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Brian D. Ray

People have been competing to control the education of children since the first Homo sapiens was born. Regardless of genteel and resourceful language and rationales promoting consensus building and democratic decision making during the past century and currently, historians of institutional education have revealed that education is typically a realm of contention. Education in the United States is no exception; history supports this claim. In like manner, the discussions about parent-led, home- and family-based education—home schooling—are simply a continuation of the struggle over who will control what goes into the minds and affects the hearts of children—the future full-fledged citizens of any nation.

Whether more persons should choose to home school is, at first glance, an insignificant issue, because currently about 89% of all 52 million U.S. conventional school students in kindergarten through Grade 12 are in state-run institutions, with the other 11% in private schools (U.S. Department of Education, 1998); only another estimated 1.2 million to 1.7 million are home educated (Lines, 1998; Ray, 1999). The issue, however, goes to the core of the centuries-old debate over who should be in the primary position of influence in the educational lives of children and what effect the answer has on society.

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Both individual children and society are powerfully affected by today's educational arrangements for the younger generation. In essence, this article is about what is the best educational arrangement that should be promoted in America. An important starting place is to keep in mind that there is nothing that de facto supports the claim that a democratically mandated, tax-funded, and state-run institutional approach to controlling individual children's education is inherently the best approach to education in America. This is the nation made up of a liberty-loving people in a republic that is based on the fundamental premises, among others, that (a) all persons are created equal, (b) all persons are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights (i.e., life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness), (c) the government shall make law that neither establishes a religion nor prohibits the free exercise of religion, and (d) governments are to be limited in their powers (Declaration of Independence; U.S. Constitution, Article I and X).

I am aware that scholars who put their faith in certain theoretical frameworks used for analysis of statements like the preceding (and the ones later in this paragraph) might accuse me of insensitivity and various self-serving, -centric-, myopic-, and power-based interests and paradigms. I am also aware that discussions about education and its reform, both recently and during the 1800s, have been laced with references to the alleged wants and needs of all kinds of particular groups (i.e., arbitrarily and subjectively selected subcategories of the human species). This constant cacophony of discord essentially revolves around what one group wants (or is told by someone else it should have) that another group has. Germane to this article, it should be noted that the preponderance of this debate and jostling for power, position, and entitlement occurs within and around the state-run school system (i.e., financed by individual citizens' tax payments at the county, state, or federal level). Either much less of this kind of debate occurs within the private school community, scholars and the media simply do not report on it, or both. Almost none occurs within the home education community. Considering this background of discord, especially within the state-run school system, the realm of careful thought about education may be helped by putting less emphasis on stereotypical skin color-, ethnic-, class-, gender-, sexuality-, and greed-based language, arguments, and polemics about groups. Rather, individual children and parents might be better served by rationales based on the concepts of the inherent worth of every person's life, altruism motivated by a balance of merit and grace, personal responsibility to help those who are in dire need and have little ability to help themselves, and voluntary giving rather than the government compelling one person to aid another. With these things in mind, I proceed to consider the benefits of home schooling to both individuals and to society.

Contemporary home-based education is not a novel form of education; rather, it is centuries old and both predates and outdates institutional schooling as most American children experience it today (Gordon & Gordon, 1990; Ray, 1999; Shepherd, 1986). Although an age-old practice, home-based education waned to near-extinction by the late 1970s in the United States. Because the institutionalization of education has so completely prescribed and constrained the educational experience and thinking of five generations of Americans, including those scholars, educational practitioners, policymakers, and laypersons today writing about home schooling and reading this article, my task is to make a simple presentation that will stimulate my readers to consider seriously that the schooling and institutions we ourselves have experienced and promoted are likely not the best thing for either individuals or for the ordered society with the least possible intrusion from the state. I think that today, as the millennia change, claims such as "I went to institutional schools and I turned out okay, didn't I ...?," "Public schools are what made America great" (Mungeam, 1993; see also Glenn, 1988), "Private education creates more divisiveness," and "We all know that the public common school best serves the common good" are hollow incantations that do little good in addressing the historical and pressing needs of any individual child or nation or humans in general. It is time for education reform-saturated researchers, philosophers, sociologists, teachers, policymakers, and parents to reconsider "the way it is" and consider "the way it might be."

I submit to the reader that five general areas of evidence and reasoning support the claim that home schooling is a good, if not the best, form of education for individuals and for society's common good. These five areas are (a) learned children who become learned adults, (b) children who are psychologically and socially healthy who become adults who are psychologically and socially healthy, (c) hardy and hearty families, (d) liberty in a just society with a nondominant state, and (e) persons with reliable character and value systems.

