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Editor: Gene V Glass, Glass@ASU.EDU. College of Education,  
Arizona State University, Tempe AZ 85287-2411

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## **School Choice: A Discussion with Herbert Gintis**

**Gene V Glass, Editor  
College of Education  
Arizona State University**

*glass@asu.edu*

### **Abstract**

Eighteen educators and scholars discuss vouchers as a means of promoting school choice and introducing competition into education. The discussion centers around the thinking of the economist Herbert Gintis, who participated in the discussion, and his notion of market socialism as it might apply to education. In 1976, Gintis published, with Samuel Bowles, *Schooling in Capitalist America*; in 1994, he is arguing for competitive markets for the delivery of schooling.

### **I. Introduction.**

This is a report of a discussion, a virtual discussion among people, many of whom have never met face-to-face. It took place in January of 1994 over a computer network; the participants in the discussion are regular contributors to an electronic forum on education policy analysis known as EDPOLYAN (contact the moderator, Glass@asu.edu, if you wish to know more). Participants receive and send electronic mail that carries along discussions of various education policy issues. Occasionally a thread of discussion will emerge and be sustained for days or weeks. One such thread was that of school choice or vouchers. The discussion was carried primarily by Herbert Gintis, an economist at the University of Massachusetts. Altogether, eighteen people participated in the discussion. Gintis's ideas on competition among non-profit,

non-sectarian schools quickly became the focus of the debate.

The discussion has been heavily edited; as much was discarded in producing this account as was retained. Portions were reordered and threads untangled to produce what appears to be a conversation. An informal tone was retained. "Hacker" short-hand was not edited: BTW= "by the way"; IMHO= "in my humble opinion," and the mysterious :-) is no hieroglyphic, it's a smiling face lying on its side. The tone is an essential part of the intellectual give-and-take of the discussion. It contrasts with the staid and assured tone of a typical journal article, where positions are often advanced with little threat of challenge or contradiction.

The participants are identified at the end of the article. They are identified by last names in the record of the conversation.

## II. The Discussion.

A discussion of a national curriculum for K-12 schools soon raised the question of "school choice," vouchers and competition in education.

**Glass:** Your remarks, Herb, seem to me to be leaning in the direction of privatizing education to promote competition. But in 1976, you wrote (with Sam Bowles) in the book *Schooling in Capitalist America*:

"The educational system, basically, neither adds to nor subtracts from the degree of inequality and repression originating in the economic sphere. Rather, it reproduces and legitimates a preexisting pattern in the process of training and stratifying the workforce. How does this occur? The heart of the process is to be found not in the content of the educational encounter--or the process of information transfer--but in the form, the social relationships of the educational encounter. These correspond to the social relations of dominance, subordination, and motivation in the economic sphere. Through the educational encounter, individuals are induced to accept the degree of powerlessness with which they will be faced as adult workers." (p. 265)

Those were powerful words that many rallied around in the 1970s. They seem just as powerful today. But surely they do not square with a faith in the role of free market competition as the solution to educational problems. Nearly every scheme of introducing competition into education that we hear would concomitantly exacerbate the dreadful inequalities of class and race that exist in this country. So please, fill us in on how you got from there to here.

**Gintis:** Promote competition, yes. Privatize, not necessarily, although I do lean in this direction. One can have competition in the public sector, or mixed private-public sector (as in higher education in the USA). What in that quotation of mine from 1976 is contradictory to the desirability of competitive economic relations? The inequality and repression relate to the distribution of wealth and the non-democratic nature of capitalist work relations. I think competition and markets are necessary, and as such, are desirable.

And, Gene, as to your claim that nearly every scheme of introducing competition into education would concomitantly exacerbate inequalities of class and race, that's because progressive people have been against competition in education! As you know, many

minority leaders are in favor of voucher systems. They must be FULL vouchers, however, not supplements to private tuition, and separation of church and state must be maintained, IMHO.

**Weaver:** I hope this shift that we perceive in your thinking is just our interpretation and not your intentions because I think we are falling into the same trap that positivists did if we believe that the so-called free market is some kind of panacea and can be applied to any circumstances.

**Gintis:** My analysis of education in 1976 was a critique of capitalism, but not a critique of markets or competition. I have not changed my position that much, although I now realize that the anti-competition stance of progressives is a great threat to social progress, and Sam Bowles and I have spent the past several years working out the political economy of state and market in a way which favors "competition on a level playing field." We economists tend to favor not free markets, but competitive economic conditions in which the state intervenes to constitute rules of the game favorable to growth, equity, environmental stability, etc. (at least it should).

As to whether, as some imagine, progressive economists are abandoning Marx because of the fall of the Soviet Union, Sam Bowles and I wrote *Democracy and Capitalism* in 1985, before the collapse of communism, in which we rejected Marxism as a system capable of understanding contemporary social dynamics.

And is competition necessarily anti-democratic, as some would have it? Well, IMHO it is not and those people who think so are simply incorrect. I can't think of any social service that, by its nature, should not be provided in a competitive context. What's anti-democratic about that?

I think economic concepts apply quite well to education-- it's a service like any other. Teachers don't like competition because like any reasonable actor holding a monopolistic position they would rather not have to face the cruel world in which people are accountable for their actions. There is no other way to render education accountable, as far as I know, than to subject it to competitive pressures. Such a flexible system also allows communities and parents (and entrepreneurs) to control their own educational resources. I suspect such a system would lead to a burst of creative community efforts.

**Garlikov:** I would argue that it is not competition so much that improves things as it is responsiveness to needs. Competition may or may not improve responsiveness to needs. Further, there is a difference between bureaucracy and centralized control, since a bureaucracy could have de-centralized decision-making controls, and since centralized control can be exercised even in a small operation, often to the detriment of the operation. When decisions are made by people out of touch with the needs at hand of either the customer or the workers who have to work with the customer, companies tend to be insufficiently responsive to the needs or the desires of customers. Bureaucracies may tend more to slow, centralized, unresponsive decision-making; but it is not the bureaucracy as such that is the problem. It is decision-making at a locus other than where the relevant information is at hand to make a responsive and reasonable decision. This is often centralized decision-making, but could be just as messed up due to lack of information if made somewhere far removed from the center of the operation. A sergeant can give a private just as bad orders as a general can.

**Howley:** Like others, I found that *Schooling in Capitalist America* provided a quintessential analysis of how schooling serves capitalist interests. I am now having a hard time accepting the ease with which you, Herb, are able to separate relations of competition from social relations of capitalist production.

**Gintis:** Thanks for the kind words. I see your problem, and you deserve a serious answer. I am a bit taken aback, however, since I have been working with these issues for at least ten years now, but with my writings geared to economists. First off, market socialism is certainly not capitalism, yet it accepts market competition (it differs from capitalism in not promoting private ownership of productive capital). I would like to see some version of market socialism replace capitalism one day. My preferred version would have lots of worker-owned firms, and would have strong worker rights in non-worker-owned firms. It would not allow combinations of labor or capital across firms for the purpose of colluding to reduce fair competition.

When Sam and I wrote *Schooling* we thought the problems of finding an alternative to capitalist economic institutions were simple, so we did not stress the issue. We were wrong. There is no known viable alternative to the "mixed economy" with a strong competitive sector and with suitable interventions by the state. Since there is no known alternative to such institutions, we have only one thing to do: search for alternatives, and in the meantime affirm the economic institutions that are necessary conditions for a viable economy. This, in my mind, is the only way to go. Yes, it is very radical, because it breaks with both right and left traditions. But it is correct. As economists, we have the obligation to tell it like it is. This is how it is.

**Howley:** Nor do I see in your comments much support for the assertion that an ideal form of capitalism (i.e., fair competition) and democracy are compatible. For one thing, the view that human beings produce better (i.e., more or more responsively) under conditions of competition depends on certain foundational claims about human nature that are different from (and, I think, incompatible with) the underlying premises of democratic localism.

**Gintis:** They had better be compatible, since it is not "foundational claims" but rather empirical reality (also economic theory, but that is an issue I'd rather not open up here) that dictates my position.

**Howley:** I am troubled by the notion of accountability that is so blithely bandied about. For education (which by virtue of its connection to the making of meaning is wildly different from any other social service) to flourish, it needs to be RESPONSIVE to the concerns of parents and communities, not accountable to them.

**Gintis:** Full vouchers allow communities to set up their own schools, and do not require unanimity: there can be many initiatives.

**Howley:** Even bureaucratic accountability but certainly choice-by-pocketbook accountability entails after-the-fact involvement. In the marketplace, consumers choose the best available products; they don't participate in dialogue about the meaningfulness of those products or the role that those products play in determining the conditions of life on earth.

**Gintis:** They can if it is relevant to do so. Higher education is a case in point. There is a strong private sector, and we have the best higher education in the world IMHO--there should be equal access to higher education, but that is a different matter.

**Howley:** Viewing education as a consumer product or service removes it from its central position in the development of human consciousness and culture.

**Gintis:** Not true, IMHO. The public sector can erect criteria for funding that embody such principles. Note that day care services hold an equally central place, yet most people I know (not all, of course) believe the service can be supplied without creating a state monopoly to do the job.

**Howley:** I think that our system of day care is a good deal more unresponsive and inequitable than our public schools. There is an enormous difference in the quality of care provided by nursery schools serving children of the wealthy and that provided by the custodial facilities serving the children of the poor. Moreover, day care centers (like IHEs) aren't routinely asked to show results other than those implicit in the perpetuation of social class distinctions.

You seem to overlook the complexities of the interplay between what seems to be the case (I wouldn't go so far as calling that "empirical reality") and what might be possible. On the one hand, you say that there is no viable alternative to the "mixed economy;" on the other that we must seek alternatives. If there is no viable alternative, how CAN we seek alternatives?

**Gintis:** As an economist I study institutional alternatives to capitalism. My colleagues and I who work on this problem have no stunning insights to offer the public yet, but we are "seeking alternatives." Similarly, I think people in their daily lives should seek alternatives. But none that I envision fall outside the framework of a "mixed economy."

**Howley:** I think your position is best characterized by your statement that we must "affirm the economic institutions that are necessary conditions for a viable economy." It is, of course, "necessity" of the sort you envision that undermines the search for alternatives. There are no alternatives if the current economic institutions are a necessity.

**Gintis:** Not at all! It is by REFUSING to recognize the "necessity" of the existing system that we ensure that it remain forever! People who criticize capitalism and don't offer an alternative are not being very helpful.

**Howley:** If you assume that the way things are is a necessary condition of life, by what process do you imagine we might arrive at something preferable (i.e., market socialism)?

**Gintis:** I think competition is both necessary AND desirable, in the best of all possible worlds. I think market socialism will include a good deal of both competition and democracy. What's the problem here?

**Howley:** In fact, advanced capitalism has a vested interest in pursuing just such "necessity" to the detriment of efforts of a democracy to impose suitable interventions. Under advanced capitalism, the interests of business are the interests of the state to a large extent, which is why schools are the way they are (as your 1976 analysis implied).

