

Combatting Consumer Madness¹

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ABSTRACT: In his 2004 article “Hannah Arendt and Jean Baudrillard: Pedagogy in the Consumer Society,” Trevor Norris bemoans the degree to which contemporary education’s focus can increasingly be described as primarily nurturing “consumers in training.” He goes on to add that the consequences of such “mindless” consumerism is that it “erodes democratic life, reduces education to the reproduction of private accumulation, prevents social resistance from expressing itself as anything other than political apathy, and transforms all human relations into commercial transactions of calculated exchange.” This, then, is the challenge of the age: to articulate the sort of education that might prompt our youngsters to imagine a genuine alternative to this consumer madness—a challenge that the authors of this paper attempt to tackle.

KEY WORDS: consumer capitalism, one-dimensional, commercialization, personalization, wanton, reason-giving

Consumer Madness

IN HIS 2004 ARTICLE entitled “Hannah Arendt and Jean Baudrillard: Pedagogy in the Consumer Society,” Trevor Norris bemoans the degree to which contemporary education’s focus can increasingly be described as primarily nurturing “consumers in training.” Quoting Henry Giroux, Norris argues that “when public education becomes a venue for making a profit, delivering a product, or constructing consuming subjects, education reneges on its responsibilities for creating a democracy of *citizens* by shifting its focus to producing a democracy of *consumers*” (Giroux 2000: 173, emphasis added). He goes on to add that the consequences of such “mindless” consumerism is that it “erodes democratic life, reduces education to the

reproduction of private accumulation, prevents social resistance from expressing itself as anything other than political apathy, and transforms all human relations into commercial transactions of calculated exchange.”

This quest for *wealth in abundance* is hardly new, of course, as Norris notes by offering us the following words out of the mouth of Socrates.

We are, as it seems, considering not only how a city, but also a luxurious city, comes into being. . . . Let's look at a feverish city. . . . This healthy one isn't adequate any more, but must already be gorged with a bulky mass of things. (*Republic*, Book II, 372e–373b)

What is perhaps new, though, is the degree to which consumption has become so unrelated to the needs of consumers. Thus, referring to the work of Jean Baudrillard, Norris argues that modern consumer society is driven not by need, but by excessive productive capacity, i.e., “the fundamental problem of contemporary capitalism is no longer” production, but rather “the contradiction between a virtually unlimited productivity and the need to dispose of the product. It becomes vital for the system at this stage to control not only the mechanism of production, but also consumer demand” (Baudrillard 2001: 41). What is being peddled, in other words, in modern contemporary society, are not objects to be treasured but rather *signs* associated with “a lifestyle and integration with the social life of people.” Norris goes on to say that

Through the transformation of the commodity into a sign, the sign is able to enter into a ‘series’ in which it becomes immersed within the endless stream of signs. This forms the ‘code’ of commercial discourse. The pitch of this discourse relentlessly increases, as each sign seeks to drown out the ‘noise’ generated by other signs.

We have entered, then, into what might be referred to as the “age of advertising,” and as a result, into what also might simultaneously be referred to as “the age of despair.” This is so because advertising only works if the consumer can be convinced that, without this product, one is lacking; but turn around, here comes the same message but for another product, but turn around, here comes another message . . . and so on into a frantic vortex of fulfillment always just beyond one's next buy. As Norris puts it, products that are advertised cannot satisfy desire because there is “nothing behind the sign, only an endlessly accelerating noise and blur.”

Norris, though, finds hope in Hannah Arendt's notion of “natality”; Arendt writes that the “new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity for beginning something anew, that is, of acting” (Arendt 1958: 9). This note of optimism, in turn zeros in on the point of possible redemption (or damnation). Thus, Norris writes:

The profound importance of *education* becomes apparent: if this wellspring of beginnings is eroded and absorbed into the endless cycle of production

and consumption through the dominance of commercial discourse, it is our *polis*, and reality itself, which we stand to lose. (emphasis added)

This then is the challenge of the age, namely to articulate the sort of education that might prompt our youngsters to imagine a genuine alternative to this consumer madness—a challenge that the authors of this paper have attempted to grapple with here.

The process by which we will tackle this issue will be through the prisms of “*what*,” “*where*,” and “*how*.” That is, we will first take a deeper investigation into *what* precisely the problem is, i.e., we will undertake a deeper analysis of what we refer to as the “commercialization of humans.” We then argue that this analysis points to *where* we ought to go, namely toward what we will refer to as the “personalization of humans.” Finally, we will argue that one promising way by which to undertake the process of personalizing humans is through specifically-tuned philosophical communities of inquiries, i.e., the *how*. See Table 1 (at the end of the paper).

