Activist-led Education and Egalitarian Social Change*

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ECONOMIC inequality is widely regarded as one of the most important issues of our time. Extreme economic disparities destabilize democracy—as the richest exert increasing control over political outcomes—and lead to forms of social stratification which take a severe toll on the mental wellbeing of the worst-off. Economic inequality also plays a key role in driving the ongoing ecological catastrophe, as the spending habits of the wealthiest tend to be concentrated in carbon-intensive activities, and limits opportunities to access the most meaningful work and the best health and educational resources to the richest few.[1]

Some political philosophers have recently proposed radically reshaping the existing basic structure of liberal democracies as a way to secure substantial increases in political, social, and economic equality for all citizens. William Edmundson and David Schweickart, for example, have defended systems of market socialism, in which the firms which make up the "commanding heights" of the economy are democratically controlled by their workers and either directly owned by them or leased to them by the state. And Alan Thomas and others have proposed a property-owning democracy, in which the state works to ensure roughly equal private ownership of capital among its citizens.[2]

[1]Martin Gilens, *Affluence and Influence: Economic Inequality and Political Power in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Inner Level: How More Equal Societies Reduce Stress, Restore Sanity and Improve Everyone's Well-being* (London: Penguin, 2018).

[2]William Edmundson, *John Rawls: Reticent Socialist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Martin O'Neill and Thad Williamson, *Property-Owning Democracy: Rawls and Beyond* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2012); David Schweickart, *After Capitalism,* 2nd edn (Plymouth: Rowman and Littlefield, 2011); Alan Thomas, *Republic of Equals: Predistribution and Property-Owning Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Rather than aims which can be realized immediately under present political conditions, however, both of these proposals clearly constitute long- or medium-term political goals. They call for the fundamental transformation of many existing political and economic institutions, and the passing into law of many novel and contentious public policies. The currently very low political profile among the demos of these institutional alternatives to contemporary neoliberal capitalism must also be raised significantly. And, most likely, some of the understandings and beliefs currently shared by many citizens—on issues like the appropriate reach of government and the legitimate entitlements of citizenship—must also be altered.

In short, instituting reform of the kind favored by many egalitarian political philosophers requires *radical social change*.[3] This raises an important question for proponents of these alternative institutional schemes: how can egalitarians begin to realize these large-scale social changes from where they are now? Which forms of political action ought to be undertaken under present political conditions in order to increase the likelihood of long-term egalitarian goals eventually being implemented, and persisting over time? These questions, concerning not why contemporary capitalism might be undesirable, or what a more just economic order might look like, but rather what ought to be done about this *from where we are now*, are often thought to be the blind-spot of contemporary egalitarian political thought.[4]

Clearly, beginning to fill this lacuna is not the *only* pressing philosophical task, but it remains of paramount importance that the orientation egalitarian thought can offer extends beyond just principles and policy and includes political action more broadly.[5] As a contribution to this task, in this article, I offer an account of what *one* of the short-term political aims of proponents of greater equality ought to be. I claim that the strengthening of *reflective capacity*—citizens' ability to impose a temporary level of distance from their commitments, to consider alternatives to them, and to evaluate their origins and validity—ought to be one key aim of egalitarian politics under present political conditions.

I then propose activist-led education programs as one desirable means to deliver this end of strengthened reflective capacity. Where activist-led education provides plentiful informational resources and opportunities to practice deploying one's reflective capacity, and also emphasizes and encourages intellectual humility, it seems well placed to help bring about this aim. Activist-led education programs are commonly subject to what I term *the indoctrination worry*, but I try to show that there are not good grounds for concluding in advance of further study that

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[3]For the definition of social change as "the significant alteration of social structure and cultural patterns," see Charles L. Harper and Kevin T. Leicht, *Exploring Social Change: America and the World*, 7th edn (London: Routledge, 2019), p. 5. Cf. Archon Fung, "Four levels of power: a conception to enable liberation," *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 28 (2020), 131–57.

[4]Martin O'Neill, "Survey article: philosophy and public policy after Piketty," *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 25 (2017), 343–75, at p. 370; Miriam Ronzoni, "How social democrats may become reluctant radicals: Thomas Piketty's *Capital* and Wolfgang Streeck's *Buying Time*," *European Journal of Political Theory*, 17 (2018), 118–27, at p. 125.

[5]Stuart White, "Inequality is not our fate," *Boston Review*, Nov. 9, 2015, <http://bostonreview.net/books-ideas/stuart-white-inequality-atkinson-mason-piketty>.

the delicate balancing of ends that permissible activist-led education requires is either categorically unachievable, or avoidable in the way these objectors often press. The argument thus provides presumptive grounds for considering the proliferation of suitably organized activist-led education programs an important component of a broader strategy of egalitarian social change.

I begin by fleshing out the ways in which what I term the *tendency to misjudge* represents a significant constraint on the feasibility of realizing egalitarian institutional schemes. In Section II, I defend the claim that strengthening reflective capacity is a desirable and important short-term goal of egalitarian political action, as it can help to overcome this tendency. Section III introduces the practice of activist-led education, detailing a number of historical and contemporary instances of it, and makes the case that—if it meets three conditions—the practice can be a desirable means to strengthen reflective capacity. Section IV then responds to the important concern that activist-led education programs are liable to result in a kind of indoctrination. I conclude by noting the need for further empirical research on this and other activist practices.

I. MISJUDGMENT AS SOFT CONSTRAINT

Participation in political life requires the making of a whole series of political judgments: judgments about what is happening and why, what constraints we collectively operate under, what the consequences of a given course of action are likely to be, and what it is necessary to do (or what *should* have been done) given all of this. These judgments are frequently incredibly difficult to make well, because, for most individuals, political decision-making is only one area of their lives in which evaluation and judgment are required, and often not the area which individuals tend to prioritize. This is compounded by the fact that, as Fabienne Peter notes, the judgments must almost always be made under situations of huge uncertainty: uncertainty about both the *circumstances* in which we actually find ourselves and what the *outcome* of various available courses of action is likely to be.[6] Sometimes, perhaps even most of the time, clear answers to the above questions simply aren't forthcoming, and yet judgment is still called for.

In order to deal with this uncertainty, political actors frequently use simplifying frames in order to orient themselves in the political world and aid their decision-making. These cognitive frames, as Kinder and Sanders have put it, "order and give meaning to the parade of events" that individuals "witness in public life."[7] These frames in thought guide individuals as they evaluate situations by putting emphasis on certain aspects of the social world—marking them out as particularly salient features—and de-emphasizing others.

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[6]Fabienne Peter, "The good, the bad, and the uncertain: intentional action under normative uncertainty," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 21 (2018), 57–70.
[7]Donald R. Kinder and Lynn M. Sanders, *Divided by color:Racial Politics and Democratic Ideals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 39.

Such frames are particularly important at moments of crisis, when confusion is more likely, or in novel situations, where new circumstances force one to re-evaluate a prior judgment. Undoubtedly, the utilization of simplifying frames is a perennial feature of political life; and it can, and frequently does, aid *good* decision-making. But it can also, I want to claim here, result in a pronounced tendency to misjudge political affairs. This occurs when the simplification offered by a frame constitutes an *over*-simplification: when the adoption of a frame causes agents to miss out significant information which would alter the judgment made.

