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Theory and Research in Education 2004; 2; 127
DOI: 10.1177/1477878504043440

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Reconciling open-mindedness and belief

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ABSTRACT

Can one be open-minded about a strongly held belief? I defend a reconciliation of the suggested conflict that turns on open-mindedness as an educational aim subordinate to the aim of knowledge, and as an attitude about one's beliefs (a second-order or meta-belief), not a weakened attitude toward a proposition believed. The reconciliation is applied to a number of related issues such as the tension between teaching for autonomy and rightful claims to authority.

KEYWORDS *autonomy, belief, fallibilism, open-minded, self-correction, truth*

A man, who is free from mistakes, can pretend to no praises, except from the justness of his understanding: But a man, who corrects his mistakes, shews at once the justness of his understanding, and the candour and ingenuity of his temper. (Hume, 1975: 623)

OPEN-MINDEDNESS is manifestly a value for any education that aims to equip students to pursue inquiry, to be self-critical and to learn from experience. Open-mindedness is also a central political value for a liberal, democratic educational system. A liberal, democratic educational system will emphasize and promote its culture and its values for the sake of developing good citizens. However, the liberal state is supposed to be neutral with regard to substantive conceptions of the good life, since promotion by the state of some conception of the good diminishes the liberty to pursue other conceptions of the good. To teach for open-mindedness is to provide students with access to a plurality of values and the skills for critically evaluating both those values and their own. Conceived in this way, cultural-educational inculcation need not count as a restriction on students' opportunities or freedom of thought.

Still, many are concerned that open-mindedness is itself a substantial value, in conflict with preservation of certain traditional values including parental

Theory and Research in Education
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VOL 2(2) 127–142 ISSN 1477-8785 DOI: 10.1177/1477878504043440

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> the import of open-mindedness in regard to a belief can only reside in one's degree (strength) of belief toward the proposition believed (so that to be open-minded about a belief is to have a lower than full assurance of the proposition's truth).[2]

Rejection of this assumption follows from the reconciliation proposed below. I introduce the reconciliation by trying to make sense of the tension, and by rejecting an easy way out suggested by Hare and McLaughlin, upon which, implausibly, the tension dissolves. The tension partly resides in an intuitive sense that strong belief rules out acknowledgment that one may be wrong, but there is a narrower basis for the felt tension.

The heard contradiction in Gardner's example, 'I am open-minded about whether racism is evil, but I believe it is', depends on its parallel with Moore's Paradox.[3] Moore's Paradox is that *assertions* of the following form are (heard as) contradictory:

> **P**, but I do not believe that **p**. e.g. It's raining, but I do not believe that it's raining.[4]

However, the whole proposition itself is not contradictory – it could be raining, and I not believe it. Moore's Paradox, though a paradox of assertion, represents a contradiction in thought: I cannot think that it is raining, but that I do not believe it (for to think that it is raining is to recognize myself as believing it, while, by the second clause, denying that I do believe it). Since I do not accept that open-mindedness about a belief must bear on the strength with which it is held, the reconciliation to be proposed does not invite a Moore's Paradox formulation.

Another way to avoid the Moore's Paradox problem and to resolve the issue is suggested by Hare and McLaughlin's response: to treat belief as a weaker attitude than required by Gardner. If I am only pretty sure that racism is evil, then, of course, I can take it to be seriously possible that it is not. However, this is a poor way to respond, most obviously because it concedes the incompatibility that ought to be questioned. The response also fails to fit the facts. Few of our beliefs are held as degrees of belief, since, among other reasons, it would introduce too much complexity for coherent thought. Moreover, only beliefs held as full or all-or-nothing beliefs can represent how we actually do hold most strong opinions. Only if you all-out believe that racism is evil are you committed to that position. If you hold it merely as some (high) degree of belief, you are of course open-minded about it, for your very position is to be poised to alteration. To be so poised is to lack commitment. The litmus test for open-mindedness is not the cases where inquiry is open, but those where one accepts as true a hypothesis (i.e. comes to all-out believe it), and so regards inquiry as settled. It is only with full beliefs that you then confront the genuine problem of how you can both maintain your commitment and have an open mind about it.

