

THE GOOD LIFE OF TEACHING

An Ethics of Professional Practice

Chris Higgins

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The Good Life of Teaching

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Foreword

There is a widespread intuition, not peculiar to our own time, that certain forms of work are more than a way of earning a wage: more even than those traditional and respectable ways of doing so that we have dignified with the name of ‘professions’. They seem unusually worthwhile and important, in a sense that is difficult to articulate. In tribute to this mystery we may say that we feel called to them, that we experience a sense of vocation. Something similar seems to lie behind the way that young people leaving college often talk about ‘wanting to make a difference’. An important part of this is captured by the term ‘generativity’, which the psychologist Erik Erikson coined to describe the natural urge to take care of others and contribute to the betterment of society. One profession or vocation which seems to ‘make a difference’ and to exhibit the features of generativity is of course that of the teacher.

If we are to understand the good of teaching, then, we need to understand not only the ways it can directly benefit pupils and students but also the way it can bring fulfilment for the teacher and so enhance the lives that he or she touches. Developing the intuition with which we started, we can say that this fulfilment is not of an arbitrary sort, as someone might happen to find fulfilment in collecting antique cars or gardening or all sorts of other activities. The good of teaching lies in its connections to the personal growth and development of the teacher, and to the more profound conceptions of human happiness and wellbeing that have been developed by philosophers since the time of Plato and Aristotle. It stands to be part of the answer to the question, which Plato has Socrates ask in the *Republic* (352d6), of just how one ought to live a life.

This connection with the nature of the good life explains the title of this book. Chris Higgins offers what he describes as a humane account of the moral psychology of teaching. The moral dimension has its origins in Classical Greek virtue ethics, and Higgins explores and illuminates it through a range of 20th-century texts, such as those by John Dewey, Hannah Arendt, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Hans-Georg Gadamer. From his discussion there emerges a sophisticated account of professional ethics, which other professions as well as the teaching profession are likely to find thought-provoking and helpful.

The book is all the more important and timely as all around the world, and in the English-speaking world in particular, policy-makers and legislators

mistake neo-liberal assumptions for common sense and think of teachers, whether at school, university or any other level, basically as a labour force: to be trained—if at all—and paid as cheaply as is consonant with securing competitive examination results. Their essential role is to manage their classes, to transmit knowledge and to deliver a predetermined curriculum in whose content and style they are to have little or no say. If they demur, it is because they are part of a ‘producer culture’ defending its own interests. Anyone, however, who believes that there is more to teaching than this will find in *The Good Life of Teaching* rigorously analysed ideas with which to explore a vision of teaching that is richer for those who undertake it and therefore, of course, more rewarding and fulfilling for those whom they teach.

Richard Smith

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Some of the initial ideas for this book were worked out in journal articles.

- Chapter 1 draws on: Higgins, C. (2002) Das Glück des Lehrers (The Flourishing of the Teacher, trans. T. Führ), *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik*, 48.4, pp. 495–513.
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- In the summer of 2008, I completed a long study of Arendt which became the basis both for Chapters 3 and 7 and for: Higgins, C. (2010) Human Conditions for Teaching: The Place of Pedagogy in Arendt's *Vita Activa*, *Teachers College Record*, 112.2, pp. 407–445.
- The Dewey portions of Chapters 4, 6, and 8 draw on: Higgins, C. (2005) Dewey's Conception of Vocation: Existential, Aesthetic, and Educational Implications for Teachers, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 37.4, pp. 441–464.
- Chapter 5 draws on: Higgins, C. (2003) Teaching and the Good Life: A Critique of the Ascetic Ideal in Education, *Educational Theory*, 53.2, pp. 131–154.
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- The educational-philosophical triangle, which I discuss in Chapter 8, was first developed in: Higgins, C. (1998) *Practical Wisdom: Educational Philosophy as Liberal Teacher Education*, Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, chap. 3.

I have been fortunate to discuss the ideas and texts in this book with students and colleagues over many years. Here, rather than repeating the names of all those I thank in the preliminary studies above, I would like simply to mention a few people who were formative of my development as a scholar along with a few who have played a crucial role in the final stages of the book.

First, I want to express my gratitude that I grew up in a family who cared about education and ideas and who supported me to follow my interests.

And I feel lucky to have been introduced to the craft of philosophy by two of the most humane intellectuals I know: Jonathan Lear and René Arcilla. René advised the dissertation in which I first hatched some of the ideas in *The Good Life of Teaching*. His confidence in me over the years has made a huge difference, as has his friendship.

During one career setback and crisis in confidence, many friends and colleagues helped me regain my footing: Mike Hanson and Ricardo Hornos never doubted that I could write this book nor that I would be fine if I didn't; Ben Endres and David Blacker were there to remind me which things were worth taking seriously and what to do with the rest; Wendy Kohli, Al Neiman, Fran Schrag, Paul Standish, and others reached out in a way I won't soon forget; and it seemed like a miracle the way Robbie McClintock and Liora Bresler appeared to take an interest in me and my work when I needed it most.

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I don't think I ever would have found my way to finish this book if not for the support and insight of Alexandra Woods.

And I know I would not have written this book without the love and support, the intelligence and editorial skill of my wife, Jennifer Burns. She freed me up to write and she read every draft of every chapter. The ideas in *The Good Life of Teaching* grew in dialogue with Jen and it has made all the difference that she has always believed in me as a thinker and a writer.

Dedication:

For my beloved boodles: Jubby, Shea-Shea and Zo-Zo. Writing takes heart and you are my heart.

Introduction

Why We Need a Virtue Ethics of Teaching

I believe the impulse to teach is fundamentally altruistic and represents a desire to share what you value and to empower others. Of course, all teachers are not altruistic. Some people teach in order to dominate others or to support work they'd rather do or simply to earn a living. But I am not talking about the job of teaching so much as the calling to teach. Most teachers I know, even the most demoralized ones, who drag themselves to oppressive and mean schools where their work is not respected and their presence not welcome, have felt that calling at some time in their lives (Kohl, 1984, p. 7).

SAINTS AND SCOUNDRELS

Open any text on teaching and you are likely to find the same formula. It is nicely captured in this passage from Herb Kohl's well-known work, but there is no shortage of examples. Kohl tells us that teaching is altruistic, fundamentally so. If we find a non-altruist in the classroom then we have discovered an imposter to the role. From the point of view of working teachers, we all know there are days we live up to our ideals, and days that fall depressingly short of those hopes, and days that seem to dwell uncertainly in between. Yet in representations of teaching, we find instead a stark contrast of motivations: teachers are either serving students or using them. In the helping professions, it seems, one must not 'help oneself'. As one teacher recruitment campaign succinctly put it: 'You've made your own dreams come true. Isn't it time you started on someone else's?'¹ In the educational imagination—from posters to policies, from monographs to movies—we find more and less restrained versions of the same Noh drama. Enter stage left—the selfless saints, devoted to nothing but the welfare of their students and martyred for the cause. Enter stage right—the selfish scoundrels: narcissists, lechers, and petty dictators of their classroom worlds.

What seems clear is that these two characters and, correspondingly, the two main discourses about teacher motivation—the inspirational and the suspicious—are but two sides of the same coin.² Inspirational accounts tend to focus on the role of teacher, holding out an image of teaching as a noble service.³

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These accounts suggest that teacher's personal interests and needs more or less harmonise with the demands of their role, and when they do not, that those needs can and should be addressed outside of work. Suspicious accounts turn to the person in the role in an attempt to reveal the hidden springs of self-interest and debunk this idea of the altruistic teacher.⁴ These accounts aim to show that such a division between personal and professional is impossible to maintain, and that trappings of the role become a cover for teachers who really want to feel smart, revisit their youth, vent their aggression, and so on. What is striking is that neither discourse seems capable of helping us understand how teaching might be the expression of the person who teaches. For in the second sort of story, there is no real teacher; in the first, there is no real person.

What these seeming rivals share is their attachment to the stark opposition between a lofty altruism and a base self-interest; neither lends itself to a believable portrait of teaching. Inspirational accounts ring hollow when they gloss over the immense difficulties and frustrations inherent in the life of a schoolteacher. They portray teachers as having *no* personal agenda, conveniently wanting only what students need, and needing only to give that. Suspicious narratives do offer a more believable psychology, helpfully acknowledging our human-all-too-human desires, needs, and weaknesses. However, they tend to assume that teachers have *only* a personal agenda, which they merely disguise with their talk of educational aims and student needs.

In contrast, my study asks how teaching might be the *expression* of one's personal ambitions and deepest motivations. It probes the reasons for our dichotomous tendency to imagine teachers as either selfless saints or selfish scoundrels and challenges the very idea of a 'helping profession'. It sets out instead to imagine the fate of the teacher struggling to be *self-ful* in the midst of a task that is overwhelming, an environment that can be deadening, and a professional culture that secretly prizes self-abnegation. In showing the resources the practice of teaching offers for self-cultivation, without minimising its very real challenges and constraints, we move closer to a humane, sustainable ethic of teaching.

A BRIEF FOR TEACHERLY SELF-CULTIVATION

Teaching is a helping profession, where caring teachers assist active learners. At the same time, education contains an ineliminable feature that pushes us past such dichotomous thinking. The feature, simply put, is that selfhood is contagious. In order to cultivate selfhood in students, teachers must bring to the table their own achieved self-cultivation, their commitment to ongoing growth, and their various practices, styles, and tricks for combating the many forces that deaden the self and distract us from our task of becoming. In this stubborn refusal to be sorted into a duty or an inclination, an act of altruism or of self-interest, the practice of teaching proves a rich ground for exploring one of the central human dilemmas and oldest ethical problems. How do we reconcile

self-regard and concern for others? Can we live with the demands of human selfhood, that each of us exists for ourselves and for others, or will we allow the quest for individuation to collapse? Will we settle for so many semi-selves propping each other up: actors and facilitators, saints and scoundrels, 'mermaids and minotaurs'? (Dinnerstein, 1991 [1976]).

In teaching and other helping professions, such questions come to a sharp point. Here we encounter a powerful drive to sort ourselves into subject and object, for-oneself and for-others. The flourishing of the teacher sounds like an oxymoron. And yet, the logic of selfhood, emulation, and development pushes back against this tendency. Consider, if you will, the following argument for teacherly self-cultivation as a pressing practical and rich ethical issue (I first state the propositions in bare form and then discuss each further below):

1. Education, no matter what else it involves, involves self-cultivation.
2. Achieved and ongoing self-cultivation on the part of the teacher is a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for fostering self-cultivation in students.
3. (from 1 and 2) Teacherly self-cultivation is a necessary condition of education.
4. Poor working conditions and the intense needs of students conspire to make such self-cultivation exceedingly difficult: the life of a teacher, it must be admitted, may be miseducative as often as it is educative.
5. Rather than recognise the teacher's self-forgetfulness and self-sacrifice as a threat to teaching itself, we rationalise them with the rhetoric of service, we hail them as the call of duty and very mark of a teacher.
6. (from 3) But teaching is not a 'helping profession', if this is taken to mean that one helps others *rather* than oneself.
7. (from 4-6) Therefore, teaching should be understood precisely as one of the human practices that most clearly forces us to confront a fundamental existential tension: we exist for ourselves and for others, and while these two dimensions of life rarely fit together easily, neither do they work well alone.

