

RESEARCH ARTICLE

An Education for Deep Agency

Susan T. Gardner

Professor of Philosophy, Capilano University, 2055 Purcell Way, North Vancouver, BC, Canada, V7J 3H5.

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Corresponding Author: Susan T. Gardner, Professor of Philosophy, Capilano University, 2055 Purcell Way, North Vancouver, BC, Canada, V7J 3H5.

Abstract

Kant's glorification of "autonomy" may have helped fertilize the prevalent contemporary educational focus on nurturing *individual instrumental reasoning*—which, it will be argued, diminishes autonomy, since the sort of "objective" reasoning of which Kant speaks requires the "bias-neutralizing" power of reasoning *with others*. Following an analysis of how the emergence of self-consciousness creates a space for a sense of freedom of choice and the drive to excel, it will be argued, referring to Kant's pre-critical work, that self-creating self-legislation requires independence from *both* the determining force of our natural inclinations *and* our drive to excel, and that an education for this *dual independence* requires that educators shift the focus from trying to make *individuals* smart, to trying to create "smart spaces" of communal inquiry with the goal of anchoring the recognition that engaging in reasoned dialogue with those of differing viewpoints is the only route to "Deep Agency."

Keywords: Autonomy, Community of Inquiry, Instrumental Reasoning, Objective Reasoning, Self-Creation, Agency.

1. Introduction

Immanuel Kant had great hope for humanity. In his lectures on *Education* (1964) he says:

It is delightful to realise that through education human nature will be continually improved, and brought to such a condition as is worthy of the nature of man. (p. 8)

And he goes to make the case that such an education must be one that strengthens the reasoning powers of humans so as to blunt the determining influence of our animate nature because "evil is only the result of nature not being brought under control" (p. 15). And in *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1967) he likewise argues that it is only through adhering to the commands of reason that one can free oneself from the determining dictates of one's sensuous nature and that such "*Autonomy* is therefore the ground of the dignity of human nature and of every rational nature" (p. 103).

In explicating the intricacies of human reasoning, Kant goes on to classify the imperatives of reason as

falling into two categories (1967): "categorical" and "hypothetical" (p. 82); the former command absolutely with regard to what ends ought to be pursued (as a rational being, one must act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law, p. 88), while the latter, which Kant sub-divides as "rules of skill" and "counsels of prudence" (p. 84) command only contingently in the sense that only he who wills the end wills the means (p. 86).

It is this classification, which seems mundane on the surface, that may be the source of much confusion as to how best to educate so that humanity can become "worthy of its nature." On the one hand, it implies that categorical thinking, e.g., universalizing one's maxim or checking whether it would be approved by an imagined "Kingdom of Ends" (Kant, 1967, pp. 100-103) is only relevant when faced with "typical" ethical dilemmas like lying or stealing, and that therefore, educating for this sort of reasoning is solely the concern of those focused on "moral education." On the other hand, since skill and prudence seem

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also essential for human welfare, this suggests that educating for the *instrumental use of reason* (when ends are given) is at least as important as educating for the *intrinsic* use of reasoning in problematically moral contexts. This thus leaves the distinct impression that *educating reason per se is a valid educational strategy*

This assumption that *educating reason per se is a valid educational strategy*, however, is interestingly contradicted by Kant's earlier work which suggests that, on the contrary, we ought to beware of the unmitigated glorification of reasoning *per se* as it propels a drive toward excellence that can be dangerous for both individuals and the societies, and that, therefore, for humans to indeed become worthy of their nature, they must strive for independence from *both* the dictates of their animate nature *and* from the dictates of the sort of reasoning that underwrites the drive to excel.

Since this latter claim seems at odds with many contemporary educational assumptions, this is the claim that will be the focus here.

We will begin our journey by first briefly exploring Kant's assumption that human nature can be improved, which will require a brief overview of what is taken to be the "nature" of we humans, namely self-consciousness. This will be followed by a more detailed analysis of Kant's admonition (in his pre-Critical work) that we ought to beware of the drive to excel (which, interestingly, is congruent with Mead's account of self-consciousness) in that it seems to land us in the no-win situation of the contradictory drives to be like and to be liked by others, on the one hand, and to be distinctively unlike others through the drive for excellence, on the other. Rising above this contradiction (in a manner not dissimilar to the move demonstrated in Piaget's conservation experiment) will bring us to the conclusion that the best to which humans can aspire is not a function of whether a choice is "reasoned," but whether the reasoning supporting *any* end¹ is or is not determined by *external* forces, which, paradoxically, are often most powerful *within* one's own mind.