Let's call the subset of the citizenry that might reasonably come to support egalitarian social change the *egalitarian constituency*. The egalitarian constituency is smaller than the total number of citizens in a given polity, excluding, for example, committed right-libertarians, and many of the citizens who directly materially benefit from extreme economic disparities. But it is also larger than the *current* number of supporters of and participants in the political organizations fighting for greater equality. It includes, for example, those who stand to benefit materially from a more equal society, but who currently, for one reason or another, have no settled ideological convictions about the desirability or feasibility of a more equal society. Following Ben Laurence, we can thus say that it includes not only those *currently willing* to voluntarily pursue such change, but also those who "might realistically come to be" motivated to do so.[8]

Exactly how large the egalitarian constituency is is, of course, a matter of empirical dispute, and one that need not detain us here. But it is worth noting that, given what is known about the so-called "ideological innocence" of many, even most, citizens in liberal democracies,[9] and the widespread negative effects of economic inequality, it is potentially very large indeed. Perhaps the vast majority of citizens lack settled political convictions, and there are also many potential ways in which greater political, economic, and social equality would arguably allow these citizens to better satisfy their various needs and interests. Regardless of how this question of precise size is settled, however, let the term *egalitarian constituency* roughly capture that subsection of the national population which is less than the entire citizenry, but nonetheless broader than the number of citizens currently actually aligned to the parties, trade unions, and social movements fighting for egalitarian social change.

My claim is that an important feature of contemporary politics is that many members of the egalitarian constituency are frequently subject to a pronounced tendency to misjudge political affairs as a result of the frames they apply to the

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[8] Ben Laurence, "The question of the agent of change," *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 28 (2020), 355–77, at p. 362.
[9] Donald R. Kinder and Nathan P. Kalmoe, *Neither Liberal nor Conservative: Ideological Innocence in the American Public* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

political world.[10] Four examples of the kinds of frames I have in mind will help to bring this out. First, many members of the egalitarian constituency are currently wedded to what we might call a *meritocracy frame,* which encourages them to believe that hard work is the biggest factor in economic success.[11] This makes it hard for them to acknowledge or recognize the structural barriers many individuals face to the overcoming of disadvantage.

There is a large body of social scientific work which reveals that many individuals face stark structural obstacles to economic advancement, and that the wealthiest tend to pass on their privilege relatively easily.[12] Yet subscribing to the meritocracy frame means individuals are instead likely to believe that those who succeed are to be congratulated for working for it, and those who have failed simply neglected to put in the requisite work, or lacked the ability to succeed in the first place. This can encourage these agents to come to see the economic and political status quo as broadly legitimate and, consequently, to be less receptive to calls for egalitarian social change or be less likely to participate in fighting for this change themselves.

Similarly, many also currently subscribe to what we can call a *fiscal profligacy frame,* tending to see large amounts of state spending on welfare and public services as unsustainable and likely to lead to economic crisis. Fearing the later effects of indebtedness, those who subscribe to this frame often think of a state's finances as fundamentally akin to a household's. Viewing political affairs through this lens commits individuals to a view of economics and state spending which most economists reject as unrealistic and undesirable, and tends to rule out as impossible or unwise certain courses of action most economists see as perfectly feasible, such as using state borrowing to invest in and grow the economy.[13] Adopting the profligacy frame means many citizens, even those who stand to benefit dramatically from increased state spending, are much less likely to see calls for financial borrowing as politically coherent and legitimate. It may even cause them to withdraw from political activity out of a sense of despondency, confusion, and powerlessness.

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[10]Is "tendency to misjudge" a more polite, but still fundamentally similar, way of saying that individuals are displaying *stupidity*? The term "stupidity" is indeed sometimes used to mean something akin to "displaying a pronounced tendency to misjudge." However, I stick throughout to the phrase "misjudgment," because "stupidity" is more often used to pass judgment on the cognitive capacities of the person *as a whole* in a way that referring to an instance of misjudgment does not. "Stupidity" in common parlance frequently refers to a broad range of mental vices (encompassing things like confident ignorance, failures of attention, and lack of self-control) and is thus both unhelpfully emotionally charged and somewhat imprecise. Misjudgment, by contrast, picks out what I take to be a much clearer and more precise phenomenon: the application of a problematically over-simplifying frame in thought. My thanks to an anonymous referee for prompting me to clarify this point.

[11]Daniel Markovits, *The Meritocracy Trap: How America's Foundational Myth Feeds Inequality, Dismantles the Middle Class, and Devours the Elite* (New York: Penguin and Random House, 2019).

[12]Sam Friedman and Daniel Laurison, *The Class Ceiling: Why It Pays to Be Privileged* (Bristol: Policy Press, 2020).

[13]Mark Blyth, *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

Some members of the egalitarian constituency also apply what we could term a *sincerity frame* to political affairs. It is common for political parties, corporations, and other agents, regardless of their actual economic or political agenda, to present themselves as on the side of the vast majority of citizens, committed to advancing *their* interests, rather than those of the privileged few. Because agents of all political stripes pay lip service to such an aim—even those whose agenda in fact systematically advances the interests of the most privileged at the expense of the great majority—applying the sincerity frame to political life causes many citizens to be insufficiently discerning about the intentions of political actors, and sometimes incorrectly take such statements at face-value.

For example, in one famous and prescient analysis, Thomas Frank documents the way Republican politicians in the US successfully presented their party as the voice of the persecuted common people, determined to tackle a self-serving elite, despite in fact using political power to further the material interests of the very richest group of Americans.[14] The propensity of individuals to assume the earnestness of disingenuous claims to be *on their side* is an important factor in the electoral success of the social and political forces opposed to egalitarian social change.

Lastly, recent history indicates that many members of the egalitarian constituency (but particularly those who are professional politicians, political advisors, and committed activists) were or continue to be wedded to what we might call a *fair-play frame*. They tend to expect all other participants in politics, including their opponents, to abide by the written and unwritten procedural norms which structure political competition in liberal democracies. Adopting this frame, however, means many of these political actors were (and remain) unprepared to respond to the relatively novel political tactics of right-wing populists.

For example, Jan-Werner Müller draws our attention to what he describes as the brazen "colonization of the state" associated with populist forces in power, in which populist actors place loyalists in previously nonpartisan bureaucratic, judicial, and media positions, and pass laws to reduce all forms of political opposition and cement their own power.[15] Adopting a fair-play frame prevents those opposed to these actions from being prepared and flexible in their responses, and causes them to underestimate the intentions of their opponents. This means that, in electoral competition, proponents of anti-egalitarian policies can overcome supporters of greater equality, as the latter lack the requisite foresight into how right-wing populists are likely to act.

Clearly, this list of misjudgments resulting from the application of oversimplifying frames is far from exhaustive (the various conspiracy theories which also often partly shape popular thinking about politics are also examples of misleading frames). But the key point is that the misjudgments which can

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[14]Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004).
[15]Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* (London: Penguin, 2017), p. 44.

result from the application of these and other frames to the political arena are instances of what Gilabert and Lawford-Smith call "soft constraints" on the political feasibility of radically transformative egalitarian proposals such as property-owning democracy and market socialism.[16] These ideal egalitarian schemes are certainly *possible* in the sense that their implementation doesn't appear to be incompatible with permanent features of collective life, such as basic laws of nature or human psychology. But the existence of a soft constraint, such as, in this case, a pronounced tendency to misjudge, renders the *immediate* realization of these schemes highly unlikely.

