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PRIVACY AND RESPECT FOR INDIVIDUALITY:
A PHILOSOPHICAL CRITIQUE OF SOME CONTEMPORARY
EDUCATIONAL TRENDS

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ABSTRACT

The threats to privacy which arise from technologies and institutions are of considerable contemporary interest, as is illustrated by a large literature upon such threats within the liberal tradition. Of particular contemporary concern are the *subjective* routes through which privacy may be undermined. This concern arises from the contemporary trend for institutions to become concerned with the *internal and subjective* lives of their charges. In education, these trends may be found in an advocacy of increased self-disclosure in the classroom, and in a call for increased personal and emotional involvement in the activities of the classroom.

The purpose of this thesis is to extend and develop the liberal case for the importance of privacy in the development of a respect for individuality in a way which pays special regard to the significance of the inward and subjective dimensions of human experience for the development of, and respect for, individuality. I argue that a regard for the distinctive character of such processes is crucial to the fostering of individuality. Central to my case is a defence of the critical role which privacy plays in preserving the virtues of character which develop through a sensitivity to these subjective dimensions of human experience.

The methodology involves, firstly, a normative characterisation of the attitudes and dispositions which are required for the exercise of respect for individuality, with a particular emphasis placed upon their subjective and inward features. This task involves an analysis of the distinction between on the one hand, the personal forms of respect, which pertain to individuality, and whose character is essentially subjective; and, on the other hand, those impersonal forms of respect whose character is essentially objective and impartial. Secondly, I undertake an analysis of some, crucial ways in which these dispositions and attitudes may be undermined by values and practices which disregard their subjective character. This analysis proceeds by way of a critical examination of two trends which may be found in some educational literature: a/ Classroom self-disclosure; and b/ Cooperative Learning.

The thesis contains two sections. In the first section, I delineate the essential features of a respect for individuality, and the virtues of character required for the proper exercise of such respect. This will involve showing this form of respect differs, both conceptually and normatively, from impersonal forms of respect. In the second section, I show the special significance of a context of privacy for the development of the virtues of character which are required for the proper exercise of personal respect.

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