It will thus be argued that *agential* reasoning requires that one neutralize the determining force of external influence *within one's own mind* by subjecting

one's judgements and viewpoints to outside critique through engaging in truth-seeking interactive reasoning with those who have contrary viewpoints (Gardner, 2009, pp. 25-28).² This will bring us to the interesting conclusion that establishing *internality*, i.e., establishing that one is well and truly an agent and not a puppet of external forces, requires an *external* process and that, therefore, it is *this process* that ought to be at the center of all education that hopes to propel humanity to being worthy of its nature.

Specifically, it will be argued that an agential-promoting education is one that (1) spotlights the *personal benefits* of trying always to think categorically, i.e., trying to establish the *most reasonable* choice amongst all possible alternatives *in all choice situations*, thus valorizing the desire to take responsibility, which, in turn, may help dissipate the present paralyzing symptoms of the "victimhood virus"; (2) offers significant practice in making reasonable choices through reasoned dialogue with others (through Communities of Inquiry à la Philosophy for Children³); and (3) underscores the principle that the worth of any action can *only* be judged by the justificatory reasons both for and against a given act (both by and to oneself and by and to others), *and/or* the justificatory context of the concrete context in which the action occurs—whether those actions are contemporary or historical.

2. Can Human Nature Be Continually Improved?

Before tackling the question of what sort of education might improve human nature, let us pause to reflect on the oddity of the assumption that human nature *can* be improved. After all, we don't wonder if the nature of daisies or donkeys could be improved unless we mean it in instrumental terms, i.e., could they be more useful to humans.

So, what precisely do we mean by the question "Can human nature be improved"?

In his book, *Kant, Liberalism, and the Meaning of Life* (2022), Jeffrey Church, political Science Professor at the University of Houston, notes that Kant was fond of pointing out that when we ask this question, we must implicitly believe that humanity *could* be improved (p. 72). Why do we assume that?

In order to evaluate this assumption, i.e., in order to know whether a class of entities could be different from the way it presently is, we must understand its basic

¹In more Kantian terms, it will be argued that it is misguided to assume that categorical and hypothetical reasoning are distinct forms of reasoning and that if one is engaged in one, the other doesn't apply. It will be argued that, if autonomy is the goal, then *before* engaging in hypothetical or instrumental reasoning, autonomy requires that one first engage one's categorical reasoning power to determine that the end toward which one aspires is justified. The former, without the latter, suggests that one is still a pawn to external forces.

²That one engage in an actual Kingdom of Ends rather than an imagined one.

³<https://www.icpic.org/>

character or its biological underpinnings. So let us pause to reflect on the distinctive characteristic of what it is to be a human being, i.e., self-consciousness.

3. Self-Consciousness

The most obvious distinctive characteristic of human beings is our capacity for “self-consciousness,” which can be described, according to Mead (1965), as the capacity to evaluate and so potentially “choose” to moderate our actions as a function of the perceived value judgments of others. We become aware of our actions, for example, when as toddlers, we might have thrown food on the floor and Mom said “No! Or no ice cream for you!” We thus become aware of our selves, not directly, but indirectly as a function of how others react to what we do and say. Self-consciousness, in other words, is not an exudate of the brain or a little ghost that sits above your head; it is, rather, a post-birth phenomenon that emerges as function of social interaction—something supported by experiments carried out on chimps (Gallop, 1977).⁴

The emergence of self-consciousness described in this Meadian sense—the emergence of an awareness of our actions as a result of significant consequences that accrue as a function of inter-subjective evaluation—can also be described as *the plug in of a traffic light in our minds*. These incoming evaluations, precisely because they signal consequences, prompt us to pause, to step back, and to realize that there are alternatives to the behavior being elicited from the environment; to realize that others are holding us responsible for activating which of the stop/go alternatives we choose. It is the response of others, in other words, that “responsibilizes”⁵ us, and gives birth to the sense that we are free to choose, and to the emerging value of independence.

While there are several species that have displayed self-consciousness, e.g., Great Apes and several marine mammals (Lei, 2023),⁶ the ingredient that put the human capacity for self-consciousness on rocket boosters is the development of symbolic language. This resulted in the tripping of a “tipping point,”

i.e., a dialectic in which the need to estimate the value judgement of others led to the development of symbolic language which, in turn, led to the possibility of being able to reflect on an ever greater number of viewpoints at any one time, which then led to an increasing sophistication and abstraction of language, and so on (Gardner, 1981).

On the face of it, this dialectic seems entirely positive. Increasing self-consciousness and increasing sophistication of language seem inexorably to lead to greater and greater possibilities of human cooperation, and hence for greater and greater possibilities for human enhancement. On the other hand, Kant, in his pre-critical work, warned us that this launching of human excellence, that was birthed by the emergence of self-consciousness, is not an unmixed blessing and might very well lead to humanity’s undoing.

