

# Restoring the Four Pillars of Education

Few would argue that modern education is in crisis. Evidence suggests our system [creates moral nihilists](#); professors [admit](#) they are teaching students who “know hardly anything about anything at all.”

So what is to be done? If education is so bad, how do we fix it?

We need to begin by reexamining what constitutes a good education, a necessary first step if any meaningful progress is to be made. Let's begin, therefore, with a definition. A good education is the fostering of growth in goodness, truth and beauty, all of which seem to be out of fashion in our disintegrating system.

Goodness is an education in “being good,” or what used to be called virtue until the word was banned from polite conversation. Learning to be good is synonymous with learning to love. And learning to love has to begin with learning what love is and, more to the point, what it isn't. Love is always selfless. It is never selfish. Love is sacrificing oneself and one's own self-interest for the good of the other. It is not gratifying our own appetites and desires. Love is putting our responsibility towards others above our own narcissistic demands. Learning to love is therefore the first necessary component of a good education.

The second necessary component is learning the truth about things. This is only possible if we believe that there is a truth about things to be known. Such a belief is, therefore, a prerequisite for a good education. Pilate's question, *quid est veritas?* (what is truth?), must be asked as if it can be answered and not as if it is a rhetorical question which is

inherently unanswerable. This means that a good education must be rooted in philosophical realism, the belief that things, including metaphysical things like goodness, truth, beauty and love, have real existence and are not merely names or artificial manmade constructs. Learning to know is therefore the second necessary component of a good education.

The third necessary component of a good education is learning to see the beautiful in created things and to learn to make or do beautiful things ourselves. Beauty is the presence of the harmonious order of a thing. It is not in the eye of the beholder but in the thing beheld. If we do not see the beauty in a beautiful thing, like a sunset or a blossoming tree, it is because we are too blind to see it. If we do not hear the beauty of a beautiful thing, like the song of a skylark or a symphony by Mozart, it is because we are too deaf to hear it. Learning to see and hear is therefore the third necessary component of a good education.

Finally, a good education is to learn how to engage with the beautiful in a creative sense. We should not just learn to read literature but to write literarily. We should not just learn to see the beauty in art but to learn to paint and draw. We should not just learn to hear the beauty of music but to play a musical instrument.

In short, a good education, inspired by the good, the true and the beautiful, should teach us to love the good, to know the truth, to perceive the beautiful, and to make beautiful things. To love, to know, to see, and to make! These are the four pillars of a good education.