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IS IT MORALLY PERMISSIBLE FOR PARENTS TO ATTEMPT TO CONVINCE THEIR CHILDREN OF THEIR COMPREHENSIVE VIEWS?

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INFLUENTIAL liberal accounts of family ethics are highly critical of the idea that parents have a right to intentionally shape their children's values. They diverge from commonsense views in denying that parents may deliberately try to influence which conception of the good their children eventually endorse. Matthew Clayton argues that respect for children's independence *qua* future adults demands that parents remain neutral towards different comprehensive views.[1] If it is permissible, for example, for a parent to send their child to a religious school, this must be for reasons other than that the parent's own religion is taught there and they want the child to follow that religion. For example, it may be permissible for the parent to select a religious school because it happens to be located close by.[2] Adam Swift, in turn, maintains that parents may transmit their religious views to their children only to the extent that this is necessary for the parent-child relationship to flourish.[3] So, for example, if a committedly atheist parent will not feel understood without their child's being aware of their outlook, the parent may share these beliefs with their child—which could very well lead to the child's adopting these beliefs too. But the parent should not intentionally try to influence their child to become an atheist simply because they themselves believe atheism to be correct.[4] On both Clayton's and Swift's views, parents are morally required to exclude from consideration that they themselves endorse a specific comprehensive doctrine when making decisions that might influence their children's values. I call this the *exclusion condition* and the accounts supporting it *exclusion views*.

Exclusion views contrast with commonsense views regarding parents' rights to shape their children's values. Many parents believe that they have a

1 Clayton, *Justice and Legitimacy in Upbringing*, "Debate," and *Independence for Children*.

2 Clayton, *Independence for Children*, ch. 2.

3 Swift, "Parents' Rights, Children's Religion."

4 Swift, "Parents' Rights, Children's Religion," 47.

moral right to shape their children's conception of the good—maybe even a moral duty to do so (i.e., a duty to teach their children what are, in their view, the *correct* views and values). Many people believe that it is morally permissible for parents to make their children join their religious affiliation. But more than religion is at stake here.[5] Certain forms of environmentalism, feminism, or views of sexuality also fall within the scope of comprehensive doctrines. It would be surprising if it were morally impermissible for parents to teach such conceptions of the good to their children. To be sure, commonsense views of what parents can permissibly do could be misguided. Still, the contrast raises some questions. Either we need to alter our current parenting practices to conform to the demands of morality, or some of the influential liberal accounts of the parent-child relationship are mistaken on this question.

This article seeks to advance the debate on parents' rights to deliberately influence their children's values, in two steps. First, it shows that the challenge to commonsense views from exclusion views such as Clayton's or Swift's has not yet been met. Responses to Clayton tend to misconstrue the challenge he raises against the commonsense view, as they fail to grasp that the exclusion view mainly concerns parents' *attitudes*. According to exclusion views, the attitude that many parents have in shaping their children's values (i.e., imparting values that one believes to be correct because one believes them to be correct)—and that common sense assumes to be morally permissible—is wrong. Swift's view, in turn, has sometimes been interpreted as laxer than it really is, and as a result, the challenge to intentional parental value shaping by his account has not been recognized in the literature, so far as I am aware.[6]

Second, this article advances a new understanding of how we should understand children's independence—an understanding that is compatible with the moral permissibility of trying to convince one's children of one's comprehensive views, obviating the liberal theorists' exclusion view. Developing this new account requires opening up the "black box" of the morality of engaging in discourse with interlocutors who are not (yet) fully rational. Once we do so, I argue, we will see that trying to convince one's child of one's comprehensive views is distinct from attempting to set their ends for them. The former is morally permissible, while the latter is not. In section 3, I offer the following interpretation of what respecting their children's independence requires of parents: parents must encourage reflection, be truthful in their arguments, show respect

5 While Swift's 2020 paper focuses on religious views (including atheism), the logic underlying his position can be extended to values that are nonreligious in nature.

6 Swift, "Parents' Rights, Children's Religion." Note that I am not applying the label 'exclusion view' to the position defended in Brighouse's and Swift's co-authored monograph *Family Values*.

for views differing from their own, refrain from instrumentalizing their children, and avoid threats of sanctions. These are *process conditions* for admissible parental value shaping. In addition, morality also demands that parents allow significant outside influences on their children's value development. These must be influences over which they do not have control (section 4). These are *background conditions* for permissible parental value shaping. While on my account, parents have a limited moral right to deliberately influence their children's values, they may not shield them from other influences—on the contrary, they must ensure the presence of such influences—and they must not attempt to control which values their children end up adopting. By doing so, parents will cultivate an appropriate attitude of respect towards their children's independence. In sum, the view developed here is more restrictive than the commonsense view, while allowing for more parental influence than exclusion views.