Under this arrangement, voucher systems will NEVER be full vouchers of the sort you talk about.

**Gintis:** If conservatives push for vouchers and progressives oppose them, you are correct. But if progressives push for an egalitarian, democratic voucher system, it could work.

**Howley:** In fact, higher education, which as you note includes a strong private sector, does a fine job of reproducing social inequities and catering to the interests of capitalism (see Clyde Barrow's *Universities and the Capitalist State* for elaboration). Private colleges, for example, serve one market, public colleges and universities another. Our higher education system surely produces graduates with differential status, but one could hardly claim that this outcome constitutes accountability; and no one holds them accountable by any other standard. Do you really want K-12 schools to become "the best in the world" by perpetuating a similar sort of hoax?

**Gintis:** This is an overstatement. I said that U.S. higher education is unequally funded. Other than that it is quite good. I have taught in European universities (in France), and so I have some personal experience, in addition to the statistical evidence.

It is ironic that, at least to my mind, progressives today are the real conservatives! They hold fast the ideas they have had since the turn of the century, and oppose all change like the plague. And these ideas are about half right, half wrong, IMHO. That includes your ideas, and probably mine as well. But I think we should be real iconoclasts in this period, real brainstormers. If the progressive people like yourself would give competition a chance, you might see that it fits into a positive vision of the world.

**Glass:** You said, "But if progressives push for an egalitarian, democratic voucher system, it could work." It's the egalitarian element, I suspect that concerns many progressives most. In this notion of a system of market socialism for schools that you have been working on, how are the egalitarian concerns handled? Many worry for obvious reasons that choice exercised by parents on behalf of their children will result in even worse and more deleterious separation of races and social class in the schools than now exists. Who would choose in this market system of education and what faith do you have that egalitarian goals will be achieved, or at least, more closely approximated?

**Gintis:** All children get the same voucher (with corrections for "special needs"), and participating schools can't supplement funds with tuition from parents. As to your worry that choice will make race and class separation worse, it would be difficult to be worse! It's pretty bad now. But education, like the health care system, could be forced to be relatively egalitarian; due process, anti-discrimination, etc. apply to funded schools. I also think "forced integration" is a bad idea, both educationally and politically, and I am not afraid of the implications of people choosing their own schools. Moreover (and I repeat), if you leave the issue of educational service delivery to the conservatives, it will most likely have the bad effects you are suggesting.

If we think creatively and with an open mind, we can increase the probability of a positive outcome. If we resist all change using classic but no longer persuasive arguments, we are consigning ourselves to policy irrelevance. IMHO, of course.

**Howley:** Do you appreciate the difficulty of instituting such alternatives considering the

power relations that support capitalism?

**Gintis:** No, not at all. The problem with the left is LACK OF ALTERNATIVES, not difficulty in implementing them, IMHO. Besides, I think there is lots of room for progressive innovation WITHIN capitalism--it's been a pretty flexible system, you know, embracing laissez faire, Nordic-style social democracy, Mondragon-style worker ownership, etc. It is certainly not clear to me that in education or other central issues of equality, personal dignity, environmental integrity, and economic growth, that an anti-capitalist stance is de rigueur, or that progressives should be looking for an alternative incompatible with private ownership of capital. As I said before, when Bowles and I wrote *Schooling*, we thought there was a clear alternative to capitalism. We don't say that in the book, but it accounts for our vitriolic attack on capitalism, as opposed to features of capitalism that we considered in need of transformation. Well, we were wrong. There is no clear alternative, or even moderately likely alternative, that is more likely to be successful than transforming one or more aspects of capitalism.

**Howley:** Consideration of these relations of power prompts me to question the wisdom of beginning change (however imaginative) with the schools, particularly when other structural features of the economy have not yet changed. What leads you to believe that the progressive voice will prevail in the political arena?

**Gintis:** It won't if we don't try! Moaning and groaning about the evils of capitalism is a throwaway, IMHO. People with ideals and ideas should offer alternative that the public can evaluate and implement. One such has been competitively delivered educational services. I was skeptical when Jencks proposed this in 1975, but Coleman, Chubb and Moe, and the EXPERIENCES by organizers in implementing competitive systems have changed my mind. This beats moaning and groaning by a long shot, or pulling in your horns and trying to protect the educational system against "new-fangled ideas."

**Howley:** How does "competition" work under market socialism? What will keep it from repeatedly recreating a class of "haves" and a class of "have-nots"?

**Gintis:** Even capitalism doesn't need a class of "have-nots." The Northern European case shows that the elimination of poverty is quite compatible with capitalism. A fortiori with market socialism. BTW, highly progressive estate taxation would go a long way in reducing intergenerational transmission of wealth.

**Howley:** Why is competition necessary in the best of all possible worlds? What foundational claims about human nature or the human condition warrant it as a fundamental principle of social formation?

**Gintis:** This is a long story, so I can't do it justice here. But I would argue that the process of individuation, which is central to dignity and self-esteem, requires competition. I would also argue that a competitive spirit is biologically wired into us as human beings, and it probably evolved because it created more fit individuals. In education or economic life, people are highly motivated by competitive situations. Of course, competition must be "managed" or it becomes personally or socially destructive. For instance, I like to compete in playing tennis, but I would not like to be executed for losing, nor would I like to compete without a tennis racquet, or against a player who could beat me with ease. In other words, competition is a TOOL of personal and social development, just as important as cooperation, in self-actualization and in the

achievement of social goals.

**Levin:** Who would be competing? Schools? School systems? Teachers? Are they competing with each other? with home schoolers? with private sector education and training? with home computer software and TV? with adult and community education institutions?

**Gintis:** This is up for grabs. Some prefer competition within the public sector, where any group can set up a "public school" as a nonprofit institution and compete with other schools for vouchers. Another is a full-blown private sector, where even large corporations can franchise local schools, or have lots of local branches all over the country, etc.

**Levin:** And what are they competing for? students? money? market share? profit maximization?

**Gintis:** Some groups will implement schools to make money, and others to achieve their particular educational goals. The tension between the two types is an inevitable, and IMO desirable, aspect of competitive systems of service delivery (think of music, film, science, etc., where the two types coexist and intermingle).

**Levin:** I think when we start to examine these questions we may find interesting consequences. One important feature, to me, is that we can't easily talk about serving customers in schools, because it isn't clear who the customers are. Are students the customers? If so, we pay remarkably little attention to what they want. In fact, they're compelled to attend. Hard to think of any other product that the customers are FORCED to consume. Is it the parents?

**Gintis:** NOW YOU ARE THINKING CREATIVELY!!! This is what I said would happen once we start dealing with the issue on its own terms, and not just rejecting it out of hand on the grounds that "competition is evil," "education isn't fried chicken," etc. I don't have an answer to this, but here are some elements. Education is to serve the development of the student, but the student is not the best judge of this (this is inherent in the concept of "student," whatever the age or maturity of the "student," but it is especially true for children). What is in the interest of students is socially constituted, so the school is ultimately the agent of society, or more immediately the government. But parents are normally the best medium for implementing socially constituted rights and responsibilities of students, since they have greater knowledge that the bureaucratic state, and they normally have a direct interest in the well-being of the student (their child). Where parents do not fulfill this position of agency properly, they may lose their rights to determine their child's education (just as in health care, I might add). We depend on parents to look out for their children's health, even when there is health insurance. But parents can be deprived of the right to care for their children--e.g., if they have religious beliefs that endanger the child's health, or where the parents are dysfunctional, etc.

**Levin:** Would competition be successful if some schools got to be huge franchise operations and many went out of business? Would it be successful if all schools were much the same and competed on the attractiveness of their buildings (there is some evidence of this happening in the UK as part of their market reform)?

**Gintis:** Yes, both would be successful, I think. Now if it turned out that choice in education led to low quality education, the system would have to be scrapped. More likely there would be "free rider" problems and coordination failure that required the careful updating of requirements for a school receiving a voucher, to ensure that parents can't choose bad schools. This is like in health care: you can choose your provider, but you can't get the insurer to pay for Bermuda vacations or spiritual healers.

**Levin:** Isn't it the case that education is really everybody's business --that all of us have a stake in what schools do, not simply those who attend or their parents or employers? Isn't that what the idea of a public good is? But as soon as we admit that education is a public good, I think we have to admit that there are quite different versions as to what education should be; we don't agree on that, as evidenced by our discussion.

**Gintis:** I don't think there is that much disagreement, but where there is, there should be diversity in types of school. A competitive system quintessentially allows this.

**Levin:** In most market systems, we satisfy individual preferences. That by itself is not enough in the case of schools, since competing individual preferences can't all be satisfied. I don't much care what kind of toothpaste you use, but I surely do care about whether your kids learn to read, because that has a direct effect on me as well.

**Gintis:** As I said before, I think schools are for students, but society is the ultimate protector of students rights and interests. Parents are the immediate protector, but parental rights can be superseded when parents egregiously violate their trust.

**Hunter:** This latter point is precisely what I was experiencing. In the face of strong (but for me, not persuasive) arguments by a powerful thinker from economics, I found myself voiceless, almost disenfranchised. The matter is made worse by the fact that I agree with you, Herb, that a mixed economy is the best bet we have at present, so my opposition comes down to a not-in-my-backyard argument--let's have competition and market forces where appropriate, but education is not appropriate. I can't help but think you have the advantage of a relatively disinterested position in comparison to educators and that this adds a kind of credibility that cannot be ignored.

I don't think it is simply that we are resistant to change, Herb, I think it is that we are genuinely convinced that this particular change has a high probability of being destructive, especially on its impact on those already economically disadvantaged. I certainly perceive myself as an advocate of change, but in both of the current threads here, I am afraid that does not come across.

Whether that means (to anyone in particular) a voucher system or not is likely to depend on that person's place on something like a left-right continuum. For me, the deciding factor is in the assumption of good stewardship on the part of parents. It seems to me that voucher advocates make that assumption all too willingly on the basis of their life in a middle class culture. That is not to say that all middle class parents are good stewards, but that good parenting is \*assumed\* to be part of middle class life. For the poor, there are a lot of impediments to "good" parenting vis-a-vis children's education that have to do with the pressing demands of survival. (In extreme cases, such as currently in parts of India and, I've been told, in colonial America, this may extend to infanticide, indicating that more than education may be affected.) Drawing on health care as an analogy, you

argue that the state can usurp decision making when parents fail to exercise their responsibilities, but I have two concerns about this: 1) in health care, this occurs only in very extreme cases, life-or-death or close to and 2) I imagine such a decision would be made more readily on behalf of children of the poor than on behalf of the children of the wealthy, who might engage the state in expensive litigation to protect "their good name." I doubt that the courts would see any exercise of voucher abuse as dangerous enough to warrant intervention, but if they did, I think the children of the wealthy would also need protection.