Learned Children

Discussions about educational reform over the past 20 years frequently have included concepts such as equity, access, race, and gender and ignored or deemphasized academic learning, despite the fact that one of parents' and students' primary interests today—as it has been throughout history—is that children learn how to read, write, compute, and know and understand some basics in the areas of science, history, and geography. It is the ability to read, write, compute, and generally communicate that historically has been one of the primary keys in terms of enabling an individual, in most countries, to do

what he or she desires to do and to lead others along a preferred path. In this regard, then, how do the home educated appear to be doing?

The balance of research to date suggests that home-based education has a positive effect on children's academic achievement as compared to the achievement of those in classroom-based institutional schools. A few researchers have found no significant differences between the achievement of the home educated and of those in state-run schools. Most scholars, however, have found the home educated to be outperforming the public schooled whether the study has been local, state-specific, nationwide in the United States (e.g., Ray, 1990, 1997; Rudner, 1999), or in other countries (Priesnitz & Priesnitz, 1990; Ray, 1994; Rothermel, 1999). Typically, the home educated score at the 65th to 80th percentile on standardized achievement tests. More complete reviews of research on academic achievement clearly support the conclusion that the home educated are doing remarkably well (e.g., Ray, 1999; see also Ray, 2000/this issue).

Although these studies have been largely descriptive in nature and not causal comparative, statistical analyses suggest that even when background demographic traits are controlled, students taught mainly by their parents do well (Ray, 1990, 1997; Rudner, 1999; Russell, 1994). Various studies provide evidence that factors such as parent education level, family income, gender of student, degree of regulation of home schooling by the state, and whether the parents ever have been certified teachers show weak relation to these children's achievement. An increase in studies that more carefully control background variables (as did, e.g., Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982) eventually will tell us more about the effect of home schooling on achievement (Cizek, 1993; Ray, 1988; Wright, 1988).

Considering the characteristics that intrinsically may be a part of home schooling (e.g., individualization of curriculum for each student, increased academic engaged time, high levels of social capital, as delineated in Ray, 2000/this issue), it is not surprising that the home schooled do well in terms of the three Rs, science, history, and geography. As Good and Brophy (1987) noted, private individualized tutoring—which, in many ways, is home-based education—"is the method of choice for most educational purposes, because both curriculum (what is taught) and instruction (how it is taught) can be individualized, and because the teacher can provide the student with sustained personalized attention" (p. 352).

Psychologically and Socially Healthy Persons

Americans, like those in other nations, value psychological and social health for their children in addition to good academic performance. Defi-

nitions of psychological and social health are likely to be very dependent on the theoretical orientation of the person doing the defining. Most adults, however, have a general idea of what it means to be healthy in these respects. A general and useful definition is that psychologically and socially healthy persons have (a) an efficient perception of reality, (b) an ability to exercise voluntary control over behavior, (c) positive self-esteem and acceptance by those around them, (d) an ability to form affectionate relationships, and (e) an ability to use their energy productively (Atkinson, Atkinson, Smith, Bem, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 1996, pp. 511–512; see also Meier, Minirth, & Wichern, 1982). Although less research has been performed in the domain of the psychological and social health of the home educated than in the realm of academic achievement, several of the preceding factors have been examined. Four areas of related research on the home educated suggest that they are doing as well or better than their conventionally schooled peers.

First, it should be emphasized that home schooling is actually home-*based* education. The parents are most often the primary decision makers about the daily activities, whether academic or social, of the children, and the majority of younger children's time is spent with their families. These children engage, however, in activities with a wide range of persons and groups and environments outside the confines of the home and family (Medlin, 2000/this issue; Ray, 1990, 1997; Wartes, 1987). In addition, as the children grow older, they spend an ever-increasing amount of time with persons and in places outside the home and family. The research base and my 15 years of close observation of the home schooling community indicate that the vast majority of home-educated children are nowhere near being socially isolated.

Second, research shows that home-educated children are healthy in terms of psychological and emotional health (Carlton, 1999; Medlin, 2000/this issue; Ray, 1999). They apparently have positive self-esteem and self-worth and live in psychologically sound families (Allie-Carson, 1990).

Third, one can infer from the research that those being home educated are doing well socially. Whether their well-being is related to interacting with others (Shyers, 1992), leadership potential (Montgomery, 1989), or being in families that are civically active (Smith & Sikkink, 1999; cf. Traviss, 1998), research indicates the home educated are doing as well or better than those in conventional schools (Medlin, 2000/this issue).

