The debate on educational justice is often conceived as a debate on distributive patterns. However, if we talk about distributive justice, we have to clarify what—namely, what type of good—is to be distributed. In the case of educational justice, the answer seems clear: the good in question is education.

However, this answer does not suffice. Two further questions arise, at this point. The first question is widely recognized as crucial to the theory of educational justice: What is it that is to be distributed—educational resources, opportunities, outcomes, or something else?

In what follows, I will focus on a second question. This question can initially be taken as a conceptual issue: What do we mean by the concept of education? It is common to distinguish a general sense of the term from a more specific meaning. Understood in a general sense, education refers to schooling and to processes of teaching and learning. The question is whether all processes of learning are educational. Even according to an unspecific understanding of the term, certain instances of learning, such as learning to play billiards, might fall outside the conceptual sphere of education. We must at least say that the debate on educational justice is not concerned with the distribution of skills in billiards.

Instead of discussing this issue on a conceptual level, we could directly turn to the normative question: Is billiards worth being taught at school? My basic claim is that an account of educational justice cannot be agnostic or neutral with regard to questions of this kind. In other words, it cannot avoid the question of which types of education are worthwhile. Referring to the English philosopher of education Richard Peters, we can call this the problem of justification.

Peters addresses this problem in his book *Ethics and Education* (1966) and the essay “The Justification of Education” (1973). He asks why “[s]cience, mathematics, history, art, cooking and carpentry feature on the curriculum [but] not bingo, bridge and billiards” (Peters 1966: 144). In his attempt to answer this question, Peters starts from conceptual considerations: He outlines a specific concept of education based on the distinction between education and training. Like the German term *Ausbildung,*
training refers to the development of specialized skills that are useful to fulfil particular tasks. In contrast to this, education or Bildung expresses a non-instrumental understanding of learning. It is often assumed that being educated is valuable in itself, and not with regard to some external purposes. There are various ways to specify this notion of education. Peters’ account focuses on cognitive capacities: The educated man, he says, “possesses a considerable body of knowledge together with understanding […] He has developed the capacity to reason, to justify his beliefs and conduct” (Peters 1973: 87). Peters’ idea is that this account of education can be gained through conceptual analysis, but must be justified by further considerations.

I do not intend to go into the details of Peters’ conceptual analysis and his justificatory approach, but let me briefly indicate how Peters attempts to justify education. In a first step, he states that the (intrinsic) value of the practice of justification cannot be reasonably questioned because any attempt to do so presupposes the value of justification. In a second step, he argues that the practice of justification presupposes certain other values that are implied by the concept of education – particularly the value of truth, knowledge and understanding. From this, he concludes that anyone who brings forward a rational argument against education thereby presupposes its intrinsic value.

This transcendental argument has mostly been rejected, and Peters himself found it unsatisfactory in later years (Peters 1983). In a recent paper, Stefaan Cuypers (2012) proposes re-formulating Peters’ justificatory account in perfectionist terms. His idea is that the specific notion of education or Bildung can be justified as a core feature of the good life. A perfectionist justification of education will be challenged by political liberals. Thus, a further question is whether Bildung can be justified on political liberal grounds.

Some types of education are widely acknowledged as valuable because there is an obvious instrumental justification for them. One type of instrumental justification refers to the positional value of certain capacities. In competitions for jobs or social positions, it might not suffice to be well-trained or well-educated; one has to do better than the other competitors. In these cases, the value of one’s education depends on the others’ level of ability. First, I would like to focus on the positional significance of education and its obvious relation to the issue of justice. Second, I consider education in its non-instrumental value. In the third part, I discuss two different types of justification for the non-instrumental aspects of education: civic and perfectionist accounts.
Educational justice and the justification of education

Fair competition and the justification of education

Let us consider, first, the so-called meritocratic principle of educational justice, as formulated by Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift: “An individual’s prospects for educational achievement may be a function of that individual’s talent and effort, but it should not be influenced by her social class background” (Brighouse, Swift 2008: 447). Nothing is said here about educational aims or the value of education. The message is that, whatever is taken as an educational aim, the prospects for achievement should be equal for persons with the same (natural) talent and the same willingness to develop their talent. I do not claim that Brighouse and Swift would subscribe to the view that considerations of educational justice are fully independent of the problem of justification. I only observe that the meritocratic principle seems to be neutral with regard to educational aims.