The first proposition will strike some readers as patent and others as wildly utopian. This is not surprising if Philip Jackson is right that education has long been torn between two fundamentally different outlooks: the mimetic (or transmissive) and the transformative (Jackson, 1986).⁵ While the educational aim of self-cultivation is the very premise of the transformative outlook on teaching, it has come to seem largely out of place in K-12 schooling with the 'gradual ascendance of the mimetic tradition' (Jackson, 1986, p. 133). Two features of the current climate make it much easier to understand education as transmission of detachable skills and discrete knowledge. According to current wisdom, nothing exists that can't be measured and nothing can be measured that can't be measured by a standardised test. Since it is quite difficult to measure transformations and

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self-formation, this constitutes a distinct advantage for the mimetic model. The transformational model also runs up against our faith in liberal neutrality expressed in our belief that government-run schools in a liberal democracy can and should remain neutral on questions of the good life. Personal transformation as an educational aim cannot help but set off the Establishment-Clause alarm system.⁶ An education based in putatively neutral, transmissible skills and knowledge is a much easier sell.

Still, for thousands of years before this brave new world, the dominant assumption, whatever the specifics, was that education was self-formation. Such an education could be oriented around ideals of civic virtue, aesthetic sensitivity, or intellectual acuity. The educated person could be understood in terms of Cicero's oratory, Pico's dignity, or Austen's amiability. But if an education does not help you at all to answer the question, 'What sort of person are you going to become?', you should ask for your money back. I will close this brief defence of the first proposition with the rousing words of one of the relatively late defenders of (one very particular version of) education as self-cultivation, Friedrich Nietzsche:

Your true educators and molders reveal to you the true original meaning and basic stuff of your nature, something absolutely incapable of being educated and molded, but in any case something fettered and paralyzed and difficult of access. Your teachers can be nobody but your liberators. And that is the secret of all education; it does not provide artificial limbs, wax noses, or corrective lenses—on the contrary, what might provide such things is merely a parody of education. Education is rather liberation, the clearing away of all weeds, rubble, and vermin that might harm the delicate shoots, a radiance of light and warmth, the kind rustling fall of rain at night; it is imitation and adoration of nature where nature is maternal and mercifully minded; it is perfection of nature when it prevents nature's fits of cruelty and mercilessness and converts them to good, when it throws a veil over nature's stepmotherly disposition and sad incomprehension (Nietzsche, 1990 [1874], p. 166).

If the truth of the first proposition has tended to be marginalised or rejected, the truth of the second has tended to be trivialised as much as accepted. The difficulty here lies not so much in proving this premise as in rescuing it from its status as a truism: we learn by example, we teach who we are, and so forth. That something is a commonplace does not mean that we truly affirm it. Truisms are in fact a canny strategy for resisting ideas. After all, if you hide or oppose an idea, someone will dig it up or come to its defence. However, if you embalm a claim in a cliché, its truth can be acknowledged in an empty gesture, one that calls for no action on our part. Thus, the truism seems to fit the logic of disavowal as famously described by the French psychoanalyst Octave Mannoni: 'I know very well, but all the same . . .' (Mannoni, 2003 [1969]).

To rescue a living thought from such a fate requires putting the idea back into play, and this calls for the special kind of seriousness known as irony. It also requires awareness that no truism is an island. In this case, shoring up the clichés that we learn by example and teach who we are is a whole supporting cast of truisms: (1) everyone is a person; (2) everyone is unique; (3) we are grateful for the examples set by others. The ironist is not cowed by these sweet-sounding notions, but is willing to deal with the embarrassing, all-too-human exceptions to these rules, such as: (1') full-fledged personhood is difficult and rare and most of us get stuck somewhere not very far along the way; (2') we are often threatened by the influence of others and haunted by the feeling that the influence of others runs so deep that we cannot be sure what if anything in us is truly our own; and, (3') when we do finally find the way toward ourselves, we may well turn off the road, choosing the comfort of habit and the crowd over freedom, which in fact we fear as much as desire. What is needed, then, is work on influence that does not shy away from such human frailties and paradoxes.⁷

With at least some of this coating of obviousness now worn away, I would like to call the following witnesses to offer testimony on behalf of premise 2:

Philip Jackson: 'Of the many attributes associated with transformative teaching, the most crucial ones seem to concern the teacher as a person. For it is essential to success within that tradition that teachers who are trying to bring about transformative changes personify the very qualities they seek to engender in their students. To the best of their abilities, they must be living exemplars of certain virtues or values or attitudes. The fulfillment of that requirement reaches its apex in great historical figures, like Socrates and Christ, who epitomize such a personal model; but most teachers already know that no attitude, interest, or value can be taught except by a teacher who himself or herself believes in, cares for, or cherishes whatever it is that he or she holds out for emulation' (Jackson, 1986, p. 124).

Maxine Greene: 'A teacher in search of his/her own freedom may be the only kind of teacher who can arouse young persons to go in search of their own' (Greene, 1988, p. 14).

Bob Dylan: 'He not busy being born is busy dying' (Dylan, 1965).

William Arrowsmith: 'And this freedom, this ripeness of self, is the indispensable element in all true teaching, simply because it speaks so compellingly to those who hunger to be free—that is presumably to all' (Arrowsmith, 1971, p. 12).

The teacher's achieved self-cultivation is the catalyst in the educative process. But, as these witnesses also testify, educators cannot simply rest on their laurels, producing accomplishments from the past like dusty old trophies. It is the

teacher's present and active search for freedom, Greene says, that communicates to students what freedom might mean. The teacher must be 'busy being born' if she is to give students a sense of what living is about. Past insights and growth quickly spoil if self-cultivation is not ongoing. It is the other's self-in-process, or 'ripeness' as Arrowsmith puts it, that moves us.

In their own way, sardonic movies about teachers offer further testimony on this point. Certainly, such movies rely on stock characters and cheap sight gags: teachers whose underwear is showing, whose power lunch is peanut butter, jelly and chalk dust, who can't operate the rudimentary technology in their classrooms, who drive up to school in battered second-hand cars, who have no love life or social skills (for a wonderful distillation of this motif, see the opening montage in *Pressman*, 1994).⁸ Ultimately, though, what these movies intend is more than comic effect. There is a pathos here, one that echoes the testimony above. Whether or not one finds such images funny, they express, I contend, a powerful and understandable thirst on the part of young people for examples of why it is worth 'growing up'.

As the third proposition indicates, the conclusion we must draw on the basis of this testimony about the importance of the teacher's own existential exemplarity—given our earlier conclusion that education fundamentally involves self-cultivation—is that the achieved and ongoing self-cultivation of teachers is a necessary condition of education.

We turn now to the fourth premise. That teaching centrally involves helping students prepare for, launch, and enrich their own life projects often distracts teachers from the fact that teaching is their project. Even those teachers determined to make their practice into a vehicle for their own ongoing growth will find this difficult given typical working conditions. Indeed, the very term 'teacher' suggests such deprivations. Consider the social distinction we make between 'teachers' and 'professors'. The distinction does not seem to be fully explainable by the age of the students each educates, the amount of knowledge each possesses, or even by the fact that professors engage in both teaching and scholarship. Ultimately, this distinction seems to serve as a rationalisation for the fact that society does not have, or is not willing to commit, enough resources for all of its teachers to work, as professors do, in conditions compatible with self-renewal, conditions such as: teaching fewer courses (on topics and via methods of their own choosing) with fewer students (who are genuinely interested in taking the class), leaving time for reading, writing, and open-ended discussion with colleagues (not to mention the chance to take a sabbatical). Where is the high school or middle-school or kindergarten teacher who would not choose these terms instead, and flourish under them?⁹

What is at stake here is precisely whether an occupation is able to pass John Dewey's cardinal test, of 'balancing the distinctive capacity of an individual with his social service' (Dewey, 1916, p. 308). Occupations with this quality are often marked by a characteristic rhythm between withdrawal and engagement, and characteristic patterns of planning, pursuit, and completion followed by intervals of rest and reflection. Such rhythms are

not some optional perk. They speak to the basic link between work and flourishing. G. W. F. Hegel brings this out with his concept of practical *Bildung*. According to Hans-Georg Gadamer's reading of Hegel, *Bildung* is a process of development or self-formation whose 'basic movement . . . consists . . . in returning to itself from what is other' (Gadamer, 2004 [1960], p. 13).¹⁰ The essence of *Bildung*, Gadamer explains, 'is clearly not alienation as such, but the return to oneself—which presupposes alienation, to be sure' (ibid.). How is such a process of alienation and return educative and what does it have to do with work?

When we work we subordinate our private whims and fancies to a public discipline and an objective set of materials. To make a table, for example, the carpenter must undergo a process of alienation, or, if you will, 'unselfing'.¹¹ He cannot merely stay rooted in his consciousness, dreaming up how the table could or should be. He must leave this cosy, subjective place for the rigors of technique and the realities of wood, grain, and gravity. If he has successfully transcended his particularity to make something universal, a table, and allowed himself to become alienated from his subjectivity into the objective realm of chestnut and chisel, then he will stand before the finished work. It will be an independently existing thing, with its legs on the ground of the objective world. And yet, it will also be his table, with him in it. As the carpenter takes in the completed work, he takes in the structure, the complexity, the culture of the made thing. He returns to himself, but he returns with more, and as more, than when he set out.¹² In this way, work is a basic modality of *Bildung*.

What do we find when we return to the practice of teaching with such thoughts in mind? First, if *Bildung* requires a dialectic of solitude and relation, a rhythm of withdrawal and engagement, then teachers have a problem. For, as Maxine Greene nicely puts it:

The problems are inescapable, wherever the teacher is assigned to teach, because he is asked to function as a self-conscious, autonomous, and authentic person in a public space where the pressures multiply. Unlike an artist or a scholar or a research scientist, he cannot withdraw to studio, study, or laboratory and still remain a practitioner. He is involved with students, colleagues, school board members, and parents whenever and wherever he pursues his fundamental project; he cannot work alone (Greene, 1973, p. 290).

Most teachers do not even have an office, let alone a true studio space and the time to explore and renew their craft. Add to this the fact, noted by many, that teaching currently lacks a true career path, so that 'moving up' typically means moving out of teaching into administration or research.¹³ The continuity of the teacher's work is also threatened on the day-to-day level: fractured by the rapid change of classes, compressed (Jackson, 1966, p. 14, reports that 'the teacher typically changes the focus of his concern about 1000

times daily'), and complicated by the fact the teacher hesitates to say of the well-educated pupil what the carpenter says of his completed table: look what I have made. Teachers instead want to say to their students: look what you have done, what you have made. And yet, teachers must not forget that launching students on their quests and helping them find their projects is their own quest, their own project.

If after a thorough consideration of the teacher's world and work—and here I merely foreshadow the themes I explore in detail in Part II—our conclusion is that teachers are prone to self-forgetfulness and even self-sacrifice, that their bid to make their practice nourish them is often squelched by the harsh conditions of their labour, then we should be quite alarmed.¹⁴ But as I suggest above, the alarming conclusion of proposition 4 is typically met with the rationalisation of proposition 5, that self-sacrifice is the mark of a true teacher. However, the argument of premises 1–3 should now help us to see through this rationalisation. When we hear of someone sacrificing their self in order to teach this should sound something like: the soccer game will proceed as planned even though we have not been able to locate a ball; the lead singer has lost her voice, but the show must go on; or, go ahead and show me your tango routine, we don't have time to wait for your partner. That is, while collapses of the delicate balance between self-regard and care for students may be inevitable, they are worrisome. And this is where the rhetoric of service comes in. In the so-called helping professions, deprivation can become a badge of honour.¹⁵

Actually the rhetoric of service is only the second line of defence, cleaning up any mess left over after education's pervasive kitsch has done its job.¹⁶ Rather than confront the reality that many teachers grow old even as they tend to the young, educational discourse offers here as elsewhere a simplified and sweetened version of reality. Then, insofar as we even acknowledge our failures to support self-ful (as opposed to both selfish and selfless) teaching, education's nagging asceticism is there to redeem such failures as moral victories.