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and religious authority. In this paper I address a crucial instance of this broad worry: *How can one be open-minded about a strongly held belief; and why should one?*

The evident tension represented in the question is that if one strongly believes a proposition, then one regards it as not seriously possible that it is wrong. (I will use 'tension' to refer to a *prima facie* conflict or incompatibility). If so, it seems pointless to submit to the typical demands of open-mindedness: to be responsive to the criticism of one's belief and to the fair consideration of rivals. Either one is persuaded by the doubts of others, in which case one goes wrong, or, as a consequence of what one believes, one comes to believe that one will never be persuaded otherwise, and so, why bother to listen?

This tension was central to a recent, unsatisfactory, exchange concerning open-mindedness and education. After allowing for open-mindedness in cases where one has no settled opinion, but denying the appropriateness of open-mindedness about a strongly held belief, like the wrongness of child abuse, Peter Gardner asks us to consider a teacher who affirms:

> I am open-minded about whether racism is evil, but I believe it is. (Gardner, 1993: 39)[1]

He holds that this affirmation is contradictory. William Hare, the main target of Gardner's critique, takes open-mindedness to require,

> that we regard our own [positions] as subject to revision in the light of critical reflection. . .The test of open-mindedness is . . . whether or not we are prepared to entertain doubts about our views. (Hare, 1992: 99; see also Hare and McLaughlin, 1994: 240–2; Gardner's reply, 1996; and Hare and McLaughlin's final word, 1998: 123)

Similarly, Hare and McLaughlin in their responses to Gardner hold that open-mindedness requires the admission of the *possibility* that one is mistaken and correlatively, 'that a position inconsistent with one's own *might* turn out to be true' (1994: 242).

Gardner appears to be rightly objecting that open-mindedness toward a specific belief is not compatible with holding that belief. Yet, details aside, Hare and McLaughlin also seem right to maintain that open-mindedness is a justified ideal for education, even with regard to the strongly held beliefs referred to by Gardner. Consequently, any answer to our original conceptual problem, as illustrated by this exchange, must be a reconciliatory one. It must make sense of a belief–open-mindedness tension, while denying an ultimate incompatibility.

The root of the impasse lies, I think, in an assumption that Gardner shares with Hare and McLaughlin. The assumption explains the unsatisfactory nature of the exchange – its failure both to reach resolution and to even appear to be resolvable. The shared assumption, which I reject, is that:

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The heart of the reconciliation that I propose divides into the following claims and consequences:

1. The primary or inherent value of open-mindedness is to our interest in the truth of our beliefs or to the growth of knowledge, the connection between the two being dependent upon an appreciation of our fallibility.
2. Since the dominant beliefs to which fallibility applies are full or all-or-nothing beliefs, rather than degrees of belief ('I'm pretty sure that p'), there is no latitude for open-mindedness about any particular belief, where this is both to fully believe it and to regard its falsity as seriously possible.[5]
3. Yet, open-mindedness is defensible in accord with its primary value [1, above] because only with open-mindedness is a believer in a position to optimally revise his beliefs with new information. Since we care that our beliefs are true and we recognize that some of them are not (i.e. we accept fallibilism), we care to be open to revising our beliefs in ways that eliminate falsehoods and in ways that improve (increase) our knowledge.
4. Open-mindedness is then a second-order (or 'meta') attitude toward one's beliefs as believed, and not just toward the specific proposition believed, just as fallibilism is a second-order doubt about the perfection of one's believing, not a doubt about the truth of any specific belief.
5. So even though there is incompatibility between believing *p* and regarding *p* as possibly false, there is no incompatibility between believing *p* and regarding it, qua a proposition one believes, as possibly mistaken.[6] The possibility that I, or the method I employ, has erred in coming to believe that *p* is not the possibility that the proposition believed is false, given my grounds for it.

Statements (2) and (3) yield the manifest tension between belief and open-mindedness. If I fully believe that Maureen is in Michigan, then I cannot also think that it is seriously possible that she is not. I cannot affirm or assert:

> Maureen is in Michigan, but it's possible that she isn't.

Open-mindedness need not have this implication. Claim (1) holds that the value of open-mindedness is primarily to our interest that our beliefs are true, which is the aim of intellectual or empirical inquiry. As Peirce and others have emphasized, inquiry at its best – science being the paradigm – is self-correcting. A hypothesis accepted as true at one time can be refuted subsequently through its role in guiding on-going inquiry. In this way, our corpus of beliefs expands, and as it does so, it eliminates many false beliefs. This self-correcting mechanism requires that inquirers are open-minded enough to allow contrary discoveries or observations to count as criticisms or refutations.