Finally, Herb, you argue that "individuation" is "essential to dignity and self-esteem." Since that seems to be not economics, my voice is returning to me. Although the assertion is reasonable, I think it is weak. Not only is it possible that there are other equal necessities for the development of dignity and self-esteem (I would suggest that participation in a community is a candidate), it is also possible to argue that the self-non-self boundary is the source of indignity and self-loathing or that dignity and self-esteem arise not from our awareness of ourselves as unique but from our recognition of our commonality or oneness (a religious, perhaps especially Eastern, perspective).

**Pendarvis:** Herb, in reference to your statement that capitalism doesn't necessarily require "have-nots," as Northern European (some) countries show in their virtual elimination of poverty. It seems to me that the basis of capitalism, a necessary element, is a group of relative "have-nots."

**Gintis:** Yes, of course. This is not only capitalism: any system in which there is competition, there are winners and losers. The stakes must be sufficiently high to induce people to compete, and hence in some situations there will be substantive winners and losers. So what? I would claim that a human society without winners and losers would be a monstrosity. In the good society, one might expect the outcomes to be somewhat (perfectly?) correlated with effort and merit, but even here I am not so sure. Where there are stochastic elements to outcomes (luck counts), winning and losing will not be based on merit (even merit is a stochastic outcome, of course, since our personal endowments are stochastically distributed).

**Pendarvis:** This basic unfairness saturates the system, including the schools, although as you and Bowles point out, they are contradictory sites. Vouchers, in my opinion, will serve to make the schools more subject to the inequities of capitalism; they won't reflect the liberal democratic basis of our government even to the extent that they do now.

**Gintis:** You have not argued why this would be the case. I have suggested the opposite, and given reasons why. I am not sure they are correct, but I lack your pessimism about the possibility of reform.

**Covaleskie:** The root of my opposition to school competition has been a belief that public education is a common enterprise, and not properly a thing of the market, where objects that are properly traded are traded. In some sense, it seems to me that the purpose of the market is to distribute things, and not necessarily equally. Education does not seem properly that sort of thing.

**Gintis:** A "common enterprise" does not have to include the delivery of the services of the enterprise by the state! The "communality" can be reflected in the rules and regulations concerning participation in the voucher system.

**Covaleskie:** The advantage of education not being a thing of the market, I think, is exemplified with a book like Kozol's *Savage Inequalities*. The force of that story, it seems to me, is founded on the assumed, and betrayed, commitment to education as a thing of the commons. In effect, Kozol tells us, "We say we have a commitment to educate all our children in common, and this book is evidence that we are not the sort of people we say we are."

**Gintis:** I have argued that vouchers should be equal for all students, with corrections for "special needs." BTW, it is easy to show that Kozol has not located the problem with our schools--it doesn't take much statistical sleuthing to show that inner city schools have higher per student expenditure than other schools.

**Covaleskie:** Under a regime of the market, I can imagine people responding to Kozol, "But we have no such commitment; we chose our school, and they chose theirs."

**Gintis:** We can have a commitment to adequate funding!

**Covaleskie:** Competition implies that there are winners and losers. The fact that that is a good thing in tennis does not imply anything about its goodness in education.

**Gintis:** If you think it would be good to have an educational system without winners and losers, I would like you to explain this system to me. I find the idea mildly absurd and morally distasteful. I guess I think progressives have moved from a reasonable abhorrence to poverty and socially unproductive wealth inequality to a dislike of unequal outcomes. It reminds me of those who hate alcoholism who then think abstinence is a virtue.

**Beadie:** If education is created and distributed by the market rather than being created and distributed by the democratic process, then we have turned a social good into an individual good.

**Gintis:** I don't understand why at all. If the basic "social good" character is determined by the democratic process, its form of delivery does not undermine this determination. For instance, we can decide collectively that all members of society have a right to eyeglasses, but that they may be purchased from private vendors. The "common purpose" lies in the definition of "need for eyeglasses" and "eyeglasses." I must have a documentable vision impairment to receive my glasses (I can't get them to resell, or to use for propping up a short leg on my kitchen table, etc.), and "eyeglasses" don't include designer sunglasses, or battery-heated neon-lit joke glasses, or ritually blessed oculars, etc.). You are confusing the PURPOSE with the MEANS OF EXECUTION of the purpose, I believe.

**Beadie:** Although individual/parent preference has always played some role in the distribution of education, we are now saying that it is the only principle of distribution. We have then given up on the whole idea/project of recreating the public through public education. What is silenced as a result is the very formulation of educational issues in terms of public/social goods.

**Gintis:** Can you see how my previous answer would deal with this? I believe you are confusing the process of determining the social parameters of education with their

implementation.

**Beadie:** The point is very similar to the point about town meetings versus electronic voting. Registering one's opinions is not the same thing as democratic decision-making. Similarly choosing one's own school is not the same thing as participating in community provision of common education.

**Gintis:** Of course not. But one can do both, and there is no contradiction between the two, IMO.

**Costrell:** I am somewhat taken aback by the thrust of the arguments against vouchers that I've picked up. Unless I've misinterpreted what I've read, the argument seems to be that public school (near-) monopoly is necessary for the preservation of democracy, the promotion of community, the advancement of socialism, the re-making of human consciousness, or whatever transcendental goal some people here seem to have in mind.

Quite aside from whether or not these arguments are correct, one might have thought there would at least be some discussion of the pros and cons of vouchers with respect to the rather more prosaic goals 99% of the populace hold for their schools, to wit: reading, writing, history, math, and science, plus a few old-fashioned virtues such as punctuality and self-discipline. After all, the school reform movement arose because of low levels of academic achievement, not because of any notable deterioration in democracy or any surge in sentiment for socialism. In the general public, there is a vibrant debate over vouchers, but it primarily focuses on student achievement (e.g. Albert Shanker vs. Chubb & Moe). Shanker's focus on standards is explicitly posed as the last chance to raise achievement before the public turns to vouchers. My guess is that if the public at large were to ride the information highway into EDPOLYAN and infer (wrongly, I hope) that much of the education industry has such vastly different goals from the parents, then, as Albert Shanker fears, we will indeed get vouchers, like it or not.

**Covaleskie:** Herbert, perhaps the difficulty here is that what you mean by "market" is radically different from what people like Moe and Chubb mean. Are you suggesting that the market ought to become part of the commons? If so, are we talking semantics, not policy differences? For example, when I object to the fact that a market has winners and losers, you read me as opposing unequal outcomes, which is not what I mean at all.

**Gintis:** I didn't use the word "market" at all! I said "competition," leaving it open as to whether private or public or mixed. I did say that we should not be afraid of "private delivery systems" but these could be non-profit (in the tax sense of the term), and could be highly regulated by the state, and still be "competitive." Now in fact I personally believe that "the market" should play a role, in the sense that groups that want to set up schools should be allowed to do so without impediment, so long as they meet the property pedagogical and civil criteria. I think that there should be "winners" and "losers" among schools, in the sense that schools that cannot attract enough students to stay in business should go out of business. If we are worried about innovative schools, there are always foundations and government agencies (NIH, etc.) that could give new project a chance to develop before becoming subject to the market's "bottom line."

**Covaleskie:** Perhaps I am just confused by the unfamiliar use of familiar terminology. Markets, as I understand them, distribute those things differentially which we have decided are not necessities, at least not in full measure, for full participation in a

democratic society.

**Gintis:** Not at all. We can have markets where the prices are set by non-market institutions, such as governments, but where the services are delivered competitively. Much of health care is delivered this way in many countries. We can extend markets to necessities, and then provide individuals with "vouchers" for these necessities (e.g., food stamps, rent vouchers, etc.)

**Covaleskie:** Education provides opportunity for full participation in society, and so is necessary in full measure for everyone. Not in equal measure, but in full measure. That seems one grounds to exclude it from what I think of as market.

**Gintis:** Not according to the above reasoning, I believe.

**Covaleskie:** Further, market suggests exchange. That is, you give me a car, I give you money. But education--more precisely, educational opportunity--should not be something I have to exchange for. I have to earn the education itself, but not the opportunity for it. Are we talking markets when we give equally to all?

**Gintis:** I must be missing something. What do you call full voucher funding? Students don't have to "earn" this, any more than if everyone aged 10 were given free tickets to Disneyland.

**Covaleskie:** Perhaps your suggestion is that the market operates when we cash in the full and equal vouchers, choosing the schools we prefer. But this then brings us back to the original problem of equity (not equality)--the parents choose for their own children, and some can choose wisely on the grounds of their own cultural capital, and some not.

**Gintis:** To question parent's capacities without a sufficient evidence of their inability to act on behalf of their children appears to me to be unsatisfactory. Besides, the system of accreditation can make it quite difficult for parents to make really disastrous choices (as with health care again, where e.g., quackery and kickbacks to patients are disallowed). I think people have shown a great ability to control their lives, as long as the system of rules they face are fair and efficient. Those parents who do not act on behalf of their children can be relieved of the right to choose their children's schools, just as with their personal care and medical treatment.

**Covaleskie:** Hence, some children will wind up being losers in the marketplace, which is what markets are designed to produce. But not due to any deficiency of their own, except the folly of choosing their parents badly.

**Gintis:** This is the general case when society places value on family control of kids. I approve of this in general, and I extend that approval to parents being stewards of their children's education.

**Covaleskie:** It also seems that this approach does not address the problem that the goods pursued are private. Unless you stipulate that the commons define the goods that schools can legitimately offer. In which case, we are again out of the market and into the commons. I frankly have no problem with this, except that I do not see why we should call it a market.

**Gintis:** Because it is competitive, there are winners and losers, and the clients choose the services they prefer. What would you call it? I don't see how it much matters.

**Covaleskie:** Finally, there is the problem of language. Something seems lost when we view our students or communities or whatever as "customers." Democratic membership seems not the sort of thing one ought to be "buying."

**Gintis:** I don't. That's what they are. One does not "buy" democratic membership, but one may exercise that membership by the choice of one's service providers. Democracy does not contradict competition and choice in the delivery of educational services, as far as I can see.

**Levin:** Some more questions about competition in education, and some repeats of the last set that nobody has yet answered. In a competitive education system, would we limit education to schools? If so, why? If not, what other educational vehicles might be acceptable for voucher purposes? At what point should students (rather than their parents) make the choices? Since it is students who are the learners, I'd argue that they should choose very early, but I can see the objections coming... What is a "full voucher"? Average student cost? If so, average of what? by grade level? by state? Or is a full voucher an assumed "real cost", and if so based on what? Given the enormous spending disparities in the U.S., this is a very important question. Clearly if the voucher amount is small there are problems, and if it's big there are other kinds of problems. Similar to the first question, who is entitled to a voucher? Ages 6 to 16? Why? What about people who dropped out or failed and now want to go back? What about adults?

**Howley:** On what reasonable basis could parents evaluate the quality of schools and over what time frame? If education is a complicated process, evaluating the educational effect of a particular school especially on the development of an individual child would require extended observation. Since this effort is not likely to happen, parents will rely on hearsay about schools and on crude (and difficult to interpret) measures like standardized tests.

