Howard Gardner is most celebrated for his conception and development of the theory of Multiple Intelligences, which has revolutionized educational thinking. Gardner has also made outstanding original contributions to the study of leadership, creativity, child development, and humanly-fulfilling work.

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In Creating Minds (1993), Gardner provoked a Gestalt switch in public understanding of creative genius, by analyzing the lives and achievements of seven diverse personalities from Einstein to Picasso, each of whom founded a new “system of meaning.” With Project Zero, Gardner directed research into children’s artistic development, yielding many controversial conclusions and providing new ideas for educators. Gardner’s GoodWork Project is a broad empirical investigation of the experiences of professional workers in a range of occupations, seeking the conditions most conducive to work which is “good” both ethically and technically. His Changing Minds (2004) applied findings from cognitive psychology to explain how people’s deep-rooted convictions can be changed.

All these and other topics are explored in this volume, by way of a debate between Gardner and his critics.

“Gardner is a force in psychology and education who deserves the full attention of both admirers and critics. I’m an admirer who believes that the concept of multiple intelligences serves as a heuristic scientific hypothesis, which moreover is in accord with contemporary brain science and genetics.”

—Edward O. Wilson
Author of On Human Nature

“A lively and thoughtful presentation of Howard Gardner’s ideas along with well considered criticisms of them by leading scholars.”

—Jerome Bruner
Author of Acts of Meaning

“Howard Gardner’s work is astonishingly diverse, imaginative, occasionally improbable, always engaging—the kind that calls for conversations deep into the night over good brandy. Howard Gardner Under Fire is the next best thing, showing from many perspectives how rich a dialogue he has provoked.”

—Charles Murray
Co-author of The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life

“This examination of Gardner’s wide-ranging and influential ideas provides a dazzling intellectual banquet.”

—Mindy Kornhaber
Co-author of Multiple Intelligences: Best Ideas from Research and Practice

Dr. Jeffrey A. Schaler (www.schaler.net) is a psychologist, psychotherapist, teacher, and writer. He wrote Addiction Is a Choice (2000), which became the centerpiece of a controversial John Stossel TV documentary. Dr. Schaler teaches in the Department of Justice, Law, and Society at American University’s School of Public Affairs in Washington, D.C. He is Executive Editor of Current Psychology: Developmental, Learning, Personality, Social. His edited volumes include Peter Singer Under Fire (2007), Szasz Under Fire (2004), Drugs: Should We Legalize, Decriminalize, or Deregulate? (1998), and Smoking: Who Has the Right? (with Magda E. Schaler, 1998).
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Volume 1
Szasz Under Fire: The Psychiatric Abolitionist Faces His Critics

Volume 2
Howard Gardner Under Fire: The Rebel Psychologist Faces His Critics

In Preparation:
Peter Singer Under Fire
To Samara Orli
Being no Michelangelo or Mozart does not condemn one to be uncreative. . . . The best solution is to find a project that will benefit humanity, in line with your limited talents, and to make the most of your situation.

— WALTER KAUFMANN (1973)

To us mind must remain forever a realm of its own which we can know only through directly experiencing it, but which we shall never be able fully to explain or to ‘reduce’ to something else.

— F.A. HAYEK (1952)
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SUSAN M. BARNETT is currently a Visiting Scholar in the Faculty of Education at Cambridge University and a member of Wolfson College. Her research and writing focuses on issues regarding intelligence, expertise, and transfer of learning. She has a Ph.D. and M.A. in Developmental Psychology from Cornell, an M.B.A. from Harvard, and a B.A. and M.A. in Experimental Psychology from Cambridge. Dr. Barnett was the recipient of a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship from 1994 to 1997. She has written articles and chapters for a variety of publications, including *Psychological Bulletin*, and is a member of both the American Psychological Association and the British Psychological Society.

NATHAN BRODY is Professor Emeritus of Psychology at Wesleyan University. He is Past President of the International Society for Individual Differences and was a member of the American Psychological Association’s Taskforce on Intelligence. As well as scholarly articles highly respected by scientific psychologists, his books include *Personality: Research and Theory* (1972), *Intelligence* (1976, second edition 1992), *Human Motivation: Commentary on Goal-Directed Action* (1983), *Personality: In Search of Individuality* (1988), and *Personality Psychology: Science of Individuality* (with Howard Ehrlichman, 1997).

