

In approaching the question of why Gardner believes it is necessary to educate for the virtues, the answers are quite simple yet multi-faceted, much like the argument in his book Truth, Beauty, and Goodness Reframed. This short paper will detail that we must educate – via schooling and life-long learning – the virtues because, otherwise, our society (societies) will not be “viable.” The reason to educate explicitly for the virtues in schooling, he implies, is that the philosophy governing our American school system is flawed. The reason to educate explicitly in life-long learning, he indicates, is that a new philosophy (postmodernism) and new technologies (the digital media) currently pose a threat if acquiesced to but could, if appropriated, augment the age-old human tradition of passing on what one has learned.

Gardner argues using stage theory and cognitive psychology that “after the opening years of life, educational institutions exert the most direct, powerful, and long-lasting impressions on the child.” That is, schooling is of paramount importance. However, though he does not discuss it in his book expressly, and though he himself is not specifically an educator (in his self-portrait he describes himself as a “synthesizer of the social sciences”), as a scholar he undoubtedly knows that Dewey’s views reign supreme in the American school system. Imbued with Romanticism’s philosophical tenets, Dewey’s modern American schooling embrace the belief that humans are born inherently good. Gardner, on the other hand believes not necessarily the opposite but has a fence-straddling perspective that humans are born neither fully good nor fully evil, fully rational nor fully irrational. He claims, early in his book, that “as a species,, we have proclivities both for good and for evil, for altruism and for selfishness” and follows up with the support for this claim by stating, later, that “empirical studies by psychologists...have almost

completely undermined the view of human beings as being fundamentally rational.” However, he also maintains hope, as he believes, that “individuals can and should be ‘good’ across the board. In the early years of schooling then - since postmodernism rears its head most prominently in adolescence and beyond and digital media ground students even more, if unregulated and uneducated, to their preference groups – Gardner gently opposes some current educational trends. He argues that schools must teach ‘constructive engagement’ so students can better siphon truth and make sense of morality (instead of relying on pure didactic moral pedagogy). Furthermore, by facilitating the creation of portfolios of works of art the student finds to meet the three symptoms of beauty (instead of, at best, leaving the pursuit of beauty unguided or, at worst, cutting the arts). In so doing, children in America have a good foundation of the virtues heading into the next stages of life – adolescence and adulthood.

As Gardner speaks about adulthood, he hovers around goodness when quipping that “profound wisdom characterizes many cultural traditions” and “individuals do matter.” Gardner argues that “any society that hopes to endure must ensure that [the virtues] are passed on in viable form to succeeding generations” because, he states, “if we give up lives marked by truth, beauty, and goodness...we resign ourselves to a world where nothing is of value, where anything goes.” To further flesh out the seriousness of this, he quotes “where anything goes nothing endures.” In the end, he is emphasizing the inevitability and importance of meaningful mentorship. For one, he states that as “growth is at or near an end [thus] the focus shifts toward what younger persons can learn from the words and examples of others.” In other words, everyone wishes to leave a legacy. What that legacy is, he yearns, is “the practical truths of a life that was lived well, and the morals and ethics of a life that served others.” In other words,

leaving a legacy matters. He evinces, therefore, that we need to know the virtues to pass them on – otherwise, they will not pass on and all will be lost.

In the end, his argument as to why we should educate for the virtues is, in effect, ironic. Though denouncing biology as a discipline since, he claims, it unnecessarily usurps much of the discussion of truth, his argument revolves around species survival albeit phrased in sociological terms – in order to survive (biological) as a species, we need to pass on what is best in us (sociological). Though extremely eloquently and considerably cogently stated, he really just hopes that the human beings continue “to develop their rational muscle” as it were and not succumb to the fecklessness of postmodernism and the complex conundrum to self-posed by the new digital media. In fact, he hopes to harness the some tenets of each and tweak them to practical purposes in preserving the virtues. Knowledge is subjective, postmodernism states, but let us make sure we pursue knowledge based on the rubrics he puts forth for what truth, beauty, and goodness are. The new digital media changes our sense of self, but let us make sure to communicate the wisdom of the “vagaries of history” concerning selfhood through them and with them.