But as point 6 makes clear, the implication of point 3 is that teaching is not a helping profession, at least not if this means, as it typically does in implication if not inspiration, that one helps others *rather* than helping oneself. After all, architects and lawyers and veterinarians all help their clients too, and all experience so-called 'intrinsic rewards'. And yet in these cases this does not exclude their receiving ample 'extrinsic' rewards of money, autonomy, and recognition; nor are we tempted to call them 'helping professions'. Thus, what leads us to label teaching, nursing, and social work as 'helping professions' does not seem to be that they offer help to others but that they refuse to help themselves in the process.

Indeed, we can offer a fairly precise sociological definition of the 'helping' professions: they are those forms of work, historically associated with women, combining difficult working conditions and a caring attention to the client's whole person. As such, the helping professions admit of Jessica Benjamin's

paradox that precisely here where the essence of the work is a kind of intersubjectivity, we find the most intense desire to split the participants into subjects and objects, agents and helpers, self-interest and altruism.¹⁷

Thus, in point 7, I conclude that teaching forces us to confront the inevitable tensions arising when subjects meet and each retains his or her agency. The question of the flourishing of the teacher turns out to test our mettle as to whether we really care about self-cultivation at all. The stakes go far beyond the fate of individual teachers. For education is one of the primary cultural sites where we wrestle with the fundamental challenge of personhood. Subjectivity emerges in the matrix of intersubjectivity, in relationships where we successfully maintain the complex tensions between self-assertion and recognition, independence and dependence, separation and connection. This task is extremely difficult, however, and we are constantly on the lookout for ways to ease this tension. Indeed, we are prone to act out on a cultural scale our wishful fantasies that pure agency might be met by pure facilitation. Everywhere we look we find masters and servants, talkers and listeners, doers and facilitators. We find divisions of a labour that cannot be divided, attempts to escape the fundamental burden of personhood: that each of us must work out, for ourselves and with others, how we can exist for ourselves and for others.

FROM THE TERRAIN OF TEACHING TO THE DEFINITION OF PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

My project, then, concerns the interplay of altruism and self-interest in the practice of teaching; it is a philosophical exploration of teacher motivation, identity, and development. To see that such questions are not the exclusive province of psychologists and sociologists, we need simply rephrase the familiar question ‘Why teach?’ as ‘Why is the practice of teaching worth putting at the centre of one’s life?’ It then turns out that we are dealing with one of the central questions of professional ethics, or so I argue, building on Bernard Williams’ distinction between ethics and morality.

Along with Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, and others, Williams has led the charge in showing the limits of modern morality and in recovering an older, broader tradition of ethical reflection.¹⁸ Such reflection will often touch on moral considerations—impartial deliberations about duty, right action, and the needs of others—but it begins and ends with first-personal questioning, in thick evaluative terms, about the shape of one’s life as a whole. Ethics is rooted in the perpetual practical question ‘What should I do next?’ and flowers, in our more contemplative moments, into questions like ‘what do I want to become?’, ‘what does it mean to be fully human?’, and ‘what would make my life meaningful, excellent, or rich?’

Professional ethics, then, should be distinguished from what I call ‘moral professionalism’, which deals with codes of professional conduct and our role-

specific obligations to others.¹⁹ In contrast, the ethics of teaching, as I propose it here, will probe the relation between the teaching life and the good life, connecting the question ‘why teach?’ with the question ‘how should I live?’ It considers what draws us to the practice of teaching and what sustains us there in the face of difficulty. The ethics of teaching involves questions like these: What constitutes human flourishing, and how does tending to the growth of others nourish my own growth? What do I prize most, and how does teaching put me in touch with such goods?

Restoring to its central place the question of the flourishing of the practitioner is the first step in constructing a virtue ethics of teaching. However, I argue that we must go even farther if we want a truly virtue-theoretic professional ethics. Following MacIntyre, I show that virtue ethics implies not only that different types of normative considerations will be applied to practice, but also that the very notion of application must be rethought. What MacIntyre reveals is that ethics is practical in a much more fundamental way. Practices are in fact our ethical sources: they are the sites where aspects of the good are disclosed to us as well as the primary scenes of our ethical education. Thus, if applied ethics carries findings worked out in the philosophy seminar to the various practices, practical ethics turns to practices themselves to learn about goods and virtues, in their variety, as they are disclosed through the particular terms and problematics of each practice. Virtue ethics therefore needs teaching as much as teaching needs virtue ethics.

Thus, I pursue long-standing philosophical problems—about self-interest and altruism, personal freedom and social roles, and practical wisdom and personhood—on the terrain of teaching. The aim is not only, as I said at the outset, to provide a more realistic and liveable account of the moral psychology of teaching, but also through this process to shed light on these basic philosophical problems. Put another way, my project:

- Advances discussions of teacher motivation, identity, and development, using the resources of virtue ethics to avoid the dichotomisation of duty and interest that has plagued many treatments of teaching.
- Sheds light on fundamental questions in ethics and philosophical anthropology, considering the particular form these questions take in the context of the practice of teaching.
- Contributes to the development of a more substantive professional ethics, showing the full implications of the contemporary retrieval of *aretē* (excellence, virtue) and *eudaimonia* (flourishing, happiness, well-being) for a philosophy of work.

OUTLINE OF THE ARGUMENT

The design of the monograph is as follows. In Part I, I develop the conceptual framework needed for an aretaic professional ethics. I have already

introduced the first steps in this process. In Chapter 1, I show via Williams and Taylor why self-cultivation and self-regard are a proper concern of ethics, and the flourishing of the practitioner a proper concern of professional ethics. In Chapter 2, I show via MacIntyre how practices offer their practitioners intimations of internal goods and practice-specific virtues and thus should be thought of as ethical sources rather than as targets of application.

Once we have rethought the nature of professional ethics with the help of Williams, Taylor, and MacIntyre, new theoretical resources become available for professional ethics. For example, in Chapter 3, I turn to Hannah Arendt, whose hierarchical phenomenology of practical life now appears as clear example of and contribution to professional ethics. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt shows us how we might think of different modes of practical activity as more and less able to provide their participants with opportunities for self-enactment. In Arendt's concept of action or the deed, we find a conception of practical life in which we are in touch with our 'natality' or capacity to initiate fresh beginnings and disclose our uniqueness (Arendt, 1998 [1958]).

In Chapter 4, I consider another phenomenology of vocational experience, that of John Dewey. Dewey shows why vocations are themselves best understood as learning environments, thus upending the traditional meaning of professional education as preparation for practice. Still, the question persists how one learns how to learn through one's work. Why does the circle of experience sometimes widen outward in purposive continuity and at other times collapse into deadening monotony or shatter into random excursions? To answer, this I turn from Dewey to Hans-Georg Gadamer (2004 [1960]) and in particular to his theory of the open question. I show how Dewey's theory of vocation and Gadamer's philosophy of the question come together to articulate an important dimension of the key virtue of *phronesis* or practical wisdom: receptivity to the newness in new situations. In this way, the discussion of Dewey and Gadamer builds on the discussion of natality in Arendt even as it reaches back to Aristotle's discussion of *phronesis*.

In Part II, I then begin to fill in and complicate this general framework for eudaimonistic professional ethics by turning to the specific practice of teaching. Each of the chapters in Part II picks up the thread from its corresponding chapter in Part I, exploring how the preliminary analyses based on Williams (and Taylor), MacIntyre, Arendt, and Dewey (and Gadamer) entail both problems and prospects for the ethics of teaching. Thus, in Chapter 5, I return to the question broached in Chapter 1 concerning the place of self-interest in the professions, extending and complicating the initial analysis in light of the special requirements of a helping profession such as teaching. I counter the notion that teaching could or should be solely altruistic with an exploration of how altruism can devolve into asceticism and lead to such a problems as teacher burnout.

In Chapter 6, I pick up the thread of Chapter 2, asking whether teaching is indeed a practice (when MacIntyre himself denies it), and if so how it relates to the primary institution which houses it, the school. Here, I also take up one

aspect of Chapter 4, namely Dewey's distinction between literal surroundings and effective environment, asking what constrains what teachers may notice (and thus impoverishes their environment) within the surroundings of schools.

Chapter 7 returns to Arendt's phenomenology of practical life, asking where Arendt herself would place teaching among her categories of labour, work, and action. Through a reading of 'The Crisis in Education' I show that Arendt's (1977b [1958]) own conception of teaching is impossible to locate in any one of the categories of her *vita activa*. Within Arendt's own system, however, we find the resources for developing a revised account of teaching as an activity containing elements of labour, work, and action, an activity affording contact with one's natality and a space for self-enactment. I close with a discussion of how teaching might be an expression of the teacher's natality and a space for self-enactment.

Chapter 8 returns to Dewey and Gadamer to ask: what do teachers (as teachers) notice and what sort of vocational environment does this afford? How might we think of teaching as itself an ongoing conversation with the world? What threatens the purpose and continuity of teachers, and thus the openness of this conversation? Is there a distinctive form of pedagogical practical wisdom? If so, what types of questions constitute its structure of openness? In this concluding chapter, I offer a vision of education as a space of humanistic questions—and our putative answers to those questions in theory and practice—and outline elements of a teacher education that is not only about learning how to teach, but about learning how to learn through teaching; a teacher education for practical wisdom that helps teachers enter the *practice* of teaching, sustain a vocational conversation, and further their own self-cultivation.

In closing, let me note two things about this way of structuring the argument: one methodological, one practical. The methodological point concerns why I have put this particular set of thinkers in dialogue. What, if anything, do thinkers such as MacIntyre, Arendt, Dewey, and Gadamer have in common? The answer is: much more than it might at first appear. Though dispersed across time and space, we might identify them as comprising a single school, a school of neo-praxis philosophy. All of these thinkers acknowledge the importance of practice-community-tradition: emphasising, after Hegel, *Sittlichkeit* (concrete, communal ethical life) over *Moralität* (abstract, formal moral obligation); and, reaching back towards Aristotle for a conception of *praxis* (action, especially ethico-political conduct) and *phronesis* (the intellectual excellence conducive to living well). Certainly there are differences in the way Aristotle and Hegel come down to each: e.g. for Gadamer they come through Heidegger; for Arendt they come by way of Heidegger and Marx; MacIntyre's Hegel comes via Marx while his Aristotle comes through Aquinas; Dewey joins this tradition by way of Marsh, Torrey, and the St Louis Hegelians.²⁰ Despite these differences, all of these neo-praxis philosophers were critical to some degree of aspects of enlightenment

rationality, late capitalism, and liberal-individualism; in short, of modernity. Each in this group sought to reconnect the present with tradition (which they saw in dynamic, not static terms) and to reconnect philosophy with the particulars of time, place, practice, and text. And if this group is sometimes called conservative, theirs is a strangely radical brand of conservatism, inspiring as many on the left as on the right.

