Homeschooling and authenticity

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Abstract

In this article, I address the relation between children's authentic identity development and homeschooling. I show the limitations of claims that homeschooling protects children's authenticity. I argue that the aim of homeschooling is the reproduction of parental beliefs and culture, which is inimical to the development of authentic children's identities. Thus, I consider homeschooling prima facie unjustified. However, I do not advocate for a prohibition of homeschooling. Instead, I argue that parents could justify their homeschooling practices by satisfying specific authenticity-based requirements. I develop the outline of these requirements in the second part of the article.

Introduction

Since its rebirth in the mid-twentieth century, homeschooling has been one of the most controversial educational practices in the United States. Supporters praise its ability to ameliorate perceived failures of the crumbling public education, while skeptics criticize its educational appropriateness and ideological bent.

One could argue that the controversial reputation of homeschooling is well deserved. The practice, as currently conducted across the United States, opens up a plethora of moral, legal, and practical problems. In recent years, for example, philosophers have debated its moral appropriateness (Reich, 2002); legal theorists have discussed its constitutional underpinnings (Gilles, 1996: 937–1034; Yuracko, 2008: 123–184), while scholars of education have argued about its educational efficiency (Curren and Blockhuis, 2011: 1–19; Ray, 2000: 71–106).

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Among these issues, one question stands out as particularly important: how does homeschooling relate to the development of the child's identity? In the debates about homeschooling, this question has rarely been asked, although its relevance has always been implicit, especially in studies focused on the moral aspects of the practice. Namely, it has been assumed that homeschooling has a significant effect on the child's self-understanding; who children turn out to be is fundamentally shaped by their early educational practices.

In many instances, homeschooling was considered to be beneficial for the proper development of the child's identity. The desire to protect the children from the 'impurity' of public education has been a rallying cry of many homeschooling advocates, who argued that children educated at home would be more authentic. Both liberal and conservative countercultural movements, as Milton Gaither suggests, hold this view. The counterculture's revulsion against conformity and longing for authenticity has become a staple element of the modern celebration of homeschooling (Gaither, 2008a: 229, 2008b).

In this article, however, I wish to counter the claim that homeschooling is beneficial for authentic identity development. I will argue that, on the contrary, homeschooling is detrimental to authenticity, and is therefore prima facie inappropriate as an educational practice.

My argument will be normative, yet it will depend on specific empirical claims. I will arrive at a normative conclusion based on two premises (one empirical and one normative). The empirical premise suggests that the aim of homeschooling is, avowedly, to reproduce parental culture, and not to educate the children in a conventional sense. This premise will be supported through evidence, provided both by the homeschooling advocates and the research data. In addition, the ideology and cultural politics of homeschooling in the United States since the 1970s onwards, reveals further that the purpose of homeschooling has been to 'privatize consciousness' and reject the ideal of intellectual diversity and complexity. All of these suggest a certain interpretation of the majority of homeschooling practices in the United States. Although the emphasis will be on one particular type of homeschooling, I will generalize from this type to homeschooling in general on the basis of relevant reasons. I will justify this generalization in the next section.

The normative premise suggests that achieving authenticity is impossible if education 'privatizes consciousness' and aims primarily at cultural reproduction (Apple, 2000: 256–271). If these premises are sound, then it follows that homeschooling is inimical to authentic identity development. In this article, I will argue that this conclusion does follow from the given premises.

The first two sections of the article will focus on the empirical premise. After I elaborate and discuss matters about it, I will outline the normative premise and propose a normative framework that could help us appraise homeschooling practices in ways that are friendly toward the idea of the child's authenticity. I will conclude the article by briefly addressing the question of homeschooling regulation.

Homeschooling and the epistemic aims of education

One of the standard claims about the epistemic aims of education is that it should aim at creating independent thinkers, or individuals who are capable of 'thinking for themselves'.

While what 'thinking for oneself' amounts to is itself a matter of considerable philosophical dispute, the most plausible understanding implies that individuals capable of independent thinking are the ones who, while not fully detached from others in forming and evaluating claims, make their own decisions about the acceptance or rejection of beliefs (Robertson, 2009: 11–35). 'Thinking for oneself', thus, means being able to process and evaluate the testimonies of others and make up your mind about matters at hand.

If we accept this understanding of the epistemic aims of education, then two things follow. First, education should not aim at completely separating individuals from their social context. An independent thinker is not someone who does not depend on others. Independent thinking is, crucially, a collaborative effort; there is no independence without a social context.

Second, education should aim at developing individuals who are capable of distinguishing themselves from others. An independent thinker is someone who, despite being dependent on others in many fundamental epistemic senses, still understands herself as a separate entity. These two implications seem to contradict each other, but that is not the case. It is plausible to have an independent thinker who is embedded in constitutive and structural relations with others.

