

**CLASSICAL POLITICAL THOUGHT
DEMOCRACY IN ATHENS AND AMERICA
POLITICAL SCIENCE 315
MICRO-ESSAY #1**

Write a 750-900 word essay on the following question. Your essay is the Google doc folder by 4 PM on MONDAY February 5. Be sure to include a title (not on a separate page) and single space your essay. Also, be sure to define your terms carefully, use the concrete case below, and include at least one claim, objection, rejoinder sequence.

In the overall mix of authorities which shape the educational curriculum of teenagers in a democracy, which authority has the stronger claim, parents operating through the school board or teachers relying on professional norms?

Consider this question using the example of Tammy Yoder from Virginia. She accuses the teachers of “corrupting my children.” (*NYT*, 10/13/21). She would object to using, for example, Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* in a high school class. Such content would NOT pass Guttmann’s non-repression rule if Yoder brought up that specific book and got the school board to ban it after a brief discussion as she argues (97-98). But parents and teachers shared authority to shape teen character is broadly recognized in liberal democracies. In the Virginia case, the majority of parents and the teachers were at odds on teachings concerning transgender and race. In such cases, if the parents prevail in a properly deliberative school board meeting vote, the ban would arguably meet Guttmann’s democratic authority standard on grounds of the legitimacy of the parent’s interest in “conscious social reproduction” (39). Should elected school boards have the power to ban American Library Association (ALA) approved books like *Beloved* from the high school classroom?

Of course, unlike in Plato’s *Republic*, modern liberal democracies are not family states. They do not claim the right to shape their citizens conception of the good. They generally allow individuals the “freedom to choose” their own conceptions. But teenagers are a special case; at an early age they can’t choose yet, and well into their teen years they will be inculcated with some conception of the good one way or another. On this point, it is significant that Guttmann rejects Ackerman’s claims for a “liberal theory of education” (35). She argues that “liberal neutrality is an unlivable ideal” (34) in educating children. Thus the teacher side of the argument cannot hide behind the neutrality ideal.

In practice, democratic states allow a host of influences to fill the gap left vacant by neutrality. Guttmann argues that both teachers and parents have legitimate claims to fill this gap. Democratic states, operating through professionals, insist on exposing children to “differing ways of life” (31), exposure which makes democratic life possible but which can severely undermine the attractiveness of a particular version of the good life which parents hope to share with their children.

Teachers argue they are looking out for the children’s interests to a life separate from their parents’ “cultural orientation” (43) that can include bigotry against other orientations that can severely cripple their children’s willingness to treat others as equals. Parents argue that they have a right to reproduce in their children ways which allow them to live together so that they can understand each other into a shared future life. Who has the better claim?