

ALSO BY HOWARD GARDNER

The Quest for Mind

The Arts and Human Development

The Shattered Mind

Developmental Psychology

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Art, Mind, and Brain

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The Unschooled Mind

Creating Minds

Leading Minds (*with Emma Laskin*)

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TRUTH, *Beauty,* and Goodness Reframed

EDUCATING FOR THE VIRTUES
IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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belief systems—like them, wedded to his smartphone—against the odds proved able to put these fragments together in a coherent way. But needless to say, we are not—and young people are not—all Barack Obamas!

In the end, despite their looming presence, neither postmodernism nor the digital media need distance or block adolescents from embracing a legitimate version of the three virtues. Indeed, as I've suggested, one can discern hopeful signs. A lovely, individualized sense of beautiful experiences and objects can emerge; a robust sense of how to treat others—globally as well as locally—is possible; and those with patience and tenacity can march steadily and even confidently toward a sturdy sense of truth.

Thanks to a world that is physically healthier if not mentally saner, most of the young people born in the twenty-first century will survive to their majority. Had they been born 250 years ago and lived into their twenties or thirties, changes post-puberty would have had to be modest. The truths of science and history did not change that quickly—Newton reigned supreme; the sense of beauty in their cultures were less contested; and, as Kant put the finishing touch on his writings, the ethical strains that are part and parcel of any complex society had not yet fully erupted.

Now, however, no such assumptions can or should be made. Thanks to the French Revolution, the Marxist revolution, the computer revolution (take your pick!), the pace of change has quickened, and the places and periods of stability are few and far between. Parents, institutions, societies that seek to impose their versions of the virtues on the young have their work cut out for them. Even if, unlikely as it may seem, one has—in one's youth—worked out one's schema of truth, beauty, and goodness pretty well, these are certain to be challenged in the decades ahead. Just how the trio fares during the adult years concerns us next.

Chapter 6

Learning Throughout Life

Once upon a time, the category of childhood scarcely existed. Portraits in the Middle Ages depicted young children as either helpless infants or miniature adults. After 1500, along with the rediscovery of classical knowledge, multiple openings to the New World, and increasingly enlightened (if not Enlightenment) notions of education, the principal contours of childhood became evident. Educators like Comenius and Pestalozzi, philosophers like Rousseau and Vico, writers like Wordsworth and Dickens, explored the unique sensibilities of childhood. But stasis was now posited at the other end of childhood. Having passed through the ages/stages of childhood, the young adult peaked just before beginning a long (or not so long), inexorable decline. As Shakespeare put it:

*The sixth stage shifts
 Into the lean and slippered pantaloon,
 With spectacles on nose and pouch on side;
 His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
 For his shrunk shank, and his big manly voice,
 Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
 And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
 That ends this strange eventful history,
 Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
 Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.*

This view of a differentiated life cycle is seen clearly in the scheme proposed by Jean Piaget. The seminal psychological thinker construed cognitive development as a set of stages that culminated in the “formal operational thinking” of the adolescent. The formal operator is able to envision all possible permutations and combinations of a situation. (How many ways can the chess player put the king into check on the next move?) She is also able to think abstractly. (As a newly sworn-in citizen, what are my rights and what are my obligations?) The formal thinker can describe the world in terms of propositions; evaluate whether those propositions are individually true; and fit the propositions together into a coherent overall framework—witness the competent scientist, historian, psychologist, economist, or chess player. Or, equally powerfully, the formal thinker can show why such systemization is not possible, in principle or at least at present. Turning to the realm of ethics, we find that the formal thinker can transcend the habits of neighborly morality and consider the responsibilities attendant to formal roles—that of worker, of professional, of citizen.

But in the decades since the Piagetian cognitive scheme was first vetted, scholars have challenged the idea that people reach their cognitive peak at age fifteen or eighteen. In what has come to be called “post-formal thought,” psychologists now recognize the importance

of subsequent stages of cognitive development. I’ll argue that these later stages can usher in new stances and understandings of truth, beauty, and goodness: that truths can be more firmly established; that experiences of beauty can be more effectively individualized; and that individuals can fulfill roles in ways that are more ethically sound. Moreover, given the longer lives that most of us will lead (even longer than in the Piagetian era, let alone in Shakespearean times), and the multitude of changes occurring in the world each passing year, it is crucial that we continue to engage the three virtues in optimal ways over the decades.

In fact, this lengthened life span ushers in opportunities. On the purely cognitive plane, we now believe that adolescents are just beginning to be able to think in terms of coherent systems of thought—let’s say, in the political sphere, reasonably comprehensive understandings of socialism, fascism, and representative democracy. To be sure, the adolescent should be able to master the precepts of one or more of these systems. But in contrast, the capacity to think about systems (metasystemic thinking), or to compare systems (e.g., national socialism vs. democratic socialism), awaits further cognitive development—ordinarily such a facility does not come into its own until the twenties, if indeed it is ever achieved. Just think of the difference between the high school senior armed with SAT achievement-test facts and the graduate student preparing to take her general examinations. It is not an “information gap”—it is a gap in systemic thinking. Only in maturity can individuals appreciate and compare and, as appropriate, synthesize the kinds of propositional and practical truths embodied across the several disciplines and crafts.

Similar progress occurs after adolescence in the realms of personality and interpersonal relations. Even the precocious adolescent still entertains an egocentrically tainted view of the world: egocentric in the sense that the world seems to be focused—sometimes even exclusively—on his or her current concerns. (Is everyone going to the dance except me? Am I competing with everyone for that internship?

Is the whole school—or the whole world—watching me?) At later stages of development, an individual has a far greater capacity to de-center: to assume a distance from her own agenda, to understand and help others achieve their goals, to create situations in which others realize their potentials, and to lead effectively by stepping into the background and allowing—indeed encouraging—others to assume greater independence and to receive most of the credit. In the best-case scenario, such development continues until the later years of life, culminating in mature judgment, effective mentoring, responsible trusteeship in various fields, and, indeed, wisdom.

“Stage views” of adult development now reflect these trends. At one time, as scholars and laypersons, we posited—and were content with—only three postchildhood life stages: adolescence, adulthood, and old age/senility. Now a stage of emergent adulthood (or prolonged adolescence) is widely recognized. (Are your grown children still living at home? Do they still call several times a week to ask for advice and seek help?) A stage of early old age is acknowledged (active retirement). And many are also recognizing a “third stage” of adulthood—the period between ages fifty and seventy-five—when life’s initial ambitions have been achieved, limitations have been accepted, and the now mature adult seeks to relate actively to the world in a new, often determinedly prosocial way. At this time, perhaps more so than at any other point in the life cycle, the person has the potential and the time to appreciate the various truths across several realms; to refine his or her distinctive sense of beauty; and to tackle sensitively and sensibly the often vexed ethical issues that arise at the workplace, the ballot box, or the town square.

