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Human Improvement

Teaching seems plain enough. An older or more educated person holds forth to those younger or less knowledgeable. Children sit at small desks, adolescents slouch in lecture halls, and grown-ups gather in semicircles. The older or more learned person almost always stands in front and almost always talks. So when I ask, "What sort of endeavor is teaching?" the answer seems simple: one in which knowledge and skills are transmitted.

All true, but not all that is true. One might also say that teachers try to improve their students' minds, souls, and habits. There are many important differences among such improvers. Some teach in kindergarten, while others do so in graduate school. Some teach subatomic physics, others inculcate religious beliefs, and, in religious schools, teachers may do both. If the range of teachers' aims is amazing, so are the situations in which they labor. Some work in one-room schools, while others instruct in universities that enroll forty thousand students. Some tutor a single student, while others face four thousand. But throughout all these differences, teachers work at a profession of human improvement. Like psychotherapists, social workers, pastors, and organization developers, they work directly on other humans in efforts to better their minds, lives, work, and organizations.

Human improvement occupations share extraordinary ambitions. Workers seek to improve skills, deepen insights, broaden understanding, cope with feelings, take another's point of view, and increase honesty. These are occupations in which workers attempt to transform minds, enrich human capabilities, and change behavior. Learning is central to all of them, and in all it is seen as the key to betterment. Workers regularly remind us that their work is crucial to modern life. Teachers cultivate practical intelligence, theoretical reason, and the capacity to solve problems, without which many argue that a modern economy would falter or collapse. Organizational consultants improve effectiveness, productivity, and even honesty in organizations. Some of these occupations, like psychotherapy and organization development, are quite new, the progeny of the idea of progress that has flourished in Europe and North America since the Enlightenment. Others, like teaching and pastoral work, are ancient but have been reconceived in light of modern ambitions.

Workers in all these unusual trades face several common predicaments. One can best be put as a paradox: although special expertise is practitioners' chief qualification to work with clients, expertise is never enough. No matter how well educated and professionally informed they may be, workers frequently have no conclusive expert solutions, even to many basic problems. Schoolteachers and academic experts regularly disagree about the purposes of practice. Many argue that teachers should instill obedience and respect for authority in students, but others insist that they should cultivate critical intelligence and the disposition to question authority. Some contend that students should learn the basics, while others argue for much more intellectually elevated work. There is no scientifically conclusive way to decide such disputes; indeed, these disputes thrive in social science, as well as in popular discourse.

Americans also dispute the best ways to reach these academic goals. Some argue that hands-on experience and practical work are the best road to knowledge, while others urge rigorous academic study. Deep disagreements exist even among advocates of rigorous study. Some argue for sustained work on academic content, while others insist on the importance of learning processes, critical thinking, or reading strategies.[1] Observers and evaluators also disagree about how to judge success. In teaching reading or arithmetic, as in any profession of human improvement, what strikes some as the same improvement—for example, learning two-digit multiplication—can be defined in different ways, each plausible from some perspective. We can identify different means to achieve any improvement, each supported by some observers and practitioners, and each backed by more or less evidence of success. Professional knowledge and social science inform these views, but conclusive evidence is rare.[2] Practitioners in every human improvement profession struggle with similar problems, as do commentators on these professions; expertise is essential to good practice, but it also is essentially inadequate.[3]

Some readers may demur and say that the progress of science or professional education will solve the problem. Prediction about matters of this sort is impossible, but the historical record is not encouraging. Uncertainty and dispute about human improvement have not diminished in the century just past, during which the entire enterprise expanded enormously, professional education in human improvement occupations grew into a vast undertaking, and social research was applied on an increasing scale. Contrary to the hopes of many advocates for the saving power of science, these developments were accompanied by increasing dispute and uncertainty. As each profession prospered, so did rival schools of thought and practice within it. Jung and Freud invented the first great sys-

tems of psychoanalysis. Although psychotherapy grew, much of the expansion was in contending treatments, and much of the professional literature was marked by disputes about them. As early skepticism about the efficacy of psychic therapy declined, it was replaced by critiques of particular treatments and later by bitter attacks on the entire therapeutic enterprise. One particularly striking example is the view, advanced by leading psychiatrists, that madness is essentially rational and that psychotherapy is a cause of human misery rather than its cure.[4]

