How Grace, Forgiveness, and Charity Can Be Reinvigorated Through Promoting Objective Reasoning

Susan T. Gardner and Wayne I. Henry

Abstract: Grace, forgiveness, and charity are near unto death in the narcissistic culture that we now inhabit and though narcissists think that engaging in a constant battle to ensure that me and mine are always the top dogs is the best of all life strategies, Twenge & Campbell, in their 2013 book *The Narcissism Epidemic,* argue that ultimately, it leads to chronic anxiety, depression, and the war of all against all. And though they flirt with the idea of perhaps rescuing religious thought—after all, Christianity and Confucianism both teach that you should treat others as you would like to be treated, a dictum that clearly counters the narcissistic ethos (p. 246) — we suggest that ramping up young people's capacity to think objectively in the practical arena is the preferable approach.

Many will be deeply suspicious of this suggestion due to the assumption that the more rational we become, the less emotional, and importantly, the less empathetic we will be. Such an assumption is faulty since objectivity in the practical arena does not leave behind one's sensuous nature but rather creates a sieve via which the rougher elements of your sensuous nature are filtered out, allowing your "finer" intentions to direct your actions.

Using the works of Frankfurt, Taylor and Frankl, a case will be made that, though essential for moving towards truth, objective reasoning is also critical for nurturing the characteristics of grace, forgiveness, and charity. Along the way, we will reflect on the danger of trying to take the short cut of directly promoting objective reason's main contender, i.e., empathy.

Ultimately, it will be argued that, in the name of a kinder gentler world, i.e., in the name of promoting grace, forgiveness, and charity, educators ought to nurture the propensity to engage in objective practical reasoning by consistently inviting students to participate in facilitated communal inquiry (the pedagogical touchstone of Philosophy for Children) so that they can experience first-hand the glory of an objective vision as it emerges in the give and take of respectful dialogue on issues that are otherwise highly contentious and divisive.

Introduction

In his book, *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race and Identity* (2019), Douglas Murray argues that contemporary citizens are suffering from what Durkheim would call "anomie," i.e., a lack of "meaning" or "a reason for being." Murray argues, however, that it is impossible for people in wealthy Western democracies today to simply remain the first people in recorded history to have absolutely no explanation for what we are doing here (p. 1) and suggests that our solution to this unbearable state is to wage continual war against anyone and everyone who can be accused of

'wrong-think' (p. 108). We have, in other words, found meaning by imaginatively beatifying ourselves as saints through finding ways to destroy those who are on the side of the devil (Hoffer, 1951, p. 91)[1]

Indulging in this sort of self-beatification seems the very antithesis of being "saint-like," particularly when compared to what might be the "standard model" of striving for "the good" by reflecting on and trying to dislodge one's own shortcomings. Of course, the goal today is still to ferret out "the bad"—but now, seemingly exclusively, only in others. Thus, rather than being charitable to one another, we have become intent on finding others to blame for even marginal infractions (Murray, 2019, p. 53), we have normalized vengeance (p. 167) and we have used social media as an opportunity to publish uncharitable and disingenuous interpretations of what other people have said (p. 156).

We humans have created the perfect dystopia.

Some would argue that this is an inevitable result of the death of God (Nietzsche, 2001, p. 139), which, in turn suggests that relief is only possible by attempting a new religious resurrection—which, given the past and present wars of religion, doesn't breed much hope.

There is hope however, and that hope, we suggest, lies with the very instrument that is often accused of killing God, namely, objective reasoning.

In what is to follow, it will be argued that striving mightily to engage in objective reasoning which, as Mill so eloquently argued (1962), *requires* that we honestly and *charitably* listen to those who think differently, will once again allow us to engage in the kind of honest self-evaluation that forefronts the challenges of being the best versions of ourselves from the perspective of, say, a perfect being or a "Kingdom of Ends,"[2] and that will, therefore, prompt us to forgive others, who, like us, are less than perfect.

The Spirituality of Objectivity

In his book *Spirituality: What is it and Why it Matters* (2013), Roger Gottlieb argues that human beings need spirituality in the sense of understanding and accepting ourselves and accepting whatever life has to offer (p. 9), but that this sort of serenity requires letting go of one's ego, surrendering one's attachments, and doing away with greed (p. 2). He asks us, ironically, what we use to evaluate how good or successful we are (p. 9) and suggests, on the one hand, that if the evaluation is positive as a function of external measures, we are only under the *illusion* of happiness (p. 9), while on the other, if it is negative, this may very well be a function of the constant contrasting of the real life we have with the fantasy of some other life where our desires are met (p. 17).

Ultimately, he argues that there are two different kinds of self-interest tied to two different senses of self (p. 47). The first (which we will refer to as the "first self") has been the focus of capitalist prompting and, more recently, of our social media system whose dominant lessons are that your needs,

[1] For a blow-by-blow example of this strategy in action, see the *Case Study: The Story of Mike Adams*, Lukianoff & Schlott (2023, pp.63-68)

[2] Kant's third categorical imperative (see below).

desires and well-being, and those of your tribe, are the most important things in the world (p. 157). The second, (hereafter, the "second self"), sometimes associated with religion or spiritual thought (though not necessarily a specific metaphysic), requires us to step back and ask "what is a truly good way to live?" (p. 118), while recognizing that the answer to this question requires profound psychological and ethical insight (p. 71), as well as emotional maturity (p. 190).