It should be noted that this principle traditionally plays a specific role in theories of justice: It is designed to regulate the fair distribution of social positions. In other words, it is taken to guarantee equality of opportunity in the competition for social status. However, considered in this light, it is obviously wrong to say that the meritocratic idea is neutral with regard to educational aims. Imagine, for instance, that our school systems focused on activities such as bingo, bridge, and billiards; schools would thus ensure that persons with equal talent and motivation for these games have equal prospects for achievement. Yet we would consider this to be unjust because it does not enable students to develop those abilities or types of knowledge that are relevant in the competition for social positions.

What are these abilities and types of knowledge? This depends on the particular circumstances in a society—namely, which abilities are factually valued in society and the labour market. Consider a society in which it is taken for granted that only eminent chess players qualify as political or economic leaders. When applying for a leadership position, you would have to play chess against other candidates for the job. Under these social circumstances, chess would have to be among the core subjects in school: It would be unfair not to do the best to support every student in becoming a good chess player.

Peters asked for justification as to why some subjects feature in the curriculum while others—“bingo, bridge, and billiards”—do not. The scenario just outlined provides a clear-cut justification for including chess in the curriculum: Being able to play chess is positionally valuable in the competition for leadership positions. To be successful in the competition for social status, you have to play better than others.
There could be other types of justification for introducing chess as a school subject; for example, chess playing could be seen as an intrinsically valuable activity or as instrumentally valuable with regard to learning mathematics. Yet if we concentrate on the problem of fair competition, these possible justifications do not matter.

It could be suspected that the focus on fair competition is at odds with the demand for education—as contrasted to training: Acquiring useful skills seems to be much more important in the competition for status than being educated, in the sense outlined by Peters. However, it is not that simple. When we look at the selective school systems in Germany or Switzerland, we see that the school type traditionally committed to Bildung (i.e., the Gymnasium) still provides good opportunities in the competition for social rewards. The Gymnasium enables students to acquire a diploma that ensures them access to higher education. Moreover, it endows them with certain types of attitudes, capacities, and knowledge that—although apparently useless—might nevertheless prove to be useful in the competition for status: Being able to read Goethe’s Faust or understanding the meaning of Kant’s categorical imperative is—to borrow Pierre Bourdieu’s term—a form of cultural capital that allows its owner to distinguish himself from the uneducated members of lower classes. In this perspective, education or Bildung is seen exclusively in its instrumental, positional value. If we rely on the meritocratic principle of fair competition, we have to conclude that, in a society in which Bildung is in fact competitively salient, access to Bildung should not be influenced by social circumstances. However, if society ascribes no competitive value to this kind of education, there is no reason to include it in the curriculum.

Within this framework, the aims of education must be derived from the conditions of competition in a particular social setting. This means that virtually anything can be justified as an educational aim if it proves to be relevant in social competitions. The meritocratic principle—as well as any other principle designed to regulate social competitions—is not tied to a particular set of aims, but it is not independent from considerations of justification. The education system can only count as just if it promotes the right type of capacities or forms of knowledge. On the other hand, certain curricular contents are justified with reference to the purpose of securing fair competition.

