

BOOK REVIEWS

Allen, Danielle. *Education and Equality*. With comments by Tommie Shelby, Marcelo Suárez-Orozco, Michael Rebell, and Quiara Alegría Hudes. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016. Pp. 150. \$30.00 (cloth).

Danielle Allen's 2014 Tanner Lectures, published here with comments and reply, offer an ambitious and rich blend of themes. Baldly summarized, they offer a defense of the place of humanities and social sciences in the curriculum, a variant on familiar objections to governments' current preoccupation with the "vocational" and promotion of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). But her framing the argument in terms of connections between education and equality is excitingly distinctive, and her route to her conclusion engages with an unusual range of influences and modes of theorizing. In just fifty pages, the argument fluently shifts from conceptual analysis to excavation of the logic of practice (à la Bourdieu) to recommendations for improving the mechanisms by which schools can be held accountable. It combines Rawls and Arendt while criticizing Piketty and Plato. It elaborates the educational goal of "participatory readiness," one element of which is developed into an account of civic agency adequate to contemporary politics, while appealing to recent empirical evidence on the impact of social science classes on students' political participation. Overall it shows the value of sustained engagement with a range of academic disciplines and approaches, both theoretical and empirical. While the sheer variety and profusion of material sometimes left me working hard to keep a grip (and I will offer my attempt to tame and frame at the end), Allen's big ideas come through loud and clear.

When thinking about the relation between education and equality, many of us are not interested in what "the actual good called education fundamentally is" (3). Theorists of social justice, for example, care about 'education' mainly because it is an important causal factor influencing people's access to other goods; if jobs and the rewards that attach to them were distributed in ways that bore no relation to how much—or what kind of—"education" individuals received, its distribution would lose much of its normative significance. Similarly, politicians whose policies are driven by a desire to equip children born into poverty with the labor market skills they need to escape it, or by the perceived importance of a country's having an "educated" workforce so that it can compete successfully in the global economy, are treating education simply as a means. So are economists who recommend the diffusion of knowledge as the best way to bid down inequalities in income and wealth.

Thinking about education itself, however, offers new and different ways to understand its egalitarian potential. Although states' involvement in the business of institutionalizing education may be justified on utilitarian grounds—

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economic or military competitiveness, the maintenance of democratic life—the microjustification of particular instances of educating must be eudaemonistic. “In order to count as education, the practices sponsored by those institutions need to further the development of an individual qua human being—namely a creature whose flourishing entails the development of a range of valuable cognitive, affective and intersubjective capacities” (14). Understood in terms of this “humanistic baseline” and with a democratic, Arendtian account of flourishing that, contra Plato, sees all human beings as possessing potentialities for a wide range of needs and potentialities—for breadwinning work, civic and political engagement, creative self-expression, and rewarding intimate relationships—education is intrinsically connected to equality, not just instrumentally so.

Which connection between education (properly understood) and equality takes various forms. In contrast to more aristocratic perspectives, the vision is one in which all students are treated as capable of the full range of potentialities; the distinctively democratic form of eudaemonism “orients us toward a pedagogic practice that is in itself egalitarian in that it seeks to meet the same range of needs for all students” (17). And because the humanistic baseline requires that we think about the education of all students in the context of a broad notion of flourishing, it “reinforces an egalitarian orientation toward human dignity that can disappear if we focus exclusively on the state-level justifications of education, which instrumentalize the student” (26). Finally, educating all citizens so that they are prepared for civic and political engagement not only brings into play a concept of political equality but also offers the prospect of political contestation over economic inequality. Political choices determine the policies that shape distributive patterns: “This is where education’s true egalitarian potential comes into play. It supplies the basis for forms of participatory democracy that might contest the labor market rules that deliver insupportable forms of income inequality” (31).

As the last quotation suggests, Allen is most interested in this third education-equality connection: it is this that is explored most fully, and this that provides the argumentative link to a liberal arts curriculum. Civic agency requires much more than “informed citizens”—citizens who know their rights and understand the mechanics of government. It involves understanding how cultural norms can be changed, how to interact with corporations and nongovernmental organizations, how to be effective on the Internet. It demands “democratic knowledge,” the science and art of association, the capacity to bond with some and to build bridges to others. It requires that citizens can interpret and understand their political circumstances, that they have the capacity to deliberate, diagnose, and persuade; these are fundamentally linguistic or verbal skills, which together constitute “verbal empowerment.”

This is where the humanities and social sciences come in: “As we cultivate verbal empowerment in our students, we build the foundation for a politically competitive social and political system” (49). This is the alternative way for education to challenge economic inequality: a holistic education, with a strong humanistic focus, delivered to all students, could produce a radical rewriting of the distributive rules in a way that STEM subjects and a merely vocational approach cannot. For Allen, the road to more distributive equality runs via the liberal arts curriculum.