1. PRELIMINARIES

Let me cover some preliminaries. First, the parental right at stake here is a *moral* right. Whether it would be legitimate for the state to enforce it is a separate question I do not address in this paper. For example, it might be that parents have no moral right to try to convince their children of their own comprehensive views, but that the state should not interfere with parents who try to do so anyway. The state cannot check parents' motivations in many cases, and trying to do so would likely be overly intrusive. This is compatible with the view that parents are overstepping their moral rights in trying to shape their children's values when they try to convince them of their own comprehensive doctrines. For the most part, the discussion that follows assumes the current legal regulation of parenthood as a given, diverging briefly from this assumption in section 4.[7]

Second, this paper focuses specifically on the moral permissibility of parents' endeavoring to shape their children's values to conform to their own *because they believe these to be the correct values to live by.* This is a standard motivation for many parents. A key feature of the commonsense view (as I understand it) is that it validates this motivation as a morally permissible ground for parental value shaping. That said, the debate on parents' rights has sometimes turned to different motivations. For example, a parent's intentions may be for the child to share a set of core values with their parent in order to foster an intimate relationship.[8] Thus, not all value shaping necessarily stems from a parent's holding

7 The details of legal regulations regarding parenthood differ among countries, but no country that I know of denies parents the right to deliberately influence their children's values.

8 Cormier, "On the Permissibility of Shaping Children's Values"; and Swift, "Parents' Rights, Children's Religion."

a specific comprehensive view to be correct; there can exist considerations in favor of value shaping that, e.g., both religious and nonreligious parents could equally accept. Correspondingly, these considerations are compatible with the exclusion view. The divergence in opinion between commonsense views and exclusion views occurs less on the level of parents' permissible *actions* than on the level of admissible *motivations* and the overall *attitude* parents must cultivate towards their children.

Third, the present discussion covers only values and normative views about which there can be reasonable disagreement, such as religion or lifestyle. I sometimes also refer to these as *conceptions of the good* or *comprehensive doctrines*, following Clayton.[9] This terminology is Rawlsian in origin.[10] At other times, I speak simply of values—by which I intend a conception of the good or a comprehensive doctrine. While the categorization of certain views as "comprehensive" may not always be crystal clear, it is certainly plausible that there are core views regarding justice and morality that all children must be taught. To be sure, reasonable disagreement exists about different comprehensive doctrines or conceptions of the good or other values. With regard to the latter, the philosophical debate often focuses on religious views, notably the question of whether parents are allowed to pass these on to their children. This is understandable because religious views have often provoked societal conflict and shape people's identities. However, one needs to keep in mind that the present discussion also covers other comprehensive doctrines. For instance, Clayton cites a wide range of examples, from a view that condemns the eating of animal products to a carnist view that praises eating animals.[11] In the debate about feminism and political liberalism, feminist views that go beyond what the state could legitimately enforce are also often identified as comprehensive in nature.[12] Other examples could be a comprehensive doctrine that prizes hard work and effort versus a doctrine recommending a more hedonistic approach to life.

Finally, the term 'child' refers to every person who does not yet have the ability to make their own judgments on such matters but who will likely develop this ability over time. Without attempting to set a precise age range, one should certainly not imagine teens to fall into the category of 'children' for the purposes of this paper.

9 Clayton, *Justice and Legitimacy in Upbringing* and "Debate."

10 Rawls, *Political Liberalism*.

11 Clayton, *Justice and Legitimacy in Upbringing*, 110.

12 Abbey, "Back Toward a Comprehensive Liberalism?"; and Neufeld and Van Schoelandt, "Political Liberalism, Ethos Justice, and Gender Equality."

2. THE EXCLUSION VIEW

This section describes the exclusion view, along with criticism it has faced. Let me start out by explaining what the exclusion view was developed in response to—namely, the current societal commonsense view on parental value shaping, which grants parents a limited moral right to deliberately shape their children's values. According to this permissive view, parents may intentionally influence their children's conceptions of the good as long as the future autonomy of the children remains secure. This view is often based on the *achievement view* of autonomy, which holds that when a child reaches adulthood, they must possess the capacity to pursue a life of their own choosing.[13] Correspondingly, parents must not act in any way that would prevent the development of the capacity for autonomy in their children. That said, deliberately imparting one's values to one's child will not usually prevent the child from developing this capacity. Therefore, the commonsense achievement view allows parents to attempt to convince their children of their own comprehensive views.[14]

Exclusion views are highly critical of the commonsense view, based on respect for children. To a certain extent, the achievement view lets parents treat their children as extensions of themselves rather than as separate people who might form their own opinions. This seems objectionable. On Clayton's account, parents must not prejudge controversial matters for their children, who, as such, cannot yet *consent*.[15] While their children are still developing their capacities for autonomy, parents must remain neutral and refrain from imposing their own values. Otherwise, once their children grow into adults, the grown children will have reason to retrospectively contest how they were treated without their consent. Clayton criticizes the achievement view of autonomy for failing to give adequate consideration to *independence* as an important ingredient of autonomy: one's autonomy is violated when others, such as one's parents, decide what ends one should pursue, including during one's childhood.[16] Independence refers to the interpersonal aspect of autonomy.[17] In order to be independent,

13 See Clayton, "Debate," 359–60.

14 There is another aspect of future adults' autonomy that the achievement view can take into account. In addition to securing the capacity for autonomy, the achievement view may require preserving an adequate range of options for the future adult to choose from (Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, 373–77). A very limiting manner of raising children (for example, in an isolated community) would likely violate this second condition for future adults' autonomy even if they still possessed the requisite *capacity* for autonomy.