**Gintis:** As you may have found out by now, economists tend to believe that people have the capacity of making informed choices, especially when the stakes are high enough. More accurately, people are more likely to make choices that are in their interests than when others (such as governments, or administrators) make choices for them.

Now that is clearly not always true, so I should outline the major exceptions, IMO. (a) Where choosing is costly, we sometimes want to delegate authority to others; e.g., the sewer commission in my city makes decisions, and I prefer to leave it that way rather than making them myself; when the authority to choose is delegated, the decision-maker should face incentives and forms of accountability to render it probable that he/she/it will act in our best interest; (b) where there are severe informational asymmetries (the chooser doesn't have all the information, or it is too costly to acquire and process the information) "truth in ...ing" laws should be constituted to ensure that individual decision-makers have the best possible information. In such situations, reputation effects and the recommendations of respected experts also play a role in rendering it more likely that choices are informed and reasonable.

In education, as I have said, children are the clients, and parents are usually the most

effective agents carrying out decisions affecting their welfare. Nevertheless a system of choice in education would have to place many restrictions on parental choice, because (a) some parents have an agenda that is either selfish or conflicts with commonly accepted standards of what is in a child's interest; (b) parents lack information on many points (what is an adequate library, what are adequate teacher credentials, etc.) so a system of accreditation is necessary for participation; and (c) there are some choices that have positive and negative external effects, so coordination problems among decision-makers may require that restrictions be placed on the types of choices that can be made by individual decision-makers (e.g., I may want to choose a school that requires parents to supplement the schools voucher income, but this choice may be disallowed on the grounds that it conflicts with established social equity goals).

The economist's bias, which I would defend very vigorously on grounds of empirical validity as well as political desirability, is that with this set of provisos, individual choice is feasible, desirable, and efficient.

**Howley:** If education is a complicated process, evaluating the educational effect of a particular school especially on the development of an individual child would require extended observation. Since this effort is not likely to happen, parents will rely on hearsay about schools and on crude (and difficult to interpret) measures like standardized tests. Also, they will rely on advertising (which surely will accompany a voucher system for funding schools). Even if the hearsay is accurate, parents will not withdraw their children en-masse; and quite inferior schools (like quite inferior washing machines and automobiles) will stay around serving some children (the children with the least savvy parents, perhaps) for a long time. Can we (as a society or a community) live with these consequences of market-driven schools?

**Gintis:** I don't believe this scenario is likely to be relevant. I think standardized tests are fine, and not as crude as you suggest. Besides, if people in education cared deeply about accountability and had a deep respect for the ability of parents to choose, they would work to develop standardized tests that DID reflect the multiplicity of skills and capacities that schools are expected to develop in children. Besides, among the most important things parents (and children) want from schools is RESPECT. Respect requires POWER, and parents only have power when they can HURT THE SCHOOL when they are displeased. The most direct way of HURTING THE SCHOOL is by withdrawing their kids. This is the power of the consumer!

The idea that there will be an "underclass" of parents who continue to use the inferior schools does not strike me as likely. Can you give me an example of that in some other area? Are there inferior airlines (that kill), restaurants (that sicken), etc. but are routinely supported by their ignorant clients? There are inferior hospitals, but these should shape up once there is universal health insurance and the health care delivery system is required to be accountable (like publishing mortality rates, etc.).

Opponents of choice always point to "advertising" as irrational and its prominence in our society as an indication that consumers are misled by emotional appeals rather than objective facts. There is very little evidence in favor of this view, however, and much against it. Most economists think that advertising is (a) informational and (b) brand recognition. False advertising is for the most part illegal (and should be where it is not). Doctors and health care plans advertise, why not schools?

**Howley:** I am also not certain how we will be able to compel groups to design schools for unattractive segments of the market. Will we be able to force or entice a group of competitors to put schools in inner cities? In remote rural areas? Or will we be able to entice them to set up schools that serve hard-to-handle kids, who are, like all kids, compelled to attend some school or other?

**Gintis:** You can "entice" people to supply services by rewarding them for doing so! If it costs more to educate a kid in the inner city, there can be "special needs" funds to do so. We "entice" people to muck around in people's orifices quite successfully, so why not in other areas? Besides, if the funds were available, rural and inner city communities would have the interest and the power to create their own schools.

**Howley:** Even if competition improved the quality of schools (which I doubt it would), how would we assure the equal quality of options from neighborhood to neighborhood and region to region? My hunch is that would be a lot of competition (i.e., options) in certain areas e.g., the suburbs) and many fewer options elsewhere? In what sense this a fair way to disperse what amounts to a fundamental right?

**Gintis:** When incomes are equalized, competitive forces tend to equalize outcomes. If vouchers were equal, the schools would be equal (pace what I said about "special needs"), I believe.

**Camilli:** As see it, the question involves whether education should be delivered through competition, or through a mechanism based on the notion that education is a common good (which competitive forces may dismantle).

**Gintis:** I have denied this opposition. The "communality" can be incorporated in the "rules of the game" surrounding who participates (accreditation, etc.) and what information is collected and distributed (standardized tests, creative performances...). The opposition between "common" and "individual" and relegating personal choice to the one is, IMHO, an unfortunate legacy of traditional political theory, that delights in the public/private opposition (Sam Bowles and I write about this in Democracy and Capitalism, if you are interested in a more general discussion).

**Camilli:** I think it suffices to say that with the current system parents are making poor choices, there are winners and losers now, schools are becoming more segregated, opportunity is unequally distributed. A belief in the common good does not alter these conditions.

**Gintis:** Blaming this on the choices made by parents is quite unconvincing. We don't have a system of choice, so parental choices don't matter.

**Gintis:** I detect in general feelings of participants in this debate a condescending and paternalistic attitude towards parents. I am telling you: this is WRONG and FATAL. I would also call it paternalistic and elitist if I wanted to get flamed, but since I hate getting flamed, I will simply call it FATAL. PARENTS PAY THE BILL and PEOPLE VOTE FOR OR AGAINST SCHOOLS, and you can think what you want of them, they are your BOSS!

**Camilli:** It seems unlikely that a belief in equity and opportunity will mysteriously

reform current practices.

**Gintis:** It won't be mysterious at all. It requires careful construction of rules, regulations, accreditation procedures, standardized tests, and the like. It requires a devotion to the project. As I said before, if the only people working on this project are enemies of equality, the result is bound to be unequal.

**Camilli:** First, in inner-city schools how could a market system be devised that is more resistant to corruption than the current system? And wouldn't an additional bureaucracy be needed to oversee schools in order to prevent gross violations of decent practice (e.g., cash kickbacks from principals to parents who enroll their kids).

**Gintis:** Any system is subject to corruption, and there always will be corruption. But as long as the basic incentives are correct and systems of accountability are in place, it can be kept to a minimum. For instance, it is illegal to buy and sell votes, and this practice is pretty well kept to a minimum. Doctors could give kickbacks to patients for using them, but the practice is not widespread. Why? Because the penalties make it not worthwhile. Moreover, it wouldn't be an "additional bureaucracy," but an "alternative bureaucracy." I don't really see the problem here.

**Camilli:** Second, do you foresee some need for formal evaluation of schools? Or would this be left entirely as an option to communities?

**Gintis:** Yes, definitely. Without standards, informed choice is virtually impossible.

**Camilli:** Third, it seems unlikely that schools could operate if children were allowed to move each year due to severe budget uncertainties. Wouldn't a market system lead to parents having to sign multi-year contracts with schools?

**Gintis:** NEVER. Not even multi-month contracts! Business have to deal with demand fluctuation, and do so routinely in our society. What's so different about schools?

**Camilli:** I think it is a mistake to dismiss too quickly the concern that some parents will not make good choices for their children. Because parents should be the stewards of their children does not make it so. How can this concern be addressed in a competitive system, if at all?

**Gintis:** Parents cannot make REALLY bad choices, any more than we can take REALLY bad airlines--they aren't allowed to exist! Even the least attentive parents will be able to "free ride" on the concerned parents (just as when I buy a bottle of wine, of which I know nothing, I "free ride" on the consumers who do know, and who set the array and pricing of brands that are available to me).

**Levin:** I don't think Herb has dealt adequately, despite his skill, with the problem of parental goodwill (not to mention the issue of student choice I raised earlier). I see much evidence that people make choices about all kinds of things, including schools, for all sorts of reasons, only some of which have to do with the assumed purposes of those services or institutions. People choose cars because of their color, doctors because of their office location, schools because of their uniforms. Some people--many people--make critical life decisions with hardly a thought. Since the outcomes of education matter not only to those making the choice, but to everyone else, we are

inevitably faced with the need for extensive regulation of choice.

**Gintis:** In fact, I have dealt with this issue already, so I won't repeat myself. BTW, these arguments remind me of the arguments against democracy in the 18th and 19th century (see Sam Bowles's and my book *Capitalism and Democracy*). Indeed, people vote with all sorts of motives, and yet there are reasons to believe the aggregation is not all that bad. Similarly, consumers buy for all sorts of reasons, but to argue that the system doesn't work adequately is difficult. It does work, and when the "voting" doesn't work well, we change the rules of the game (democratically).

**Levin:** As you know, Herb, the history of regulation of industry on our continent suggests that regulation often ends up being for the benefit of the regulated rather than the clients. This is surely part of the present critique of public schools--provider capture. So why would this be different under a competitive system?

**Gintis:** I don't know this at all! I think the regulation of industry tends to follow the will of the people. When people want more environmental regulation, or safer automobiles, they eventually get it. Of course industry fights back, and there are exceptions to my generalization, but the notion that government benefits the capitalists is one-sided and a very poor basis for public policy, IMO. Also the political system could be more accountable to the public (e.g., through campaign finance reform, etc.), but to give up on the system altogether is defeatist in extremis.

**Olgetree:** Well, as a non-educator, non-economist parent of 3, I was about to speak my piece about these, but Herbert just took the wind out of my sails with his comments on the attitude towards parents exhibited in this discussion. I don't have much to add to what he said, except a few observations.

Like Bob, I view school as a place for my children to learn reading, writing, math, etc. -- what I consider academic skills. So I *\*want\** them to score well on standardized tests. (I've administered a SAT, and those are the types of questions I want my child to be able to answer.) But I view it as *\*my\** responsibility in the areas of morality, world view, sex education, drug education, etc. The school's usurping of this responsibility is why we have been compelled to homeschool our children.

I do recognize the fact that many Americans like to be taken care of. We often prefer the easy way, and are not particularly fond of taking on difficult responsibilities. As a result, many parents are willing to abdicate their parental responsibilities to the school. And social architects, licking their lips, are more than willing to accept those responsibilities. Doesn't make it right, though. (But the fact that homeschooling has grown from 15,000 in 1980 to about 500,000 today shows that many parents are waking up and taking those responsibilities back.)