The trends I’ve mentioned point to continuing development, at least through the middle years of life, and in the happiest circumstances until the ages of sixty, seventy, or even older. These trends reflect not only human psychology; evidence mounts that our bodies and brains can grow and adapt for decades after adolescence. Yet, as

should be evident, these developments are only *possibilities*, by no means necessities or imperatives. If there are millions of individuals who continue to develop, for decades, there are certainly untold millions who have reached the high point of development by the middle of the second decade of life. Such individuals stagnate, are content to maintain their current (often fragile) understandings and outlook, actively resist growth, or even regress to more primitive modes of thought and action.

It would be disingenuous to pretend that such a continuing or even expanding sense of agency during the adult years—as I’ll call the latter periods—is entirely within the control of the individual. Bad luck can throw off one’s hoped-for life course. If one has to work twelve hours a day at the same boring job (or at two or three equally joyless workplaces) to keep the family fed and clothed, there is less time for any kind of personal growth. If one inhabits a religious or social environment that strongly dictates conformity, pressures mount to remain as one was, or as one’s neighbors are, or as they appear to be. If one inherits a constitution—mental or physical—that is frail, efforts to continue to grow, to change, to develop, are more difficult to mount and sustain. Still, one can take heart from inspiring examples like those of Theodore Roosevelt, who overcame physical infirmities, or Winston Churchill, who overcame learning difficulties, and led long and ever more active lives, or, even more dramatically, Helen Keller, who, despite lack of sight and hearing, achieved and shared deep insights about the human condition. More recently, we encounter impressive examples of women reared in strict Islamic settings who risked life and limb to escape an abusive arranged marriage and to initiate a new life, alone, in a new world.

Some factors that limit growth are beyond one’s own control. The anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss distinguished between “cool societies,” which change at glacial speed, and “hot societies,” which are in frequent, indeed constant, turmoil. Compare “cool” ancient Egypt,

where significant political changes occurred over the centuries, with “hot” China in the twentieth century, which transmogrified in very short order from empire to republic to totalitarian communist regime, to a distinctive blend of socialism and capitalism. Clearly, an individual has the greater opportunity to change, develop, and grow in a setting that itself is being constantly transformed.

Of course, change is not always easy, nor is it necessarily desirable. With respect to relations among human beings, alternative scenarios exist. Traditional “cool” societies are marked by the dominance of a few strong ties. Individuals come to know intimately a small set of relatives, neighbors, and friends, and to depend on this deeply entrenched social network over long periods of time. In sharp contrast, modern “hot” societies spurn or devalue such deep ties in favor of numerous, far weaker, far more flexible ties. Denizens of such societies know a great many persons, but inevitably much more superficially; they can contact these individuals in numerous ways, but may do so only sporadically. Traditional society is distinguished by the same set of family pictures or other mementos or heirlooms that remain on one’s front table or desk for decades; modern society is marked by a large and rapidly evolving rolodex, a rich database in one’s personal digital assistant, and dozens if not many hundreds of entries on a favorite social network site.

Without question, in a rapidly changing world the ability to make use of many weak ties proves advantageous. Such ties not only expose one to far more information and experiences but also afford one the opportunity to compare different versions of truth, to develop one’s own distinctive sense of beauty, and to think clearly and to act responsibly with respect to complex ethical and moral dilemmas. Too much flexibility may prove a hindrance in a society that remains at a relatively low temperature; but, clearly, greater flexibility becomes a mark of survival in any “hot” society.

From the opening years of life, those of us who happen to have been born and raised in “hot” societies are more accustomed to

change and more likely to have become able to deal with, to anticipate, and even to grow fond of continuing major alterations in the landscape. At the same time, it must be recognized that the attenuation or loss of deep, intimate, long-lived ties can be personally painful. Moreover, indices of happiness and trust tend to be higher in societies that have maintained such strong links among human beings. Still, given the trends in today’s world, it is evident that people will need to be able to survive—and to arrive at viable versions of the virtues—in fast-changing, relatively “hot” milieus.

Painting with a very broad brush, we could say that in most societies, throughout most of history, notions of truth, beauty, and goodness were relatively consensual. In our terms, truths were established rather than emerging; beauty was traditional rather than individualized; vexed interpersonal issues were adjudicated by neighborly morality or not at all. Conceptions changed slowly, sometimes even imperceptibly. For centuries in Europe, portrayals of Christ and the Virgin Mother were the primary preoccupation of visual artists. Moreover, often there was a tendency to collapse the three virtues—what was seen as true was also beautiful and good, and the reverse implicatory sequence obtained as well.

Not that we should remain content with brush strokes that are too broad. Even in the distant past, views of the three virtues did change. Sometimes, change was due to powerful leaders—say, Moses for the Hebrews, or Shi Huangdi of the Han Dynasty. Sometimes, changes came about as the result of cataclysmic events—say, the Black Plague, the Lisbon earthquake, or the melting of the icecaps. More often, changes—both beneficent and malevolent—occurred as the result of the meeting and clash of cultures, the guns of war, the spoils of the victor, the adaptations of the vanquished. Of course, not all changes are permanent—civilizations roll back as well as march forth. The Middle Ages (once called the Dark Ages)—beloved by Henry Adams—were far less dynamic than the centuries that preceded or follow them.

Few periods of history compare with our own in terms of the speed and decisiveness of changes. Just about everyone over the age of thirty-five can remember vividly the fall of the Berlin Wall, the surprisingly brief hegemony of Western democracy coupled with market capitalism, the shock of the attacks of 9/11, natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina or the tsunami of South Asia, the worldwide financial meltdown in the autumn of 2008, the Gulf oil spill two years later. Circumstances once considered permanent and resolved—the Cold War, the inviolacy of the borders of the United States, the natural corrective force inherent in financial markets—did not withstand brutal facts and factors. From one decade to the next, inhabitants of countries like Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Poland, Romania, Venezuela—even the relatively calm United Kingdom and the United States—were exposed to dramatically different notions of good and evil. And with each cohort of artists challenging the core values and practices of its predecessors, any effort to maintain a constant or consistent aesthetic seemed doomed. Not only did these changes occur at warp speed; but in contradistinction to earlier eras, individuals became aware of them almost instantly. It has been claimed that within two days of its occurrence on August 31, 1997, 98 percent of adults around the world had become aware of the death of Princess Diana.