A Deeper Analysis of the Commercialization of Humans, i.e., “The *What*”

For those of us who strive to enlist in the battle against consumer madness, the fundamental question must be whether the natural attraction of consumption can ever be out-gunned by an alternative ideal, and if so, what would that ideal look like? We suggest that such an ideal can begin to emerge only from a deeper investigation into three major challenges: (1) the importance of “the Joneses”; (2) the problem of one-dimensionality; (3) the power of the corporation. We will deal with these in turn.

1. The Importance of “The Joneses”

To begin with, an ideal that challenges the natural attraction of consumption would have to reign in a seeming desperation to “keep up with the Joneses.” This challenge is particularly daunting given that our outrage at having less than others is actually built into our genes. In testament to this fact, Paul Bloom, in his book *Just Babies: The Origins of Good and Evil* (2013), presents a host of empirical studies that support the view that humans are naturally programmed not only to separate others into “us and them” as a function of the evolutionary need to create coalitions, but, as well, are naturally programmed to compare “me” to “them,” even within one’s own “in-groups”; with a particular focus on those who do better. Thus, with regard to their relative positions to others, though children have been shown to be highly sensitive to inequality, it appears that this upsets them only when they themselves are the ones getting less. In this regard, they are similar to monkeys, chimpanzees, and dogs, all of whom show signs of being bothered by getting a smaller reward than someone else (80). Indeed, this outrage at getting less is so intense that they would rather get nothing than have another child, a stranger, get more than they did (81).

And to make matters worse, Joshua Greene, in his book *Moral Tribes* (2014), presents empirical evidence to show that, when we compare ourselves to others, rather than focusing on relative happiness—which is what one might assume is what really matters, we focus almost exclusively on material wealth (281–283). Indeed, this tendency is so pronounced that even philosophers fall prey to what Greene calls “the wealthitarian fallacy” (285), i.e., confusing the importance of maximizing happiness with maximizing wealth. This conflation of happiness with material abundance is, of course, one strongly supported by the consumer narrative that links self-identity with “ownership of stuff,” and so narrows the focus of comparison to levels of consumption almost exclusively.

2. The Problem of One-Dimensionality

Similar to Norris, though over thirty years earlier, Herbert Marcuse, in his 1969 book *One Dimensional Man*, bemoaned the degree to which

independence of thought, autonomy, and the right to political opposition are being deprived of their critical function in a society which seems increasingly capable of satisfying the needs of individuals through the way in which it is organized. (4)

In line with the notion already discussed of the importance of creating demand, as opposed to supply, Marcuse, too, speaks of “created” needs, which he says are “false” (4–5) in the sense of being “heteronomous” (5), i.e., created by dominant repressive social forces. Marcuse argues that such repression, or lack of liberty, is largely unnoticed due to the overwhelming abundance of consumer choice. He wants to remind us, though, that

the range of choice open to the individual is not the decisive factor in determining the degree of human freedom, but *what* can be chosen and what *is* chosen. . . . Free election of masters does not abolish the masters of the slaves. Free choice among a wide variety of goods and services does not signify freedom if these goods and services sustain social controls over a life of toil and fear—that is, if they sustain alienation. (7–8)

Using a wide range of evidence, Marcuse makes the case that the economic, political, and cultural forces in contemporary society collude to create a one-dimensional society populated by one-dimensional “happy” puppets—happy only in the sense that their artificial needs are, for the most part, being fulfilled—though, their entire lives are spent working so that that might happen. Or, in the words of Galbraith, in his book, *American Capitalism*, “The Community is too well off to care!” (Galbraith 1956: 96).