The reason that misjudgment is a severe feasibility constraint on the success of the political fight for greater equality, is that, in each of the cases discussed above, the adoption of these simplifying frames causes members of the egalitarian constituency to misjudge or misinterpret the reality of political circumstances in ways which enable the perpetuation of inequality. The adoption of these frames thus contributes to the continued power and dominance of those who benefit from present economic and political hierarchies and to the general resilience of the political status quo.

To be clear, the claim here is not that the political misjudgments made by many members of the egalitarian constituency are *singularly responsible* for the difficulties and failures of egalitarian social change. A tendency to misjudge among members of the egalitarian constituency is certainly not the exclusive source of the resilience of the inegalitarian status quo, as if simply lessening the tendency to misjudge would be enough to secure egalitarian social change by itself. For one thing, it is clearly not the case that all political opposition to egalitarian social change among the citizenry would dissipate provided these misjudgments among the egalitarian constituency were removed.

In the liberal democracies of the advanced capitalist nations, for example, the successful institutionalization of these egalitarian schemes most likely requires a political party committed to these policies winning (and retaining) government. To do so, it would have to successfully resist—among other obstacles—the political influence of the powerful employers and capital owners who benefit from the economic status quo and are likely to oppose these policies through political donations, lobbying, media power, and the threat of capital flight and strike.[17] Lessening the tendency to misjudge among the egalitarian constituency would not remove this obstacle, and it would not also *automatically translate* into members of this constituency coming to possess the kind of deeply rooted ideological commitments required to overcome this opposition to egalitarian social change.[18]

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[16]Pablo Gilabert and Holly Lawford-Smith, "Political feasibility: a conceptual exploration," *Political Studies*, 60 (2012), 809–25, at p. 813.

[17]Thomas Christiano, "Money in politics," David Estlund (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 241–60.

[18]See, e.g., discussion of the importance of a so-called "militant minority" to social change; Micah Uetricht and Barry Eidlin, "US union revitalization and the missing 'militant minority,'" *Labor Studies Journal*, 44 (2019), 36–59. For the role that political parties can play in both maintaining and enhancing political commitment, see Lea Ypi, "Political commitment and the value of partisanship," *American Political Science Review*, 110 (2016), 601–13.

Much empirical work in political science also indicates that substantial social change usually only occurs at what is often termed a *critical juncture*, when the relatively path-dependent continuity and stability of institutions is temporarily halted, and a window of opportunity for fundamental divergence opens up. The choices made in these moments of flux are thought to "establish certain directions of change and foreclose others in a way that shapes politics for years to come."[19] For this reason, it seems relatively implausible that radical social change is likely to occur absent a political or economic crisis of some kind. The objective (or subjective) absence of a critical juncture thus arguably also constitutes a serious constraint on the prospects for egalitarian social change.

Despite not being *singularly responsible*, however, the tendency to misjudge political affairs among members of the egalitarian constituency remains, I would suggest, a significant reason for the resilience of the status quo. Lessening the misjudgment constraint would arguably make the egalitarian constituency *more able* to confront this set of agents politically opposed to egalitarian social change, *more likely* to come to have the kind of firm moral commitments required of a militant minority, and *more able* to take advantage of a critical juncture, when it arrives.

For example, one danger at moments of heightened social flux, or among groups of highly committed political actors, is a certain over-eagerness or political rashness which may cause political action to be ineffectual or too short-termist in its focus. Absent an ability not to apply certain misleading frames to the political arena, how will the egalitarian constituency discern the wisest course of action at these crucial political moments? And how will they refrain from being drawn in by the potentially emotionally appealing defenses of the old order that will be offered to attempt to shore up support for it in the wake of this crisis, or distinguish successfully between sincere advocates of social change and self-serving opportunists?

For this reason, it is not the case that stressing the relative importance of the misjudgment constraint commits one to an implausible intellectualist view of how political change occurs; it can account for the prevalence of a number of other constraints. It simply points out that removing the misjudgment constraint is almost certainly one necessary component of successful social change, among others.

Critics of this case may well contend that it is actually preferable to focus political energy on the removal of constraints *other* than the tendency to misjudge outlined here. They might suggest that a different obstacle in fact represents the "key" constraint that will maximally unlock possibilities for egalitarian political transformation. But such a case currently remains to be made, and I would

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[19]Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier, *Shaping the Political Arena: Critical Junctures, the Labor Movement, and Regime Dynamics in Latin America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 27.

welcome further contributions to this task of mapping the many soft constraints on egalitarian social change. Even proponents of egalitarian social change who prefer to emphasize other soft constraints as ultimately more central would be hard pushed, however, to *deny entirely* the simultaneous importance of tackling the misjudgment constraint.

II. THE TRANSITIONAL VALUE OF REFLECTIVE CAPACITY

I argued above that the tendency to misjudge—whether on the part of that section of the egalitarian constituency that is currently relatively politically inactive, or of that which is far more active—is part of what enables the perpetuation of economic inequality. How ought egalitarians to tackle this obstacle to the achievement of their preferred political goals? In this section, I claim that the answer lies in cultivating greater reflective capacity among members of the egalitarian constituency. I then proceed in the final half of the article to make a concrete suggestion for how reflective capacity might be strengthened under present political conditions via the proliferation of suitably organized activist-led education programs.

I define reflective capacity as the ability to impose a temporary level of distance from one's commitments, to consider alternatives to them, and to critically reflect on their origins and validity.[20] Why might seeking to cultivate the reflective capacity of members of the egalitarian constituency be a political priority for advocates of egalitarian social change? My claim is that citizens with strengthened reflective capacity can become more resistant to the political dynamics which seek to encourage the adoption of the simplifying frames which can cause misjudgment. Central to this claim is that the frames individuals apply to politics are not simply plucked out of thin air: they are heavily influenced by contingent political factors.

At least two sources of frame-inculcation seem particularly important to emphasize. First, it is well established that economic elites can, as Allen Buchanan has put it, "produce distortions in the free exchange of information and biases in the identification and framing of public issues" through their direct and indirect influence over news media.[21] Political scientists tend to describe instances of this influence as "framing effects," wherein communications by media and political elites influence and shape citizens' frames in thought.[22] In other words, individuals typically pick up or have their frames reinforced through exposure to the kinds

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[20]I take the phrase from Stephen Macedo, *Liberal Virtues: Citizenship, Virtue, and Community in Liberal Constitutionalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 269. Cf. John Christman, "Autonomy, self-knowledge, and liberal legitimacy," John Christman and Joel Anderson (eds), *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism: New Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 330–57, at p. 331.

[21]Allen Buchanan, "Political liberalism and social epistemology," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 32 (2004), 95–130, at p. 128.

[22]Dennis Chong and James N. Druckman, "Framing theory," *Annual Review of Political Science*, 10 (2007), 103–26.

of content found in the news media. Arguably, this point is also further reinforced by recent revelations about the power of online "microtargeting" to change and reinforce political preferences.[23]

Second, the influence of economic elites over news media is compounded by the fact that once a sufficient number of individuals regularly apply such frames to politics, their friends, family, and colleagues are often considerably more likely to adopt them too, as a result of political socialization.[24] It is also important to note that the detrimental effects of this political manipulation tend to cluster around those adults who are already the most economically, politically, and socially disadvantaged, as almost all existing pedagogy available in the advanced capitalist democracies which can counteract the effectiveness of this frame-inculcation focuses either on children or on those young adults with the economic and cultural capital to attend university.

