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## **Teacher Neutrality – Liberal, Democratic, Epistemic**

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### **Introduction**

There is a wide-spread view that teachers – at least in public schools – should stay ‘neutral’ with regards to certain issues. According to common views in this field, it is not strict neutrality that is required, but neutrality regarding certain spheres or issues. It is mostly assumed, then, that there is a set of issues on which teachers can legitimately take a stand – or maybe should take a stand.

In this essay, I proceed with a concept of teacher neutrality that is open for a variety of different interpretations, referring to all kinds of possible controversies occurring in our societies. This means that I do not restrict the usage of the term to the sphere that is traditionally addressed in the debate on the neutrality of the (liberal) state: Here, the concept mainly refers to ethical and religious issues. An influential interpretation of political neutrality in current political philosophy is that for the state to be neutral means that political measures should not be *justified* with reference to (contested) ethical or religious doctrines. This view can be expressed using John Rawls’ notion of ‘public reason’: A justification of political measures in the medium of public reason refrains from referring to controversial doctrines, thereby potentially enabling a consensus, at least among those who satisfy some basic standard of ‘reasonableness’ (Rawls, 1993).<sup>1</sup>

While this or a similar notion of political neutrality is to be considered in the discussion of teacher neutrality, I do not intend to *derive* an account of teacher neutrality from a general theory of liberal neutrality.<sup>2</sup> Rather, I look directly at the role of teachers, and the question of whether they should transmit certain views as the correct ones. I present two different accounts of teacher neutrality that I find

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<sup>1</sup> While Rawls himself does not use the concept of neutrality in his *Political Liberalism* (1993), philosophers proceeding within a broadly Rawlsian framework have sometimes adopted the term. For instance, Gina Schouten (2019) writes: “The *neutrality constraint on liberal legitimacy* holds that the legitimacy of a particular intervention depends on that intervention being justifiable by way of reasons that are neutral among different conceptions of value” (p. 11). Here, then, the notion of neutrality is closely linked to the concept of political legitimacy.

<sup>2</sup> One version of a ‘derivative’ account of teacher neutrality is presented by Matthew Clayton (2018, p. 332): Teachers in public schools should be neutral because taxpayers cannot be expected to fund schools that support controversial ethical or religious aims.

both plausible – a ‘liberal’ and a ‘democratic’ account –, and I relate this discussion to Michael Hand’s considerations on what he calls the ‘epistemic criterion’ (Hand, 2008).

In his work, Hand provides an answer to the question of which issues should be presented as controversial, in school, and which should be taught in a ‘directive’ way. To teach an issue *directively* means, in Hand’s usage of the term, to endorse one of two or more conflicting views and to try to persuade students that this is the right view. This can happen through direct communication or indirectly, e.g., by asking questions or presenting materials in a certain manner. The alternative to directive teaching is to remain neutral, and to allow for – or to encourage – a controversial debate on an issue in the classroom. According to the epistemic criterion, as Hand understands it, teachers should remain neutral or ‘impartial’, when different views “enjoy the support of corroborating evidence and credible arguments”. Hand adds that “[w]here only one view enjoys such support, teachers can and should endorse it” (Hand 2008, p. 217). This is the core idea of the epistemic criterion that is tied to some notion of ‘epistemic neutrality’ – a term not used by Hand himself.<sup>3</sup>

Hand does not situate his approach within a political framework. He seems to assume that the relevant questions in this field can be answered without reference to liberal or democratic principles. It should be noted, however, that his justification of the epistemic criterion goes beyond purely epistemic considerations, as it highlights the notion of human flourishing and specifically the value of rationality. Before I discuss his account more closely, I outline what I characterize as the liberal and the democratic approach to teacher neutrality – and I also ask how these approaches relate to epistemic concerns. The question is whether – and in which way – these accounts are compatible with the epistemic criterion. Another question is whether the epistemic approach can by itself provide a satisfying account of teacher neutrality. My claim in this essay is that this is not the case. I hold that a plausible understanding of teacher neutrality cannot do without including liberal democratic considerations.

