



## Thinking with Spinoza, Locke, and Dewey about self-control, education, and democracy

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### ABSTRACT

In the 17th century Spinoza and Locke wrote about education as aiming at self-control. In the 20th century Dewey argued for a similar view in *Experience and education*, where he described education as enabling people to have control over their own lives. These three philosophers all saw self-control as involving both the ability to make well-advised decisions and the competences necessary to follow them through. In the first half of the paper their theories are rephrased and explained. After that, the elements they have in common are analysed and supported with references to recent philosophical and psychological work on self-control. It is also argued that these common elements apply not only to individuals but also to groups and communities. The concluding section is a reflection on the relevance of what they said to modern discourse on educational aims and education for democracy.

### KEYWORDS

Aims of education; self-control; democracy; Spinoza; Locke; Dewey

## Introduction

In *Experience and education*, his last major work on the philosophy of education, Dewey (1991) intertwines several different themes. One of them is self-control and how education makes us free. What he says about this harkens back to what Spinoza and Locke wrote, in the latter half of the 17th century, about education for freedom. These three thinkers all argued that self-control requires education, and they all saw education for self-control as transformative in that it changed our psychological drives. For them, the way to escape from the rule of powers or tendencies that we neither understand nor control requires educating the whole human being, emotions included. Such education is not only about enabling rational thought to subdue other elements of the mind, but also about learning to be guided by reasonable desires and autonomy-enhancing habits.

Although Spinoza is traditionally classified as a rationalist and Locke as an empiricist, they had, in fact, much in common: both spoke for toleration of different religions, freedom of conscience, ideals of individual liberty, and scientific rationality. Spinoza's works were banned in many lands soon after their publication (Israel, 2002; Popkin, 2004). Locke was for a time in exile in the Netherlands (Woolhouse, 2007), and some of his contemporaries accused him of Spinozism (Israel,

2002, p. 468). Later generations saw the two of them as pioneers of the enlightenment (Israel, 2002; Moseley, 2014), and much of what Dewey wrote can be read as a continuation of the same trends, emphasising that ordinary people could, and should, think for themselves and take care of their own affairs. He was, as Putnam (2004) has pointed out, also an enlightenment thinker.

In the next section of this paper, I will spell out the common themes of self-control in the accounts given by these three philosophers. After that I compare what they said to recent psychological and philosophical views, and I argue that the key elements of their approach are consistent with widely held modern theories. Finally, I explain how their models of self-control can be applied, not only to human individuals but also to groups of people, and reflect on the relevance of what they said to modern discourse on educational aims and education for democracy.

## The ideal aim of education

In Chapter 5 of *Experience and education*, Dewey (1991) says: 'The ideal aim of education is creation of power of self-control' (p. 41). In that same chapter he distinguishes between positive and negative freedom, and maintains that 'freedom from restriction, the negative side, is to be prized only as a means to a freedom which is power: power to frame purposes, to judge wisely, to evaluate desires by the consequences which will result from acting upon them; power to select and order means to carry chosen ends into operation' (p. 41). In the following chapter he adds that the positive side is identical with self-control. From this, and from what he had to say about the ideal aim of education, it follows that education aims at positive freedom. In what follows, he maintains that education enables people to form and execute rational purposes, and that this ability constitutes self-control.

The elements of Dewey's theory about education for freedom outlined above are similar to, and probably influenced by, parts of what Locke said about self-control in his *Essay concerning human understanding* (Locke, 1959), and about education for autonomy in *Some thoughts concerning education* (Locke, 1989) and the posthumously published *Of the conduct of the understanding* (Locke, 1993; Harðarson, 2023). They also bear striking similarities to what Spinoza (1982) wrote about freedom in *The ethics* and his emphases on what Dahlbeck (2016) describes as empowerment through learning and through knowledge.

### *Spinoza, Locke, and Dewey on agency*

One of the things Spinoza and Locke have in common is their view of human agency. According to them, rational thought does not suffice for inducing action. In their opera magna, *The ethics* (Spinoza, 1982), and the *Essay* (Locke, 1959), they both emphasise our human limitations. They also agree that self-control, or positive freedom, depends on education.

Locke's most detailed exposition of his theory of agency is in chapter xxi of the second book of the *Essay*.<sup>1</sup> There he says that what determines the will is the most pressing 'uneasiness a man is at present under' (Locke, 1959, II:xxi:31).<sup>2</sup> In what follows, he says that uneasiness includes pain, disquiet, and all desires.