Finally, limited research to date suggests that the home educated are successful as young and older adults (Medlin, 2000/this issue). For example, home-educated girls are becoming young women who develop personal voice and " ... the strengths and the resistance abilities that give them such an unusually strong sense of self" (Sheffer, 1995, p. 181). More generally, they are

doing well in terms of academics just prior to and in college (ACT, 1997; Galloway & Sutton, 1995; Ray, 1997, 1999; Rudner, 1999), and many colleges are recruiting them actively (Ray, 1999). They are doing well in terms of critical thinking (Oliveira, Watson, & Sutton, 1994), leadership in college (Galloway & Sutton, 1995), and general life activities (Knowles & Muchmore, 1994).

In sum, studies indicate that home-schooled children and adults who were home educated are psychologically and socially healthy. As mentioned with regard to research on academic achievement, these studies have been mainly descriptive in nature and not causal comparative.

Hardy and Hearty Families

Humans throughout the centuries have recognized that families (i.e., a father, a mother, and children) are the core functional unit of society (Blankenhorn, 1995; Carlson, 1993; Popenoe, 1996; Wiggin, 1962). Healthy families make for healthy societies. Popenoe (1996) wrote that the empirical evidence "shows that by far the best environment for childrearing is in the home and under the care of the biological parents" (p. 214), and, generally speaking, the main generator of close, warm, and enduring relationships for individuals is marriage and the family. "Numerous studies show now ... [that] a strong family structure is anti-poverty insurance" (Olasky, 1996, pp. 192–193; see also, e.g., Tucker, Marx, & Long, 1998; White & Kaufman, 1997). Especially pertinent at this time in American history when almost 30% of all children are born out of wedlock, Blankenhorn (1995) emphasized the necessity of parents, fathers in particular, investing energy and resources in their children: "Paternal investment ... is an essential determinant of child and societal well-being" (p. 251). Furthermore, the research evidence has made clear that parent involvement in a child's life is crucial—perhaps the most significant factor—to a child doing well in the world of schooling and academics (Coleman, 1991; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Henderson & Berla, 1994; U.S. Department of Education, 1987, 1994). Of particular interest to those who emphasize the wants and needs of special groups, many researchers have pointed out the special importance of parent involvement in the lives of minority children. For example, Chavkin (1993) reported, "Unfortunately, the educational system has been less successful in educating this growing minority population than it has the majority population" (p. 1); parent involvement clearly improves student academic achievement, and minority students and children from low-income families have the most to gain from such involvement (p. 2).

Not only have members of the modern intellectual class (e.g., researchers) found that strong families are good for children and society, centuries

of core belief systems (i.e., religions) have told people that families are important to the well-being of humans. One should note that I am using in this article a functional definition of religion—that is, *religion* generally means a set of beliefs that deal with ultimate concerns. As Baer (1998) explained, "Secular descriptions of reality ... can function just like supernatural descriptions" (p. 107). With this in mind, one can say that religions have held for millennia that the family is an institution ordained by something or Someone greater than individual humans, and the family—both as an institution and particular groups of persons—is to be promoted and defended against degradation and loss of function.

For example, Christianity and Judaism, two religions significantly related to the history and traditions of the United States, both accord great importance to parents and the family. Meyer (1929/1983) wrote regarding education in ancient Israel:

> All education is at first religious in the sense that religious motives and ideas predominate in the educational efforts of all primitive peoples. ... Here lies the explanation of the religious-educational character of Hebrew national life, and here, too, the secret of Israel's incomparable influence upon the religious and educational development of the world. The religion of Israel was a vital religion and it was a teaching religion. ... The home was the only school [including learning to read and write] and the parents the only teachers. (p. 901)

Modern traditional Jewish thinkers concur:

> With respect to education, however, the traditional Jewish sources speak unequivocally, laying down a number of clear principles relevant to the current debate: (1) *Parents must have responsibility and control* ... (2) *Teachers and schools are agents of parents* ... control and responsibility remain with the parents. ... The "education establishment" always remains accountable to parents. (3) *Education should inculcate values as well as knowledge.* Because of this, the Jewish tradition does not see education as purely secular. (Pruzan, 1998, p. 2; see also Lapin, 1993, 1999)

Likewise, traditional Christians today (including both Catholics and evangelicals) concur that parents have the primary and final rights and duties regarding the education of their children (e.g., Adams, Stein, & Wheeler, 1989; Ball, 1994; Clark, 1988; DeJong, 1989; Hardon, 1998; Hocking, 1978; Klicka, 1993; Skillen, 1998).

Based on more limited knowledge, I also understand that traditional Muslims today agree that the primary authority and duty regarding the

education of children lies with parents (see, e.g., http://www.ArabesQ.com). Finally, I think it is clear that the large majority of adults in the United States today, regardless of what faith they might espouse (i.e., be it more natural- or supernatural-based), philosophically agree that parents hold the primary right and duty regarding children's education and are, ultimately, the ones best equipped to make educational decisions (cf. Phi Delta Kappa International, 1998).