So, the standard account of the epistemic aim of education calls for the production of some mediated independence in developing individuals. Education should enable individuals to think for themselves in a social context in which other individuals exert an epistemic influence on them. Thinking independently means making up one's own mind while collaborating with others in common epistemic projects.

Homeschooling, perceived in this light, seems to fit the standard epistemic aim. Since its rebirth in the United States during the mid-twentieth century, homeschooling has been understood as just another way to achieve independence of children from the intruding social context. This understanding was formed against the background of (what was considered at the time as) failing public education, characterized by rigid curricula, overcrowding, and cookie-cutter policies, all of which, allegedly, were poised to betray the children's uniqueness. Many parents think that public school kids are 'like sheep', without any independence (Reich, 2002: 159). The preservation of children's independence and authenticity is one of the main motivations behind parents' decisions to homeschool their offspring.

Many authors have noticed and reported these motivations. According to Mitchell Stevens (2001),

> [a]t the heart of homeschoolers elaborate conversation about children is a faith that deep inside each of us is an essential, inviolable self, a little person distinctive from all the others, and, based on that distinctiveness, worthy of extraordinarily specific care. (p. 8)

This sentiment reflects the teachings of the intellectual founder of homeschooling, John Holt, who professed that the aim of reforming education was not to improve it, but

> to do away with it, to end the ugly and anti-human business of people-shaping and let people shape themselves. (Stevens, 2001: 35)

Both liberal and conservative homeschoolers invoke the analogy between the public school and factory. Many parents equate public education with an assembly line, aiming

at mass production of unified results where the uniqueness of individuals had no particular value. It is interesting that even amid the tremendous ideological diversity of homeschooling groups, there is a consensus around the premise that the public education erodes their children's ability to be authentic. In almost all of its variants, homeschooling is considered a reaction against the perceived adverse effects of modernity in education; indeed, the entire movement has distinct romantic features.

In the United States today, we find many different kinds of homeschooling. The differences mainly derive from varied parental motivations to homeschool their children. Most of them are religious; parents wish to transmit a religious doctrine to their children and feel unsatisfied with the ability (or the willingness) of the public education to do so. Others are secular; some parents are unhappy with the quality of the public education system in their community, and believe that they can do a better job in educating their kids.

To do full justice to homeschooling, a normative analysis of this practice should examine all of its ideological variants, in which particular cultural or social norms inform the actual educational practice. However, in my article, I will focus on only one of these – the conservative Christian variant. Doing so, as I believe, will not necessarily distort the entire phenomenon of homeschooling for two main reasons. First, the majority of homeschooled children in the United States today belong to conservative Christian families. Second, as Robert Kunzman (2009) suggests,

> whether conservative Christians comprise two-thirds, one half, or even less of total homeschoolers, what seems beyond dispute is their disproportionate influence on public perception and rhetoric, and the ways in which the HSLDA [Home School Legal Defense Association] and state-level affiliates hold sway over much of the policy environment surrounding homeschooling. (p. 3)

Conservatives comprise not just the majority of the homeschool movement, but also fill in most of the symbolic meaning of the homeschooling today in the United States. Thus, a focus on this variant of homeschooling, as a proxy for the whole homeschool movement in the United States, is justified. So, what are the particular aims of Christian homeschoolers?

Fortunately, one does not need to do much interpretive work to answer this question because conservative Christian homeschoolers are quite explicit about their aims. In addition to the rejection of the public education's authenticity-eroding influence on their children, conservative Christian parents tend to see homeschooling as an opportunity to shape their children's minds through their religious doctrine. In his empirical research of conservative Christian homeschooling, Kunzman shows that this is the primary purpose of homeschooling in the eyes of these parents (Kunzman, 2009: 13).

Furthermore, Brian D. Ray (2000: 72), one of the most prominent contemporary advocates of homeschooling, explicitly suggests that the transmission of 'particular cultural and ethnic values to their offspring' is the primary parental motivation behind the decision to homeschool their children. In almost all instances of conservative Christian homeschooling, the parental aim is to reproduce their culture by transmitting it to their children, and not something else. The advocates of this kind of homeschooling are quite open about it; there is no doubt that the imperative of cultural reproduction shapes their understanding of the epistemic aims of (home) education. Christian homeschoolers are

not emotionally detached from the contents of the curriculum. They often have strong opinions about the nature of the material taught to their children. Homeschooling, for them, is a way to exert full control over the curriculum, and by extension, over the thoughts and worldviews of their children.

To a certain degree, this is unproblematic. Since parenting implies shaping the children's values, it is inevitable that parental culture will shape children's outlooks (see Brighouse and Swift, 2014). As Stephen Gilles (1996) suggested,

> [p]arents' loving efforts to transmit their values help form their children's characters, enable them to learn what it is to have a coherent way of life, and develop their capacity to enter into caring, long-term relationships with others. In this sense, we might think of parenting as the familial reproduction, not of biological organisms or clones, but sociable individuals. (p. 941)

However, if this presumption merges the concepts of upbringing and education to the degree that they become indistinguishable, then it is problematic. Sure, parenting is a part of the child's education, but it does not exhaust the entirety of it. Most parental educational efforts are, for example, based on what could be called the 'input model', by which parents try to instill a set of behavioral or cognitive contents into their children and expect their compliance. Parents, by default, have a significant concern about their children's compliance with these contents. Most of these concerns are, prima facie, justifiable.