Because of the pervasive homogeneity of the problem, i.e., because contradictions of the proletarian/capitalist sort of which Marx spoke are not evident in society, Marcuse is pessimistic about the human future. We are, he seems to be saying, stuck with being contented pigs, rather than striving to become discontented philosophers

(Mill 1962) (which is hardly surprising given his belief that philosophy has argued its way into irrelevance²). He does, though, in describing the characteristics of the one-dimensional person, suggest where we might focus our educational energies. According to Marcuse, the one-dimensional person is one-dimensional because there is no *inner* dimension, i.e., no critical power of Reason (11); no source of self-determination (49); an inability to be judgmental (99). “The ‘inner’ dimension of the mind, in which opposition to the status quo can take root, is whittled down” (10). The “private” thus has become “public” as is evidenced, amongst other things, by the lack of privacy in general³ (note: this was written before the onset of social media!) and the lack of sexual privacy (including forbearance) in particular.⁴ The assumption seems to be that it is only with the emergence, or re-emergence, of an inner dimension will a new awareness of “true” needs (7) become apparent. In the meantime, we suffer the hell of “Affluent Society” (23) whose “supreme promise is an ever-more-comfortable life for an ever-growing number of people who, in a strict sense, cannot imagine a qualitatively different universe of discourse and action” (23).

And, Marcuse adds, the present situation is uniquely pernicious because, despite the wailings of the 99 percent, there are no genuine oppressors against whom to fight. “The capitalist bosses and owners are losing their identity as responsible agents: they are assuming the function of bureaucrats in a corporate machine. . . . The tangible source of exploitation (thus) disappears. . . . Hatred and frustration are deprived of their specific target” (32). Which, of course, bring us to “The Corporation.”

3. The Power of the Corporation

In his landmark book and documentary, *The Corporation* (2004), Joel Bakan argues that the corporation, with its legally binding psychopathic mandate to administer only to the welfare of stockholders rather than the public at large, has become the dominant institution of our time. This is borne out by the staggering wealth of such entities. In 2005, for instance, the annual revenue of Walmart surpassed the annual GDP of Sweden (Norris 2011: 36). And quoting from business ethicist Wesley Cragg, Norris, in his 2011 book *Consuming Schools: Commercialism and the End of Politics*, notes that of the 15 companies/governments with the largest budgets, 6 are governments and 9 are corporations. And of the 100 largest economies in the world, 51 are now global corporations and only 49 are countries. And what is even more troubling is that these giant entities now have their sights set on our children in an effort to produce what they refer to as the “nag factor” or “pester power” (Norris 2011: 50). In pursuit of this goal, the annual corporate spending on marketing to kids in the U.S. has grown from \$100 million in 1983 to \$15 billion in 2011 (Norris 2011, 45)—note: there are 1000 million in a billion! It is thus hardly surprising that the school children in the movie *Super Size Me* (Spurlock 2004), when shown dozens of corporate logos, were more successful at identifying them than when shown pictures of such important historical and religious figures as Jesus, Martin Luther King and Mother Teresa.

We, who hope to rescue our youth from the clutches of corporate power, need constantly to recognize the insidiousness of its influence. We need to eschew, for instance, the temptation of white-washing its destructive power by enlisting cooperate support for schools that are chronically underfunded due to corporate insistence of lower taxes. As post-modern theorist Jean Baudrillard insists (2001), it is corporate messaging, i.e., the semiotic character of consumerism (not consumer goods per se) that is so menacing—or what Baudrillard describes, destructive of “the real.” This is not just about the fact that the “real” value of consumer goods has been exchanged for “sign” value, but the “real” value of persons, that we refer to as “consumers,” is being exchanged for “signs.” Thus, Tom Peters, in an article entitled “The Brand Called You,” suggests that “It’s time for me—and you—to take a lesson from the big brands, a lesson that’s true for anyone who’s interested in what it takes to stand out and prosper in the new world of work . . . our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called You.”

And just to put the nail on the coffin, it is important to note, as Wayne Henry does in his paper “Consumer Capitalism Meets Inquiry” (2016), that this creation of artificial needs seriously calls into question the foundational justification of capitalism, i.e., that it was uniquely able to maximize benefit for all of us.

Where to Go From Here: Combatting Commercialization through Personalization

Though we will deal with the three challenges of the Joneses, limited dimensionality, and corporate power separately, all three are intimately connected.

1. Keeping Up with “The Noemas” Instead of “The Joneses,” i.e., Changing How We See the Other

A case can be made for making the claim that attempting to measure the worthiness of one’s self by comparison to others is an endeavor that should *not* be discouraged. Aside from springing from what appears to be a biological imperative (see reference to Bloom above), such a comparative endeavor appears to be the only method by which any of us can compare the worth of anything. Thus, we argue, that comparing ourselves to the Joneses is not the problem; the problem, rather, is that we compare ourselves to “the Joneses”—with “the Joneses” referring here to how the Joneses appear on the *outside*, i.e., how big their houses are, how flashy their cars, etc. This seems to be an inevitable result of the alienation that is a consequence of playing the zero-sum game of Consumer Capitalism, i.e., that we view one another as repositories of wants, and hence as *obstacles*: what you have is precisely what I want. Given that this is the case, it would seem to follow that the lynch pin for seeing one another differently is to compare ourselves along a dimension other than one that is zero-sum.