15 Clayton, "Debate" and *Justice and Legitimacy in Upbringing*.

16 Clayton, "Debate."

17 Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, 377.

one must not be subject to coercion or manipulation by others; so when parents impose their values on children, this violates their independence.

Importantly, it is morally relevant what *intentions* parents have when they take certain actions that may influence children's values: "Two children can have the same thing happen to them—they are fed meat, for example—but, nevertheless, the motivation of the parents can be markedly different in a way that is relevant to the children's autonomy. One parent might be motivated solely by the aim of providing a balanced diet while another might aim to create carnivores."[18] What is important for Clayton is that parents exclude the fact that they themselves endorse a certain view—in this case, carnism—as they make decisions that may influence their children's values.

Another liberal account of parental rights that supports the exclusion condition is Adam Swift's.[19] He argues that parents must not exceed their sphere of *legitimate authority* in raising their children. Since parental authority is based on the aim of securing familial relationship goods, parents must influence their children's values only to the extent that this is necessary to obtain these goods.[20] While it is admissible for parents to share their deepest convictions openly and freely in order to foster intimacy with their children, they should not transmit their own convictions simply because they hold them to be correct. Parents who do so anyway "have misunderstood their role and the moral character of the parent-child relationship."[21] A parent's ultimate aim must be not that the child adopt a particular value but only that their relationship flourish. This implies that parents must not intentionally shape their children's values in the way the commonsense view construes it. While not arguing in favor of neutrality, Swift's view shares with Clayton's the demand that parents exclude certain reasons from consideration as they make decisions that might influence their children's values. Swift's position therefore endorses the *exclusion condition*: parents must set aside what they themselves believe to be the correct values to live by in making decisions that will influence their children's values.

Although the exclusion view has faced plenty of criticism, I believe it still poses a significant challenge, which must be addressed. First, some existing responses to Clayton do not take into account that the exclusion condition is mainly about avoiding certain *motivations* rather than actions. For instance, proponents of the exclusion view may allow for children to go to church or to mosque, but not for the reason why parents usually want to take them there

18 Clayton, *Justice and Legitimacy in Upbringing*, 110.

19 Swift, "Parents' Rights, Children's Religion."

20 Swift, "Parents' Rights, Children's Religion."

21 Swift, "Parents' Rights, Children's Religion," 47.

(i.e., teaching them what they view as the true religion).[22] Hence, the conflict with the commonsense view remains. This kind of response is insufficient to defeat the exclusion view.

Second, some potential responses to the exclusion view could be successful, but they involve making some assumptions that I hope to avoid. In particular, these responses depend on theoretical commitments that proponents of the exclusion view are wont to reject. The first of these is a perfectionist response. According to Tim Fowler, parents should act to secure their children's well-being.[23] This requires parents to take action lest their children fall into empty or worthless ways of life—which may well happen in the absence of deliberate parental influence. For example, if parents do not actively influence their values, children may fall prey to the allure of consumer culture, which would be harmful to them. The idea here is that there will unavoidably be some influences on children, and so parents, who are responsible for ensuring their children's well-being, had better make sure that these influences are beneficial.[24]

To be sure, children's well-being is a very important consideration for parents, and it may well be plausible that respecting their independence cannot have absolute priority over their well-being. But this moral perfectionism relies on problematic assumptions. First of all, Fowler's view supposes that parents can confidently and reliably make judgments about the relative moral worth of different lifestyles. This is a fairly strong assumption to make. While *some* lifestyles—e.g., mindless consumerism or moral nihilism—can safely be identified as having less worth than others from a moral perspective, it remains the case that there are many matters about which there is seemingly irresolvable disagreement, such as whether a religious life is better than a secular one. Second, to the extent that it *is* clear that some lifestyles are more worthwhile than others, there need not always be a conflict between promoting children's well-being and respecting their independence. Fowler's arguments highlight situations in which there is a conflict between respecting children's independence and

22 As argued by, e.g., Giesinger, "Parental Education and Public Reason"; and Cormier, "On the Permissibility of Shaping Children's Values."

23 Fowler, *Liberalism, Childhood and Justice*, 128–30. A similar defense of perfectionist childrearing has also been put forward by Franklin-Hall, "What Parents May Teach Their Children." Since parents bear significant responsibility for the views that their children come to hold, he argues, they enjoy the privilege of guiding them towards the views they believe to be right and true.