Any plausible conception of education, however, goes beyond that. An education concerned over the children's unreflective adoption of a particular set of *beliefs* is inappropriate. If the epistemic aim of education is to create individuals capable of independent thinking, including a critical assessment of the testimony of others, then teachers, being among those 'others' whose testimony children should ultimately learn to evaluate, cannot have their emotional authority attached to the content of education. In other words, teachers, unlike parents, must not be emotionally invested in the value of certain kinds of claims, especially if these claims turn out to be integral to the children's self-knowledge and self-understanding. Doing so would amount to indoctrination, and not education (Callan and Arena, 2009: 104–112).

An important problem for homeschooling that lurks in the background of the discussion that follows is the fusion between parenting and education. One of the potential corollaries of my claim in this article could be that parents cannot play a dual role and be teachers simultaneously because their emotions toward the curriculum invalidate their pedagogy. Some philosophers have already addressed similar concerns, and I will focus on this issue in a separate paper (see Suissa, 2006: 65–77). It should be sufficient here to suggest that the emotional investment of homeschool parents prevents their children from creating the necessary distance between themselves and the material taught. They cannot develop the requisite evaluative stance toward the teachers' testimony because teachers are their parents, who have a strong (and entirely justified) emotional grip over them. I will defend the claim that homeschooling, without further justification, cannot produce independent and authentic thinkers and is thus questionable as an educational practice.

Also, what I wish to show is a contradiction between the homeschoolers' professed care about the authenticity of their children and their overall aim to use homeschooling

to transmit their beliefs to their children. If cultural reproduction is the ultimate aim, then the homeschooling parents are concerned over the status of their own religious and cultural doctrines, and not of the authenticity of their children's identities. Their primary focus seems to be on the survival of their doctrines and not the authentic identity development of children. It could be the case that what is behind the critique of the cookie-cutter public schooling is not the legitimate parental worry that overpowering cultural norms will shape their children, but the worry that the children will be shaped by the cultural norms the parents themselves reject.

We cannot be entirely certain, at this point, that the parental double standard best explains this contradiction. There may be variables that we are not aware of. However, the explanation may become more apparent if we examine the broader cultural and political background of the homeschooling practice in the United States. I turn to this issue in the next section.

The culture and politics of homeschooling

If we want to understand homeschooling, it is not sufficient to conceptualize it as just another way societies organize education. Homeschooling is not just an alternative educational practice; it is an alternative educational space. The geography of children's education – the physical design, the boundaries, and the structure of the educational space – all significantly affect children's behavior (Kraftl, 2014: 133). If homeschooling indicates a dislocation of the educational space from the public (school) to private (home), what are the intended effects of this dislocation on children's learning?

Almost all historical studies of the phenomenon have suggested that the rise of counterculture in the second-half of the twentieth century correlates with the modern rise and popularity of homeschooling in the United States. The most influential force in this socio-cultural shift in the United States has been the conservative Christian movement, based on a traditional Biblical understanding of family relations, education, race, and sexuality. Michael W. Apple (2000) calls this the 'conservative restoration' and it implies an alliance between different sectors and agents of society in favor of certain educational policies (p. 258). First, the *neoliberal* agents, representing the ruling economic and political elites, have promoted privatization policies in all areas of society under the guise of beliefs that private enterprises are intrinsically better than the public ones. In education, this translated to promotion and popularization of 'school choice' and 'voucher' plans and policies. The second element is the *neoconservatives*, representing cultural and political conservatives advocating for the return to 'higher standards' of the past education, with strict discipline and reverence of tradition and the authority of the 'elders'. The third element is the *White working class*, whose mistrust of the government, economic and cultural insecurity has made them prone to accept authoritarian and populist practices revolving around religion, strict gender roles, and sexual propriety. According to Apple (2000), the third group seems to be the most influential in driving the most substantial portion of the homeschooling movement (p. 259).

Homeschooling, as Apple in his study suggests, is a reactive and defensive movement against specific changes in American society. It is an educational equivalent of the gated communities, privatization of parks and neighborhoods, the phenomena of the flight of

the White middle- and working-class from the increasingly de-segregated urban areas and city centers. In many ways, as he puts it,

> the movement towards homeschooling mirrors the growth of privatized consciousness in other areas of society. It is an extension of the 'suburbanization' of everyday life that is so evident all around us. (Apple, 2000: 251)

The dislocation of the educational space from public to private is, in this sense, a genuine ideological and political movement. It is, as Apple (2000) notes, not just an indicator of the plight of the White middle class from the problems and the dangers of the city, but more importantly, a manifest rejection of the idea of what the city represents, 'cultural and intellectual diversity, complexity, ambiguity, uncertainty, and proximity to the Other' (p. 262).