4. The Birth of the Drive to Excel

While Kant’s Critical writings (1956, 1967) emphasize the need to eschew those actions that cannot pass the moral test of one of the categorical imperatives, his earlier writings were more Rousseauian (Church, 2022, p. 30) and tended to focus on trying to articulate a genealogical account of the development of the human species.

Kant’s pre-critical work, thus, gives us the opportunity to flesh out a more nuanced vision of what the inter-subject evaluative process produces. Aside from self-consciousness, these evaluations also, at the same time, instill an obsession for ensuring that these evaluations are positive. Or, in Kant’s words, self-consciousness brings with it *a telos of perfection* (Church, 2022, p. 8), a need for esteem (p. 39), or a drive to be viewed as distinct from others (p. 10).

Thus, rather than juxtaposing reason and animate nature as he does during his Critical period, in his pre-Critical period, Kant juxtaposes self-consciousness and mere consciousness. In so doing, he draws our attention to potential problems produced by the tension between our animate nature, which he describes as driving us toward wholeness and community with others, in contradistinction to what he refers to as distinctly human, i.e., a drive to excel that tends to separate us from others (Church, 2022, p. 10). And it is this tension between sociability and unsociability that both drives human progress and yet is the source of many of our troubles (Church, 2022, p. 67). Thus, Church (2022, p. 53) interprets Kant’s early lectures as suggesting that:

Anthropology motivates ethics because our biology does not determine our behaviour but, on the

⁴For a succinct, but more detailed account of the development of self-consciousness, see Gardner (2011b).

⁵Dog owners tend to have an intuitive grasp of this process. John might say “no” in a loud voice when puppy pees on the floor, while praising puppy profusely when puppy pees outside, all the while knowing that, initially, the puppy hasn’t a clue about where to pee and not to pee. However, with sufficient interpersonal interaction, puppy learns. It is, in other words, by holding puppy responsible for its actions that puppy ends up becoming responsible for its actions, i.e., John “responsibilizes” puppy.

⁶And, of course, all animals that can be trained can be described as minimally self-conscious in the sense of becoming aware of their actions as a function of the consequences that emerge from the inter-subjective evaluation of those actions.

contrary, divides us between two competing ends. Our ambiguous nature generates in us the question, what ought we to do? Which natural end should we choose? (Church, p. 53).

This quandary—this perplexity of how humans ought to be and what we ought to do—that emerges as a result of wanting both wholeness and community on the one hand, and distinctiveness and esteem on the other, is not unlike the apparent no-win situation demonstrated by Piaget in his conservation experiments, which, interestingly, Piaget notes occurs in the earlier stage of individual development, thus mirroring Kant’s suggestion that a contradictory stage emerges in the early genealogical development of the human species.

5. An Apparent No-Win Situation

One of Piaget’s conservation experiments takes the following form (Ginsburg and Oppen, 1969, p. 167-174).

If you take a beaker of water and pour it into tall thin glass and then take the same beaker and pour the new batch of water into a wide short glass, a young child of, say, six years old, will first say the tall one has more, then, no, that can’t be right, the wide one has more, and so on. At this stage of development, the child is in a no-win situation, since neither answer seems satisfying because of the pull of the other. This contradiction is eventually overcome with “qualitative upgrading” (Gardner, 1981), i.e., when a child acquires the concept of “volume,” and so is able to hold the two dimensions of “height” and “width” together at the same time.

It is of particular note that “volume” is not something that can be seen; it must be thought. It is thus in this sense that this “qualitative upgrading” that happens when a child acquires the concept of “volume” is not dissimilar to Kant’s suggestion that we need to think through how to hold together our contradictory “vocations” of community and distinctiveness. Engaging in a frantic continuous trade-off between the two will leave us with a sense of worthlessness, since satisfying one comes more and more at the expenses of the other (Church, 2022, p. 67). We thus need to find an “order of the soul”⁷ that will simultaneously satisfy our conflicting ends, our animal longing for wholeness and our human desire for distinctive excellence (Church, 2022, p. 71).

⁷This is not dissimilar from Piaget’s claim that the problem that “preoperational” child experiences (described above) is that s/he thinks in terms of parts of a situation at the expense of perceiving those parts in relation to a more integrated whole, and that the latter is the goal (Ginsburg and Oppen, 1969, p. 167).