This suggestion, that we humans have two senses of self and that we need to ensure that the call of the "second self" is not ignored, mirrors Kant's claim that we are composed of two different kinds of nature, our sensuous or animate nature (the first self) that is focused on maximizing our desires (potentially using instrumental reasoning), and our rational nature (the second self) that urges us to evaluate our proposed actions from an *objective viewpoint* and to avoid those actions that, for example, cannot be universalized (not dissimilar to the "golden rule" of avoiding doing unto others what you would not have done to yourself). This suggestion that to be our best selves requires that we listen to this "second self" also mirrors Harry Frankfurt's claim that, to be our best selves, we need to engage in what he refers to as "second order" evaluation rather than an unreflecting pursuit of whatever "want" comes knocking at the door. As well, it calls to mind Charles Taylor's argument that ultimately the good life requires "authenticity, (i.e., choosing consistently with one's reflective values)." It is also, interestingly, in tune with arguments of Matthew Lipman, the founder of Philosophy for Children, who, though famous for noting that thinking can be described in three distinct ways, i.e., critical, creative and caring thinking, argues that ultimately it is objective thinking that lends excellence to all three.

Ultimately what ties these authors together is the view that the "second self" is, in a sense, transcendental: that it has the capacity to rise above our sensuous nature—to rise above the self that is pushed and pulled by the environment in which it moves—and evaluate the worth of that self of which, importantly, it is part. In order to do that, though, it needs a standard of evaluation that is separate from the evaluative ways of the sensuous/animate self (the first self)—a standard other than need, greed, egoism, pride, etc., and this standard was referred to by Kant as objectivity.

Kant argued that by donning the cloak of objectivity, we would not only be able to be our best selves but, as well, we could be confident that we were treating others in the best way possible by not only accurately taking into account all the relevant circumstances, but also, by evaluating the situation from an unbiased viewpoint that affords no unwarranted privilege—especially to ourselves. It was in this way, and only in this way, that we could claim to be acting ethically—hence the title of Kant's treatise: *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals (1967).*

Before analysing objectivity in practical reasoning in more detail and how it can promote grace, forgiveness and charity, let us first explore the need for objectivity. In particular, let us explore the thesis that ours is a culture that has been swamped by the evaluative ways of the sensuous/animate self, i.e., that we are a culture of narcissism—i.e., it's all about ME! —and hence in need of a strategy that reinvigorates the "second self."

The Culture of Narcissism

Twenge & Campbell, in their book *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement* (2013) argue that studies have shown that there has been a relentless rise of narcissism in our culture (p. 1): that the fight for the greater good in the 1960's became looking out for number one in the 1980's (p. 4). High schoolers believing that having lots of money is "extremely important," for instance, increased 66% between 1979 and 2006 (p. 35), while four times as many women had breast augmentation in 2007 (almost half a million) than did in 1997 (p. 146). And in case there is temptation to view this as a function of "white privilege," they note that twice as many black as white teens said they'd rather be famous than be smarter, stronger, or more beautiful (p. 37).[3]

Twenge and Campbell (2013) suggest that this alarming rise in narcissism has many causes that include overindulgent parenting that promotes narcissism rather than healthy self-esteem (p. 73), celebrity culture (p. 90), inflated grades in school (p. 80), and easy credit (p. 123). However, the factor that seems most notable is what they refer to as Web 2.0—social media. They argue that Web 2.0's greatest success has capitalized on our need to feel significant and admired, and, above all, *seen* (p. 122), but that it facilitates the kind of superficial, emotionally bankrupt relationships favored by narcissistic people since it is based on superficial exchanges instead of meaningful conversations (p. 111). They note that just as animals evolve and change to fit into their environments, young people are becoming more narcissistic to fit into the demands of the new digital world (p. 114).

What is particularly interesting about Twenge and Campbell's description of the narcissist is that it so closely resembles characteristics displayed by those in the "woke" crowd toward those who are guilty of "wrong-think" (Murray, 2019, p. 108; cf.: Lukianoff & Schlott, 2023). They note that narcissists display aggression, incivility, entitlement, and a lack of empathy (p. 86) precisely because they love themselves so much that they believe that their needs take precedence (p. 196); that narcissists belittle and blame others so they can feel better about themselves and can continue their antisocial ways undeterred by anticipated negative self-sanctions (since they have no standard of evaluation other than from the "id") (p. 197); that narcissists display anger and verbal aggression against anyone who dares to disagree (p. 202); that their sense of "entitlement" results in believing that the world owes them more than they contribute (p. 230) and they have a fundamental lack of respect for other people since their own needs (or those of their tribe) are paramount, and others' needs are minor (p. 234).

Summarizing, Twenge and Campbell (2013) suggest that we are becoming a people who may be beautifully painted and clothed but who have empty minds (p. 159), and that, ultimately, our social fabric will tear under the weight of egotism and incivility (p. 303).