What I find most appealing about Apple's position is the connection we can make between his view and a number of empirical studies conducted in the last decade. For example, in his empirical research on the motivation of states to adopt homeschooling regulation, Tal Levy reports several similar findings (Levy, 2000: 905–923). First, home-schooling is statistically more likely to be practiced by White conservative Christian families. The presence of fundamentalist Christian groups in some states even increases the popularity of the practice. Second, homeschooling correlates significantly with desegregation. The more segregated certain areas are, the fewer homeschools will they have. The popularity of homeschooling is proportionate to the level of racial integration in public schools (Levy, 2000: 914). Third, increased investments in public education do not reduce incentives for parents to pull their children out of public and into homeschools (Levy, 2000: 916). Although it would be intuitive – and to some degree consistent with the homeschool advocates' claims – to presume that the lack of investment in public education is a significant factor in parental decisions to homeschool their kids, it seems not to be the case. This finding suggests that parental motivations are almost exclusively cultural and political.

The thesis that homeschooling is primarily reactive seems not only confirmed by research on the White middle-class Christians who flee racially integrated schools, but also by research on other ethnic groups who choose to homeschool their children as a reaction against other factors. For example, Ama Mazama and Garvey Lundy argue that homeschooling in the African American community (a mere 10% of the total number of homeschooled kids) is a form of racial protectionism. According to them,

> one of the main reasons African Americans increasingly choose to educate their children at home, [is] namely, their strong desire to protect their children from the ill effects of school-related racism. (Mazama and Lundy, 2012: 724)

Unlike White parents, who pull their children out of public schools because they become more racially integrated, Black parents pull their children out because of discrimination. Mazama and Lundy note several elements of this discrimination. First, they report that the curricula of most public and private schools are Eurocentric, promoting overall igno-rance of non-European, mainly African cultural contributions. Second, the majority of teachers in public schools are White, and as members of the privileged class, they often

participate, consciously or unconsciously, in White supremacist policies and practices. Third, there is a disproportional placement of Black kids in the special education classes. They report that African Americans are twice as likely to be labeled as 'mentally retarded', revealing in many instances an arbitrary nature of the diagnoses, which have probably been influenced by racist sentiments. Fourth, there is a disproportionate use of school punishment, where Black children are over three times more likely to be disciplined in some way than the White children (Mazama and Lundy, 2012: 726–729). Even for non-White parents, homeschooling is a particular cultural reaction against some (perceived or real) objectionable elements of the broader society.

Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that homeschooling is a reactionary movement. For most parents it seems to arise more from certain cultural, social, and political concerns than a particular educational philosophy. Although there is a diversity of homeschooling practices, as well as a diversity of motivations to homeschool children, one particular type of homeschooling still appears dominant: the homeschooling of the White conservative Christian middle class, which makes the majority of all homeschooled kids in the United States. On the evidence presented, this type of homeschooling is a reaction against progressive modernization of education in all aspects, especially racial integration, and multicultural and secular curricula. Despite its marketing or public justification, it is clear that its primary aim is to reproduce the parental culture through their children.

If this is true, then homeschooling is, as Randall Curren and J.C. Blockhuis argue, prima facie unjustifiable. It fails to satisfy the primary epistemic requirement of education: the creation of independent thinkers. Homeschooling seems part of a broader cultural and political teleology whose primary aims are conservative and reactionary.

However, their argument applies here only partially because it does not address the question of authenticity. As I wish to show in the remaining of the article, the focus on this issue is of crucial importance for determining the all-things-considered justifiability of this practice. In other words, should parents stop homeschooling their children? Should governments outlaw the practice? I provide some answers below.

Educating for authenticity

Before we answer the question about homeschooling, we should first address the question of educating for authenticity. What does it mean to educate for authenticity? In the next section, I will evaluate Stefaan E. Cuypers proposal to conceptualize authenticity in the forward-looking sense, tying it to the notion of responsibility. After that, I will offer a counter-proposal to Cuypers' account and connect the discussion of authenticity to homeschooling.

Authenticity as responsibility

Cuypers begins his examination of authenticity from the perspective of the debates about free will. He does so because the question of authenticity reveals a particular problem for the subscribers of externalist compatibilism about free will. Namely, compatibilism is the thesis that the idea of the free will is compatible with physical determinism, while externalism about free will is the thesis that the individual's environment is pertinent to

the questions about the freedom of and responsibility for person's actions (Cuypers, 2009: 123). According to the externalists, a person has a free will, and is responsible for their actions, only if certain conditions (external to the person's mind) are met.