My claim is that individuals who persistently utilize their reflective capacity when it comes to political affairs are much less likely to accept or uncritically use the kinds of frames which result in political misjudgment. They are more able to discern their own interests and to analyze statements and situations independently. They are more flexible in their assessment of novel situations and their responses to them. Clearly, this does not mean that such individuals will always get it right, or that they will always have a clear picture of what is going on in the political world. Social psychologists, for example, have identified a number of cognitive biases (such as the just-world and disconfirmation biases) which appear to mean that the utilization of misleading, over-simplifying frames is likely to be a near-permanent feature of political decision-making.[25]

But while it is almost certainly true that *part* of the reason for the popularity and embeddedness of frames like the meritocracy or fiscal profligacy frames is the way in which they cohere with relatively innate features of human psychology, it remains the case that the level of predisposition individuals have towards these and other biases is largely a product of the social environment which they inhabit. Some level of tendency to misjudge is likely inherent in human psychology, but a good part of this tendency is exacerbated by contingent, alterable features of the social world, such as the political dynamics mentioned above. For example, a just-world bias is likely to be accentuated if, from a young age, one has been exposed to stories in the news media about "self-made" economic elites.[26]

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[23]For related discussion, see Arthur Beckman, "Political marketing and intellectual autonomy," *Journal of Political Philosophy,* 26 (2018), 24–46, at p. 35.

[24]Maria Teresa Grasso, Stephen Farrall, Emily Gray, et al., "Thatcher's children, Blair's babies, political socialization and trickle-down value change: an age, period and cohort analysis," *British Journal of Political Science,* 49 (2019), 17–36.

[25]Thomas Gilovich, Dale W. Griffin, and Daniel Kahneman, *Heuristics and Biases: The Psychology of Intuitive Judgment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[26]Carolyn L. Hafer and Robbie Sutton, "Belief in a just world," Clara Sabbagh and Manfred Schmitt (eds), *Handbook of Social Justice Theory and Research* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 2016), pp. 145–60.

By making citizens more resistant to the kinds of political dynamics which seek to encourage the adoption of the simplifying frames which can cause misjudgment, strengthening reflective capacity can, I claim, help to overcome the misjudgment constraint on egalitarian social change. A citizenry with strengthened reflective capacity creates a more advantageous environment for securing greater social, political, and economic egalitarianism, by making the adoption of misleading frames *less automatic*. Being less likely to fall prey to politically induced misjudgment is not the same thing as simply not falling prey to it at all. But if it seems plausible that a significant reason for the prevalence of misjudgment is the political dynamics which seek to induce it, then it follows that making individuals more resilient to these dynamics will at least weaken the tendency to misjudge.

Reflective capacity thus possesses what we might term *transitional value* for egalitarians. Its strengthening would be desirable, because it increases the chances of success of egalitarian social change when members of the egalitarian constituency employ reflective capacity with greater frequency in their political decision-making. This claim is therefore distinct from arguments that persistent utilization of reflective capacity among the citizenry aids their ability to live well in general or has beneficial consequences for the health of a respectful and tolerant liberal democracy.

An ability to step back and reflect on one's commitments, to consider alternatives to them, and to evaluate their validity may well also help to secure these things. But the claim here is, by contrast, that one often overlooked component of the instrumental value of reflective capacity under present political conditions is that it has beneficial consequences for egalitarian social change when members of the egalitarian constituency employ this capacity with greater frequency. In short, claims for its importance to democracy or wellbeing do not exhaust its value for egalitarians.

Note that as an *instrumental argument* for cultivating greater reflective capacity, the claim is not that part of what it is to lead a fully good, flourishing life is to continuously employ one's reflective capacities across each and every realm of human life. Certainly, it doesn't seem wholly unreasonable to, as Christman puts it, "leave some room for the unreflective and the automatic in life," as in, for instance, one's commitments to friends, loved ones, and various cultural artefacts.[27] It is highly contentious, and indeed unnecessary for our purposes, to hold that it is *always and everywhere* better to employ one's reflective capacity than to not, and that a life which constantly distances itself from its commitments is intrinsically more valuable than a life which does not.

Admittedly, it is probably quite likely that individuals who are positively predisposed to the use of their reflective capacity in political judgment will find it difficult to confine its use solely to this realm. The inculcation of reflective

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[27]John Christman, *The Politics of Persons: Individual Autonomy and Socio-Historical Selves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 140.

capacity among members of the egalitarian constituency when it comes to political judgment thus may well "spill over," as it is sometimes put, and come to be used in other domains unrelated to politics.[28] But even if this spill-over effect does in fact occur, it is not clear that this incurs the kinds of moral costs that ought to make us reconsider our endorsement of cultivating greater reflective capacity among the egalitarian constituency.

For one thing, the idea that certain (familial, religious, or community-based) commitments will be weakened or have less meaning or significance if we occasionally reflect on them and their merits is highly doubtful. As Eamonn Callan notes, "the detachability of commitment is not the same as superficiality."[29] Additionally, in many cases, without an ability to occasionally distance oneself from one's commitments, one is deprived of reasons for thinking them well founded, and thereby less able to avoid the temptations to not discharge the duties involved. As Paul Weithman points out, reflective capacity is often, in fact, "necessary to sustain" adherence to relatively unreflective commitments in the first place.[30] Even if, in fostering greater reflective capacity among members of the egalitarian constituency when it comes to matters of political judgment, proponents of egalitarian social change are thereby inevitably promoting the use of reflective capacity in life more generally, it is thus not clear that this ought to cause them to refrain from pursuing this aim.

III. ON ACTIVIST-LED EDUCATION

Thus far, I have sought to show that a significant soft constraint on achieving egalitarian social change is a pronounced tendency to misjudge among members of the egalitarian constituency, and that, consequently, one important short-term aim of the political struggle for greater equality ought to be the strengthening of these citizens' reflective capacity. One important further question which remains, however, concerns the concrete political practices that are best placed to deliver strengthened reflective capacity under present political conditions. I turn now to this question. I begin by introducing the practice of activist-led education, before delineating the conditions under which the practice might effectively deliver the good of strengthened reflective capacity. I then respond in Section IV to a worry that activist-led education is bound to result in a kind of indoctrination.

In 1924, the British economic historian and socialist thinker R. H. Tawney described what he saw as

> the recognition by ever wider sections of the working-class movement that if it is to solve its own problems, mobilize its own forces, and create a social order more in

[28]Stephen Macedo, *Diversity and Distrust: Civic Education in a Multicultural Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 179.

[29]Eamonn Callan, *Creating Citizens: Political Education and Liberal Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 59.