Research does not yet clearly show whether home schooling creates hardy and healthy families. There is evidence, however, that this may be the case (Allie-Carson, 1990; Carlson, 1993, 1995; Lines, 1994; Romm, 1993; Smith & Sikkink, 1999).

If parent involvement in the lives of children is so critical—based on both research on children's academic success and major religious worldviews—and home-based education is essentially the epitome of parent involvement, then the vast majority of educators, ministers of faith, and parents should be rushing to embrace its practice. During the past 2 decades, in fact, there has been a rush toward home schooling by a relatively significant percentage of parents, but hardly by a majority of educators and ministers of faith. I do not have space in this work to address ministers of faith, but I must take space for the question of why, perhaps, educators are not more ardently advancing the practice of parent-led and home-based education. One might make a good case that the primary reason is the control of a colossal amount of money from taxation (e.g., Brimelow & Spencer, 1993; Lieberman, 1997; Toch, 1991). However, I do not expand on this possibility in this article. Giving educators some benefit of the doubt, I think that at present the answer mainly has to do with their personal conceptions of what is the common good with respect to liberty in a just society with a nondominant state.

Liberty in a Just Society With a Nondominant State

With respect to social and political life, liberty means several things: A person shall not be encumbered with respect to what he believes; the government shall neither try to stop a person from believing something nor try to make a person believe anything (U.S. Constitution). Liberty means that every person is allowed to be as kind and generous as he or she wants to be to any other person or group. A person is not allowed to harm another in any way that clearly violates a clear and unambiguous standard.

Within a freedom-loving nation such as the United States, liberty also entails the idea that a person's rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness will be guarded in a way that is clear and unambiguous (e.g., all adult persons

may vote, any person may sit at the front of a room in a public-access building); it does not mean the government may coerce private persons to give money (e.g., via taxes), jobs, or privileges to other individuals or groups. Liberty means that the government shall not violate the private spaces and relationships of others (e.g., the home, the family, private business) unless there is clear and probable cause that something unlawful is taking place therein. Liberty does not mean, as some believe, license to do whatever one wants to do as long as it does not "clearly harm someone else."

It is clear that society ultimately must make choices of morality on many issues and correspondingly create and uphold law (Bauman, 1999). Each faith tradition, whether more anthropocentric or more theocentric, uses different approaches and standards regarding moral goodness. Judeo-Christian tradition would say that true liberty is attained in thought and action consistent with supernaturally revealed truth that should be the basis of a government's law and is therefore protected by the law. In a freedom-loving nation comprised of individuals with disparate worldviews (e.g., orthodox Jews, Marxists, neoliberals, and New Age adherents), passionate but respectful disagreement about the definition of liberty will continue for a long time. Perhaps more than liberty, justice has been the focus of American thinkers and policymakers during the past 2 decades.

As with the term *liberty*, justice's definition largely depends on one's worldview, one's functional religious presuppositions (see, e.g., Apple, 1993; Skillen, 1998; Welner, 1999). *Justice* has been defined in many ways:

> According to the Romans, justice meant "giving to each its due." Plato and Aristotle conceived of justice as the proper ordering of society, resulting from the rule of reason over passion in public deliberation. The biblical tradition ties justice to righteous conduct—that which is consistent with God's commandments, a proper respect toward the Creator and His creatures. Many today stress the concept of justice as "fairness." (Skillen, 1998, p. 1)

Although I cannot solve the debate here, I suggest that a just society is one in which government officials treat all individuals impartially and in accordance with all law that is constitutional and moral (i.e., good); the government punishes anyone who harms another person (see, e.g., Olasky, 1996, Appendix B; Old Testament, Rom. 13:3–4, New American Standard). A just society is not one in which the government is authorized to force one person or group to give something (e.g., money, a job, more control over capital) to another person or group; that is to say, a just society does not mean one in which those in power—be they political representatives, think-tank sages, university professors, or union leaders—use the

force of law and the state to try to create a society that has an absence of differences in things like amount of money earned, kinds of jobs held, or "one's relationship to the control and production of cultural and economic capital" (Apple, 1982, p. 505) when compared by persons' skin color, ethnic background, religion, gender, or sexual practices. For example, a just society is not one that assumes the state has an obligation to meet an indeterminate number of unspecified "needs of all children" (e.g., Clinton, 1996, pp. 128–145; Welner, 1999, p. 2). The nuanced difference between protecting a right and assuring that a person obtains a benefit may be vague, and I again recognize that there may be passionate but respectful disagreement in a constitutional republic about what is a just society.