But how is this to be done? Mark Sagoff, in his article “At the Shrine of Our Lady of Fatima, or Why Political Questions Are Not All Economic” (2007), suggests that the answer lies in shifting our focus from seeing ourselves as merely consumers

to that of also seeing ourselves as citizens.⁵ He explains that: “We act as consumers to get what we want *for ourselves*. We act as citizens to get what we think is best or right *for the community*” (26). What is distinctive about meeting as citizens is that, since we are meeting to address shared concerns and shared values about what is best, or right, for the community, dialogue and resulting action can never be premised on zero-sum. The basis for debate and action in the public sphere, rather, must be mutual accommodation and compromise of personal interest for shared gain (win-win).

A second distinctive feature about meeting one another as citizens is that our exchanges will perforce be based on *giving reasons*. This giving of reasons in the public sphere is distinctive because such reason-giving is, by and large, noticeably absent in the consumer realm; no reasons are needed, or expected, as to why I might want purple high-heeled shoes, for instance, or the latest technological gimmick. By contrast, if I think that university education should be free, or that there should be a surtax on the super-rich, then not only must I provide reasons, I must also be prepared to meet objections offered by those with differing viewpoints. Such reason-giving discussions open up the opportunity of genuinely listening to one other and, hence, to potentially seeing one another as willing partners in a larger project that transcends our individual wants. And though we will inevitably be comparing ourselves to others in such reason-giving dialogue, in this sort of exchange we will come to view one another as *repositories of reasons*, rather than merely as repositories of preferences. It is in this sense that we suggest that meeting in public space offers the potential to meet one another as minds (as opposed to mere bodies); or as Husserl might say, to meet one another as “noemas”; or as neuroscientist Daniel Siegal might say (2012), it is here that the possibility of “mindsight” emerges.

Such reason-giving in the public realm may, of course, be fake: I may, for instance, be arguing against a surtax on the super-rich solely on the basis of self-interest. And, in such cases, the interchange may devolve once more into seeing one another as merely self-interested obstacles. But the possibility of failure is not the important point: the important point, rather, is the possibility of success. If those in reason-giving dialogue can continue to press, and press again, for the “real” reasons for positions offered, a genuine meeting as minds may indeed come to pass.

2. Enhancing Dimensionality, i.e., Changing How We See Ourselves

Due to the invisible nature of the repressive, liberty-destroying forces of consumer society, Marcuse was pessimistic about our capacity to transform our condition, though he did suggest that our salvation might lie in reinforcing what he referred to as an *inner* dimension, one that would make evident the “true” needs of persons. The challenge we take up here, then, is to describe in more detail what such a second or inner dimension might look like and for that, we turn to American philosopher, Harry Frankfurt.

In his 1971 article “Freedom of The Will and the Concept of a Person,” Frankfurt argues that having *second-order volitions* is a capacity that is essential in

order for an entity to be considered “person”—a capacity that distinguishes us from other living entities (10). A second-order volition, which Frankfurt also refers to as “will,” can be described as having the desire that one’s second-order desires be effective in guiding action, with second-order desires, in turn, being described as evaluations of one’s first-order desires. Thus, your first-order desire may be to buy the new iPhone that you actually do not need. Your second-order desire may suggest to you that continuously wanting money-wasting new gadgets are not the sort of wants that a person like you ought to want. If you had a second-order volition that matched your second-order desire, it would follow that what you really wanted was for the second-order desire to be effective in guiding your behaviour.

An intriguing situation that Frankfurt discusses is a situation in which an agent has second-order desires but *no second-order volitions*. He refers to such an agent as “wanton” (presumably playing on the definition of “undisciplined”). Frankfurt says that

The essential characteristic of a wanton is that he does not care about his will. His desires move him to do certain things, without its being true of him either that he wants to be moved by those desires or that he prefers to be moved by other desires. (11)

And he goes on to say that

What distinguishes the rational wanton from other rational agents is that he is not concerned with the *desirability of his desires* themselves. He ignores the question of what his will is to be. Not only does he pursue whatever course of action he is most strongly inclined to pursue, but he does not care which of his inclinations is the strongest.” (11, emphasis added)

The wanton appears to have “no identity apart from his first-order desires.” (13)

Frankfurt argues, further, that having second order volitions is essential for making sense of the notion of having, or indeed lacking, *freedom of the will*. He thus argues that

The concept of a person is not only, then, the concept of a type of entity that has both first-order desires and volitions of the second order. It can also be construed as the concept of a type of entity for whom the freedom of its will may be a problem. (14)

It ought to be stressed here that, for Frankfurt, freedom of the will is not coextensive with freedom of action construed as not being constrained. By contrast freedom of the will can be described as being free to want what one wants to want (15).