The practical point is that the book is designed to be read in several different ways. As I have noted, Part I concerns general issues about the relation of work and human flourishing while Part II revisits each of these issues on the terrain of teaching. Thus, while the argument is certainly designed to build chapter by chapter, one need not necessarily read the chapters in order. For example, one might choose to read the book crosswise rather than lengthwise, following all or some of the threads through directly. Thus, after reading Chapter 1 on the first-personal dimension of ethics and professional ethics, one would turn directly to Chapter 5 to read about self-interest in teaching and the helping professions. Then one would follow the discussion of MacIntyre straight through from Chapter 2 to Chapter 6, and so on. Indeed, one could follow either of these patterns in reverse: some may decide to read all of Part II, followed by all of Part I; others may want to be introduced to each topic in the context of teaching and then go back for its more general treatment in practical philosophy. Each of these variations has its advantages. Some readers may prefer to stick with one thinker; others may appreciate moving across theoretical paradigms. Some readers may prefer beginning with a thinker's general project; others may prefer to see how the theory bears on teaching, going back as needed for background.²¹

NOTES

1. NYC Teaching Fellows advertisement, posted in New York City subway, 2002.
2. There are, of course, several happy exceptions to this rule: the idea of teaching as an existential project has been a consistent theme in the work of Maxine Greene (see, for example, Greene, 1973; 1978b; 1987). Margaret Buchmann (1988) describes teaching as a 'given form of the good life'. David Blacker (1997) explores teaching as a bid for immortality. For a rich portrait of how one high school art teacher shaped himself and others through his teaching, see Barone, 2001.
3. There are countless examples of works in what I am calling the inspirational mode. Indeed, we can identify three genres here: self-help books on reflection and renewal; literature on teaching as a noble calling; and first-personal narratives of trial and triumph. And indeed, teaching may be reflective, noble, even triumphant; but, such celebrations of the teaching life ultimately demean it when they fall prey to simplification and sentimentality. Too many works in this mode substitute bullet points for argument and analysis, clichés and jargon for thinking through something in a fresh way. Meanwhile, rhapsodies on the rewards of teaching ring hollow when they fail to acknowledge how difficult it is for teachers to make their practice a vehicle for their own self-cultivation. The self-help genre does acknowledge the problem but then typically treats the symptoms in a superficial way. One book offers teachers tips on: alternatives to antibiotics, calming the inner critic, headlice, meditation, snacking, and on 'taking

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time to: breathe, celebrate success, collaborate, communicate, declutter, drink water, eat, exercise . . . ' (Holmes, 2005, p. 194, bulleted in original). Another counters with this list of 'anti-depressants': Sunlight/Conversations about good books and films/Cheerful students/A baby's face/Dark chocolate and excellent coffee/Ocean views . . . ' (Casnave and Sosa, 2007, p. 47).

There are also books that invite teachers to attend to themselves in a deeper way (from Waller, 1932, especially Part Five; through Jersild, 1955; to Palmer, 1998). In *Letters to a Young Teacher*, Jonathan Kozol (2007) creates a discursive space (in his literary recreation of his actual correspondence with a teacher) that is anything but simplistic or sentimental. And yet there is always the risk that even a work like this will be swallowed up by the pervasive kitsch that plagues education. For example, the cover of the Kozol volume describes it in this way: 'the author . . . gently guides a first-year teacher into "the joys and challenges and passionate rewards of a beautiful profession"' (it is not clear who or what the jacket is quoting, but it does not seem to be Kozol himself). A work like Kozol's is genuinely inspiring because it resists at every turn the urge to inflate and sweeten, modelling how someone combines deep ideals with a keen eye for the real. On the whole, though, the inspirational mode too often gives in to the urge to buoy up the spirits of teachers with literal or rhetorical anti-depressants. Whether it is chocolate or a sweet narrative about how a teacher beat all the odds to change her students' lives forever, there is always a crash after a sugar rush, triggering a craving for an even sweeter confection.

There are, of course, works on teacher calling whose idealism is more than cheerleading and narratives by teachers whose hopefulness is more than Pollyanna optimism. In his portrait of a transformational teacher Franklin Lears (who, it is worth remarking, left teaching after one year), Mark Edmundson makes a point of noting:

Frank Lears was a remarkably good man, though it took me some time to see it. Lears' goodness was of a peculiar sort. He was always doing something for himself as well as for you. In the process of working his best deeds, he didn't mind affronting what you might call his spiritual enemies. Lears' goodness, like that of almost all great teachers, always had an edge to it (Edmundson, 2003, p. 7).

Two teacher autobiographies that also get at this 'peculiar' sort of goodness are Rose, 2005 [1990]; and Inchausti, 1993; for a typology and sympathetic discussion of this genre, see Preskill, 1998).

4. It is difficult to illustrate a pervasive, informal discourse concisely. Suspicion of teacher motives seems to be the default assumption of many in educational circles. Here are three (constructed) examples of the kind of debunking of idealistic takes on teacher motivation one hears. Readers may judge for themselves whether the italicised lines below, those of the cynical character B, are familiar.

Exchange 1

A: 'Teachers have a calling'.

B: '*You mean they feel called to have summers off.*'

A: 'That's too cynical.'

B: '*Perhaps, but this talk of personal calling is still mystification. What we have here is social striving. Given the class position of certain families, teaching is an acceptable compromise between trades and out-of-reach, high-status professions.*'

Exchange 2

A: 'Teachers want to help their students gain the knowledge to succeed'.

B: '*Hogwash! Teachers construct students as ignorant in order to feel smart themselves. And we can go further and say that maintaining this gap helps teachers maintain their authority, feeding what is ultimately a kind of power trip.*'

Exchange 3

A: 'Teachers need to master techniques of classroom management in order to maintain an orderly learning environment'.

B: *'I'm afraid you have it backwards: the supposed need for order to teach the official curriculum is the very enactment of the true, if hidden, curriculum. Schools are designed to breed docile citizens and compliant workers'.*

A: 'But, on that theory, teachers are pawns in a larger social agenda rather than driven by a hidden personal agenda'.

B: *'True, but consider that those who choose to teach, and thus to make young people sit still and fill in worksheets, are themselves survivors of this very process. So we could see teaching as a selection process for those who have a high tolerance for the kind of boredom and compliance built into schooling.'*

A: 'If schooling is really as bleak as you suggest, I don't think anyone would naturally thrive in that world'.

B: *'Ok, maybe no one naturally likes seeing the world divided into multiple choice, short answers. So perhaps the best explanation for teacher motivation is what Freud called "fort-da": one way to deal with suffering something unpleasant is to turn around and do the same thing to someone else. So teaching is a kind of educational "Stockholm syndrome".'*

We can find examples of suspicion of the teacher's motives as early as Willard Waller (1932) who, for example, speculates at one point that teachers may be drawn to the profession out of a desire to control others, 'an inherent need of the personality for being in some sort of managerial position' (p. 379), adding sympathetically that educators may become autocratic because they are working in a low status profession and feel threatened by the constant encroachment of parents, politicians and other groups who on their autonomy (pp. 10–11). (Thanks to Darryl DeMarzio for pointing me to these two passages, and reminding me of the Delpit passage I quote below.)

- To pick one strand of a more recent literature, that of critical pedagogy, we observe two stages of suspicion of the teacher's agenda. First, there is the idea that traditional teachers secretly want to perpetuate an unjust society, taking delight in the sonority of their own speech and construction of themselves as rich in knowledge ready to be banked into students. I refer of course to Paulo Freire who taught us that and how educational 'generosity' can be 'malefic' (see, for example, Freire, 2000 [1973], pp. 44–45, 60, and *passim*). Even as this inspired a generation of critical pedagogues, it also inspired a second wave of suspicion of these supposedly liberatory intentions. The most famous of these is Elizabeth Ellsworth's critique of the notion of dialogue in critical pedagogy (Ellsworth, 1989). Or consider Lisa Delpit's equally famous intervention, calling the 'good intentions' of progressive educators (specifically white educators who dogmatically insist that students of colour need to be protected from direct instruction in hegemonic Anglo culture) 'conscious delusions about their unconscious motives', suggesting (second hand but seemingly with approval) that white teachers must really be wanting to ensure for their own children 'sole access to the dwindling pool of American jobs' and that at least 'black folks *know* when they're lying!' (Delpit, 1995, p. 27, emphasis in original). To pick one final example, almost at random, Swiffen, following Jones, suggests that while dialogical teachers may appear to want subaltern students to come to voice, what is really at work is 'the fantasy or romance about access to and unity with the other' (Jones, 2004, p. 62; quoted in Swiffen, 2009, p. 57) and 'the desire to be recognised as eliciting oppressed voices' (Swiffen, 2009, p. 60).
5. Since Jackson acknowledges the central role of 'personal modelling' in transformative teaching, it seems clearer to call his two outlooks 'transformative' and 'transmissive', noting that mimesis is at work in both traditions in different ways. Jackson is far from

alone in diagnosing this educational schizophrenia. For example, Zvi Lamm sees education conflicted over aims of socialisation/enculturation and self-actualisation (Lamm, 1976; quoted in Egan, 2008, pp. 9–10); Richard Rorty sees education confused over how to pursue both ‘socialization’ and ‘individualization’ (Rorty, 1999); and, Kieran Egan sees education as an unworkable marriage of ‘socialization, Plato’s academic idea, and Rousseau’s developmental idea’ (Egan, 2008, p. 9). I return to this point in Chapter 6 (see below, p. 179).

6. The Establishment clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States reads ‘Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion’. Church/state issues are different in each national context and many liberal democracies have no such formal separation. And, of course, *de facto* and *de jure* separation, as recent US history testifies, are often different matters. Still, the question of the neutrality of government-run schools arises in some form in many liberal democracies.
7. For a theory of influence that foregrounds our dread and disavowal of duplication, see any of Harold Bloom’s ‘revisionist’ works (beginning with Bloom, 1973); for two classic explorations of originality and influence, see Emerson, 1985b [1841] and Nietzsche, 1990 [1874]; for two recent studies of pedagogical imitation and apprenticeship, Steiner, 2005 and Warnick, 2008.
8. This episode is available online at <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0654963/>
9. Of course, it has always been a relatively small percentage of college instructors who have enjoyed such working conditions. Many college instructors are part-time or work in ironically named ‘teaching colleges’, where they have 4/4 or 5/5 teaching loads and no support for scholarship. Indeed, given the rapidly changing face of higher education, we may not need to worry much longer about this two-tier system. According to a new US Department of Education study, tenured or tenure-track faculty members now constitute only one quarter of US college instructors, down from 57% in 1975 (reported in Wilson, 2010). And this is only one symptom of a more general trend toward corporatization of the university, vocationalization of higher education, and commercialization of campus life. Here I refer less to the historical entwining of the ‘multiversity’ with the military-industrial complex (see, for example, Washburn, 2006; Giroux, 2007), or to the equally alarming recent rise of for-profit universities (see, for example, Ruch, 2003; Tierney, 2007), or even to the current dismantling of the public university (Newfield, 2008; Morphew and Eckel, 2009; Folbre, 2010), but primarily to the increasing commodification (within a wide variety of colleges and universities) of teaching, learning, and scholarship. This new, ‘university of excellence’ (Readings, 1996, chap. 2), seems to have less and less interest in person, process, and pedagogy in its adoption of an entrepreneurial, product delivery, customer satisfaction model. In this model, students are viewed as ‘instructional units’, faculty described as ‘full-time equivalents’, and scholarship assessed by grant dollars and publication poundage (for a sample of the growing list of portraits and political economies of this new university, see Kirp, 2003; Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004; Waters, 2004; Bousquet, 2008; Donoghue, 2008; Tuchman, 2009; Chan and Fisher, 2009.)
10. For a history that traces the development of *Bildung* through 19th century German culture, especially literature, see Bruford, 1975b. On how the Hegelian concept of *Bildung* is taken up and transformed by Dewey see the recent work by Jim Garrison and James Good (Garrison, 1995; Good, 2006; and Garrison and Good, 2010). For explorations of how the quintessentially modern concept of *Bildung* might continue to have life in postmodernity see the recent special issues of *Educational Philosophy and Theory* (Bauer, 2003) and the *Journal of Philosophy of Education* (reprinted as Lovlie *et al.*, 2003). Arcilla (2010) shows how to be a post’ 68 Marxian humanist through his

powerful rehabilitation of aesthetic *Bildung* in which he defends the project of existentialist, liberal learning through encounters with modernist artworks (those which stress their medium). (For some other recent discussions of *Bildung*, see Thompson, 2005; 2006; Vinterbo-Hohr and Hohr, 2006; Hammershøj, 2009).