Cuypers suggests that compatibilists cannot deal with the problem of externalism unless they deal with the issue of authentic education and upbringing. According to Cuypers, the main problem for these free will theorists is what David Zimmerman (2003) called the 'puzzle of naturalized self-creation in real time':

> How do some children manage to develop the capacity to *make up their own minds* about what values to embrace, by virtue of having gone through a process in which they play an increasingly active role in *making their own minds*, a process that begins with their *having virtually no minds at all*? (p. 638)

Cuypers approaches the solution of this paradox in three steps. First, he defines authenticity as an element of personal autonomy, a broader concept that implies agential control over their choices. For Cuypers, a decision is autonomous if the individual has control over and if he/she is authentic with respect to it. The authenticity requirement of autonomy implies that the choice 'causally issues from antecedent springs of action', which the agent considers truly his/her own (Cuypers, 2009: 126). In the educational context, however, this suggests a certain paradox because any educational activity involves interference of external agents into the child's understanding of the world.

Second, Cuypers analyzes Robert Noggle's attempt to resolve the paradox by suggesting the existence of two stages in the child's development: the pre-normative and the post-normative stages. During the pre-normative stage, the child develops an initial evaluative scheme, which in the post-normative stage becomes an evolved evaluative scheme. The development of this evaluative scheme is co-extensive with development of the core and the peripheral self. The *core self* is considered to be the most authoritative part of a person's personality. The core self serves as the authenticating mechanism for justifying other (peripheral) elements of the personality. For example, I may decline a friend's invitation to go out for a coffee because I wish to binge watch *Breaking Bad*. However, after a brief reflection of that action, I may decide that being a good friend is much more important to me than watching the TV show and reverse my previous decline. In such case, my core self would be checking and evaluating other aspects of my personality.

Authentication is, as Noggle suggests, a relational process between the core self and the peripheral self. Thoughts, emotions, or values are authenticated by the person's core self, and if authentication is positive, then those psychological elements are integrated into the authentic identity of the person. However, according to this scheme, successful authentication requires the existence of the double self, the one doing the authentication and the one consisting of the elements being authenticated. While that is unproblematic for individuals whose evaluative scheme has developed to a degree of having a core and a peripheral self, there is a fundamental paradox in the education of children, who by default lack this level of cognitive sophistication: they do not yet possess the authenticating core self.

For Noggle (2005), the paradox of authentic education is resolved if we posit that the core self that develops in the pre-normative stage under conditions that would otherwise

be authenticity-eroding (upbringing and education without the authenticating self) is by default authentic:

> When the initial self forms, it is the only self that there is. Sadly, that initial self is the only game in town, so to speak. Now if we ask whether some *element* of that initial self is authentic, then the answer simply has to be 'yes' (p. 103).

Cuypers rightfully rejects Noggle's account. Qualifying all elements of the initial self as authentic just because there is no complex mental process through which individuals typically authenticate parts of their identity could lead to many problems. For example, if we accept Noggle's account, then we would have to accept that any possible upbringing would produce individuals with authentic identities. Imagine, for example, a conservative religious family raising a transgender child. Through introspection, the child might begin to register feelings that her assigned identity does not correspond with who she truly is, but if her core self is formed through upbringing that denies the possibility of a mismatch between assigned and true gender, then she will never develop the requisite psychological capacities to form an authentic personal identity. The external influence on her core self during the pre-normative stage will hamper the proper development of her authenticating self in the post-normative stage.

One of the main reasons Cuypers rejects Noggle's proposal is the belief that the backward-looking approach, which looks for past 'springs' to explain present action, will be either 'hard to swallow' or practically impossible. To preserve the value of authenticity for autonomy and compatibilist free will, Cuypers turns the table and proposes a forward-looking theory of authenticity. He proposes a

> relational view of authenticity according to which springs of action, such as beliefs and desires, are authentic or inauthentic only relative to whether later behavior that issues from them is behavior for which the normative agent into whom the child will develop can shoulder moral responsibility. Our view on authentic education is in this sense forward-looking: although pertinent psychological elements instilled in the child during the prenormative stage are not authentic per se, they can be authentic with an eye toward future moral responsibility. So, on our relational conception of authenticity, elements constitutive of an evaluative scheme are not authentic in their own right, but only authentic relative to future responsibility. (Cuypers, 2009: 134)

Cuypers suggests that the paradox of authentic education cannot be solved, because any upbringing and education will bring external influences to the child, and they will inevitably be inauthentic. The only option, according to him, is to separate educational influences into (a) the ones the child could be held responsible for, once it develops into a fully fledged normative agent and (b) the ones the agent could not be held responsible for. For example, we cannot hold an agent responsible for commitments adopted as a child through coercion, deception, subliminal influencing, or in some related way that would prevent the child from seeking evidence or reason (Cuypers, 2009: 138).

