

Finding vs. Constructing the Good Life

Timm Thorsen
Professor of Sociology
Alma College

Much More than Semantic Differences

Differences in Reality Assumptions
Differences in Human Nature Assumptions
Differences in Our Role in Living the Good Life
Differences in View of Work
Differences in How to Change Reality
Differences in Education's Role

Two Parallel Arguments

- Each is Internally Consistent
- Only Common Ground--The Other is Wrong
- The Arguments Involve a Forced Dichotomy

Reality Assumptions

- FINDING
 - Utopian or Can Be
 - Simple
 - Optional
 - Subjective
- CONSTRUCTING
 - Indifferent/Dangerous
 - Complex
 - Obdurate
 - Objective

Human Nature Assumptions

- FINDING
- Unconstrained
 - Intellectually
 - Morally
 - William Godwin's Enquiry Concerning Political Justice
- CONSTRUCTING
- Constrained
 - Intellectually
 - Morally
 - Adam Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments

Reality Changes

- FINDING

- Social Engineering
- Humans in Control
- Planned & Delivered
 - No Unanticipated or Ironic Consequences
 - Per Simple System

- CONSTRUCTING

- Evolution
- ?? Control
- Design Paradigms-
Work in Progress
 - Unanticipated and/or Ironic Consequences
 - Per Complex System

Our Role

- FINDING

- Passive
- Entitled
- Work as Unclean
 - Purity & Danger
 - Wheat Fields
 - White- vs. Blue-Collar
 - Dirty Jobs

- CONSTRUCTING

- Active
- Earned
- Work as Meaningful
 - Rice Paddies
 - Garment Industry
 - Clean Fingernails

Education's Socialization Role

- FINDING
- “Personna”
- Dionesian Self
- Low Context Self
 - Shallow, Poor
- Passionate, Happy, ?
Stability
- “Advisor”
- CONSTRUCTING
- Character
- Apollonian Self
- High Context Self
 - Deep, Rich
- Controlled, Joyful,
Balanced
- Mentor