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<sup>3</sup> My considerations here focus on the question of whether some views should be *directively* transmitted – not whether teachers should *disclose* their own views. In contrast to Bruce Maxwell (2023), I do not distinguish ‘neutrality’ from ‘impartiality’, but use both terms more or less interchangeably. Maxwell – following Thomas Kelly – uses the concept of neutrality for teachers who do “not disclose their own viewpoint on a controversial issue to students” (p. 611). ‘Partiality’ – by contrast – is equated with directive teaching, within this framework.

### **The liberal account**

The liberal account – as I present it here – starts from some notion of respect for persons' views and values. The demand for respect can either refer to already developed or to developing views. In the context of the debate on teacher neutrality, the main concern is not that students are directly brought to *act* in ways contrary to their values, but that their views are marked as wrong or unreasonable in class, or that students are unduly influenced in the development of their views.

One version of the liberal approach is expressed in Martha Nussbaum's account of (Rawlsian) political liberalism. Nussbaum (2011) states 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" (p. 39). People should not be denigrated, Nussbaum says, for believing in astrology, crystals, or the Christian doctrine of Trinity, and she adds: "Why not let them, and their beliefs, alone?" (p. 28).

While publicly justifiable principles – such as the principle of respect – are legitimately transmitted, in schools, according to the political liberal approach, teachers should remain neutral with regards to contested ethical or religious views. In Nussbaum's account, this also means that they should refrain from *epistemically* evaluating students' views and from directly promoting those views that seem to be in accordance with epistemic standards. Nussbaum refers to Rawls's concept of reasonableness to clarify her view: The term is used to demarcate which persons ('reasonable persons') can be part of the liberal project, and which views (or 'comprehensive doctrines') are acceptable within this framework. Rawls (1993, p. 59) himself only sets minimal epistemic standards (of consistency and coherence) for the reasonableness of persons' comprehensive doctrines, Nussbaum goes one step further, claiming that reasonableness is to be defined in purely moral terms – persons' views count as reasonable if they are compatible with the principle of respect. This account of teacher neutrality, then, seems to collide with the demands of the epistemic criterion, as outlined by Hand, at least to the extent that this criterion refers to ethical and religious views: Political liberals might agree that as far as public or political issues are concerned, it is appropriate to apply epistemic standards, not however, if people's 'personal' or 'private' beliefs are at stake.

Starting from the notion of respect, it should be asked whether acting in accordance with the epistemic criterion in the classroom should really be characterized as denigrating or disrespectful. Here, we might distinguish different ways of bringing in epistemic concerns. To say "that argument is better than faith" means, as Nussbaum suggests, to

promote a specific (rationalist, liberal) conception of the good – a ‘perfectionist’ ideal that cannot be expected to be endorsed by all reasonable people. While this kind of general statement might indeed be considered as problematic and maybe disrespectful, there are other ways of invoking epistemic concerns, first, by making specific substantive assertions that might contradict some aspect of religious belief, or second, by highlighting procedural epistemic standards.

For someone who believes in astrology, it is not necessarily denigrating to be confronted with evidence that speaks against his or her beliefs. Also, it is not disrespectful to teach those who have grown up in a Christian environment that some aspects of the Biblical tradition are confirmed by historical research, while others are not. So, bringing in epistemic concerns seems at least *compatible* with the principle of respect, if students’ views or form of live are not actively denigrated.

It might be argued, in addition, that teachers *should* put forward epistemic considerations in order to enable students to critically evaluate the values and beliefs they have uncritically taken up during their upbringing. The aim here is to support them in developing their ‘own’ beliefs, potentially in contrast to what they were taught by their parents.<sup>4</sup>

Nussbaum’s view that students’ ethical or religious convictions should be immunized from rational scrutiny is even less plausible when not students’ already developed views, but their developing views come into focus: When a person does not yet have views that count as ‘her own’, she cannot be denigrated in her views by highlighting epistemic demands. Rather, being introduced into epistemic practices might help her develop her own perspective. She might ultimately still choose a life of faith, but be aware which of her beliefs are backed by evidence. While it can be argued, then, that employing some version of the epistemic criterion is not denigrating to students, there might still be moral limits as to how young people are to be influenced in the development of their views and values.