Their suggested response to this calamity is that we need to find ways in which to reinvigorate the otherwise obvious truth that we individuals are all of the same species (p. 106, p. 286) and, though each of us is unique in the sense of being shaped by different familial, cultural, and historical contexts,

[3] All of this was anticipated by Christopher Lasch in his classic book, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (1979).

most of our differences are a function of luck, and that, therefore, fundamentally we are all pretty much the same.

Though they flirt with the idea of perhaps reviving religious thought—after all, Christianity and Confucianism both teach that you should treat others as you would like to be treated, a dictum that clearly counters the narcissistic ethos (p. 246) —we suggest that ramping up young people's capacity to think well in the practical arena, i.e., tothink objectively, is the preferable approach. The happy consequence of this approach is that, aside from enhancing practical reasoning, it will have a positive spill-over effect in the theoretical arena and, hence, will not require a revolutionary transformation in education.

Objectively Tackling Narcissism

Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1967)—a more manageable version of his *Critique of Practical Reason* (1956)—offers us a self-help book on how to combat self-beatification, a.k.a., narcissism. As noted above, Kant argues that we have two distinct natures, our sensuous nature and our rational nature. Kant is often misunderstood to be suggesting that, at our best, we would be robotically rational, but this depiction fails to recognize that his three categorical imperatives function only as an objective *sieve* for our ordinary sensuous-based intentions. That is, Kant recognized, like Damasio (2003) after him, that animals are set in motion by appetitive stimuli (our sensuous nature) and that, like other animals, human behaviour is continually shaped, i.e., *determined*, by the narcissistic-promoting environment in which they move. However, he believed that to simply acquiesce to the incessant demands of our desires not only results in the negativity and chaos that one would expect from interacting self-serving animals, it is the harm to individual selves that Kant finds most worrying. According to Kant, the dignity that results from magnifying the power of the "second self," i.e., our rational nature, is the highest goal to which we humans can aspire; it is the dignity that accrues when we are able to control the "all for me" input of the "first self" by subjecting its demands to the rules of reason and then forsaking those actions that do not measure up.

The prime characteristic of reason is that it is objective, i.e., the outcome is not biased by one's desires, and Kant offered us three versions of what he called "categorical imperatives," any one of which can be used to ensure that one's evaluation is objective.[4] These categorical imperatives can be understood as contrasting with hypothetical imperatives: the latter get their force from one's desires, e.g. "Do X if you desire Y," while the former just commands "Do X," in the same way that a mathematical formula demands that one presumes that the answer is '4' when presented with the equation '2 plus 2', or that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. Reason can offer no other answers; our desires are irrelevant.

Kant's first categorical imperative demands that we forsake any action that does not pass the universalizability test (p. 88). It shows its force against narcissism by utterly outlawing a behavior typical

[4] It is worth remarking that Kant formulated each of the three Categorical Imperatives in different ways. He seems to imply that each formulation illustrates the nature of the imperative from a different perspective, but that they all come to the same thing, i.e., they all have the same implications for how one should judge in any concrete situation. Some philosophers have questioned this last assertion, but we ignore these details in what follows.

of narcissists and now rampant in the contemporary academic setting, i.e., cheating. Clearly cheating cannot pass the universalization test since, for one, if everyone cheats then cheating will cease to be effective (as is evidenced by the now extensive use of ChatGPT to write assigned essays that, in turn, has rendered the typical request to write essays in university almost obsolete). As well, cheating can't be universalized because it harms those who don't cheat by rendering their effort less impressive. Nonetheless, as Twenge and Campbell note, cheating along with narcissism, has reached epidemic proportions (p. 206). They note, for instance, that in 2002, 80% of students at Texas A&M University admitted to cheating and that, in another study of the same year, 74% of high school students admitted to cheating, yet 93% said they were satisfied with their personal ethics—something, they argue, that is a classically narcissistic disconnect between reality and self-concept (p. 206).

Kant's second categorical imperative that we must always treat others as ends-in-themselves and never *merely as a means* (p. 95) requires that we recognize and respect others, who—like us—have life plans and who ought to be perceived as self-determining entities who have absolute value, in contrast to "objects of inclination" that have only conditional value (Kant, 1967, p. 95).

> Persons, therefore, are not merely subjective ends whose existence as an object of our actions has a value *for us*; they are *objective ends*–that is, things whose existence is itself an end (emphasis in the original, p. 96).

This dictate, that we treat others never merely as a means is utterly at odds with the narcissist's *modus operandi* to always treat others solely as a means. Twenge and Campbell (2013) argue that narcissists view others primarily as fuel to power their status and esteem (p. 215); that they view others conditionally as a function of their ability to meet the narcissist's needs, and so consider others as fungible, in the sense of being interchangeable (p. 214); the continuing acceptability of the other is conditional on the degree to which they serve at the altar of the narcissist's ego. Narcissists, in other words, display a fundamental lack of respect for other people precisely because they consider their own needs paramount, and others' needs minor, if not irrelevant (p. 234).

