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Education at the Margins of the Political

Abstract:

This paper argues that the political can respond to that which exceeds it without reducing it to the same, and that public education is one of the most important places where this can happen. I present a rationale for public education to assist that which exceeds the political: singularity, solitude and difference. What I maintain is that the political must welcome this excess, especially through public education, or else it would not be possible to provide the educational context for that which might be of significance to individuals without having socio-political value.

Introduction

The political tends to be conceived of as the whole and its particulars: a state and its citizens. Public education is one of the ways in which the state accounts for its citizens by educating them in terms of the perceived good of the social whole. This perceived good is not simply that which is explicitly outlined in public education policy but also based on the ideological influences which the state perpetuates. The traits of neo-liberalism are perhaps those most common in contemporary public education, where socio-economic value becomes the dominant force directing state activity. A clear and convincing argument is presented for this as being our contemporary condition in Michael Peters' work, especially in "The new prudentialism in education: Actuarial rationality and the entrepreneurial self" (2005). This argument aside, existence exceeds the socio-political and there are aspects of all individuals and their relations which do too, however, the political, through public education, touches on that excess. Usually it touches on it through reducing it to its own logic, which means making existence determinable in terms of shared social value. The political frames the social

and manages it, even as the social influences the political (through elections, referenda, or even popular dissent or uprising). Through the frame of the political, individuals are only thought in terms of the aspects of their identity which are social. Aspects of an individual's identity or experience which are asocial or even anti-social are sometimes dangerously vulnerable to the forces of political and social expediency, manifested most clearly in public education systems, where all that is of value is that which can be used to help students find their place on, or climb, the social ladder. The location of this issue can be traced at least as far back as Rousseau's discussion of amour-propre and amour-de-soi in *Emile*, where 'the man accustomed to the ways of society is always outside himself and knows how to live only in the opinion of others. And it is, as it were, from their judgment alone that draws the sentiment of his own existence.' (Rousseau, 1987, 80-81). Public education presents a context where individuals are taught to judge their intelligence, their capacities, their motivations, and their goals through the opinion of others. The means for a conceptualisation of a self outside of socially valid exigencies are not explicitly supported or protected. Aspects of an individual's existence and experience which are not socially valuable are implicitly labelled as a waste product. Ironically then, those that 'fail' in the education system and are forced to live with that stigma might also be those most likely to preserve non-conformist aspects of their identity. What is often missing in public education and society more generally is encouragement and support to maintain interests and aspects of a self which are not socially 'valuable' or accepted, such as being alone, listening to or playing unpopular or 'unpalatable' music, engaging in 'unsavoury' hobbies, doing things you are bad at and that hold no 'future', or activities that might ordinarily be classified as disruptive.

I present a rationale for public education to assist that which exceeds the political: singularity. That is to say, aspects of individual experience which have no corresponding social value. Singularity is not the singularity of a 'person', it is the singularity of experiences which are not universalizable. What I maintain is that the political must welcome the singularities that exceed it,

especially through public education, or else it would not be possible to provide the educational context for that which might be of significance to individuals without having socio-political value. To be able to define the implications of this argument in terms of teaching practice, I also articulate a description of what I call the 'impartial educator', which is the educator who concerns him or herself with a singularly responsible form of education which exists outside of the usual 'partial' education directed towards helping the student achieve in terms of the socio-political. As such, the 'partial' take on special meaning in this paper (as it does in Arendt), whereby the partial is a *part* of the whole and the partial educator focuses on the aspects of an individual which directs itself towards the whole. Equally, the 'impartial' is that which is not directed towards the 'whole' or even considered to be part of any whole. The impartial educator directs themselves towards that which exists outside of social prescription and reproduction in educational contexts. Being an impartial educator does not preclude one from also being a partial educator, it is simply that the quality of impartiality allows the educator to teach on the margins of the political, instead of being confined within it.