For whatever reason, I guess I resent being denied the right to educate my children as I please for the simple reason that I'm not considered, by the education establishment, to be smart enough to decide what's best for my children. Herbert wisely resisted using the terms paternalistic and elitist. I will as well. But as the great round one is quick to point out, an essential aspect of statism is the belief that the masses are incapable of making the best choices for themselves, and therefore an informed, enlightened "elite" is required make their decisions for them.

**Gallagher:** We who work in public education do work for the parents. But, we work for more than just parents. We work for the whole society. It is not just a client relationship. The entire society, through its laws, requires the education of youth. So, we work for the non-parents too who see the social need for all children to receive an education, hopefully so they can join the society as productive members - both as children, and as adults later in life. We should respond (Aimee Howley's wonderful word) to the parents of the children, for they are the ones primarily responsible for the education of children, but we must also use some of our educational expertise (hopefully, people recognize that we have some of that, notwithstanding Bill Bennett and George Will). Al is correct that he and his spouse have responsibilities for teaching their children their values about religion, sex, etc. But, their children will have to live in a world with many differing value systems. When do they face that world -- at 21? Just because children see people with other values doesn't mean that they adopt them. If parents work with their children teaching and practicing what they preach, children will generally follow. Otherwise, how could we find children coming out of very poor, violent, drug infested neighborhoods of our inner cities who become ministers, nurses, teachers, college academics, plumbers, policemen, ... just plain wonderful people? It has to be family units who influence these kids...and in many cases, one parent family units. But, do parents have the corner on values? I know that schools provide the safety net for many children who come from dysfunctional families, and give them values to follow that they don't get at home.

**Hunter:** Herbert, I think it is important that you know you are forcing many of us to think.

**Gintis:** That's good--it has forced me to think, too. I must say that my fingers are getting tired from so much typing, and I am getting exhausted from the high rate of information flow!

**Hunter:** I dislike the idea of for-profit schools, but I don't see prohibiting them; I just dislike the idea of putting public money into them (just as I dislike a lot of loan guarantees and other props that convert public money into private capital). Could your notion of vouchers accommodate this?

**Gintis:** Yes, but as I have said, I don't understand the dislike. We allow people with food stamps to go to private stores to use them, and we allow private health care deliverers, even what the payment system is public. Here is a general rule: Government should set and enforce rules, and should fund public goods, but should not produce anything. "Anything" is too strong, but you get the idea.

**Hunter:** Part of my resistance to for-profit schools comes from the effect of competition, however. It is one thing to compete for students on the basis academic reputation in an environment in which competition and cooperation are in some sort of balance (I am assuming that not-for-profits could see themselves as all serving some public good and that failing schools might even recognize their failure and disband willingly, knowing that they are performing a service by doing so. A for-profit school in this environment, however, might develop a highly proprietary sense of ownership of the methods it deems to contribute to its success. (I am thinking of an infomercial I saw last night in which the product being sold consisted of things like the knowledge of which kinds of exercise are most likely to increase metabolism--why should health information or access to more effective instruction be held hostage in the service of increasing

individual wealth?) At least two car companies boast that they give away important safety patents and if it is true, it is evidence that a profit motive needn't preclude altruistic behavior, but it certainly doesn't promote it. On a slightly different matter (teacher merit pay), Murnane and Cohen say, in part, "If teacher's pay is based solely on success in raising reading scores. there are strong incentives for teachers to keep their classroom doors closed and neglect the teamwork that contributes to the accomplishment of other school goals." (Harvard Ed. Review, 56(1), 1986, 355) Why wouldn't we expect that same problem with competitive for-profit schools?

**Gintis:** You apparently don't like competitive systems, and you are throwing up all the examples of how they might fail! The patent system has led to a very high rate of innovation in virtually all fields, and it must be protected! It is short-sighted to note that patents create monopolistic positions; in the long run this benefits society (the length of the monopoly must be just right...). Who ever said a teacher's pay should be based on success in raising reading scores? Do you think "piece rates" are the only form of effective incentives? They are hardly ever used in the economy!

**Hunter:** The kinds of broader social goals that we ask schools to achieve (sex education, drug education, citizenship education, etc.) would fall away as schools sought to outdo one another on achievement criteria (which, despite my support for testing, I must emphasize, we do not do exceptionally well). If you and I worked for for-profit schools, would there be reason for us to share ideas here?

**Gintis:** If there are standardized achievement tests, that could include all of these issues. Who ever said schools should be judged on reading scores? Do you think that is what parents want? I will assure you it is not (just as we don't want cars that are maximized for speed, safety, fuel efficiency, or any other narrow attribute). Competition does not destroy a sense of community. In higher education, there is lots of competition (my department has lost lots of funding recently because the number of majors went down; we are reorganizing our offerings to deal with this). Does that mean that I don't share ideas with others (e.g., what we are doing right now!)?

**Hunter:** Earlier, I raised a question about your frequent use of health care analogies. While both involve service delivery for a public good, isn't the nature of the service sufficiently different that we cannot expect analogous behaviors. Specifically, since the state intervenes in parental responsibility for health care decisions only in the most extreme cases, why should we expect that there would ever be sufficient reason to intervene with the exercise of a family's voucher options as long as the kids went to SOME qualified school?

**Gintis:** Your observation is not apposite, I think. The array of services available to parents in health care is decided socially. First the accreditation of health care professionals. Second the determination of what is covered by health insurance. Third, the criminal and civil liability laws concerning parental responsibility. It is not hard for a parent to act responsibly in this context. Nevertheless, the competitive context is decisive in giving people what they want. Dysfunctional parents can have their stewardship right over their children suspended or revoked, but this is not likely to be an important instrument of public policy, IMO.

**Hunter:** And why shouldn't we expect that in poor neighborhoods this would be the closest school since transportation elsewhere would be a problem?

**Gintis:** There would be more local schools, once the "territorial monopoly" of the public school were relaxed.

**Glass:** Permit me to pose a very concrete series of questions and encourage anyone with an opinion about them to respond. They are somewhat pointed toward Herb, as you will quickly realize, but I would like others' opinions as well. Imagine that a state (or nation) adopts a regulated competitive market mechanism for providing education (K-12). Parents receive vouchers in the amount of \$3,500 for each school-age child, and they can be spent at any government approved non-profit school. In response to this opportunity, several fundamentalist religious groups form schools and prepare to receive students. One can imagine Orthodox Jewish, strict Muslim and many types of evangelical Christian groups doing so.

We can imagine, I think, that the groups in question would find the economics of this system quite appealing--after all, the Catholic Church seems to get the job of educating children done for something like two-thirds the expense of public education. It is unlikely that these schools competing for vouchers could be ruled ineligible on the grounds that they were actually religious schools and would hence violate the First Amendment. We are dealing with rational economic creatures here, and they would easily find a way to establish the appropriate legal barriers between the religion and the new school. Would this phenomenon, just described, happen rarely or frequently in the United States? Approximately what percent of the children in the US might be so closely connected to a religious group that the group would vigorously recommend a particular school to their parents? 2%? 15%? 40%?

**Gintis:** I don't agree that it would be difficult to detect essentially religious schools trying to pass as sectarian. Religious institutions can be ruled ineligible if they spend part of the school day giving religious instruction, if they hire teachers preferentially of particular religious affiliations, etc. I don't even think this is a difficult area to implement.

I think it would start out at 1%, but if it were allowed, it would increase to at least 25% of all school aged children. Perhaps more.

**Wenning:** In response to Gene Glass's question about a hypothetical regulated competitive market involving vouchers, I choose to answer in terms of the regulated competitive market already in place in our public ed. system that involves charter schools. Seven states have passed legislation authorizing charter schools and they are currently operating in at least three states. In response to Gene's first question concerning how often religious groups would seek to form schools, I would have to agree with Herb, namely that about 1 percent would attempt to do so. This is already occurring to some extent with charter schools.

**Gipson-Fredin:** I can't claim a national perspective, but here's my view as a midwestern transplant, now firmly rooted in Southern California. Life must be very different here from the way it is in Massachusetts.

Frequently. 40% Here are some of my reasons: 1) Latinos are a large and growing population with a preference for parochial instruction. (See *Redefining California, Latino Social Engagement in a Multicultural Society* by A Hurtado, D. Hayes-Bautista,

et al) 2) Tom Metzger's group is alive and well in Fallbrook where students in the public high school recently found their lockers papered with white supremacy propaganda. (Sadly, this sort of thing happens fairly often around here. They say, among other things, that the holocaust never happened.) Presumably many in his group have children and would prefer schools run by those in sympathy. 3) You have probably heard about Vista (my home, BTW) where a fundamentalist Christian majority on the school board has added "creation science" to the public school curriculum. (Things may not turn out exactly as planned, however. I have heard of a teacher who is looking for creation stories from various cultures to present along with Genesis. Does anyone know of a 3rd grade version of the Maya's Popul Vuh?) On second thought, maybe 40% is too LOW.

**Glass:** Assuming that you believed that such schools should not be used for religious instruction, how would you attempt to monitor such schools to insure that such instruction was not taking place?

**Gintis:** See the above. Monitoring is easy. Of course a few schools would escape, but we could hold the level of violation down to 1% or less.

**Wenning:** In response to Gene's question about monitoring, I would suggest continuing current monitoring efforts already underway at the federal and state level. Civil rights and compliance agencies at these levels of government currently monitor public schools' compliance with laws concerning handicap access and services, race, ethnicity. Charter school laws currently ban such discrimination also.

**Gipson-Fredin:** Monitoring could be endless and still be ineffective. We could look, as we do now at hiring practices, textbooks, teaching practices, demographic distribution of students, adding religious preference as a variable. (Would this lead to affirmative action by religious sect? Would David Karesh's crew be recognized as a historically underrepresented group?)

**Glass:** And are there any things that seem to you so important to be taught to nearly all children today that you would impose the restriction that every school receiving vouchers would have to teach them?

**Gintis:** Yes. Probably 90% of the curriculum can be agreed upon as universally valid, at least in general (reading, writing, arithmetic, etc.) This is really easy.

**Wenning:** In response to Gene's third question, I also must agree with Herb again. Most of what should be included in curricula in competitive schools can be prescribed by federal, state, and local governments. This occurs to some extent also with charter schools--which must be approved by local school boards and state departments of education.

**Gipson-Fredin:** Yes. Beginning with the value of separation of church and state and the essential equality of all people. The maintenance of such fundamental political principles would be most at risk under such a system. Is it a coincidence that the browner our schools become, the higher the interest in dismantling them, and the more they're in need of "accountability" instead of funds for instruction? A graph of trends in public school ethnicity, finance, and private and home school enrollment might be very telling.

**Glass:** Could such schools as I have imagined turn away students who wished to enroll on the grounds of the students' race or creed? And what about turning away students on the basis of their physical disabilities? (What if a blind student shows up to such a school with the \$3,500 voucher in his pocket and a \$2,000 handicap adjustment but the school says "Sorry, we just can't help you." Would you revoke the school's license to be a voucher-receiver?)