Spinoza (1982) thought of human actions as causally determined (I:app; III:p2s).<sup>3</sup> He also argued that we are driven by emotions that fall into three main categories: pains, pleasures and desires (III:p11s). These drives were our very essence (III:p9s), with reason having a weak foothold and needing support from educational strategies to have any effect on what we do (Yovel, 2004). The first four books of Spinoza's (1982) *Ethics* are mainly about how dependent we are on natural causes, and how hard it is to understand our own drives and gain rational control over our actions. The arguments in these four books present us with the same problem as Locke's theory of agency: How is rational conduct even possible? Dewey wrestled with this same question in his 1922 work, *Human nature and conduct*. There he said that our life is ruled by impulses that are modified and shaped by

habits: 'They create out of the formless void of impulses a world made in their own image' (1983, p. 88). In his view, habits and impulses have similar power over us as the conative elements described by Spinoza and Locke. Of these two, the habits are less 'susceptible of alteration; while instincts are most readily modifiable' (1983, p. 77) and thus he describes man as 'a creature of habit, not of reason' (1983, p. 88).

Dewey's post-Hegelian view of the mind involves an awareness of how social mores constitute the individual self. His emphases on habit make his theory different from the philosophy of mind that we find in the works of Spinoza and Locke. But although Dewey poses his questions about the possibility of rational conduct with concepts that are different from those used by the other two philosophers, and although the answers given by the three of them are couched in different terms, the gist is the same. They all describe ways to modify the conative elements of the mind, not by reason subduing all emotions and impulses but rather by educating them. For Spinoza (1982) this is the only way because an emotion cannot be checked except by another emotion (IV:p7); and for Locke (1959) 'the greater good ... does not determine the will, until our desire ... makes us uneasy in the want of it' (II:xxi:35). Dewey (1983) argued that autonomy depends on using our intelligence to modify our impulses and habits, and maintained that the foe is not convention 'but stupid and rigid convention' (p. 115): to view 'all conventions as slaveries, is to deny the only means by which positive freedom in action can be secured' (p. 115).

Locke (1959) said that we are able to modify the strength of our drives because, although our actions are governed by the uneasiness pressing most strongly on our mind, we can suspend action and 'during this suspension ... we have opportunity to examine, view, and judge of the good or evil of what we are going to do' (II:xxi:48). According to Locke, such an examination can create a new discontent: if we find, for instance, that another course of action is likely to have consequences that we come to desire when we think about them, then thinking affects our drives (Harðarson, 2020).

Both in *Human nature and conduct* (Dewey, 1983) and in *Experience and education* (Dewey, 1991), Dewey describes the ability to stop and think as the key to self-control. In the former work he describes how our drives can change for the better during a 'period of delay' (1983, p. 137), and in the latter he says that '[t]he crucial educational problem is that of procuring the postponement of immediate action upon desire until observation and judgment have intervened' (1991, p. 44).

Spinoza does not say explicitly that suspension or postponement of action enables us to escape from the bondage of our passions. In the fifth book of *The ethics*, however, he does, say that our passions change when we form clear and distinct ideas of them (Spinoza, 1982, V:p3). Lloyd (1996) captures the core of his view succinctly where she says that the 'mind attains freedom by bringing its understanding to bear on its own passions' (p. 10).

All three thinkers developed accounts of human agency as initially governed by non-rational drives with, however, the possibility of modifying them through thinking and learning. They also tried to explain why the modified drives give us more freedom or self-control than the unmodified ones. Spinoza's (1982) answer to this question is formulated in the preface to the fourth book of *The ethics* where he says that 'a man at the mercy of his emotions ... is often compelled, although he sees the better course, to pursue the worse' (p. 153). Locke (1959) concurs and says that it is 'a perfection of our nature, to desire, will, and act according to the last result of a fair examination' (II:xxi:48), and 'the further we are removed from such a determination, the nearer we are to misery and slavery' (II:xxi:49). Dewey (1991) agrees and says, in the sixth chapter of *Experience and education*, that a person who is 'at the mercy of impulses into whose formation intelligent judgment has not entered ... has at most only the illusion of freedom. Actually he is directed by forces over which he has no command' (p. 42). One of the three philosophers, Locke (1959), discusses addictive behaviour in this context when he says 'let a drunkard see that his health decays, ... and the want of all things, ... attends him in the course he follows: yet the returns of uneasiness ... drives him to the tavern' (II:xxi:35). They all, however, describe our native lack of self-control as being like addiction in that we are driven to acts that cannot pass any test of rational evaluation.

