussion seems headed. This debate remains hobbled, as we shall see, by the widespread but false assumption that our state schools currently provide a truly “public” education. Nonetheless, these new developments are promising—the populist impulse behind school choice may yet receive its fair hearing.

For practical purposes the debate on parental choice began in 1960 with Milton Friedman’s *Capitalism and Freedom*. The book was a libertarian manifesto, an apotheosis of the market; in education as elsewhere Friedman portrayed consumer freedom as virtually a good in itself. Almost immediately, however, welfare politics reduced Friedman’s ideas to instrumental status, as liberal Democrats seized upon vouchers as a weapon to be wielded in the War on Poverty. As a result, the literature on school choice was for a decade suffused with a practical and fabian tone. The primary issue for welfare warriors Stephen Sugarman, Christopher Jencks, and Stephen Axons was to specify institutional designs whereby choice in both private and public sectors could help non-rich families rescue their children from conscription into failed schools. At one memorable moment, Daniel P. Moynihan suggested that Congress convert federal educational subventions into vouchers for the poor.

The Democratic flirtation with the idea eventually fizzled, leaving it to economists to raise the banner of school choice. It happened this war in the 1970s, as economic theory became the darling of policy makers, the understanding of the market as just one practical tool among others lost center stage. The freedom to choose was elevated from a means to an end, subsuming arguments specific to school choice under the same justifications offered for the deregulation of banks and airlines. Along with travel and finance, schools were another consumer service in which competition and creative destruction were to reduce friction. Milton Friedman seemed to have enjoyed his libertarian revenge.

Government educators and their unions shrewdly perceived this as a political opportunity; they simply confirmed and then exaggerated this truncated image of a market for schools. The National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers would concede that the invisible hand, in its Darwinian fashion, might achieve more efficient delivery. What it could not do, they said, is tell society what it would be good to deliver. Their favorite comparison was between franchised schools and franchised hamburgers. Education is not like fast food or airlines, they rightly pointed out; it has values apart from personal preference, and professionals not subject to market pressures know what these are.

The debate between the marketeers and the school monopoly sputtered on in this polarized and vacuous form through the late 1980s. The economists wrote books about efficiency, and the schoolmasters responded with books about democracy, as if the two were oil and water. The marketeers compounded their own isolation by rejecting overtures from liberal Democrats who believed that school choice could be presented as a hope for the underclass. In four states and the District of Columbia, libertarians sent initiatives to the ballot after stripping term of all regulation that would protect low-income families—a condition for the support of moderates, who now stood aside. Albert Shanker once expressed to me his delight at this self-marginalization of advocates for choice; he accurately forecast that only 30 percent of voters would support the libertarian petards.

The phony polarity of this debate has now disappeared in light of the extremely promising Milwaukee voucher program and its sequels outside Wisconsin. With some real experiences to study, we are once again able to ask whether school choice, properly designed, can serve a *range* of democratic and human values—including efficiency—in a manner superior to the traditional school monopoly. Our four authors approach this question directly and indirectly, in ways that conflict but also

illuminate. The first two come upon the stage expressly as “liberal” philosophers; for them this word has ultimate moral significance. Once you understand what is truly liberal, you know what to do with the schools.

Indeed, Meira Levinson aggressively entitles her book *The Demands of Liberal Education* (Oxford University Press, 250 pp., \$35). To understand how liberalism gets so demanding the reader must join the author inside the unisphere of modern liberal thought. “I have not tried to convince individuals of the desirability of liberalism itself,” she writes. “I took liberalism as a given.” Nevertheless, she is keen to distinguish herself from shipmates less correct, especially Rawlsian “political liberals” who tend to be soft on the sorts of ideological crime that swarm out there in a pluralist society. She seems more comfortable around “comprehensive liberals,” who might hope to extend their influence beyond the public square. It would take a more perceptive reviewer to tell the differences among the sects. Here I focus only upon her institutional ideal for delivering education in the liberal mode. Its real-life chances are zero, but the view is instructive.