[30]Paul Weithman, "Educating in autonomy and tradition," *Social Philosophy and Policy,* 31 (2014), 229–56, at p. 256.

conformity with its own ideals, it must attend to the education of its members with the same deliberation and persistence which it has brought to the improvement of their economic position.[31]

Tawney was speaking not as a disinterested observer and social critic, but rather as someone who had themselves devoted a significant amount of time to this very task. Through his involvement in the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), Tawney taught many of those he called "the educationally under-privileged" about the causes and effects of the Industrial Revolution in England, in the hope that this knowledge would aid their attempts "to mould the society in which they live."[32]

Several other famous British intellectuals, including Harold Laski and Raymond Williams, were also once known for their politically motivated participation in the WEA;[33] and the wider history of radical politics in the 19th and early 20th centuries is replete with many such examples of political activists engaging in pedagogy. The International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, for example, which helped to build a flourishing trade union across differing gender and racial lines during the Great Depression in the US, famously once had leaders who "believed that workers and their representatives needed to understand economics and history on as sophisticated a plane as university students did."[34] Similarly, the Social Democratic Party of Germany—whose members often favored Wilhelm Liebknecht's slogan "Wissen ist Macht" (knowledge is power)—had a school in Berlin for several years, at which Rosa Luxemburg and other Marxist intellectuals taught political economy and the history of socialism and the labor movement to party members.[35]

We find a contemporary example of this political practice in "The World Transformed," a four-day political education festival which has run alongside the UK Labour Party's annual conference since 2016. Participants can attend workshops which conceptualize the complex disadvantages which occur at the intersections of class, race, and gender, or hear from practitioners of the "community organizing" approach to political campaigning, or attend reading groups which introduce participants to ideas from the tradition of radical political thought (such as Antonio Gramsci on hegemony, or Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau on populism).[36] The World Transformed also organizes mini-festival events centered around political discussion and debate across the UK, throughout the year.

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[31]R. H. Tawney, "Introduction," T. W. Price (ed.), *The Story of the Workers' Educational Association 1903–1924* (London: Labour Publishing Company, 1924), p. 8.

[32]R. H. Tawney, "The WEA and adult education," R. H. Tawney, *The Radical Tradition: Twelve Essays on Politics, Education and Literature*, ed. Rita Hinden (London: Allen and Unwin, 1964), pp. 82–93, at p. 92.

[33]Jonathan Rose, "The workers in the Workers' Educational Association, 1903–1950," *Albion*, 21 (1989), 591–608.

[34]Daniel Katz, *All Together Different: Yiddish Socialists, Garment Workers, and the Labor Roots of Multiculturalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), p. 93.

[35]Nicholas Jacobs, "The German Social Democratic Party School in Berlin, 1906–1914," *History Workshop Journal*, 5 (1978), 179–87.

[36]See <https://theworldtransformed.org/festival/2019/programme>.

Despite their notable differences, these varying activist practices, past and present, all share four important features. First, each involves *formal* pedagogy, explicitly aimed at increasing the knowledge and critical thinking capacities of its students. Each of the examples features organized learning objectives that spread over a prolonged period of time, and a mix of pedagogic techniques, such as small-group seminar discussion, lectures, and reading and writing exercises. This kind of education contrasts with the kind of *informal* education one might receive from walking around a museum, or from free-flowing conversation with friends or family.

Second, the pedagogy in each case is specifically focused on increasing knowledge among students on *political* topics. Clearly, no education can be *free* of political content, but the kind of explicitly political education that focuses on, for example, the history of the labor movement sharply contrasts with an education one might receive in fine art or literature completely detached from questions of social organization. Third, the classes are for a particular group of individuals: rather than for young, school-age children, the classes are primarily run for the benefit of *working adults*.

Lastly, the practice in each case is also *activist-led,* organized in a relatively bottom-up fashion by ideologically driven political actors with explicitly political motives. It is therefore also clearly distinct from top-down, state-sanctioned, both compulsory and further political education practices, like the citizenship lessons offered to some school students in liberal democracies, or the formally recognized degrees in the social sciences available at most higher-education institutions. The fact that they are activist- rather than state-led also means that they are necessarily *voluntary*. Participants can freely enter (and exit) them; there is no source of legitimate political authority, or series of strong economic incentives, which *compels* them to attend.

Despite some signs of a renewed interest in the practice of formal, political, voluntary activist-led education for adults (hereafter simply activist-led education),[37] it is clear that it is in fact an increasingly rare and marginalized political practice today. The many political parties that once engaged in these efforts are now primarily well-oiled parliamentary machines, focused narrowly on increasing their vote share at the next election, and thus unlikely to offer any political education to their members beyond some basic canvassing training. And the trade unions and other organizations (such as the WEA) that once encouraged their members to expand their intellectual capacities to enhance their ability to act politically, now tend to offer almost solely vocational education narrowly tied to improving their members' productivity and prospects on the labor market.[38]

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[37]Clearly, forms of activist-led education that are neither formal, nor explicitly political, nor aimed at adults, either have existed, or could exist. But it would require a very different article to examine these in sufficient depth.

[38]Lawrence Goldman, *Dons and Workers: Oxford and Adult Education since 1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 248–67.

Is there a case for egalitarians attempting to reverse this marginalization? Education *in general* is certainly widely regarded as being able to increase the frequency with which citizens employ their reflective capacity. Most egalitarians accept the idea that, broadly speaking, education *of some kind* is an important way to deliver greater independence, autonomy, or intellectual freedom.[39] But why think that activist-led education, of the sort described above, is an appropriate method for achieving this goal?

It is clearly not the case that *any* political practice which meets the bare definition of formal, political, voluntary activist-led education for adults will reliably cultivate strengthened reflective capacity. Rather, the practice might be capable of doing so, I claim, when it creates what Tawney calls "the nucleus of a university" in places "where no university exists"[40] (or, we might add, where one *does* exist, but which various individuals might be incapable of attending). Tawney does not specify further what the necessary conditions for the creation of this nucleus are, but I think we can plausibly interpret him as claiming that this process entails three important conditions. If it is to strengthen reflective capacity, the activist-led education must provide plentiful (1) basic informational resources and (2) opportunities to practice deploying reflective capacity, and it must also (3) both emphasize and encourage intellectual humility. I now describe each of these conditions in more detail.

First, the successful utilization of reflective capacity when it comes to political judgment requires a base level of information regarding political history, the organization of different institutions, and the roles taken by different political actors, in order to function effectively. As Rosenblum and Muirhead have put it, there is a "*universe of knowledge* essential to reasoning about politics and policy."[41] One cannot sufficiently distance oneself from one's political commitments and consider alternatives to them, for instance, unless one is equipped with various basic facts about how political life functions, such as the basics of national and international politics, including the functioning of parliaments and international institutions and the historical context in which they are operating. The activist-led education, I claim, must thus reliably provide a wide range of basic political information if it is to foster greater reflective capacity.

Second, if activist-led education is to cultivate greater reflective capacity, it needs to provide plentiful opportunities to practice deploying this capacity, so that its use might become habitual, or what Callan calls "second nature."[42]

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[39]Paulo Freire, *Education for Critical Consciousness* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013); Meira Levinson, *The Demands of Liberal Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[40]R. H. Tawney, "An experiment in democratic education," Tawney, *The Radical Tradition*, pp. 70–81, at p. 77.

[41]Nancy L. Rosenblum and Russell Muirhead, *A Lot of People Are Saying: The New Conspiracism and the Assault on Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), p. 101, emphasis added.

[42]Eamonn Callan, "Autonomy, child-rearing, and good lives," David Archard and Colin M. Macleod (eds), *The Moral and Political Status of Children* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 118–41, at p. 126.