24 A related but distinct objection involves skepticism about the very possibility of independence. If maintaining independence is a pie-in-the-sky ideal rather than a real possibility, then *other* moral considerations naturally come to the forefront. I do not further investigate this skeptical position regarding the possibility of independence since it would involve leaving the common ground I share with the proponents of the exclusion view.

securing some other important good, using cases in which respecting a child's independence will expose her to the risk of severe harm.[25] However, there are many situations in which none of the options available are harmful to children or in which it is unclear which of the available options is more harmful. For example, from a religious perspective, *not* having been introduced to religion may seem harmful, but from an atheist perspective, having been raised *with* a religious faith might seem harmful. If independence as understood by Clayton has any moral weight, it seems that parents do not have a right to privilege their own comprehensive view in such a situation, at least not based on judgments related to harm.

A second potential response to the exclusion view involves an appeal to parents' interests—specifically, parents' interest in passing on their conceptions of the good to their children.[26] The issue then becomes one of weighing parents' interests against children's autonomy interests, which could well tip the balance towards the moral permissibility of parental value shaping. Macleod argues that parents have an interest in creative self-extension, as part of what makes parenting particularly valuable to parents is the prospect of passing on one's conception of the good to one's children. In order to act permissibly, parents need to make sure that the development of their children's autonomy is not endangered by parental attempts at value shaping. On balance, Macleod maintains, parents have a right to "provisionally privilege" their own conception of the good.[27] However, they must not shield their children from other influences nor from scrutiny of the parental view.

There is a key difference between Macleod's view and mine: Macleod's view relies on the identification of "passing on one's own values" as a parental interest deserving of recognition. It is controversial whether the parental interest in creative self-extension is morally significant. Even if it is, can it so outweigh children's interests in developing their autonomy that parental value shaping becomes, on balance, morally permissible? Proponents of exclusion views are generally not open to this idea. Clayton and Swift both endorse a dual-interest view, according to which parents' interests have some weight when it comes to making decisions that affect both parents and children, but affirming a parental interest in creative self-extension in particular is a different matter, as it stands in tension with putting significant normative weight on

25 Fowler, *Liberalism, Childhood and Justice*, 128–30.

26 Macleod, "Parental Competency and the Right to Parent" and "Conceptions of Parental Autonomy."

27 Macleod, "Conceptions of Parental Autonomy," 349.

protecting independence.[28] Without taking a position on these questions, I aim to show that parental value-influencing can be morally innocent *whether or not* parents have a morally significant interest in passing on their values to their children. They are at liberty to do so as long as they respect their children's independence—which I argue is compatible with influencing one's children's values. My aim is to develop a response to Clayton and other proponents of the exclusion view in a way that shares most of the assumptions they hold but leads to a different conclusion.

In what follows, I try to show why aiming for a child's adoption of a certain value because one believes in it can indeed be morally permissible and in line with respecting the child's independence.

3. Does Deliberately Influencing Children's Values Always Fail to Respect Their Independence?

In this section, I argue that respect for children's independence is compatible with deliberate parental value shaping, as long as parents do not attempt to control which values their children ultimately endorse. To achieve this, certain *process conditions* (which will be examined in this section) and *background conditions* (which will be discussed in section 4) must be fulfilled. I propose that these conditions are necessary for respecting children's independence, and we should embrace them in lieu of the overly restrictive exclusion condition. I first critique Clayton's claim that respecting children's independence requires that parents abstain from trying to convince their children of the correctness of their own comprehensive views. Then, I go on to show that Swift's view is also unnecessarily restrictive.

Clayton argues that trying to persuade a child of a certain comprehensive view is impermissibly directive due to the child's lack of ability for ethical reflection.[29] It is important to emphasize that my critique of this view is not based on doubts about the importance of independence as a condition for autonomy. I believe that Clayton is quite right to be concerned about future adults' independence when it comes to the deliberate shaping of their values, and failure to do so is a weakness of the commonsense view. I also agree with Clayton that the achievement view of autonomy gives parents too much leeway by

28 Swift, while not as committed to independence as Clayton, comments with regard to creative self-extension that "there is something inappropriately self-serving about this kind of attempt to justify the claim to parent a child" ("Parents' Rights, Children's Religion," 40). The logic of his position suggests that he would also be skeptical of referring to creative self-extension as a justification for particular parental decisions.

29 Clayton, *Justice and Legitimacy in Upbringing*, "Debate," and *Independence for Children*.

neglecting future adults' independence. However, there are different possible interpretations of what respecting independence requires when it comes to children, and Clayton's is ultimately not convincing.

Independence, as already mentioned, refers to the *interpersonal* aspect of autonomy. In order for us to be autonomous, our choices must be our own, which excludes certain kinds of interference by others, namely coercion and manipulation.[30] As Clayton interprets it, protecting independence is about *non-usurpation*.[31] What does this require? It should be uncontroversial that trying to influence someone's values is *not* morally objectionable in the case of adults for whom the other two conditions for autonomy are fulfilled—i.e., they have the capacity for autonomy and an adequate range of options to choose from. It is generally morally permissible to try to persuade other adults of one's own comprehensive views, provided that no attempt at coercion or manipulation is involved.