Levinson tells the reader that the core purpose of liberal education is the flourishing of personal autonomy; all else is subordinate. Happily, other benign civic ideals such as tolerance are also best served by the liberal program of schooling as it goes about the nourishing of autonomy. The embodiment of that program in a working system becomes quite complex in a pluralist social order, because there are versions of the good life and the civic ideal that compete with the liberal vision. That is, they rest upon philosophical or religious premises that reject the right of the individual to choose his or her own concept of the good. Much of the book is given over to lamenting irreconcilable conflicts between certain Christians (especially “fundamentalists”) and the author’s own liberal “demands.” These practical threats from the Christians are largely unspecified but, for her purpose, may remain so. It is enough that these religious folk would hold the free individual child responsible to an external moral authority; parental hopes of this sort could never satisfy the ideal of autonomy, hence are properly (could one say “morally”?) excluded from the liberal curriculum.

But Levinson sees that childhood complicates the liberal ideal. Children stand in special need of liberal protection; yet their very autonomy requires resources that are hard to duplicate outside the family. These include not only the means of survival and safety, but the “cultural coherence” and “identity” that make us real persons. This seems a dilemma, for when parents are allowed to create the coherence that comes simply from being themselves, they notoriously thwart autonomy and frustrate little liberal identities.

The best a liberal can do is to limit these opportunities for parents to act as bearers of specifically illiberal ideas, while educating the society toward the emergence of a new social consciousness (even among parents) that will support the assignment of every child to a “common school,” meaning one that presents every reasonable idea—but no other. These schools, when they arrive, will interdict all “fundamental conceptions of the good,” for autonomy requires the “sense of detachment,” even—or especially—from one’s own beliefs; the autonomous child is one who holds his own convictions in constant and liberating suspension, “detached from local and parental control.”

This regime need not entail complete neglect of the child’s need for “cultural coherence”; again, the family must be respected in some dimension if the child’s identity is to be confirmed. This is not impossible even in a pluralist society, so long as the liberal school confirms only that part of the family repertoire which is neither philosophically nor religiously fundamental. This means that some families will have few or none of their values confirmed inside the school; but many children from these morally oppressive home environments may discover a coherence and identity—a substitute family—right there in the school.

The liberal educator anticipates that families who are diverse in belief will value choice in education. To a degree, this impulse can be good, since individual children respond differently to different teaching methods in the pursuit of autonomy. There is reason, then, to allow pedagogical options—even through vouchers—so long as all schools embrace the liberal curriculum of sound ideas. Of course, as Levinson laconically observes, there would be “little if anything to distinguish private” from state schools. And, by the way, with or without vouchers, she would impose regulation upon all private schools so as to secure the liberal objective, and would “embed children’s rights to an autonomy-promoting education in the Constitution.” Meanwhile, Supreme Court decisions enunciating parental rights, such as *Pierce v. the Society of Sisters* (1925), must be “interpreted.” In the end, she is happy, if necessary, to impose the liberal ideal by force, but for this we first “must change.. . beliefs and values.” Levinson is certainly correct about the chasm between this vision and the hopes of those outside her liberal cloister. The book is heuristic and provocative. One wishes that Orwell could have read it.

Stephen Macedo holds the chair of Politics and Values at Princeton and returns to a favorite theme in his *Divinity and Dissent: Civic Education in a Multicultural Society* (Harvard University Press, 384 pp., \$45). Like Ms. Levinson he resides under the dome of liberal thought and fears the influence of kerygmatic religion out there in the public square. Inside the fraternity he is distinguishable as a “civic liberal” whose stewardship of schools would be a hair more trusting of the poor and dissident than Levinson’s. He hopes he is consistent with John Rawls’ “political liberalism,” but he “goes beyond” Rawls by specifying “an

account of the political and social structures that help promote a publicly reasonable liberal community.” Macedo’s ambitions are cosmic: “We work to transform the whole of the moral world in the image of our most basic political values.” One braces for a Big Bang, but the pace is measured.

The book commences with specifics about the threat to education from religion, at least in its historical forms. His flagship example is the rejection during the 1840s by New York’s Catholic Archbishop John Hughes of a proposal for religious neutrality within the state schools. Hughes deemed neutrality unfair to believers and, in any case, impossible to achieve; the just and equitable solution, he said, would be the support of all ideas without discrimination. This was not to be, and, given mid-century fears of an impending “Romanist” majority in America, Macedo allows that the states’ decision to monopolize tax-supported education could even be glossed as a hedge for freedom (i.e., from a foreign power). Macedo, however, does not bless the ensuing century of Protestant state curriculum, and carefully applauds the Catholic social outlook of our own time as it recrystallized in Vatican II. For this transformation of the Church he credits America herself, though just how a state school monopoly segregated by race and class helped Rome to see the light is unexplained.