Absent these frequent deployment opportunities, an individual's reflective capacity might remain under-utilized or even entirely latent. Individuals may just prefer the comfort of their current commitments to pursuing contradictory information, or feel deeply intellectually infallible.

But, if the activist-led education provides a space where individuals can think critically about political issues through writing, discussion, and reading, it can help create the *habit* of utilization, making the persistent utilization of one's reflective capacity more likely. Participants can come to possess the necessary feelings of confidence in their abilities required to make deployment of the capacity a live option, and value its regular use. Access to plentiful opportunities for the deployment of one's reflective capacity, so that its use can become second nature, is thus also a necessary condition for the achievement of strengthened reflective capacity in activist-led education programs.

Third, the activist-teacher must both emphasize and encourage intellectual humility throughout the pedagogic process. Activist-teachers must make clear to participants that they are fallible, that the subject matter is complex and controversial and definitive answers are hard to establish. This emphasis also involves teachers being seen to display a continuous curiosity: seeking to keep up with intellectual innovations in the subject one teaches and applying the standards of rational inquiry to all the content covered. Emphasizing intellectual humility means not just not ignoring controversies, reasonable disagreements, and so on, but also actively exposing students to competing perspectives.

It means being keen to study differing points of view and being able to point students to the work of dissenting and critical voices. Activist-teachers should also make it known that they welcome critical questioning of every aspect of what is being presented or discussed (or occluded), and an emphasis should be placed more generally on the pedagogic relation as one of collective discovery and learning, rather than preaching. Without this emphasis, participants are more likely to create a habit of political *deference*, rather than one of utilizing their own reflective capacity.

As well as emphasizing their *own* intellectual humility, activist-teachers must also make serious efforts to encourage intellectual humility on the part of the student-participants in the practice. This involves constantly reminding students that they are susceptible to error in their analysis, and that they ought to question their own views and those they are exposed to in the classroom. Students should be encouraged to do their own research and contribute where they disagree or have their doubts. Teachers should, in short, make efforts to encourage class participants to direct their critical scrutiny towards the very content being taught, and to ensure that they feel confident engaging in such scrutiny. Without this encouragement, participants are more likely to be over-satisfied with their current views than they are to possess the desire to distance themselves from their own commitments in the way required by reflective capacity.

Notice that this intellectual humility condition is not the same as a *neutrality* proviso. It does not require that the educator expose pupils to *exactly the same amount* of content from all perspectives, giving equal weight to every concern from every point on the ideological spectrum. As Kyla Ebels-Duggan points out, given limited resources of various kinds, educators must always make certain decisions about "which matters to take to be settled … what alternatives to consider, what to regard as plausible," and so on.[43]

But an activist-teacher can fail to meet the neutrality condition in these ways, so long as efforts are made in their pedagogy to emphasize and encourage intellectual humility at the same time, and plentiful opportunities are available for participants to question the material covered in class. The humility condition does not bind so tightly that it calls for teachers to leave all of their political commitments at the door.[44] To demand of activist-led education that it abides by a neutrality proviso would be to mistakenly apply the same standard to activist-led education for adults operating on a voluntary basis in civil society that one would apply to state-directed schooling for children or young adults. I thus think that it is sensible to presume that the usual neutrality restrictions that apply to state schooling are relaxed somewhat when the education is optional, rather than compulsory, and for adults, rather than children.

Ultimately, the participants in the practice ought to be able to choose where to spend their free time. The worry cannot simply be that the plentiful information to which they are exposed will have a political slant of some kind, as this kind of worry would extend to most of the films, books, radio, and television that citizens will more or less freely consume. Members of the egalitarian constituency are subject to a range of influences on their judgment, none of which can plausibly be described as living up to a neutrality proviso, and all of which bias judgment in one way or another.

Why should activist-led education have to abide by a neutrality proviso that most, even all, of the other influences on an individual's political judgments do not? Within the range of practices that live up to the humility proviso, there is an acceptable *range* of political slant. We just want, as participants in these practices, to feel in with a suitably good chance of being able to note its slant, identify it, and think about its plausibility. I think that activist-led education that provides both plentiful informational resources and opportunities for deployment and which encourages and emphasizes humility falls within this range of acceptability.

IV. THE INDOCTRINATION WORRY

I have tried to show how, if it provides participants with plentiful basic informational resources and a space to make the deployment of their reflective

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[43]Kyla Ebels-Duggan, "Educating for autonomy: an old-fashioned view," *Social Philosophy and Policy,* 31 (2014), 257–75, at p. 271.

[44]I thank an anonymous reviewer for their helpful suggestion to frame the claim here in this way.

capacity habitual, and emphasizes and encourages intellectual humility, activist-led education can enable participants to better overcome the various kinds of misjudgment that obstruct the course of egalitarian social change. One important worry about this argument runs as follows. While activist-led education of this particular kind may well result in the fostering of reflective capacity, in practice, won't on-the-ground instances of activist-led education be unlikely to live up to these three conditions? Won't *actual* activist-teachers under present political conditions be motivated to *break* these conditions and, in fact, conduct education which results in indoctrination, rather than strengthened reflective capacity? Call this the *indoctrination worry*.

One helpful way to think about indoctrination is as the inculcation of closed-minded belief.[45] Agents who have been indoctrinated display a kind of rigid, emotional investment in the truth of some of their intellectual commitments. They thus lack the motivation to consider available evidence or arguments sufficiently when this would lead them to revise these commitments. Teachers can inculcate closed-minded belief, both intentionally and unintentionally,[46] perhaps by filling the basic informational resources provided in class with misleading or overly simplistic myths, or severely limiting the information offered in ways favorable to their own particular political or social agenda.

The teacher may also provide no opportunities for the exercise of participants' critical reflection on what is being taught, or severely constrain these opportunities in such a way that certain topics or positions are kept off the pedagogical agenda. The teacher may also set themselves up as a kind of all-knowing sage, with reasoning powers and knowledge far beyond the capacities of their pupils, thereby encouraging in the program's participants a kind of intellectual servility or cowardice. Teachers might fail to give reasons when presenting something as true, and explicitly or implicitly encourage students to emulate this attitude of intellectual hubris. Typically, instances of indoctrination involve some combination of all of these tactics.

The inculcation of closed-minded belief in these, and no doubt other, ways is usually considered a serious moral wrong. One plausible way to ground the wrongness of indoctrination is to claim that it violates a fundamental duty of respect we owe to all rational persons to treat them as ends in themselves, rather than merely as means to our own ends. To indoctrinate is to fail to treat others as capable of making their own decisions about what commitments they ought to

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[45]Eamonn Callan and Dylan Arena, "Indoctrination," Harvey Siegel (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 104–21.