This short book helped me see several new things and several old things afresh. Allen is right that academics working on education tend to divide into those who come at it from an interest in broader distributive issues and don't seem that interested in what education actually is and those who are interested in education but don't seem that bothered by its connection to wider questions of social justice. In forcing that divide into the open, and offering various stimulating thoughts about how to bridge it, Allen breaks intriguing new ground. Her suggestion, in effect, is that those in the first camp are operating with too limited a picture of the feasible set, missing education's distinctively egalitarian potential. They see that the distribution of education influences the distribution of other goods, and may affect its own positional value, but neglect the way in which a curriculum aimed specifically at enhancing political equality may play a more game-changing role, challenging the norms and rules around what kinds of economic inequality are acceptable.

Her discussion of civic agency was, for me, the most exciting part of the book. It brought home the extent to which my academic training and intellectual milieu has wedded me to, and embedded me in, the "impartial deliberation" aspect of preparation for citizenship; in terms of my own microjustifications, she has already made me think differently about what I am doing when I teach. An interesting issue here concerns to what extent a division of labor approach is appropriate. Perhaps some of us can go on teaching our students to make distinctions and evaluate arguments while leaving it to colleagues to cultivate their rhetorical capacities and equip them with the other skills they need to engage effectively in political life. (I confess that I find it hard not to grimace when undergraduates tell me how keen they are on debating. From my perspective, that kind of rhetorical skill is something to be knocked out of them.)

Allen's contribution will undoubtedly provoke extended discussion and careful evaluation of the many discrete argumentative moments. Indeed, in addition to the comments collected in this volume, there has already been a symposium in the *Boston Review* that assembles a number of commentators who discuss a helpfully accessible version of part of the argument. Certainly, as others have noted, her case depends on some somewhat speculative causal claims that are supported by rather limited empirical evidence. But there are also places where the reasoning eluded me.

Most important, perhaps, she makes much of the idea that current debate about the proper purpose of education—often captured as "vocational" versus "liberal"—should be understood as invoking "two concepts of education" (which is the title of her first chapter). Drawing on Rawls's early analysis of punishment, Allen suggests that the "logic of education makes two different kinds of justification relevant to the practice: there is the justification for the state's maintenance of a system of education, and the justification for particular instances of teaching carried out within the system" (11). This is the divide that underlies the apparent conflict between "utilitarian" and "eudaemonistic" views about education's proper purpose—with only the latter offering the appropriate justification for the "actual goal of educating" (13).

The last move in that chain is a bit of conceptual analysis: if it isn't developing individual human beings by developing their capacities for flourishing, then

it isn't "education." Nothing much turns on that, and certainly the etymology of the word meshes with her take on it, but there is something to be said for an analysis that makes "education" more descriptively concerned simply with the processes that produce the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and attitudes that inhere in people. On that alternative conceptualization, children might be "educated" in ways that not only fail but do not even try to develop their potentialities, and it is a separate question what particular goods education should indeed seek to promote, both in the lives of those being educated and in those of third parties who stand to benefit or suffer from the way others are educated (Harry Brighouse et al., "Educational Goods and Values: A Framework for Decision-Makers," *Theory and Research in Education* 14 [2016]: 3–25).

But it is the "two concepts, two logics" aspect of the argument that I find most mysterious. As Tommie Shelby notes in his particularly instructive comment, there seems to be an underargued shift from "the logic of the socio-political practice of state involvement in education," or indeed "the logic of education properly understood," to a claim about what forms of education or modes of educating are in fact justified. I can understand how the logic of a practice might include or generate claims about what actions it justifies, but it seems a further question whether that practice is indeed itself justified or can indeed justify the actions that constitute it.

Allen's picture, as I understand it, is complicated—and I wonder whether it is more complicated than is helpful. She wants to insist that the state's utilitarian purposes do in fact justify its involvement in and maintenance of a system of education, even though those purposes are not themselves "educational" *sensu stricto*. It is the micropractice, with its eudaemonistic justifications of particular instances of educating, which aims at the latter. But she also seeks a "coherent" account of the purposes of education that integrates or aligns the two (14) and notices that two of the four human needs identified by her Arendtian, democratic account of flourishing (breadwinning and civic engagement) are in fact those at which the sociopolitical practice was aiming in any case: "the state's 'utilitarian' goods (economic competitiveness and a flourishing citizenry) turn out to be features of an individual's eudaemonistic good if merely considered from a different perspective" (17). She has previously noted, along similar lines, that "even if one thinks it necessary to teach a child his tribe's rituals in order to preserve that tribe (a collective utilitarian concern), one in all probability also thinks that life in that tribe is in the child's best interests (a eudaemonistic perspective), so one's view about inculcating social norms is tethered to a view about the child's good" (13).

Allen seems to see this overlap between the utilitarian goals of the state and the eudaemonistic purposes of educators, properly understood, as a happy coincidence. She talks about a "surprising proximity" (18) between the system-level goals and the individual-level goals that emerge from her eudaemonistic account. That would make sense if she were conceiving the former in merely descriptive terms. There is, after all, no reason why the state should have been interested in the well-being of its citizens (and surely plenty of states have not been). But if the state's involvement in education really is *justified* by its "utilitarian" goals, then that surprise seems odd. One might rather think: "Of course the two coincide! Just as well! If the state's purposes in education were not aligned with the inter-

ests of its citizens, how would its establishment and maintenance of the sociopolitical practice of educating them be justified?"