Ultimately, Kant’s answer is that we need to strive for a deep form of independence; deeper than the more obvious but superficial sense of *toddler independence* that emerges when one does one’s own thing in opposition to others, i.e., deeper than continuing to throw food on the floor just to show Mom who’s boss. The independence to which Kant is referring is independence from *both* the determining influence of our animate nature (i.e. inclinations and community) *and* from the determining influence of our need to be perceived as independently distinct—though it is important to note that “independence” does not mean “avoidance.” That is, just in the same way that estimating volume does not mean *discounting* height or width but rather trying to figure out the best way of taking each into account when estimating how each contributes to the whole, so being independent from the determining influence of both one’s animate nature and one’s need for esteem does not mean *discounting* either, but rather trying to figure out the best way of taking each into account when estimating how each contributes, or should contribute, to the whole person that one is trying to become.

6. Independence from Both our Inclinations and our Drive to Excel

6.1 Independence from our inclinations

Kant is not the aesthetic denier of happiness (Church, 2022, p. 64) as some reading of his later Critical work might suggest. An examination of his pre-Critical work reveals that he believed that happiness is important because it makes us more likely to develop morally, since the unhappy person may be too depressed to make moral progress, and “adversity, pain, and want are great temptations to violate one’s duty” (Church, 2022, p. 66). On the other hand, allowing ourselves to be consumed by the call of our animate inclinations will leave us with a sense of worthlessness since it makes us entirely *passively dependent* on the contingently available sources of our happiness.

So, an agent ought not to allow this part of our dual nature to determine his/her choices.

6.2 Independence from our drive to excel

As opposed to the *intrinsic* value of reason that supports categorical reasoning, in his pre-Critical writing, Kant reflects on the *instrumental* use of reason in pursuit of excellence and esteem. According to this view, reason used in the service of excellence can lead to a society of extreme competitiveness, which, though the overall impact is the perfecting of humanity’s capacities (Church, 2022, p. 45), since

it also produces the anxiety that others might be striving for ascendancy *over us*, gives rise, as well, to the unjust desire to acquire superiority for oneself over others. And to add insult to injury, this drive toward perfection is ultimately dissatisfying because one cannot live long enough to achieve the perfection toward which one aims (Church, 2022, p. 55).

What is interesting about Kant's description of *this* use of reason is that the implication is that *this* use of reason does *not* support autonomy, but is, rather, hijacked by the need for esteem, and thus imprisons us on an endless treadmill of competitive dominance and universal war (Church, 2022, p. 41).

Thus, though the emergence of the drive to excel creates, *in theory*, the possibility of *choosing* between wholeness and distinctness, it is more correctly described as the emergence of a second and contradictory determining force that is different from the determining force of our animate nature and ultimately lands humanity in a no-win situation of forever being dissatisfied with either choice, given the inherent determining nature of both, as well as the pull of the alternative.

Since choosing between the determining force of our animate longings and the determining force of our need to excel does not ultimately land us in an *agential space* of being *independent*, the question we must now explore is whether such a space exists. This is a critical question because, if *all* your choices are determined by outside forces, there is a very real sense in which YOU don't exit; you are simply a cog in the universal machine of external forces.

7. Agential Space

In Kant's moral treatises, he argues that the *only* force that can combat the determining power of *external* forces is the *internal* determining force of reason, which can be *considered internal only insofar as it is used for its own sake and not in the service of some external reward*.⁸ It is important to note, then, that *it is only a certain kind of reasoning that supports autonomy*. But if this is the case, this brings us to the conclusion that it is simplistic to assume that just because a choice emerges from an internal reasoning process that that this is evidence of autonomy, since external influence may very well have been introjected by the reasoner. Thus, to the question "Why did you do what you did?" the *only* response that would indicate au-

tonomy would be that, *given the reasons both for and against this choice*, which would include the reasons emanating from both one's animate nature and one's drive to excel, *it was the most reasonable thing to do* in light of the individual one hopes to become. In stepping back and evaluating future actions in light of their self-creative impact, one thus overcomes the "preoperational" contradiction of which Piaget speaks of thinking "in terms of parts of a situation at the expense of perceiving those parts in relation to a more integrated whole" (See footnote 7).

This motivation can thus be defined as *emancipatory* in the sense that the *reason for wanting to be reasonable* is solely for the sake of being reasonable, thus escaping the grip of the determining power of external forces. This motivation can also be defined as "the will to be self-defining" in the sense that one wants the force that defines the contours of the self to be from within oneself, or, borrowing from Maslow, one wants to be "self-actualized" (Maslow, 1943; McLeod, 2024).

Maslow's term of "self-actualization" is interestingly analogized to Kant's term of "autonomy" because of the similarities of their overall vision of human development. Maslow theorized that the *kinds of yearning* that motivates human action develop in a hierarchical progression beginning with the motivation to meet one's physiological needs, then one's need for safety, then one's need for love, then one's need for esteem, and finally a need for self-actualization (Maslow, 1943, p. 394). Thus, both thinkers theorize that our anchoring needs are animate and include the need for connection; while the succeeding need is that for esteem; and that the ultimate achievement is for "the self to take charge of the self"—what Kant referred to as "autonomy" but what Maslow referred to as "self-actualization."