Unfortunately, these insights do not provide us with a clear-cut answer to the question of how the relevant type of education is to be distributed. The problem is that any sort of educational inequality is likely to be positionally salient. Should we stipu-
late strict educational equality? According to the meritocratic view, inequalities due to social background—but not inequalities of natural endowment—should be neutralized. Inequalities of effort are not seen as unjust, even if they are caused by social circumstances (Satz 2012: 159). Many adherents of the meritocratic view, it appears to me, are somewhat uneasy about this distinction between justified and unjustified inequalities. After all, natural inequalities are not more deserved than inequalities of social background.⁴

Undoubtedly, the problem of fair competition must be addressed. I think that significant inequalities of educational resources are likely to spoil the fairness of social competitions. Moreover, legal and informal forms of discrimination within the school system are, in my view, morally unacceptable.⁵

**Educational justice and the non-instrumental value of education**

The type of justification considered thus far leads to a distorted—or at least incomplete—picture of education and its value. Even those aspects of education that are commonly seen as non-instrumentally valuable are reduced to their instrumental, positional value. Moreover, the reasons for promoting non-instrumental forms of education depend on the conditions of social competition in a particular society. In a society where *Bildung* is competitively irrelevant, there is no reason to educate young people.

In our societies, it is controversial whether and to what extent the school system should be committed to the non-instrumental aspects of education. This is why Peters tried to develop a justification for education. Such justification is independent of considerations of justice, but I claim that a theory of educational justice must rely on an account of the value of education. If there is no value in being educated (and not only trained), it does not matter, from the perspective of justice, how education is distributed among individuals. However, if the value of education—and a certain type of educational aims—can be justified, this might change the way we consider the problem of distribution.

My idea is this: Once it is acknowledged that everyone should be educated in a certain way and achieve certain aims, the primary question is whether all students equally reach these aims. Thus, the question is not whether an equal amount of resources should be spent on them or whether all students—or all students with equal talent—reach the same level of achievement.
Consider Brighouse and Swift’s remarks on the non-instrumental aspects of education:

“[E]ducation is valuable not only for competitive reasons; in addition to improving career prospects, it independently improves individuals’ lives by enabling them to engage in a wide range of intrinsically valuable pursuits, such as reading good literature and discussing it with friends, playing complex games, entertaining themselves with mathematical puzzles, and socializing with people who speak other languages. This ‘intrinsic’ value of education typically contributes significantly to the quality of life” (Brighouse, Swift 2008: 462–63).

In the last sentence, the authors present a justification for including literature, complex games, mathematics, and foreign languages within the curriculum: These pursuits are intrinsically valuable and contribute significantly to the human good. In other words, educational aims might be justified with reference to the idea of the good human life.6

According to Brighouse and Swift, the meritocratic principle should be applied not only to the instrumental benefits of education, but also to its intrinsically valuable aspects. Persons with equal talent and motivation should have the same prospects to be initiated into intrinsically valuable activities. As previously noted, Brighouse and Swift’s formulation of the meritocratic principle does not refer to educational aims. Yet these authors do claim that activities such as reading literature significantly contribute to a person’s quality of life. The question is, then, whether they see commitment to the human good as an integral aspect of educational justice.

If they do so, they should also acknowledge that it is of primary importance to enable every person to achieve these aims. This means that, everybody should have an effective opportunity to develop the capacity to read and enjoy good novels. Some students might have difficulties acquiring this capacity because they are disadvantaged by their natural endowment or their family circumstances. In either case, it seems crucial to support them in learning to read literature simply because this enables them to have a good life.

Thus, focusing on educational aims leads to an account of educational justice that is clearly distinct from the meritocratic idea. The meritocratic principle can be satisfied if (1) students are educated for the wrong aims, (2) all students equally fail to reach an appropriate level of achievement with regard to the relevant aims, and (3) the naturally disadvantaged are not supported in achieving these aims. The main
shortcoming of the meritocratic conception is that it does not ensure an appropriate education for all students.

Against this backdrop, I would like to turn to the adequacy view of educational justice, as presented, for instance, by Debra Satz (2007, 2008, 2012; see also the work of Elizabeth Anderson 2004, 2007). Satz’s account is concerned not only with patterns of distribution, but also with educational aims. In contrast to egalitarian accounts, it involves the insight that a substantial conception of education is an integral part of an account of educational justice.