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When one keeps an open-mind one places oneself in a position to discover that some of one's beliefs are mistaken. Such an open-mind also affords opportunities to discover new truths and to understand the conflicting beliefs of others. Along these lines, Mill (1978) observed that by confronting opposed views, even those holding a correct view are compelled to deepen their understanding of it. Our reconciliation and resolution of the conceptual problem is this: even though from my point of view if I believe *p*, there is no serious chance that it is mistaken, I do recognize myself as generally fallible [(4), (5)]: some of my beliefs are going to be false. I even know various areas in which I am more likely to err. (A natural, but controversial, suggestion, attributed to Plato's *Euthyphro*, is that our beliefs are more vulnerable in areas of value or opinion, rather than fact or proof.) The fallibility I can admit is not really attached to any specific belief (first-order), but rather concerns my beliefs or ways of believing overall (second or meta-order). It is to view my beliefs as what I believe, rather than just the proposition believed. From this viewpoint, I know that I cannot in any systematic way ferret out mistaken beliefs individually. For since each one is fully believed, I cannot recognize any consideration as a reason to doubt a belief without thereby surrendering it.

To clarify the resolution by reference to Moore's Paradox, observe that there is nothing contradictory about the following affirmation:

> Maureen is in Michigan, but this belief is among a set of my beliefs, some members of which are likely to be mistaken, and so I should keep an open-mind about them.

This is contrived, but it is not inconsistent as thought or assertion. Admittedly, the example of 'Maureen is in Michigan' is atypical of the kind of propositions over which open-mindedness is a thriving issue. For just this reason of its simplicity, it yields the pertinent tension at its sharpest – what (epistemic) value can be found in being open-minded toward it? Since the example poses the strongest challenge, if our reconciliation works with so non-controversial an example, the standard ones – opinions, disputed claims – will be easier to swallow as succumbing to our reconciliation. In particular, we can apply the reconciliation to Gardner's favored case. There is no inconsistency in a teacher affirming:

> For the following reasons . . . . which I have conveyed to my students, racism is evil – there is no real possibility that racism is not evil. So the students should believe it without qualification. Nevertheless, they should also appreciate their fallibility, particularly in forefront matters of value and personal commitments, and so should appreciate the need for a willingness to engage in activities and adopt attitudes likely to expose and remove errors. There is no inherent conflict though because the full belief that racism is evil is compatible with that belief as a member of a set of beliefs some of which are likely erroneous or requiring modification.

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The reconciliation can be clarified through a simple illustration: An assembly line to process widgets. The company imposes extremely high standards, so that each widget that comes through the manufacturing process is of the highest quality. So, as a product of the process, each widget is certified as non-defective. (This is the analogue of strong or all-out belief that each widget has no defect.) Nevertheless, as indicated by the returns of a few upset customers, some widgets get through with slight defects and imperfections – as good as the process is, it is not infallible. (Note that this is a judgment about the process, or a second-order judgment.) As a consequence, the company institutes a policy whereby a post-process monitor carefully examines one out of every batch of ten widgets. (A policy is a uniform treatment of a range of cases, whose application to a particular case [widget] does not depend upon prior determination that this case deserves the treatment.) Accordingly, assume that widget 30 is selected out. The following two judgments of the monitor are in tension, though we now recognize that there is no actual conflict or incompatibility:

> This widget has no defects or imperfections.
>
> I should carefully examine widget 30 for defects or imperfections.

Their compatibility becomes manifest once we state explicitly the actual basis for the examination:

> The process by which my company manufactures widgets is a reliable one, and so each widget is justifiably certified as error-free. Nevertheless, probably some few that we judge as lacking in defects or imperfections by our manufacturing process do (or will) suffer imperfections, which we care to correct. So we adopt a policy to randomly check one out of every ten widgets, and it so happens that widget 30 falls under this policy.

Since the company's fallibilism is about the process of manufacturing, not any specific widget, recognition of that fallibility need not diminish assuredness about any widget.