STEPHEN J. CECI holds a lifetime endowed chair in developmental psychology at Cornell University. He has written over three hundred articles and chapters, and given hundreds of invited addresses around the world. His past honors and awards include the Lifetime Distinguished Contribution Award of the American Psychological Association (2003, shared with Elizabeth F. Loftus), and the American Psychological

**Anna Craft** is Professor of Education at the University of Exeter and Visiting Scholar at Harvard University. Her twelve books include *Creativity Across the Primary Curriculum* (2000), *Creativity in Early Years Education: A Lifewide Foundation* (2002), and *Creativity in Schools: Tensions and Dilemmas* (2005). She is co-founder and joint convenor of the British Educational Research Association Special Interest Group, Creativity in Education.

**Howard Gardner** is the John H. and Elisabeth A. Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. He also holds positions as Adjunct Professor of Psychology at Harvard University, Adjunct Professor of Neurology at the Boston University School of Medicine, and Senior Director of Harvard Project Zero. The author of over twenty books translated into twenty-six languages, and several hundred articles, Gardner is best known in educational circles for his theory of multiple intelligences (MI), a critique of the notion that there exists but a single human intelligence that can be assessed by standard psychometric methods. His recent books, available in paperback, are *The Disciplined Mind: Beyond Facts and Standardized Tests*, the K–12 *Education that Every Child Deserves* (2000) and *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century* (1999). In 2004, two new books were published: *Changing Minds: The Art and Science of Changing our Own and Other People’s Minds* and *Making Good: How Young People Cope with Moral Dilemmas at Work* (with Wendy Fischman, Becca Solomon, and Deborah Greenspan).

**Deanna Kuhn** is Professor of Psychology and Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. She holds a Ph.D. in developmental psychology from the University of California, Berkeley, and was previous-
ly on the faculty at the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University. She is a fellow of the American Psychological Society and a board member of the Cognitive Development Society, as well as a member of numerous other organizations in psychology and education. She is former editor of the journal *Human Development* and is co-editor of the *Cognition, Perception, and Language* volume of the *Handbook of Child Psychology*, fifth edition, and the forthcoming sixth edition. She has published widely in the fields of psychology and education in outlets ranging from *Psychological Science* and *Psychological Review* to *Harvard Educational Review* and *Liberal Education*. She is co-author of *The Development of Scientific Thinking Skills* and author of *The Skills of Argument*. Her *Education for Thinking* (2005), seeks to identify the thinking skills that we can justify as objectives of education.

**Tanya Luhrmann** is the Max Palevsky Professor in the Committee on Human Development. She trained at the University of Cambridge (Ph.D., 1986), taught for many years at the University of California San Diego, and joined the University of Chicago faculty in 2000. Her work focuses on the social construction of psychological experience, and the way that social practice alters psychological mechanism, particularly in the domain of what some would call the ‘irrational’. She is an anthropologist, and uses primarily ethnographic methods to identify the salient features of the social context. Her books include *Persuasions of the Witch’s Craft* (1989), *The Good Parsi* (1996), and *Of Two Minds* (2000). She is a director of the Clinical Ethnography project in the Department of Comparative Human Development.

**David R. Olson** is Professor of Applied Cognitive Science at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, and University Professor Emeritus of the University of Toronto. He is author or editor of numerous articles and books including *The World on Paper* (1994) and co-editor with Nancy Torrance of *The Making of Literate Societies* (2001) and author of *Psychological Theory and Educational Reform* (2003). Olson is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and the U.S. National Academy of Education. He was a Fellow at the Harvard Center for Cognitive Studies in the 1960s where he first met and became friends with Howard Gardner.

**David Pariser** is a Professor of Art Education, in the Fine Arts Faculty at Concordia University, Montreal. He has taught art in the public schools in Massachusetts and Illinois. A Fellow of the American
Psychological Association, he has published reviews, essays and research articles in *Leonardo, Studies in Art Education, Poetics, Visual Arts Research*, and the *American Journal of Education*. He is the author of several book chapters and encyclopedia entries. His interests include: the study of juvenile work of great artists; emerging models of graphic development; cross-cultural models of aesthetic development, and the study of life in classrooms. He is the director of the teaching internship program in Art Education.

**Mark Runco** earned his M.A. and Ph.D. (Cognitive Psychology) at the Claremont Graduate School. He soon earned the Young Scholar Award from the National Association for Gifted Children. A few years ago he earned the E. Paul Torrance Lifetime Achievement Award from the same Association. He is Past President of the American Psychological Association’s Division 10 (Psychology and the Arts) and founding Editor of the *Creativity Research Journal*. He co-edited the *Encyclopedia of Creativity* (1999). Currently he is Professor at the California State University at Fullerton at the Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration in Bergen.