It is this characteristic, of “being free to want what one wants to want,” that is being hijacked by consumer society, i.e., unlike *unwilling addicts* whose second order volition is to get control of their addictions (12), we consumers tend to be

wanton addicts, i.e., we pursue whatever course of action we are most strongly inclined to pursue, but we don't much care which of our inclinations are the strongest (11).

If the goal is to begin to structure an educational experience that might "resurrect personhood," we would do well to look at the basic defect of the wanton, namely that he either 1) lacks of the capacity for reflection or 2) is mindlessly indifferent to the enterprise of evaluating his own desires and motive (Frankfurt 1971: 13). We need to be sure, in other words, to ensure that educational experiences 1) prompt deep self-reflection and 2) alert agents to the dangers of self-indifference.

3. Enhancing the Power of Interpersonal Connection, i.e., Changing How We See "Us"

Many of us, who live in democracies, defend its superiority to other systems not only because, when push comes to shove, we can "throw out the bums," but also because of the high correlation between a democratic way of life and the material comfort for its citizenry. Why is it, then, that John Dewey, in his book *Democracy and Education* (2007), argues that education in a democracy cannot be justified solely by its potential for material output (93). The answer is that Dewey would deem the above justification of democracy as "missing the point." The real value of democracy, according to Dewey, is not merely its form of government, but rather its "mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (68). And this conjoint living is not a function of merely a whole bunch of living together, as David Riesman so poignantly argued in his book *The Lonely Crowd* (1950). Conjoint living, rather, requires "that I understand the other and that the other understands me" (Dewey 2007: 8). This interpenetrating sort of interpersonal communication, according to Dewey, not only makes for more smooth sailing and robust enthusiasm for any coordinated endeavor, it also, more importantly, enormously enhances a deeper understanding on the part of all participants of who they, themselves, are.⁶ This self-understanding, in turn, is of utmost value as such understanding is necessary for an agent to be able to perceive and/or claim that his/her actions were a product of who s/he is. Thus, to the degree that self-understanding emerges out of (certain kinds of) interpersonal communication, and to the degree that agency emerges out of self-understanding, so agency or autonomy can be said to be a product of (certain kinds of) interpersonal communication; I am, in other words, "me only because of we" (Gardner 2007).

"Being me," however, is a matter of degree; that is, I can be more or less autonomous in any given situation and at any given time as a function of the degree to which I can, as both Mead and Merleau-Ponty would argue (Rosenthal and Bourgeois 1991), appropriate "a pre-personal decision with an explicit decision" (147), i.e., as a function of the degree to which I can justify my actions in light of the person I want to become (Gardner and Anderson 2015). Given the counter-vailing determining forces to which we are all constantly subject, however, *agents need to understand the source of their agency in order to maximize it*; that is, they

need to understand how, and in what precise way, interpersonal dialogue can contribute to personal freedom. *In order to enhance the power of “us,” in other words, we need to make that power visible.*

How Education Can Enhance Personalization

Our challenge, then, is to articulate what sort of educational experience might alter how we see others, how we see ourselves, how we see the value of “us,” so that we come to value ourselves and others as persons rather than mere placeholders in commercial discourse.

1. Seeing Other Minds through Meeting

In order to meet one another as citizens, as opposed to merely consumers in competition, students must see one another as repositories of reasons, as opposed to mere repositories of preferences. In order for this to happen, first and foremost, students must genuinely *meet* one another. Typical learning environments, designed with other goals in mind, often have the effect of guaranteeing that students will *not* meet one another in this sense. By contrast, a Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI⁷) sets the stage for such a meeting by having the students sit in a circle so that they can at least make eye contact.