Satz claims that the education provided by the democratic state should be “adequate for democratic citizenship and for relations of civic equality” (Satz 2007: 647). I propose reading this as a justification for a certain type of education. According to Satz, educational aims are justified “with reference to the idea of equal citizenship” (Satz 2007: 635). As she notes, “[w]e can derive, in general terms, the nature and content of educational adequacy from the requirements of full membership and inclusion in a democratic society of equal citizens” (Satz 2007: 636). This is a justification of education that differs fundamentally from the one presented by Brighouse and Swift. It is not the human good that justifies certain educational aims, but the principle of civic equality.

As Satz points out, this principle determines not only the aims, but also the level of education that should be reached by all students: Everyone should be educated up to a certain threshold level of achievement. As soon as we think of educational justice in terms of educational aims, it is natural to introduce the notion of a threshold that is set by these aims. You can reach a certain aim or fail to reach it. Consider the capacity to read literature: In the development of a person’s reading skills, there comes a point when he or she becomes able to read good books. This is the threshold that everyone should reach (if reading novels is valuable).

We should think of the threshold level as a platform: Once a person has reached this platform, he or she has the opportunity to refine his or her capacities, especially by using them. For example, in terms of the capacity to participate in public debates, education enables students to acquire the basic capacities for discursive communication. By participating in the political discussions, they constantly improve their abilities in this field.

Let us turn back to the question of how educational aims can be justified. Satz, to be sure, does not work with the distinction between intrinsically and instrumentally
valuable aspects of education. Yet she makes it clear that functioning as an equal citizen requires more than a narrow form of training (Satz 2007: 637, 2012: 166). In what follows, I will focus on determining to what extent the civic account is apt to justify those aspects of education that go beyond the preparation of students for the labour market and the competition for social status.

I will also discuss whether the civic account should be preferred to justifications that rely on a notion of the human good. I will start by considering this latter type of justification and then return to the civic account.

Civic standing and the human good

What about justifying education or Bildung with reference to the good? It must first be noted that various types of education might be instrumentally valuable in promoting the good, such as by enabling persons to get an interesting job. However, apart from this, being educated is often conceived as non-instrumentally valuable. According to Brighouse and Swift, education is valuable because it introduces us into intrinsically valuable pursuits, which implies that the specific ideal of education might be justified by arguing for the intrinsic value of certain activities. Yet “bingo, bridge, and billiards” might also be conceived as intrinsically valuable pursuits that contribute to the quality of life. After all, games are usually played for their own sake.

According to Peters, games like bingo are not educational because they are not connected with knowledge, reasoning, and understanding. Stefaan Cuypers (2012) agrees with Peters on this point. He also shares Peters’ view that a hedonistic justification of education is not fully convincing (Cuypers 2012: 5). Instead of turning to a Kantian transcendentalist strategy, as Peters did, Cuypers proposes proceeding within a perfectionist framework: “Perfectionism is a type of objective list theory which maintains that, besides pleasure and desire-satisfaction, some excellences or ‘perfections’ […] are intrinsically valuable” (Cuypers 2012: 9). Thus, three elements are essential for the perfectionist approach: 1) objectivism, 2) a commitment to intrinsic value, and 3) the reference to excellences or perfections.

Cuypers’ justification of education is based on the claim that knowledge is an objectively and intrinsically valuable perfection: “[K]nowledge is intrinsically valuable, for it involves the exercise of cognitive abilities to some degree of excellence by some appropriate standard (which is minimally set by the demand for justification)” (Cuypers 2012: 11). In line with Peters, he assumes that being educated means to
Educational justice and the justification of education

possess (objectively and intrinsically valuable) knowledge. Against this backdrop, he claims that a justification of the value of knowledge can ground a justification of education.