Kant's third categorical imperative offers us a strategy for ensuring that we are being reasonable by asking us to imagine ourselves as being worthy of becoming a member of a Kingdom of Ends (p. 100)—something Kant suggests that we can imagine if we think of a group of rational/sensuous individuals but abstract the sensuous part, i.e., abstract the personal differences and all the content of their private ends (p. 101)—something not dissimilar to John Rawls suggestion that just action requires that we imagine ourselves behind a veil of ignorance (1971).

According to Kant, from this position, we will recognize that everything in life has either a *price* or a *dignity*. If something has a price, something else can be put in its place as an *equivalent,* i.e., it has *relative* value. By contrast, members of a kingdom of ends have intrinsic value in the dignity that accrues from both creating and adhering to the rules of reason (p. 102). The continual risk, though, is that we too become someone of merely relative value if we submit to the beck and call of our sensuous nature that is completely determined by the environment in which we move. To protect our intrinsic value, we must get into the habit of universalizing our maxims (i.e., our intentions) and, in so doing, recognize that we become a member of a possible Kingdom of Ends (p. 103). It is because we are able, in this way,

to reach beyond the programing of our sensuous nature that Kant says we can achieve autonomy: "*Autonomy* is therefore the ground of the dignity of human nature and of every rational nature" (p. 103).

Kant's argument that we, both as individuals and as a society, will do better if we reinforce the power of reason, i.e., the power of the *second self*, dovetails with Twenge and Campbell's (2013) argument that our social dystopia and rising individual misery is the result of the fact that we have ceased to make the distinction between a healthy sense of self-worth and unhealthy narcissism (p. 14), i.e., we have allowed the first self too much control. And this precisely is the point that Kant is making by arguing that the dignity that accrues from objective practical reasoning outweighs *by far* the pleasures that accrue from trying incessantly to live up to the demands of the id—something, of course, that Freud, too, would endorse. In other words, Kant is arguing that, of course, you should believe in yourself, but the crucial point he is making is that you need to be careful on choosing which self to believe in.

Worries About Objectivity

On the face of it, the advantages of getting into the habit of constantly checking in with the universalizing capacity of one's reason are so extensive that one wonders why, after so many centuries, we humans still seem so poor at it. Obviously, the complexity of our modern world and the ever-expanding negative consequences of otherwise good intentions (e.g., the ballooning of the human population to the detriment of all life on the planet as a function of modern medicine, and climate change as a result of breathtaking advances in industrial production) exacerbates the challenges faced by practical reasoning. However, there is a more fundamental issue at the heart of the reluctance to let reason rule and that is the worry that our selves are somehow like pieces of cake: the more rational we become the less emotional, and importantly, the less empathetic we will be.

This fear is perhaps best captured in the story in the bible (1 Kings 3:16-18) in which Solomon is confronted by two mothers claiming that each was the real mother of an infant son. The wise king ordered that the baby be split in two, with one-half of the baby going to each mother. This suggestion seems on the one hand "fair" and "objective," but on the other hand, outrageous. Who would want to be the kind of person who would willingly chop a baby in half? If that is what objectivity requires, who wants it?

On second thought, though, it is not at all clear that such "a solution" would pass any of Kant's categorical imperatives and so, at least from Kant's viewpoint, would not be considered objective. Clearly the maxim that one should kill the baby if another claims parenthood cannot be universalized, nor would this be treating anyone in the situation as an "end in itself," nor can one imagine a group of perfectly rational individuals recommending this solution.

What is missing in the above account of Solomon and the two mothers is the second part of the story. After Solomon makes the decision, mother #1 believes that it is perfectly fair, while Mother #2 begs Solomon to give the child to Mother #1 and so save its life. These differing reactions convince Solomon that the real mother is the one who loves the child so much that she would rather lose it than see it harmed; the real mother, in other words, is the one who is able to rise above the narcissistic dictate

that "if I can't have it, no one should have it," and instead views the child as having absolute rather than a merely relative value, i.e., the real mother is the one who can view the situation objectively.

It is imperative, therefore, that the plea for objectivity is not perceived as a plea to leave behind one's sensuous nature. Our sensuous nature is vitally important; it is what first puts us in motion and keeps us in motion; if we didn't ***want or value*** anything, we wouldn't move.

So, our sensuous nature is not the problem. ***The problem is our sensuous nature unchecked by reason.*** In the above situation, mother #1 is being directed solely by her sensuous nature, while the sensuous nature of mother #2 is checked by reason. Similarly, the sensuous nature of a young man may suggest to him that taking advantage of a woman when she is unprotected is a great idea, but his universalizing reason will tell him no. Or, if someone is a Hutu, his sensuous nature may tell him that getting rid of the Tutsis will make life so much better for him; unhappily, even though universalizing reason says no, he may not listen. The same holds true if someone is a Nazi deciding that the Jews are vermin, or White folks deciding that Black folks are legitimately enslaved. And if someone were either a Catholic or a Protestant many centuries ago, their devotion to their religion would have told them that they were commanded by God to kill "the other," all of which led to continuous wars between Protestants and Catholics between 1618 and 1648 (The Thirty Years War) during which approximately 1/3 of central Europe's population died.