If the widget example does well illustrate how to understand fallibility conceptually, it exposes a misunderstanding of fallibilism central to the influential arguments of Mill (1978). He reasoned from fallibilism, as a doctrine that most any of our judgments are liable to error, to diminished empirical support or certainty in regard to a particular judgment. However, this appeal to fallibilism, even if based on a misunderstanding (of a second-order for a first-order doctrine), provided Mill with a crucial premise in his famed defense of *tolerance* (of liberty of speech and thought). If we reject the epistemological basis for Mill's tolerance argument, how is toleration to be defended?

Within our reconciliation, tolerance can still be justified. The problem of how one can be tolerant toward opposed views without lessening one's strength of commitment parallels, of course, the open-mindedness/belief

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problem, and so invites our reconciliation. Let us say that I hold strongly that the USA should pressure Israel to accept a Palestinian state and you hold the opposite. So I regard your view as not just wrong, but dangerous. This judgment seems to generate something like our familiar tension, if it requires that to argue with someone implies according some minimal credence to his or her position (and correlatively, a lesser strength of belief toward one's own).

Yet, I hold both that your view should be tolerated, not suppressed or censored, despite its definite falsity, and that I may learn from arguing with you over it. I can do so only if extending tolerance to you does not (thereby) diminish the strength of my attitude (belief) toward my own view. In order to argue with others, it is sometimes claimed or assumed that one must be receptive to their criticisms and their alternative. Thus, it is inferred, one must regard those alternatives as at least initially credible or as having a serious chance of turning out correct. To adopt either of these attitudes forces withdrawal from full (or strong) belief and assuredness that one is correct, since one admits the possibility that a conflicting view is correct. Such a withdrawal would undermine the force of having convincing arguments, and it does not ring true. You cannot believe something less assuredly true merely because you are willing to allow it to be challenged.[7]

In obvious ways, the reconciliation proposed above carries over. I have reason to engage in critical discussion with you as an expression of my open-mindedness in regard to a belief of mine. Since the open-mindedness is justified by my view of myself as fallible, it does not follow from my judging it worthwhile to engage in the exchange that I do not know, or should not be certain of, my belief (and so too that yours is erroneous). Tolerance for your position is a political, not epistemic, judgment of equality, community and liberty.

We have concentrated on the how-possible conceptual problem of open-mindedness, at the expense of how-to issues, particularly in regard to education. Obviously, the latter topic goes well beyond the confines of this paper and some of it has been addressed elsewhere by others. However, we will briefly treat of how-to issues that are closely tied to our reconciliation of the conceptual problem.

Like the widget manufacturers, we cannot be open-minded (etc.) in regard to all our beliefs. ('We should be open-minded. But not so open that our brains fall out.') It would be a colossal waste of time, even were it feasible. Indiscriminate open-mindedness is harmful to belief's *aim of truth*. It would assign no more risk to such vulnerable beliefs as that capital punishment is permissible as it does to such practically invulnerable ones as that there are dogs. To be so widely open-minded would be to give the appearance of

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open-mindedness, while rendering it ineffective. In fact, given the vastness of our beliefs, open-mindedness will serve its primary purpose only if we are *highly selective* about what to be open-minded about. (The widget manufacturer has it easy; he or she has only to select out some number of widgets among a finite stock, but our beliefs, explicit and immediately implied, are not only infinite, but huge in myriad overlapping categories.)

Selection is informed by self-knowledge, especially of our own biases. General knowledge is also relevant, as already suggested by the above allusion to Plato's *Euthyphro*. We should be more open-minded in regard to controversial opinions than beliefs that are the product of simple observations.[8] Subject-matter knowledge provides further guidance. We learn (and teach) which claims in an area are to be taken for granted, and which ones are at the forefront of investigation. It is one thing to be open-minded about your belief that Homer wrote the *Iliad*; it is another to be open-minded about whether the *Iliad* was written before the 20th century. The more (honestly and reliably) selective we can be, the more worthwhile is open-mindedness (for our interest in truth). Thus, we can capture the intuitive sense that the Pope cannot be open-minded about the existence of God without drawing the conclusion, as Gardner does, that belief and open-mindedness are incompatible. As a *conceptual* matter, the Pope is not compelled to resist open-mindedness about his belief that there is a God, if our reconciliation succeeds. Nevertheless, the Pope can argue that the prospects of this belief being false are far less than for many other beliefs, and so it is not worthwhile to engage in activities of open-mindedness directed to that specific belief.