How, then, does a rapidly altering terrain, including a kaleidoscope of virtues and vices, affect individuals who are well past their initial development and their initial stages of learning? At one time, we might have thought that we could not teach new tricks to an old dog, let alone to a middle-aged human. But today, a newly reigning cliché—lifelong learning—must become more than a cliché. Learning ceases to be the targeted burden of childhood and adolescence; it becomes the privilege—but also the obligation—of an entire lifetime. We now know that, contrary to long-held beliefs in the scientific community, the adult nervous system remains plastic, flexible, and capable of effecting new neural connections. Indeed, we have little

reason to believe in biological constraints on the acquisition of new knowledge, tastes, and values.

And yet lifelong learning can be difficult, elusive, even in the best of situations. For those of us who remain in school, literally or in effect, continuous learning *appears* to be easier. After all, we are surrounded by the paraphernalia of education—teachers, students, curricula, courses, books, computers, libraries, the worldwide web. Learning is literally within the reach of one's own or one's neighbors' hands. And yet, we all know individuals within academe who remain stagnant, set in their views, oblivious to the changing winds, waters, and words. And even if one grows within one's own field of expertise, it is perfectly possible to remain paralyzed in other spheres. Sometimes, individuals do not even try to grow or deepen in unfamiliar domains. At other times, despite valiant efforts, growth in new spheres proves very difficult. Though we can admire and respect their daring, Nobel laureates and other winners of prestigious prizes rarely distinguish themselves in new sciences, arts, or crafts.

There is another imposing obstacle along the path to lifelong learning, even for those of us blessed to live the life of the mind. Lifelong learning would be easier if one could just extend the path of college or graduate school—one more course, one more exam, one more degree. But all too often, the seemingly well-trodden path contains tortuous zigs and zags. Many of us who mastered the truths of a particular discipline or craft would find it straightforward to continue digging deeper into that same groove of knowledge. But disciplines can change fundamentally—splintering, coalescing, reconfiguring. Moreover and crucially, nowadays much work is no longer discipline based—it is problem centered (and appropriately so); it involves interdisciplinary content knowledge as well as the capacity to work fluently and flexibly with individuals from different disciplines as well as different cultures. These stretches may prove to be formidable; there are many more claims about the importance of interdisciplinary

work than there are clear-cut demonstrations of *successful* interdisciplinary work. And when multidisciplinary work succeeds, it is often far from clear why it succeeded and how that success might be replicated and modeled for others.

That said, in the broadest possible terms, it has become much easier for adults, both within and outside of educational institutions, to remain in tune and in touch if they so wish. The ubiquitous media—old, new, mechanical, electronic, digital—enable that contact. Anyone regularly engaged with the Internet and the web—anyone who blogs or who reads blogs—will be exposed as often as he or she likes to what is new, noteworthy, changing.

Of course, the flow of information is hardly an unabashed good. Many of us feel overwhelmed, in over our heads, much of the time. The new imperative has become synthesis—the capacity to gather, prune, organize information of all sizes and shapes and forms, and to repeat the cycle indefinitely. “The synthesizing mind” is able to take in copious information; apply reliable criteria in determining what to attend to and what to ignore; exhibit the capacity to put things together so that one can hold on to them (a synthesis “just in time”); and then, unless one happens to be a hermit or a troglodyte, communicate the gist of the synthesis to others in an effective and memorable manner. In truth, we have just begun to understand the challenge of effective synthesis, let alone develop the pedagogical and digital tools that can make it a reality for most persons. Advantages will flow to those of any age with a head start on this process. Ideally, one should blend the youthful ability to take in and store new information with the well-honed judging and evaluating capacities of older persons.

Inevitably, some individuals have readier access than others to information, knowledge, and quality syntheses. Yet in the end it is up to the individual to decide whether he or she wishes to keep up with what is happening in the world. One’s continuing development de-

pends principally on the kind of environment—day in and day out—in which one chooses to spend one’s time. One can remain with the same group of friends or search for new ones; one can play games with the same people or seek new partners and opponents; one can visit and revisit the same works of art, or seek out new ones; one can have the same conversations repeatedly or deliberately bypass these linguistic and interpersonal ruts. Especially in a digital age, one can choose to visit the same sites, chiefly those that agree with one’s views and tastes and moral code, or one can choose to visit new sites, particularly those that reflect new framings and raise new questions. In any reasonably democratic society, no one else dictates these regimens; the responsible person is the individual in question.

Many factors determine the choices one makes about how to spend one’s days and nights: the need to hold on to one’s job (or advance to a more attractive one); the desire to maintain one’s health or improve one’s finances; the goal of becoming a responsible citizen; the quest to maintain friendships or seek new ones, to convey one’s values to intimates, to quench one’s own curiosity or to hold one’s own in conversations with valued others—those older or younger, wiser or in need of wisdom. Few people will explicitly state as their objective the pursuit of truth, beauty and goodness. And yet, lifelong learning cannot afford to skirt these vital dimensions.

First truth. Within one’s own work and life spheres, there will doubtless be more practical truths. In my own case, what it takes to write and then publish an article or book has changed numerous times over the decades; and if I continued to proceed just as I did in the early 1970s, I would have little success. I used to “be published and wait for reviews”; now, unless I am determinedly proactive, I’d wait forever without anyone taking notice of the publication. The changes are even manifest in the slower-changing realm of teaching. I used to deliver hour-long lectures with, at most, an occasional slide

and an occasional aside. Now nearly all of my teaching is seminar style, lectures are available online, and discussions are punctuated with ample PowerPoint presentations and timely access to the web for both the students and me. The politics of the workplace, as well as the processes of work production, are ever changing: Widely shared beliefs are not what they once were nor will they remain frozen in the decades to come. Which is not to say that all previous knowledge is evanescent. Certain practical and propositional truths obtain across the ages in writing and publishing: in teaching the young, caring for the sick, making a sale, and keeping a client. It is as important to cherish those perpetual truths as to remain open to new ones.

But one's work life is by no means the only, nor even the most salient, area of changing truths. Anyone interested in what is happening in the world needs to track our growing collective understanding (as well as, of course, our continuing confusions). New findings pour in from the several sciences; historical revisions are the order of the day. (Nor do economics and psychology and literary criticism remain unchanged, nor should they!) We do not understand the Civil War or World War I (then called the Great War) or the Cold War in the same way as our grandparents did. The gulf in understanding between earlier eras and our own is even greater when it comes to the sciences—from our burgeoning knowledge of the birth, age, and extent of the universe, to the nature and flexibility of genetic material, to the course of early hominid evolution. Even the ways in which science is conducted have changed enormously—projects now involve dozens or even hundreds of researchers, experiments probing temperatures close to absolute zero, speeds far exceeding sound, technology at the nano-level, vast simulations inconceivable before the computer age. (If items on standardized tests of science have changed little, they reflect more about the test-makers than about the stability of science per se.) It is not easy to keep up with the cavalcade of new truths; but if one makes the attempt, one is likely to attain better understanding of the world in its numerous facets.