11. Thanks to Richard Smith for suggesting this term. For a recent defence of manual work as ‘soulcraft’ including a description of just this sort of unselfing, see Crawford, 2009, pp. 90–100.
12. There is another aspect to practical *Bildung*, namely the way in which a vocation enables one to claim a space in the network of social relations and seek the recognition of others. As Garrison and Good explain:

For Hegel self-development depends on fulfilling the universal norms of a determinate social function, thereby achieving social recognition: ‘[A] human being must be *somebody* [etwas] . . . he must belong to a particular estate [“*Stand*,” a place, a standing in society]; for being somebody means that he has substantial being. A human being with no estate [*Stand*] is a merely a private person, and does not possess actual universality.’ We seek confirmation of our self worth through the recognition of other self-conscious agents like ourselves (Garrison and Good, 2010, pp. 59–60, quoting Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §207).

I explore this side of vocation in my discussion of MacIntyre in Chapter 2, and in particular in relation to the internal good of a ‘biographical genre’ (see below, pp. 57–58 and 59–60).

13. See, for example, Johnson (1990, pp. 6 and 282-4). I return to this point in Chapters 6 and 8; see pp. 202 and 252 below.
14. I discuss the working conditions of teachers in Chapter 6 (see below, pp. 198–202); I return in Chapter 8 to consider how the culture of schools disrupts the purposive continuity required of a Deweyan vocation (see below, pp. 248–254).
15. How altruism devolves into asceticism and leads to teacher burn-out and ‘burn-in’ is the focus of Chapter 5.
16. I return to the topic of kitsch in Chapter 8 (see below, pp. 252–253).
17. Here I foreshadow the feminist, psychoanalytic critique of the helping professions I offer in Chapter 5 (see below, pp. 161–170).
18. See e.g. MacIntyre, 2007 [1981]; Williams, 1985; Taylor, 1989. Such work in the 1980s was made possible by the groundbreaking work of G. E. M. Anscombe, Iris Murdoch, and Philippa Foot. See, for example, Anscombe, 1958; Murdoch, 1985a [1970]; Foot, 1978. For a more extensive bibliographic reconstruction of the renaissance in substantive ethics, see Chapter 1, notes 1–3. See also note 4, a long methodological treatment of rival ways of marking the distinction between older, broader and newer, narrower ways of framing the normative.
19. There is a growing literature linking the revival of virtue ethics to professional ethics, but all of it tends toward a fairly narrow, moral interpretation of virtue (see e.g. Oakley and Cocking, 2001; and Walker and Ivanhoe, 2007). Martin (2000) promises to rethink professional ethics in the spirit of Williams, but even he largely ignores the question of the flourishing of the practitioner. Two recent books extend MacIntyre’s theory of a practice to a specific occupation, one for journalism and the other for business (see Borden, 2007; and Painter-Morland, 2008). For a religiously inflected and suggestive, if unsystematic, look at the aspirational aspects of the professions, see Shaffer, 1987. The best virtue-theoretic treatments of teaching are Sockett (1993), Hare (1993, 1995), Hostetler (1997), and Carr (2000, 2005, 2006). On the whole, though, these works tend toward a moral (rather than ethical) interpretation of virtue,

failing to foreground the flourishing of the teacher or counter the asceticism implicit in the discourse around teaching. Hostetler's (1997) edited collection, though focused on practical wisdom, remains tied to moral dilemmas. Sockett (1993) explicitly disparages a 'what's in it for me?' approach to teaching (p. 130), illustrating his discussion of the service ideal with references to Gandhi and Christ (p. 132), explaining that there is a spectrum of teacherly idealism from cynical, 'pandering' teachers to 'the saints and heroes like Jessica Siegel who struggle along in circumstances of considerable deprivation' (p. 139). What Sockett does not mention is that Siegel, the focus of Samuel Freedman's *Small Victories* (1990), burns out and leaves the profession (I consider Siegel's case in Chapter 5; see below, pp. 152–153). On the other hand, Sockett makes a point of saying that teachers need care and thus must be allowed to show the private person in the public role so that their students may see and appreciate them for who they are (Sockett, 1993, pp. 142–143). And Hare concludes with the notion that the virtues of teachers are not only to be valued as a means to enhance student growth but also, in their own right, as part of the teacher's own development into 'an educated individual and admirable person' (Hare, 1993, p. 161). In a previous work (Higgins, 2003b, p. 138), I faulted Carr for neglecting the flourishing of the teacher in his virtue-ethical account of teacher professionalism; he has since replied, offering a thoughtful and helpful critique of my own position (see Carr, 2006, pp. 178–180).

20. Though he does not figure as prominently in this book, I would also include Michael Oakshott—who gets his Hegel via Bradley—in this group. Taylor, himself a careful student of Hegel, might be said to belong to this 'school' as well; Williams is a more complicated fit. In any case, the connection of Williams and Taylor to the others is a logical one: their arguments for the connection between ethics, projects, and personhood pave the way for the treatments of work, experience and flourishing that follow.
21. Thanks to Nick Burbules for helping me think through this feature of the book's design.

PART I

The Virtues of Vocation
From Moral Professionalism to Practical Ethics

1

Work and Flourishing: Williams' Critique of Morality and its Implications for Professional Ethics

Many philosophical mistakes are woven into morality. It misunderstands obligations, not seeing how they form just one type of ethical consideration . . . [It] makes people think that without its very special obligation, there is only inclination; without its utter voluntariness, there is only force; without its ultimately pure justice, there is no justice. Its philosophical errors are only the most abstract expressions of a deeply rooted and still powerful misconception of life (Bernard Williams, 1985, p. 196).

Much contemporary moral philosophy . . . has tended to focus on what it is right to do rather than on what it is good to be, on defining the content of obligation rather than the nature of the good life; and it has no conceptual place left for a notion of a good as the object of our love or allegiance . . . So much of my effort . . . will be towards enlarging our range of legitimate moral descriptions, and in some cases of retrieving modes of thought and description which have misguidedly been made to seem problematic (Taylor, 1989, p. 3).

INTRODUCTION

In order to understand professional ethics, we first need to understand the nature of ethics itself. This assertion seems straightforward enough. But what if we, in modernity, have forgotten a large part of what ethics is? To put it more precisely, what if we have come to mistake one part of the ethical for the whole? Could we be suffering from an acute case of moral myopia? It is this very idea advanced by Williams and Taylor who take their place in a long tradition. In trying to help us see what a 'peculiar institution' modern morality is, Williams (1985, p. 174; cf., 1993 [1972], p. 9) echoes Hegel's critique of Kant (Hegel, 1977 [1807], pp. 211–409; Hegel, 1991 [1821], sections 2–3), Nietzsche's critique of slave morality (e.g. Nietzsche, 1969 [1887]), and Bradley's defence of 'My Station and its Duties' (Bradley, 1988 [1876]). Even in the Anglophone, analytic tradition, the critique of the modern, moral

truncation of the ethical realm and recovery of a more robust conception of ethics has been underway for half a century: from the groundbreaking early essays of G. E. M. Anscombe (1958), Philippa Foot (1958a, 1958b), and Iris Murdoch (1956) through Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue* (2007 [1981], chaps. 1–9).¹ Meanwhile the project of retrieval called for by Taylor has been advanced on multiple fronts: with the reassertion of the priority of the good and the ethical importance of the shape of a life as a whole; with the recovery of ancient conceptions of happiness, virtue, and practical wisdom; with the return of the thick language of so-called 'secondary' ethical terms and the reintegration of social, historical, spiritual and aesthetic questions into ethics.² Ethical inquiry has of late become both more idealistic (exploring visions of human flourishing) and more realistic (attempting to reconcile ethical notions with human desire and a liveable moral psychology).³ As we work toward an expanded notion of professional ethics, let us take Williams as our chief guide, reconstructing his distinction between ethics and morality. When helpful, I will supplement Williams' account with details from Taylor's critique of modernity's 'cramped and truncated view of morality' and his retrieval of substantive ethics (Taylor, 1989, p. 3).⁴

RETRIEVING SOCRATES' QUESTION

For Williams, the fundamental ethical question is neither 'How ought I to act?' nor 'What are my obligations to others?' Both of these questions, Williams argues, are far too narrow. If we are to capture the full range of the ethical, we need to return to Socrates' question in Book I of the *Republic*: 'It is not a trivial question', Socrates chides his interlocutors, 'what we are talking about is how one should live'.⁵ For Williams, this remains the most ecumenical invitation to ethical reflection ever offered. Socrates' question, Williams writes, is 'entirely non-committal, and very fruitfully so, about the kinds of consideration to be applied to the question' (Williams, 1985, p. 5). It invites you to think about the shape your life is taking and to consider what it would mean truly to flourish as a human being, but this may translate into any of a variety of concerns, from the richness of one's experiences to the nobility of one's actions. One person may wonder if her work is truly original, while another wrestles with whether he has been generous to others. Others will respond in terms of authenticity, responsibility, wisdom, or piety. Part of what the question is asking is which ethical terms *should* be central in your deliberations, which ideals reflected in your choices.

In itself, Socrates' question contains only two major assumptions: that ethics is practical, and that it is reflective. As a 'particularly ambitious example of a personal practical question' (p. 18), Williams argues, it is closely related to questions such as 'what should I do now?' and 'what is the best way for me to live?' (p. 5), and therefore retains their 'radically first-personal' quality (p. 21). In other words, it is an important fact about ethical questions

that they are always asked by a particular person, and it is understood that nothing would count as an answer that did not speak to that person. This is because the ethical agent is motivated by a concern for her own *eudaimonia*, by her desire to flourish.⁶ Someone might very well come to think that his flourishing was tied up with the cultivation of certain other-directed virtues, like kindness or compassion, but no ethical deliberation, in Williams' sense, would ever lead someone to sacrifice his *eudaimonia* in the name of altruism. For Williams, a course of action 'has to appeal to that person in terms of something about himself, how and what he will be if he is a person with that sort of character' (p. 32). As a species of practical deliberation, then, ethical reflection is essentially partial, linked inextricably to a particular agent's desires and aspirations.

At the same time, the reflectiveness of Socrates' question makes it more ambitious than our everyday practical questions in two respects. The question of how one should live, Williams suggests, leads beyond a mere moment of decision 'to press a demand for reflection on one's life *as a whole*' (p. 5, emphasis in original). Ethical reflection may be prompted by a specific choice I have to make, but its defining question is not, What is the right thing to do in this situation? Ethics is better represented by questions such as: Who do I hope to become? What is worthy of my time and effort? and, What is the best sort of life I can live? As you will recall, though, Socrates' question was not 'How should I live?' but 'How should *one* live?' This is an important difference since, in the latter form, I am reminded that while this question is mine, it is also everyone else's. Thus, ethical reflection not only pushes me to generalize beyond a particular context for action, but also invites me to generalize beyond my own experience. As Williams explains, Socrates' question 'seems to ask for the reasons we all share for living in one way rather than another'; it provokes us to think about 'the conditions of *the good life* . . . for human beings as such' (p. 20, emphasis in original).