It is imperative to note, however, that no matter how much eye contact, *mere talking together is not meeting*. It might instead be simply verbal punch and counter-punch or mere opinion gathering. It is also imperative to note that, though the goal is to see one another as repositories of reason, few of us can be accurately described as such, i.e., few of us engage in the kind of reflective work that requires that we try to analyze what reasons we have for the positions we hold and the actions we undertake. And worse, this tendency to “being asleep at the wheel” is exacerbated by our immersion in the culture of Consumer Capitalism because reasons for sheer “wants” rarely seem necessary.

It is here that the facilitator of a CPI is key. That is, the facilitator must be prepared to be actively involved in assisting the students to *discover* the reasons that they have for the positions that they hold and the actions they undertake, i.e., the facilitator must see that part of her role is to help transform consumer participants into active inquiring citizens. And in this regard, since inquiry requires that all participants follow the inquiry wherever it leads, the facilitator must also be prepared to help students *positively withstand* disagreement by helping them to understand that not all reasons are of equal value, but, rather, that reasons can only be evaluated as a function of standing up to opposition, which is why we all need one another (i.e., disagreement is assistance, not attack).

The facilitator, as well, must model the ideal of what it means to meet one another, i.e., she must bring herself to the table as she authentically is (Gardner and Anderson 2015), as opposed to, for instance, trying to follow an internal detailed script of how a CPI ought to be run. This is so because meeting one another requires that we indeed meet one another as we truly are, even if only with respect to

the situation at hand. Though being authentic is not sufficient, it is nonetheless an important part of helping participants see the other as a fellow traveler on an exciting inquiry journey, rather than a combatant in the game of verbal manipulation.

Which leads us to our last point: a facilitator ought to avoid, at all costs, the facilitation of an inquiry into an issue about which she has a cemented view. As Gardner (forthcoming) points out, when participants look back on such a fake inquiry, they will realize that “what looked like a summoning of selves was in truth a surreptitious maneuvering to summon canvases onto which scripts could be painted.” In such situation, the facilitator has devolved into being just a marketer by another name.

2. Seeing Ourselves through Bringing Ourselves to the Table

If one of the goals of education is to help students transition from a consumer view of focusing on “what I want” to a personhood view of focusing on “what I want to want,” i.e., of acquiring an inner dimension, then it is imperative that such an educational experience not only prompt deep self-reflection, but to alert agents to the dangers of self-indifference.

In this regard, practitioners in the field of Philosophy, and in particular the field of Philosophy for Children, must themselves be alert to the fact that not all philosophical questions are equally effective in promoting self-reflection.

Thus, for example, though the following questions are the sort that are often popular for use in a CPI’s, they are not the sort that will prompt participants to look inward:

How is noise different from music?

What makes something funny?

Is an egg a living thing or not?

Are numbers real?

Though the above sorts of questions may be excellent fodder for promoting reasoning per se, they are not the sort that will prompt reflection on issues of what an agent ought or ought not to want, think, feel and act.

A good rule of thumb, then, is to suggest that a good portion of questions under inquiry in a CPI, ought to be of the sort that require what Kant referred to as “practical” reasoning. We offer the following as examples:

Is it OK for me to stay silent when one friend bad-mouths another?

Would you like to live forever?

Is there a difference between being popular and having friends?

When we buy something, are we obligated to ask how it was made?

Such a practical approach concurs with that of Carol Dweck who argues that we ought to focus on students’ self-theories of intelligence. To paraphrase Dweck, when engaging students in a philosophical discussion, teachers need to look at

the network of beliefs *that work together* to produce important behaviors and outcomes; that is, they need to look at the meaning systems that give rise to the behaviors and outcomes we care about (Dweck and Molden 2005: 122). Dweck argues that such self-theories, in turn, lead to self-esteem and achievement outcomes (Dweck 2006; 2000).

Deanna Kuhn (1991; 2005; 2016) likewise argues that such self-reflective experiences are important as they offer an opportunity to change one's mind. This, in turn, gives rise to the understanding that our adherence to certain beliefs has a history: if we thought about and gave ourselves an answer to a certain question at some period in time, then there is always the possibility that we can change our minds later. This in turn nurtures the notion of agency. If, on the other hand, we have always thought, or convince ourselves that we have "always thought" something, then it becomes harder to change, i.e., it appears that who we are has almost nothing to do with us.

It is this seeing ourselves as "authors of who we are," through the experience of engaging in tough-minded practical reasoning, that forms the groundwork for that continuing inner monologue that is necessary for self-depth, i.e., for the possibility of autonomous thought and action that can serve as a counterpoint to the heteronomous force of Consumer Capitalism. As Bandura (1997) points out: "Beliefs of personal efficacy constitute the key factor of human agency. If people believe they have no power to produce results they will not attempt to make thing happen" (3).