In what follows, I analyze what meeting the requirement of "avoiding manipulation and coercion" requires of parents in the case of children, and whether it is compatible with parents' deliberately steering their children towards their comprehensive views and values. This is a challenge, as it involves thinking about the morality of engaging in debate with interlocutors who are not fully rational.[32] I will suggest that it can indeed be morally permissible to try to convince children of one's comprehensive views, and I will also propose a number of process conditions that need to be in place for this to be the case.

The case of children is clearly more complicated than that of adults. On the one hand, one could think that because children as such do not yet fulfill the capacity condition for autonomy, we simply have to manipulate and coerce them in some ways, and that this is permissible. Some forms of coercion are allowed with regard to children (e.g., preventing them from running out onto the street), and raising them might also include some instances of morally acceptable manipulation (e.g., presenting two sets of clothes to a toddler to give them an illusion of choice and thereby prevent a temper tantrum over getting dressed). So why worry about inculcating particular values in children? On the other hand, one might think that we need to be extremely cautious when influencing children's values precisely *because* they still lack the capacity for autonomy. Clayton's interpretation of what it means to respect children's

30 Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, 377–78.

31 Clayton, *Independence for Children*, ch. 2.

32 There are few existing attempts to do this. One that I am aware of is a paper by Bou-Habib and Olsaretti ("Autonomy and Children's Well-Being") in which they argue for respecting children's autonomy *as children*, which they distinguish from respecting their independence.

independence reflects this second intuition. Since children do not yet fulfill the capacity condition for autonomy, we should not instill any view in them that is controversial and that they could later reasonably come to reject. We ought to wait until they are ready to engage with controversial views—until then, only what meets a liberal neutrality requirement may actively be taught to them.

To demonstrate the moral importance of independence, Clayton uses a number of hypothetical scenarios featuring comatose patients in order to show that we must not simply make decisions for individuals who are unable to consent rather than waiting for them to wake up and make these decisions themselves.[33] For example, we should not just give a person a nose job while they are comatose or improve their fertility without asking them first. We would presumably all agree. He then extends this reasoning to children: we must wait for them to figuratively "wake up" and make their own decisions when they reach the point at which they are cognitively capable of doing so. But there is a serious disanalogy to the comatose—namely, that children are forming their values precisely during a period in which they are not yet capable of full autonomy. Indeed, children develop their cognitive capacities *gradually*, before finally (hopefully) becoming fully autonomous, and they are necessarily already reflecting on values before reaching this point. They are not "asleep" like a comatose person but rather in a state in which their rational capacities are only partially developed yet to some extent (depending on their age) sufficient to engage in discussion with adults.

The comatose patient analogy seems phenomenologically inaccurate. Due to children's partially developed capacities for ethical reflection, when parents attempt to influence their offspring's values, there is usually an interactive quality that Clayton's analogy fails to capture. The process is not entirely one-sided, as in the case of the surgeon giving a comatose person a nose job—a child participates in their own moral development. Parents do not just decide what values their child is supposed to have and inform them of this. Much more is usually required: active participation by the child, efforts at justification by the parents, etc.

This inaccurate analogy then leads to a conflation of two things that seem different at a normative level: Clayton equates attempting to influence one's child's values with *imposing* one's values on them. To be sure, imposing one's values on another person is coercive and therefore a violation of independence. But not every instance of deliberately influencing the values that a child comes to hold is necessarily coercive or manipulative. The key moral distinction here is the difference between attempting to *influence* and attempting to *control*. An attempt to influence presents a particular option (such as a particular comprehensive

33 Clayton, "Debate," 357–59.

doctrine) as preferable to others, but it does not seek to control the outcome (i.e., whether the child actually adopts it). An attempt to influence in fact follows quite naturally from endorsing a certain conception of the good. If I endorse it myself, it is because I consider it both correct and important. The impetus to take a stand for it, particularly in a dialogue with my children whose lives I want to go as well possible, is not morally objectionable per se. But intending to and attempting to *control the outcome*—that my child ultimately indeed adopts this conception of the good as well—is indeed morally objectionable.

To illustrate, let us say that a parent deliberately tries to influence their child to subscribe to a religious worldview or to a secular comprehensive doctrine such as veganism, to which they themselves adhere. For example, the parent tells the child why they would like them to endorse this worldview, presents their own reasons for doing so, tells them relevant stories that support the parent's own view, etc. I argue that such efforts by parents are not *necessarily* coercive or manipulative, even though they certainly could be. They violate children's independence only if they aim at controlling the outcome of what values the child comes to hold.