In this vein, Matthew Clayton (2012, see also Clayton, 2006) – who considers his argument as anti-perfectionist – has put forward what he calls ‘the independence view’, mainly referring to parental education: “A person’s independence is violated when others decide which ends she should pursue or serve. When others force her to pursue a particular goal or manipulate her into wanting to pursue it, they treat her as a vehicle for the realisation of their ambitions” (Clayton, 2012, p. 360). According to Clayton, initiating children into religious practices is a way

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<sup>4</sup> The issue of teacher neutrality is sometimes considered as a problem of parental rights: Teachers should remain neutral in order not to interfere with parents’ education. I do not discuss this view here.

of setting ends for them in a field which is highly controversial. Clayton uses the Rawlsian notion of public reason, arguing that children – if we imagine them as reasonable – might consent to basic moral or political principles, but not to contested religious or ethical views. We can assume that they will someday endorse *some* set of contested views, but we cannot know which. Transmitting these kinds of views is therefore illegitimate, in Clayton’s perspective, while some forms of moral and political education are justified.

Clayton’s view on parental education is highly controversial. His main line of argument might be more widely acceptable when it is transposed into the realm of public education: Teachers should not directly transmit contested views on the human good, in order not to intrude on students’ individual development, by setting ends on their behalf. Instead, it might be argued, students should be enabled to develop their own views on reasonably contested issues and set their own ends. As suggested, this can entail introducing them into epistemic standards, or presenting some issues as epistemically settled.

The two approaches just outlined – Nussbaum’s and Clayton’s – proceed within a political liberal framework and are connected to a notion of liberal neutrality. As I would like to suggest, the respect-based justification of teacher neutrality is not restricted to this kind of model: For one, it might refer to all kinds of contested issues, not only to people’s ‘private’ or ‘personal’ beliefs on ethical or religious questions, but also their political views. Moreover, I assume that it is possible to develop a liberal perfectionist account of teacher neutrality referring to the demand for respect. Liberal perfectionism is not neutral with regards to competing conceptions of the good as it privileges a liberal account of human flourishing highlighting values such as rationality, autonomy, or individuality. Values of this kind, however, leave room for a variety of forms of life and conceptions of the good, and it might be demanded, against this backdrop, that teachers should stay neutral with regards to those conceptions of the good that are compatible with liberal values.

### **The democratic account**

The core idea of what I call the democratic account of teacher neutrality is that teachers should remain neutral – at least regarding certain issues – in order not to condition the outcome of the democratic process.<sup>5</sup> If teachers or the public school system as a whole were allowed

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<sup>5</sup> This basic idea is also expressed in a paper by Harry Brighouse which amounts to a critique of civic education: “Civic education is problematic because legitimacy deprives governments of the authority to condition the consent of future citizens” (Brighouse, 1998, p. 734).

to inculcate certain political and other values in students, political decision-making could be manipulated. In particular, governments representing a political majority view – that is, not a view acceptable to all – could influence the educational process in their own favour, thereby strengthening their grip on power. This is what authoritarian governments tend to do, but in liberal democracies, citizens should be put in a position to freely participate in the political process, expressing their own views and values. The democratic account differs from the liberal approach in that it is not ‘student-centred’, but ‘public centred’ (Schouten, 2018): In the liberal framework, the focus is on the possible wrong done to individual students when they are unduly influenced, be it regarding personal or political issues. The democratic account, by contrast, is grounded in the public interest in sustaining democracy. It is mostly concerned with publicly relevant issues – religious or ethical controversies might be relevant to the extent that they impact political decisions.