The argument in this paper is at a distance from - and perhaps even quite contrary to - emancipatory or inclusive educational theories. Rather than attempting to free individuals from the chains of normative politics or include them in that politics regardless of their difference, an education at the *margins* of the political advocates for *leaving people alone*. This is of course not to say that public education should (or even could) abnegate its responsibility to educate individuals in the knowledge, skills and civic virtues relevant to historically contingent social realities - but it does mean that public education must be approached as much in terms of its limits as its content. The usual engagements with what is conceived of as the limits of public education tend to question or promote the validity of various authorities in requiring an education in subjects such as evolution and sex education, or the wearing or not wearing of the hijab or cross. These questions are beyond

the remit of this paper because, while they might seem to illustrate the 'limits' of the political in education, they are in fact key examples of where various political perspectives actually take hold of education and reduce it to their logic. It is, in fact, not a question of the limits of the political in education at all but rather one of what kind of political subjects are being constructed, or even 'reproduced'. In contrast, this paper advocates for a recognition and active intellectual defence of that which exceeds the political in education. This paper argues that, even if according to certain theoretical logic, we may always be subject to the political, political subjects are not all we are. For those readers who might welcome this claim with a shrug of the shoulders, or for those who might smile to themselves at its apparently tautological or platitudinous character, this paper is written especially for you.

Definitions are key to the arguments made in this paper. The argument is itself about definitions, especially the definition of the difference between the meaning and use of the terms 'singular' and 'particular' in political philosophy. Particularity defines an individual in terms of generality. The 'general' are the qualities and rights which apply to all particulars. The particular individual is understood only through their being a part of the 'whole' of the political. To be 'partial' in the context of the particular and the general would be to take a view that is in line with generality. Singularity defines an individual experience in terms of 'negative generality'. The negatively general are the aspects of an individual experience which are not reducible to particularity. The singular must be impartially understood as unique, which would also mean understanding that there are things about them that cannot be understood. To be impartial in the context of the singular and the negatively general would be to take a view that is opposed to or separate from generality. This is the view of the impartial educator.

I emphasise particularity in politically endorsed education because the very reason for its existence is, generally speaking, to educate the citizen for their good and the social good. The

rationale for public education is, unsurprisingly, founded on perpetuating the interests of the state. That is not to say that public education does not account for individuals but that it only does so in terms of their identity as a citizen, and therefore as a particular of the political whole. Even if, as is now the fashion, public education attends to different kinds of individuals and their variable skills and interests, it only ever does so in terms of an assignable value, which accredits their specificity in way that reduces it to generality. Thus, whatever an educational activity exhibits is always thought in terms of how it can be reduced to the logic of accreditation and social accommodation. This is, for good reason, seen as being beneficial to the student: their differences can be used to provide them with an award which presents their individuality as having a discernible social value.

Singularity, on the other hand, provides an unusual and productive way in which to think educational experience outside of social value while still being facilitated in the context of public education. The most explicit aspects of attention to singularity in education would – somewhat ironically – be in drawing attention the fact that the largest amount of the students’ public educational experience must treat them as a particular. That is to say, as a citizen and as a part of a whole. Students should be frequently reminded that their education is not only ‘for them’ and is rather designed primarily to support them in becoming good and productive citizens. It is only by repeatedly drawing their attention to this fact in all manner of educational contexts that it becomes possible for them to quite clearly see the margins of the political in their education. These ‘reminders’ would not simply attempt to valorise their studies but would - perhaps somewhat cynically – reveal that their grades in compulsory subjects they may not like are sometimes more important than what they might actually learn from that subject. Once the political context of the majority of their educational experience becomes apparent, educational experiences which exceed the political domain might be recognised. This could support students to be able to see certain

aspects of their education as political and others as personal., perhaps allowing them to affirm certain seemingly purposeless experiences as personally educative.