Spinoza, Locke, and Dewey all described self-control as involving guidance by knowledge rather than by idiosyncratic or personal tendencies. Writing about Locke's theory, Yaffe (2000) said that 'the possibility of giving oneself over to forces external to and better than oneself is a crucial aspect of free agency' (p. 119). This applies equally to the other two philosophers. According to the fifth book of Spinoza's (1982) *Ethics*, people are most truly free when they are driven by an intellectual love of God. Dewey saw clear-sightedness and sound judgment as enhancing freedom and, in a 1908 book about ethics, he argued that '[e]very narrowing of love, every encroachment of egoism, means just so much blindness to the good' (Dewey, 1978, p. 379). In the second edition of this book the wording has changed but Dewey still maintains that selfishness is a form of stupidity: 'A person of narrow sympathy is of necessity a person of confined outlook upon the scene of human good' (Dewey, 1985, p. 270). Furthermore, all three of these philosophers thought that what is for our own good is also good for other people. Thus, in their view, learning to stop and think and to reflect on our drives enables us not only to be guided by knowledge about our own interests but also to pay heed to the common good. For Locke (1959) this is, at least partially, because God has 'power enough to call to account the proudest offender' (I:lii:6). Spinoza (1982) argued that virtue is happiness (II:p49s), and that the good of the individual is identical to the good of humanity (IV:p37; Balibar, 2020; Della Rocca, 2004; Read, 2020). Dewey also identified the highest form of human happiness with moral behaviour (Dewey, 1978, pp. 254–257; Fishman & McCarthy, 2009; Shook, 2013). I hope they were right about this, but I make no claim to know that; and I leave it open here as to what extent it is possible that self-control might serve egotistical purposes that are harmful for others.

### *Self-control and rationality*

Both in ordinary language, and in philosophical parlance, the meaning of the word 'freedom' is multi-dimensional. One dimension is negative liberty, the freedom we enjoy if we are not hindered by other people in doing what we want to do. Another dimension is having many options, of not being constrained to any one course of action. If we focus on these two dimensions, then it may seem strange to think of it as freedom to be guided by knowledge. Such guidance may seem to preclude both the liberty to follow one's own longings and the possibility of having many options. Nevertheless, the three philosophers did not see their accounts of positive freedom as excluding negative freedom. To make this more plausible and comprehensible let us imagine two persons, one of whom we call Mr. Gullible and the other, Mr. Perceptive. The former can easily believe anything, and thus has many options and can quickly and conveniently adjust his opinions to his desires. The latter cannot bring himself to believe anything without checking the evidence and making sure it is true. Both may have full freedom of opinion in the negative sense, but since Mr. Gullible is more easily deceived, Mr. Perceptive has more control over his own mind and hence more freedom in the positive sense. The three philosophers all argued that something similar applies to actions as applies to opinions, namely that being constrained by one's own mind to do what is right and good is not an abridgement of freedom. This view did not originate with Spinoza and Locke in the 17th century. It was supported by Augustine of Hippo (around 400 CE), who taught that God was perfectly free because he could neither err nor choose the worse of any two options (Rist, 2014).

The three philosophers all described the human mind as dependent on natural causes and unable to acquire perfect freedom. In their view we have limited self-control that can be improved. Spinoza (1982) does, however, discuss the possibility of near perfect freedom in the fifth book of his *Ethics* where he calls such freedom blessedness (V:p34s; V:p2) and concludes that it is very rare (V:p42s). Locke (1959) also emphasises our cognitive and psychological limitations and describes the human lot as a 'fleeting state of action and blindness' (IV:xvi:4). Dewey (1991) uses the term 'growth' to describe development towards maturity and freedom. He says that 'there are many obstacles, which tend to obstruct growth and to deflect it into wrong lines' (p. 15) and that it 'should be an ever-present process' (p. 30), thus indicating that the search for self-control is open-ended.