A similar story can be told about teaching. Disputes about the best ways to instruct are as old as public education. In the United States, some educators and divines in the 1700s saw instruction as a fierce struggle with depravity, while others saw it as a gentle cultivation of humanity's goodness. The birth of public schools in Boston in the 1830s and 1840s was accompanied by a fierce battle between reformers and schoolmen about whether instruction should be grounded in the rigorous recitation of facts in books or in efforts to solve "real" practical problems. These old divisions are still with us, but a myriad of other theories and practices have sprung up in the intervening decades, including, among others, Montessori education, anarchist schools, progressivism, behavior modification, open education, free schools, and Christian fundamentalist schools. Levels of education, literacy, and humanity in instruction have grown greatly since Horace Mann campaigned for public schools in the 1840s, but so have competing ideas about instruction and attacks on teaching as a cause of oppression and ignorance. The progress of education has been accompanied by increasingly bitter critiques and multiplying disputes about whether education has improved or weakened. Some commentators portray schooling as a vicious attack on innocent children or a calculated

means of holding entire populations in intellectual and political bondage, ideas that were almost entirely absent from early debates about public education.[5] The growth of formal education evidences expanding faith in the possibilities of human improvement and increasing doubt about teachers' capacity to deliver the goods.

That paradox has been vividly displayed in recent efforts at school reform. Since the mid-1980s state and federal governments have pressed schools, especially those that serve disadvantaged students, to improve. Policy makers insist that schools should eliminate gaps in average achievement between advantaged and disadvantaged students and between African American or Hispanic and white students. That goal is unprecedentedly ambitious, not only because the policies propose to judge schools by results rather than by the quality of instruction but also because inequality in students' social and economic backgrounds and in their schools' educational resources is great. But the same policies that express extraordinary faith in the schools' capability for human improvement argue that public schools have seriously failed. If they have failed as badly as the policies assert, though, how can they be expected to produce dramatically different results? The answers—charter schools and school "turnaround" chief among them—combine the view that many public schools are hopelessly incapable, with the idea that effective education can be achieved by changing organization and leadership. The evidence that nearly half of charter schools do less to boost students' performance than comparable local public schools does not bear out the optimism, but it has done little to blunt advocates' pessimism about public schools and their optimism about charter schools.

The paradox of expertise is evident also in the proliferation of self-help improvement schemes. Books, magazines, tapes, and video

recordings promise emotional peace without therapists: we need only perform therapy on ourselves. Various experts propose education without teachers: we need only read manuals or use computers. Managers are urged to improve their organizations in five minutes by reading a book or listening to a tape. These schemes testify to both an irrepressible faith in human improvement and deep doubts about practitioners' expertise. If we can find peace without therapists, education without teachers, and decent organizations without consultants, how important are practitioners, and how weighty is their expertise?

To date, the progress of human improvement and expanded knowledge about it seem to have increased uncertainty rather than diminishing it and to have complicated practitioners' work rather than simplifying it. Practitioners must solve more problems, learn more, and work more skillfully, but doubts about their expertise multiply along with these demands. As efforts to improve humanity have grown, so have our ambitions, our sophistication, and our critical capacities. Although better scientific and professional knowledge can inform practitioners' understanding and work, there is ample reason to doubt that this knowledge will end dispute or uncertainty. One reason is the idea of progress that these professions exemplify, for the more they prosper, the better we can see how much remains undone and what might have been better done. Such insights are a regular accompaniment of progress in human improvement.

I have mentioned only a few bits of evidence among many that might be marshaled on these points, but they are basic because they touch on the ends and means of improvement. Practitioners and commentators argue about whether such uncertainties and disputes are a temporary problem that will be eliminated with the progress of social science and professional knowledge or a permanent

feature of such work. They debate whether these professions are sciences, practical arts, or social engineering. Unlike carpentry or plumbing, the very nature of these professions and practitioners' knowledge and skills are matters of continuing uncertainty and often of ferocious dispute. Moreover, this account is only one source of uncertainty, for no practitioner can entirely anticipate how clients will respond in classes, therapy sessions, and other settings. Teachers are regularly surprised by students' interpretation of a story or their solution to a math problem and often must revise their approach in consequence. Human improvers cannot work without their clients, but work with them typically opens up uncertainty.