I argue that the personal is not always the political, especially once the singular has been decoupled from the particular and we no longer conceive of ourselves as unified beings, further unified in an organic social whole. If a teacher agreed with this view and wanted to enact the margins of the political more performatively in their practice, it might be facilitated by providing time in the weekly schedule for what might be called passive teaching, indirect education or education by 'letting be.' This would mean allowing access to spaces and resources for activities which would not be graded. The students would be under no obligation to produce work and any work they produce would not be assessed. They would receive a blanket 'pass' mark for attendance. The difference between the judicious and limited utilisation of this kind of performative practice in schools and the construction of an entire school which *only* operated this kind of practice is significant. Teachers would be present but passive, and available to answer questions or provide assistance. Teachers could respond to work if asked but not assert opinion or evaluation as a matter of course. If students decided they would prefer not to engage, and instead play, talk, do work for other classes, or remain unengaged, this would also be permissible. In a deep sense, this time would be considered 'impartial.' That is to say, there would be no expectation for students to exhibit anything which would be of value to them in terms of their political partiality. A.S. Neill's Summerhill School (and his underpinning theories for it) attempted a far more dramatic *political* break with educational norms. The point of the practice at Summerhill school was that it made the students into democratic citizens. I make no such claim for passive teaching. The whole point is that it is completely unconcerned with the political ramifications of the education conducted therein. This is precisely why I suggest that its usage in formal educational settings should be judicious and limited,

as well as *always* being coupled with an explicit and more dominant focus on the politically oriented aspects of education.

Hannah Arendt serves an important purpose in this paper by illustrating an educational and political tendency against which my argument in favour of singularity will be presented. This argument is presented despite the fact that Arendt argued against an explicitly political education; a perspective usefully challenged (in a way which is not incompatible with the argument I present) in Aaron Schutz and Mary G. Sandy (2015). I take this step because while contemporary reality does not reflect Arendt's educational utopia, it does reflect her understanding of the political. An analysis of the aspect of her political thinking which best articulates the relationship between the general and particular (state and citizen) will be offered alongside critiques of it from the perspective of singularity. Aspects of her work act as a foil for my own argument, as well as for those of Claude Lefort, John Llewelyn and Pierre Rosanvallon; the three other major interlocutors in the development of my claims. The argument here is not that Arendt's political thinking is wrong (in fact, several of her other writings present a perspective that would not be incompatible with that presented here) but rather that she reveals how political relations are played out in most contemporary and many classical political orders. It is the fact that she reflects the conditions of the political so successfully that makes her particularly helpful in locating its margins.

The margins of the political

Hannah Arendt, in the development of her Kantian political philosophy, perceives the political as an enclosed and reciprocally constructed realm, meaning that it is constructed on the basis that one is able to judge (or imagine) how others see things and that there is, in fact, a 'world held in common' (Arendt, 2007, p.198-199). This political world, which is also a stage, is defined as a perceivable

whole which gives meaning to the particulars. Thus, the teachers and students participating in a lesson in a classroom would be primarily perceivable in terms of a political whole. A student or teacher who acts to disrupt or ignores the whole comes under the judgment of it. For her, 'The advantage the spectator has is that he sees the play as a whole, while each of the actors knows only his part or, if he should judge from the perspective of acting, only the part of the whole that concerns him. The actor is partial by definition' (Arendt, 1982, p. 68-69). Therefore, in this political theatre, citizens (such as Arendt herself) are the spectators who judge whether or not poets (the example she gives of an anti-social actor, which could just as easily be a teacher or a student) have misbehaved (which is a theme very much in the tradition of Plato's argument for the censoring of the poets in Book II of *The Republic*). She argues that 'there has always been trouble with them; they have often shown a deplorable tendency to misbehave' (Arendt, 1982, p. 225). Again, a comment which easily aligns with those levelled against students by teachers or against teachers by politicians. The particulars, or individual citizens, are only given meaning by the whole in Arendt's reading of Kant. If the actions of a particular actor are in contradistinction to the 'good' of that whole, then they are effectively judged to be bad citizens. The education that occurs for Arendt within this political theatre - which is analogous to the political more generally - is therefore the education of the particular in what it *already is* via a perceivable generality which allows for plurality without difference as a form of particularity without politically acknowledged uniqueness or singularity. For Arendt there is no margin to the political, either in or outside education. An individual is always a 'particular' – and those who act 'singularly' will be judged harshly.