[46]Rebecca M. Taylor, "Indoctrination and social context: a system-based approach to identifying the threat of indoctrination and the responsibilities of educators," *Journal of Philosophy of Education,* 51 (2017), 38–58.

hold, and what goals they ought to pursue and why, and thus to fail to recognize them as capable of living their own lives.[47]

The indoctrination worry is right to point out that activist-teachers are indeed going to be faced with situations in which they might consider it politically advantageous for this inculcation of closed-minded belief to occur, and thus to commit what appears to be a serious moral wrong. This is because the activist-educator has *two* aims in the classroom, rather than—as is typical for state-led educators—one: they have a narrowly pedagogic goal (of trying to cultivate reflective capacity), but also a substantive political goal (of trying to further the egalitarian cause). The first goal leads to a desire on the part of the activist-teachers to uphold the three conditions delineated above, but the second goal potentially leads to a desire to fail to uphold the three conditions when it is politically unwise to do so.[48]

Because, very roughly, unity tends to increase political power, it might strike activist-educators as politically advantageous to inculcate closed-minded beliefs in at least some areas, rather than observe the three conditions on reflective-capacity-cultivating activist-led education highlighted above. If participants in activist-led education were to come to display a kind of rigid, emotional investment in the truth of certain political positions, for instance, they could potentially come to be motivated to contribute in greater ways to the project of egalitarian social change. If they were to come to lack the motivation to consider available evidence or arguments sufficiently when this would lead them to revise these commitments, this may make them less prone to political disillusion, disagreement, and confusion. These are some of the kinds of *homogenizing pressures* likely to be felt by any activist engaged in a project of social change.

The indoctrination worry gets its force from the normative implications introduced by the presence of an *explicitly politically motivated* actor in the pedagogic relation, as it is this which introduces the teacher's second goal into the classroom. It is thus a potentially very damaging objection, as it targets one of the constitutive features of activist-led education as such. If it goes through, it seems to imply that all practices that share this characteristic are likely to be impermissible.

One tempting way to respond to this concern would be to simply concede the incompatibility between teachers having substantive political goals and upholding their duty of respect, but deny the priority of this duty, claiming that political circumstances are such that they gain a permission to violate this duty. In other

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[47]Joseph Raz, "The role of well-being," *Philosophical Perspectives,* 18 (2004), 269–94, at p. 289. Cf. Stephen Darwall, "The value of autonomy and autonomy of the will," *Ethics,* 116 (2006), 263–84. While we all plausibly have duties of this kind, an individual who occupies the role of educator arguably has *special moral obligations* to uphold this duty of respect towards their pupils and is liable to be especially deserving of blame when they fail to do so. See Jake Monaghan, "The special moral obligations of law enforcement," *Journal of Political Philosophy,* 25 (2017), 218–37.
[48]A version of this tension applied to the competing pressures on the liberal state when it comes to the education of children—to which this discussion is indebted—is articulated in Harry Brighouse, "Civic education and liberal legitimacy," *Ethics,* 108 (1998), 719–45.

words, the value of avoiding indoctrination in all forms is simply outweighed by the desirability of the political goal being pursued, or the unjust nature of the circumstances in which the educators find themselves.[49] I am sympathetic to such arguments, as it certainly seems plausible that there are situations in which political actors might gain permissions to act in what would normally be considered impermissible ways, because of the injustice of their situation.

But I think that this is to sell the case for activist-led education short. I do not think that there are good grounds for conceding the idea that it is unachievable for activist-educators to possess the motivational profile required to avoid indoctrination. It is not always the case that activist-educators will inevitably engage in the inculcation of closed-mindedness, but that this is simply all-things-considered permissible. Rather, I think it is reasonable to claim that activist-educators can further the egalitarian cause without having to engage in indoctrination in many circumstances.

Ceasing to pursue their substantive political goals, when doing so runs the risk of inculcating closed-minded belief, clearly involves a delicate and demanding balancing of ends on the part of activist-teachers. Constraining the pursuit of one's substantive political goals, insofar as this pursuit becomes incompatible with upholding a duty of respect, will certainly not be easy. However, it is not clear to me that the delicate balancing of ends required of activist-teachers is particularly *more* demanding than many of the other political practices which activists successfully engage in.

For example, in a fascinating discussion, Andrew Sabl discusses the "*delicate psychic balancing acts* that seem necessary for good organizing."[50] Facilitating productive political meetings, for instance, often involves a great deal of patience on the part of the activist, and a certain amount of restraint in pursuing one's own agenda. One must resist the urge to take over, and to be dogmatic, *even when one thinks doing so could plausibly speed up the success of one's political cause*. Activists on community canvasses, to use another example, must similarly resist the temptation to just lie or pretend they have answers when they don't, *even when doing so could plausibly advance their political aims*. Despite the fact that choosing not to engage in these kinds of behavior might set back one's political cause, many activists choose to act in this way in order to treat their fellow citizens in morally appropriate ways.

To do activism, then, often just *is* to engage in precisely these kinds of balancing acts: resisting urges and reining in one's behavior in order to act in accordance with one's duties. If activists can successfully acquire the distinct disposition of character Sabl thinks is necessary for other forms of political practice, what stops

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[49]While he does not mention the specific political tactic of activist-led education, an argument of this sort is pursued at length in Burke A. Hendrix, *Strategies of Justice: Aboriginal Peoples, Persistent Injustice, and the Ethics of Political Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

[50]Andrew Sabl, *Ruling Passions: Political Offices and Democratic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 272, emphasis added.

the complex balancing of ends required in permissible activist-led education from being similarly achievable? It thus seems rash to think that achievement of this balancing is simply out of the question.

It might further be objected that, even if not outright unachievable, the moral dangers involved are such that the practice is still best avoided. However, this position only seems attractive if a plausible alternative candidate for strengthening reflective capacity can be offered. One such commonly floated candidate is expanding state-led education. This is indeed the most commonly noted way to strengthen reflective capacity in almost all existing political philosophy, which essentially assumes that "educating for autonomy" can or should only be done in state schools, to children or young adults.[51]

There may well be some good reasons for thinking that dramatic changes in the way that liberal states deliver education (such as expanding citizenship lessons) is a *more ideal* way to strengthen reflective capacity without encountering the indoctrination worry. For one thing, there is likely to be more institutional oversight in state-led education, which can guard against the freedom of the teacher to engage in the kinds of practices where activist-teachers have far greater individual prerogative.[52] Reforms to state-directed education would certainly also reach a larger number of individuals than even the most ambitious activist-led practices are likely to, and would be able to both reach a greater number of the most disadvantaged in particular, as well as intervening in their lives at a much earlier—and therefore educationally more crucial—time.

However, holding resolutely to this position regarding the desirability of *only* state-led education denies what we might term the contemporary reality of ideological state-capture. There are few, if any, signs in recent state education policy in the advanced capitalist nations that anything like this vast expansion of state-led political education is remotely possible in the near-to-distant future. The idea of the state encouraging popular participation in political life for the betterment of democracy goes against the grain of a now deeply embedded governing logic that conceives of education increasingly as a method for improving employer-friendly skills and dispositions that enhance the value of capital.[53]

To implement the idealized form of state-led education preferred by many would require a decisive break with the entire ruling rationality of our times:

[51]Danielle Allen, *Education and Equality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016); Elizabeth Anderson, "Fair opportunity in education: a democratic equality perspective," *Ethics,* 117 (2007), 595–622. One exception to this general trend is Elizabeth Frazer, "Iris Marion Young and political education," *Educational Philosophy and Theory,* 38 (2006), 39–55, which does discuss activist-led forms of education, if only to ultimately stress the superiority of state-led efforts.

[52]Although it is also important not to be starry-eyed about the historic ways in which *state* education, even with these mechanisms for greater oversight, has itself functioned as a complex form of indoctrination. Thus, it is not as if state-led education would represent a failsafe guard against the indoctrination worry. See, for example, Paul Willis, *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (Abingdon: Routledge, [1977] 2016).