The core idea of the democratic account is best elucidated with reference to the concept of political legitimacy. This concept is used in current political philosophy to address the problem of how political power is to be exercised in the face of deep-rooted disagreement: How are political decisions to be taken in order to ensure that their enforcement can count as legitimate? Democratic thought provides a specific scheme of political legitimacy: Political decisions are legitimate to the extent that they are rooted in democratic practices and procedures (Peter, 2009). It is common to understand democratic legitimacy in purely procedural terms. Alternatively, legitimacy might be tied to the quality of the outcomes of the democratic process, especially their epistemic quality. The question is, then, whether the outcomes are correct or just. This understanding of legitimacy seems problematic as it presupposes an objective – in the sense of procedure-independent – standard of correctness.<sup>6</sup> In Rawlsian terms, we might say that even if there is an objective standard of correctness or justice, it remains ‘reasonably contested’ what this standard is: Reasonable people might disagree in this field, e.g., due to their differing life experiences and position in life. The procedural account of democratic legitimacy might be spelled out in moral and/or epistemic terms. For one, defining legitimate procedures leads to basic moral principles that ground the decision-making process, especially some principle of equality, or equal participation. In this sense, the procedural conception of legitimacy incorporates substantive values or principles. The principle of equality – as applied to this

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<sup>6</sup> David Estlund (2008) provides a critique of this kind of view. Estlund himself argues for a conception he characterizes as epistemic proceduralism.

context – might be understood in a narrow sense, expressing the requirement of equal voting rights, or in a highly demanding way that includes economic or social equality. In this latter sense, it might be argued that significant economic inequalities tend to hinder the socially disadvantaged from effectively participating in the political process despite their formal right to do so. Education plays a special role in this context: It seems clear that effective participation requires some sort of knowledge and competence which can be acquired through education. Education is in this sense among the conditions of democratic legitimacy, or at least instrumental to the realization of these conditions: Only if individuals are appropriately educated can they be expected to function as equals in the democratic process. If this is acknowledged, further questions regarding education arise: What should the aims of a ‘legitimacy-oriented’ education be, that is, which kinds of knowledge, competence or attitudes should students acquire? Which level in the development of relevant capacities should they reach? Which educational inequalities are acceptable in this context? One way to address these issues is to determine a threshold level of education that seems ‘adequate’ with regards to the aim of ensuring democratic legitimacy.<sup>7</sup> A minimalist account of education would set a low threshold and focus on certain basic competencies that are necessary to process politically relevant information appropriately. However, the bar might be put much higher: A more demanding and potentially more controversial conception of education could include a broad range of knowledge as well as capacities for critical reflection and the participation in deliberative practices.

In this way, considerations on the moral grounds of a procedural account of legitimacy lead to educational questions that include epistemic aspects. Apart from that, it makes sense to directly focus on the epistemic quality of democratic procedures, especially procedures of public deliberation. So-called deliberative accounts of democracy are characterized by a conception of legitimacy that puts deliberative practices front and centre: Legitimacy is sustained through the constant exchange of reasons that potentially leads to the modification of some individuals’ views. To the extent that these practices of deliberation are “well-ordered” and conform to certain “epistemic norms”, as Fabienne Peter (2021, p. 395) puts it, they can be said to exhibit epistemic quality. This quality lies in the procedures themselves, and might also show in the outcomes of the democratic process. Education seems necessary to

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<sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Anderson (2007) and Debra Satz (2007) both present accounts of ‘adequacy’ (or ‘sufficiency’) in education that are linked to the requirements of democracy, but without highlighting the notion of democratic legitimacy. Their accounts are framed as contributions to the debate on educational justice.

enable individuals to make contributions to the public discourse in accordance with the epistemic norms guiding it. This sets a high bar for a legitimacy-oriented education: Basic competence does not seem to be enough, rather, citizens need deliberative capacities and wide-ranging knowledge.