For Macedo this nineteenth-century history stands principally as a cautionary tale for moderns, one in which Jerry Falwell is made to play Pius IX. Whatever the reality of the old Roman menace, Macedo’s demonization of today’s Christian enthusiasts seems farfetched, and he cites little evidence to support his argument. Both Levinson and Macedo make too much of a few publicized courtroom skirmishes, notably the federal litigation entitled *Mozert v. Hawkins County Board of Education*. In that case, fundamentalist parents in Tennessee discovered what they considered antireligious themes in the local public school curriculum. Like the Amish, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and others before them, these plaintiffs were content to have the rest of the students learn the material, merely seeking an exemption for themselves. (They lost.) To conjure a threat to liberal values from a few such cases seems out of proportion.

In any case, religious dissenters make an odd primary target. How much, if at all, do these outliers and their beliefs contribute to our present culture of incivility? Most of America’s anxieties in this area concern not bad beliefs but bad *conduct*, posing three very earthly—and earthy—questions for the educational mission: 1) What *behavior* is correct? 2) What *source*, if any, obliges humans to pursue it? 3) In cases of doubt, how does one reason toward it?

Unfortunately, these questions are alien to the liberal, at least in public space; these good deeds are not something to be identified in some pre-institutional order of real moral relations. Indeed, for many liberals the good is not a discovery at all, but rather the imaginative conception of some possible state that the individual may or may not choose to seek. The creative process begins for Macedo “by defining an objective human good.” In this view, “the law is the only public morality we have.”

This effort to detach the good from natural (much less religious) sources and from specific moral content is, of course, familiar. Liberals would have us invent the terms of public life without regard to conceptions of the good that are inaccessible to unaided reason. This does not mean that they are personally allergic to real morality. Indeed, in their families and private lives many treat proper conduct as if it were something nonnegotiable; it may be this experience of the authentic good that often makes the institutions that liberals propose more sensible than the arguments they offer for them. In any case, they need broad consent for their inventions; hence they often respect in practice the plebeian premise they reject in theory— that human freedom is a thing given and yet bounded.

Our authors nonetheless see parents in general as a threat to the primary liberal objective of autonomy. It follows that family dominion must be limited to a parental “privilege” coupled with the duty (not the right) to direct the quotidian details of childrearing. Meanwhile, in the school the state must stand vigilant to rescue the child’s mind from commitment to every fundamental moral or religious conception, for these tend to become permanent premises that only frustrate the march toward autonomy. Neither author attaches particular value to a diversity of ideas, cultures, or ways of life; when the liberal school has its day, it will honor only those versions that meet the standard of “public reason.”

In my view neither book makes enough of the poisonous effects of the present school monopoly upon the very values that liberals cherish. Nor does either author highlight the explosion of public charter schools; perhaps this new diversity only compounds the liberal fear. In these books, even talk of vouchers is brief. Levinson highlights criticisms from early studies of Milwaukee, neglecting the now dominant success stories. Macedo thinks that parental choice depletes our moral capital, while monopoly “helps to advance values.” But he is far from closed-minded, and—having whispered “I will ne’er consent”—in the end consents to properly regulated vouchers even for religious schools that are not (in that happy phrase) “pervasively sectarian.”

Turning to Rosemary C. Salomone provides something of a relief from ideology. Not that her book *Visions of Schooling: Conscience, Community, and Common Education* (Yale University Press, 352 pp., \$30) is anything but liberal in spirit or content; indeed, she appreciates Macedo’s earlier work, and she can recite the orthodoxies of the liberal sects. But she is not herself

anxious to satisfy any litmus test or to privilege one authentic version of the creed. Indeed, *Visions* is more a story—even a pageant—than a unified theory. It is a well-tempered tale of ideas at war over the concept of a common school.

From the beginning, Salomone says, certain American educators wanted the state school “to be inclusive by being uncontroversial”; for others public education was to practice straightforward “imposition and indoctrination.” Yet a few others hoped the school might be diverse and inviting to all ideas. What was common to neutralists, inculcators, and eclectics was the impulse to disconnect the child from the lower-class family. We hear from Salomone how these contrasting and harmonizing aspirations played out in prolonged ideological struggle inside and outside (and for and against) the public monopoly.

