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AFTERWORDS

LIZ JACKSON'S REVIEW OF MY BOOK, *Equality, Citizenship, and Segregation*, gets many things right, and I am pleased that we appear to share concerns about the educational needs of the most disadvantaged (see her review in *Educational Theory* 64, no. 6 [2014], pp. 661–667; see also Michael S. Merry, *Equality, Citizenship, and Segregation: A Defense of Separation* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013]). As I discuss early in the book, there is a lot of confusion about what separation entails given the opprobrium with which the concept is historically associated; indeed, emotions typically run high around this topic, and perhaps with good reason. To her credit, Jackson's review does not suffer from this defect; there is none of the parochialism or excitable rhetoric that one often encounters among educational scholars.

But Jackson's measured tone does little to allay my concerns about her review omitting the book's core argument. Considering that it is basically a work in political and moral theory, I would have expected to see more than a passing reference or two to the argument's framing principles, namely equality and citizenship. Further, considering that in this book I defend a *prima facie* argument for separation in the domain of education, I would have expected to see more about what this entails in her review. Yet, in contrast to her terse summaries of the case studies, Jackson hardly broaches the core principles shaping this discussion as outlined in chapter 3, or, even more critically, the careful defense for "voluntary separation" (VS) that I set out in chapter 4 and return to in subsequent chapters. The case studies are important, but only to the extent that they serve to illustrate how, on the strength of the framing principles, VS can work. Failing to examine what the arguments for VS are is a key weakness in her review, particularly when these serve as the fulcrum for the entire book. Yet before I say more about the book's core argument, let me

first correct a few of Jackson's — no doubt unintentional — misunderstandings.

First, I provide no argument for "separating" groups; rather, I defend a principled, empirically informed, and contextually sensitive pragmatic justification for separation *under existing conditions of segregation* for members of stigmatized and disadvantaged groups — a justification that is attentive to both involuntary as well as voluntary factors. Without attention to both factors, I argue, one cannot make sense of spatial concentrations. Second, I do not argue for using the principle of equality as a *justification* for separation, as Jackson contends. Rather, I defend the argument that conditions of segregation may be conducive to the fostering of equality and citizenship. Third, Jackson seems to think that I defend a "preservationist" (and hence conservative) understanding of culture and identity, when, in fact, I explicitly repudiate this in the book; the understanding of dynamic, complex, and hybrid cultures and identities runs through each of the case studies and much of my previous work elsewhere. Fourth, it is simply not the case that my defense of a separationist strategy is chiefly about promoting "self-esteem" (nor is it about "student pride," "identity construction," or "emotional healing"), important as each of these certainly is. Curiously, Jackson mentions "self-esteem" no fewer than eleven times in her review and asserts that the book lacks "a critical analysis of the importance of self-esteem," though the term appears only one time in the entire book and is thus not a central feature of my argument. Finally, Jackson asserts that "the argument [for VS] more or less fails when it comes to social class" (666), without offering an explanation for this point. Yet the third case study of VS for "poor whites" in the UK, which I describe as a difficult case involving a marginalized and stigmatized "group," is problematic not because the group in question is poor or

white, but because the presence of enabling conditions — for the moment — appears more difficult to realize. But this concerns a specific “group” in a specific historical context, and thus cannot be extrapolated to the poor or disadvantaged more generally. Around the world, the oppressed have consistently shown themselves capable of rising up and organizing against their oppressors and, on their own terms, pursuing those things — including their education — they have reason to value.