**Jeffrey A. Schaler** is General Editor of the *Under Fire* Series and Executive Editor of *Current Psychology: Developmental, Learning, Personality, Social*. Schaler taught psychology at Johns Hopkins University’s Peabody Conservatory of Music from 1993 to 2003, and is now professor in the Department of Justice, Law, and Society at American University’s School of Public Affairs. He is the author of *Addiction Is a Choice* (2000), and has edited or co-edited several books, including *Drugs: Should We Legalize, Decriminalize, or Deregulate?* (1998), *Smoking: Who Has the Right?* (with Magda E. Schaler-Haynes, 1998), and *Szasz Under Fire: The Psychiatric Abolitionist Faces His Critics* (2004). In 1999 the Center for Independent Thought awarded him the Thomas Szasz Award for Outstanding Contributions to the Cause of Civil Liberties.

**Dean Keith Simonton** is Distinguished Professor of Psychology at the University of California, Davis. He has authored more than three hundred articles and chapters, plus nine books, including *Scientific Genius; Greatness, Genius, and Creativity; Origins of Genius; Great Psychologists and Their Times*; and *Creativity in Science*. He has received the Sir Francis Galton Award for Outstanding Contributions to the Study of Creativity, the Rudolf Arnheim Award for Outstanding
Achievement in Psychology and the Arts, the William James Book Award, the Theoretical Innovation Prize in Personality and Social Psychology, and the George A. Miller Outstanding Article Award. He is Fellow of several professional organizations, including the American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Psychological Society, and American Psychological Association.

Robert M. Spillane is Professor of Management at the Macquarie Graduate School of Management, Macquarie University, Sydney, and was Dean of the School from 1989 to 1991. He has been a Visiting Scholar at the London Business School, the University of Stockholm, and the Abcor Institute in Frankfurt. From 2003 to 2005 he delivered a highly acclaimed series of lectures for the Art Gallery Society, New South Wales. He has published nine books, more than 120 scholarly articles, and the play, Entertaining Executives, first performed at the Mermaid Theatre, London, in 2006. His recent books include The Mind's Eye: An Introduction to Philosophy (2004), Questionable Behavior: An Introduction to Psychology (2005), and The Management Contradictionary (with B. Marks and R. Marks, 2006).

Graeme Sullivan is Chair of the Department of Arts and Humanities and Associate Professor of Art Education, Teachers College, Columbia University. His research involves the investigation of critical-reflexive thinking processes and research practices in the visual arts, described in his book Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts. Sullivan has published widely in the field of art education and in 1990 he was awarded the Manual Barkan Memorial Award from the National Art Education Association for his scholarly writing. He maintains an active art practice; his Streetworks continue to be created and installed in different cities and sites (www.streetworksart.com).

Carlos E. Vasco, M.Sc. (Physics), Ph.D. (Mathematics), is now Professor Emeritus of the National University of Colombia at Bogota. In 1985–86 he was Distinguished Schumann Fellow and Lecturer in Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education in Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he has often been appointed Visiting Scholar during the last twenty years. Dr. Vasco was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1989. He was Advisor to the Ministry of Education from 1978 to 1993 in charge of the mathematics syllabus design. In 1993 he was selected by the President of Colombia to co-ordinate the Presidential Commission on Science, Education, and Development, and
he published the seven-volume series of documents of the Commission. Now he teaches part-time and directs doctoral dissertations in cognitive development and in mathematics-and-science education in two doctoral programs at the Universidad de Manizales in Manizales and the Universidad del Valle in Cali, Colombia.


**WENDY M. WILLIAMS** is a Professor in the Department of Human Development at Cornell University, where she studies the development, assessment, training, and societal implications of intelligence and related abilities. She holds Ph.D. and Master’s degrees in psychology from Yale University, a Master’s in physical anthropology from Yale, and a B.A. in English and biology from Columbia University. In the fall of 2001, Williams became co-founder and co-director of the Cornell Institute for Research on Children (CIRC), funded for $2.5 million by the National Science Foundation. In addition to dozens of articles and chapters on her research, Williams has authored eight books and edited four volumes. She is a Fellow of the American Psychological Society and four divisions of the American Psychological Association. She received the 1996 Early Career Contribution Award from Division 15 (educational psychology) of APA, and the 1997, 1999, and 2002 Mensa Awards for Excellence in Research to a Senior Investigator.
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H.G.

Many years of conversation with my friend Ernest H. Bradley contributed significantly to my thinking on these and related matters. I appreciate Howard Gardner for trusting me. David Ramsay Steele continues to be a great Editorial Director.

J.A.S.
Howard Gardner, a name to conjure with among today’s public intellectuals, is most celebrated for his conception and development of the theory of Multiple Intelligences, which has revolutionized educational thinking. But Gardner has also made outstanding original contributions to the study of leadership, of creativity, of child development, and humanly-fulfilling work. All of these topics are explored in this volume, by way of a debate between Gardner and his critics.