This is an oft-told tale but includes new insight from two resources specific to the author. One is her professional grasp of the constitutional principles at stake; she is a professor of law at St. John’s University in New York and in full command of the legal sources as well as the many sub-isms of liberal philosophy. The other is her book’s initial inspiration; it rises out of Salomone’s earlier study of an outbreak in the 1990s of parental dissent in the patrician New York suburb of Bedford. A long chapter of *Visions* summarizes this story, and the five chapters preceding it are an artful Baedeker to the incubating theories of lawyers, philosophers, educators, and dissident families that met head-on in the Bedford high school.

The objecting parents in this tale cooperate with central casting by being Christian—but with a twist. These are not Appalachian fundamentalists but a half dozen suburban Catholic professionals. I won’t spoil the story, but in brief these parents think that weird cultic stuff is going on at the elegant state school their children attend. They are partly right but wind up with most citizens mad at them, including the trial judge who gives them only a partial victory in litigation. (The case is now on appeal.)

The Bedford story confirms the ubiquity of conflict and ideological imposition within the traditional governmental schools, and not only over specifically religious issues. Such conflicts seem inevitable to Salomone, who tends to picture tax-supported schools as a unitary ideological system that must cope with a diverse clientele. She considers one remedy that might heal and justify the old monolith: simple accommodation, where schools excuse dissenters from the offending portions of the curriculum. To this reader her argument here seems (properly) halfhearted and even despairing; in any case it ends in a near requiem for the “neighborhood school as [representative] of a functional community.” She sees now that America has succeeded in creating ideological diversity even among the wealthy—one size can never fit all—and she lacks Levinson’s stomach for universal coercion.

Or does she? In the end, as her preferred solution, Salomone would extend a more or less uniform state curriculum to the private sector but now within a system of choice—charters and vouchers. She would include only those religious schools “that agree to advance certain core political principles and comply with educational standards imposed by the state to assure . . . adequate education for democratic citizenship.” This uniform civic curriculum is, she thinks, “a relatively modest” proposal, but one wonders. It appears that she would add materially to the regulations that now affect private schools; but it is not made clear how these new restrictions would enhance the learning and good citizenship of their graduates. The social science of today tells us that these youngsters are already distinctly civil—at least by state school standards.

On this very note enter Charles L. Glenn, who, from a rather different planet, brings us *The Ambiguous Embrace: Government and Faith-Based Schools and Social Agencies* (Princeton University Press, 304 pp., \$35). Glenn is an inner-city Episcopalian priest, a professor of comparative education at Boston University, and a father of seven. For many years he was chief designer and administrator of successful programs of racial integration in public schools that employ various mechanisms of choice. He is also our national guru on European systems of family empowerment. His new book is an invitation—enthusiastic and even (in some sense) liberal—to trust the family and its favored private institutions; but it is also, and first of all, a warning. Glenn dons the role of sentry for those private religious schools that Salomone and Macedo are prepared to embrace. He plays Cassandra, not as a bureaucrat manqué (he is unrepentant), but as a prudent steward of precious but fragile institutions.

Glenn first assembles and analyzes whatever social science has to tell us about the responses made by two sorts of religious institutions—schools and social agencies—to their experience of government regulation, money, or both. To this he adds fresh historical accounts of two prominent Protestant agencies, the Salvation Army and Teen Challenge (a drug recovery program); carefully he assesses their adjustments to public threats and enticements. All this is further enriched by recurrent comparisons of these domestic American encounters to European patterns of interrelation between private religious agencies and governments.

The evidence strongly suggests that faith-based social agencies and schools serve certain governmental social goals better than can government itself. Our national project to “reinvent government” thus should seek out the genius of those “mediating institutions” that happen to be religious. They affirm in their nature the transcendent duty of the Christian to serve the common

good through the church and thus— *ceteris paribus*—the duty to be open to service within government programs of contracting, grants, vouchers, and the like.

Glenn's caveat is this: the efficacy of religious agents appears to be a direct function of maintaining their identity; they succeed at the secular task precisely when they conduct their work without suppressing their own beliefs, values, or confessional style. Liaison with government can threaten this religious identity through clumsy regulation. The federal "charitable choice" provisions presently assure some measure of religious freedom to private social agencies; strangely, however, there is no constitutional or statutory counterpart in education. Religious schools must beware the sirens of subsidized choice.