How, then, can teacher neutrality be understood against this background? The basic idea is that decisions on where to stay neutral should be taken with reference to the aim of establishing or sustaining legitimacy: The question is, then, which views should be transmitted directly to make democratic procedures legitimate, and which forms of directive education would undermine legitimacy. The problem is that the conditions of legitimacy themselves remain controversial: According to a 'dynamic' understanding of democratic legitimacy, these conditions can themselves be subject to democratic deliberation (Gutmann & Thompson, 2004). Still, there are some basic aspects of legitimacy, such as the demand for equal respect, that can be assumed to be part of every reasonable account of liberal or democratic legitimacy. It is clear, then, that teachers should transmit a principle of respect, and directly oppose racist or sexist views, and other forms of disrespect for persons. It is less obvious what role epistemic considerations should play in a legitimacy-oriented education. As proposed, students' initiation into epistemic practices is essential within the framework of deliberative democracy. Other accounts of democratic legitimacy put less weight on deliberative processes. It might be argued that in order to be able to vote, it is not necessary to possess highly-developed deliberative capacities. However, even those who do not consider such capacities especially relevant should acknowledge that promoting them is not detrimental to legitimacy: Introducing young people into deliberative practices – and the corresponding epistemic norms – is at least compatible with the aim of ensuring democratic legitimacy. There is then no need for teachers to remain neutral on these norms, at least to the extent that publicly relevant issues are at stake. Teachers might also – in line with Hand's epistemic criterion – make substantive assertions on issues that are epistemically settled.

Teachers should be neutral, however, on contested ethical, religious or political views that do not make part of the normative core of democratic legitimacy. The reason is that democratic decisions can only count as legitimate if they are the result of an open process, in which all citizens can freely participate. If these decisions were predetermined by education, their legitimacy would be undermined.

### **The epistemic account**

Both the liberal and the democratic account provide a *justification* for teacher neutrality. Each justificatory framework raises the question of



the *scope* of the issues on which teachers should not take a stand. I have argued that both frameworks might be interpreted in ways that allow or require teachers to introduce epistemic concerns: Some version of the epistemic criterion might be justifiable within the liberal and democratic account or is at least compatible with their guiding principles.

Before I address Hand's own justification of the epistemic criterion, I look at how this criterion might be understood. It seems natural to define it referring to the concept of knowledge – in its classical understanding as 'justified true belief'. Alternatively, we might highlight the concept of truth alone and state that teachers should directly transmit what is objectively true. It is not fully clear to me whether Hand would support either the knowledge or the truth condition. As I read his account, he is focussing on the notion of justification: Those views that are justified by evidence and arguments – while there are no relevant reasons speaking against them – can and should be taught directly. A more modest version of the justification-based account would allow those assertions to be transmitted for which good reasons exist, despite their being relevant counter-arguments. This would widen the scope of the epistemic criterion, compared to Hand's approach.

Both the knowledge and the truth condition set the bar for what is to be transmitted in schools very high. In many areas, we do not have knowledge in the strict sense, or at least we do not agree on what the truth is. For instance, while there are good reasons to believe that our climate is changing, and that human behaviour is at least one of the causes for it, some of the assumptions now made by scientists in this field will eventually turn out to be false – we do not really 'know' what will happen in the next years although we have sufficient evidence to take decisive action now. The same problem seems to apply to Hand's justification-based approach: Should teachers treat scientific issues as controversial, as long as at least some counter-evidence is available? It should be noted that Hand's primary interest lies in the field of morality, not science: He assumes that at least some moral rules are justifiable in a way that leaves no room for doubt.

Let us now look at how the epistemic criterion might be *justified*. I would like to distinguish a 'direct' epistemic justification for the criterion from a 'rationality-oriented' justification. Hand ties this latter kind of approach to a perfectionist justification as he considers rationality as a core aspect of human flourishing. This perfectionist account is not neutral with regards to varying conceptions of the good, and for this reason invites objections. However, I assume that it might be possible to justify rationality as an educational aim in non-

perfectionist terms, e.g., by referring to the requirements of democratic deliberation.