While this proposal successfully avoids the paradox by admitting that its standard resolution is impossible and taking a completely different route, it is still far from unproblematic. There are several difficulties with Cuypers' account. First, it does not necessarily

follow that any backward-looking account cannot resolve the paradox. As I will elaborate later, an account focused on educational activities that help the child correctly perceive and understand reality, both external (the world) and internal (her own experience) while providing her with the possibility to engage and re-create that reality, could satisfy the minimal authenticity requirements.

Second, it is questionable whether a forward-looking account of authenticity accurately reflects the standard meaning of the term 'authenticity' that users of English language apply in other comparable cases. For example, the authenticity of material artifacts usually refers to the congruence between the claims about those artifacts and their intrinsic character. An authentic work of art is the one whose symbolic representation accurately portrays what the work of art truly is. Labeling an object a Rembrandt painting is authentic only if the object in question actually *is* a Rembrandt painting. We can consider the label authentic only if we have reasons to do so (if the painting indicates a certain technique usually associated with Rembrandt, or if there is a legitimate signature). So, authenticity, in this and other similar cases, pertains to questions about the reason relations between certain claims and certain objects.

Accordingly, the authenticity of personal identities corresponds to the reason relation between those identities and the persons labeled under them. A person's identity is authentic if it accurately describes what the person truly is. The relation between the identity claim and the person is mediated by a reason. If the person has a reason to identify as an X, then she is authentically X.

In all of these cases, authenticity always has a backward-looking perspective. We check whether the claim made on behalf of a particular object or a person accurately represents what that object is. The existence of the object is always prior to the object-related claim that needs authentication. It would be odd if the object whose proper relation to the claim that needs authentication we are examining would start existing only after the claim is made.

Third, attaching authenticity to responsibility might not always be (or in most cases) successful in delineating what kinds of educational and upbringing practices count as authentic. Of course, in cases such as coercion, deception, and similar, the answer will be obvious. However, in many other cases, it will be far from clear whether some aspects of education subvert responsibility. Take for example, again, the case of a transgender child. If the child grows up in a conservative religious family and develops the identity she has been assigned at birth, is she responsible for her gender identity? If at some point in her life she decides to act upon the introspective knowledge of her own true gender identity and initiates a transition, is that transition authentic? Does her religious upbringing subvert any responsibility for her action of gender transition?

I am not sure that Cuypers' account is helpful in cases like this. It seems to me that this account is stretched between two implausible positions. On the one hand, there is a permissive position, which says that, apart from explicitly wrong cases of deception and manipulation, all educational and upbringing activities are authentic because they allow us to hold the individuals responsible for actions that spring from them. If we choose the permissible option, then we will be faced with plenty of cases, such as the transgender one, that will fall through cracks and we will have no satisfactory answer for them.

On the other hand, there is a restrictive position suggesting that, since individuals really cannot be held responsible for anything that has shaped us outside of our control – and large sections of our lives will be like that – then no educational and upbringing activity is actually authentic. For example, I have been taught by my parents to eat meat, and because of that, I have grown to like its taste. Since I cannot be held responsible for liking the taste of meat, then it would mean that my desire for steak is inauthentic. If we choose the restrictive position, then we are back to square one: the paradox of authentic education seems inescapable.

Unfortunately, the concepts of responsibility and authenticity, while related in some obvious cases, cannot be causally connected in ways Cuypers suggests. We are sometimes going to be held responsible for things that are not authentically ours, and sometimes we will not be held responsible for things that are. The responsibility-authenticity connection is not always uniform and thus is not reliable enough to serve as a good predicting device.

Similarly, the forward-looking responsibility account will not be too useful for evaluating the justification of homeschooling. Unless we consider all forms of homeschooling a form of deception, then the permissive position would suggest that homeschooling does not thwart responsibility and is therefore compatible with authenticity. We will hold educated adults responsible for their actions and beliefs, even if those beliefs are formed during the pre-normative homeschool period. For example, if an adult person X was homeschooled and during this process taught that evolution is false and creationism true, then we will hold him responsible for this kind of belief. For example, he will not qualify for certain kinds of jobs based on this belief. No responsible society would hire him to serve as a biology Professor. According to Cuypers' account, because we would hold him responsible for his beliefs, then those educational practices imparting creationism in X as a child would not be considered problematic from the perspective of authenticity. However, as I aim to show, we do have reasons to consider those practices problematic; they are not beneficial for the development of X's authentic identity development.

According to the restrictive position, there is no substantial difference between the home and public school. If we cannot be held responsible for any beliefs that we have, then any form of education we may have received is by default inauthentic. The restrictive position has even greater difficulty for evaluating homeschooling. From the perspective of this position, there is nothing that makes homeschooling unique and different from any other form of education.

Homeschooling and authenticity: The scrutability base

The solution to the authenticity paradox in the context of homeschooling is, as I wish to suggest, to adopt a backward-looking account and work out a detailed proposal that can satisfy the authenticity requirements.