Maslow's theorizing also mirrors Kant's in his suggestion that all needs are "deficiency needs" (or D-needs) and come from external forces *except* for self-actualization which he describes as a "being need" (or a B-need) that comes from *within* the individual (Vinney, 2024) thus reflecting Kant's insistence that the drive to follow the dictates of reason is only laudatory if it is undertaken for the sake of reason alone, i.e., for the sake of *being* reasonable.⁹

Although references to Kant and Maslow offer us labels by which to refer to "independent choice," or

⁸In his moral treatises, Kant argues that for an action to count as moral, the motivation of one's actions must be for the sake of the moral law alone (Kant, 1967, pp. 55, 68, 69), i.e., for the sake of trying to choose the "most reasonable" alternative available.

⁹Juxtaposing Maslow's theory of the developmental progression that transpires within the individual and Kant's theory of the developmental progression that transpired within the human species also interestingly echoes the hypothesis that "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny."

the highest to which humans can aspire, it will now be suggested that the label “Deep Agency” is more compelling, since, on the one hand, it is less easily misunderstood, and on the other, it will assist us in defining what would count as *evidence* for the occurrence of Deep Agency, and so operationalize it as a genuine educational target for those who hope to educate so that humanity can be better than it is.

8. Deep Agency

Unhappily, despite Kant’s earnest attempts to persuade us to follow the emancipatory powers of categorical reasoning, his efforts have clearly fallen short. This may be because of the confusion over the word “autonomy” that suggests, to some, the sort of rampant “individualism” inherent in cut-throat capitalism. Or it may be that, in stressing that autonomy is evident when we are acting morally, Kant implies that autonomy is *only* evident when we were acting morally, thus suggesting, unrealistically, that altruism ought to be the sole human focus. On the other hand, Maslow’s advocacy of self-actualization might, to some, seem like the mirror image of Kant in that it suggests that our focus should be entirely on advancing the self¹⁰. This altruism/egoism split, however, can be transcended by foregrounding the fact that it is the *emancipatory force of categorical reasoning* that underpins *both* moral action and self-actualization, i.e., that the emancipatory force of reason brings out our best, both in how we treat others and in how we manage ourselves. Thus, the label “Deep Agency” is both accurate and more compelling since it concurs with the human drive of wanting to be independent, i.e., wanting to be the author of one’s own life, while implying that this is also the best we can do for others, thus overcoming the egoism/altruism split.

Changing the nomenclature of the highest to which humans can aspire, however, will do little if we are unable to articulate what would count as evidence of Deep Agency. That is, while a behavior might *appear* laudatory and “self-defining,” it may be nothing more than a function of the algebraic sum of determining stimuli. A dog, for example, may look like it “chooses” the steak over spinach when offered both, but, of course, the dog doesn’t “choose” the steak, the steak “chooses” the dog in the sense that the steak has a more forceful determining power than spinach. And though Existentialists tell us that we are radically free, the situation of Sartre’s (2007) famous example of a young man in WWII trying to decide if he should

stay with his mother who has already lost a son or go to war might very well be described similarly, i.e., that the ultimate “choice” will be totally a function of which of the two options has the stronger determining power.

Of course, Kant understandably worried mightily about misjudging the value of one’s own and/or the value of another’s actions (e.g., Kant, 1967, pp. 65-67, “the motive of duty”) since the structure of any action might *appear* to be entirely the result of an arduous reasoning process, when in fact it was utterly determined by the magnet of external forces, e.g., esteem or admiration.

However, if we move the Kantian focus away from a solitary figure and instead imagine an individual in the company of others, the suggestion emerges that we can estimate the degree to which any choice is “reasonable” by the *justification offered*¹¹. If the justification is such that it is evident that the individual has taken into account as many available alternatives as possible and tried to objectively judge which is the “least worst” option (Gardner, 2009, pp. 29-33), this ought to serve as grounds for labeling the choice “reasonable,” or at least as “reasonable” as is humanly possible. This interestingly, mirrors Kohlberg’s claim that one can only estimate the level of moral development of an individual by the structure and complexity of the reasoning process offered (1969). The suggestion here is that one can estimate the “intrinsicality” of the reasoning by the structure and complexity of the justificatory process offered.