It goes without saying—at least in this book!—that one should continue the effort to converge toward truths. What factors determine whether, as an adult, one will be successful in this goal? To begin with, a commitment to pursuing truths, wherever they may rise, and even when they go against a cherished held belief, is necessary. In light of this commitment, it is also vital to keep informed, to follow the latest findings, to evaluate them critically but not cynically. In some fields, this “checking in” can be intermittent; but as one who has sought to follow the biological sciences over the decades, I can testify that one must remain constantly vigilant if one has any hope of “keeping up.”

When it comes to practical truths, one must be equally vigilant. While they are less likely to be written about, changes in the lab, the workshop, or the atelier can be quite rapid and, particularly in a highly technological age, quite dramatic. Not infrequently, the apprentice may in some respects be more “current” than the master.

Here lies an important dimension of adult development in our times. Perhaps in earlier eras, the elders held nearly all of the intellectual as well as the political cards. No longer! Today, in many ways, young persons have both the intellectual vigor and the technical skills that are at a premium across the virtues. Older and supposedly wiser persons do well to listen to, watch, and learn from their youthful contacts (be they children, grandchildren, students, apprentices). And yet, the relationship is and should be reciprocal and complementary. When it comes to the commitment to pursue truth, and the ability to discern the trivial from the vital, older persons have much to give to their younger counterparts—and it becomes their responsibility to do so.

In the sphere of beauty, too, change is the order of the day. But change here is far less linear. After periods when artistic trends move inexorably toward greater complexity and abstruseness, there is a virtually inevitable reaction in the favor of the simple, the straightforward, the determinedly demotic. And yet the *form* of that reaction

cannot be predicted. In the visual arts, minimalism, pop art, old-fashioned realism were all (possible and actual) reactions to the arcana of abstract expressionism. Within music, minimalism, extreme regularity, fusion, third stream, unabashed romanticism were all (possible and actual) reactions to the intricacies of serial music.

Adult development allows us to recognize our individuality—the ways in which we resemble all individuals or some individuals, but equally and more importantly, how we differ from all other persons. This increased insight accompanies our experiences with a wide range of individuals and our continuing and thoughtful reflection on the nature of these experiences—most especially, those that encompass the realm of the beautiful. With reference to the arts, we can acknowledge those works—musical, literary, cinematic, graphic—that prove popular, even beloved, by other persons. At the same time we can come to understand—and to cherish—our own particular and perhaps even peculiar tastes, our individualized sense of beauty. I like to think of this growth as the continuing accumulation of a personal, richly annotated portfolio of all our significant experiences with works of art (and, for that matter, our encounters with nature).

It's been claimed, intriguingly, that after one enters one's forties, the human mind finds it extremely difficult to absorb truly new aesthetic norms. Proclivities become sclerotic. Put concretely, so the claim goes, if you are a Westerner in his fifth decade whose mind has not been exposed to the arts of Asia, you can never truly appreciate Indian reggae or Chinese ink-and-brush scrolls or Balinese dance.

In a literal sense, this claim cannot possibly be true. Despite the jokes of Jack Benny, a beloved comedian of the radio era, there is nothing sacred about the age of thirty-nine. Moreover, so much depends on one's own earlier experience—its breadth, its continuity—and one's own openness to change, that individual differences here must dwarf developmental (life-stage) or cohort differences (the place and date of one's birth).

Still, just as older scientists have increasing difficulty in accepting new paradigms—even the redoubtable Albert Einstein could never embrace the seemingly quirky though powerful truths of quantum mechanics—older eyes and ears do not readily absorb strikingly new artistic genres. I would go further. The sophisticated eye and ear may well be able to assimilate a new form—and indeed may even be able to put into words why that new form has merit, why it has mesmerized younger critics and youthful audiences. And yet, at a gut level, at the feeling level, at the depth of the experienced “tingle,” it may indeed be difficult for a forty-, fifty-, or seventy-year-old person to accept easily, and to gain pleasure from, a work of music, film, literature, dance, painting, or sculpture that deviates significantly from the hitherto known and valued presentations. An entirely new area of art—say, computer-generated graphics or electronic music—may prove particularly elusive. The central tendency of our sense of beauty may have become fixed by then, and alterations are accomplished with increasing difficulty. That is why “golden oldies” radio stations and classic films exercise an almost hypnotic power over those who were once there, once young.

Note that these limitations in the altering of taste have virtually nothing to do with initial predispositions. The genres that one comes to like (or to loathe) are due almost entirely to one's own experiences of living in one or more cultures during a specific historical era. The norms are emergent, not given. Once they have become entrenched, however, due largely to age and repetition, these norms prove increasingly difficult to alter—constituting a challenge to our emotional as well as to our cognitive systems.

That's the sobering news, but it's not the last word. A growing aversion to “the new” need not be fatal. As I've argued here, the important challenge in the world of arts is the capacity to notice differences. If I am unable to make discriminations within a new art form, medium, or genre, then clearly I cannot relate to it in a meaningful

way. But if I can learn to make the consequential distinctions—and any kind of help from any source, human or electronic, is welcome—I’ve crossed an important line. At least, I understand what the fuss is about. And perhaps—just perhaps—I’ll be able to transition from noting the critical difference to being able to enjoy it, even to crave it. Earlier I traced some of my own “changes of tinges” with references to the works of painter Anselm Kiefer and composer Elliott Carter.

Changes in artistic sensibility affect artists as well as members of an audience. For decades, composer Igor Stravinsky could not hide his contempt for the twelve-tone serial music pioneered by his contemporary Arnold Schoenberg. Yet Stravinsky’s much younger contemporary, conductor Robert Craft, kept exposing Stravinsky to new serial music. And to everyone’s surprise, almost as soon as Schoenberg had died, Stravinsky began to compose in this demanding genre—and, in the view of many, gained a new lease on his composing life. Here’s a case, in the realm of beauty, where young and old joined forces in a powerful way. As I write, Elliott Carter has passed the age of one hundred and is still writing compositions that are powerful and beautiful. Having opened up so many musical pathways in earlier decades, he is able to build upon them, synthesize them, and even change them significantly in his second century. (The great evolutionary biologist Ernst Mayr published five books while in his nineties.) The novelist Philip Roth, the poet W. B. Yeats, the painter Gerhard Richter, and the choreographer Merce Cunningham are other artists whose later works spoke to audiences of the time. If one continues to be open to the world and to keep one’s instruments of creating in good order, there are no insurmountable barriers to continued aesthetic growth.