How we fail to be fully rational, free and masters of our own affairs can be elaborated in abstract philosophical terms. It can also be described with the vocabulary that we use to talk about our everyday experience. Much of what goes astray, and people have reasons to regret is, at least partially, due to lack of self-control. The list of examples is endless. In some of them the agents have good intentions but fail to act on them: They may want to focus on a problem but the mind wanders; Decide to study for an exam but spend the day playing computer games; Try to have a good time together but start quarrelling; Plan a healthier lifestyle but fail to break bad habits; Attempt to talk to a disabled neighbour as an equal but fail to hide their prejudices. In other cases, people fail to form resolutions, intentions or desires in accordance with their rational beliefs or available knowledge: Some crave more fashionable clothes and more expensive cars than their neighbours, knowing fully well that such competition does not bring them happiness; Know that less meat and more vegetables would both improve their health and reduce their ecological footprint but still fill the shopping carts with meatballs and sausages; Realize that more time with friends and family would bring more happiness than a higher income but still put all their energy into a struggle for job promotion; Understand that their evidence is not conclusive but still have an urge to insist that the opinions they cherish are beyond reproach.

### *Two models of self-control*

The ties between freedom and self-control on the one hand, and rationality and learning on the other is a recurrent theme in Western philosophy. It can be found in the works of thinkers as different as J. S. Mill (2009) and Hegel (1978), who recommended 'subduing one's opinions by the labour of study, and subjecting one's will to discipline and so elevating it to free obedience' (p. 167). The three philosophers under discussion here shared a similar view of how this comes about. Spinoza and Locke maintained that human beings were moved to action by uneasiness or emotion. Dewey described the springs of action as impulses modified by habits. They all explained self-control as being dependent on our ability to stop and think, to seek knowledge, deliberate, and reflect on our own drives and what they lead to. Such thoughtful postponement can make our desire to do what is for our own good stronger than the pressures we were previously under. It can also adjust many desires and drives to knowledge gained through rational thought and study.

When we use our knowledge and cognitive abilities to make up our mind, the outcome is typically an intention, a decision, or a resolution. Spinoza and Locke would both say that such conclusions can only move us to action through inducing or strengthening some emotion or uneasiness. If we make it public, then we may, for instance, create a reputational pressure to act on it. I leave it open here how decisions are related to emotions. What the three philosophers explicitly say about self-control in the works I have cited is compatible with seeing such control as connecting rational thought and action via decision. It is also compatible with supposing that rational thought modifies many, or even most, of our drives and the habits that shape them. Based on this we can sketch two simplified models of self-control: where cognition includes knowledge, sound judgment and rational thinking; where decisions and resolutions count as intentions; and among the drives are emotions, impulses, and habits:

**Model 1:** Cognition → Intention → Action

**Model 2:** Cognition → Drives → Actions

If Spinoza and Locke were right, then the second arrow in Model 1 works through some drive and a more complex and accurate version is: Cognition → Intention → Drive → Action.

These two models are complementary rather than antagonistic and a more detailed model (like the one presented in Harðarson, 2017) can accommodate both. Model 1 emphasises the ability to

act on one's best judgment regardless of inner struggles. People have such an ability provided an intention modifies some drive, or gives rise to a new one that becomes strong enough to subdue temptations or inimical desires. Model 2 emphasises the ability to habituate, educate, and civilize the conative elements of the mind, to bring them into harmony with what is known about our own good.

### Modern views of self-control

The two models outlined above include two gaps each, represented by the arrows. Lack of self-control—often called 'akrasia' in the philosophical literature—can therefore be of different types depending on where the failure that Rorty (1980) described as 'akratic break' is located. Spinoza, Locke, and Dewey focused on how people can bridge the former gap, from rational thought or knowledge to intention or inducement to act. Some modern accounts highlight the second gap. Holton (2009) has, for instance, argued that self-control is primarily an ability to form resolutions and act on them despite contrary desires or temptations. Others, like Mele (2010), have argued that full self-control bridges both gaps, making both intentions and actions conform with one's better judgment.