Of course, being able to reason in the *emancipatory sense* and being able to articulate that reasoning to others, are both dastardly hard, given, on the one hand, the non-stop distractions of all the goodies to which external forces beacon us and, on the other, given that the contemporary educational system actually camouflages the *intrinsic* value of reason by its obsessive focus on improving the *instrumental* use of reasoning in the service of the sort of excellence that draws esteem and creates “market value.” As well, offering “critical thinking” courses or “inquiry education” may very well be solidifying the ceiling that prevents we humans from being better than we are now because they can nudge students to adopt a kind *certainty* that vaporizes the possibility of the sort of dialogical space needed to evaluate the quality of one’s own reasoning and that of others. And that is why an extensive education on the merits and

¹⁰Thus, mirroring our contradictory “vocations” of community and distinctiveness mentioned earlier.

¹¹Or as Wittgenstein would say: “it is not possible to obey rule privately” (1968, par 202)

know-how of developing *dialogical* reasoning in the *emancipatory sense* is so important if, in fact, the goal is indeed for humanity to become worthy of its nature. Without such an education, humanity's destiny is not in human hands.

9. An Education for Deep Agency

An education that helps motivate students to “think their way to freedom” (Gardner, 2009), i.e., to employ their best, most objective, reasoning in figuring out which of all available alternatives would best serve as a building block to the self they hope to become is one that requires that we move away from the vision of the solitary thinker (à la Rodin) and instead imagine an individual in the company of others; i.e., that educators move away from trying to make individuals smart to, instead, trying to educate so that students know how to create “smart spaces.”¹² This is so because no one can assume that they have imagined all the potential alternatives to an action until they have accessed as many proposals as possible, i.e., until they have engaged in dialogue with those who think differently, nor can they estimate the strength of the reasoning that supports any one position unless it is subjected to critique (Pierce, 1955; Popper, 1985). Since listening to those who think differently can be difficult in the extreme¹³, an education that supports this propensity requires (1) spotlighting the *personal benefits* of making the *most reasonable* choice in *all choice situations* thus valorizing both the propensity to dialogue, as well as the desire to take responsibility, and in so doing becoming a non-victim; (2) offering significant practice in making reasonable choices through reasoned dialogue with others; and (3) underscoring the importance of evaluating an agent's justification both for and against a planned action (both one's own and that of others)—and/or the justificatory concrete context in which any action occurs—in order to estimate its worth.

Let us deal with these in turn.

9.1 Valorizing Deep Agency as a Magnet

9.1.1 Contentment and dignity

According to Kant, engaging in objective reasoning, i.e., reasoning that may be influenced but not determined by one's wishes and wants, would

¹²Instead of trying to estimate how an imaginary group of perfectly rational beings would evaluate one's intended action à la Kant's Kingdom of Ends, try instead to access varying viewpoints of actual rational beings in order to make that estimation.

¹³One study in 2017 found that 2/3 of subjects would pay money to avoid the discomfort of exposing themselves to the other side's political views, and some went so far as to compare it to having a tooth pulled (Rauch, 2021, p. 29).

be identical for any rational entity in an identical situation (1967, p. 79-81, p. 92), and is the highest good to which we humans can aspire (P. 64), but only if such reasoning is done for its own sake because, for a reasoning being to do otherwise is to betray what it means to be reasoning being and, hence, produces self-contempt and inward abhorrence (p. 93), as opposed to the deep contentment (p. 64) and a sense of dignity (p. 78, p. 102) that accrues to those who adhere to reason's imperatives for no other reason than that they are the most reasonable of all alternatives.

It must be stressed that the contentment of which Kant speaks lies in the dignity that accrues when one is aware that one's decisions are not being manufactured by the pressure of external forces; that the contentment is solely a function that one knows deeply that one is an *agent* and that one is, and wants to be, responsible for all the decisions one makes in the environment in which one finds oneself: that one is the author of one's own life.

That there is positive psychological splash back from engaging in objective reasoning does not in any way undermine its worth any more than the positive psychological splash back that one experiences when one loves deeply, or makes great art, or is a devoted medic, or is a superlative athlete, detracts from worth. There is all the difference in a self's world between intrinsic and external reward.

9.1.2 The Anchoring that comes with responsibility

In his heart-breaking but lovely book *Man's Search for Meaning* (1984), Viktor Frankl, a survivor of the Holocaust, suggests (p. 156) that, aside from the Statue of Liberty on the East coast of America, there ought also to be a Statue of Responsibility on the West Coast. He makes this suggestion to underscore the point that the only freedom worth having is the freedom to take responsibility for one's actions.

Frankl's life is a testament to the fact that one has little control over the challenges one might have to face along the road of life, but that one can nonetheless find an anchoring peace in knowing that one always has control, and *should take responsibility* for, how one responds to those challenges. Thus, Frankl says:

Each person is questioned by his life. He can only answer to life by answering for his own life. To life, he can only respond by being responsible (p. 131).