Practitioners' efforts to manage the paradox of expertise are complicated by a second predicament: they depend on clients. They can succeed only if their clients strive for and achieve success. If students, patients, and members of organizations do not become practitioners of their own improvement, professionals cannot succeed. A carpenter can produce results if he has the skills and knowledge of the trade, the will to work, and good materials, but all of a teacher's art and craft will be useless unless students embrace the purposes of instruction as their own and seek them with their own art and craft. This is one reason that students' resistance to teachers' direction can be a potent source of students' influence; it can be threatening not simply because students defy authority but also because they deny teachers success. Clients' will and capabilities are no less important than those of practitioners; indeed, practitioners' work in these trades often aims to cultivate their clients' will to better themselves and their skill at such work. Whatever their own attainments and position, workers depend on their less skilled, less mature, or less healthy clients for their own success and satisfaction.[6]

This is no theoretical matter, for human improvers and their clients often differ about their work. Teachers who are eager for Shakespeare or medieval history regularly encounter students who want accounting or auto mechanics. In such cases the purposes of instruction must be negotiated and renegotiated as part of instruction because clients' commitment is essential. Improvement cannot go forward without willing participants, but clients regularly fear improvement, doubt its possibility, are indifferent, or prefer something other than what practitioners offer.[7]

Practitioners' dependence is manifest everywhere in their work. It can affect the politics of practice, because practitioners cannot succeed without clients who work with them toward their success. Often they can influence clients' motivation, but not always, and in any case they cannot control it. Moreover, the social organization of work is a potent influence on clients' commitment. Teachers in many public schools try to find ways to "motivate" their students because they work in unselective institutions that students are compelled to attend. Teachers in many selective private schools often work with students who want to be there, in which case problems of motivation are less acute. Similarly, most psychiatrists and psychoanalysts in private practice typically select clients who wish to work with them and use that mutual choice and patients' payment to help mobilize patients' engagement. The mobilization of commitment is managed differently in various sectors of each occupation. Private practitioners who select clients who seek assistance and pay for it have a less acute problem than their colleagues who work in public facilities that compel or accept all comers. In the former case the social arrangements of work manage a great deal of clients' commitment for the private practitioners, while in the latter their publicly practicing colleagues must try to mobilize

and sustain clients' commitment despite the wish of many that they were somewhere else and were doing something else.

One device that practitioners use in this connection is to delegate responsibility to clients. Therapists often assign patients a key role in deciding what problems should be solved and when they have been solved. Organization consultants invite clients to decide on the goals they will seek and when they have been achieved. Teachers often try to anticipate what particular students will find appealing and to make suitable assignments, and they often negotiate the content of instruction with students.[8]

Practitioners' dependence imposes limits on skill and knowledge additional to those arising from limits on expertise. If a neurotic patient refuses to discuss his problems, the therapist's special expertise may be of little avail; if anything helps, it may be the little-skilled suggestion that therapy cannot proceed unless the patient cooperates, and the silence that can follow. If eight-year-olds reject their teacher's plan for a French lesson, no amount of instructional knowledge of French is likely to help. Unspecialized coaxing by the teacher, a stern admonition from a parent, or a trip to the principal may do the trick. In such cases and many others, practitioners' expertise is insufficient to produce results or even to get started.

Practitioners often must supplement their own expertise with clients' consent and with the knowledge and skills that clients bring to bear. Clients' commitment and knowledge are essential companions of practitioners' expertise and often a nearly complete substitute for it, as when students' engagement with a subject enables them to learn despite weak teaching. The need for supplements would exist even if all practitioners were exquisitely skillful, for teachers, psychotherapists, and organization developers work on other human be-

ings whose commitment to improvement is essential for the mere opportunity to practice, let alone for success. No amount of improvement in practitioners' knowledge and skills, marvelous though it might be, could supplant clients' commitment and the many essential but little-skilled things that practitioners or others do to mobilize and sustain it. Here again, the problem is managed differently in varied social arrangements of practice. Practitioners in private practice or very selective public settings can count on selectivity to help mobilize clients' will to improve, while their equally skillful colleagues in unselective settings often must labor to mobilize that commitment.