**Gintis:** Turning away citizens from a public provider of a service on the basis of race or creed is illegal in the US. Remember the Civil Rights Movement? There are exceptions for explicitly religious organizations, but schools would not be exempted, in my vision of a system of school choice. The question of physical handicaps is an area that would have to be worked out through public discussion. It is also a question of degree. There are laws on the books now prohibiting discrimination against the handicapped, so the legal issues are not too difficult. There are efficiency considerations, as well. It might be better to have some institutions that specialize in handling some types of disability. But if this violates the rights of the handicapped, then such specialization might be outlawed.

**Wenning:** In response to the fourth question concerning turning away certain students, the answer is usually no--just as in charter schools. Charter schools are entitled to a certain level of state funds, based on the characteristics of students they enroll. I am currently exploring how Chapter 1 funds can be allocated to charter schools. This is particularly interesting concerning charter schools that are legally separate from the school districts in which they are located. Such charter schools may be considered local education agencies under federal laws.

**Gipson-Fredin:** No, they couldn't turn students away legally, but they probably would be successful in creating systemic and emotional barriers in the old, familiar ways. The requirement to maintain physically accessible plants would tend to discourage the proliferation of alternative schools and reduce the competition some find so appealing.

**Hunter:** Herbert's reply to Gene's spate of questions served to bring out the reactionary in me (after all the good he's done). First, the answers are too quick and too easy ("easy" comes too easily). I mean, I think this is a good set of questions yet I find Herbert responding almost dismissively with numbers pulled out of (where?). I am sorry, but that was way to facile for me to take it seriously.

Catholic (and some other religious) schools receive state funding in Canada (rather an irony since we have an official religion that is Protestant). Catholic schools are permitted to hire teachers on the basis of religious affiliation since the expectation is that religiosity is not restricted to a religion class but imbues the whole of the school experience. I personally do not like this (discrimination in hiring), but the courts apparently have upheld it. Once the state begins to provide funding equitably to church run schools, I do not think the interpretation of separation of church and state would work the same way--you would no longer find yourselves saying schools cannot teach religion, you would find yourselves saying the state cannot regulate religious practice and or teaching in the schools. This seems very clear to me, but I recognize it is not an assumption most of you are making. I am not saying that in such a system the state ought to be able to regulate religious practice in schools; I am saying that if it would not be able to (and unlike Herbert, I think it wouldn't), those of you who think religious liberty is tied to the separation of church and state might wonder about whether you want tax

dollars spent that way.

**Gallagher:** I am concerned by the tenor of all of this. I feel like the discussion is treating children like BIC ball point pens, products. It seems like a factory model of input-process- output. Is education that? As a teacher and teacher educator, I have trouble with the concept of treating children and their education in that way. The idea of a market economy of educating just doesn't work for me. Comparing education to health care isn't really a good comparison. Education is the business (oops... I'm falling into the same lingo!) Again, ...education involves activities in changing people - hopefully for the better. This requires time. It is not the opening of a port in the head of the student and pouring in information. It requires very complex activities involving many variables. There are learning approaches, learning styles, so many of what we call the "affective" domain factors, and the psychomotor, and many other things. Al is right that the family has responsibilities in education. So does the religious and the economic institutions of society, and government. Yes, there is money involved but that cannot be the sole controlling factor. Otherwise, we would put the special education children back in the closet in the back room, as was done earlier in this century. Maybe, we wouldn't even bother spending money trying to teach those who don't want schooling (here I mean children who don't know better).

There are many very dedicated teachers and professionals in inner city schools. They are heroes in my view, working under very difficult conditions and having a positive effect on many children. Those children get an education. But, if we were to remove the "good" students from those schools, where and how would we educate those left?

**Bolland:** Gregory Camilli said "it seems unlikely that schools could operate if children were allowed to move each year due to severe budget uncertainties. Wouldn't a market system lead to parents having to sign multi-year contracts with schools?" And you responded: "NEVER. Not even multi-month contracts! Business have to deal with demand fluctuation, and do so routinely in our society. What's so different about schools?" What is different about schools is that the students in a classroom have a large effect on each other and on the teacher's plans, just by being there. Much more so than hospital patients do on each other even. I would worry about the effect on other students, not the effect on the school business.

**Gintis:** The same is true in most walks of life. Firms invest in their employees, and their employees' productivity depends on long term relationships among them. Does this mean that employees should have to offer their firms multi-year contracts? Or even multi-month contracts? If I consume a product, should I have to offer the supplier a multi- year contract for the product, so as not to expose the supplier to the risk of demand fluctuation? I think not.

**Bolland:** Would you care to elaborate a bit on your comment that you did not think vouchers should be used at religious schools? Why not? Religious colleges are subsidized. Do you think they should not be or do you see something different in K-12?

**Gintis:** This is a complex issue. I believe in the constitutional separation of church and state, and have often acted and written on its behalf (I am active in ACLU here in Massachusetts). This separation has a long history, and can be defended as a necessary (or at least highly desirable) ingredient in a liberal democratic society. Historically, religious organizations have attempted to use the schools to initiate their members'

children into the faith, and have eschewed the distinction between Truth and Faith. This is inimical to democracy and tolerance, and counter to Enlightenment reason (IMHO). We should attempt to maintain a secular educational system for the same reason that our forbearer struggled to separate church and state. BTW, this should not be seen as an attack on religion. My position is compatible with deep religious faith. I do not believe religious higher education should be subsidized, if such institutions discriminate in hiring, favor the exercise of one religion over another, or alter the presentation of viewpoints or class material from a particular (or even general) religious perspective.

**Pemberton:** Herb, your discussion of the potential of competition to produce "better" schools has included a comparison of the structured delivery of education via publicly provided schools to the "competitive" system which delivers medical service. Let me point out that at present, medical service to inner city areas and rural regions is NOT enhanced by "competition". In both types of regions, doctors are scarce, often of considerably lesser quality and minimal dedication, AND THEY OFTEN ARE THERE ONLY BECAUSE OF PUBLIC MONIES SPENT TO KEEP THEM THERE.

In the rural area where I live, which is only about 50 miles away from some fancy suburbs with a surplus of medical specialists in practice, yet the only way to get doctors out here is to offer them payback on their loans in return for a two-year stay in the boonies. Sure some of them are good, but many are not. The effects on the community and local education are noticeable. About a third of my students were born at home, without so much as a tip-of-hat to pre-natal care. More than half of those with reading difficulties have a history of ear infections that were either untreated, or insufficiently treated. Caseloads are so huge, that routine physicals must be scheduled a year in advance, and most annual flu-bouts become epidemic in the community in part due to the routine 3-4 hour sit in a crowded waiting room to see a doctor as a "walk-in" for any and all unscheduled illness. There are other problems that exist in rural medical facilities that are undreamed of in the well-provided suburbs, and many of these problems are due to the fact that "free enterprise" makes it more sensible for a good and ambitious doctor to set up practice in the lucrative suburbs than among country folk.

Vouchers and free enterprise MAY bring minor and perhaps mostly cosmetic "improvements" to suburban and middle class urban schools, but, looking at the medical field indicates that those improvements will be lost as soon as the challenges of poverty and distance are tossed into the pot. Likewise, looking at the huge body of legislation and the even larger body of court cases involving protection of consumers from the callous indifference of "competitive" businesses towards their customers should very clearly indicate that "competition" is not the only answer, not the best answer, and probably not even an "imperfect but good" answer to the problems in the schools.

**Covaleskie:** Anne's comments have crystallized my growing feeling that too many of the people here have spent too much time in the 'burbs, or rather exclusive sections of cities, and too little time with the kids in some of this country's schools. The presumption is that anyone who doubts that all parents will make wise and good choices for their kids is thereby and for sure labelled as an elitist and paternalistic. Guilty as charged, if that be the definition.

This feeling began to dawn on me when we were discussing toothpaste choice. You see, in the rural NY community where I taught for nine years, many of my elementary grade children already had no teeth, just blackened rotting stumps. In my kindergarten class, I

provided every child with a toothbrush, but I then had to teach many of the kids what they were for and how to use them. But so as not to be elitist, should I agree that these parents will make good choices about schools for their children?

We live in a society where Beavis and Butthead are not just watched by kids, but are a cultural phenomenon; where kids spend their allowance on music that glorifies violence and demeans women, and parents allow that; and where one of the most popular video games shows the winner tearing the still-beating heart out of the loser. May I humbly offer these in evidence that the occasional parent makes foolish--downright stupid--choices on behalf of their children. To be concerned about the communal responsibilities toward all children is NOT to say that there are not good parents, not even to say that most parents are not good. It is to note the fact that there is some evidence that some children are in fact abused and neglected, and that some parents themselves are in positions of such little power that they have neither the information nor position to make good choices. To "reform" education by empowering parents and disempowering the community seems to me to put these children, the most vulnerable, at risk. And yes, I am VERY MUCH aware that we are already abandoning many of these children, but we do so in violation of a stated (or once assumed) common commitment, which will be weakened even more in a market place, methinks.

**Fetler:** Economic theory I think is affected as much by political sentiment as it is by its scientific methods and tools. Is that why they call it the dismal science? I don't mean to criticize, but only to acknowledge the fact that economists often make assumptions about human wants, needs, and behavior that overlap with more purely political theories. And it seems to me that voucher economics over the last five to ten years has been more political than scientific.

**Gintis:** There is plenty of "scientific" evidence. Read Coleman, Chubb and Moe, and references therein. Also, you are quite vague; what "assumptions" have I made in this exchange that you take exception to?

**Fetler:** California's recent voucher initiative was touted as saving taxpayer dollars. The reasoning was simple. Shift funds from public to private schools, i.e., provide scholarships (vouchers) for one-half the amount currently allocated to public schools that a parent could redeem in cooperation with a private school that could freely accept or reject a child. And radically deregulate voucher redeeming schools, possibly to immunize them against legislation that might seek to reinstate regulation. Herb, where were you when they wrote the language for this initiative?

**Gintis:** In Massachusetts. ;-) I was vehemently opposed to this initiative, because of its partial-funding nature. It was, IMHO, much worse than nothing.

**Fetler:** Allocation of public money is a political act. Sweeping deregulation is also a political act. Competition and market forces then somehow result in better service (facilities, security, instruction, etc.) for the customers (children, parents, communities, states, etc.) of education services. Is this the invisible hand, or is it a sleight of hand? People may be dissatisfied, but considering the vast sums of public money, the lives of children and adults, and the social fabric that are at risk, it would be nice to have some answers in advance to less political questions about appropriate goals, functions, structures, governance, processes, etc. Or a phased implementation, or pilot testing and evaluation. None of this was addressed by the California voucher initiative, and I'm not

aware that it has been reasonably addressed in any actual voucher program.

**Glass:** Mark Fetler reminded us yesterday that there is a difference between economic theory and political reality--California being the instance most freshly in memory.