It’s in the theory of intelligence that Howard Gardner has made the biggest splash. Intelligence is an area charged with emotion. In the deep conflicts it stirs up, a test of intelligence is more like a test for HIV than a test of blood pressure. I have frequently encountered people whose problems-in-living were bound up with their perceptions of their own intelligence and its assessment. I will mention here a couple of cases out of many.

Years ago, an undergraduate student of mine was about to graduate and he looked somewhat down. I asked “aren’t you happy you’re going to graduate in a few days?” He said “I’m not happy at all.” I asked him why. He explained “I’ve hated college for the past four years and it’s only since I’ve taken the last few courses with you that I’ve been excited about what I’m actually learning. Now that I’m finally excited, college is over. I was just beginning to enjoy college.”

I was touched and decided to talk to him more about why he was so unhappy in other classes. He told me that he was bored. His grades were always among the highest in the class. I noticed that he didn’t seem to study much for exams in my courses and still wrote outstanding answers to exam questions. At one point he told me how much he hated the exams. When I questioned him about this, it came out that he had several times, in high school and college, been falsely accused by his teachers of cheating.
His family was poor. He had grown up in a rural area of New England. His parents had separated and at times he and his mother and siblings lived out of their car. He was asked to come to school on Saturdays. He despised doing so, but his mother and the school administrators insisted. I asked him why and he explained this was because of his scores on a certain test. “What test?” I remembered asking him. He said he didn’t like to talk about it because people thought of him differently when they knew about his scores on this test. To make a long story short, he had scored 170 on an IQ test. What was odd, too, was that his physical dress and appearance—back then, punk-rock style with a black belt full of chrome skulls—was nothing like one might expect of someone we might consider, with an IQ so high, well into the genius category. What is being “highly intelligent” here? What does it look like?

A second story comes to mind. A man in his forties came to me many years ago for counseling. He was very depressed. It seemed clear to both of us that if he went back to college and got a master’s degree, he could improve his prospects as a teacher. I’d suggested Johns Hopkins University, if for no other reason than that it had a good master’s program available for adults who already had jobs. Since he’d been out of school for so long, apparently the admissions department at Hopkins insisted that he take a few courses to see how well he performed before they formally admitted him into their graduate program. I discovered that he was taking two courses more than those required during the probation period. He received A’s in all those graduate courses.

He continued to see me in what evolved into analysis while he worked on his master’s degree. He would weep in each of our sessions, saying over and over again how he couldn’t do well in class and couldn’t do what was necessary to complete the master’s degree successfully. He was especially upset over one course in particular. He was convinced he could not pass this course. I looked at the work required, and told him that I thought it was difficult, but emphasized that I also thought he was clearly “smart enough”; what he needed to do was put in more energy studying and less energy whining.

One day several weeks later he told me that he was ending his analysis with me. I asked why and he explained that he had visited an “educational psychologist” who told him that his distress at not being able to do well in school was a symptom that he should not be tackling strongly intellectual work, but should be focusing his educational training on vocational skills, skills that did not require much intellectual effort. He was apparently “traumatizing” himself. She recommended he go for an IQ test.
I told him I thought this was the last thing he should do. He asked me why. I asked him, “What if you find that your IQ score is below average? Is that proof that you’re not smart? And if your IQ score is higher than average, what will that mean to you?” I asked him to consider how his problem was not that he was dumb, but that he believed he was dumb. He said his mind was made up, we shook hands and said goodbye. As he was walking out the door of my office, I asked “How did you do in that one course you were so upset about.” He paused and said rather sheepishly “I got an ‘A’.”

I expected never to hear from him again. About a year later, I found a message on my phone machine: “Jeff, this is X, I just want you to know that I received my master’s degree from Hopkins, I have a new position of teaching responsibility I said I could never achieve, and I want to thank you for everything you taught me.” To me, his story was a perfect example of someone whose belief about his ability had more to do with success and failure than his ability itself.

**Gardner and Multiple Intelligences**

Prior to Gardner’s *Frames of Mind*, there was little sustained theoretical opposition to the reigning paradigm of IQ, in which it is supposed that intelligence is a single concept known as ‘g’, exhibiting itself in scholastic attainment and detectable by a narrow range of puzzle-solving tests. Gardner transformed the discussion of intelligence and education by making a powerful case that there are several different forms of intelligence, some of which express themselves in activities not traditionally considered strictly academic.