Existential Psychologist, Paul Wong (2007) refers to Frankl as “the Prophet of Hope” and urges us all to embrace what Frankl calls tragic optimism (Frankl, 1984, p. 161) as we negotiate the inevitable difficulties

of life. Wong (2007) argues that Frankl's message is that we need to go *forward* into *risk*, *knowing that there will be failure* and knowing that this is the *only* journey to a good life; that we always must focus on the gap between who we are now and who we want to become (Frankl, 1984, p. 127).

9.1.3 *Becoming a non-victim*

It ought to be recognized that an education for Deep Agency is antithetical to our contemporary "victimhood culture" of which Campbell & Manning speak (2018)—a culture in which *lack of agency* is being valorized. They describe this culture as one in which intersecting classifications of victimhood serve as stepping stones to sainthood, i.e., that one's moral status is positively correlated with degrees of victimhood (p. 22). Proclaiming loudly that one is a victim is to proudly announce that one has little agency over one's life, and that one is therefore in need of assistance (p. 11), and that *others* ought to take responsibility to ensure that one's environment is sterilized of the potential insult of microaggressions (p. 3, p. 74).

Aside from extinguishing the agential power of those who have been infected by the victimhood virus, the agency of those not so infected is nonetheless diminished by those in this "woke" crowd who are constantly vigilant (p. 223) for any evidence that someone might do or say something that undermines the legitimacy of victimhood ideology, thus discouraging non-infected agents from following the dictates of their own reasoning for fear of being reported to "the diversity police" (p. 148). And worse, Campbell and Manning argue that the university is the epicenter of victimhood culture (p. 65)—the very forum that should be the place for the clash of ideas and pursuit of contestable truth (pp. 222-223), the very forum that should be focused on promoting Deep Agency in an effort to fulfill its responsibility to educate so that humanity can become worthy of its nature. And worse still, if the analogies between Kant, Maslow and Deep Agency are persuasive, then it follows that academic institutions are actually promoting immorality and stifling the possibility of self-actualization.

9.2 A Lot of Experience in Engaging in Inquiry Dialogue with Others

Striving for Deep Agency might also be described as striving for what Angela Duckworth (2018) calls "grit," a belief that our own efforts can improve our future (p. 169), that rather than striving for fragile perfection (p. 190), we instead embrace an

undefeatable spirit (p. 189) which, when faced with challenges we can't control, is nonetheless resilient in the belief, articulated by Nietzsche, that "what doesn't kill me, makes me stronger."

In talking about the precursors of "grit," Duckworth makes the important point that *hard work* in one's early years is critical. Thus, she refers to Robert Eisenberger (p. 238) who, in experiment after experiment, found the same results: compared to rats in the "easy condition," rats who were previously required to work hard for rewards subsequently demonstrated more vigor and endurance on the second task (p. 239). She goes on to argue that the association between working hard and reward can/must be learned. Without experiencing this connection, the default is laziness (p. 240).

This, then, can serve as an argument against lazy education, i.e., throwing out facts for students to memorize and regurgitate, which requires little of the students and even less of instructors.

By contrast, engaging students in dialogical inquiry with others (referred to as a Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI) in Philosophy for Children (P4C) circles) on highly contentious questions requires deep engagement from all the participants, students and instructors alike—particularly the latter. This is so because, if the question is indeed contentious, as it must be if the work of nurturing "grit" is to be done, the facilitator of genuine dialogical inquiry must deal with the potential of enflamed emotions, the sneakiness of dog whistles, the often inability to reflect on the reasons offered by those with opposing positions, and the terror of appearing politically incorrect.

It is thus not surprising, then, that many in P4C circles prefer such "safe questions" as whether the ship of Theseus is the same ship at the end of the journey as at the beginning, or whether this child's painting is or is not art, or whether the wind in the trees is really music. Since students are not invested in the answer to these questions, they will tend to solicit lazy responses ("Sure, if you want to call it art, call it art"), and since they could just as easily "change their minds" ("OK, so maybe it isn't art"), the instructor has very little to do other than opinion-gathering, which is very safe in a "Woke" environment in which students are predisposed to view challenging educators as oppressors in need of being "cancelled."

Nonetheless, Henry and Gardner (2024) argue in their article "Education in the Age of Woke," that, educators must remain firm in their conviction that keeping the educational landscape safe from wokester-flareups, or keeping themselves safe by refusing to poke the

wokester bear, or worse, siding with wokesters in the name of safety, utterly betrays the educational calling. Despite the minefield, educators must rise to the challenge of creating an environment in which young people acquire both the will and the way to become their best selves and so maximally contribute to the flourishing of the society of which they are a part. That environment can be nothing other than one in which they learn to dialogue respectfully and meaningfully across difference—an environment in which “reason rules,” and in which diverse “reasoned” viewpoints are both solicited and welcomed (pp. 15-16).