As he points out, this line of argument is not committed to a narrow type of perfectionism that depends on a teleological account of human nature, but to a broad perfectionist view that is rooted in “everyday moral judgements” (Cuypers 2012: 12). As Cuypers claims, we intuitively endorse the view that someone who spends his time playing video-games—or the games mentioned by Peters—without caring for literature, history, science, or mathematics is far from living a life that is truly worthwhile.

The problem is, however, that this intuition is not generally shared. It is not only contested whether the education system should promote a reason-based type of education, it is even more controversial that adults’ flourishing essentially depends on reading good novels and doing mathematics. Many people conceive of their lives as worthwhile, although they do nothing of the kind.

Kirsten Meyer (2011) thinks that this problem is best addressed by refraining from an objectivist perfectionist justification of education. As she notes, perfectionist accounts of value are not only hard to justify, but are also likely to conflict with the liberal demand for state neutrality (Meyer 2011: 119). She agrees with Cuypers, however, that education can and should be justified with reference to the human good. Turning to a subjectivist conception of the good, she claims, helps to solve the problems just mentioned.

According to her view, certain activities (e.g., reading a good novel) can be intrinsically valuable because they enable us to make certain valuable experiences that cannot be reduced to mere pleasure (Meyer 2011: 103). While Meyer distinguishes her account from hedonism, she agrees that it resembles hedonism in an important point—value is tied to subjective experiences. In this sense, her account—as well as the hedonistic theory of value—can be considered as subjectivist (see also Cuypers 2012: 10). However, hedonism highlights pleasure as a good that is valuable independently of whether it is being valued. In fact, it is not generally agreed that pleasure is essential for the human good. In the same sense, it can be denied that the experiences provided by a good novel are worth having. Consider, for instance, a person who judges a religious life of work and prayer as more valuable than a life that contains diverse aesthetic experiences.
It is the objectivist strain in Meyer’s account that grounds its educational significance. Take the example of a student who considers playing video-games as more valuable than reading novels. According to a purely subjectivist account of value, we would have to assume that his subjective judgement expresses what is good for him. In this case, there would be no good reason to educate him. But if we assume—as Meyer does—that the initiation into the sphere of literature will provide him with opportunities for valuable experiences, there might be reason to educate him in this way.

Two questions must be distinguished, here. The first question is whether some sort of education (or Bildung) is valuable—in either a subjective or objective way. The second question concerns the sphere of political justification: is it legitimate for the liberal state to promote these forms of education, or to make them mandatory for all? Meyer states that since she endorses a subjectivist account of value, her justification of the value of education—that is, her answer to the first question—can be used to address the second question. She claims that her justification of education does not violate the basic principles of liberal thought—especially the principle of neutrality—and can therefore ground a political demand for Bildung. I think, by contrast, that her account of the value of education expresses a particular conception of the good that cannot be expected to be generally endorsed, in the process of political justification.

In Rawlsian terms, it can be said that political principles must be acceptable in the light of “public reason”, that is, they cannot be justified with reference to a controversial conception of the good (Rawls 1993). So, Bildung—as a contested educational ideal—cannot be justified with reference to a conception of the good that is itself contested. Consequently, it seems illegitimate for the state to promote Bildung, and to make young people engage in cultural activities they do not themselves value.

It might be doubted, however, whether this line of argument can be applied to (non-autonomous) children and adolescents. First, these persons are not in a position to participate in a reasonable public discourse, and to give a qualified form of consent to coercive political arrangements. Second, it seems that non-autonomous persons are not morally violated by forms of education that are justified on perfectionist grounds. It is clear that forcing adults to read good novels would have to be considered as a lack of respect for their conception of the good. The demand for liberal neutrality might be linked to the principle of respect: if the state promotes one particular perfectionist conception of the good, this can be seen as a form of disrespect towards those
Educational justice and the justification of education

who hold alternative views (Nussbaum 2011). This line of thought, however, does not apply to persons who have not yet developed a conception of the good that is fully their own.