Using eight criteria to demarcate separate ‘intelligences’, Gardner at first identified seven:

1. linguistic intelligence;
2. logico-mathematical intelligence;
3. musical intelligence;
4. bodily-kinesthetic intelligence;
5. spatial intelligence;
6. interpersonal intelligence;
7. intrapersonal intelligence.

Because Gardner sees individual humans as combining these intelligences in differing magnitudes, the multiple-intelligences (MI) approach leads to a greater appreciation of individual uniqueness. It
views individual humans in a multidimensional, rather than unidimensional, way. And this, I believe, is definitely for the better, especially when we consider the self-perpetuating and self-reinforcing quality of assessments of ‘intelligence’. Schools teach courses emphasizing that students solve certain kinds of problems and think in certain ways. People who do well in activities thus conceived tend to get college places and promotions, and to have more of a voice in how others will be evaluated. Rich rewards accrue to the individuals Herrnstein and Murray termed “the cognitive elite,” while those talented in other ways may find themselves unrecognized and unvalidated.

MI theory quickly became very popular with educationists, less so with theoretical psychologists. It has been disputed whether all seven are really separate intelligences, or (from a contrary viewpoint) whether the list could easily be extended. Suggestions for other kinds of intelligence include naturalist intelligence, spiritual intelligence, existential intelligence, and moral intelligence. Howard has accepted naturalist intelligence, but still has his reservations about the others.

Intelligence is useful, it seems, only in terms of what people can and can’t do with their lives. The demands a society places on a person to become a producer may require certain skills and not others. The task of growing up is to develop a marketable skill. This is something that is not achieved through intelligence, *per se*, but through a combination of many different factors. First and foremost, it seems to me, are effort and discipline. When we teach people that they have a limited ability called intelligence, they seek to live up to this label or identity. In this sense, believing what a person can do seems to have much more to do with motivation and success in life than intelligence or luck. If one doesn’t have the will to act on one’s intelligence, it seems that intelligence, whether singular or plural, loses its effectiveness. Howard has written on the importance of creativity, and I agree with him here for the most part. In my own work as a therapist, professor, and writer for over thirty-three years, I find that motivation and “meaning-making” are more the keys to leading a good life, a rewarding life, and ultimately the “intelligent” life.

**Multiple Accomplishments**

When I first met Howard Gardner, I remember, as we were planning this book, and planning whom to invite to contribute to it, that Howard did not strike me as the kind of person who thought there were two kinds of people in the world at all—for instance, those who went to Harvard and
those who went to college somewhere else. I remember a few remarks we exchanged as we ate lunch together. People think they’re special because they went to a certain school, much like people think they’re special because they’ve scored well on an intelligence test. However we view it, intelligence is something highly valued throughout the world, much like going to Harvard and teaching at Harvard will always be. People like to find ways to make themselves feel important.

Howard Gardner has moved on from his multiple writings on multiple intelligences, and MI is certainly not the only contribution he will be remembered for. While his other achievements are described more fully in this volume, we should especially note his theoretical work on creativity, leadership, and personal development.

Just to touch on a few of Gardner’s contributions:

In *Creating Minds* (1993), Gardner provoked a Gestalt switch in public understanding of creative genius. He analyzed the lives and achievements of seven diverse personalities (Freud, Einstein, Stravinsky, Eliot, Martha Graham, Picasso, and Gandhi) each of whom founded “a new system of meaning,” and each of whom sacrificed some personal fulfillment in pursuit of their revolutionary missions.

In Project Zero, inspired and launched by the late Nelson Goodman, Gardner has conducted and directed research into children’s artistic development, yielding many controversial conclusions and providing new ideas for educators.

The GoodWork Project, begun in 1995, is a broad empirical investigation of the experiences of professional workers in a range of occupations. Its ongoing research seeks individuals and institutions most conducive to work which is good both ethically and technically, as well as engaging for the workers. The Project seems ideologically motivated by a pronounced hostility to economic freedom, which I cannot share.

In *Changing Minds* (2004), Gardner made a popular application of findings in cognitive psychology to explain how people’s deep-rooted convictions can be changed. He catchyly identified seven elements necessary for intellectual transformation: reason, resonance, redescriptions, research, real-world events, resources, and resistance. The book has been found highly stimulating by a wide range of readers, from business leaders to social psychologists.

In the varied endeavors he has undertaken, Howard Gardner has combined broad erudition and a concern for rigorous research with an unpretentious formulation which immediately engages the interest of practical people going about their everyday lives. His conclusions have always been hotly debated, and many of the debates around Howard’s
work are still heating up. He is therefore perfectly suited for the *Under Fire* format, in which a leading controversial thinker is confronted by leading critics, and gets to have the last word—at least within the covers of this volume.