9.3 Evaluating Actions as a Function of Justification and/or Context

Contemporary culture has landed humanity in what seems like the mirror image of agential support. On the one hand, we are all subject to the silent but silencing manipulatory force of political correctness that requires we negatively judge those whom the crowd has condemned, yet on the other hand, contemporary “virtue credentials” prohibit the judging of tribal-mates on the grounds that it suggests an “oppressor attitude” that one might know better, thus impeding otherwise potentially helpful moves of initiating reasonable dialogue with and/or about what others ought and ought not to do.

Both of these cultural norms are based on a misguided understanding of freedom. The latter is clearly based on the erroneous assumption that the freedom worth having is the freedom to be determined by whatever grabs our attention; we should *feel free* to do what we want to do without judgment from others. But, as we saw above, the *freedom to be determined* is not freedom—it is just the sort of determinism to which our animal cousins are subject. Yes, it may *feel* like freedom because of the space created by self-consciousness but, without reasoning to keep that space open, it is just determinism that feels like freedom. It is the feeling of elation that a toddler gets when, contra Mommy’s reasoning, he throws his food on the floor, or strips naked in public.

However, when Mommy explains to him that throwing food on the floor is wasting a resource that his parents work hard for, or that stripping naked will upset those around him in the same way that most of us would be upset if those around us stripped naked, Mommy is not trampling on toddler’s freedom. On the contrary, she is offering him the reasoning tools that will allow him the freedom of which Kant speaks, i.e., the freedom to be reasonably in charge of one’s own destiny rather than being pushed and pulled by

the various determining external forces to which one is exposed.

Nor is it the case that reasoning about the actions of others is negatively “judgmental,” *as long as reasons and/or evidence are offered* rather than spouting off insulting labels (e.g., s/he is a racist, or supremacist, or transphobe, or whatever) and *as long as* the complex context in which the chosen actions transpired are taken into account. These two conditions allow us to contribute to the freedom of others by, on the one hand, helping to lay bare how reasoning helps us determine which of competing options is most reasonable, and on the other, short circuiting the “unreasonable” tendency to get on the band wagon of condemning actions divorced from the context that explains them¹⁴.

10. Conclusion

Contemporary education is built on the assumption that educating reason *in all its forms* is a strategy that holds the promise of fulfilling Kant’s dream that humanity can be “continually improved, and brought to such a condition as is worthy of the nature of man.”

However, it has been argued here that the educating reason in the service of individual excellence carries with it all the dangers of which Kant speaks in his pre-Critical work, namely the obsessive need for esteem, the anxiety that others might be striving for ascendancy *over us*, and hence the desire to acquire superiority for oneself over others, all of which land us in the dog-eat-dog situation we presently find ourselves in.

It has thus been argued that what is needed is the recognition that the only sort of reasoning that will help humanity “continually improve” is of the categorical type, i.e., that we reason for reason’s sake; that the justificatory framework that supports *all* our choices is that, given all the options, this was the most reasonable.

It has also been argued that educating for categorial reasoning, unlike educating for instrumental reasoning, requires a shift from promoting individual excellence to educating so that students become adept at creating

¹⁴Greg Piasetzki (2023) makes a strong case for the unreasonableness of students who have participated in the toppling of the statue of John A. Macdonald, the first prime Minister of Canada, on the grounds that he oppressed the Indigenous population by setting up residential schools, while utterly ignoring the fact that, during his time, such schools were only set up by the request of Indigenous Chiefs, and that Macdonald was so concerned about the welfare of the Indigenous population that he insisted that all be vaccinated against small pox with the result that, when a particularly virulent smallpox decimated the white population of Montreal, very few of the neighbouring Indigenous population were effected.

“smart spaces” in the sense that they recognize that excellence in reasoning not only does not bring with it the need to “outdo” others but actually helps bring out the best in both the self and others in the sense that all participants benefit from engaging in truth-seeking dialogue that is focused on the objective evaluations of differing viewpoints with respect to what ought and what ought not to be done. This sort of education requires that it mirror the goal, i.e., it requires that students are educated in the “smart spaces” of the sort referred to as “communities of inquiry” in the field of Philosophy for Children (Lipman, 1988, 1992). It is precisely this sort of education that has the promise of nurturing Deep Agency and hence, it is precisely this sort of education that holds the promise that human nature will continually improve toward the goal of humanity becoming worthy of its nature.

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