It follows that the association of discussion, discovery learning, and community of inquiry models of learning with the promotion of open-mindedness, and lectures and the authority of teachers, texts and experts as not promoting it, or even antithetical to it, is simplistic. The former better models a paradigm of the salient features of open-minded inquiry. However, it ignores a non-salient, but crucial, background condition for fruitful open-mindedness: a high degree of selectivity. As we observed above, a central question of open-mindedness should be *when* to be open-minded (or self-critical). To view this question as central requires that authoritative demands pervade education, and so provide a constraint on seeking autonomous judgments (among students). Selectivity of content is becoming more crucial, since the information on any topic that is immediately available is huge and of enormously varying quality – consider the Internet. Correspondingly, judgments of what to teach or to critically examine automatically exclude other candidates. In doing that, they either implicitly judge those other candidates as not (as) worthwhile or arbitrarily overlook them. Thus in literature classes Shakespeare triumphs over Jackie Collins.

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The need for high selectively in order for open-mindedness to be worthwhile applies to *how* one is open-minded, and not only to *what* one is open-minded toward. The primary question is what sources to attend to in checking on one's beliefs. For example, to check on my belief that the Volvo is a better deal than the Toyota, I check *Consumer Reports* rather than my neighbor. Once this question is engaged; it becomes apparent that a free marketplace of ideas is problematic as an expression of open-mindedness best fit to realize our aim as believers of increasing knowledge or understanding. In his recent book, Bernard Williams writes:

> We cannot take for granted that Mill's optimistic conclusion that maximal freedom of speech must assist the emergence of truth in what has come to be called 'a marketplace of ideas'. (Williams, 2002: 212)

One current difficulty he raises is in regard to the Internet:

> the Internet shows signs of creating for the first time what Marshall McLuhan prophesied as a consequence of television, a global village, something that has the disadvantages both of globalization and of a village. Certainly it does offer some reliable sources of information for those who want it and know what they are looking for, but equally it supports the mainstay of all villages, gossip. It constructs proliferating meeting places for the free and unstructured exchange of messages which bear a variety of claims, fancies, and suspicions, entertaining, superstitious, scandalous, or malign. The chances that many of these messages will be true are low, and the probability that the system itself will help anyone to pick out the true ones is even lower. (Williams, 2002: 216)

An obvious, if weak, response is that part of teaching open-mindedness is to guide students to distinguish between worthy (better) and unworthy (worse) sources via such criteria as the record of reliability of the sources; the constraints on the reporters to be honest; and the respect in the community accorded these sources.

Although the value of open-mindedness depends on selectivity, not all selectivity calls upon individual judgment, as the widget example attests. But there are also powerful, routine devices of *self-correction*, involving neither adopted policy nor selectivity, which cleanly reveal the value of open-mindedness and the necessity of a commitment to it, at least for wide swaths of our beliefs. The most familiar of these is *perception*: beliefs alter when they run counter to (non-negotiable) contrary observations. Perceptual mechanisms operate without our selecting out beliefs to be subject to correction. You believe that your friend Alice is in St Louis, and then you spot her driving in Brooklyn, and so immediately you cease to believe. Perception is naturally 'on' as a mechanism of open-mindedness (more precisely, self-correction) without setting it to 'on' for purposes of open-mindedness. Nor does it require input from us as to what to test, in contrast to its role for evaluating competing hypotheses.

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A more educationally familiar and pertinent mechanism of open-mindedness or self-correction is *argument or discussion* (or reading from, or listening to, varied and respected sources). In engaging in everyday discussion, one subjects a set of one's beliefs (about the matter at hand) to risk of serious objection or criticism by others.[9] Since I fully believe *p*, I regard your opposed belief *q*, as wrong. Nevertheless, I can not only be tolerant of your view (for political reasons), but judge it epistemically worthwhile to argue with you over the matter. For argument with others is one policy of open-mindedness I adopt to serve as a check against my anticipated mistaken beliefs, as well as anticipated mistaken judgments as to which beliefs need not be subjected to open-minded examination. As with perception, to be open-minded in these cases requires little more than to not be close-minded: to not engage in special efforts to protect one's relevant beliefs from critical attention.