For Williams, then, Greek ethics is constituted by the tension between its practical pull toward the personal and its reflective push toward the universal. To our modern eyes, this may look more like ambivalence about morality than ambiguity within ethics. This, Williams argues, is due to our modern moral prejudices, our tendency to equate egoism with the 'narrowest form of self-interest', and to reduce self-interest to the 'pursuit of pleasure' (p. 15).⁷ Hedonism is certainly one possible response to Socrates' question, but as Greek ethics amply bears out, it is far from the only—or even the most likely—response. As Williams explains:

Neither Plato nor Aristotle thought of the ethical life as a device that increased selfish satisfactions. Their outlook is formally egoistic, in the sense that they have to show to each person that he has good reason to live ethically; and the reason has to appeal to that person in terms of something about himself, how and what he will be if he is a person with that sort of character. But their outlook is not egoistic in the sense that they try to show

that the ethical life serves some set of individual satisfactions which is well defined before ethical considerations appear (p. 32).

Greek ethics has an irreducibly first-personal quality. Even when one is reflecting about other-regarding virtues, Williams says, 'it is still his own well-being that the agent in Socratic reflection will be considering' (p. 50). Williams calls this egoism 'formal' to head off the mistaken impression that Socrates' question calls for answers which are egoistic in content, inviting agents to think only of themselves. Once we distinguish between these varieties of egoism, we can see the practical pull and reflective push of ethics as a productive tension rather than a troubling contradiction.

Still, such a formally egoistic ethics may seem, if less crass, too individualistic. Here, too, anachronism blurs our vision. As MacIntyre and Taylor have convincingly shown, while ethics is rooted in the existential predicament and moral psychology of the individual, this hardly makes it individualistic in the modern sense. MacIntyre shows how the distinction between self and social role, definitive of modern individualism, is incompatible with virtue ethics (see e.g. MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], chaps. 3 and 15). Meanwhile, Taylor traces the rise of the modern self as atomized and interiorized; once we have come to see the self as a container, it becomes difficult to conceive of the good as something independent of the moral agent (Taylor, 1989, esp. chap. 11).

Another possible misunderstanding of the formal egoism of eudaimonistic ethics is that because everyone must answer Socrates' question *for* themselves, that they could or should somehow answer it *by* themselves. This misunderstanding is aided by the tendency, in modern values-talk, to exaggerate both the amount by which people differ from each other on normative questions and the ease of taking a relativistic stance toward another. To bring discussion to a crashing halt, just utter the magic words: 'these are my values'. What thinkers such as Taylor and MacIntyre have shown, though, is that even the most private deliberation is conducted in a relatively public language. Ethical reflection always takes place in a particular language, a language we learn from and share with others.⁸ Each language will have its particular qualitative vocabulary and ethical emphases, but this means that normative differences are more likely across social groups than between individuals. Indeed, as Taylor shows, even these social-cultural differences are relatively trivial compared to the tectonic shifts in our visions of human flourishing over time. *Sources of the Self* outlines a series of epochal ethical horizons from Greek antiquity to the present (Taylor, 1989, parts II–V). One lesson to be drawn from this is that, at any one time, our views on the most important matters (and especially on which constitute the most important matters) are remarkably uniform. Furthermore, when disagreement does occur, it is only meaningful against the backdrop of a shared tradition. Indeed, modern individualism—the idea that one should strive to become one's own person, to challenge received ideas, and to think for oneself—is itself just one powerful, widely shared ethical tradition among many others.⁹

The other point to make here is that the individual differences we do find are all the more charged for their rarity. Modern values-talk would make it seem as if rival answers to Socrates' question could rest comfortably side by side. In fact, it matters very much to us whether family, friends, neighbours, and public figures hold different views of the good life. What appears to be moral relativism is often the scrupulous practice of a specific virtue, namely tolerance. And even those who do make a practice of not judging the actions of others with their own ethical norms tend to be far less forgiving of themselves. Nothing provokes a fresh encounter with Socrates' question like learning that someone whom we respect and with whom we identify has a different understanding of what is most worthwhile in life. This is why, even though everyone has a personal understanding of what is good and where they stand in relation to that good, it is exciting and profitable (if also frightening and dangerous) to engage in dialogue with others about these understandings.

In sum, ethics grows out of first-personal, practical questions about who I want to be and how I should live. Ethics can be interpersonal, insofar as we reflect in dialogue and by means of a shared language, but it is never impersonal. It is rooted in the existential challenge that each of us must figure out what to do with the particular life we have been given. There is a push in ethical reflection to generalize beyond the present moment of a personal decision to consider one's life as a whole, and to think about what constitutes the good life for human beings in general. At the same time, ethical ideals are always embodied in concrete ways of life and ethical language is inescapably thick and qualitative.

MODERN MORAL MYOPIA

I have already highlighted some of the ways in which this older tradition of ethics is hard to reconcile with our modern moral mindset. The eudaimonistic outlook may strike us as too religious, too aesthetic, too psychological, or just plain too self-centered to be considered properly ethical. This is because modern ethical thought has developed in what Williams calls a 'peculiar' direction. Indeed, Williams finds ethics so altered, and so narrowed, in modernity that he coins a separate term for it. He retains 'ethics' as his name for the older and broader tradition of thinking about the normative, and uses 'morality' to designate the newer and narrower approach. According to Williams, morality constitutes but 'one particular variety of ethical thought' (Williams, 1985, p. 174). As intriguing as this claim may be, it poses three immediate difficulties.

The first lies in seeing modern moral thinking as *one* thing, as a unified whole. After all, in the current scene we find not harmony but tense debates (abortion, euthanasia, etc.) and rival camps (consequentialism, deontology, contractarianism, etc.). Williams does acknowledge that morality 'embraces a

range of ethical outlooks' and thus cannot be considered 'one determinate set of ethical thoughts' (*ibid.*). At the same time, he maintains that there is a common 'spirit' that cuts across such divisions and debates (*ibid.*). It is simply that we are too close to perceive it readily. As Williams puts it, 'morality is so much with us that moral philosophy spends much of its time discussing the differences between those outlooks, rather than the difference between all of them and everything else' (*ibid.*). Thus, such seeming adversaries as consequentialism and deontology turn out to have more in common, relative to eudaimonistic ethics, than they have differences. In Kant and Mill, in the original position and the trolley problem, we ultimately find the same 'general picture of ethical life' (*ibid.*).¹⁰ For Williams, then, morality is 'the outlook, or, incoherently, part of the outlook, of almost all of us'. Morality is our current ethical *horizon*, in the sense that a horizon cuts off one's vision but also gives one the impression of surveying the whole landscape.

This brings us to the second difficulty. For now that we have started to see the unity of morality, it becomes difficult to see it as one ethical system among many, since it seems to occupy the whole territory of the ethical. This is why thinkers such as MacIntyre, Taylor, and Williams turn to history, and Greek ethics in particular, to help them denaturalize such modern truisms as the equation of ethics with altruism and obligation. Hermeneutically sensitive work with historically recessed texts can reveal alternative horizons of ethical thought (I stress the quality of the engagement since historical texts may be read simply as confirming our modern prejudices). Once one acquires this broader historical horizon, the entire complex of morality begins to appear as but one narrow sub-system within ethics.

We have now made short work of two interpretive problems presented by Williams' claim that morality is but 'one particular variety of ethical thought'. The third difficulty will prove more complicated, leading us into the heart of the ethics/morality distinction. The problem is that Williams seems to consider morality both an ethical system and an anti-ethical system. On the one hand, he sees morality as the modern inheritor of the tradition running down from Socrates' question; on the other hand he sees morality as a betrayal of that tradition, having banished Socrates' question to the self-help section at the bookstore. This ambiguity is plain when we consider the relation to the two fundamental ethical assumptions contained in Socrates' question. Morality does manifest an ethical lineage insofar as it emphasizes reflection in the realm of the practical, but it develops each of these core ethical notions in a fateful way. In the hands of morality, the practical attitude is transformed from something essentially partial to an instrument of impartiality. The invitation to reflection, meanwhile, is re-interpreted as a call to engage in a kind of public, procedural rationality. To see how the former reversal takes place, we must first understand the difference between ancient ethical reflection and modern moral deliberation. This will lead us into the notion of moral obligation until we return finally to impartiality and morality's suspicion of desire.

Both ethics and morality accord a high place to reason, but our conception of reason has changed radically since the time of the Greeks. In the classical conception of ethics, rationality is substantive. It involves knowledge of what is good and a perceptual ability to see what those goods might mean in concrete situations. The former amounts to a kind of contact with the order of things rather than the exercise of an ordering faculty. The latter, practical wisdom, involves letting one's ideals dictate what is salient in a situation even as one lets the specificity of the situation inform our ideals in ways we could not have anticipated.¹¹ In contrast, the modern conception of rationality is distinguished by its expository and procedural nature. We now consider something rational, Williams argues, only if the reasons for it can be spelled out clearly in a widely accessible language. It is not merely the demand for articulation of reasons that distinguishes the modern approach to practical reason, but its further demand for a clearly stated procedure for organizing and assessing such reasons.

Compare the place of argument in substantive ethics. It is certainly possible to argue within and across ethics, but such argument is always supported by, and indeed takes place in, thick, descriptive languages. This means that ethical argument inevitably takes the form of redescription. In other words, we tell stories in which the actors (ourselves and others) emerge as, for example, heartless, witty, or heroic. Such stories help us to determine not only if a particular evaluative term is fair, but also which ethical terms are most likely to be illuminating in the case at hand. It is not understood ahead of time that all actions will be judged, say, for their heroism. Rather, it is a particular narration—keyed to specific events and embedded in a community of discourse—that helps to convince us that a binary like heroic/cowardly fits the bill. This means that there is no limit to the number of considerations that might apply to a given case and no end to ethical argument. Ethical language is inescapably provincial—our rich languages of praise and critique grow out of concrete historical, social-cultural milieux, and the only way to become less provincial is through conversation, that is, through dialogical encounters with other evaluative languages.¹²

Morality, one of whose hidden ethical ideals is cosmopolitanism, takes this freedom from provinciality as one of its highest priorities.¹³ Only it hopes to opt out of the slow and, as it were, horizontal route of conversation, attempting to fly free of provincial tethers through abstraction. Thus morality seeks a common procedure for adjudicating all moral claims in a single deliberative language thin enough to be applicable in all situations. Indeed, in morality one single concept comes to dominate our ethical thinking. 'It is the mistake of morality', Williams argues, 'to try and make everything into obligations' (p. 174).

In a moment, I want to consider how this places the moral agent in a special bind and how it impoverishes our vocabularies of admiration and disdain. First, though, let us note one apparent attraction of this view, namely that it would seem to offer us a way to escape from one of the painful aspects of ethical

deliberation. In the ethical conception, life is understood as inevitably tragic in the sense that we are constantly confronted with choices, choices in which something good will be left undone. As MacIntyre puts it:

One way in which the choice between rival goods in a tragic situation differs from the modern choice between incommensurable moral premises is that both of the alternative choices which confront the individual have to be recognized as leading to some authentic and substantial good. By choosing one, I do nothing to diminish or derogate from the claim upon me of the other; and therefore, whatever I do, I shall have left undone what I ought to have done (MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], p. 224).