In what follows, I restrict my attention to the direct and the rationality-oriented justification. According to the former, an assertion can and should be directly taught simply by virtue of its epistemic qualities, that is, by its being well-justified (or true). What could be wrong about uttering an assertion supported by evidence and arguments? In everyday discussion or public deliberation, we are certainly in a good epistemic position if we can justify what we say. However, in these contexts, it seems perfectly fine to put forward assertions that are not strictly speaking settled, that is, for which valid counter-arguments are available. In political debates, people try to persuade others from positions that can be considered as reasonably controversial. This would correspond to a modest version of the justification-based reading of the epistemic criterion. So, if this criterion is appropriate for contributions to public discourse, why should it not also apply to teaching?

The question is whether the classroom situation is relevantly different from the practice of public deliberation. One way to characterize the difference between the two is by pointing out that public discourse is – at least ideally – symmetrically structured, with all participants having the same status and rights to participate. The teaching situation, by contrast, has an asymmetric structure: Teachers and students have a different role or ‘status’, that is, they differ in their rights and duties. For instance, teachers are usually ascribed the right to discipline their students, and to evaluate their performances. This puts them in a special position to influence their students in the development of their views. As I would like to argue, this social constellation raises specific justificatory problems that go beyond the question of what counts as an epistemically valid contribution to the public discourse.

Hand seems to reject this view: He characterizes the practice of teaching – at least if it goes along with providing reasons for what is transmitted – as “non-authoritative” and explains that it is “an exercise in the giving of advice and the promulgating of information, not an exercise in the issuing and enforcing of commands” (Hand, 2008, p. 224). Therefore, Hand says, it does not require the kind of justification that is demanded for coercive state action: The political question of which measures can legitimately be enforced does not apply to education. This also means that the liberal distinction between the public and the private is not to be considered in this context: “[T]he purpose of the distinction between public and private values is precisely to delimit the legitimate scope of authoritative interventions by the state. The distinction is therefore strictly irrelevant to the task of determining the proper content of directive moral education” (Hand 2009, 224).

While reason-based teaching is not ‘coercive’, however, it might be characterized as ‘authoritative’ in the sense that teachers – due to their special status – tend to be recognized as epistemic authorities. In my view, the liberal question as to how students can legitimately be influenced should be taken seriously. Hand by contrast seems to deny that the liberal account has any bearing in this context: Teaching in accordance with the epistemic criterion does not raise the issue of respect for students’ developing views. Alternatively, Hand’s view might be interpreted as saying that the epistemic account has already solved the liberal problem of respect: It might be argued that to respect students simply means to proceed in a reason-based manner – instead of bypassing their reason, for instance, by indoctrinating them.

One problem that Hand needs to address is how students with non-rational ‘private’ views – those who believe in astrology, crystals, or the Trinity – should be treated. In liberal terms, it seems clear that persons are entitled to this kind of beliefs – as I have argued, however, highlighting epistemic standards in the classroom is not necessarily denigrating to religious students. Hand can be interpreted as avoiding this problem by referring to the (Rawlsian) notion of ‘reasonable disagreement’. He writes in his *Theory of Moral Education*: “Human beings, exercising their powers of reason in the absence of coercion, will come to different conclusions on matters of morality because the relevant evidence and argument is subject to more than one plausible interpretation. The Rawlsian worry is that this casts doubt on the possibility of a just and stable society of free and equal citizens; my interest here is in the doubt it casts on the possibility of a defensible form of moral education” (Hand 2018, S. 5).

Hand attempts to transpose the idea of reasonable disagreement from the political to the moral sphere: While reasonable people – according to both Rawls and Hand – will disagree on many things, there is a realm where dissent cannot be considered as reasonable. Hand pursues some notion of objective moral correctness, while the public reason standard employed in the Rawlsian framework is agnostic on whether those rules that are justifiable to reasonable people are grounded in objective reasons. Despite this difference, it might be assumed that the scope of Hand’s epistemic criterion is more or less identical to the scope of a political liberal account.