Crucial to these sources or mechanisms working so well as self-correctives is that they operate (to various degrees) *independently* of oneself. In everyday discussion, I do not control either others' judgment of what beliefs of mine to criticize or how that criticism should proceed. I only weakly control the selection of topics for critical, social, discussion.

The independence is not complete, and in appreciating this incompleteness, we converge on the importance of self-knowledge to open-mindedness, raised already. To a large degree, I control who I speak to, what media sources I attend to, and more prominently, I control my own acceptance of their critical import (much less so for perceptual correction). Whenever one declines to accept the findings of independent sources (e.g. *Consumer Reports*), one implicitly judges in one's own favor, which, if recognized, raises doubts (and self-doubts) as to one's retaining proper authority to enter the assessment. In judging that one's position on the Middle-East is surely correct, one thereby implicitly judges that one is not influenced (biased) by one's own position to exempt it from criticism or to drawing upon a skewed sample of commentary.

It is the kind of *dual* judgment one must make in putative cases of conflict-of-interest. A judge in deciding whether to recuse him- or herself from a case because of a potential conflict-of-interest must simultaneously decide that he can evaluate the case impartially, and that that very judgment is made impartially (i.e. that he is in a position to make the decision about himself impartially, when he is the one deciding). The judge must be able to stand back from his own involvement, and, from that point of view, determine that he is in a position to decide impartially. This is an especially hard thing to do, since he must see himself as entering a judgment that he recognizes as placing his position to judge in doubt.

The disposition to open-mindedness depends upon our capacity to view our own beliefs as if an observer, without withdrawing our authority over our

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own beliefs. We treat a belief of our own as just something someone believes, and so, of course, it might be mistaken.[10] Within this perspective on oneself, one appreciates that the faults or failures that one ascribes to some others are likely to hold of oneself, even though the ascriber does not so detect them. One does not exempt oneself from the weaknesses one finds in others.

To teach for open-mindedness is to get students to appreciate the objective view of oneself, including our inherent resistance to it. The teaching should develop out of students' own reflective exercises, otherwise it will misleadingly appear as an alien intellectualist exercise. Consider, though, an ordinary case: Tommy gets very angry at Julie for teasing him at lunch time. Afterwards Tommy thinks that he responded more harshly than usual. He is thus stimulated to recall that in an earlier class that day, he received a B on a paper that he thought deserved an A. In taking the latter datum as helping him to understand (and evaluate) better the appropriateness of his anger, Tommy is stepping back from himself and using a piece of evidence that any observer of him will use. So here is a natural exercise for teachers to build upon. Teaching for open-mindedness involves lessons about improved self-understanding, even if no specific teaching is directed to self-understanding.

Once one takes that objective view, one recognizes reasons to provide *checks* on one's judgments, even when (and sometimes especially when) one finds no (internal) reasons for such checks. (The *fanatic* is someone who refuses to step back from his own judgments, and to allow his beliefs to be subject to independent checks and controls.) The imposition of such checks recalls, again, the parallel with the company producing the widgets: the post-process monitor provides a check on the manufacturing process that in yielding a widget at the end of the assembly line implicitly claims that no checks are needed.

This duality lesson for teaching and curriculum is easily lost. Stanley Fish in discussing the implications of his view of literary interpretation for (teaching) practice writes:

> not only does one believe what one believes but one *teaches* what one believes. . . . And since you will always believe in something, there will always be something to teach, and you will teach that something with all the confidence and enthusiasm that attends belief, even if you know, as I do, that the belief which gives you that something, and gives it to you so firmly, may change.. . . Until they do, however, we will argue *from* their perspective and *for* their perspective, telling our students and readers what it is that we certainly see and trying to alter their perceptions so that, in time, they will come to see it too. (Fish, 1980: 364–5, original emphasis)

Fish's observation starts off from the correct thought that belief guides action and that to believe is to claim the truth of what is believed. However, he ignores the importance of second-order beliefs – beliefs about one's (first-order) beliefs. Once the second-order point of view is brought forth as a

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potential corrective of our first-order judgments, we have reason to draw back from Fish's conclusion. We have independent reason for so drawing back since his recommendation is anathema to liberal education, one aspect of which is deep respect for great traditions of texts and ideas. We show such respect by not teaching in perfect accord with contemporary taste, even when, as is usual, we share that taste. There is much that any of us will teach that we do not directly believe, unless we lack humility and the institution within which we teach exercises no controls on our hubris.