In considerations of adult development, the realm of morality and ethics has been marked by controversy. Lawrence Kohlberg—the principal scholar of moral development of recent times—saw moral judgment reaching its high point by the third decade of life. At the “post-conventional” stage, the young adult thinks through moral is-

sues on her own; she is able and willing to oppose the regnant rules and regulations, if these are deemed unjust; for her part, she is also willing to accept the consequences, to engage in civil disobedience in the manner demonstrated by such moral exemplars as Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., Aung San Suu Kyi, Liu Xiaobo, or Nelson Mandela.

Our own studies suggest, however, that in the “realm of the good,” stances develop far more gradually, and may continue to grow and deepen throughout one’s active life. Here again, clarity about this realm is enhanced if one honors the distinction between neighborly morality and the ethics of roles.

With respect to neighborly morality, we do not find, nor should we expect to find, important new injunctions. Prescribed and proscribed actions with respect to our neighbors have evolved over tens of thousands of years and are unlikely to change in fundamental respects. Cheating, lying, stealing, maiming, killing—all remain taboo. And yet, it is apparent that the means and the range of neighborly morality are constantly under negotiation. In my lifetime, I have seen my loyalties expand beyond members of my own ethnic group (during childhood, German-Jewish families living in northeastern Pennsylvania) to a much broader sphere, and that shift continues to change and broaden to this day and, I trust, for as long as I live. Many who once distanced themselves from those of different racial or ethnic backgrounds or alternative sexual orientation no longer do so. In many parts of the world, the inclination toward pseudospeciation—the belief that some groups are not truly part of the human family and so do not merit being treated as conspecifics—is on the sharp decline. Yet, it would be naïve to consider these inclusionary trends to be inexorable: Stereotyping and stigmatizing remain powerful human inclinations that can be activated by events or demagogues.

When it comes to “the ethics of roles,” the picture is quite different. Changes are the order of the day, and these can continue to jolt many of us. Professions come and go—and once-secure professions,

such as print journalism, change in a manner of years, or even months. (In 1993, the *New York Times* paid more than \$1 billion for the *Boston Globe*; in 2011, the paper is worth only a small fraction of that amount.) New professions emerge; teams composed of different professions or disciplines have nearly become the norm. Just how to behave, and what to believe, in these altered professional environments has to be a source of continuing change and, no doubt in many cases, continuing confusion. For example, how—in the throes of the 24/7 news cycle—can the journalist take the time to confirm sources? Should the doctor reject a treatment that he has customarily recommended once a prestigious website has declared it ineffective? How do lawyers and agents deal with intellectual property at a time when it is so easy to transmit any and all contents on the Internet? Even professionals who want ardently to do the right thing can be at a loss; if our research group wanted to help them, we'd ideally need a constantly changing "Toolkit" for each profession.

Consider the rapid changes in my own field of psychology. When I announced to my teachers, four decades ago, that I felt it was vital to study the effects of brain damage on cognition, these teachers (whom I still venerate) assured me that I was wasting my time—that little of import about the human mind had been or would be ascertained by the studies of the brain or of damage to the nervous system. Thirty years ago, when I proposed to a funding agency that it support a newly emerging field called cognitive neuroscience, I was dismissed out of hand. Today, no one would dare to take such foolish stances. They are obviously false. Indeed, psychology has given way to cognitive science, and cognitive science is fast giving way to cognitive neuroscience, not to mention cognitive social neuroscience and other splinter sub-disciplines.

Virtually no one can anticipate the ethical issues that arise in newly emerging disciplines like these. What does one do after inadvertently uncovering information about a developing nervous system that suggests a person—perhaps even a fetus or a newborn—is at risk

for a learning disability? Particularly a disability for which there is no known effective intervention? How is one to think about the development and marketing of an expensive drug that could significantly improve the attention or memory of a well-heeled student preparing for her college entrance examination? Is it proper to recommend genetic engineering that could enhance the athletic competitiveness of a child? Anyone involved in the helping, measuring, or teaching professions can be—or soon will be—confronted with dilemmas like these. And yet, so far as I know, there is little guidance—no courses in graduate school, no license in neuro- or bioethics—that prepares one to confront these challenges.

In the ideal, the ethics of roles expands over the course of the life cycle. At the workplace, the young adult thinks primarily of responsibility to his boss and to his family; the middle-aged adult thinks more broadly about the responsibility to the organization and to the core values of the profession that she has joined; and the mature adult, whom we dub a "trustee," assumes partial responsibility for the overall health of the profession and its relation to the wider community. A parallel expansion may occur with respect to citizenship. While the young adult thinks primarily in terms of his street or his city, older persons may see themselves as citizens of ever larger collectivities—climaxing, in the most dramatic cases, to the entire planet. It may be useful to think of, and perhaps assemble, an ever expanding and deepening annotated portfolio of experiences in the moral and ethical realms.

With respect to "the good," we again encounter a terrain where young and old can join forces productively. Almost always, new fields of work are populated by younger scholars and practitioners. They know the technical ins-and-outs of the new terrain. Yet neither their own experiences nor their earlier role models necessarily prove of much help in dealing with the "dilemmas of the good" that arise. Older individuals may not have the technical knowledge of the new profession or discipline. Yet, at least in the happiest cases, these mature persons are alert to ethical quagmires and can draw on relevant

examples from other, longer-existing realms (as well as designating apparently similar examples that are no longer comparable or no longer relevant). And so, for example, methods and prototypes from medical ethics dating back to the Hippocratic era may provide helpful clues about how to deal with issues that arise in such newly emerging fields as genetics counseling or neuroeducation. By the same token, modes of speech and action once forged in the Athenian agora can continue to inspire those involved in civil action today.

Though we now realize that development—cognitive, social, emotional—can continue throughout one's active life, we must concede that such development is neither certain nor easy. Keeping up with what happens in spheres of interest and concern, reflecting on the meaning of these occurrences, attempting constantly to update one's own understanding are crucial steps. Whether in the realm of truth, beauty, or the good, one must be leery of retaining old habits of thought and action, even if they are comfortable, and remain open to new lines of thought and action, even if they are initially uncomfortable and threatening. Perhaps in distinctive ways, the attitudes and expertises of young and old can complement one another.