The third predicament is that practitioners are pulled in contrary directions as they try to manage their dependence. Because professional success depends on clients' improvement, there are powerful incentives to press for dramatic change, since the greater the client's accomplishment, the greater the practitioner's success. But human improvement can be both risky and difficult because more ambitious improvements are more difficult to achieve and pose greater risks of failure. Old ideas or habits must be revised or abandoned if clients are to change, whether in learning physics, improving emotional health, or increasing organizational effectiveness. If improvement works, it can be exhilarating, but it frequently is difficult; after all, the old ideas and habits often worked, however roughly, and it may not be easy to cast them aside. Clients also must acquire new skills, habits, understanding, or states of organization, which also can be difficult and risky; if they cannot change as much as they had hoped, perhaps they cannot become the person they wished to be or were told they should become. In a world that values human improvement as one of its most precious ambitions, such failures can weigh heavily.[9]

The more that workers seek ambitious success for their clients, the more likely they are to provoke resistance, precipitate failure, or both. Because changes that are risky and difficult for clients threaten practitioners' prospects, they have incentives to define improvement in such a way that clients will not resist or can easily accomplish it, for modest improvement may be better than resistance or failure. Teachers, therapists, and their colleagues in sister practices regularly worry about whether they should aim low in order to avoid the risk of total failure by clients and achieve at least some success for themselves, or aim high in order to gain great improvement for their clients and similar accomplishment for themselves. The problem has no lasting or generally satisfactory solution, but it must be managed somehow if work is to continue.[10]

These three predicaments are unique to human improvement. Teachers and organization consultants need the will to work in addition to their specialized knowledge and skills, and in that respect they are just like carpenters and architects. But carpenters and architects do not require the consent and commitment of their wood or designs. Only teachers and colleagues in related occupations require clients who bend their own will and intelligence to the work, along with practitioners. Workers in these occupations thus face another predicament that derives from a combination of the last two: they have special status, authority, and influence, and their clients often are seen as unskilled, deficient, or even pathological, but workers in these occupations are useless without their clients and often powerless with them. Patients who doze on the couch and students who read comic books or send text messages in class impede not only their own improvement but also practitioners' progress as professionals.

This last point implies that the predicaments operate jointly, because practitioners are regularly caught between their claims to

special knowledge and their dependence on clients. Their expertise is essential for access to clients, for their clients' trust, for fees or salaries, for social position, and for results. But practitioners' expertise always is insufficient, and they must rely on other resources or arrangements, supplementary to specialized knowledge and skills, to sustain their work. Some of the supplements belong to clients—their will to work and their knowledge and skills. Others belong to practitioners and include everything from the courage to face uncertainty to the generosity of spirit that enables one person to devote himself to help others. Some belong to both practitioners and clients—the capability to understand each other and to put oneself in the intellectual or emotional place of the other. Such empathy and mutual understanding are essential to our lives as social animals, but they have been investigated much more in sociobiology and anthropology than in practices of human improvement.[11] Improved knowledge and skill are sorely needed in teaching and its sister practices, but no matter how well educated and experienced they may be, workers need much more than specialized knowledge and skill to do good work.

It therefore seems fair to say that human improvement professions are impossible.[12] Teachers, therapists, and organizational consultants do not constantly tear their hair or weep and wail; they go to work every day like anyone else, and they cope with boredom in addition to the problems sketched here. But their work requires the management of unique and often-deep difficulties that have no entirely satisfactory solutions, and the solutions that workers do patch together regularly come unglued.[13] At the same time, to say that these predicaments must be managed is not to say that practitioners must deal with them constantly or attentively. For one thing, practitioners and clients themselves can regulate how much they need to attend to the problems discussed here. If

psychotherapists and patients use cognitive behavior therapy to induce weight loss or end smoking, they need not struggle with great uncertainty about the ends and means of improvement. In contrast, uncertainty and doubt will increase if they use traditional "insight" therapies to help patients understand why they overeat or smoke, decide what they can do about it, and then try to do it, for doubt and uncertainty are essential in these therapies.

Practitioners and clients can thus increase the risk and difficulty of their work by embracing relatively complex and ambiguous purposes and methods, or they can ease matters by adopting relatively clear and simple objectives and methods. They are not absolutely free agents, but they can regulate work together from the inside by choosing the ends they seek and the means they use. Such regulation is a central element in human improvement because it allows workers and clients to shape how large the predicaments of human improvement will loom, and what skills, knowledge, and other personal resources they must deploy.