From this perspective, what seems strange is rather that two of her four elements of human flourishing—creative self-expression and rewarding relationships—do not align with the system-level justifications for education. Allen rejoices at that fact, on the grounds that we do not want the state to colonize our lives in those areas, though she also insists that the state must “leave space” for them (18). This left me unclear whether, for her, the state is justified in ensuring that its educational institutions do indeed develop those potentialities (albeit without specifying particular content of a kind that might perhaps count as “colonization”) or whether she really thinks it is not the state’s business to concern itself at all with those capacities (its role being merely to give educational institutions the space to do that if so inclined). The former is surely the more plausible position, and what she says about how teachers should be held accountable across all four dimensions suggests that she agrees. But in that case the state’s involvement in education is not limited to that justified by its “utilitarian” purposes, and the grand schema that distinguishes those from education’s intrinsic eudaemonistic goals seems to lose its bite.

Many of Allen’s substantive claims are extremely important: the need for a holistic approach, the multiplicity of ways in which educational institutions can promote or impede the capacity to flourish, the importance of attending to how those capacities are distributed, and the special game-changing potential of cultivating participatory readiness as civic agency. But, insofar as it is her aim to argue those claims, I suspect she could do so more straightforwardly, perhaps by locating them within something like the following schema:

- i) identify the full range of things we want education to do for the educated and those who stand to benefit, or suffer, from their education (maybe a concern for the distinctive goods of childhood—seriously undervalued by current policy regimes—might be added to her list);
- ii) add in any concerns about how those goods should be distributed (acknowledging here possible long-term causal processes with distributive implications, such as the impact of greater political equality on economic inequality, and noting the positional aspect to political influence which she seems to underplay); and
- iii) assess which institutions (e.g., public or private, family or school) and which policies (e.g., funding formulas, accountability regimes) may legitimately and effectively promote those various goods and their proper distribution in current circumstances.

Of course, I am here reframing Allen’s concerns in an alternative mode that she may well find uncongenial—and perhaps even colonizing. Certainly, debate about answers to (i), (ii), and (iii) would be far from simple, and there would be plenty to disagree about (including how educational curricula and teaching methods should respond to—and equip us to deal with—those disagreements themselves). Doubtless I am neglecting other strands in her argument that will be valuable for those with different agendas. Still, for me, what Allen has given

us is a wonderfully rousing and thought-provoking contribution to a debate best conceived in these terms.

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Chandhoke, Neera. *Democracy and Revolutionary Politics*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015. Pp. 192. \$114.00 (cloth); \$29.95 (paper).

We are used to thinking of major revolutions, such as the French or American ones, as being justified because they established a democratic order. In contrast, Neera Chandhoke's *Democracy and Revolutionary Politics* asks us to consider whether political violence can be justified within a democracy. Her answer to this important question amounts to a tentative yes, namely, whenever a democratic order severely fails to guarantee just outcomes in terms of substantive equality (12, 114). Being indebted to Nancy Fraser's tripartite theory of justice, Chandhoke argues that for those who suffer, to an extreme extent, from a lack of social status (recognition), material resources (redistribution), and especially voice (representation), violence can provide a last resort for regaining agency. Violence is thus *prima facie* justified as it allows the oppressed "to speak back to histories not of their making" (2, 58, 60, 118, 121). This analysis comes with a note of caution, though. According to Chandhoke, such violence has to occur within the context of a progressive movement. Thus, acts of violence have to be guided by a political vision that mobilizes the population. Otherwise, a mere "theatre of violence" performed by guerrillas, paramilitaries, and state forces will degrade the oppressed to the role of passive spectators (157–58).

The mistaken prioritization of violence over politics is, according to Chandhoke, also the major problem of the Maoist struggle in India, which has in recent decades tried to overthrow parliamentary democracy in order to establish a different form of (a people's) democracy, mainly inspired by the communist revolution in China (75, 86). A feature that separates Chandhoke's study from others is that it uses this conflict throughout as an empirical reference point for her conceptual and normative considerations. Echoing Hannah Arendt's distinction between power and violence, Chandhoke maintains that the Maoists erroneously emphasize the alleged power that "flows from the barrel of a gun" (75). Instead they should focus on convincing people to join the project of overcoming the unjust order—and on the role violence can play for such mobilization. Drawing on the history of anticolonial struggles, Chandhoke detects "imaginative techniques of mobilization" (132) in the historical guerrilla organizations of Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde which targeted the lumpenproletariat and, after having achieved territorial control, "established alternative political, administrative and economic structures in the liberated regions" (133), thus creating "the nucleus of a future state" (137). Unfortunately, the exact relationship between violence, the regaining of agency, the political mobilization of the population, and the actual improvement of the fate of the oppressed remains rather vague throughout the book. Although Chandhoke wants to combine political theory with empirical