Nor is government itself even the chief source of danger. Glenn shows that the identity of religious agencies and schools is vulnerable, first and foremost, to standards touted by private professionals. Their impulse to rationalize and regulate charitable work is plausible and hard to resist even *inside* the religious organization. It goes down hard with professionals (and their sometime government sponsors) to hear that, for many clients, therapeutic programs work precisely because they deploy the enthusiasm and spontaneity of amateurs. Glenn allows that professionalism must be respected; the trick is to regulate minimally and in a manner that preserves the religious identity of the provider.

Glenn makes his warning vivid with a scattering of statistics and a few horror stories of virtual capitulation by religious providers. However, he never retracts or dilutes the imperative—*itself* religious—that under the right conditions these institutions be ready to serve the common good. Nor, on the other hand, is he fazed by the specter of "cults" and "sects" that haunts our liberal authors. Here our national experience with the regulation of hate groups and racists is relevant. In any school voucher scheme, Glenn would limit participation to schools that respect the norms of racial neutrality, civil order, and the rule of law. Regarding curriculum, the standards now governing private schools are sufficient; as for the rest, little more is needed beyond certain protections for the poor, namely admission and tuition rules plus transportation and information guarantees of the sort presently embodied and operating successfully in the low-income programs of Wisconsin, Ohio, and Florida. Private schools must also be allowed to apply religious criteria in hiring; the point always is to maintain identity.

The reader will apply his or her own standard in assessing the individual merits of these very different books. But all four can be recommended for their relative candor and balance, qualities sometimes wanting in the literature of school reform. Each of the books, moreover, is a step—in Glenn's case a substantial and enthusiastic step—toward greater trust of ordinary people and their mediating institutions.

Nevertheless, I am puzzled by two qualities of the writing (though I now spot them in my own). One is the apologetic air with which all but Glenn peck tentatively at the issue of state domination over children, especially the children of the poor; at the same time, by contrast, every small concession to parental choice is accompanied by worries of an educational Munich. The other odd note, possibly related, is the relative neglect in books otherwise so professional of the more scholarly arguments for choice. When, as here, skeptics make concessions to choice, one would expect strong justifying reasons. But, apart from Glenn, the rationales are principally that the Constitution allows it, that dissenters will be grateful, and that competition may improve test scores in the state schools. That choice would empower the non-rich is grudgingly agreed, but such freedom for parents is met with faint praise.

If choice comes, is it to be tolerated simply as an efficiency device and/or a concession to popular whim? Or are there strong positive arguments? Offhand I can think of over two dozen; most could be arrayed in categories such as these: *practical* arguments about measurable elements such as test scores; *vocational* considerations such as the elevation of teaching to professional status; *intellectual* values that insist upon a free market for ideas held by the poor; *child welfare* claims about the best decider of the right school for this individual child; the *autonomy* argument that it is the empowered family, not the state, that best nourishes the independent self; *tolerance* theory holding that social trust among groups is maximized when family identity is respected by government; arguments from *justice* that would end the system of conscriptive school assignment focused upon the poor; arguments for *racial integration* founded upon a new freedom of association across arbitrary government boundaries; and *family* theory which understands the corrosive effect of losing responsibility for one's own children.

Why are these categories of justification largely ignored? I suspect that most of us who are not libertarians have come to the school question wearing an ideological blinker: there is a diverting myth that remains a confounding premise for those who write about education. This is the widespread assumption that American state schools are functionally "public." For two reasons they do not merit the label, and this matters, for the false premise clouds all our judgments. For a thing to be public, notes the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the first requirement is that it be "open to all" in the manner of the park, the pool, the library, the museum, the street, the square. But what Americans still call the "public" school is accessible only to its neighbors; to attend, one must first manage to live nearby. Stretching things one could, perhaps, say that the schools in poorer neighborhoods such as Watts are functionally "public" because most of us could afford to move there. But Beverly Hills we cannot save, for it is a legislated

scheme of private choice that in effect peddles school vouchers in the housing market. The rich buy autonomy; the rest get conscripted. “Public?” To the contrary, the system is a balkanized plutocracy. This is the first abuse of this important word.