3. The Power of "Us" Being Made Evident through Theory and Practice

In her article "Teaching Freedom" (2001b), Susan Gardner makes the case that "Since biases can be characterized as potential 'external' influences on an individual's own thinking, and since eliminating such external influences is a necessary condition for autonomy—or what Kant referred to as "self-legislation," the ultimate value of utilizing pedagogical techniques, such as creating a Community of Inquiry [which she also refers to as an opposition-exposing, or an impartiality-producing procedure] is that it enhances the possibility of individuals becoming their "own persons." In this sense, Gardner is making the case, as she does in other articles (2001a; 2004), that since I can only be said to really exist (as opposed to being a placeholder for the ideas of others) insofar as I can impartially claim that my views are my own, and since engaging in dialogue with differing viewpoints of others is a necessary condition of doing so,⁸ clearly "we" are a necessary condition of "me." However, she goes to argue that merely engaging in such interactive thinking is rarely sufficient to expose the truth of that claim. Gardner argues that since striving toward impartiality often seems counterintuitive and even counter-productive—particularly when outside the nurturing environment of the Community of Inquiry, we must *explain to our students the "why" behind the "what,"* i.e., why it is imperative that they transfer this process outside the classroom (an explanation, for instance, that takes up the first thirty pages of Gardner's critical thinking text [2009]). It is only by explaining in detail why *impartiality is necessary for autonomy,*

and why impartiality requires being open to opposing views, that there can be any real hope that students will continue to engage in the never-ending process of “us formation,” and, in so doing, come to value the power of interconnection which will help serve as an antidote to external messaging.

As an aside, it is of interest to note that the fact that this form of self-empowerment will not be recognized without direct instruction is underscored by the fact that, though self-consciousness per se is likewise a product of social interaction (Mead 1965), few understand its dynamic without being made directly aware. Unlike the birth of the self, however, which is largely a product of the other, the continuing expansion of the self is a product of the efforts by all those willing to dialogically walk to the middle of the bridge (Buber 1958); motivation for doing this may be dependent on understanding its payoff.

Garrison, in his book *Thinking Collaboratively: Learning in a Community of Inquiry* (2016), similarly argues that the key for sustained motivation and emotional satisfaction in a community of inquiry “is for participants to identify with the purpose of the learning community” (61); and “that participants must have the metacognitive awareness of the intended content goals (epistemological) and the inquiry process (metacognitive)” (64) in order for the process to be a success. Where we differ from Garrison is in our estimation of the essential value of such interchange, which Garrison views primarily as externally strategic, e.g., as a better form of education or as a better way to run a business, while we view it as internally strategic, i.e., the payoff is internal rather than external to the participants.

Two other factors that are important in creating a CPI that lays bare the power of “us” (and already discussed under the heading of “other perception”) are ensuring that topics are relevant and that facilitation is authentic. Returning once more to the latter, it is of interest to note that psychotherapist, Carl Rogers (1961) termed such authentic presence as being congruent (287), i.e., that a teacher or therapist must be exactly who s/he is—“not a façade, or a role, or a pretense” (282), nor a “faceless embodiment of a curricular requirement” (287). Though laudable on the face of it, it ought to be recognized that being oneself as a teacher is no easy task as the worry is that, since teaching is generally viewed as unidirectional, being “real” may seem inappropriately unprofessional. This worry dissipates, though, once we recognize that, if the goal is self-growth through “us,” then this process can never be unidirectional; if either of us grows, we both grow. This assumption, in turn, and interestingly, can be used as a check for the health of the community; if the facilitator does not feel that s/he is learning and evolving in the process of facilitating the inquiry, then s/he is not engaged in a real relationship, and the chances are that any perception of power will appear to be emanating from the facilitator, not from the group, i.e., the power of “us” will never become evident.

Conclusion

The focus of many educational strategies, including the worldwide movement of Philosophy for Children, with its pedagogical anchor of the Philosophical

Community of Inquiry, tend to put a lot of focus on enhancing thinking power. There is, of course, much merit in that goal. The analysis undertaken here, however, suggests that given the natural inclination to compare ourselves to others, the tendency toward one-dimensionality as a function of the pressing power of immediate wants (albeit artificially created), and given that both these propensities are reinforced with the enormous power and determination of corporate might, we will lose the battle to save the personhood of humanity from the commercialization of consumer madness if we do not also focus our educational strategies on attempting to alter how we see others, how we see ourselves, as well as the degree to which we can appreciate the power of the “in between” (Buber 1958).