Permit me to suggest that the relevance of economic theory to the school choice (voucher/market socialism) issue being debated here is propped up by a set of political myths, which when exposed, severely weaken the pro-vouchers position.

It is believed by some that the current system of schooling in America has failed and that sweeping reforms (some even like to speak of them as "systemic reforms") are necessary. Evidence for this failure is variously gleaned from what is believed by some to be the low academic achievement of American school children, from problems of drugs and untimely pregnancy and from criminal behavior of young adults; add to this the Nation's balance of trade in world markets and you have the list of complaints against America's schools that most reformers advance. That these are true or that they can be laid at the door of the school house are myths. Robert Costrell wrote on January 12th that "After all, the school reform movement arose because of low levels of academic achievement..." This is false. Not only is it false to claim that the pressure to reform arose from low academic achievement, the assertion itself that academic achievement is "low" is an aged, wheezing canard. Academic achievement in America is higher than it has ever been; read the best evidence, viz., the National Assessment of Educational Progress, and not newspaper accounts of SAT scores or political pronouncements.

**Gintis:** While it is true that the public is not likely to opt for structural change in education unless and until people think the current system is not working, it is our job as social scientists, IMHO, to consider, evaluate, and develop alternatives. A system of competition in education is a case in point. We should support such a system, and work to eliminate its drawbacks and strengthen its weaknesses, on its own terms and in comparison with the existing system. It is up to the public as to whether alternative systems are to be implemented or not. I have been working on the theory and experience of democratic firms (worker control/ownership) for these reasons for the past eight years. And it is not because hierarchical capitalist firms "don't work."

**Glass:** There are many states in the US with academic achievement levels higher than Germany, Japan and the other nations we seem to look to with envy in these times, and yet these states have vigorous reform movements just like low performing states. Crime arises in large part from the profitability of drugs, teen-age pregnancies from a berserk welfare system and the trade imbalance from a host of economic and political problems that have nothing to do with the educational level of the citizenry (aging economic infrastructure, unfair trade practices by foreign oligopolies, and the like).

**Gintis:** People are dissatisfied with the public school system, and they have a right to the kind of treatment in educational service that they have in health service or any other kind of service. It is our job to help people meet their educational goals, not to tell them they are full of crap (at least if you think that their goals are legitimate, and in this case I do).

**Glass:** Most of the ills of America's schools arise from the largest unregulated, decentralized market one can imagine: the residential real estate market. Our schools reflect the ills of voluntary choice in living quarters that has created ghettos of racial

isolation and poverty.

**Gallagher:** To school choice. We have a form of school choice right now. We call it neighborhood schools and school districts in the suburbs and rural areas. Speak to the real estate agent. "Do you have children? Yes. Well, you ought to look at a home in the Holleydell Township ... their schools are considered among the best in the area! Let me show you ..." Well, if you are interested in the education of your kids, guess where you look for a house. Your kids go to those schools. Parents in that district are probably educated and value good schools. They participate. So, it is a form of school choice. To the inner city. Social and educational impoverishment. Economic depression. Public housing. Children as parents. Choice? Get a reality check by visiting some of those schools. (I dare you!) Talk to the principal, the teachers, the guidance counselors, the school social workers. Talk to the kids. Look around. School choice is for those who know enough to know what to choose. They already have. Either their kids go to private schools or they live in areas where the public schools are "good." School choice will not solve the problem. It won't address the problems of the poor and the educational problems of poor areas. It is because the problems go beyond just the schools. It is a problem of community education and community restructuring. I see school choice as a further disenfranchising of those who need education more than their peers of better means.

**Glass:** Herb, you said early in this discussion that the segregation of the US schools along racial and economic lines could hardly be worse so why not try choice. On this, I respectfully believe you to be quite wrong. Court ordered desegregation is a failure in Northeastern cities where courts were hamstrung in attempts to enforce quotas across district lines, thus permitting white flight to the suburbs. Desegregation has not only been successful in the South, it is resulting in substantial improvements in the education of minority children. See the NAEP results of the last 20 years broken down by race and region of the country if you doubt this. Racial segregation of the schools in this country could not be worse if vouchers and choice were instituted? Don't believe it.

The pressure for reform of America's schools is not new. It has existed for decades and is one of the easiest routes to political power in this country. It arises from the transition of the nation's economy from manufacture to service. As the service sector of the economy rises, the pressure on government services to cut costs grows more intense. Police, fire, highways, prisons, the military--all of these areas are experiencing the same pressure for reform that education is experiencing. The belief that Americans are dissatisfied with their schools and are demanding reform is false. Tom Miller, a researcher for the City of Boulder (Colo) recently won an award from the Western States City Management Assoc (approx. name) for his study of citizen surveys. He performed a meta-analysis of over a hundred citizen satisfaction surveys (How do you feel about schools? parks? road? police protection? etc.) Schools came out higher than nearly every other area of public service, and they received high ratings of satisfaction (75% and greater). He observed another phenomenon: parents think that their local school is doing a good job but they worry that schools elsewhere aren't.

There is a belief by some that in a government regulated market curriculum, admissions, delivery of instruction, hiring of personnel and the like could be so successfully and closely monitored and controlled that fairness and constitutional protections would be insured. I doubt it. The costs of this regulation would be enormous, wiping out any

efficiency gains that a market would offer. Plus, the regulation would be politically impossible.

**Gintis:** Why do you think this? This appears to me to be quite wrong. There are other systems that are relatively efficiently regulated. Why do you believe that government runs the schools okay, but couldn't regulate the delivery of educational services?

**Glass:** I asked earlier, "Are there any things that seem to you so important to be taught to nearly all children today that you would impose the restriction that every school receiving vouchers would have to teach them?" And you answered: "Yes. Probably 90% of the curriculum can be agreed upon as universally valid, at least in general (reading, writing, arithmetic etc.). This is really easy." I don't know what country you have in mind, but it is not the U.S. as I see it. There is scarcely any consensus at all in this Nation about what the goals of schooling should be or how they should be reached. The "general level" of agreement is a facile chimera that will rapidly disappear when any political body (school board, state legislature or Congress) sits down and attempts to delineate what is necessary to teach and what is not permitted.

**Gintis:** Regulatory commissions, not Congress, set regulations. Again, I simply don't see the problem, and I maintain the 90% rule. I keep wanting to say, "look at health care" (where all the contending systems involve patient choice, BTW), but I don't want to sound like a parrot. :)

**Glass:** Finally, to return to Mark Fetler's reminder that we are facing not just economic questions but political questions, let's ask proponents of choice this question. Those arguing for choice in schooling point repeatedly to the existence of other markets (evidencing various degrees of government regulation) in the country: airlines, medicine and the like. Likewise they express a faith in the intelligence and rationality of the consumer of services in markets that offer choices. Why then has choice in K-12 public schooling not evolved in this country? Why? Strong labor unions that fought off legislation and protected the fat cat teachers? Hardly. A unique and unaccountable myopia on the part of freely acting citizens who have seen that choice among doctors is rational but somehow have thought that choice among schools is not? Implausible. Why?

**Gintis:** This is a very good question. Without answering it (I don't have an answer as to why education falls after other state monopolies have long fallen), let me note your generally conservative logic "don't change anything until it is a clear failure; whatever is must be good, because it has survived." Now I think this is generally good advice, but it is NOT GOOD FOR THOSE OF US WHO WORK IN EDUCATIONAL THEORY AND POLICY: it is up to us to envision alternatives and let the nay-sayers tear us apart! Why do you defend this system so strongly (and, I might add, with an ostensible emotional force that I don't understand)? Am I missing something?

**Hunter:** We Canadians already have confessional schools and other private schools that do not now drain the public purse. Won't the institution of a voucher system immediately and dramatically increase the number of students for whom the state is paying? Wouldn't that be an enormous problem for states like Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Louisiana with large Catholic populations (probably in reverse of that order)?

**Gintis:** I very much oppose funding religious schools, as I have said. Most private

education today is parochial, I believe. But in the long run you are correct, since if parents have choice, they will tend to broaden their array of choices beyond the current parochial schools. But this is a larger issue: I also think education should not be locally funded at all, so a fiscal reform in education would both include competitive delivery of services and 75% or 80% national funding of the schools (the rest state and local).

**Levin:** I'd like to take the discussion of competition in a different direction. Let's suppose that competition of some sort will have positive effects on education (I believe that's a reasonable supposition, by the way). How important will these effects be? Is choice or competition in itself likely to bring major improvements to education such that we don't need any other policy measures? This seems to me to be highly unlikely for several reasons. Competition elsewhere in the economy has both good and bad effects, as has been pointed out repeatedly in our discussion. Just as it's hard to paint competition as unfailingly wicked, so it's hard to see it as the source of all good.

**Gintis:** Of course this is correct. I have not been arguing laissez faire, but rather the proposition that in many spheres, proper specification of the "rules of the game" followed by competitive delivery of services, is the proper way to organize the sphere. Publicly funded education with private delivery AND NO RULES CONCERNING THE QUALITY OF SCHOOLS would be an absolute disaster--like the S&L boondoggle, but much larger.

**Levin:** Similarly, the private sector (though I'm not sure that term really has any meaning any more) produces some good things and some quite bad things. Like government--like most things in life?--it produces both good and bad. A simple faith in one solution to complex problems is quite likely to be mistaken.

**Gintis:** I repeat: who has expressed a "simple faith"?

**Powers:** If you trust government to define, enforce, and regulate his system, why does he not trust government to operate it?

**Gintis:** This is fundamental. I don't trust government to operate it because such a system is unaccountable, and therefore has no incentive to do a good job. The legislators who make the rules of the game are accountable to the voters, and their actions (and the effects of these actions) are (or should be, and can be with proper informational access rules) therefore are likely to be more in line with the wishes of the public. But the real issue is broader than this: it is a central tenet (with considerable empirical support) that effective social systems involve government making the rules within which private actors operate, and that they construct these rules so as to render private actors accountable for their actions, and that competition is one of the few known forms of rendering actors accountable for their actions. But this is a really good point to bring out in so stark a manner. Thanks.

**Powers:** Herb, you departed from good manners and common courtesy when you suggested that the arguments of some participants in this discussion were rooted in a deep commitment to the present system, no matter what alternatives might be proposed. I found in your statement a slightly veiled implication that the arguments were invalid because they were rooted in self-interest.

**Gintis:** I am sorry if I offended anyone. In fact, conservatives are proud of their

commitment to the "present system" and I don't take it as an insult to call someone a conservative. I am a conservative on many issues, because I prefer what is to "flying to evils I know not of." My point is that IN OUR PROFESSIONAL WORK, we should be tolerant of innovation, no matter how skeptical we are of innovation. It is my general feeling that the sixties New Left types (who have given our society so much) have become the conservatives of the '90's, but on the WRONG ISSUES: all of the old socialist oppositions are IMHO silly and inappropriate (private/public, self-interest/altruism, state/market) and I get frustrated at people who still operate in that oppositional mode. But to repeat: it is no insult to be called a conservative in my book!