The positive consequence of the thirty years of unchecked sensuous nature, however, was that it led to the Enlightenment (1685- 1817), a period during which philosophers scrambled to try to reason with the rest of the world that they ought to use reason as a **sieve**: i.e., **don't do what reason tells you *not* to do.** As long as it passes that test, go for it—love, laugh, and enjoy life. And you may find, paradoxically, that objective reasoning in the sense of valuing others unconditionally will lead to a life even more filled with love, laughter, and enjoyment than your sensuous narcissistic self could have imagined.

Educating For the Demise of Grace, Forgiveness, and Charity

In July 2018, the students at the University of Manchester painted over the mural of Kipling's poem "If" (see appendix 1), written almost a century before, because he lived in an era in which most people of the world were centrally governed, e.g., belonging to an empire, and he believed that being governed by the British was better than most (Murray, p. 179).[5]

The irony of this situation should not be overlooked. These were students who were receiving an education that they believed required them to desecrate a poem that was urging them to always strive

[5] Such demonstrations of "virtue-signalling" are not uncommon in this age of "woke." As just one more example, the students in Montreal, Canada, in 2023, toppled the statue of Canada's first prime minister, John. A. McDonald. (https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/john-a-macdonald-statue-montreal-1.6951642) whom they accused of being racist for his role in creating Canada's residential school system, apparently without being educated as to his motive (e.g., to equip indigenous people to compete in a modern economy) or his other actions, e.g., ensuring that indigenous people were vaccinated against small pox.

to be their better selves, judge others within the context that they found themselves, recoil from hatred, and fill the unforgiving moment with a willingness to exert energy toward the good.

These were students who believed their education required them to abjure the sort of objective reasoning that would have required an extensive analysis of what a citizen in England might have thought over a century ago (approximately half a century *after* England abolished slavery—though 30 years *before* the Americans abolished slavery and a century before Mauritania[6] did the same). They were also utterly ill-equipped to judge colonialism in light of the entire human history that testifies to the fact that all animals, including humans, are programmed to move from areas of high population density and low resource availability to those of lesser population density and higher resource availability. Even our closest relatives demonstrate this propensity (as is evident from the Chimpanzee war that lasted from 1974-1978 in Gombe, Tanzania).[7]

On the other hand, one might argue that, though not acting objectively and hence not ethically, they can nonetheless be perceived as acting from empathy for those who suffered under colonialism. However, according to Paul Bloom (2016), this sort of empathy is worse than counterproductive. Bloom argues that it is crucial to recognize the distinction between "emotional empathy" and what he refers to as "cognitive empathy" and his entire book *Against Empathy* (2016) is devoted to making the case that the former can be toxic in that it can be used for cruelty and exploitation (p. 3) and is utterly biased (i.e., not objective) by privileging a small group of people while utterly ignoring the welfare of those people not so captured (p. 9, p. 31). By contrast, Bloom recommends that we engage in "cognitive empathy," the kind of empathy that ensures that we take into account the context of the situation and strive mightily to estimate whether our present actions have any negative long-term consequences. To take into account, for example, if one may be promoting the practice of parents crippling their children by giving money to a crippled child on the street in India, or that if one may be putting local farmers and markets out of business through contributing to foreign aid (p. 99). Bloom emphasizes that the conclusion is not that one should not give, but rather that one should give intelligently with an eye toward the consequences (p. 101); that one should use both heart and head and engage in what he refers to as EA-effective altruism (p. 102), i.e., altruism that has been put through the sieve of reason.

Ultimately, Bloom prefers the word "compassion" to empathy because he argues that empathy, i.e., the mirroring of someone else's feelings (p. 41), virtually by definition, can only have a limited focus (p. 16), i.e., how can you empathize with a large number of people all of whom have conflicting emotions? By contrast compassion can be diffuse and can result in great overall benefit because it is based on reason and so requires that one do what there are the best reasons for doing (p. 52). And he quotes Michael Lynch who defines reason as the act of justification that one would believe would convince a neutral third party (p. 51). Objectivity anyone?

Ultimately, Bloom is making the case that we are trying to make here when he says "surely the case for an objective and fair morality is self-evident. Would one prefer a subjective and unfair morality?" (p .215); that emotions like empathy, or anger can be useful servants, but they should never be masters

[6]https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slavery_in_Mauritania#:~:text=In%201981%2C%20Mauritania%20became%20the,allowing%20slaveholders%20to%20be%20prosecuted.

[7] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gombe_Chimpanzee_War

(p 212). Impartiality is at the core of all moral systems (p. 159) —that is the pinnacle toward which we ought to strive and that is what ought to be the core value of all education.

Bloom, in still other words, is arguing against trying to educate directly for a kinder and gentler world by springboarding off empathy for those who have suffered to embrace a self-righteous demonizing of perceived oppressors, and instead, to educate in support of the ability and motivation to take all the complexity of past and present situations into account when making objective ethical judgements, even if steering off the "woke agenda" seems perilous.

Surely in the name of kinder gentler world, it is worth the effort.

Education in Support of Grace, Forgiveness, and Charity

In what follows, we will make the case that there are several thinkers, including Mathew Lipman, Charles Taylor, and Harry Frankfurt, who point us toward embracing the kind of education (and way of being), that will at least chart the way toward nurturing grace, forgiveness and charity. That path is lit by objective reasoning.