Even if the phrase *postmodernism* had never been uttered, even if we were chugging along without the new digital media, continued productive learning throughout one's life would constitute a formidable challenge—or, for those belonging to the “glass half full” cohort, an inviting opportunity. Not all strive for this learning—many are content to remain buried in their foxholes or resting upon their easy chairs. And not all those who so strive will succeed—we smile at the autodidact or the bootstrapping expert who thinks that he has scaled new heights, but who has actually fallen flat on his face! And since (perhaps beneficently) the nervous system does not know what is wrong with it, we are spared the knowledge that we ourselves have failed in efforts to remain informed, current, ahead of the pack.

For those who are not digital natives, and for those who do not keep up with the changes in the speed, style, and delivery of informa-

tion via new media, continued learning poses ever greater challenges. We risk falling further and further behind those who have mastered the media, who know the latest tricks and have access to the most current “apps,” who can combine and synthesize knowledge at an ever more rapid rate. This is one of those areas where the Matthew Effect—“the rich get richer”—reigns supreme. To those with digital intelligence, much is given, and the more that has been given, the greater the cumulative advantage. Immanuel Kant reflected brilliantly on some of the world's greatest enigmas while wending his way around Koenigsberg 250 years ago; but it is anyone's guess whether, in the assimilation and organization of information, he could compete today with a precocious youngster armed with a versatile handheld device.

Older persons can choose to avoid the digital media—at the risk of missing much, if not most, of what is happening in the world, both technologically and substantively. Those of us, no longer young, who venture into the new digital media find much of our worldview challenged. We encounter a plethora of alleged truths on the Internet, the full gamut of moral and ethical codes and mores, and a constant barrage of ever-changing aesthetic presentations that may or may not lead to experiences of beauty. The search for firm truths, universal ethics, a consensus on beauty seems doomed, or at least continually receding.

Yet, as they survey or surf the media, adults are also advantaged. Having knowledge and standards, they can bring these to bear on the copious information that is available. Understanding the nature of claims and counterclaims, of rival forms of expertise, and of the changing nature of understanding, older persons can be in a privileged position to make judgments of truthfulness—not in the sense of absolute or final truths but, rather, in the sense of data or information converging toward truth. And here, those capacities that emerge after adolescence—for systemic thinking, for putting one's own agenda aside—place one in good stead.

Much the same line of reasoning applies to experiences of beauty and choices in the ethical realm. The new digital media present an unending diet of objects and events to apprehend and evaluate. Initially, these can overwhelm. But preparation in one's earlier years can prove an enormous boon. That preparation ought to include some kind of portfolio—tangible, virtual, mnemonic—well stocked with references to earlier experiences. In the case of beauty, that portfolio consists of experiences felt to be beautiful (or instructively not so). In the case of the good, that portfolio consists of one's experiences with ethical dilemmas (successfully navigated or less so). Well-considered judgment can lead to a heightened sense of individual beauty and to better-conceived and substantiated actions at the workplace and in relevant civic spheres.

As I write these words, I recall the apt words of John Gardner (no relation), a treasured mentor. Gardner spoke admiringly of a colleague who had an "uncluttered mind." The abilities to assimilate and absorb quickly may be helped today by access to the latest media and technology; but they do not substitute for clarity of vision, purpose, and method. Take in all the information that you can; organize it as well as you can; but do not lose sight of what is truly important, truly valuable, and how you can use that knowledge in the service of "the good." Here again, older persons, particularly those who have maintained and reflected periodically upon their portfolio of prior experiences, may offer a perspective that is valuable to those who succeed them.

While the rise of the digital media may seem sudden and dramatic—particularly for so-called digital immigrants—the postmodern perspective has been in the air for decades. Accordingly, it proves less surprising and less insidious for most adults. I've argued that the postmodern perspective does not loom menacingly during childhood. Even if the child is regularly exposed to skepticism about

the verities (say, she lives in a postmodern household!), that skepticism is unlikely to have much force. After all, what does it mean to reject truth or beauty or goodness if one lacks a full-blown sense of these terms and concepts? And indeed, *the* cognitive assignment of middle childhood, as researchers have come to understand it, is precisely to learn the society's views, the conventional wisdom as it were, with respect to truth, beauty, goodness—their details, their embodiments, their enemies.

Any consensus with respect to the trio is likely to be challenged during adolescence—unless such defiance is forbidden by a totalitarian or fundamentalist community. Teenagers are able to think of the world in ways other than it is, and this cognitive advance means that received wisdoms do not automatically receive a "pass." That is why protest marches are common for fifteen-year-olds, much less so for five-year-olds or fifty-year-olds. As the years mount, the realities of earning a living, raising a family, fighting the ravages of aging and disease come to the fore; the luxury of challenging the status quo becomes the province of a minority elect—if indeed that minority is allowed to express itself. For every aging *enfant terrible*, there are legions who march steadily into the ranks of old farts. As Winston Churchill famously quipped, "If a young man is not a socialist by the time he is 20, he has no heart. . . . [I]f he is not a conservative by the time he is 40, he has no brain."

(Note the difficulty of determining the truth these days. When I looked up this quotation on the web, I found versions of it attributed to Georges Clemenceau, Benjamin Disraeli, David Lloyd-George, George Bernard Shaw, and Woodrow Wilson. Clearly it is a saying that is all too readily attributed to a certain kind of politically aware middle-aged Western male living in a democratic society [particularly if he happens to be named George!]. But if I am right, one should ultimately be able to discover the author of these words, if not the sentiment.)

Old hat or new wine, the “postmodern perspective” is here to stay. It exerts an effect on individuals of all ages, whether they’ve read the relevant works or never heard the relevant words. Like a bobo doll that keeps bouncing back to rubbery equilibrium each time it has been knocked to the floor, the reservations and reversals embodied in postmodern thought cannot be permanently stifled. Indeed, thanks to the digital media, these doubts are more insistent than ever. One advantage accruing to adults is that they are probably familiar with the critique and so can put it into perspective. While a challenge to the very possibility of truth may seduce a teenager for a time, it is more likely to be taken in stride by those who have “been there before.”

What happens during the adult years when the postmodern critique intersects with the virtues of the beautiful and the good? With reference to beauty, it becomes all too easy to proclaim “*de gustibus non est disputandum*.” But then one is left with the unpalatable conclusion that anyone can like anything, for any reason; and that there is not even the possibility—let alone the legitimacy—of agreement among individuals. With respect to art and entertainment, people can always vote with their feet—deciding which events to attend, which objects to buy, when to toss fragrant bouquets or to hurl rotten tomatoes onto the stage. But the risk exists, particularly as we age, of ignoring new objects and experiences that might be meritorious—and simply becoming creatures of habit, continuing to favor the same artists, the same works, the same theaters, even the same seats and the same refreshments.