It is in the first chapter of the last part of *The Hypocritical Imagination* that John Llewelyn engages with Hannah Arendt's reading of Kant in her *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy*. It is here that he sets out his understanding of the relationship between primary justice and ethics and draws out the significance of recognizing the singular before the particular and the general. He

argues against Arendt's assertion that, 'man's dignity demands that he be seen (every single one of us) in his particularity and, as such, be seen - but without any comparison and independent of time – as reflecting mankind in general' (Llewelyn, 2000, p. 147). He asks:

How does one see a person as reflecting mankind in general without comparison? Is not seeing him or her as reflecting mankind in general comparing him or her, if only in general terms, as a case of humanity, that is to say, as a particular, meaning by this an instance falling under a concept? Is that not to treat him or her as one of a number, so as a number, not as a person – to treat him or her as *personne*, as a nobody, even if one does that in order to credit him or her with rights? (Llewelyn, 2000, p. 147)

By emphasizing a general conception of humanity which is to be related to all particulars, Llewelyn argues that Arendt, through Kant, ignores singularity in favour of particularity of the general. As Llewelyn points out, by thinking 'every single one of us' as a particular rather than as singular, Arendt reduces the individual to a nobody, albeit a nobody with superficially equal rights. The ability for the political to afford rights is extremely important but sets aside how the political might account for that which exceeds it, by not accounting for it directly, but indirectly by recognising its own limits. It is the political without margin. It is the educational consumed by politics. As such, the right to education is not under scrutiny here but if that right is not accompanied by a certain attention to singularity then that right simply becomes a means to facilitate the reduction or transformation of the singular to the particular. The partial educator as actor teaches how to be a successful citizen, while the impartial educator teaches an individual in their singularity in a manner that is not politically prescribed. By positing a situation where one is only able to think ethics in terms of general and particular, Arendt's reading of Kant reduces the ethical to political totality, leaving no room for singularity. This is dangerous because the educator then becomes obligated to think the education of an individual in terms of social value *for their own benefit*. Attending to the educational

experience of the individual in terms of that which cannot be explicitly articulated or certified in terms of social value becomes entirely insignificant and a misuse of the educator and students' time. The singularity of an individual's experience is excised from public educational experience. It could be suggested that Arendt is here thinking politically and not in terms of ethics but my argument is that the political *must* account for the ethical which exceeds it. This is not a self-contradiction because the political can both prescribe and leave space for the ethical. In a classroom this is easily articulated in terms of educational effort expended on assisting students in achieving grades or reaching prescribed learning outcomes but also time afforded to activities which are not prescriptively outcome oriented. The educator can be both partial and impartial. The educator must attend to the right of the individual (as particular) to be educated in terms of the political (exemplified by helping them to achieve certifications) but impartiality implies that they might also have a different kind of ethical responsibility to the student. And further, that the student should have a right to be educated in the distinction between their particularity and singularity. Impartial education, or education without a prescribed or assignable social purpose, would still have to be taught *in general* even if it specifically refers to that which exceeds it. This excess is what Llewelyn goes on to explore in a philosophical context by asking whether or not there is something 'higher than rights' or 'better than ethics' which would be 'the non-essential essence of the ethical that one could distinguish from the ethical in the Kantian sense by calling it proto-ethical' (Llewelyn, 2000, p. 147-148). The spectator passes judgment and is defined by their partiality with regard to the whole, while, for Llewelyn, the experience of the 'face-to-face encounter' implies an ethics beneath or before the relation between the general and particular. Llewelyn's Levinasian notion of 'primary justice' is an ethico-existential justice which operates only in the singular (Llewelyn, 2000, p. 147).

Singularity

In *Democracy and Political Theory*, Claude Lefort argues that, '[t]he disturbing thing about Hannah Arendt – and it is the sign of a shortcoming – is that, whilst she rightly criticizes capitalism and bourgeois individualism, she never shows any interest in democracy as such, in modern democracy' (Lefort, 1988, p. 55). For Lefort this is significant as democracy was the first regime which had been able to distance itself 'from the fantasy of an organic society' (Lefort, 1988, p. 55). The problem with Arendt is that she replaces the 'One' which is the 'supreme guide' (or fascist dictator) with the 'One' that is the plurality of spectators for whom there is always a shared right and wrong. As a consequence, the politics she derives from Kant suffers from much of the same critique of the 'whole' that totalitarianism is subject to. Hers is simply the replacement of more explicit state control with a perceived common good; beyond that the critique remains remarkably similar (a parallel point has been argued in terms of Marxism by Wim Weymans (2012)). This suggestion can be illustrated through an analogy between Arendt's accusation of the misbehaviour of the poets (which I analogised with teachers and students earlier in this paper) and a section from a chapter of Lefort's *Complications: Communism and the Dilemmas of Democracy* titled 'The Fabrication of the Social'. There he writes of Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*:

Solzhenitsyn reported a commissar's remarks to a Communist director of a combine who was sent for the second time to a camp...The two protagonists were joined by an indissoluble bond, but the relationship was not personal. The party no longer appeared as a power far above them, since circumstances could have made them exchange places. The accused did not cease to be included in the *we* that excluded him. (Lefort, 2007, p. 167)

The accused is only ever seen as a particular to be judged in terms of the general and all particulars are in this way interchangeable and, in every crucial political sense, the same. For Arendt also, in terms of judgment, the poet is a bad citizen and misbehaves according to that which supposedly includes him even as he acts against it and isolates himself from it. His individual citizenship is

entirely synthesized with the political whole and defined by its generality and thus becomes entirely negated when he is not understood. Despite this, he is still subject to the judgment of the spectators. Because the political is itself aesthetic for Arendt, any aesthetic action (perhaps any action whatsoever) which does not convey or endorse the logic of whole as perceived by the plural spectators would – at least in terms of the political - be ‘deplorable’ (Arendt, 2007, p. 225). The poet, like the Communist director, is at once included in his particularity and isolated in his singularity from that which accuses him of misbehaviour. Teachers and students are in a similar predicament. Any educational activity – or any activity performed in an educational context at all – would be considered deplorable if it could not be conceived of as serving the political whole. Although most educational theorists might be loath to admit that they follow this logic, it is a danger that befalls any educational theory which lets itself be guided by even the vaguest positive notion of the social good. My claim is that if there are no limits to the political in their conception of education then their ‘inclusion’ of others is precisely an exclusion of everything that makes those others ‘other’.

The idea Lefort draws from Solzhenitsyn, that ‘The accused did not cease to be included in the we that excluded him’ (Lefort, 2007, p. 167) therefore has remarkable implications for the political aspect of education. A disengagement or rejection of any part of public educational experience will taint a person *in terms of* public education and its political value. To be unsuccessful in, excluded or expelled from, or advised or forced to discontinue public education, marks a person through their lack of certifications. Even focusing on activities which do not have a conceivable purpose in terms of the social good becomes politically questionable. A person is judged in terms of what they do not have and what they do not do. The system includes and passes judgement on those it excludes. This practice is endemic to public education (or any politically valued education which involves certification) partly because of the necessity for schools to be efficient in the production of ‘certified’ citizens. To a great extent, schools are judged in terms of how successful

they are at producing politically valued outcomes. They are held accountable by means of abstracted general criteria, which the *particular* students are more or less successful at achieving. *Singularity* is an excess which, in terms of the political, schools only *need* to attend to if a student is not exhibiting their particularity effectively enough.

One of the supposed benefits of thinking every particular as part of a whole or organic society is that no one is lost in the crowd, which Lefort points out is a common critique of modern democracy, fuelling, 'both a horror of anonymity and a longing for an imaginary community whose members experience the joys of being together' (Lefort, 1988, p. 181). It is this anonymity as a form of negative generality in relation to a defence of the solitary, which emphasises co-existence of singularity and particularity. He asks why it should be denied that there is

a link between solitude and anonymity, why deny that recognition of the other as being shaped in our likeness implies that we must also accept that we cannot know the other, and why, finally divorce the truth of association from the truth of isolation, when we should be taking them together? The answer is obvious: it is as though, for almost two hundred years we had been forced to oscillate between making an apologia for individualism and making an apologia for mass democracy, between disavowing one and disavowing the other. (Lefort, 1988, p. 181-182)

What Lefort here locates as the 'recognition of the other being shaped in our likeness' has much more in common with Llewelyn's reading of Levinas than Kant or Arendt's generality reciprocally reflected in every particular. From Lefort's perspective there is no longer the necessity to make a choice between self and society or individualism and mass democracy because that choice is illusory and not one we are actually able to make. In the same way, there is no need to choose between particularity and singularity; one can be both. In fact, it would be difficult to conceive of many

situations where one would not be both, even if the political and educational discourse did everything it could to restrict or ignore this decoupling.