Furthermore, workers and clients are not Robinson Crusoes and Fridays, parked on islands all their own. Their work also is regulated by society, economy, and culture. Some teachers work in institutions that admit only talented and commited students and dismiss them for poor performance; they are less likely to struggle with dependence on students than equally capable colleagues who work in drab public schools. Some teachers work in schools or societies that have a strong consensus about educational results; they are less likely to be plagued by uncertainty about the ends and means of schooling than equally able colleagues who work in schools or systems torn by persistent disputes about those matters. Social arrangements in these occupations sharpen the predicaments of improvement in some cases and blunt them in others. Variation in

these arrangements increases the probability that unusual expertise will be needed to get barely decent results in some cases, while fine results can be achieved with modest expertise in others.

To attend to the predicaments of human improvement thus is not to claim that all practitioners constantly worry about them. Attentive coping is not the only way in which these problems are managed. Workers and clients can diminish or increase the attention they give to these predicaments by internal regulation of their practice, and occupations and societies can do so by how they configure the social arrangements of practice. Much can be learned by figuring out why some workers and clients are little troubled by the predicaments sketched here, while others are plagued by them. The predicaments are distinctive to these occupations, but they are not always at the top of workers' minds. I propose them as a useful way to interpret work in these occupations, whatever workers may worry about.

My claim that these occupations are distinctive also is not a claim that they are unique, for human improvement bears remarkable similarities to other work. In the early years of the twenty-first century, many occupations can make some claim to human betterment, and most do. Social progress is an increasingly widely accepted value, and more and more occupations and enterprises explain and justify themselves with reference to it. Advertisers assert that they are improving our capacity to satisfy emotional needs. Managers claim that they are improving our capacity to be productive or to enjoy work. Soap manufacturers announce that their products "care" for our children. Whatever one thinks of these claims, only teachers, psychotherapists, and their colleagues work directly on other humans in order to improve their minds, skills, and organizations.

But someone may ask: what about many other occupations, ignored thus far, in which practitioners work directly on others? Cosmetics salesclerks work on their customers, surgeons work on their patients, human resource managers in large corporations work on their employees, and prison guards work on prisoners. Great promises for human improvement are regularly made for cosmetics, health care, management, and involuntary detention. Can one deny that these are also practitioners of human improvement?

Consider the improvements and how they are cultivated. Surgeons do not try to make their patients into apprentice surgeons, nor do salesmen try to improve their clients' capacity to sell vacuum cleaners or encyclopedias.[14] Some managers try to help subordinates become managers, but many do not. In occupations such as sales, physical medicine, and many branches of management, practitioners strive for distinctive results: items sold or manufactured, profits earned, bones and organs repaired, and the like. Improving clients' minds, souls, and knowledge is subsidiary at best and often is either irrelevant or merely decorative. In guarding prisons or other police work, workers typically are more custodians than meliorists; their assignment is to keep people away from trouble, not to improve their capabilities.[15]

In contrast, teachers can succeed only if they help students acquire some elements of their own special expertise: knowledge of a subject, skill in explaining it, strategies for solving problems, and the like. When classical psychotherapists succeed, they typically do so by helping their patients acquire elements of their own therapeutic expertise: insight into emotional problems, understanding their sources, skill in noticing symptoms, and a grasp of the barriers to improvement. Only teachers and workers in sister trades must help their clients to learn how to improve, for only in these

occupations must clients become apprentice practitioners in order for the workers to succeed.

Thus if there are elements of human improvement in many modern occupations, there also are important differences between human improvement practices and other occupations in which people are processed. But it would be unwise to draw hard-and-fast lines between these types of work, for the distinctions are contested within occupations. Some human resource managers in firms define their work in terms of profits made or units produced, but others define it to include understanding achieved, knowledge acquired, and capacities improved. Some prison managers define their work in custodial terms, but some do seek prisoners' rehabilitation; some prison guards act as though they were teachers, while others are brutal or indifferent.[16] And while some teachers act like prison guards, others seek intellectual liberation for their charges. The shape that these occupations take in any given case depends on organizational differences, clients' dispositions, and workers' preferences, among other things.