Two kinds of responses can be made to this objection. The first possible response points that children's parents might object to perfectionist forms of education. But is it plausible that refraining from perfectionist education is owed only to the parents, but not to the children themselves? Alternatively, the idea of the hypothetical or future (reasonable) consent of the children might be introduced. According to this idea, educational measures have to be reasonably acceptable to the children themselves. We can ask, then, whether children have reason to consent to forms of education that are justified with reference to a contested conception of the good. If we rely on Rawls's notion of public reason, we must assume that persons can reasonably disagree on matters of the good. So, we cannot expect children to reasonably agree with this sort of education (see also Clayton 2006). It might be concluded from this that the children themselves are wronged if the liberal state commits them to a perfectionist form of Bildung.

Let us turn to the second type of justification mentioned earlier: justification based on the idea of equal citizenship. According to Satz, “citizenship requires a threshold level of knowledge and competence for exercising its associated rights and freedoms—liberty of speech and expression, liberty of conscience, and the right to serve as a jury, vote, and participate in politics and in the economy” (Satz 2007: 636). To participate in politics, persons need the capacity to think critically about public issues. Such civic education clearly requires more than training. However, Satz refers mainly to the public activities of citizens. It is not clear whether her account involves the initiation of students into practices such as literature and art. Moreover, nothing is said about the capacity for autonomy in personal matters. Traditionally, Bildung has often been linked to the capacity for personal autonomy.

Satz's conception of citizenship comes close to Rawls' notion of political autonomy. As Rawls states in his Political Liberalism, children should be educated for political autonomy, but not for ethical autonomy. He conceives of ethical autonomy as a core feature of a liberal conception of the good that—according to his view—should not be privileged in the education system of the liberal state. The civic account promoted by Satz seems to be compatible with a Rawlsian political liberalism; it does not presuppose a particular conception of the good, but is based on the normative idea of
equal civic standing. This idea is widely recognized as fundamental to the liberal democratic order, which is why it seems promising to take it as the basis for the justification of education. However, it is dubious whether all the relevant aspects of education can be justified in this way. Should we accept the view that certain educational aims can only be justified in perfectionist terms? I think that there is room to enrich the civic conception of education:

One reason for initiating students into cultural practices such as literature or art is that future citizens should be enabled to feel at home in the cultural world in which they live. This is a precondition for conceiving oneself as a fully fledged member of the political community. Thus, everyone should get an idea of what a novel is and what it means to read a novel. Yet this does not mean that everyone should see the reading of novels as an essential part of his good life.

Imagine that you come to live in a cultural community that is radically different from the one in which you grew up. If you want to belong to that community, you will first have to learn the language of this cultural group and the various codes of behaviour that guide its members in their everyday lives. In addition, it will be necessary for you to acquire a fundamental understanding of the more sophisticated cultural practices of this community, such as drama, songs, religious worship, and philosophy.

A second point is highlighted by Martha Nussbaum in her writings on education. Nussbaum thinks that schools should foster what she calls “the narrative imagination”: “This means the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person’s story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have” (Nussbaum 2010: 96–7). According to Nussbaum, initiating students into literature and art can help foster the development of this ability that she sees as essential for democratic citizenship. Citizens should be enabled to develop understanding and sympathy for others and show genuine concern and respect for them. According to this approach, becoming acquainted with literature and art is an important aspect of people’s moral and political development.12

Nussbaum’s point refers exclusively to individuals’ role as citizens. In line with Rawls, she thinks that the justification of personal autonomy as an educational aim would have to rely on a perfectionist form of liberalism—that is, a liberal account that is grounded on a controversial conception of the good (Nussbaum 2011: 36). I think, by contrast, that an education for some sort of personal autonomy can be justified in non-perfectionist terms—namely, as an aspect of equal citizenship. My argu-
Educational justice and the justification of education

Educational justice relies on the notion of autonomy as the capacity to act in accordance with one’s own—or authentic—views. Educating children for autonomy means, among other things, enabling them to develop views of their own. My basic idea is that an education that undermines the development of autonomy and authenticity is likely to keep children in a subordinate status. Children will then be unable to emancipate themselves from their parents’ influence and become independent citizens. But how can the development of authentic attitudes be ensured?