There are a range of different factors at play that can indicate the presence or absence of a parental attempt to control the outcome. The following conditions determine whether a parent is maintaining a respectful attitude towards a child's independence. First, whether or not the parent encourages the child to ask questions and reflect on the issues discussed. Second, whether the parent is truthful in their representations of comprehensive views or whether they resort to lies. Third, the presence or absence of sanctions imposed on the child for disagreeing with the parent on their values. Fourth, whether or not the child is instructed to outwardly show allegiance to the parent's values. Fifth, whether or not the parent is respectful of values that differ from their own. I believe that these conditions are all indicative of a parent's motivations to influence rather than to control their child's beliefs; if a parent is in violation of one of these conditions, they are failing to respect their child's independence. Parents must abide by these—individually necessary—process conditions for the permissibility of deliberate parental value shaping in order to respect their children's independence.[34]

To what extent does this response address not just Clayton's argument against deliberate value shaping but also Swift's? Similarly to Clayton, Swift writes critically of parents "guiding their children toward their own religious views," which he deems illegitimate.[35] It is not clear whether "guiding" is exactly

34 The conditions are not jointly sufficient, as there are also content restrictions on what values parents may try to convince their children of, as well as background conditions, as described in section 4 below.

35 Swift, "Parents' Rights, Children's Religion," 47.

the same as "trying to convince," however. I believe that Swift is imagining a fairly hierarchical relationship between parent and child (which, of course, is often the case) whereby "attempting to convince" amounts in practice to guiding or directing. He is also worried about instrumentalization, writing that parents are not permitted to treat their children as means to pursue their own ends.[36] But this is not necessarily the case for every instance of a deliberate parental attempt at convincing their child of a certain comprehensive view. A parent might be motivated simply by the content of their own convictions rather than by a desire to express their own views *through* their children. To the extent that a more respectful approach to debating with children is possible and that instrumentalization need not occur, the reason to nonetheless resist the idea that parents may try to convince their children of their comprehensive views may simply be that the familial relationship goods approach does not provide a rationale in favor of it.[37] However, the familial relationship goods approach can allow parents to do things that are not based on their fiduciary role, as long as there are no objections to it from a moral perspective. If we do not have to worry about violating children's independence or about harming them in some way, parents may be permitted to try to convince their children of their own comprehensive views—not because this is part of the parental role but simply because they are at liberty to do so. I therefore think that Swift could accept parental value-influencing if he were to embrace my account of what it means to respect children's independence.

Will my account allow parents to teach their children about any comprehensive view they endorse? Certainly not. Views that are objectively harmful to children are not reasonable and can be excluded on those grounds. Furthermore, there are comprehensive views that can easily be taught in a respectful manner, and then there are views that must not be taught to children because they are transmitted in a way that is almost automatically disrespectful of children's independence. What I have in mind are views that order parents to teach their children in a way that violates the process conditions. Some comprehensive views contain such inbuilt authoritarianism and therefore must not be taught to children. This is not surprising: respect for children's independence is connected to a broadly liberal outlook.[38] This means, of course, that my account retains many of the restrictions on parents that Clayton and Swift also defend.

36 Swift, "Parents' Rights, Children's Religion," 47. On the instrumentalization worry, see also Clayton, "Debate," 360.

37 On the familial relationship goods account, see Brighouse and Swift, *Family Values*.

38 Of course, this is not to say that only one view will be left, nor that there remains no space for serious controversy. Clearly, there is a range of different worldviews that all share the feature of respect for children's independence. These include both religious and secular views. For example, the views motivating veganism or "carnism" could both be liberal in nature.

It is clearly more restrictive than the commonsense view. Still, I think the distinction between my account and exclusion views remains important because my account allows parents to take a stand for and try to pass on their values, in the sense of trying to convince their children of the importance of those values. It allows for something that many parents who intend to be respectful of their children would very much like to do.

I would now like to address some possible objections to the claim that deliberately influencing a child's values can ever be morally innocent. First, one could object that the picture I have painted is overly intellectualized. What happens in families is not a dialogue in the style of a philosophy seminar, with reasons being presented and debated. How would such a dialogue even be possible, especially with young children? In reality, children will learn to pray with their parents before dinner, for example, or join them regularly for church services—effectively turning them into Christians before they even know it. In other words, the process of value adoption could be quite automatic. This kind of parental conditioning is problematic, as it seems incompatible with respecting children's independence. I agree with this point, and I believe conditioning to be morally inadmissible according to the process conditions described above. The process conditions identify as morally impermissible many of the practices that the commonsense view would allow, such as religious schooling aimed at the adoption of a particular faith.[39]

Moreover, we should not underestimate the extent to which philosophical debating with children actually *does* happen. Many children start asking their parents probing questions quite early on. A toddler's "why phase" typically starts around age two to three.[40] At four to five years of age, a child could already be asking philosophical questions about the nature of God. Parents do not

39 On the other hand, this does not imply that it is impermissible for parents to, e.g., celebrate Christmas with their children or enjoy meals that are part of a particular tradition. Engaging in festivities with a religious background does not in itself imply an attempt to make children adopt religious beliefs. There is a well-known notion of being "culturally Jewish" that—while fully acknowledging the particularities of Judaism—can also be extended to other religions and worldviews to describe how people can be culturally at home in a certain religious tradition without endorsing the religious faith connected to it. I was raised "culturally Protestant," for example, but my parents deliberately refrained from inducting me and my sibling into this faith.