We have suggested that a kind of education that would assist in the personalization of humans would be one that ensures that students at least *see* one another (as in a CPI circle), and a CPI in which the facilitator: 1) assists participants in discovering reasons; 2) repackages disagreement so that it seen as an asset; 3) is authentic; 4) avoids “fake” inquiry into topics for which s/he has a cemented answer; 5) ensures that questions are practically relevant; and 6) explains the “why” behind the “what,” i.e., explains how genuine interpersonal dialogue is a necessary condition for the self-growth.

Since attempting to enhance the personhood of our students can be undertaken at the same time as we attempt to enhance their thinking skills, and since

Table 1

WHAT Is the Problem?	WHERE To Go?	HOW To Get There?
The commercialization of humans	The personalization of humans	Through a “kind” of philosophical community of inquiry
1A. As a Function of Keeping Up with the Joneses (Seeing Static Bodies)	1B. Keeping Up with the Noemas (Seeing Moving Minds), i.e., <i>changing how we see others.</i>	1C. By <i>Meeting</i> through Authentic Facilitated Reason <i>Discovery (for both)</i> : (seeing others are repositories of reasons that may differ)
2A. One Dimensionality As a Function of Focusing on Desires	2B. Enhancing Dimensionality by Focusing on Second-Order Desires (Evolving From “Being Moved” to “Being a Mover”), i.e., <i>changing how we see ourselves.</i>	2C. By Entangling The Self in Practically Relevant (Versus Theoretical, Aesthetic, Abstract) Questions (Not “what <i>do</i> I want,” but “what <i>should</i> I want?”)
3A. As a Function of Submission to Corporate Power	3B. Enhancing the Perception and Hence Power of Interpersonal Connection, i.e., <i>changing how we see “us.”</i>	3C. By Explicating the “Freedom Power” of “Us Formation,” and with Practice through Relevant Authentic Dialogue

enhancing thinking skills alone might simply enhance the evil genius of consumer madness, undertaking the latter without undertaking the former might be properly be judged as utterly wrong-headed.

Notes

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the June 2016 NAACI conference in Montclair, New Jersey.

2. On page 187, Marcuse takes aim at the British analytic tradition, in particular; he notes the ludicrousness of taking seriously “the differences between Scott and the author of *Waverly*; the baldness of the present King of France; Joe Doe meeting or not meeting the “average taxpayer” Richard Roe on the street; my seeing here and now a patch of red and saying “this is red”; or the revelation of the fact that people often describe feelings as thrills, twinges, pangs, throbs, wrenches, itches, prickings, chills, glows, loads, qualms, hankerings, curdlings, sinkings tensions, gnawing and shocks (the latter is from Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*: 83). Such musings, Marcuse argues, are at best “entirely inconsequential. And at worst, it is an escape into the non-controversial, the unreal, into that which is only academically controversial” (199).

3. “Solitude, the very condition which sustain the individual against and beyond his society, has become technically impossible” (71).

4. Marcuse refers to our rampant sexualized society as “institutionalized desublimation” (74). “The mobilization and administration of libido may account for much of the voluntary compliance. And the *Happy Consciousness* comes to prevail” (79).

5. Others have made a similar point, e.g., Robert Kuttner, *Everything for Sale* (1998).

6. With communication, you find that your own attitude toward your experience changing because “to formulate requires getting outside of it, seeing it as another would see it” (Dewey 2007: 9).

Hanna Arendt argues, in her book *The Human Condition* (1958) that although what she refers to as laboring and manufacturing humans (*Animal laborans* and *Homo faber*) each possess the capacity to speak, their speech is merely a “mean of communicating information” (179), this sort of speech does not reveal unique personal identities nor entail the “disclosure of who.”

7. The Community of Philosophical Inquiry is the pedagogical anchor of the educational initiative known as “philosophy for Children.” See, e.g., <http://www.montclair.edu/cehs/academics/centers-and-institutes/iapc/>.

8. See also Mill (1962) who argues that “the only way in which a human being can make some approach to knowing the whole of a subject, is by hearing what can be said about it by persons of every variety of opinion, and studying all modes which it can be looked at by every character of mind. No wise man ever acquired his wisdom in any mode but this; nor is it in the nature of human intellect to become wise in any other manner” (146).

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