First of all, parents must refrain from indoctrination and other manipulatory forms of education. Second, it seems important to foster children’s capacity for critical self-reflection. Adults, to be sure, can lead authentic lives without constantly reflecting on their basic values. The case of children, however, is special. Even if children are not intentionally manipulated, they constantly take up attitudes from their social environment in a rationally uncontrolled way. Fostering their reflective capacities enables them to critically evaluate the values or beliefs they have already adopted, or are in the course of adopting.

The notion of autonomy presupposed in this line of thought is to be distinguished from both an ideal of individual self-realization and a rationalist understanding of autonomy. It expresses the idea that persons should be enabled to autonomously choose a conception of the good, but is compatible with conceptions of the good that do not highlight the values of individuality or autonomy. Moreover, persons might autonomously rely on values and beliefs that cannot be rationally justified to everyone. It is possible, I think, to critically reflect on one’s values without applying strict rational or scientific standards to them.

I take it, then, that autonomy with regards to personal matters is constitutive for equal citizenship. This leads me to a final point: Being autonomous with regard to the personal life presupposes that a person is aware of different options of the good. Thus, the individual should be informed about various religious and ethical views. Moreover, he or she should come to know that activities such as reading novels might contribute to the quality of life. Consider, for instance, a working-class child whose parents do not read novels and who has no access to good books. Were we to stop teaching literature in public schools, this child might never even get in touch with good books and never have the opportunity to start caring for them. This argument is perfectionist in the sense that it is grounded in considerations about the good. However, I think that it is compatible with political liberal ideas because it does not presuppose that a life without literature, art, or philosophy is not worth living. Initi-
Johannes Giesinger

Introducing students into certain cultural and intellectual practices with which they might otherwise not become acquainted expands children’s future opportunities for choice.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I made three related claims. My basic claim is that the issue of distributive educational justice is related to the problem of the justification of education. It is not enough to determine patterns of distribution; which kind of education is to be distributed must also be clarified. It is pointless to provide everyone with a fair share of something that has no value. Considerations about the value of education as well as certain educational aims should be seen as an integral part of an account of educational justice. I would say that an education system should not be considered as just if it promotes the wrong type of capacities or forms of knowledge.

My second claim is that focusing on educational aims has consequences for the problem of distribution. For instance, if we hold that all students should become autonomous, our primary concern must be that everyone has an effective opportunity to develop the relevant capacities. Yet further considerations must be made to ensure fairness in social competitions.

My third claim is that the justification of education should start from the normative idea of equal civic standing. The question is then what kinds of capacities are tied to the status of citizenship. I think that a broad conception of civic education should lie at the heart of an account of educational justice.

1 See also Constantin Stroop’s considerations on the notion of an educational opportunity (in this volume).

2 In this essay, I neither provide a clear-cut account of Bildung (or education), nor a discussion of what it means that Bildung is “intrinsically valuable” (on this latter issue, see also Peters’ work on liberal education: Peters 1977a, 1977b). I work with a rough notion of Bildung as a sort of education that goes beyond forms of training that prepare students for the labour market and for the competition for social rewards.

3 In contrast, Wilhelm von Humboldt’s notion of Bildung focuses on the ideal of individual self-realization (see Humboldt 1792: 69). Thomas Schramme’s account of education (in this volume) might be read in Humboldtian terms.