The problem with the critique of the backward-looking perspective is that it rests on an inadequate conception of knowledge. Namely, the (restrictive) claim that any kind of knowledge imparted to the child in the pre-normative stage will necessarily close off possibilities for independent expansion of knowledge is not justified. Neither is the (permissive) claim that any kind of knowledge imparted to the child will leave the options

for the future independent expansion of knowledge. Educational contents are not open or closed worlds by default; some kinds of contents are productive, inviting their holders to investigate things further and make new content based on specific rules of reasoning, such as inference, while others are not. Those that are productive in this sense could be considered beneficial for the development of the child's authentic identity because they will develop the child's ability to respond properly to epistemic reasons to self-identify one way or the other. If education allows children to produce knowledge claims of their own, evaluate testimonies of others, and engage in epistemic exchange with her teachers and peers, then their identity development will be more likely to reflect who they truly are: they are more likely to be authentic.

It is plausible, I believe, to make distinctions in the kinds of educational contents and determine which ones satisfy the productivity requirement. We could take, for example, John Dewey's approach and evaluate whether some types of contents close the child off from the 'experiential continuum' that can help her further develop her own unique perspective on the world (Dewey, 1938). Such distinction could then serve as the basis of the normative appraisal of homeschooling practices.

However, there is a practical problem with this approach. While sound in principle, this proposal would be very hard to implement. It would require evaluating all possible sources homeschooling parents use to educate their children and determine if they satisfy the productivity requirement. That would be an immense job and would require much regulative micro-management that could be intrusive and harmful for the parent-child relationship. Also, some contents would also be hard to assess: the connection between a particular educational practice and productivity requirement could sometimes be hard to establish. So, is there a possible alternative that could still preserve the 'spirit' of this proposal?

I believe that there is. For example, we could suggest that there is a specific knowledge base that could serve as a guarantee that the child's future experiences, if build upon that base, would be more likely to be productive (thus authentic) than not. We could adopt David Chalmers' idea about a certain compact base of knowledge claims and suggest that if the future child's knowledge is scrutable from that base, then it is authentic. Namely, Chalmers (2012) argues for the scrutability thesis, which

> says that the world is in a certain sense comprehensible, at least given a class of fundamental truths about the world. In particular, it says that all truths about the world are *scrutable* from some basic truths. It roughly means that there is a connection in the realm of knowledge between the basic truths and all the rest: given the basic truths, the rest of the truths can be determined. (p. xiii)

Chalmers' project is based on Rudolf Carnap's idea of developing a blueprint of basic knowledge claims that could serve as a structure for understanding and constructing the world and our experience in it. Chalmers (2012) goes beyond Carnap's empiricism, however, and makes a claim that the scrutability base, out of which other knowledge claims could be developed, consists of a set of 'primitive' concepts, including among others logical, mathematical, phenomenal, spatiotemporal, nomic, normative, and indexical concepts (p. 390). The compact base of truths is not necessarily limited to these concepts

only, but it is at least inclusive of them. It represents the smallest possible set of different kinds of truths about the world that could serve as a basis for subsequent agential construction of their particular reality.

Chalmers' scrutability thesis is itself complex, involving a variety of scrutabilities (such as inferential, conditional, and a priori) but a generalized approach to scrutability, according to which scrutability applies across different epistemic scenarios, could be sufficient to develop the backward-looking authenticity requirement for the evaluation of homeschooling (Chalmers, 2012: 423). Namely, we could suggest that if the child's educational content, acquired either at public or homeschool during the pre-normative stage of development, includes the compact scrutability base, and the education is conducted in an otherwise unobjectionable manner, then the commitments and identities the children adopt in the post-normative stage will be authentic. The requirement of authenticity would be satisfied because the base itself provides for the widest possible variety of subsequent experiences and identities at the child's disposal in the post-normative stage. If the manner of the child's upbringing and education does not violate the child's integrity in some other ways – through coercion, manipulation, or some other objectionable practice – then the commitment the child adopts later will reflect both the scrutability base, which consists of the basic truths about the world, and the child's own uniqueness, generated either biologically or socially. Reflecting the truth about the world, and one's unique position in such a world, is, I believe, sufficient to establish authenticity.

To specify this proposal further, we could outline the kinds of claims that would be part of the scrutability base. For example, we could include the basic rules of (formal and informal) logic. The child should learn at least about the concepts of a reason, truth-value, types of arguments, entailment, validity, justification, inference, fallacies, and similar. It would also include some basic mathematical concepts and operations, such as commutativity, distributivity, probability, proof, and similar. It should also include knowledge about the phenomenal and indexical claims. The child should be able to recognize and understand the role and value of specific mental and bodily experiences. It should also learn to understand the nature of cognitive perspective and the role of spatiotemporal indexical claims in the broader picture of the knowledge about the world. Obviously, the child should learn about the fundamental physical laws of the universe. It should be acquainted with the central claims of the natural sciences, from the claims about the age of the universe to the claims about the evolution of the living organisms.