Fervent wrangling over the definitions of liberty and justice in the context of this nation's and the world's common good will continue. There is often little one can do, in the end, to make another person accept one's own definitions. This is the "nice" thing—the convenient and relaxing thing—about America; everyone may have his or her own opinion. There are many individuals and groups who know, however, that there is a way to ensure that others will accept particular definitions of liberty and justice (or other concepts such as the common good, correct social theory, the best functional religion for a nation). They merely give the state power to create and enforce a system that retains the appearance of noncoercion but effectively guarantees the majority of the population will be under the control of the state and will come to espouse these particular worldviews and notions of liberty and justice. State-controlled schools may be the perfect system to meet these ends.

To the advantage of those who want to use state-run schools to meet their desired ends, I recognize (and I think others hold a similar view; see, e.g., Baer, 1998; Ball, 1994; Everhart, 1982) that the state-run school system has become essentially the "default setting"—the natural, normal, unchallenged choice, so to speak—for most Americans. The implicit assumptions are so pervasive in the thinking and writing of Americans, even among those who are advocates of parental rights, duty, and ultimate authority with respect to children's education, that they often talk about "withdrawing" or "taking children out of" the state school system (e.g., Welner, 1999, p. 2). These terms are even used to describe parents who never sent their children away from themselves and a home-based environment to be taught and directed by the strangers and experts at the state institutions. The practice of sending children to state schools and the language that accompanies it is entrenched in America. It is the "what is," not necessarily the "what ought." Although this language is now ingrained, it is notable that the majority of American parents would choose private or home schooling rather than state-run schools if they thought they genuinely had

the choice (Carper & Layman, 1997; Glenn, 1988, p. 284; Havermann, 1998; Phi Delta Kappa, 1998). Of special interest to those who focus on particular groups in the state-run system, Black adults appear to be more interested in authentic choice than do White adults (Glenn, 1988; McDowell, Sanchez, & Jones, 2000/this issue; Phi Delta Kappa, 1998).

Debate about the role of the state in education in America has been strong for well over a century (Arons, 1983; Ball, 1994; Everhart, 1982; Glenn, 1987, 1988; McCarthy, Oppewal, Peterson, & Spykman, 1981; McCarthy, Skillen, & Harper, 1982; Richman, 1994; Spring, 1990; Toch, 1991). I submit that those who promoted voluntary education under the authority of parents and First Amendment free associations and who opposed state-run schooling during the early history of the United States (e.g., the Voluntaryists; Glenn, 1988) were correct; the instruction, education, and indoctrination of children never should have been given over to the state and its agents. The practice of such has caused ceaseless strife among Americans, as Sowell (1993) explained, and it naturally causes the reduction of diverse and free thinking in the people of the United States (Ravitch, 1992). It appears that the desire of many proponents of state-run education over the past 200 years has been to control individuals and "the Other"—individuals or other groups of persons who think differently from oneself—to use the term in a way probably not intended by some (e.g., Apple, 1998).

Historical accounts provide insight regarding the motivations behind advocates of state-run education. For example, McCarthy et al. (1981) explained that Thomas Jefferson had tension in his thought

> between his theoretical commitment to individualism and his pragmatic bent toward collectivism. ... Jefferson did not take a direct route to the state [guaranteeing societal order]. He turned instead to the school as the primary institution to guarantee the order and freedom he desired in society. In Jefferson's thought the school gave up its autonomy to the state and became little more than a department of the state. And Jefferson saw nothing wrong with indoctrinating students into a philosophy of government as long as it corresponded to his understanding of orthodoxy.
>
> Benjamin Rush ... saw that Jefferson's program was but another form of sectarianism. ... [But] he followed the same route into pragmatic collectivism that Jefferson followed. (p. 85)

Rush unabashedly predicted that "our schools of learning, by producing one general and uniform system of educator, will render the mass of the people more homogeneous and thereby fit them more easily for uniform and peaceable government" (McCarthy et al., 1981, p. 86).

Horace Mann was able to accomplish in the mid-1800s what Jefferson was not able to do in the late-1700s. As McCarthy et al. (1981) wrote, "Mann was successful in that he convinced enough people that a system of public schools which championed a supposedly nonsectarian religion was essential to the well-being of the social, economic, and political order of the state" (p. 86; see also McCarthy et al., 1982). Glenn (1988), likewise, historically and lucidly uncovered much of the thinking that has been behind the advocacy of state-run education in several nations; his findings also corroborate the kinds of thinking exhibited by Jefferson and Rush, as just noted.