**Covaleskie:** Kathy focuses the difference rather sharply with the almost casual comment that we should not be so paternalistic as to protect people from silly choices. I dissent. Considering what is at stake in education, for both the individual child and the commons, we should indeed want to protect children, and the society as a whole, from the silly choice of individual parents. Not only "want to," but feel morally obligated to. In all the talk about whether "choice" is good, that may be the real disagreement.

**Gintis:** Not at all! Children have rights and education is one of them. Parents are best seen as stewards, not owners, of their children, IMHO. Children should be protected from parental ignorance and malfeasance, insofar as the institutions of "protection" are less susceptible to ignorance and malfeasance than the parents. I am sure there are people who will disagree with this, or will argue that the government is virtually always more ignorant and malevolent than parents, but it is NOT true that this point separates pro- and anti- choice advocates!

**Bolland:** I think vouchers and free enterprise are not a good enough solution unless the vouchers are adequate. Vouchers that essentially give middle income folks a supplement and leave poorer folks with no choice will do just what you say, it seems to me.

**Gintis:** I think this is really key! Partial funding is just an upper-middle-class give-away, and solves no serious problems.

**Hunter:** You preclude the possibility of additional payments by parents to schools accepting government vouchers. My question was whether WE are accepting that as a feature of whatever choice system we are discussing.

**Gintis:** I am suggesting that it SHOULD be part of such a system. It certainly is not part of any existing system.

**Hunter:** I would be shocked if there is agreement on this point. I would be shocked if anything close to a majority of choice/voucher advocates would agree with that condition.

**Gintis:** This is why I don't support most of the existing voucher plans.

**Hunter:** And I would be dumbgasted and flabberfounded if it could actually be made to work (what about contributions to the "building fund?", in-kind contributions of time, equipment, special facilities (if I owned a leisure center, I'd let my kids school use it for little or nothing), etc.?)

**Gintis:** Of course there would be violations, but they could EASILY be kept to say, 25%

of total expenditures. And expenditure differences don't matter that much anyway, I believe.

**Hunter:** I think you may be underestimating the ingenuity of people where money is concerned.

**Gintis:** You are attacking my professional integrity ;-). Economists NEVER underestimate such a thing.

**Hunter:** I tend to agree with John Covalenskie that educational services demand a level of cooperation that makes competition seem insupportable.

**Gintis:** I think the competition/cooperation dichotomy is largely untenable. All social production requires an interaction of both. Large firms are "cooperatives" that operate under conditions of competition. If you are correct in your thinking here, EVERYTHING I believe about economic systems is invalid. There is tremendous cooperation and sharing even in competitive systems. Note that higher education is competitive, except that there is not equal funding of students, yet we share a lot. In the computer industry, which I know fairly well, there is constant sharing of everything except marketable proprietary information (and there is GNU, which makes sharing and profitability even more compatible. In the fashion industry, it is totally impossible to hold exclusive rights to a design, I believe. I don't see this as a problem at all. BTW, if there were some dynamite pedagogical technique developed that were protected by patent, antitrust law can make the company holding the patent license it to others. This happens with telecommunications technology.

**Hunter:** Herb, you have shown great faith in competition as a prime factor governing economic behavior (I don't think that overstates the case). I wonder if this is a given for economists. Are there economists who are not wedded to competition in this way? If so, what do they say about school choice?

**Gintis:** Many economists disagree with me--many of my friends. I consider them wrong and often excessively conservative. Try the Marxists on the PEN-L forum, or perhaps the post-keynesians on the PKT forum.

**Hunter:** If economists are in fact totally in synch on this matter, isn't this a rather incredible phenomenon? And, being among those soft-hearted, weak-minded, jellyfish who think that we may at times go overboard on competition (you couldn't tell if you played squash or volleyball or poker or chess with me), I can't help but wonder if it could be possible, assuming the economists all agree on the value of competition, whether economics isn't missing a bet somewhere.

**Gintis:** Please do not form opinions about the class of "economists" by the views of two. My arguments should stand on their own merits. BTW, if you want economists who agree with you position (whatever it is), you can find them. There are biologists who don't believe in evolution, medical researchers who don't believe HIV causes AIDS, etc.

**Garlikov:** You are not saying that there should be competition among students for schools, but that there should be competition among schools for students, with the government leveling the playing field by giving everybody sufficient voucher money to pay for a decent education.

**Gintis:** Yes, this is exactly what I was saying.

**Garlikov:** At any rate, the competition you propose is not like a competition for jobs. You appear to think that the vouchers can make it possible for everybody to afford a good education and that competition will arise to EARN the voucher money.

**Gintis:** Again, right on the money... Strike that...Right on target.

**Garlikov:** When people question the efficacy of bringing competition into the schools in order to cure the ills that market competition causes (in the sense of their being perhaps UNNECESSARY economic losers, under competition), you say that you are not trying to bring the same kind of competition as workers for jobs (i.e., students for good slots). What you would like to see created is competitive (educational) products for those who have money to spend for them --and giving everybody the money to spend. I had the feeling that some people think you want poor kids to have to compete with rich kids for good schools. I think you are trying to give poor kids a better chance of attending a better school.

**Gintis:** Thank you for making the argument clearer.

### **The Forum Participants**

**Nancy Beadie** is Assistant Professor of Education in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Washington. She is an historian of education with interests in the history of different school finance and governance practices. (nbeadie@u.washington.edu)

**Kathleen A. Bolland** is an Associate Research Educational Psychologist in the University of Alabama's Evaluation and Assessment Laboratory, College of Education, and a doctoral student in the School of Social Work. She is interested in policy analysis, program evaluation, and the philosophies of social research. (KBolland@Ccmil.Bamanet.ua.edu)

**Greg Camilli** is Associate Professor of Education at Rutgers in New Brunswick, NJ. He is interested in testing, statistics and education policy. (camilli@zodiac.rutgers.edu)

**Robert M. Costrell** is Professor of Economics at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst MA. His recent research applies economic theory to the issue of educational standards. (costrell@econs.umass.edu)

**John F. Covalesskie** is Assistant Professor of Education at Northern Michigan University in Marquette, MI. He is a philosopher of education with interests in public policy, moral education, and school reform. (FACV@NMUMUS.BITNET)

**Mark E. Fetler** directs Planning, Effectiveness, and Accountability at the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. His interests include educational policy analysis, research, and collaboration of K-12 with postsecondary institutions. (mfetler%cc1@ts9.teale.ca.gov)

**John V. Gallagher** is an Associate Professor of Secondary Education at Rowan College

of New Jersey. His interests include curriculum development, educational policy, philosophical foundations, and science and technology education. (gallagherj@SATURN.ROWAN.EDU)

**Rick Garlikov** is a philosopher living in Birmingham, Alabama. (DEMS042@UABDPO.DPO.UAB.EDU)

**Herbert Gintis** is Professor of Economics at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. (gintis@econs.umass.edu)

**Joan Gipson-Fredin** coordinates testing services at Mira Costa College in Oceanside, CA. She is a seasoned assessment practitioner with an interest in assessment as belief system. (joangf@fallbrook.csusm.edu)

**Gene V Glass** is Professor of Education at Arizona State Univ in Tempe AZ. He is a statistician with interests in policy analysis. (glass@asu.edu)

**Aimee Howley** is Associate Dean of the College of Education at Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia. She holds a degree in educational administration; her research interests include school reform, teacher characteristics, and gifted education. (ess016@marshall.wvnet.edu)

**Bill Hunter** is a Hibernian-American Canadian teacher educator who has written on moral education, educational measurement and the teaching of psychology. He is currently head of the Department of Teacher Education and Supervision at the University of Calgary in Alberta, Canada. (hunter@acs.ucalgary.ca)

**Benjamin Levin** is Associate Professor of Educational Administration at the Univ of Manitoba. He works on problems of education policy and economics. (levin@ccu.umanitoba.ca)

**Alan Ogletree** is a programmer/analyst for IBM working under contract to NASA at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, TX. His interest in education policy stems not from professional interest, but from an interest in how his own children are to be educated based on a foundational set of core (Christian) beliefs. (Alano@vnet.ibm.com)

**Anne Pemberton**, a Special Education teacher at Nottoway High School in rural Nottoway, Virginia. She is Curator for Academy One on Virginia's PEN, Moderator for The Introducing Game through The Chatback Trust, and friend to telecommuting students and teachers everywhere. (apembert@vdoe386.vak12ed.edu)

**Edwina Pendarvis** is Professor of Education, Marshall University, Huntington, WV. (ded011@marshall.bitnet)

**Tom Powers** is Professor of History at the University of South Carolina at Sumter. (TPOWERS@USCSUMTER.USCSU.SCAROLINA.EDU)

**John Weaver** is finishing a dissertation at the University of Pittsburgh on academic politics and the restructuring of the German university system. (jweaver@vms.cis.pitt.edu)

**Richard J. Wenning** is with the U.S. General Accounting Office. (w5r@cu.nih.gov)

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### Editorial Board

Syracuse University

John Covaleskie  
Syracuse University

Andrew Coulson

Alan Davis  
University of Colorado--Denver [mfetler@ctc.ca.gov](mailto:mfetler@ctc.ca.gov)

Mark E. Fetler

Thomas F. Green  
[tfgreen@mailbox.syr.edu](mailto:tfgreen@mailbox.syr.edu)

Alison I. Griffith  
[agriffith@edu.yorku.ca](mailto:agriffith@edu.yorku.ca)

Arlen Gullickson  
[gullickson@gw.wmich.edu](mailto:gullickson@gw.wmich.edu)

Ernest R. House  
[ernie.house@colorado.edu](mailto:ernie.house@colorado.edu)

Aimee Howley  
[ess016@marshall.wvnet.edu](mailto:ess016@marshall.wvnet.edu)

Craig B. Howley  
[u56e3@wvnm.bitnet](mailto:u56e3@wvnm.bitnet)

William Hunter  
[hunter@acs.ualgary.ca](mailto:hunter@acs.ualgary.ca)

Richard M. Jaeger  
[rmjaeger@iris.uncg.edu](mailto:rmjaeger@iris.uncg.edu)

Benjamin Levin  
[levin@ccu.umanitoba.ca](mailto:levin@ccu.umanitoba.ca)

Thomas Mauhs-Pugh  
[thomas.mauhs-pugh@dartmouth.edu](mailto:thomas.mauhs-pugh@dartmouth.edu)

Dewayne Matthews  
[dm@wiche.edu](mailto:dm@wiche.edu)

Mary P. McKeown  
[iadmpm@asvm.inre.asu.edu](mailto:iadmpm@asvm.inre.asu.edu)

Les McLean  
[lmclean@oise.on.ca](mailto:lmclean@oise.on.ca)

Susan Bobbitt Nolen  
[sunolen@u.washington.edu](mailto:sunolen@u.washington.edu)