Imagine you are a middle-school history teacher, who believes strongly in the use of textbooks, rather than original texts, because in younger grades the reading of original texts will be very difficult and coverage will be too greatly sacrificed. So you use textbooks. However, you are also likely to use some original texts, by your own choice, rather than by institutional mandate. You will do so because others, whom you respect, value it, and because of your professional regard for the traditions of historical study. Standing back from your own judgment, you realize that it is this kind of judgment that is more likely to alter subsequently (as 'faddish'). In imposing a check on your own curriculum decisions (beliefs), you do not (yet) concede any reason to renounce your view. Contrary to the tenor of Fish's remarks, recognizing which beliefs 'may change' can alter our teaching, even if the alteration does not yet require surrendering those beliefs.

Open-mindedness depends upon, and leads to, an appreciation of the value of a dual view of one's own beliefs – internal and objective – even if the dual-view generates a tension that threatens continued believing. The tension is an expression of the value of open-mindedness, and that value would be undermined if one tried to resolve the tension by surrendering or weakening the belief.

The belief–open-mindedness tension is one facet of the traditional tension between education for autonomy and the necessity of deferring in education to authority and tradition. My emphasis has largely been on autonomy only because the focus is defending open-mindedness. Even if it is granted that open-mindedness is strictly compatible with traditional religious and cultural beliefs, as it is actually taught and promoted, it may undermine them. For many of those beliefs will depend upon according authority to texts and to individuals due to their place in these traditions, rather than for their expertise.

We are positioned to dodge this issue. If students come to understand the nature and value of open-mindedness, and become adept at its workings, the task is complete. Whether the student applies them in personally sensitive areas is a decision that is not that of the educational institution. Of course, some of the teaching of open-mindedness will touch on sensitive areas. But this is a general curriculum difficulty, not specific to promoting open-mindedness.

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(Think of decisions in regards to evolution and creationism in biology courses.) The educational task is fulfilled if it equips students to appreciate and evaluate the costs and benefits of applying (or not) the learning to sensitive and personal areas.

However, I do not want to completely dodge the issue. Viewing open-mindedness as an educational goal *subservient* to truth or knowledge,[11] rather than as an independent objective (as of intrinsic educational value), helps here in two ways. First, it limits the scope of the promotion of open-mindedness. Were it a free-standing objective, a forceful argument arises to teach for open-mindedness in areas of greatest sensitivity, where resistance to open-mindedness is high. On the position defended here, however, open-mindedness does not demand teaching outside the standard curriculum. There is no demand that teachers press students on matters of personal belief except insofar as those are implicated in subject-matter content, which is independently justified for inclusion in the curriculum. Second, teaching for open-mindedness can be candidly justified to parents and others as consonant with the basic mission of education which is to teach (important) truths and to advance knowledge and understanding in various subjects.

Truth and knowledge are very ordinary and pervasive aims of education, constituting the most basic criteria for sorting texts, topics, and resources into what can be included in the curriculum and what is to be excluded, except for historical or similar indirect purposes (e.g. teaching astrology within the history of science, not as science). To realize this basic mission involves teaching methods of inquiry that are our best means for judging truth and falsity. The teaching of open-mindedness, as we have noted, is a part of this basic mission. Thus, no special justification for it is required – once you accept the basic educational criterion and mission of furthering knowledge, you are committed to the teaching of open-mindedness. Consequently, to revert to a problem noted at the beginning, teaching for open-mindedness is not to introduce the teaching or promotion of new subjects or values.

NOTES

1. Actually, Gardner asks us to contrast two beliefs of a teacher:

   (a) I am open-minded about whether racism is evil, but I firmly believe that it is;
   (b) I am open-minded about whether racism is evil, but I believe it is (Gardner, 1993: 39; my numbering).

   If (a) is contradictory, then open-mindedness is not compatible with firm belief. But if (b) is not contradictory, then open-mindedness is compatible with belief. Gardner calls this view the 'firm account'. Instead, he holds the 'weak account' on which (b) is contradictory as well.