It is crucial to recognize that many individuals holding notions that the state should be in control of future adult citizens are from this century, not only from past ones. For example, Wiggin (1962), of the University of Maryland, described herself as liberal in religion and in politics and firmly believes "that the proper place for a child or youth in a republican society is in a public elementary or secondary school" (p. viii) and that state-run schools are "a gigantic moral enterprise" (p. 36) in which society transmits to its citizens the correct answer to questions such as: "Who is an American? ... What should this American know and what should be his behavior? ... [and] How may he be a good American citizen?" (p. 36). A professor of education stated in 1981, "Public schools promote civic rather than individual pursuits" and "Each child belongs to the state" (as cited in Richman, 1994, p. 51). Winnie Mandela promised to South Africans in the early 1990s free and compulsory education and stated, "Parents not sending their children to school will be the first prisoners of the ANC [African National Congress] government" (Richman, 1994, p. 51). Apple (1993) explained the struggle that leads up to what becomes the "official knowledge" to be transmitted to future generations of students: "a *selective tradition* operates in which only specific groups' knowledge becomes official knowledge [of texts used in public schools]" (p. 65). A then-advocate of re-Christianizing state-run schools, Simonds (1993) promoted doing "indirect evangelism" in public schools by influencing the selection of curriculum materials that give a biblical view and omitting materials that promote nonbiblical views. He also stated that students "should be taught patriotism and the traditions of Western culture, as well as principles of self-government and democracy," and the "Judeo-Christian philosophy of life ... should be included in textbooks and the teaching process as a matter of history and the basis for our values, and ethical practices" (p. 109). More recently, an educator and official at the Oregon State Department of Education whose area of authority is home schooling told me that the state, not the parents, should have ultimate authority in making sure that a child receives an education according to the state's demands (D. Perkins, personal communication, May 17, 1999).

Not all persons' desires to use state-run schools for control and social change are as obvious as some of those in the preceding paragraph. For example, a thinker such as Apple (1993, 1996) provides elaborate analyses of the complex issues involved and power being exerted within the realm of America's state-run schools and claims commitment to an ethical and political principle that, among other things, dignifies human life, sees others not as objects to be manipulated, and considers all persons acting as "*co-responsible subjects* involved in the process of democratically deliberating over the ends and means of *all* of their institutions" (Apple, 1993, p. 3). Regarding such seemingly virtuous goals, two very important things must be considered. First, it is common knowledge that a relatively small percentage of citizens—especially parents with school-age children—have ever (especially during the past 50 years) democratically deliberated over the nature and power relationships of state-run schools in any local, meaningful, and effective way. They are not the ones—and never have been, at least in recent history—deciding the nature of state-run schools or the official knowledge being promulgated therein. Second, the same persons who say others should not be manipulated or coerced with power also advocate the state's continuation as the proprietor of indoctrination. As an example, we can read what Apple (1996) had to say about state-controlled schools:

> Many of us have quite ambivalent feelings about the place called school. All of us who care deeply about what is and is not taught, and about who is and is not empowered to deal with these issues, have a contradictory relationship to these institutions. We want to criticize them rigorously and yet in this very criticism lies a commitment, a hope, that they can be made more vital, more personally meaningful and socially critical. If ever there was a love/hate relationship, this is it. ... I certainly do not want to act as an apologist for poor practices [in schools]. Yet, during an era when—because of rightist attacks—we face the massive dismantling of the gains (limited as they are) that have been made in social welfare, in women's control of their bodies, in relations of race, gender, and sexuality, and in whose knowledge is taught in schools, it is equally important to make certain that these gains are defended. Thus, there is another clear tension in this volume. I want to both defend the idea of a *public* education, and a number of the gains that do exist, and at the same time to criticize many of its attributes. (pp. xv–xvi)

If by those like Apple "public" schools mean tax-funded and state-controlled schools, then there appears to be an inherent self-contradiction in their arguments in favor of peaceful democratic deliberation and against inequalities and dominating powers. On the one hand,

they are disturbed that "the Others" (e.g., "rightists") have prevailed at times past in state-run schools and are now prevailing in too many ways (Apple, 1996, 1998, p. xvi), and they argue for nonmanipulative practices in society. On the other hand, they say they are glad they have made gains in certain areas (e.g., women's control over their bodies and whose knowledge is taught in schools) and want to hold on to those gains—gains that often have been attained via powerful political moves and the manipulation of others. My hypothesis (based on what I have read and experiences such as those I have had with educators at professional conferences like the annual meetings of the American Educational Research Association for more than a decade) is that these same persons who advocate state-run schools and the elimination of coercion and manipulation would like to teach children in state-run schools many specific attitudes and beliefs—that these people hold to be true—that are strongly objected to by "the Others" of different worldviews or religious persuasions. In other words, I infer that they are glad when they, or others who believe as they do, prevail in getting their way in the polity, curriculum, and official knowledge of the state-run schools.