[53]Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (New York: Zone Books, 2015).

current incentives, aims, and understandings about the reach of government would have to be fundamentally challenged and disputed. The many constraints facing attempts to implement property-owning democracy or liberal socialism are much the same for massively expanding the state education sector. For answers to the questions of egalitarian transition to be insightful, and politically relevant, particular attention thus needs to be paid to forms of political action which do not assume control of the liberal state. This is because, in many cases, lack of access to the levers of state power is *precisely the problem that needs to be overcome*.

For those seeking to overcome the misjudgment constraint and strengthen reflective capacity, it is thus not clear that there is an alternative path open to them which is less prone to the indoctrination worry. It does not seem an appropriate response, then, if one cares about the goods that state-led education *could* secure, to merely wait for an opportunity for children to finally gain access to them, given how unlikely this currently looks. As well as not appearing definitively unachievable, activist attempts to attain this balancing themselves, without recourse to the state, thus also strike me as essentially unavoidable under present political conditions. Alternative practices that do not face the same difficulty, but which can achieve the same end, just do not appear to be available.

While clearly far from conclusive, I think that these remarks demonstrate that there are not good grounds to conclude that activist-teachers' possession of a substantive political goal is simply incompatible with their ability to successfully uphold a duty of respect towards their pupils. The indoctrination worry is not so strong that it ought to prevent proponents of egalitarian social change from even entertaining this practice as a means of transitional politics. These remarks thus provide a presumptive case for organizations inspired by the long, but now largely forsaken, tradition of activist-led education being considered an important component of a more expansive egalitarian political strategy.[54]

V. CONCLUSION

In this article, I have offered an account of what one of the short-term political aims of proponents of greater equality ought to be. I began by claiming that one important constraint on the feasibility of egalitarian social change is what I termed a pronounced *tendency to misjudge* among members of the egalitarian constituency. In order to make sense of a political world brimming with uncertainty, these citizens often apply simplifying frames which help them navigate novel situations and make decisions. But these heuristic devices, such as the meritocracy and the fiscal profligacy frames, frequently cause members of the egalitarian constituency to misinterpret the reality of political circumstances in ways which enable the perpetuation of inequality.

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[54]I thank an anonymous referee for this perspicacious formulation.

I then moved on to endorse the strengthening of *reflective capacity* as one significant way to tackle the misjudgment constraint. By heightening the ability of members of the egalitarian constituency to impose a temporary level of distance from their commitments, to consider alternatives to them, and to evaluate their origins and validity, reflective capacity can help create greater resistance to some of the political dynamics driving misjudgment, and thus create a more hospitable political environment for egalitarian social change.

Finally, I proposed activist-led education programs which provide plentiful informational resources and opportunities to practice deploying reflective capacity, and also emphasize and encourage intellectual humility, as one desirable means to deliver the end of strengthened reflective capacity under present political conditions. I further claimed that there are not good grounds for concluding that permissible forms of activist-led education are either categorically unachievable or avoidable in the way that proponents of the indoctrination worry might press.

The indoctrination worry, and any response I can offer here, is ultimately just speculation about the feasible motivational profile of the activist-teacher. There does seem to be some evidence that the educators involved in previous instances of the practice were often highly attuned to the importance of living up to the duty of respect. For example, Tawney writes of the importance he attached to trying to "draw as many as possible of the partialities in" rather than chasing "all the partialities out" of his activist-teaching.[55] Tawney's comments about learning from his pupils further suggest that he was disposed in the right kind of respectful way towards them: he once wrote that he "can never be sufficiently grateful for the lessons learned from the adult students whom I was supposed to teach, but who, in fact, taught me."[56]

But it seems clear that to make a more final and definitive judgment against this concern, one would need to evaluate in some depth a specific instance of activist-led education on the ground. To see if an activist-led education program is providing plentiful information, opportunities for deployment, and emphasizing and encouraging sufficient intellectual humility (or whether political circumstances are such that they gain permissions to not meet these conditions) one would need to, essentially, see it up and running.

The best way to achieve this would be to conduct an exercise in ethnographic political theory which embeds itself in a particular practice and navigates in real time the normative consequences of the actions of activist-teachers. As Lisa Herzog and Bernardo Zacka have recently claimed, ethnographic observation can deliver a "closer understanding of social practices [which] can *help us better evaluate them from the standpoint of independent normative principles.*"[57] It is this kind of research which would best enable proponents of egalitarian social

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[55]Tawney, "The WEA and adult education", p. 90.
[56]Ibid., p. 91.
[57]Lisa Herzog and Bernardo Zacka, "Fieldwork in political theory: five arguments for an ethnographic sensibility," *British Journal of Political Science*, 49 (2019), 763–84, at p. 773.

change to see in far greater depth whether activist-teachers (or indeed activists involved in other political practices) are successfully navigating the tensions between their substantive political goals and the duties owed to the participants in the practice.

This empirical research would also potentially enable proponents of reviving activist-led education to settle a whole host of other important questions. For instance, what kind of balance of pedagogic activities and curricular content best enables teachers to meet the conditions delineated above? Is virtual activist-led education (particularly important when social distancing measures prevent face-to-face discussion, and given the way political misjudgment can proliferate online) adequate for meeting these conditions, or is there something uniquely valuable about in-person interaction?

Is there anything at stake in whether activist-teachers choose to "piggyback" off the existing institutional infrastructure of political parties or trade unions, or should they rather attempt to remain independent from these organizations? Are activist-teachers best able to live up to these conditions if they are drawn primarily from the ranks of professional educators, who have received formal teacher-training of some kind? And, perhaps most importantly, how can activists most effectively achieve and sustain motivations among members of the egalitarian constituency to participate in this and other political practices?[58]

As Thomas Christiano has noted, despite its obvious limitations in answering certain kinds of complex political questions, one thing that political philosophy can do is to "provide a map that gives us pointers as to what kinds of empirical research needs to be done."[59] While the remarks collected here thus cannot provide anything like certainty concerning the desirability of concrete instances of activist education, I hope they do enough to convince readers that looking at existing instances of activist-led education on the ground is an important future task for proponents of egalitarian social change. While I cannot respond definitively to the many research questions raised by these reflections in the space afforded to me here, I thus hope to have at least given them a kind of salience and urgency they did not possess before.

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[58]One particularly important issue here, raised by a referee, concerns the potential for pedagogic practices which inculcate reflective capacity to fail by themselves to engender the sufficiently intense political commitments among participants required for sustained engagement in the project of egalitarian social change. While activist-led education can, I would claim, have desirable consequences in terms of its ability to reduce misjudgment, it will typically most effectively bring about social change if pursued *in conjunction with a number of political practices which do not take the cultivation of reflective capacity as their primary aim* and are thus perhaps better suited to harnessing and solidifying political commitment. Ultimately, egalitarians ought to rely on a complex ecology of differing forms of activism if they are going to successfully reduce the soft constraints on the feasibility of a more just political and economic world, and activist-led education should certainly not be viewed as a panacea. Dealing with this issue in any more detail, however, would obviously require an article of its own. See also n. 18.

[59]Thomas Christiano, *The Constitution of Equality: Democratic Authority and Its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 7.