Lipman

Mathew Lipman, the founder of the Philosophy for Children (P4C) movement,[8] wades into the same territory as Kant by trying to analyze the relationship between different parts of ourselves and, like Kant, argues that ultimately an alert and effective objective-reasoning-self anchors the values of other ways we might approach the world.

Specifically, Lipman argues that engaging youngsters in facilitated dialogical inquiry, referred to as "communities of Inquiry" (1992, p. 3) or "communities of deliberative dialogue" (1992, p. 238), nurtures three ways of approaching the world, i.e., critical thinking, creative thinking, and caring thinking. It is important to emphasize that, according to Lipman, these three are inextricably tied together.

In his book *Thinking in Education* (1992), Lipmann makes the case that "creative thinking" and "critical thinking" are simply different ways of describing the focus, or the context, of higher-order thinking (1992, p. 193) and he goes on to stress that since creative thinking can by no means be *in any way* uncritical, it might be best to describe "creative thinking" as "thinking for oneself" (p. 199 and p. 204). Not surprisingly, then, he references Kant whom he notes was severely critical of those who betray their own *creativity* by letting other people do their thinking for them (p. 202). In equating his notion of creative thinking with Kant's notion of autonomy (or thinking for oneself), Lipman thus implies that the process of creative thinking is nothing other than objective thinking in the service of thinking for oneself—something that paradoxically is enhanced by thinking with others. And then, precisely because creative thinking requires dialogue with others, he goes on to argue that "the community of inquiry is perhaps the most promising methodology for the encouragement of that *fusion* of critical and creative

[8] https://www.icpic.org/

cognitive processing known as higher-order thinking" (emphasis added, p. 204). This view is interestingly echoed by Ed Catmull the founder of Pixar Animation, who writes in his book entitled "*Creativity Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces that Stand in the Way of True Inspiration*" (2014), that engaging people in communities of inquiry—what Pixar refers to as "Braintrusts" (p. 86), whereby smart, passionate people are put in a room together and charged with identifying and solving problems, and encouraged to be candid with one another (pp. 86-87), is what ultimately founds the creative excellence of Pixar. And he goes on to describe Braintrust engagement as a lively interchange that is waged not in the hopes of anyone winning but one that seeks only to excavate the truth (p.99)—a description that seems paradigmatic of what Lipman calls a "community of inquiry."

After making the case that critical and creative thinking are best perceived as fused together, Lipman later argues (1995) that caring thinking be added to make a "3 in 1" description of higher-order thinking. He suggests that we often overlook the caring and creative aspects of critical thinking because we tend to assume that critical thinking is mostly about information processing. He thus recommends that, rather than information processing, we think of critical thinking as "relating to bits of experience," and by doing so it will become evident that, of course, caring thinking is part of critical thinking since caring thinking, or emotions, are precisely how we respond to a changing environment (p. 3). Ultimately, Lipman makes the claim that caring thinking is best described as thinking about a matter that the thinker thinks is important, and in so doing, he seals the deal that it is virtually impossible to think *at all* without engaging in "caring thinking" (p. 12): if we didn't care about the issue, why would we think about it? And if we add Lipman's description of caring thinking to his earlier claim that critical and creative processing are fused together, this bring us to the recognition that critical, creative, and caring thinking are consubstantial, i.e., different aspects of the same essence; they are the trinity of higher order thinking. This, in turn, leads us to understand that objective reasoning would most certainly support grace, forgiveness, and charity since objective thinking allows us to get "me" off center stage and so opens the way for our creative and caring attitudes to shine beyond our egoistic demanding selves.

Taylor

In his book *The Ethics of Authenticity* (1991), originally part of the CBC's 1991 Massey lecture series entitled *The Malaise of Modernity,* Charles Taylor argues that, in earlier societies, what we now call a person's identity was largely fixed by his or her social position (p. 47). However, in modern society, we must negotiate our identities with others (i.e., I must persuade you or an imaginary objective court about what is true about me). My identity has to be won through exchange, and, as a result, I can fail to persuade an audience what they should regard as true of me (p. 48). And so, like Lipman, Taylor is making the case that human life is fundamentally dialogical, and like Kant, he is making the case that, in striving to secure our identities, we have focused on the wrong self, i.e., one that emphasizes the sort of superficial self-fulfillment that underwrites the trend toward relativism, nihilism, the lack of civic participation,[9] and, in general, what has been called the epidemic of narcissism (p. 53). However, Taylor argues that this trend does not deserve the cynical interpretation of a mere backsliding into biologically-

[9] Cf., Putnam, R. D. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon and Schuster.

based selfish egoism but rather ought to be perceived as a misplaced reaching for an ideal, namely that of an authentic self. Like an over-confident trapeze artist, we have reached for the highest bar, but that due to the drag of serious conceptual confusion, we are falling short, and in so doing, are potentially tumbling toward our demise. A solution to the *Malaise of Modernity* and all the psychological, sociological, and political problems that it brings with it, therefore, is to clarify far more precisely in what the ideal consists.