In a recent collection of papers about the philosophy and psychology of self-control, edited by Mele, Shoemaker (2020) argues that the former gap is no less important than the latter, and says that lack of self-control 'may apply to both attitudes and actions' (p. 385). On the one hand, it is possible to fail to form an intention in line with one's best judgment or values. On the other hand, people can fail to act accordingly. In Shoemaker's paper, the two gaps to be bridged are, on the one hand, between judgment or values and intentions, and, on the other, between intentions and actions. He does not say, as Spinoza, Locke, and Dewey did, that full self-control requires one's judgment or values to be guided by sound reasons. On his model, self-control is primarily the ability to form and execute intentions in accordance with one's own beliefs regardless of how rational they are. Some other authors of papers in the collection, however, do connect agency to rationality: like Vargas (2020), for instance, who says that 'responsible agency is to be understood primarily in terms of a capacity to recognize and respond to reasons' (p. 401).

It may seem possible to distinguish between simple self-control and rational self-control and say that simple self-control only requires actions to be connected to beliefs via intentions or drives, but rational self-control adds the further condition that the beliefs are justified. I think Spinoza, Locke, and Dewey would all point out that we do not have full self-control if our beliefs are easily swayed by something other than good reasons, such as wishful thinking, social pressure, or indoctrination. I also think that they would be right about this. The only real self-control is rational self-control.

#### *Divided mind models*

Several recent accounts of self-control, labelled divided-mind models, distinguish between two orders of mental processes, variously denominated as lower vs. higher, desires vs. resolutions, or quick and emotional System 1 processes vs. rational and slow System 2 processes (Cummings & Roskies, 2020; Funkhouser & Veilleux, 2020; Mylopoulos & Pacherie, 2020; Sklar & Fujita, 2020). On these models we have self-control when our actions are guided by processes of the higher type, and we lack self-control when those of the lower type take over.

Sklar and Fujita (2020) argue that one weakness common to divided-mind models is a lack of clarity as to why the higher processes are considered more our own than the lower ones. They also point out that the higher types 'have been shown to play a key role in helping people justify indulging in temptation' and add that 'both automatic and deliberate elements operate to enhance (and hinder) self-control' (p. 69). We may think of a desire to live a long and healthy life as being one

of a higher order than a craving for another glass of whisky. Nevertheless, the ability to make up a complex story to argue that I deserve one more drink involves intelligence and conscious reasoning.

Spinoza, Locke, and Dewey avoid this problem by anchoring freedom to intellectually defensible reasons. They could point out that there are objective reasons to see health as important. The elaborate self-deceptions of an addict manifest lack of self-control, not because they fail to enlist cognitive abilities but because, rather, these very abilities are used to evade the truth. Their ranking of drives is not only psychological, not only about the status of various elements within the mind of the individual, but also about how they compare with knowledge about what the world is like and what is good for us.

### *Trait self-control, the muscle metaphor, and holistic accounts*

One of the two best known psychological models of how our values or evaluative judgments can guide us despite adverse drives was developed by Mischel in the 1960s. He described *trait self-control* as the ability to delay gratification of a desire when it is in one's own best interest to do so (Mischel, 1996).

The other psychological model is Baumeister's theory of ego depletion developed in the 1990s. Research conducted by him, together with his co-workers, indicated that after people had resisted one temptation, they were less likely to hold out against a different temptation (Baumeister, et al., 1998). Based on this, they argued that self-control is like a muscle that gets tired after work. This type of fatigue they called *ego-depletion*, and maintained that self-control is primarily an ability to resist such depletion. They also argued that this ability could be improved through training (Baumeister et al., 2006).

These two theories offered two different psychological measures of self-control. It came as a surprise to many when it turned out that there are people who score high on tests of trait self-control but still get quickly depleted when they use the self-control 'muscle' (Hofmann et al., 2014; Hofmann et al., 2015; Imhoff et al., 2014). These results are not contradictory however: the strength measured by Baumeister et al. seems to be the ability to make a drive strong enough to resist other drives. Trait self-control may function, at least partially, through one's ability to use knowledge to modify or neutralise antagonistic drives (Harðarson, 2017). Baumeister's methods may gauge the aspect of self-control highlighted by Model 1, and the measurements developed by Mischel may assess the abilities hinted at by Model 2. In other words, the ability to resist temptations differs from the ability to make some of them less tempting.

In a recent work, Baumeister et al. (2020) support their depletion theory, adding to it and making it more holistic by highlighting not just the strength to resist temptations, but also abilities for avoiding them. They cite research indicating that 'high self-control works by establishing habits and routines, so that one can then rather easily and automatically move through life, effectively and successfully getting the right things done' (p. 27). In short, they complement a Model 1 type description of self-control with additions in the spirit of Model 2. Sklar and Fujita (2020) support an account that is even more holistic, and describe self-control as coordination of many elements of the mind.