Although it is difficult and risky to ascertain the motives of contemporaries, history provides both perspective and motivation to do so. I suggest that many of today's proponents of state-run education are no different from their colleagues of the past. Thankfully, scholars have pointed out that some of the most appalling regimes in memorable history were enamored with using state-run schools to control the thought of children and thus, eventually, the nation (Ravitch, 1992; Richman, 1994). By compelling children to be schooled and then only funding schools that are controlled by the state, a government is inherently acting inequitably toward one group of persons—those who do not want or choose not to put their children under the indoctrinating authority of the government. This coercive use of different scales for different persons is to be detested, and it violates the universally accepted golden rule (Prov. 16:11, 20:23; Matt. 7:12, New American Standard). In addition to other arguments about why state-controlled schools should exist and why children should attend them, some have argued that this is a way to protect children from their parents (e.g., their ineptitude, abuse, narrow-mindedness, crude influence). In response to this line of thought and to the others, it is important to remember certain things, as Skillen (1998) made plain:

> While it is true that public law should not misidentify the family as a totalitarian enclave in which parents may do anything and everything whatever to their children, it is also true that every public-legal attempt to "liberate" minor children from parents makes the minors subject to

whatever legal, medical or other authority is then authorized to direct or influence their actions. Thus, not only are the children not liberated from all external authorities, but one of the most important non-governmental institutions of society is thereby weakened by the overwhelming power of the state. The family as an institution suffers injustice, as does the child who was created first for family life and, via the family, for eventual adult maturity and personal independence.

In sum ... I would argue that the failure to identify human beings correctly as persons-in-community and the family as the foremost community for children, when combined with the failure to discriminate properly in law between adults and minor children, leads to the publicly unjust treatment of families and children. (pp. 3, 5)

Today's advocates of state-run education view the schools as a way to enact their vision of the good life, the good society, the common good. These schools are a way to keep millions of children (i.e., future adult citizens) under the tutelage of those who can teach them to think and act as they allegedly should.

However, in a nation that claims to be liberty-loving and an advocate of citizens' free thinking, there can be no room for an arrangement in which the state puts its citizens under its own particularistic and value-laden teaching. The functions of instruction, education, and indoctrination should be left in the hands of the private, personal, particular, and peculiar worlds of parents and their families and their volitionally funded and privately managed free associations. Any wrong behaviors that might proceed from teachings of these parents and their free associations would be tempered by clear and consistent law and related punishment for the violation thereof.

But, in the end, perhaps the discussion about who should have the main control over children's instruction and education does not revolve around one's conception of liberty in a just society with a nondominant state and to what extent and how one group should control another. Perhaps the conflict most essentially revolves around which values and beliefs (i.e., faith or religion; McCarthy et al., 1981, p. 111) should prevail in our society.

Persons With Reliable Character and Value Systems

There was a time when I thought—and most people still do think—that all Americans agree on the goodness of some basic traits such as honesty, faithfulness, dependability, kindness, and helpfulness. At this point in American history, and that of Western culture in general, however, it is dif-

ficult to say that we can even agree about the absolute goodness of these traits. Intellectual faith systems such as metaphysical naturalism (Johnson, 1995), post-modernism, and sociobiology seem to call into doubt anything of durability and stability in the realm of human ethics and morality. I hope to see an increasing percentage of our society possessing beliefs and expressing behaviors that are good. Among other things, these beliefs include treating all human beings as created equal: "They need no title or qualification beyond their simple humanity in order to command respect for their intrinsic human dignity, their 'unalienable rights'" (Keyes, 1999). But it is now clear that Americans are having great difficulty agreeing on even the character traits that so many once thought were fundamental. Intimately related to this goal, the quintessential issue regarding any child's education actually may be what value system or worldview should be taught to him or her, not what is the socially accepted definition of justice or whether honesty is always the best policy.

Proponents of compulsory schooling law and state-controlled schools, whether "leftists" or "rightists," are working, perhaps unwittingly, to make sure that something called the "common curriculum"—the one approved by those in positions of power—is taught to all (or most) children. Advocates of these government institutions hope they will long be the ones in positions of power. Conversely, most proponents of home schooling and parental choice and authority only want to make sure that their personally chosen curriculum is taught to their children. These folks are not asking the state or anyone else for money or power to teach their curriculum to anyone else. They are asking the state and their neighbors to assume that they, the parents, have the best interests of their children and society's common good in mind. In fact, these parents are only asking the state, and their neighbors and thinkers who empower and influence the agents of the state, to let them go about their lives peaceably and quietly in the privacy of their homes and communities with their children. Advocates of home-based education are familiar with the golden rule and the big issues of liberty and justice for all in society. These parents want the state to allow individual citizens to choose freely when and how they will help other parents.