In this regard, the new digital media can provide help. Nowadays, one can easily access hundreds, thousands, even tens of thousands of critiques of what is beautiful (and you can substitute whatever evaluative adjective you favor). Indeed, it is easy to be exposed to any and—it sometimes seems—all individuals’ senses of what they value and why. Moreover, other persons on one’s aesthetic wavelengths, or neural networks programmed with respect to one’s preferences, can

offer a steady diet of objects and experiences that one should be predisposed to like. One’s current satisfaction quotient may go up. But perhaps one ought deliberately to instruct these human or computational “nudgers” to stretch a bit—offering not just those items that one has a 90 percent chance of liking but also those where the batting average may be lower, yet with concomitant rewards that may enlarge your consciousness, increase the secretion of serotonin, and heighten your chances of flow. On such an account, each individual has the option of determining how open or closed he wishes to be with respect to new aesthetic offerings.

A continuing development of a sense of beauty rests on a broadening notion of artistic merit. As I argued earlier, beauty in the classical sense, indeed beauty in any sense, need not be *the* arbiter of works of art. Features such as interest, memorability of form, the potential to induce awe are equally valid considerations; one’s own pleasure zone can pleasurably extend as one adopts a more latitudinarian stance. The risk, of course, is abject resignation with respect to *any* standards—the conclusion that “anything goes,” the refusal to render any judgment of beauty or merit. Happily, however powerful as a rhetorical stance, such a position proves to be impossible in practice. As human beings, we will make choices, establish preferences, sometimes change them; we may as well proceed in as informed and open a way as possible.

So long as they remain open to new aesthetic experiences, adults can look forward to happy outcomes with respect to the realm of beauty. If adults have the motivation to take advantage of new media, exploring unfamiliar works of art, surveying a range of praise and criticism, and then stepping back and forming their own judgments, the prospect of a genuine individualized sense of beauty is enhanced. No new cognitive capacities are needed here—voluntary exposure to new experiences starts early in life and has no statute of limitations. But the capacities to see one’s whole self clearly—not as one would

like to be seen *but* as one actually is—and to discern both similarities *and* differences from others—lay the groundwork for a personal sense of beauty. And so long as one keeps an open mind, that sense of beauty can continually be altered and enhanced.

Which leaves us to ponder the headline “Morals and Ethics Meet the Postmodern Challenge.” For most observers, the postmodern challenge has been most salient with respect to the moral sphere, broadly conceived. All but the most benighted are aware that people, groups, cultures, differ deeply in their views about how to live; what boundaries to honor; what is appropriate with respect to worship, sex before or outside of marriage, sexual preference, polygamy, contraception, the death penalty, euthanasia, collective guilt, and a host of other “hot button” issues. And even when there appears to be a consensus or near consensus within a particular community or nation (say, for the sake of argument, in Dubai or Poland or Costa Rica), one simply has to cross a border or traverse a body of water to encounter—head on—cultures or subcultures with radically different views of what is proper, what is acceptable, what is taboo.

How these contrasts are dealt with differs dramatically across individuals and societies. The gamut runs from the defiant intolerance displayed by a fundamentalist group like the Taliban to the perhaps too-forgiving stance of Scandinavians—at least before an influx of immigrants from a multitude of cultures put the fabled Scandinavian tolerance to an unprecedented test. The head of a Muslim family kills his unmarried daughter because, willingly or not, she has had sexual relations with a Swedish male. As justification, the father explains that this putative murderous act draws on, in fact is dictated by, his deepest religious belief systems, thereby challenging the mores of northern Europe. Practices of neighborly morality clash head on with universalist views of citizenship. And of course, within the host society, individual reactions differ, even within families.

In the area of ethics and morals, as in other areas, individuals can and do change their minds in the later decades of life. To take a per-

sonal example, I used to believe that freedom of the press was paramount and that the press could and should publish as it wishes. In 2005 a Danish newspaper published a set of cartoons that ridiculed Islam. The reaction was swift. There were riots in several Islamic cities, people lost their lives, serious threats were lodged against the offending cartoonist and the editor who permitted their publication. These severe consequences caused me to change my mind. I now believe that the press should not publish needlessly inflammatory materials—in this case, cartoons that ridicule religious leaders and icons. The press should be able to express its opinions freely and honestly but should do so in clear and unambiguous language, not through inflammatory graphic imagery and caricature. As I put it, freedom of the press remains an important value—indeed, a core value of the profession of journalism. But pursuing a utilitarian or consequentialist line of argument, I also believe that on some occasions the press should engage in self-censorship. Here a universal ethical principle gives way to more traditional or parochial forms of morality.

(Of course, in these days of the Internet, any and all images will be circulated—no way to stop it. And so it is necessary to introduce a distinction between the responsible press and the other—call it “irresponsible”—press. On my revised ethics, the responsible press can continue to publish all views, but should take special efforts to do so in ways that are not needlessly incendiary.)

The potential to change one’s mind with respect to the virtues remains important throughout the life cycle. Perhaps, as a thoughtful adult, one should not easily change one’s mind, particularly on issues where a wide consensus has obtained among informed individuals and where one has long held a certain point of view. Yet, one should equally avoid the stance of the fundamentalist. (As noted earlier, when I use the term *fundamentalist* I do not refer to a person of rigid religious beliefs. Rather, I use the term to designate *any* individual who makes a commitment *not* to change his mind on any topic—or indeed on all topics.) It is rarely worth spending time trying to change

the mind of a fundamentalist, because he has committed himself irrevocably to a totally different set of assumptions.

An individual is least open to changing his or her mind when three conditions obtain: (1) One has had a long-term adherence to a particular view; (2) that view contains a strong emotional or affective component; and (3) one has taken a public position on that view. Conversely, when a viewpoint is relatively new, is not accompanied by deep-seated emotions, and has been kept private, changes of mind are less difficult to effect.

Individuals, groups, and cultures will differ on which spheres afford easy mind changes, and which prove more refractory to change. Judgments of truth depend largely on the sphere in question. They are probably easiest to change with respect to areas of knowledge about which one knows little (e.g., how many strings in superstring theory, how to secure a certain sound on a Chinese string instrument), and correlatively more difficult as one becomes more knowledgeable and as the issues impact one's own life. As a general rule, judgments and experiences of beauty are the easiest to change, because one's relations to others are less likely to be at stake—unless one happens to be a widely known artist or critic.