Taylor notes that clarifying that ideal is difficult in a liberal context which must be neutral with regard to what constitutes a good life (pp. 17-18), and that this indeterminism has tricked us into focusing on what Alex de Tocqueville called "*petits et vulgaires plaisirs*" or, in Nietzsche's words, "pitiable comfort" (1991, p.4), or in Kant's words, our sensuous nature. This kind of freedom to do one's own thing—of being free to do what I want without interference from others (p. 27), however, cannot anchor our identities precisely because I have to justify to others why, as a person, I have significance, and to do that, I need to be able to refer to a background of intelligibility, or what Taylor calls a horizon (p. 37). I can't just decide what is significant either by decision or just feeling: I can't just *decide,* for instance, that what is most significant is wiggling my toes in warm mud—it is not an intelligible claim (p. 36). If anyone could just decide what is significant, then nothing would have significance. So, the ideal of self-choice can't stand on its own, it presupposes that there are *other* issues of significance beyond self-choice (p. 39). That is why, instead of dismissing our present narcissistic culture altogether, or just endorsing it as it is, we ought to attempt to raise its practice by making more palpable to its participants what the ethic they subscribe to really involves (p. 72). What we ought to be doing is fighting over the *meaning* of authenticity (p. 72); something that, of course, Kant tried to do some 250 years ago under the slightly different title of fighting over the meaning of autonomy: i.e., that autonomy or authenticity requires that we rise above the seduction of our sensuous selves, and employ our objective reasoning powers, as much as is humanly possible and in each and every decision that we make; to strive to be the best version of ourselves that is empowered precisely because we are able to articulate to others, as well as hear alternative descriptions, why we believe those are the best decisions. An education of the sort Lipman proposes, in which we are dialogically engaged with others on relevant practical and important issues, is precisely the sort of education that will support autonomy and authenticity, and hence support grace, forgiveness and charity in all that we do.

Frankfurt

In his 1971 article "Freedom of The Will and the Concept of a Person," Harry Frankfurt argues that what distinguishes human beings from our animal cousins is our capacity for what he calls *second-order volitions* (10)—our capacity to become "persons." Quite simply, a second-order volition is a process whereby one evaluates the demands of one's sensuous nature and decides whether they are the sorts of desires worth having. Frankfurt refers to an individual who has no second-order desires as "wanton," and he goes on to say that what distinguishes the rational wanton from other rational agents is that the former is not concerned with the *desirability of his desires* themselves. Not only does the wanton pursue whatever course of action he is most strongly inclined to pursue (p. 11), he appears to have "no identity apart from his first-order desires" (p. 13).

Frankfurt warns us that this "apparent freedom" to follow one's sensuous nature, and despite its seduction, is not the kind of freedom worth wanting, and that instead we ought to be focusing on freedom of the will, i.e., being free to want what one wants to want (p. 15). Otherwise, we are no different from our animal cousins (p. 12) who are helpless bystanders to the forces of which they are subject (p. 16).

If the goal is to begin to structure an educational experience that supports "personhood," as opposed to mere "animalhood," we would thus do well to look at the basic defects of the wanton, namely, that he either 1) lacks the capacity for reflection, and/or 2) is mindlessly indifferent to the enterprise of evaluating his own desires and motives (p. 13). These defects suggest that educational experiences that 1) prompt deep self-reflection, and 2) alert agents to the dangers of self-indifference by constantly engaging young people in the kind of dialogical communal inquiry that supports objective reasoning about matters of relevant and practical importance will not only support individual identity, but will also support grace, forgiveness and charity precisely by requiring that the selfish, all-for-me demands of the sensuous self take a back seat.

Conclusion

Though biologically programmed to be social, when it comes to living with others—particularly with others who are not "our kind"—so that we all might flourish, we humans have a distinctly checkered history. Contemporary dysfunction is such that a call to "educational arms" seems as urgent as it did to Theodor Adorno (a German philosopher who fled the Nazis before WWII) who argued in his paper "Education After Auschwitz" (1967) that

> Every debate about the ideals of education is trivial and inconsequential compared to this single ideal: never again Auschwitz. It was the barbarism all education strives against. One speaks of the threat of a relapse into barbarism. But it is not a threat—Auschwitz was this relapse, and barbarism continues as long as the fundamental conditions that favored that relapse continue largely unchanged. (p. 1)

And those fundamental conditions that continue largely unchanged to which Adorno was referring are two-fold. The first is that education continues to refuse to recognize that "the single genuine power standing against the principle of Auschwitz is autonomy, if I might use the Kantian expression: the power of reflection, of self-determination, of not cooperating" (Adorno, p. 4).