At first sight, morality might seem to be no different in this regard. After all, the ‘moral dilemma’ is the preferred genre of modern moral philosophy. On closer inspection, though, the difference between this tragic dimension of ethics and the conventions of what Edmund Pincoffs aptly calls ‘quandary ethics’ is clear (Pincoffs, 1971). Moral dilemmas, of course, offer no easy solution or perfect choice, but they do suggest that one should determine the right course of action. Enlightenment morality, MacIntyre argues, has taught us to search for a ‘principle of priority between moral principles’ that could help us select and justify the correct choice (MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], p. 224).

The moral actor may be spared the anguish of the tragic choice, but through its peculiar psychology, morality imposes another difficult fate. To illustrate this difficulty, Williams asks us to imagine a case where there is a conflict over an everyday obligation.¹⁴ Imagine that an artist—we will call her A—has promised to drive out to visit her friend B one weekend. As the weekend approaches, however, A suddenly learns of a rare opportunity: there is to be a show in town that weekend of one of her favorite artists, a source of ongoing inspiration for her own work. This is no mere scheduling conflict, mind you. A and B, who were once quite close, have grown more distant of late, neither of them quite sure whether this is the cause or the effect of their getting together less often. Meanwhile, A has cancelled before, always for a good reason, but not without causing tension. Finally, let us add that though A and B share many interests and a good deal of history, A and B have never really connected around A’s love of art. Should A skip the show or cancel her trip? Let us compare moral and ethical ways of handling this sort of situation.

Viewed ethically, this is an example of ‘tragic’ choice between rival goods. A enjoys B’s company and wishes that they could recapture the intimacy they once enjoyed. A worries that cancelling will not only hurt B’s feelings but significantly strain this relationship which she values. It is important to see that, in this ethical light at least, this is not merely a question of maximizing one’s pleasure. The question for A is not merely which course will better satisfy her existing desires. There is a more fundamental question raised by situations such as this, one that we can sometimes dodge or postpone, but never entirely avoid. That is

the question of what desires and commitments we should have. One crucial theme running through neo-aretaic thinkers such as MacIntyre and Taylor is that modern morality has led us to see goods merely as desirabilia (anything we happen to desire), as if their goodness stemmed from our desiring of them.¹⁵ For the critics of morality, however, this is a fundamental error: goods are not valuable because we value them; we value them because they strike us as good. If the skeptic fixes on this phrase ‘they strike us’ and points out that this is no guarantee that they are truly good, then he has actually helped to make our case. For it is just this gap between genuine goods, to which I truly owe my allegiance, and ersatz goods that gets erased on the projectivist view. As Taylor puts it, some goods—he calls them ‘hypergoods’ to distinguish them from mere desirabilia—must ‘stand independently of our desires, inclinations, or choices [since] they represent standards by which these desires and choices are judged’ (Taylor, 1989, p. 20). Put another way, A’s conflict involves tensions in her descriptions of herself. On the one hand, her identity is partly woven around the description of herself as ‘B’s friend’. She wants to be able to continue thinking of herself as someone who is a member of B’s circle and as someone who is a good friend in general. On the other hand, she sees herself as an ‘artist’ and as the kind of person who would not miss this show. In this way, even a fairly simple conflict has the potential to put us in touch with the basic ethical questions: Who am I? What do I really love? What do I hope to become? What sorts of things are worth putting at the center of my life? This ethical reading does not tell us which course A should choose, but it does highlight what is at stake in A’s choice.

Williams’ worry is that such ethical deliberation tends, given our modern moral temper, to be short-circuited by the notion of obligation. While talk of obligations would not seem to be very natural or helpful in a situation such as A’s, once it gets a foothold it tends to take over entirely. If A views cancelling with B as the breaking of a moral obligation to keep her promises, Williams suggests, she will then be tempted to understand her desire to go to the art show as a rival obligation. Why? Because, as Williams observes,

... obligations have a moral stringency, which means that breaking them attracts blame. The only thing that can be counted on to cancel this within the economy of morality, is that the rival action should represent another and more stringent obligation. Morality encourages the idea that *only an obligation can beat an obligation* (Williams, 1985, p. 180).

Feeling the bite of conscience, A will search for an even more stringent obligation to nullify the first. The problem is that it does not really make sense to say that A has an obligation to go to this particular art show of which she just learned. Thus, A may resort to a common strategy of moral agents, what Williams calls ‘*the obligation-out, obligation-in* principle’, answering ‘the demand within the morality system to find a general obligation to back a particular one’ (p. 181). A may understand her choice as flowing from, for

example, a general obligation to support the arts whenever possible. The idea is that since her promise to the arts is more general, it supersedes her promise to visit her friend on this particular weekend and she can cancel her trip with a clear conscience.

However, as Williams suggests, this may be just the beginning of A's problem:

Once the journey into more general obligations has started, we may begin to get into trouble—not just philosophical trouble, but conscience trouble—with finding room for morally indifferent actions. I have already mentioned the possible moral conclusion that one *may* take some particular course of action. That means that there is nothing else that I am obliged to do. But if we have accepted general and indeterminate obligations to further various moral objectives, as the last set of thoughts encourages us to do, they will be waiting to provide work for idle hands, and the thought can gain a footing (I am not saying it has to) that I could be better employed than in doing something that I am under no obligation to do, and, if I could be, then I ought to be: I am under an obligation not to waste time in doing things I am under no obligation to do . . . If obligation is allowed to structure ethical thought, there are several natural ways in which it can come to dominate life altogether (pp. 181–182).

Here Williams describes the knots which result when we try to live by morality alone, cramming all of the evaluative dimensions of life into the idea of obligation. And yet this extreme Calvinist logic—when all other work is done, one heads downstairs to move rocks from one side of the basement to the other—is not the only difficulty for the modern, moral actor.¹⁶ 'Blame is the characteristic reaction of the morality system', Williams notes, and 'remorse, or self-reproach, or guilt . . . is the characteristic first-personal reaction within the system' (p. 177).

This reductive and severe moral psychology leaves A in a difficult bind, making it difficult for her to articulate what is truly involved in the choice she faces. When the good is reduced to the right and the right is reduced to complying with obligations, we may feel a sense of vertigo at our newfound inarticulateness about the good. It is hard to fathom how so many different vocabularies of evaluation, whole worlds of appraisal—as different, one from the next, as Oscar Wilde is from Pascal—could be collapsed into the single idea of blame. The reduction in our emotional lives to the single feeling of guilt is no less severe. Gone are the myriad moral sentiments (if I may expand that phrase) from 'gut' reactions such as pride, shame, longing, affection, and disgust to more complicated emotional states like envy, aspiration, dignity, awe, and commitment. Gone are all those rich qualitative distinctions—from Sextus' disturbance/*ataraxia* through Rousseau's *amour propre/amour de soi* to Ellison's visibility/invisibility—those ethical phenomenologies so particular to a time, place, and writerly articulation that they can only be understood

through a rigorous hermeneutics and sustained empathetic engagement.¹⁷ Gone is all this rich diversity, replaced only by a digital moral logic: innocent or guilty.

We have now considered several key features of Williams' critique of morality: its distortion of practical reasoning, its convolution of moral psychology, and its drastic collapse of the richness and range of ethical considerations into the black hole of obligation. There remains one crucial component of morality left to consider: its commitment to impartiality and suspicion of desire. And it is this topic that will lead us to the question of the nature of professional ethics.

WHAT DO MORAL AGENTS WANT?

For much of the history of ethics, questions about what and how one desires or loves have been central topics for ethical consideration. In modern morality, while still boasting a starring role, desire is now always cast as the villain. And desire does seem perfect for the part. After all, if duty is to be the hero, then inclination must be the foil, since these appear to be opposites. Desire is grasping and self-interested; morality is about checking self-interest in the light of impersonal or altruistic demands. The history of ethics, however, belies the claim that such conclusions are inevitable. Indeed, in many ethical systems, desire is thought of precisely as a guide to what is good. Here Williams offers the example of the scholastic motto 'everything pursued is pursued as being something good' (*omne appetitum appetitur sub specie boni*) (p. 58). How do we get from inclination as a guide to the good to inclination as the antithesis of moral duty? How do we get from desire as a central ethical concept to desire as morally irrelevant, even dangerous?

In *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor traces just this history. Though Taylor's history is rich in incidental detail, for our purposes we may concentrate on two key moments, two major shifts in our understanding of reason, desire, and goodness. In ancient ethics, Taylor reminds us, reason was also thought crucial for leading a good life but this meant something very different than what it comes to mean in modernity. For the ancients:

We love the good, and the good we love is in the order of things, as well as in the wise soul, aligned with nature. But the second of these orders is not self-sufficient: we can only have order in the soul in seeing and loving the order of things. For Plato this means having a vision of the Good; for the Stoics this means seeing and affirming the course of the world . . . Reason is understood substantively: rationality is the power to grasp the order of things, itself a reflection of reason (Taylor, 1989, p. 255).

What is striking about this conception is its distance from the logic of modern values talk. As noted earlier, we moderns are apt to say that something is

good because we value it, a crucial and highly problematic reversal of the idea found in the ancients that we cherish something because of its goodness. In classical ethics, the good is importantly outside and independent of our will, and it is this very independence that compels our allegiance and helps us shape our lives.

Consider, by way of contrast, what Robert Bellah and his colleagues discovered in their interesting study of US moral psychology (Bellah *et al.*, 1985). They asked middle-class (and it seems mostly white) Americans from a range of professions why they made the choices they did in their lives. Invariably, their subjects responded that their choices flowed from their values. When pressed further, when asked why they held those values, they responded that these were the values they had chosen. Now the point is not to catch people out in a logical fallacy. The circular reasoning here is vicious because it impairs our ability to articulate our values and understand our choices. One subject, Brian, talks about an earlier time in his life as if talking about another person (pp. 5 ff.). As he sees it, his former self had one set of mutually supporting values and choices and his later self has another set. When asked what led to the change from one set to the next, he is at a loss. The person who chooses his values and whose values are backed only by choices will be prone to a feeling of arbitrariness and to a difficulty in perceiving the unity of his or her life.

In classical ethics, where our moral sources lie outside of us, the key questions are: Have we fixed our attention on what is truly important? Have we devoted ourselves to things truly worthy of our allegiance? Are our projects and desires oriented toward what is genuinely good? As these ideas are taken up and transformed by Christian thinkers, though, our moral sources begin to move inward. As Taylor puts it:

Christian thought introduces a change, well articulated in Augustine. This natural bent to love the good can fail; we suffer through a Fall from a perversion of the will. There are potentially two loves in us, a higher one and a lower one, charity and concupiscence (Taylor, 1989, p. 256).

In other words, there is a shift from emphasizing *what* one desires to *how* one desires. Of course, it makes sense in Christian thought to ask whether one loves mere worldly fame or eternal life, money or God, and so on. The point is, though, that even within the set of preferred objects, the question of motivation arises: it matters whether one is loving God for the right reasons. What Taylor wants us to see is that what was united in the classical Greek notion of *eros*, namely our wanting and our striving, begins to unravel into two rival notions: needy, appetitive *concupiscence*; and loving, giving *caritas* (in Greek, *agape*). To know whether I am living well, I must know if I am pursuing the right sorts of things; to know whether I am pursuing the right sorts of things, I must know whether the desire for them comes from the right part of myself.

And of course this is not the only change we see in Christian ethics. As Taylor points out:

This is one respect in which Christianity was radically different than pagan thought. The highest virtue was a kind of love, unstinting giving, whose paradigm exemplar gave his life for others. The centre of gravity of the moral life shifts (p. 258).