The second is more subtle; it is the unexamined premise of universality that is inserted into virtually all discourse on state schools. The word “public” is deployed to imply some intellectual unity that is a quality of the system. The *OED* recognizes such a restraint upon the use of the word: any conception offered as “public” must be “extended... or universal.” Public-ness entails a unity of informing spirit; in order to be truly “public” in the modern state an educational policy must be the declared and coherent enterprise of a people.

Intellectual coherence can, of course, inform a conception that is not yet complete, a work in progress. Such, perhaps, was the idea of state education in its first century. Its literature, though discordant, was united in its confidence (as in John Dewey) that the competing inspirations were all vectoring and that a common core could and would eventually be sculpted and realized as a truly *public* reality. If such a common vision still exists, it is a work in regress. What remains is a narrow core curriculum that pursues, first, the child’s personal utility, and, second, the barest kind of social contract. State schools do all seek to raise test scores and teach the rule of law. Learn the skills, the sciences, and a little history; avoid committing crimes and torts. That much is coherent and universal, and thus is still truly “public.” (Of course it is also part of the mission of every “private” school.)

But that’s about it. Beyond these basics each state school stands on its own moral bottom, for there is no cultural agreement—no public gnosis—about what it is to be a good person, or what such a person should seek to realize as the common good. This is not an observation about religion, its sects, or its enemies. It is a claim about human conduct. To make this plainer, consider the range of contested moral questions on which individual educators must take a side—or simply avoid: animal rights, gender roles, obedience to parents, obedience to other adults, premarital chastity (and condoms), assisted suicide, pornography, economic justice, civil disobedience, the role of sports, ethnicity, abortion, environmental policy, gun control, cloning and genetic engineering, global capitalism, diet, free speech. Should P.S.91 teach that homosexual conduct is good, bad, or a lifestyle option? Practical choices must be made concerning every such issue. And each question will be answered yes, no, or maybe, for even silence is a message. I have no advice on the right answers, but this I now see. Schools engage these questions differently from one another whether by a decision of the state, district, school, or teacher. Whose preference the individual child will encounter thus is determined more by chance than by any philosophy that could be called “public.”

But add to these specific cases the grandest disagreement of them all. It concerns the very possibility of serious moral teaching. Is there a real good, or is social contract the only source of obligation? What sort of pre-institutional imperative, if any, is available to schools once they are forbidden to acknowledge religious foundations? Could natural law inform the curriculum of an Aristotle Charter High School? Perhaps, but even if enough of us could agree on the source of a natural morality, we would still divide over its specific applications, just as Robert P. George and Andrew Sullivan recently divided over its application to homosexual conduct.

To render coherent the debates on education we would need to give correct names to the phenomena at issue, exercising self-restraint in the use of “public.” Beyond the basic curriculum no ideas presently qualify as such; what is taught is chosen according to the preferences of the individuals who happen to be in charge. Answers to contested questions always consist of somebody’s *private* convictions. On such matters the public square of education is not merely naked; it is not even public. Thus it is that state schools like Beverly Hills which fail the criterion of free access also fail the test of universality; often they teach a variety of private moralities inside their own communities. In the rich suburbs this is by consent of the individual families who could, if they chose, flee to Santa Monica—or St. Mary’s. In Watts, by contrast, the various private orthodoxies are simply imposed; whether the moral menu features sports, philanthropy, or zen, it is a dish du jour.

It has always been convenient to assume a vague state of neutral uniformity among state schools as a premise for our national conversation. In doing so myself I have too often miscast the message of the state educator as the “Vanilla curriculum.” Many educators do serve vanilla; but clearly this is only one of several flavors. We need a more candid image of this uneven moral topography. My candidate is the Rocky Road curriculum; it may be laced with vanilla, but its soul is a particularity of hard chunks, marshmallows, and—for the connoisseur—nuts galore.

What exactly is the harm in such a government menagerie? The evil consists in the collaboration of this unprincipled diversity with a monopoly system of assignment for the ordinary citizen. Being choiceless, the non-rich family is conscripted for a moral lottery operating at its very un-public local school. But seeing this is halfway to fixing it. And ordinary Americans now seem to grasp the reality; observing the curriculum wars in the media they have come to understand their status as a captive audience for whatever gospel is delivered to their child. This populist insight could account for much of the huge shift of opinion toward subsidized choice among ordinary families, especially minorities. The poor do not fancy all the surprises their children

now encounter in the Rocky Road curriculum. If my child is going to be taught somebody's pet ideas, that somebody might as well be me.

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