On the other hand, educators continue to preach about how we ought to emotionally bond with and treat others. To which Adorno responds

> I consider it an illusion to think that the appeal to bonds—let alone the demand that everyone should again embrace social ties so that things will look up for the world and for people—would help in any serious way. The so-called bonds easily become either a ready badge of shared convictions—one enters into them to prove oneself a good citizen—or they produce spiteful resentment, psychologically the opposite of the purpose for which they were drummed up. They amount to heteronomy, a dependence on rules, on norms that cannot be justified by the individual's own reason. It is for this reason that the advocacy of bonds is so fatal. People who

> adopt them more or less voluntarily are placed under a kind of permanent compulsion to obey orders. (p. 3)

Nonetheless, it is perfectly understandable, in light of heart-breaking dysfunction of contemporary society, why educators often feel compelled to try and promote the better angels of our nature. We, too, see all the unkindness perpetrated by humans on one another, and we, too, believe that we would all be better off if we all worked for a kinder, gentler world. However, we believe it is important to avoid the temptations to which many in past generations succumbed, particularly those of a religious bent, to try and reform humans directly by preaching that we all ought to love one another, or in contemporary terms, we all ought to try to love "some" by hating others. We are suggesting that all along, this perceived split between reason and emotion, between thinking and caring is a false dilemma and that, while you can most certainly have caring and emotion without thinking and reason, you cannot have thinking and reason without care and emotion—*as long as that thinking or reasoning is objective.*

Some might object that this can't be right because education has *always* been focused on promoting good thinking and reasoning, yet somehow it landed us in a narcissistic, materialistic, egoistic, uncharitable society. This objection, however, misses its mark because this unhappy result is not a function of education's promotion of reason; it is a function of education's exclusive promotion of the *wrong kind of reasoning*, i.e., instrumental reasoning, the kind of reasoning used by the sensuous self, i.e., education has been focused on creating evil geniuses. However, once it is recognized that promoting *objective* reasoning will inevitably bring with it serious objective evaluation both of the ends towards which any action points, as well as the identity splash-back of engaging in such actions, this, in turn, will lead to the widespread recognition that grace, forgiveness, and charity are attitudes by which all our transcendental authentic selves flourish. Or, in Adorno's words, for grace, forgiveness and charity to be genuine, they need to be justified by an individual's own reasoning, and for that to take place, those individuals need to be proficient in objective reasoning.

References

Adorno, T. (1967) Education After Auschwitz. Accessed at http://josswinn.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/AdornoEducation.pdf

Allport, Gordon W. *The Individual and his Religion*. New York: Macmillan, 1950.

Behary, Wendy T. *Disarming the Narcissist.* Oakland, CA.: Harbinger, 2013.

Bloom, P (2016) *Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion.* New York: Harper Collins.

Catmull E. (2014) *Creativity, Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces that Stand in the Way of True Inspiration.* Toronto: Random House.

Code, L. (2006) *Ecological Thinking: The Politics of Epistemic Location.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Damasio, A. (2003). *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain*. New York: Harcourt, 2003.

Durkheim, E. (1897) *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*.

Frankfurt, Harry. 1971. "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person." *The Journal of Philosophy* 68.1: 5–20. https://doi.org/10.2307/2024717

Gottlieb, R. S. (2013) *Spirituality: What is it and Why it Matters.* Oxford: OUP.

Habermas, Jurgen (2008) *Between Naturalism and Religion.* Trans. Ciaran Cronin. Cambridge, UK; Polity.

Hoffer, Eric. (1951) *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements.* New York: Harper Collins.
Kant, I (1956) *Critique of Practical Reason.* Translate by L. W. Beck. New York: Bobbs-Merrill.
Kant, I. (1967) *The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals.* Translated by H J. Paton. New York: Harper and Row.
Lasch, Christopher (1979) *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations.* W.W. Norton.
Lipman, M. (1992) *Thinking in Education.* Cambridge University Press.
Lipman, M. (1995) Caring as Thinking. *Inquiry: Critical Thinking Across the Disciplines.* 15 (1), pp. 1 – 13.
Lukianoff, G. & R. Schlott (2023) *The Canceling of the American Mind: Cancel Culture Undermines Trust and Threatens All of Us – But There Is a Solution.* New York: Simon & Schuster.
Marray, D. (2019). *The Madness of Crowds: Gender, Race and Identity*. London: Bloomsbury.
Mill, John Stuart. (1962) On Liberty. *Utilitarianism, On Liberty, Essay on Bentham.* Ed. M Warnock. New York: New American Library.
Nietzsche F (2001) Zarathustra. Patrick, Linda E. *Existentialist Literature.* Belmont, Ca.: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.
Nussbaum, M. (1992) Emotions as Judgments of Value. *The Yale Journal* o} *Criticism,* 5 (2).
Putnam, R. D. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon and Schuster.
Rawls, John (1971) *A Theory of Justice.* Harvard: Harvard University Press.
Taylor, Charles. (1991) *The Ethics of Authenticity.* Harvard University Press.
Twenge, J. M. & W. K. Campbell (2013) *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement.* New York: Atria Paperbacks.

APPENDIX 1.

'If'

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream - and not make dreams your master;
If you can think - and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two imposters just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,

Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools;

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on!"

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings - nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And - which is more - you'll be a man, my son!
"And—what is more—you'll be worthwhile, my daughter and son."
-Rudyard Kipling

Address Correspondences to:
Dr. Susan T. Gardner
Professor of Philosophy,
Capilano University,
2055 Purcell Way,
North Vancouver, BC,
Canada, V7J 3H5.
sgardner@capilanou.ca

Wayne I. Henry
Professor Emeritus, Philosophy
University of the Fraser Valley, situated
on the sacred lands of the Stó:lō Peoples
33844 King Road, Abbotsford, B.C.
Canada, V2S 7M8
https://wayneihenry.com/