4 One way to deal with this uneasiness is to complement the meritocratic principle with an additional principle. Rawls, for instance, introduces the difference principle at this point. Not notes that this principle ‘gives some weight to the considerations singled out by the principle of redress’ (Rawls 1971: p. 100). The principle of redress states that all undeserved inequalities – including inequalities of endowment – ‘call for redress’ (ibid.).
This problem must be further discussed. My idea is that a principle of fair competition should complement the principle of adequacy that is developed in the remainder of this essay. I am sceptical about Satz’ attempt (in this volume) to transform Rawls’ principle of fair equality of opportunity (that is, his principle of fair competition for social rewards) into a principle of adequacy. This strategy does not give appropriate consideration to fair competition as a distinct problem of educational justice.

This view is expressed in Randall Curren’s Aristotelian account of educational justice (in this volume).

Interestingly, Randall Curren (in this volume) seems to assume that his form of eudaimonism is compatible with liberal principles. Curren endorses a Kantian notion of equal respect and combines it with Aristotelian considerations. In a first step, he provides a justification for liberal education that does not rely on eudaimonism, but on a Kantian principle of respect (Curren, this volume, Ch. 5: p. 83–84). In the second part of his essay, he justifies liberal education with regard to the human good.

It might be objected, however, that the civic account justifies education not in its intrinsic value, but as instrumentally valuable with regards to civic demands. But I would say that the relevant capacities or attitudes should not be seen as a means for the realization of full citizenship, but as constitutive for it.

The account that Satz presents in this volume focuses too on the public role of citizens. Satz claims the state should provide all persons with “a threshold of knowledge and competence for public responsibilities” (Satz, this volume: Ch. 2, p. 46). Furthermore, she points to the importance of the “capacities for empathy, self-respect, imagination and reciprocity” and mentions the relevance of “mutual understanding, mutual respect, and tolerance” (Satz, this volume: Ch. 2, p. 46). Satz thinks that egalitarian civic relationships can only be established and maintained by persons who possess these capacities or virtues.

In the passages, where Rawls makes his statement on education (Rawls 1993: 199), he implicitly refers to a previously made distinction between political and ethical autonomy (Rawls: 77–8), but does not mention the terms. It should also be noted that Rawls’s Political Liberalism provides the theoretical resources to justify personal autonomy as an educational aim. Rawls (1993.: 19) states that the normative equality of citizens depends on their having “two moral powers”. The second of these powers—a capacity for a conception of the good”—might be described as a form of personal autonomy. Rawls explains: “The capacity for a conception of the good is the capacity to form, to revise, and rationally pursue a conception of one’s rational advantage or good” (Rawls 1993: 19).

Rawls’s considerations are directed against the “liberalisms of Kant and Mill” (Rawls 1993: 199). It is clear that Rawls could also have mentioned Humboldt’s liberalism—that is grounded on an ideal of Bildung as individual self-realization.

In an interview with the Swiss national radio (DRS 2, February 3, 2012), Nussbaum was asked whether she would consider her account of education as a conception of Bildung. She replied: „We're
using *Bildung* without feeling entirely satisfied by that because it has a kind of traditionalistic implication that I don’t really want ..."

I cannot provide a thorough discussion of this problem, here (see e.g. Cuypers 2009; or Noggle 2005).

Nussbaum writes that “teachers in public schools should not say that argument is better than faith as a general way of solving all problems in life. To say that is to denigrate students who are members of nonrationalist religions. They may certainly say that in contexts where citizens of many different views debate about fundamental matters, rational argument is crucial. They may also commend it as part and parcel of a particular enterprise, such as scientific proof. But they should not say, ‘Live your life by reason and not by faith’” (Nussbaum 2011: 39). I agree with this, but according to my view, this is compatible with fostering students’ self-reflective capacities. Nussbaum seems to think that children should be educated to critically think about public issues, but not about personal life problems. However, she notes that “real freedom to live according to one’s own view also requires protecting [...] the spaces in which children learn about options so that they can really live their own lives. That sort of thing Rawls calls ‘political autonomy’” (Nussbaum 2011: 36). This view, it seems to me, comes close to the view defended in this essay—autonomous citizenship involves the capacity to live one’s own life.

References


Educational justice and the justification of education