In Closing

Home schooling allows parents, in a context of nurture and high social capital, to choose freely a unique and effective education for their children. Each year a child grows older gives the parents and the child more opportunity to forge stronger bonds and a richer, relationally developed curricu-

lum. Parents and children in such an arrangement, under no compulsion or coercion from the state, are allowed to escape the hidden curriculum of others and of the state, choose texts for learning, and work together in their communities as they "see work–family–religion–recreation–school as an organically related system of human relationships" (Tyack, 1974, p. 15).

The battles over power and domination that riddle state-run schools cannot sap home schooling parents and their children of their strength, consume their energy, and destroy their zest for learning. Zeal for social justice, liberty, the common good, and being right with one's Creator can be approached from an environment of security, strength, and stability while the ever-maturing child year after year steps out into larger and more expansive spheres of challenge, democratic deliberation, and creative service to others.

The voices of those who are anti-home schooling, anti-parents' rights, and antichoice and of those who assert that home schooling causes "balkanization," "divisiveness," "social anarchy," "narrow-mindedness," "fundamentalism," "segregationism," and "possessive individualism" are increasingly hollow and impotent. Evidence supporting their claims is (and always has been) scarce to nonexistent (e.g., Caldwell, 1999; L. Berg, organizational specialist, National Education Association, personal communication, July 28, 1999). Furthermore—and tragically for this nation's children and to the chagrin of the proponents of state-run schools—the power struggles, illegal drug deals, racism (Greene & Mellow, 1998), violence, philosophical contention, religious censorship, lack of parent involvement, low academic achievement, high dropout rates, premarital sexual activities, teachers' and bureaucratic antiparental power (Baker & Soden, 1998), and greed-based high-stakes labor disputes that are associated with the halls and culture of public schools and so powerfully overshadow the significant incidents of success and joy therein make the common criticisms of parent-led home schooling look very wan and insignificant.

I have explained that the research evidence on home-educated children's learning, psychological and social health, and success in adulthood supports the inference that home schooling has very positive effects. Research and theory also suggest that home schooling is associated with, if not causes, strong and healthy families. I have argued that persons who desire liberty in a just society will embrace and advocate home-based education as the educational option of preference. Also, although several ideas I present and promote in this article may be outside the majority view of contemporary educators, thinkers, and those who publish in the field of education, I have documented that these ideas are certainly neither neoteric nor outside the realm of reasonable and bona fide discourse. Finally, I have posited that although debates over the meanings of and how to advance liberty and justice may continue forever, the issue of how

we should make education available to children and youth is essentially a matter of which value system or worldview should be taught to them and who will control the decision; it should be their parents, not the state.

Home schooling is done out of intense care and concern for today's children. Research is clear that home schooling is chosen to (a) assure that children are academically successful, (b) individualize teaching and learning for each child, (c) enhance family relationships, (d) provide children guided and reasoned social interactions with youthful peers and adults, (e) keep children safe in many respects, and (f) transmit particular values and worldviews to the children (Ray, 1999). Parents do not engage in home education, by and large, to aid some group (be it a majority, minority, disadvantaged, or advantaged one). It is done for today's children, knowing that if they benefit, then society as a whole ultimately will benefit and thus the common good will be served.

Home schooling is a potent way of education and a rich social experience that had all but vanished by 1980 from the consciousness of the American people. Family-based and parent-led education is now back in strength and dynamism. Hundreds of thousands of people in America (and other countries) are enthusiastically developing the thesis that it liberates children and families. Home schooling gives parents and children an opportunity to escape the multiple dominating powers and special interest groups who constantly vie for control within the dominion of state-controlled schooling.

Although I have attempted in this article to put relatively little emphasis on subcategories of humans, it is critical to note in this age of such emphasis that both leftists and rightists, light-skinned and dark-skinned, poor and wealthy, those with special needs and those with talented and gifted children, and theists and humanists are joining the ranks of home schooling. Research and anecdotes indicate that involvement of a diversity is presently accelerating. Home schooling is very open to the public. It frees children and families from the coerced consensus-building processes of the state-run schools. It gives individuals and groups the freedom to help others in direct, personal, immediate, and effective ways. Based on research and philosophical reasoning, I believe that in the long run home-based education academically and psychologically benefits children, emancipates persons to choose their social and political lives freely, and advances the common good of any nation.

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