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2. The heart of what is unsatisfactory about the exchange is the lack of attention to the concept of belief. Gardner rightly intuits a conflict between believing *p* and being open-minded about it. But he fails to understand what it is about the concept of belief that generates the conflict or seeming conflict. So he emphasizes strength of believing, rather than belief itself, and he focuses on examples like the one about racism or the Pope's belief in God. Instead, he should focus, initially anyhow, on the predominant, plain beliefs such as that Maureen is in Michigan or 2 + 2 = 4, which for all their dullness provide a more transparent view of the concept of belief. Hare and McLaughlin share adherence to the same skewed, but salient, sample of examples as Gardner. This is one reason why they never display appreciation of the puzzle driving Gardner. They are right to not be satisfied by a resolution which allows for open-mindedness as a matter of character, but not as attached to (firmly held) beliefs. But their solution, whereby open-mindedness attaches to beliefs as the recognition of the possibility of error and the 'entertainment' of doubts, simply never confronts the conceptual problem suggested by the heard contradiction in assertions of the form 'p, but it is possible that not-p' e.g. 'Plato is a great philosopher, but it's possible that Plato is not a great philosopher'.

3. A sad commentary on the state of philosophy of education as a sub-field of philosophy is that it appears that neither the authors, nor the editors, nor the referees in this extended exchange recognized the connection to Moore's Paradox or, as noted below, the Preface Paradox. For extended discussion and references, see Sorensen (1988).

4. Both for the parallel, and for Gardner's point, it would be better to use as an illustration: I am open-minded about whether racism is evil, but I believe it is.

5. I am then in partial agreement with Gardner that 'rational thought cannot be reconciled with being open minded about a proposition whilst appreciating that it contradicts or is inconsistent with what one believes' (Gardner, 1988: 92). However, I regard this as a misleading way to express the import of open-mindedness.

6. See further Adler (2002: chs 10 and 11).

7. However, there is a concession that ought to be extended to the (misguided) argument from toleration to weakening. Although we are not compelled to weaken the strength of our belief merely in engaging in argument over it (and we cannot), we ought to bracket our belief within the limited purview of the critical exchange. I cannot both agree to entertain your criticisms of my belief, but then, when you actually present a criticism, reject it because it conflicts with my belief. If we disagree as to whether James is a conservative or a liberal, I cannot reject your evidence of his regularly voting Republican on grounds that he would then not be a liberal, according to what I believe.

8. Quine's (1980) notion of 'centrality' to the web of belief provides a related mark of what is less worthwhile to be open-minded about. For difficulties with it, see Rott (2000).

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9. We can at this point offer a summary of some results, where p is one's (full or all-out) belief:

    1. 'I am open-minded about *p*': This can be true, but it is generally misleading to assert because it suggests specific doubts about *p*, rather than, what should be intended, that *p* is among those beliefs to which a policy of open-mindedness is adopted, given recognition of one's fallibility.
    2. 'I am open-minded about *p*, but I will not change my mind about it'. Or, 'It's possible that I am wrong about *p*, but there is no point in being open-minded about it'. I can recognize that fallibility extends to my belief that *p*. Nevertheless, given that I must be highly selective for open-mindedness to be worthwhile, I can exempt *p* from any real open-mindedness efforts, which is the attitude most of us have to beliefs such as that it's easier to read J.K. Rowlings than James Joyce.
    3. I can sincerely deny that I have an open-mind about *p*, yet it be true that I am open-minded about *p*. The denial reflects my assuredness of the truth of *p*. Correspondingly, I do not select it for any specific open-minded checks. Nevertheless, I have adopted policies, like an inclination toward discussion and argument, which entail open-mindedness insofar as I am a fair participant in those practices. Though I do not choose to select p for dispute, others may do so. In involving myself in the dispute, perhaps only by listening, I may be confronted with decisive, though thoroughly unanticipated, grounds to reject p, which I am too reasonable not to accept. In this way, I impose a check or control on my own judgments of which beliefs are especially vulnerable.

10. The logical form here is akin to that of the Preface Paradox: from within the research and thought invested in his book, the author regards each proposition in it as correct (i.e. as expressive of what he believes and can justify). But then the author stands back from his work. The author recognizes that other authors are as competent and as thoughtful as he. Yet, many of their comparable works, nevertheless, did contain serious errors. So from that (detached) point of view, he appreciates that his own work can contain mistakes and so he has reason to take steps to check on it further.

11. On this theme, see Adler (2003).

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