Another reason to eschew rigid distinctions is that occupations change over time. Physicans conventionally defined their work in terms of patients' physical health, and many still do, but increasingly they see that physical health can depend on how well patients understand their problems and how firmly they commit to the solutions; hence physicians work more and more on understanding and mutual commitment. Five or six centuries ago, what little schoolteaching there was dealt either with simple skills useful in commerce and administration or with otherworldly salvation. The problems of human improvement were not on anyone's plate because secular betterment was not a socially accepted enterprise. Human improvement occupations are an invention of the last several

centuries, the progeny of efforts to realize the idea of progress in social practices. One result has been the transformation of several ancient occupations. Pastoral work, which was focused on otherworldly salvation for centuries, has gradually been reoriented; pastors still offer guidance in matters beyond experience, but they borrow from social work, education, and psychotherapy so that even their otherworldly work now includes elements of secular human improvement.

The boundaries of human improvement professions also blur because these trades are not similarly constituted in all societies and often are contested within them. The speed of modernization varies among nations, as does enthusiasm for the doctrine of progress. Psychotherapy has been much more popular in America, with its established Protestant passion for self-improvement, than in the European countries in which it was invented. Teaching addresses a more limited range of purposes in Asian societies than in the United States, but even Americans disagree deeply about the extent to which it should attend to human improvement. Fundamentalists often see teaching in traditional terms and argue that it should orient students to salvation. Some reformers and practitioners think that teaching ought to be restricted to traditional academic matters and eschew broader improvement, but the ubiquity of human improvement also is evident here, for fundamentalists explain their view of school as an alternative to the broad aims of secular education that aims at improved self-esteem, sex education, and other things, along with academic matters.

These arguments will persist, waxing and waning with circumstances, but they all are variations on an essential modern theme: humanity's capacity to better self and society, to repair mind, soul, and organization with specialized knowledge and skills. It is un-

profitable to define these occupations tightly because history and social variation outgrow tidy boundaries. We can see that some practices of human improvement (teaching, psychotherapy, and organization development) are further down the modern road than others, at least in the United States, and so more clearly exhibit the distinctive predicaments of this most modern work. We can also see that the same practices seem to be moving in a similar direction in less modern societies, and we can imagine that this movement may become more pronounced in the future.

It would be surprising if the momentum of human improvement did not increase, pulling more occupations and enterprises into channels that others already have taken. In a few decades many salesclerks may become practitioners of retail therapy, using goods, services, and clinical insight in this cause. There already is evidence that consumers search for emotional improvement in the goods and services they purchase, and that many salespeople skillfully assist them. Alhough I can delineate the leading features of practices like teaching and psychotherapy today, it seems reasonable to expect that ambitions for human improvement will continue to grow tomorrow if we assume that there will be no convulsive rejection or collapse of modern civilization. This expansion will be difficult to avoid in a civilization that identifies progress so closely with increased technical mastery, personal comfort, and satisfaction of individual wants.[17] The boundaries of this new family of practices thus will probably remain indistinct and weakly defined, partly because they lie along an uneven and shifting frontier.

This account throws some additional light on my claim that human improvement occupations are impossible. Because they make great modern promises for secular betterment, they open up many great modern puzzles. Each occupation organizes these matters

differently because each employs a distinctive approach to setting and solving the problems. Classical psychotherapy is mostly centered on the discourses of emotional renewal and self-discovery; practitioners and clients focus on defining and solving problems by probing personal history, practicing new habits, or both. In contrast, teachers set and solve human improvement problems in the discourses associated with various academic subjects, theories of learning or schooling, or some combination of the two. But although the specific terms of reference vary from one human improvement occupation to another, these occupations still have much in common. Workers all try to better the human condition in some specific cases by increasing their clients' capacity to think, feel, or act. As a result, workers and clients are regularly confronted with certain common problems. What can this person become? How will we define human improvement in a given case? What methods of human betterment are best and most appropriate to achieve that progress? And how will we know if we have done well, or well enough, or whether we have done anything constructive at all? Should workers take an expansive view of human possibility and press for great improvement, or should they restrict their dependence and limit the demands on themselves and their clients by setting simpler and easier goals?

Workers in these remarkable trades thus face versions of the problems of producing and assessing human progress that all modern societies confront in national social policy. To undertake human improvement is to do the most essentially modern work. Because teachers, therapists, and organizational consultants try to deliver on these most distinctive promises of modern civilization, they also wrestle with the problems of defining and justifying human improvement with which entire societies have struggled throughout

the modern centuries. But they confront these problems in the midst of particular individual efforts to improve other human beings, rather than engaging them on the grand scale of social policy. As an analyst, I can make hay from the predicaments of human improvement, but practitioners must somehow find ways to manage them that are good enough to warrant work with the person in the next seat, the next hour, or the next consultation.