40 Before that age, it is rather difficult for parents to deliberately influence their children's views because the children do not yet have the ability to understand them. What is possible, of course, is formally enrolling a child in a religion, e.g., through infant baptism. I suspect that it is best to separate the analysis of symbolic actions such as baptizing a child from the question of whether parents may deliberately influence their children's values. Performing a baptism on an infant does not in and of itself influence what values the child comes to hold.

have to approach influencing their children in an overly intellectual manner in order to satisfy the criteria for morally innocent influencing that I have outlined above. Rather, what matters is that they refrain from presenting themselves as all-knowing authorities.

Secondly, one may object that the power differential in the parent-child relationship effectively makes any attempt on a parent's part to influence their child's values coercive or manipulative. Given children's dependence on their parents, do the former have a realistic opportunity *not* to endorse the latter's values? Seemingly, no matter how careful parents are with their influencing, it remains highly likely that children will ultimately adopt the values of the adults upon whom they depend most. If so, all attempts to influence would necessarily always turn into attempts to control, given the particular features of the parent-child relationship. One might resist this objection, noting that on the account I have developed, the morally relevant difference between influence and control resides in parents' *intentions* rather than in the expected effects of their actions on children. Nonetheless, I still agree that the power asymmetry between parents and children poses a serious problem. Respecting others' independence also demands that we avoid dominating them. My proposal that parents ensure the presence of other sources of influence is intended to mitigate this power differential. Some checks on parents' influence on their children must be in place. I turn to these in the next section.

4. INDEPENDENCE AND PARENTAL NONDOMINATION

In the previous section, I argued that parental attempts at influencing a child's values can be morally permissible. Indeed, it is not morally objectionable per se to enjoin others to adopt what one considers to be the right views, and although children are not yet fully autonomous, it is possible to engage in dialogue with children without a parent's seeking to control the outcome. Admittedly, though, the power asymmetry in the parent-child relationship makes this particularly challenging. In this section, I further argue that in order to respect children's independence, parents must also avoid being the sole or dominant influencers of their children's values. In addition to the process conditions, some *background conditions* must also be met.

Part of Clayton's motivation for developing his neutralist view is that the parent-child relationship shares important features with the relationship between a state and its citizens.[41] The parent-child relationship is coercive, nonvoluntary, and has a massive impact on children's lives. These features have led Clayton

41 Clayton, "Debate."

to defend strict moral limits on what parents may justifiably do. But these very features of the parent-child relationship might be unjustifiable. *Should* parents have that kind of power over their children in the first place? Justice considerations might call for reducing parental power in order to decrease children's vulnerability to their parents.[42] I am sympathetic to such proposals. But taking the current legal status quo regarding parental rights as a given, what must parents do in order to respect the independence of their children even while trying to influence their comprehensive views?

I have argued that there is a difference between attempting to influence and attempting to control the values of one's child, and only the former is morally permissible. However, recognizing that the power differential between parents and children makes it particularly challenging to avoid coercion or manipulation in this context, there must be a further condition in place in order to more robustly secure respect for children's independence: a parent must also avoid *dominating* their child's value development.[43] This is another facet of not attempting to control which values one's child comes to endorse.

Let me explain how the concern over parental domination regarding their children's value development can be connected to the independence condition of autonomy. The worry with regard to independence is that if parents shape their children's values, this coerces the latter into adopting specific views that they may have wanted to reject if other options had been given. One possible way to avoid this problem is for parents to abstain from value shaping altogether, waiting instead for children to develop the capacities needed to reflect on and adopt their own views—this is Clayton's approach. Another possible solution, however, is to permit several different sources of value shaping as children grow up.[44] Of course, this approach does not guarantee that the views children develop are fully their own, given that they always rely on others' input in their value formation. It does more or less guarantee, however, that they will not naively come to affirm *a specific other person's* views (in this case, their parents'). According to this interpretation of independence, the idea is not that a child should remain totally uninfluenced by others in their value development but that they should be exposed to a number of different people with significant influence.[45]

42 Gheaus, "Childrearing with Minimal Domination."

43 In using the term 'domination', I do not intend to import a full-fledged neo-republican framework into may analysis. I simply intend to respond to worries regarding monopolies of influence, which may endanger children's independence.

44 Gheaus, "Enabling Children to Learn from Religions Whilst Respecting Their Rights."

45 For an example of how this could work with regard to religion, see Gheaus, "Enabling Children to Learn from Religions Whilst Respecting Their Rights."