We are at one and the same time isolated and associated, pre-political and political, ethical and aesthetic: *singular and particular*. Which is why this is also what Llewelyn neologically calls an 'aesthetic' (Llewelyn, 2000, p.170-181) understanding of existence and in Lefort's words it takes the truth of 'association alongside the truth of isolation.' It is these features that Lefort implicitly refers to when he asks in *Writing: The Political Test* if it really is

so difficult to hold two ideas at once? Can't one recognize that the history of democracy cannot undo the histories of the State, of capitalism, and of technology, and that it is ruled by principles that are its own? When we said that democracy is a form of society, that doesn't mean that in democracy the signification of everything that comes to pass and shapes the life of a people is neatly wrapped up in it. (Lefort, 2000, p. 272)

Especially when theorized in the light of Llewelyn's critique of particularity it becomes clear that, while singularity cannot be reduced to the political and is constituted partly by the condition of isolation, democratic politics allows for the spaces within which singularity can generatively interrupt it and inform it from the margins of the political without, as in Arendt's reading, being expelled for misbehaviour.

Impartiality

Unlike Arendt, Pierre Rosanvallon does not believe that 'the actor is partial by definition' (Lefort, 2000, p. 68-69). In *Democratic Legitimacy: Impartiality, Reflexivity, Proximity* he puts great emphasis on the necessity of creating conditions for the institution of impartial actors and bodies. Not only are they often perceived by the public, somewhat ironically, as having greater democratic legitimacy

than elected representatives and bodies, their decisions and actions are able to be singular and responsive to singularity. The creation of these conditions is therefore necessary to be able to facilitate the impartial educator. The educator exists on the margin between the political and unpolitical, and, as such, can be both partial and impartial. Impartiality is that *within* the political which can respond to that outside of it, without reducing it to the same. Arendt's Kantian emphasis on the whole and the general removes the condition of independence which is necessary for impartiality. For Rosanvallon independence is a status, whereas impartiality is a quality (Rosanvallon, 2011, p. 94-95). The status must be instituted before the conditions exist wherein the quality can be practiced.

While making a point totally opposite to Arendt's thinking, Rosanvallon uses a markedly Arendtian (and therefore Kantian) language to explain the necessity of independence of an impartial actor as well as the social influence on its legitimacy:

One can be independent of the government hierarchy and still entirely biased on the issues that one is charged with overseeing. Independence is an intrinsic *general* characteristic of a function or institution, but impartiality is a characteristic of a *particular* actor or decision-maker. Impartiality requires independence, but independence by itself is not enough to achieve impartiality. (Rosanvallon, 2011, p. 94-95)

The conditions affecting the impartial actor become almost explicitly Arendtian, recalling general judgment on the particular actor, when he makes clear that the actor gains their legitimacy through its actions because '[a]lthough an authority may claim a *presumption* of impartiality, it still needs to prove in practice that such a presumption is justified' (Rosanvallon, 2011, p. 96). For Rosanvallon, impartiality 'needs to be perpetually constructed and validated. The legitimacy of impartiality needs to be fought for at all times' (Rosanvallon, 2011, p. 95). To think the singular, the independent and the impartial is to think outside or without the logic of the general and the particular. And so,

although the impartial actor requires legitimacy afforded to it by the public, it must *first* be independent. Equally a supposedly impartial actor might be considered illegitimate by a small number of individuals in terms of singular need, while being accepted as impartial by the majority. Clearly the accusation of its illegitimacy would therefore not be representative of judgment of the general but rather of the singular.

Educators in public education systems cannot avoid their partial role in service to a historically contingent political 'good'. A significant aspect of their professional responsibility is to equip their students with skills, knowledge and civic virtues which allow them to succeed in terms of, and serve, the normatively conceived social good. This is the aspect of teaching which those working in the Arendtian tradition (as well as many of those working with ideas from Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, and Dewey) conceive of so clearly. They are right to draw attention to it and right to attend to the debates within the sphere of the general and universal. They are also right to think of the teacher and student as particulars. However, as I have hoped to show, the emphasis on the individual as a particular should not come at the cost of also considering that individual's singularities. And it is this aspect of existential clarification that the educator can also be conceived of as having a responsibility towards. In this way, educators must themselves be conceived of as singularities, independent from the generalising political system which they also represent. Educators must be impartial as well as partial actors, as only then can they respond to singularity as singularities. It is this recognition of this relationship *between* singularities as well as particulars that distinguishes the impartial from the neutral.