In contrast, the areas of morality and ethics may prove most difficult to invade and alter—views tend to persist, to carry strong emotional overtones, and, especially as one becomes responsible to or for others, to offer occasions for public pronouncements. Often, the moral values are part and parcel of a religious position to which the individual has a long and strong emotional bond. It takes a truly dramatic event—say, the discovery by a homophobe that one or more of his *own* offspring are gay—to trigger or facilitate a change of mind in the moral arena.

At times, however, mind change with respect to ethical issues is possible through less dramatic interventions. Occasionally one meets and likes someone from a determinedly different walk of life. In the

course of spending time together, one gradually discovers that this person has views quite different from one's own. At such times, it is possible to have conversations that change one or even both minds. Robert Wright speaks of such encounters as the exercise of "moral imagination"—the capacity to put oneself in someone else's shoes. Commissions on Peace and Reconciliation in war-torn societies build on this potential of human intercourse. The capacity for such empathy need not decline over the life span—and perhaps in the best instance, it can even flourish, particularly if one remains alert to the experiences of others. That is what appears to have happened in the case of former presidents John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. Long bitter foes, they reconciled and even found themselves more often in agreement as the decades passed.

One other reason to remain open to mind changes: Sometimes, nearly everyone happens to be wrong. Despite the seemingly entrenched consensus that financial markets will inevitably correct themselves, more than one great financial upheaval has occurred in less than a century. Despite the belief that the end of the Cold War spelled the triumph of democratic capitalism, state capitalism is now in the ascendancy. I will not forget what the notable scholar of linguistics Noam Chomsky once told me: "I never accept anyone else's word about anything." Accumulating experiences that one has been wrong, or that others have been wrong, may make one more willing to consider alternative descriptions of reality. Modesty and flexibility do not particularly correlate with age: They reflect traits that one can either denigrate or cultivate.

Life lasts longer nowadays for most of us than it did in earlier eras. And exposure to a range of propositions, experiences, and values has never been greater. Those with flexible minds, with open minds, are at a distinct advantage overall, as contrasted to those who want to adhere to every word uttered by their mother and father, if not to every word of the Holy Mother and the Holy Father. So are those who

know how their own mind works and can marshal that metacognitive knowledge in cases where the course to pursue is not clear. Finally those who have greater distance from themselves may, paradoxically, come to understand better the ways in which they are truly distinctive. They may also be in a better position to determine what they can learn from the young, and what they might transmit to the young.

As I've argued here, our era has ushered in a playing field that puts younger and older persons in an admirably complementary position. Adolescents and young adults generally have a mastery of the new media; they also have grown up in a world where postmodern ideas of diversity, relativism, and skepticism are part of the intellectual atmosphere. For their part, adults have had far more experience in making judgments in their areas of expertise, the realm of beauty, the spheres of work and civic action. Moreover, particularly if they have accumulated and kept track of their learnings, they can bring a soundness of judgment to the trio of virtues that complements the greater vigor and learning capacity of young persons. Working together, young and old can master the media and the varieties of modernist thought, rather than being overwhelmed by them.

Such complementarity and synergy represent an inspiring aspiration. Yet, sooner or later, we all must come to grips with our own mortality. Writer Albert Camus may have exaggerated when he declared that "there is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide." But it takes a truly benighted individual to ignore the reality that he or she may die at any moment, and, barring a bizarre circumstance, is likely to die before his or her descendants. Initial proclivities are long past; societal norms have long since been absorbed; the inexorable forces of biological decomposition, gradual or aggressive, with or without concomitant cognitive decline, come to the fore. One's own growth is at or near an end; the focus shifts toward what younger persons can learn from the words and the examples of elders.

As conceived by my teacher Erik Erikson, the final years of life are characterized by a struggle between feelings of integrity and feelings of despair. The individual ponders the ways in which his life has made sense to himself and to others, the contributions he has made, as well the hurts, physical or psychological, short term or more long lasting, intentional or not, that he may have inflicted on others. He ponders as well his own aspirations and missions, where he has succeeded and where he has fallen short of his own or another's (or of still others') wishes. And assuming that he lives in a community that is supportive or at least attentive, others will be curious to learn just what he has valued, and why, and which lessons he would pass on to future generations. Of course, this "demand" is greater in societies that move slowly, and where elders are honored for their wisdom, than it is in societies, like most today, that move rapidly, have little memory for the past, and are attracted to the young, the swift, the facile, and the novel, be it exemplary or egregious. Nevertheless, particularly at trying times, the lessons of experience prove valuable, if not invaluable.

And so, if we are to look to those who are long-lived or deeply lived, which configuration of virtues is most vital to cherish and to pass on? I would single out two: the practical truths of a life that was lived well, and the morals and ethics of a life that served others. To some extent, these truths and good-nesses can be verbalized, and that is why we sometimes hang on to the words of those who are about to depart. But far more powerfully, it is the lives rather than the words of these elders that attract our attention and, as appropriate, activate our moral imaginations.

It is a source of regret to me that so many young people today find no one to admire, or restrict their admiration to individuals known only to them and their immediate circle. I am gratified that I can look to twentieth-century public figures like John Gardner or Eleanor Roosevelt or Mahatma Gandhi or, in the contemporary world, to Burmese dissident Aung San Suu Kyi, cellist Yo-Yo Ma, social entrepreneur

William Drayton, scientist and naturalist Jane Goodall, philanthropist George Soros, pioneering microfinancier Muhammad Yunus—and admire the truths that they discovered or affirmed, the beauties that they admired or created, and the values that they embodied and passed on to the young. The generations of our world would be diminished in the absence of the models that they have provided. And it is worth underscoring, as well, that these admirable figures have continued to seek out, and to learn from, the lively young in their midst. In this way, they epitomize that complementarity between younger and elder persons that may well be at a particular premium in our postmodern, digital era.

Conclusion | Looking Ahead

At the outset of this book, I contrasted the austere splendor and unity of the Middle Ages, as portrayed by historian Henry Adams, with the pastiche of direct quotations, paraphrases, and putatively original materials collated by the contemporary author David Shields. The worldviews presented in these works could not be more different. Adams assumed that, at least in the ideal, there can exist a world that is true, beautiful, and good—and at a single historical moment. The passages selected by Shields present a contrasting perspective: extreme skepticism that these virtues make sense today.

I've wondered whether, if Adams and Shields could somehow be brought together, they would have anything to say to one another. Adams could hardly bear the America of a century ago. In contrast, Shields seems fully to embrace the artistic possibilities of the contemporary world—the incredible capacity of the digital media to combine