The self-control theory that I extracted from the works of Spinoza, Locke, and Dewey, accommodates the discovery that the two measures – of trait self-control on the one hand and ego depletion on the other – yield apparently conflicting results. In line with that theory, strengthening a drive that accords with our best judgment so that it can subdue other drives may be thought of as a step towards self-control. Doing so may require the type of resistance to depletion described by Baumeister. Modifying a plurality of impulses and desires so that we can do what is right without any risk of depletion would represent an even better degree of self-control from the standpoint of that theory. The theory is, moreover, in harmony with recent views of self-control as coordination,

because if all goes well, and we develop good self-control, then most of our drives are appropriately modified by our best judgment.

### Self-control, education, and democracy

In recent years, philosophers of education have proposed various overarching educational aims. Kristjánsson (2020) argues, for instance, that education should aim at human flourishing, including not only virtues but also well-being. Kitcher (2021) describes three main aims:

First, a capacity for self-maintenance, most obviously directed toward readiness for the work environment. Second, an ability to function as a citizen – and here I focus on participation in democratic social and political life. Third, the ground should be laid so that individuals may be able to pursue lives they find fulfilling. (p. 4)

Self-control in the sense explained above is different from these two proposals in that it aims at empowering the students to find and formulate their own purposes, to understand what is worthwhile and to adjust their lives accordingly. Behind the educational philosophies of Spinoza, Locke, and Dewey is the realization that education for a society of equals aims to make all citizens able to participate in discussing and deciding on the very aims of education. That does not exclude agreement on aims like those proposed by Kristjánsson and Kitcher. Nor does it exclude traditional subjects and emphases on what the sociologist Young (2009) has described as powerful knowledge. Both Locke (1989; 1993) and Dewey (1991, p. 54) recommended curricula that were partially academic and subjects based. Arguably, Spinoza would have supported their proposals (Dahlbeck, 2016, p. 162). What education for self-control does exclude is a curriculum prescribed by experts without attempting to give the students the intellectual means to evaluate what is meted out to them. Dewey (1991) writes about this in the final chapter of *Experience and Education* where he endorses:

the participation of the learner in the formation of the purposes which direct his activities in the learning process' and adds that 'there is no defect in traditional education greater than its failure to secure the active cooperation of the pupil in construction of the purposes involved in his studying. (p. 43)

The philosophical accounts of self-control supported by Spinoza, Locke, and Dewey are about individual self-control rather than self-control of groups or communities. Dewey, however, also wrote about self-government of groups although he did not use the term 'self-control' in that context. In his main work on political philosophy, *The Public and its problems* published in 1927, he described democracy as beginning in small face-to-face communities, and argued that successful political democracy was not possible without self-governing societies of equals at the local level (Dewey, 1984).

There are different interpretations of Dewey's writings about democracy (Harðarson, 2019; Shook, 2013). Some have argued that this is, at least in part, because there are conflicting strands in his political philosophy (Manicas, 1982). These complications notwithstanding, one of the strands is an emphasis on public reason as a key element in democratic self-government. Although the two seventeenth century philosophers did not endorse democracy in unequivocal terms the way Dewey did, Spinoza (1951) maintained that input from the many is apt to correct the errors of the few 'and to bring men as far as possible under the control of reason' (p. 206) and Locke (1959) argued forcefully against all claims to monopoly of truth in the first book of the *Essay*. Thus, each of the three philosophers supported some of the main ideas behind a view of democracy as public reason. The version of this view that I have in mind is the one elaborated and defended by Sen (2009), where democracy means that all can participate in the search for solutions to the problems of society, point out flaws in arguments and present their considerations, and the day is carried by the validity and soundness of arguments rather than by the number of votes. In *The public and its problems*, Dewey



(1984) endorses a similar view although he thinks voting is also important because 'counting of heads compels prior recourse to methods of discussion, consultation and persuasion' (p. 365).

I do not deny that applying models of self-control to groups is problematic for several reasons. Some of them have to do with how dubious it is to attribute motivation to groups (Brown, 2022), and some with Arrow's (1963) impossibility theorem, originally published in 1951, showing that groups cannot have orders of preferences that follow from the preferences of individual members. It seems clear, however, that if democracy involves public reason, then it requires the type of self-control described by Model 1, namely the ability to form and execute a rational decision.