Here, however, I would like to come back to the modest interpretation of the justification-based account: If reason-based teaching is considered as a way of giving advice, it is not clear why teachers should restrict themselves to issues that are epistemically settled: Why not provide reasons on an issue even if there are valid counter-arguments – that is, issues on which there is reasonable disagreement? In my view, we must resort to the liberal or democratic account to answer this question.

Let us now turn to the rationality-oriented justification of the epistemic criterion: Hand's central claim is that if teachers remain neutral or impartial regarding epistemically settled issues, this "cannot do other than convey to students the message that epistemic considerations are not decisive" (Hand, 2008, p. 218). In taking an epistemic stand – Hand argues – teachers highlight the importance of reasons in the formation of one's beliefs: "So if we are serious about promoting rationality, we must also be serious about teaching students to judge candidates for belief against the evidence or arguments in their support" (ibid.). According to this line of thought, then, teaching on the basis of the epistemic criterion is an appropriate *means* to foster the development of rational capacities and attitudes: This amounts to a causal argument that can easily be disputed: It is not clear that rationality cannot be promoted without directly transmitting specific propositional assertions. Much of the debate on the epistemic criterion centres around this issue: For instance, Maughn Rollins Gregory (2014) argues that in order to promote rationality, teachers do not need to endorse certain substantive positions, but can focus on introducing students into epistemic procedures that lead them to make the right conclusions themselves. Gregory calls this "procedurally directive teaching" (2014, p. 637). Brian Warnick and D. Spencer Smith think that "soft directive teaching" is appropriate for promoting rationality: "This approach allows teachers to take a position and explain the reasons behind it, while also laying down markers of uncertainty and openness to challenge. Using this approach provides students with an example of how a reasonable person might come to a conclusion about a forced question even in the face of, say, conflicting evidence" (Warnick & Smith 2014: 244).

Against this background, it might also be argued that teaching in accordance with the modest version of the justification-based account does not necessarily undermine the promotion of rationality. If teachers defend their views referring to reasons – and maybe also point out possible counter-arguments – students will not come to believe that reasons do not matter in the formation of our views. Given Hand's rationality-oriented argument, it is not clear, then, why only those views that are epistemically settled should be directly transmitted.

### **Conclusion**

The liberal and democratic accounts provide an answer to the question of why teachers should be neutral. This entails an account on why they are not legitimised to influence their students in certain ways, even if they do so by providing reasons.

Hand's account, by contrast, does not entail a clear-cut justification of why teachers should remain neutral on issues that are not epistemically settled. His main claim is that they should *not* be neutral in cases where the reasons only point in one direction – in his view, this is mainly because being neutral in such cases undermines the promotion of rationality. As I have argued, it is not clear why extending the scope of directive teaching could harm the realization of this aim: Why for instance should teachers refrain from telling their students to vote only for political parties that are in favour of decisive action in the field of climate policy? There are certainly good reasons for taking this political stance – but obviously, reasonable people might have other political priorities.

Many would say that in public deliberation, we are free to take partisan positions on issues that are not epistemically settled. Also, if someone asks for advice as to which party she should vote for, we can certainly recommend the Green Party, and support our advice with evidence and arguments. As suggested, however, the educational constellation is special: Due to the asymmetrical structure of the situation, teachers are *de facto* in a good position to influence students in their developing religious, ethical or political views.

Why should they not be legitimised to use this position to promote particular views? In my eyes, the answer to this question cannot – or not exclusively – lie in epistemic considerations, but must rely on the liberal and/or democratic account. *First*, there is a demand to respect students in their developing views, allowing them and enabling them to form their own set of beliefs and values. *Second*, we must ensure a free and open democratic process that exhibits political legitimacy.

Both justificatory accounts might be spelled out in various ways, but it seems clear that they do not require strict neutrality: In liberal terms, at least some basic political principles (such as the demand for respect or tolerance) can and should be transmitted. The democratic account requires those principles to be directly taught that form the normative core of political legitimacy. As it happens, these kinds of principles are likely to count as epistemically settled, within Hand's account.

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