It is plausible to suggest, then, that if the child's education is inclusive of the scrutability base, then such education satisfies the authenticity requirements. A child who learns the rules of inference, for example, in combination with phenomenal knowledge about physical inputs, will be able to make conclusions about its own sexual or gender identity through the process of responding to epistemic and practical reasons it might have. The conclusions the child reaches through this process are more likely to reflect the child's uniqueness and enable her to achieve an authentic existence. Similarly, a child who learns about the basic laws of the universe and the evolution of the living organisms will be able to understand his own unique position in the world and develop an authentic understanding of his own identity.

Regulating homeschooling

Does homeschooling satisfy these conditions? Public education already satisfies this requirement. The curriculum of public schools in the United States, for the most part, covers the main elements of this base. To the extent that children in public schools are taught critical thinking, mathematics, physics, chemistry, psychology, and social science, they are on the path to developing into authentic adults.[1]

However, it is not clear that all types of homeschooling, by default, satisfy all of these basic requirements. To the extent that homeschooling is a reaction against the social and scientific progress that alters traditional norms of culture, it seems poised against some parts of the compact scrutability base. For example, conservative Christian homeschoolers who neglect, avoid, or directly contradict claims about the age of the Earth or the evolution of humans, violate the authenticity requirement. Undoubtedly, some of them cover most of the scrutability base, but their countercultural default makes them primarily selective against certain parts of the base that fits well with their deeply held beliefs. The scrutability base is a set of compact and mutually coherent knowledge claims. Cherry-picking among them to serve an alternative cultural teleology will distort the requisite experiential continuum the children must have to develop as authentic and autonomous individuals.

Does this mean that homeschooling should, in general, be discouraged or banned? While we do have reasons to consider homeschooling problematic, I do not necessarily endorse a radical regulative action against homeschooling. I think that the analysis in this article suggests at least that there should be a specific and somewhat strict regulation of the practice. To that extent, I concur with points made by Rob Reich, Randall Curren, and others who claimed that homeschooling is prima facie unjustified and that parents must bear the burden of proof to show that their homeschooling practice satisfies some of the requirements outlined earlier. Thus, I believe that homeschooling could be a viable alternative to some parents, provided that the appropriate government agency validates their approach.

Conclusion

In this article, I addressed the problem of authenticity in the context of homeschooling. While the authenticity of children has been usually considered a value the homeschooling was supposed to protect, I tried to show the limitations of such claims. I argued that the aim of homeschooling, frequently clearly stated by its practitioners and advocates, is the reproduction of parental beliefs and culture, which is inimical to the development of authentic children's identities. Parental calls for authenticity, I argued, are thus not genuine. This conclusion can be inferred not only from parental justifications of the practice in terms of cultural reproduction but also from the analysis of cultural politics of homeschooling. Several researchers have shown that the practice of homeschooling in the United States is a product of countercultural movements and sentiments whose primary motivation is the rejection of the cultural, social, intellectual, and political complexity of the public realm in the country. Homeschooling is a reactionary and a romantic movement aimed at conserving parental culture and molding their children in the light of

parental religious beliefs. Given this background motivation, it is prima facie poised to violate the requirements children need to become authentic adults.

While I criticized the practice of homeschooling, I stopped short of suggesting for its prohibition. I argued that parents should bear the burden of proving that their educational practices do not violate the authenticity requirements. If parents make sure that their homeschooling covers the main elements of the scrutability base – the set of compact claims from which all truths about the world could be derived – then their homeschool curriculum will be beneficial for their children's authentic personal development. Thus, this article should not be read as a blanket critique of *all* kinds and types of homeschooling.

The main virtue of this proposal is that it is based on a realistic conception of personal authenticity. It admits that education is formative of the child's conception of the world. What children learn in school will be a part of whom they will turn out to be.

This thesis, however, does not necessarily mean that these educational contents will make children by default inauthentic. We all live in a world in which a specific set of physical laws rule. Learning about these laws, which shape who we are, does not make us less authentic. If authenticity is a reason relation between certain claims and certain objects, then a person whose education teaches him about the basic truths about the world is more likely to be true to himself because he has reasons to be so; he is also a part of the world.

The knowledge of certain logical, indexical, or phenomenological truths will teach children to create identities based on basic knowledge claims. They will learn how to integrate future learning experience in a coherent whole; they will also learn that some experiences are unique to them and that other people could have comparable, yet different perspectives on the world. Whatever they build on top of that compact base will be authentic: it will reflect who they really are. If homeschooling can convey this kind of education to children, then it should continue to exist as an alternative educational practice.

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Note

1. Perhaps needless to say, the translation of the scrutability base content to school curricula will depend on the natural capabilities of children of various ages to grasp complex concepts. For instance, I am not proposing that first-graders should be taught formal logic, but some other, simpler concepts and rules of reasoning, appropriate to their stage.

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