Tellingly, parents who want to *control* their children's value development often actively try to exclude other influences from their children's consideration, hoping thereby to prevent their children from embracing other values. But this manipulative behavior violates children's independence, as it seeks to control what values one's children will ultimately come to hold. This is true whether or not the attempt is actually successful, as it is the parents' intention to control that is morally relevant. Lest they dominate their children's value development, parents must therefore ensure access to other sources of influence that they do not control.

This general idea of securing a diversity of influences is not new, of course. For instance, we find it prominently in Joel Feinberg's influential contribution on children's right to an open future.[46] The requirement that parents must send children to public schools or at least teach their children a certain curriculum set by the state is commonly defended, even as a legitimate legal imposition by the state. However, my proposal differs from this. I am arguing in favor of parents' moral duty to expose their children from a young age to being influenced by other adults. These could be friends, godparents, neighbors, relatives, caretakers, and so on, with whom the child gets to spend a significant amount of time. In order to avoid the charge of attempting to control the outcome regarding what comprehensive view their children come to espouse, it is important that parents actually relinquish some control. (For instance, exposing their children to adults who are known to share the parents' views would not be sufficient.) Considering it is unusual for adults to feel at ease frankly sharing their values with other people's children, it will likely be necessary to explicitly give them permission and indeed to encourage them to do so.

One might worry that such conversations will expose children to harm. What if other adults teach them harmful views? Of course, if a parent finds out that harmful views are being taught to their child, they are allowed—and indeed morally required—to stop the child from interacting with the adult in question, as per their overarching duty to protect their child from harm in general. Parents must accept influence only from people whose views fall within the realm of reasonable disagreement. If, for example, an adult argues in favor of the corporal punishment of children, then it is perfectly acceptable and indeed required to shield one's child from that opinion. The more difficult question is: What if other adults are passing on views that one simply considers to be wrong? For example, must an atheist parent allow another adult to present arguments in favor of a Christian worldview to their child? I think this is indeed what follows from the requirement to refrain from controlling

46 Feinberg, "The Child's Right to an Open Future."

which values one's child ultimately adopts. And as already established, the parent is also entitled to explain why they themselves are atheist and to argue for their view as well.

A further worry might be that children will become confused by hearing different views from different adults. For example, what will a child think if they hear from their parents that God exists but are then confronted with an atheist position from another adult? On the other hand, some children already hear very different views *between parents*, and this seems entirely acceptable. There is also something positive about the confusion that results from hearing varied and possibly opposing views, namely that it requires children to engage critically with the different views, which in turn helps them to develop their own values.

If this matter is indeed all about parental intentions, one might wonder why parents must, as I have maintained, really take positive actions to avoid dominating their child's process of value formation. Could a parent not claim that all that is morally required of them is a negative duty to refrain from attempting to control the outcome of which values their child comes to endorse? If it happens anyway, they might protest, this is not their fault. I would answer that parents must take active steps to involve other adults due to the power differential involved in the parent-child relationship. As mentioned above, it may well be that the legal regulation of parenthood should be changed to address this issue. Until then, parents must take steps to mitigate the risks that come with their powerful legal and social position vis-à-vis their children. Otherwise, they knowingly subject their children to a situation in which the latter are unlikely to resist adopting their parents' values—and this would be disrespectful.

Of course, avoiding parental domination is not going to appeal to parents who want to ensure that their children come to endorse a particular worldview. I do not believe it is possible to find common ground with such parents on a liberal basis, and because of this, my view is clearly at odds with the commonsense view. Respecting children's independence simply requires accepting that their values might differ from one's own. Parents are not entitled to control which values their children come to espouse. However, there are parents who are committed to a particular worldview that they would like to take a stand for, without, however, imposing it on their children. This does not seem unreasonable, and it is compatible with liberalism, provided certain conditions are met. Some of these conditions pertain to the influencing process, while others pertain to the background of parental nondomination. Parents who fall in the camp of those who want to influence their children while also respecting their independence may very well be persuaded that they should avoid dominating their children's value development.

5. CONCLUSION

It was long taken for granted that parents are entitled to deliberately influence their children's values, or even simply to decide for them which values to endorse. This has rightly been questioned by philosophers in recent years: parents cannot properly respect their children while simultaneously setting their ends for them. Matthew Clayton has argued in favor of neutral childrearing, whereby respecting children's independence requires that parents refrain from imposing their conception of the good on their children. Adam Swift has recently argued that parental attempts at influencing must be motivated by a desire to create a flourishing parent-child relationship rather than by a belief in the correctness of one's view. I have put forward the claim that we should abandon this exclusion condition, and that deliberate value shaping can be morally permissible. The independence condition for autonomy is indeed important when it comes to children—ignoring it amounts to being blind to the interpersonal aspect of autonomy. However, rather than requiring neutrality from parents, in my view, the independence condition requires parents to refrain from attempting to control their children's views. This does not amount to a reconciliation with the commonsense achievement view, as it is more restrictive of parents than the latter. On the other hand, it allows parents to attempt to, for example, influence their children towards adopting a worldview that prizes individual autonomy in all spheres of life.[47]

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