### *Group self-control*

Imagine a group of people, say a high school class, who go out together now and then, sometimes to play laser tag, sometimes to a bowling hall. One day they meet to discuss what to do. They have received an offer from an opera house. If they buy twenty or more tickets, then they get them for half price, allowing them to see Mozart's Magic Flute, and still stay within budget.

If the class has good self-control, they consider their options, come to a reasoned conclusion, and then do what they decide. Since there are two gaps to be bridged, from reasons to decision, and from decision to action, lack of self-control can mean either that they do not come to a reasoned conclusion, or that they do not act on their decision.

The former type of failure can happen in diverse ways. One possibility is that no one in the group has ever been to an opera, no one knows anything about the Magic Flute, and they simply ignore the offer without knowing that most of them would like the music and have an educative experience that they would remember with pleasure. In other words, they have failed to acquire the knowledge needed to evaluate the options.

It is also possible that some members of the class search for recordings, find the music thrilling, discuss the options, and see good reasons to think that now it is time to try something new, and suggest accepting the offer from the opera. Then the most vociferous member of the group says, 'come on, only old ladies go to the opera house.' Two or three others laugh aloud and say something derogatory about the opera. No one dares to answer them, so the group opts for laser tag. In this case, they have some knowledge about all the options, but they fail to use it.

The latter type of failure can also happen in different ways. We can, for instance, imagine that about one third of the class really wants to do go to the opera and the last ten times they have been out together the two thirds interested in bowling and laser-tag have dragged this one third with them. Imagine also that they all agree that it is fair to opt occasionally for something that the one third minority desires and decide unanimously to go to the opera house. After the meeting, some of the students mention to their friends from another class that they are going to the opera the following weekend and hear some mocking remarks about snobs, and about old-fashioned music that no one really enjoys. The next day, half of the class declares they are not going. The only reason is that they fear being held up to ridicule. Twenty tickets are out of the question, and there goes the discount. In the end no-one goes. In this case they fail to execute their decision.

This example indicates that successful democratic self-government of a group requires self-control of the type described by Model 1. It is more of an open question how to apply Model 2 to groups. It seems plausible, however, that for full rational self-control, they need the ability to adjust their habits and social pressures to knowledge about what is for the good of all. The last of the three failures in the story above, where they did not do what they decided, gives us reasons to think that groups may need improved social mores to gain full self-control.

## Concluding remarks

In the case of large groups and political societies, all sorts of specialized knowledge and research may be needed to come to reasoned conclusions. Dewey (1991) pointed this out in his book *Freedom and culture*, published in 1939, one year after *Experience and education*. There he argued that democracy needs 'spread of the scientific attitude' (Dewey, 1991, p. 168).

Since reasoning about public affairs may draw upon knowledge that some have by virtue of having specialized in various arts and sciences, much of what we call higher education can be seen as education for intelligent public reasoning, and thus, also for democratic self-control.

What Dewey said about self-control being the ideal aim of education was meant, in part, to guide school development. Granted that self-control requires reasoning that draws upon all sorts of knowledge, his statement can also be read as an attempt to summarise simultaneously what good education has always been about, and the core ideals of the Enlightenment as initiated by Spinoza and Locke. These two seventeenth century philosophers both wrote about self-control or positive freedom as the overarching aim of human growth and advancement. They both argued for a view of what education is primarily about that have deep ties to the philosophy of education developed by Dewey in the first decades of the twentieth century. This view is consistent with modern philosophical and psychological theories of self-control and worth further consideration.

## Notes

1. This theory is not in the 1st edition of the *Essay*. Locke rewrote chapter II:xxi for the 2nd edition and this chapter changed more between the five editions published during his lifetime than any other part of the work. Yaffe (2000) has written a comprehensive account of these changes. My understanding of this chapter in the second and subsequent editions is based on his exegesis.
2. II:xxi:31 is section 31 in chapter xxi of the second book of Locke's *Essay*. The edition I use is Locke (1959).
3. I:app and III:p2s refer to numbered elements of *The ethics*, i.e., Appendix to book I and scholium below proposition 2 in book III. The edition I use is Spinoza (1982).

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