Notes

2. Human Improvement

1. See, for example, *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read; An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction* (Washington, DC: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000), and compare it with E. D. Hirsch, *The Knowledge Deficit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), chaps. 2, 3, and 4.
2. There are several sources for the following discussion of uncertainty. One is the historical literature on the rise of education and other social services, which traces expanding aspirations and arguments; see, for example, Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876–1957* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968). Another is philosophical discourse about epistemology, especially in the philosophy of science; see Stephen Toulmin, *Human Understanding* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972). Still another is argument about the nature of social science knowledge; see David Braybroke and Charles E. Lindblom, *A Strategy of Decision* (New York: Free Press, 1963), and Charles E. Lindblom, *Inquiry and Change* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).

3. Throughout I use the term "practitioner" as a synonym of "worker" only to reduce repetition, not to signify some elevated skill or knowledge.
4. See R. D. Laing, *The Divided Self: A Study of Sanity and Madness* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1960); and Thomas Szasz, *The Myth of Psychotherapy: Mental Healing as Religion, Rhetoric, and Repression* (Garden City, NY: Anchor-Doubleday, 1978).
5. See Paul Goodman, *Compulsory Mis-education and the Community of Scholars* (New York: Vintage, 1964); Edgar Friedenberg, *Coming of Age in America* (New York: Random House, 1965); and Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America* (New York: Basic Books, 1976).
6. Willard Waller made this point central to his analysis in *The Sociology of Teaching*, first published in 1932 (New York: J. Wiley, 1965). Charles Bidwell offered a more formal account a few decades later in "The School as a Formal Organization," in *Handbook of Organizations*, ed. J. G. March, 973–1023 (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1965). In his classic book *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), Dan Lortie connected many of these ideas about school organization to classroom practice.
7. Commentators on teaching have long noticed the importance of resistance to teaching. See, for example, chapter 5 in Edward Eggleston, *The Hoosier Schoolmaster* (1871), an account of teaching in rural America, first published as a magazine serial; for a current, easily available version, see http://www.schooltales.net/hoosier schoolmaster. Resistance is everywhere in Waller's *Sociology of Teaching*; for a good example, see p. 445 ff.
8. Arthur Powell, Eleanor Farrar, and David K. Cohen discuss such negotiation in *The Shopping Mall High School* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985).
9. There is occasional recognition of difficulty and risk in educational commentary, but they have not been seen as central problems. However, difficulty and risk have been viewed as central in

psychotherapy. Such differences in theories about work help set expectations for what practitioners can accomplish.

10. Ann Berlak and Harold Berlak, *Dilemmas of Schooling: Teaching and Social Change* (London: Methuen, 1981); Magdalene Lampert, "How Do Teachers Manage to Teach?" *Harvard Educational Review* 55, no. 2 (2001): 178–194.
11. Most recently, see Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, *Mothers and Others: The Evolutionary Origins of Mutual Understanding* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 1–64.
12. I take this term from Janet Malcolm, *Psychoanalysis: The Impossible Profession* (New York: Vintage, 1981), and Shoshana Felman's discussion of Freud and Lacan, "Psychoanalysis and Education: Teaching Terminable and Interminable," *Yale French Studies*, no. 63 (1982): 21–44.
13. On teachers' management of dilemmas, see Magdalene Lampert, *Teaching Problems and the Problems of Teaching* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001); and Berlak and Berlak, *Dilemmas of Schooling.* Others have pointed to the same or similar features in policy making or decision making generally; see Lindblom, *Inquiry and Change.*
14. Changes in medical practice and the reduction of many common diseases in advanced industrial societies have greatly changed medical practice, so that many doctors and patients now deal with a broad range of social and psychiatric problems. Thanks to Alida Zweidler-McKay for helpful advice about these matters (personal communication).
15. William K. Muir, *Police: Streetcorner Politicians* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).
16. Thanks again to Alida Zweidler-McKay for helpful advice (personal communication).
17. Oswald Spengler, among many others, argued that the pursuit of progress was essential to modern Western (he wrote "Faustian") civilization; Spengler, *The Decline of the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

Teaching and Its Predicaments

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HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England

2011