Impartial actors exist to *avoid* the fate of all politics being subject to the general and instead being able to respond to the singular in terms of law. As such, impartiality must also be thought of as being entirely distinct from neutrality. Rosanvallon argues that impartiality 'does not exist in the abstract but is always related to an action or decision. It is therefore different from mere neutrality,

which often means simply detachment or even reluctance or refusal to intervene. By contrast, an impartial individual is an *active third party* who takes part in civic affairs and plays a constructive role of a particular kind' (Rosanvallon, 2011, p. 95). Thus, because the political is instituted (differently in different contexts) via precedents such as constitutions and judgments, there must be those who actively and impartially represent the principles of these precedents. There is also, of course, a singularity involved in the judgment of the impartial actor which does not conform to Arendt's logic of the spectator as a particular representative of the whole. As such, the judgment of the impartial actor adds something new rather than reducing something to the same.

In another of Rosanvallon's readings of Arendt, the judge 'is a spectator, to be sure, but an *active and engaged spectator*, whose action helps to institute and regulate the life of the city' (Rosanvallon, 2008, 235). In this slightly earlier reading from *Counter-Democracy: Politics in an Age of Distrust*, the judge, seemingly at once partial and impartial - actor and spectator - erases the distance between the stage and the audience. Articulation of impartial action is most obviously exemplified by the judge in a courtroom but the example given by Rosanvallon has a much broader reach. He argues that German ordoliberalism ('Their idea was to structure economic activity in such a way as to guarantee social stability' (Rosanvallon, 2011, p. 117)) sits within the realm of constituent impartiality and is separated from constituted partisan politics. That is not to say that it is unpolitical or purely spectatorial. Instead, it is the utilisation of constituted power as a means to increase the stability of constituent power, this constituent power then being an example of constituent impartiality. In terms of education this could be seen as using the constituted power of school policy to increase the constituent power of teachers; or, even, of a teacher occasionally creating a pedagogical context where the students can significantly express their individual constituent powers. In both cases the institution or utilisation of the impartiality of the educator is what is protected by the positive constitutional powers. The positive protects the negative. Teachers

and school administrators should not be put off attending to singularity because they can only do so alongside the general and the particular. All exist in consort. To reject the opportunities of constituent impartiality because it somehow represents constituted and partial political power is to begin the process of disallowing any constituent impartiality. This reduces the entire socio-political realm to the theatrical enactment of agonism and competition, wherein only the judgment of the plural spectators is both passive and impartial. To confine impartiality to the inactive or purely spectatorial is to remove any notion of active impartiality from the political altogether. Individuals do not become particulars just because they act. This is where Arendt's chastisement of the 'misbehaving poets' is again so revealing. She forces them into a logic where they are judged as being socially corruptive, while all the time they operate under an entirely different logic. Of course, the distinction that Arendt makes between partiality and impartiality is based on her conviction that a political whole is made up of particular manifestations of the general. And so, the problem here is not the logic of the general and the particular but rather a logic of the general and particular which completely ignores, erases, rejects or punishes the singular. As Llewelyn, Lefort, and Rosanvallon show, the political and educational logic of the general and particular *can* accommodate the singular, it is simply that Arendt, like so many others before and after her, doesn't let it.