So what is the basic argument for VS? First, it begins with the recognition that even with the elimination of imposed de jure segregation, both residential and educational segregation remain virtually unchanged owing partly to the exercise of liberty (what I call the non-facilitative principle because its exercise does not facilitate “integration”); most efforts to reduce segregation routinely fail (as the geography and sociology literature annually show), and often for reasons having to do with failing to take both voluntary association, but also the structural inequalities of public schooling, seriously. Taking stock of these inescapable realities, we better understand the *nonideal conditions* on which the core argument for VS is predicated. Second, it is not segregation per se that should concern us, but its *attending conditions*. Many forms of segregation are consistent with liberal democratic principles, and may assist in fomenting resistance to oppression. Third, given stubbornly high levels of segregation, but also complex involuntary and voluntary reasons for it, I offer a *pragmatic* defense of separation. It is pragmatic precisely because it is wildly unrealistic (and often implicitly racist) to assume that equality and citizenship are simply unattainable unless and until disadvantaged and marginalized groups are “integrated” with the mainstream. Fourth, a pragmatic defense of separation in this book pertains exclusively to stigmatized and disadvantaged groups, those who consistently live with racism and/or exclusion, or for whom the promise of “integration” (as white liberals imagine it) is simply a fantasy. Fifth, a *prima facie* case for VS — a reclaiming, redefining, reorganizing, and redirecting of the terms of one’s segregation — means, among other things, that neither its being “voluntary” nor its being “separate” is a sufficient justification; enabling conditions must be present (or capable of being fostered), and, most central to the argument, VS must be framed by

concerns about equality and citizenship (and not “self-esteem”). In sum, my defense entails a rejection of “integrationism,” the ideology that justice for the most disadvantaged is only possible under conditions of “integration” as defined by majority groups.

But pushing the implications of VS further, Jackson raises an interesting question in her review about “mainstream inclusion” of students with special needs. The question is apt, and she is correct that many now argue against separation as the best way to demonstrate equality of recognition, status, and treatment. Yet while it is true that I do not take up the issue of special needs in a systematic way, I do briefly draw an analogy in chapter 1 between the notion of “integration” and “inclusion,” where I say, “Whether all children with disabilities should sit alongside their nondisabled peers remains a practical as well as a moral question. . . . Among other things, we will need to assess the nature and severity of the disability, whether pull-out instruction benefits or alienates, how inclusion affects the pupil in question (but also how it affects his or her classmates), how ‘reasonable accommodation’ in the classroom should take place, and so on. To be sure, when de jure policies separate children by disability — emulating analogous policies on the basis of gender, ethnicity, or race — they should be challenged as discriminatory. But it is doubtful whether doing away with all separate instruction is beneficial” (*Equality, Citizenship, and Segregation*, 7–8).

As with cases related to disability, each case for VS, too, will be inherently complex, context-specific, and often highly dependent on a multiplicity of variables that may be enlisted to make (or break) a defense of VS. As I also argue in the book, stigmas may recede for some groups yet remain implacable for others. Still, while involuntary factors undeniably will constrain, they rarely are able to expunge voluntary responses to one’s unchosen predicament. That is why, pace Jackson, even social class separation — the “vexing case” that I examine in chapter 7 — should not be so quickly dismissed, certainly not by those who carry leftist credentials and espouse radical pedagogies yet then effectively belie these credentials by claiming that the oppressed are simply powerless victims unable to do anything for themselves. It was the disabled, after all, who led the

charge for sweeping legislative changes in the United States, just as women, blacks, gays, and other marginalized groups have. But class-based loyalties, too, have brought down empires and continue to challenge concentrations of power. This doesn't mean that they always succeed, of course, but if pragmatic separatist strategies

can facilitate greater justice for the most disadvantaged, then I for one unreservedly support them.

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Designed to stimulate ongoing dialogue among authors and between authors and readers, "Afterwords" is a forum for critical and constructive responses to the articles and book reviews published in *Educational Theory*. Contributions are short and to the point: 750–1000 words for longer responses; 350–500 words for shorter rejoinders. While some responses are commissioned by the editor, the journal welcomes submissions to "Afterwords." Submissions will be vetted by the editor according to how well they prompt further reflection on positions advanced in the journal. Manuscripts should be submitted as an e-mail attachment to EdTheory@illinois.edu.