Negative generality

A judgment can serve the function of being exemplary and somewhat pedagogical but must first and foremost be considered in its singularity. The decision of a judge is not partial or particular, it is singular. But its singularity is not just the singularity of the judge that matters but rather the singular relation between the judge and judged. Llewelyn (and Levinas) would go so far as to say the relation is asymmetrical and is grounded in the singularity of the other rather than the same. This relation is not an aggregate generality which exists as the product of plural spectators, which, like electoral

legitimacy, in Rosanvallon's view, rests on 'on popular recognition' and represents an 'aggregate generality, a quantitative social weight' (Rosanvallon, 2011, p. 97). It is closer to the 'negative generality' which he conceives of in terms of impartiality, seeing it as 'implicit in the fact that *no one* should benefit from a privilege or advantage. In a divided society, where an aggregative generality of identification can no longer be taken for granted because the general interest remains in doubt and subject to pressure from many different interest groups, there is a greater tendency to adhere to a negative-procedural form of generality (Rosanvallon, 2011, p. 97). It is actually much more to do with avoiding 'being swayed by public opinion' than representing it and more to do with have one's individual situation 'taken into account and fully assessed' than being included (Rosanvallon, 2011, p. 98). Negative generality is the generality of unique singularities, many of whom quite often want to or would benefit from being left to their own devices. Negative generality helps to show why we should not focus on 'including' others in terms of anything but the general and particular. It is a reminder that we are all always somewhat excluded and that exclusion is precisely what makes us who we are and also what makes our education our own as much as the state's.

The recognition of negative generality could be perceived as the institutional recognition of the unsocial power of citizens through 'treating all issues according to dictates of law and reason' (Rosanvallon, 2011, p. 98). The decisions made by impartial institutions are considered impartial because they are not made in terms of the general and the particular, where the singular is regulated by the general *as if it were always, only, and ever* a particular. Instead, each individual is treated singularly before the law and not as a reflection of the whole of mankind. The legal system is also not the 'general', it is rather the provisional means for doing justice to the singular. Negative generality signifies the existence of a 'power' which cannot be taken to exhibit the quality of generality. In passing, Rosanvallon articulates this power in terms of Claude Lefort's concept of 'the empty place' or *lieu vide*. However, while negative generality and the empty place have much in

common, for Lefort, the empty place is formulated as that which takes the place of divine law or its mediation (Lefort, 2007, p. 991). Negative generality goes a step further by indicating everything that cannot be reduced to positive totality. Read together, the empty place and negative generality provide the tools for thinking that which defies origin and presence. Natural law, divine law and general law are erased and replaced by a provisional and responsive law which attempts to do justice to the singular.

Rosanvallon has shown how those working in the legal system can accommodate for and respond to it, while I have attempted to show – via a discussion of the decoupling of the singular and particular – how educators can also think about doing so. It is in fact almost as if there is a reversal of Arendt's position, replacing the plural spectator with the singular judgment. Citizens, individually or in groups, are more likely to be 'partial' than impartial, while impartial actors or institutions act at a distance from citizens. This distance is crucial in being able to facilitate social justice. In Rosanvallon's view '[t]he influence of special interests and pressure groups has increased for structural reasons. In order to rein them in, the most effective strategy is to create institutions whose role is to defend negative generality, because it is no longer possible to conceive of society as a positive totality' (Rosanvallon, 2011, p. 98). Schools and universities must join these institutions in defending negative generality if they want to do anything but create citizens who are valued only – and sometimes even in their own eyes - in terms of their reflection of the social good. This paper has argued that there is no conceivable whole or absolutely applicable generality, even though there are many educational theorists, philosophers, political parties, and pressure groups who would argue otherwise, which is why 'the socialization of power in a negative form is needed as a corrective to the shortcomings of the positive form' (Rosanvallon, 2011, p. 99).

Conclusion

The argument I have made would suggest that what public education requires from political philosophy today is a neutral conception of the negative. That which cannot or is not intended to be understood in terms of positive representation should not simply be conceived of as bad. The negative aspect of the singular must be articulated in general terms, first and foremost by moving away from the emphasis on the citizen as being primarily constituted as a part of a whole. This would form a part of the positively constituted political system's creation of conditions for the negative which exceeds it. The positive must protect the negative. As Rosanvallon argues, the role of socially legitimate impartial actors would be crucial in achieving the responsiveness to singularity that such a system requires. However, such a system also requires the means for allowing singularities to remain at a distance from the social.

As far as the political is concerned, the world we share must also account for the world(s) we don't share. Public education is one of the means by which this can and does occur. The political and the unpolitical coexist –this is an existential fact - but it is up to the political to account for *and create* its own margins, one of which is marked by the philosophy and practice of education.

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