So, on the one hand, Christian ethics from the early Church Fathers all the way through Aquinas remains aretaic/eudaimonistic. The ethical task is still to answer Socrates' question, to explain to the agent why a certain form of life is good for him. What is radical is its elevation of certain virtues, its elaboration of new virtues, and its supernatural idea of the human *telos*. What divides, say, Aristotle and the *New Testament*, then, is not whether their views are broadly speaking aretaic, but how they conceive of the virtues. Neither the similarity nor the gap between Greek ethics and Christian ethics should be exaggerated, a point which MacIntyre stresses in his colorful way:

The New Testament's account of the virtues, even if it differs as much as it does in content from Aristotle's—Aristotle would certainly not have admired Jesus Christ and he would have been horrified by St. Paul—does have the same logical and conceptual structure as Aristotle's. A virtue is, as with Aristotle, a quality the exercise of which leads to the achievement of the human *telos* (MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], p. 184).

The ethics of St Paul is still structurally eudaimonistic—faith, hope, and charity are offered as elements of a happy and admirable life, and not bitter duties running directly contrary to all inclination. At the same time, we see the seeds of modern morality's categorical distrust of desire and ego in a thinker like Paul. 'Charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up', St Paul says, and 'seeketh not her own' (*I Cor.* 4, 5).

As Taylor shows, one can trace this distinction between concupiscence and charity right into early modernity. For example, he finds in the hyper-Augustinianism of the Jansenists the worry that one may never know whether one's prayer really flows from grace or from some self-serving motivation (Taylor, 1989, p. 356). From here, it is but a short jump to a similar secular, moral idea we find in Kant, whom Taylor finds drawing 'heavily on Augustine's model of the two loves, the two directions of human motivation' (p. 366).

According to Kant, the moral actor must not be inclined to do his duty or the action ceases to be moral. We are not acting *from* duty, Kant (1997 [1785], p. 13) argued, when some 'direct inclination' or longer term 'selfish purpose' leads us to act in accordance with duty. For Kant, we cannot even be motivated by 'the promotion of happiness of others' (p. 17). Moral actions must be motivated solely by respect for duty, by *Achtung* before the moral

law. Thus, if the shopkeeper in Kant's famous example gives the correct change to the child because he thinks this is smart business practice, it does not count as a moral action. On Kant's view, it would still be too consequentialist, if less egoistic, for the shopkeeper to desire the outcome that the child have the correct change to avoid being reprimanded by his parents. Meanwhile, the shopkeeper must also not be motivated by the desire to be a kind person (or a good Kantian). While our respect before the moral law does speak to our excellence (that we are rational beings with dignity) we are not supposed to listen lest it turn out that moral action be actually motivated by 'vanity or . . . inner satisfaction in spreading joy' (p. 14). Even actions that seem to have been entirely motivated by duty, Kant worries, may have a 'secret impulse of self-love' so that 'even the strictest examination can never lead us entirely behind the secret incentives' (p. 23). This leads Kant to the extraordinary claim that there may never have been a single moral action in all of human history (*ibid.*).

Earlier I mentioned that Taylor identifies two major transformations in our ethical understanding of desire and goodness. The first concerned the internalization of moral sources, the rise of *agape* and the denigration of *eros*; the second, early modern shift shows '*agape* . . . sliding into benevolence or altruism' (Taylor, 1989, p. 314). Thus, Taylor charts the change from wanting the good, to wanting in the right way, to willing rather than wanting. By the time the Christian doctrine of love—with its charity/concupiscence distinction—had hardened into the Enlightenment's calculus of self-interest and altruism, desire has become a guide not to the good but to the bad. As the inheritors of this austere tradition, the question 'Was it for my own gain or the good of the other?' is always at the center of our moral deliberations. We find ourselves defining duty in opposition to inclination and judging altruism by its distance from self-interest.

For Williams, the key is to recast this received idea in the form of an explicit argument, for when we do this we can see just how riddled with faulty assumptions it is:

1. Anything motivated by desire is directed toward pleasure.
2. The pursuit of pleasure is egoistic.
3. Ethical motivation involves a contrast with the egoistic.
4. [from 1–3] Therefore, desire cannot be the motivation for ethical activity.
5. The only motivation other than desire is a sense of obligation.
6. [from 4–5] Therefore, the ethical must be concerned with obligations.¹⁸

The argument may be valid but it is thoroughly unsound. According to Williams, 'almost all of the assumptions of this argument are wrong' (Williams, 1985, p. 49). About the first premise, for example, Williams notes that it is already false to think that the satisfaction of every desire issues in pleasure, but it is false to the point of incoherence to say that every desire

aims at pleasure. Some desires, Williams notes, aim at states of affairs that do not involve the agent at all. If a mother desires that, after her death, her children should find happiness, it is the outcome that is desired, not the pleasure one might take in imagining this outcome while still alive.¹⁹ Assumptions 2 and 3 are problematic as well, so the argument never makes it to the first conclusion (4). Even if it did, 5 seems wildly exaggerated and gives us little warrant for the final jump to 6. Our moral suspicion of desire has deep historical, cultural, and religious roots, but it is certainly not grounded by the argument above.

What is especially important for our purposes is to note how the historical formation of our opposition between altruism and self-interest, duty and inclination, dovetails with the rise of secular callings or professions. Taylor explains:

With the affirmation of everyday life, *agape* is integrated in a new way into an ethic of everyday existence. My work in my calling ought to be for the general good. This insistence on practical help, on doing good for people, is carried on in the various semi-secularized successor ethics, e.g. with Bacon and Locke. The principal virtue in our dealing with others is now no longer just justice and temperance but beneficence. With the internalization of ethical thought, where inclinations are crucial, the motive of benevolence becomes the key to goodness. (Taylor, 1989, p. 258)

As the Christian notion of charity travels from the world of Augustine to that of Bacon and Locke it changes in important ways. In particular, the new value on the horizon, according to Taylor, is an affirmation of the mundane world. The Christian idea of *agape* becomes ‘semi-secularized’, reworked as part of a new ethic of everyday life. And what is especially intriguing for our purposes is Taylor’s suggestion that there is an agapism built into the very logic of professionalization. With this in mind, we turn in the next section to a consideration of how Williams’ ethics/morality distinction maps onto the terrain of professional ethics.

FROM MORAL PROFESSIONALISM TO PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

The next question to consider is whether this moral cramp in our ethical thinking extends into the domain of professional ethics. Taylor has already provided us a hint, namely that the very idea of a profession was born of the same historical moment in which modern morality was taking shape. The concepts of altruism and professionalism seem to be intertwined. Consider, for example, William Sullivan’s rehearsal of the three conventional criteria for status as a profession:

(1) specialized training in a field of codified knowledge usually acquired by formal education and apprenticeship, (2) public recognition of a certain

autonomy on the part of the community of practitioners to regulate their own standards of practice, and (3) a commitment to provide service to the public which goes beyond the economic welfare of the practitioners (Sullivan, 1995, p. 2, numbering added).

About the first criterion, we will have more to say later.²⁰ The second and third criteria together point the way toward professional ethics as it has traditionally been conceived. The second criterion has two parts: professionals ask for autonomy in the conduct of their practices, but in return they promise to regulate their own behavior. Thus professional associations adopt codes of ethics, showing that they respect the rights of their clients and the laws of the land in addition to the goals of their practice. The third criterion relates to these goals, which themselves have a moral component. And this Sullivan spells out, precisely as Williams and Taylor would predict, in terms of something beyond their self-interest, in this case represented by their pecuniary interest. If the code of conduct is the expression of the second criterion, the oath of office may be the expression of this third criterion.

Here we need to distinguish between the forms of expression and what they express. For the cynic will rightly point out that no code of conduct has ever made anyone better. At most such codes make the amoral and the immoral better at covering their tracks. So we could say that though they are completely ineffective at improving conduct, at least they describe good conduct. And yet, such codes are usually too streamlined, and indeed reductive, to be able to map onto the real complexities of practice. And of course here is where the philosophical study of professional ethics steps in to explore specific dilemmas of practice in a nuanced way. For example, should a teacher contact a social worker if a student, writing a journal under a promise of confidentiality, writes something that may be a reference to past abuse he or she has suffered? For our purposes, though, the lesson is the same. Whether boiled down into codes and oaths, or articulated finely in philosophy journals, the focus and limits of this activity we call professional ethics remains constant. The focus is on what professionals owe their clients and when these role-specific obligations are trumped by more fundamental moral norms. Professional ethics is typically understood as the attempt to delineate the boundaries of professional conduct in light of more general notions of right action.

There is no denying the interest and importance of such questions. No one doubts, for example, how pressing and complex are the debates over doctor-assisted suicide or whether public school teachers should teach about contraception. And yet, such concerns do seem to fall squarely within the modern ethical system we have, following Williams, learned to call morality. What we have heretofore called 'professional ethics' would be better described as 'moral professionalism'.

This conclusion leads us to ask, what sorts of questions and concerns would occupy a genuinely professional *ethics*? What would it mean to connect

Socrates' question with professional life? What does work have to do with human flourishing? If posing this question was the work of this first chapter, answering it is the task of the entire book. However, I would like to make several preliminary points here.

First, we need to be wary of the problem that it is possible to adopt a virtue-theoretic approach to professional ethics without significantly challenging the narrowness of morality. Virtue-ethics can sometimes appear in a highly moralizing guise. Mentioning that we are attending to character along with principles and consequences is not enough. For it is quite possible simply to dress up a discourse of moral obligation in talk of professional dispositions, without indicating a shift to a genuinely aretaic or eudaimonistic view.

What I have tried to show is that central to a genuinely aretaic professional ethics is the question of how practices contribute to the lives of their practitioners. When it comes to the idea of professional life, we encounter the trademark moral dichotomies between inclination and duty, self-interest and altruism. Codes of conduct most heavily regulate the spaces where the professional's self-interest, understood as basic if not base appetites, is likely to lead to abrogation of duty. Thus, some who might be willing to go along with Williams and Taylor on the general ethical point, that self-regard and (not simply other-treatment) is a prime normative consideration, might still miss the implication of this for professional ethics. The notion that the flourishing of the practitioner is of ethical import is perhaps even harder to grasp given the logic of professionalism we have just reviewed.

For example, even Mike Martin's *Meaningful Work* (2000), a book which explicitly promises to rethink professional ethics in the spirit of Williams' insights, fails to address the questions of professional ethics as I have defined them. Martin barely touches on the way vocations provide meaning in the lives of practitioners. Focusing on how personal ideals help professionals do the right thing and serve the good of their clients, Martin largely neglects the question of how professional ideals might be vehicles of the practitioner's own ethical quest. For that matter, even Williams himself does not seem to have drawn the implications of his own critique of morality for professional ethics (see e.g. Williams, 1995).

Thus we confront the question anew. What does work have to do with human flourishing? Or to put the matter more skeptically: even if Williams is right that all individuals must confront Socrates' question, why think that they should confront Socrates' question *qua* architects, doctors, or teachers? The simplest reply might run as follows: ethics, as we have come to understand it, concerns the task of thinking about and shaping one's life as a whole; how we spend our time is of central ethical interest; work takes up a high percentage of our time; therefore, one's choice of work is a central matter of ethical concern. But let us consider the matter in more detail, beginning with the idea of justice.

At first blush, the concept of justice would seem to lead us away from the eudaimonistic conception of professional ethics we are seeking and right into the heart of moral professionalism. Is my work just? This question seems simply to ask how my professional conduct impacts my clients and others impacted by my practice. However, there is another way of posing the question, and of understanding justice. For we might also ask: Does my work do justice to myself? In this version of the question, justice becomes an educational concept, one which Robbie McClintock calls ‘formative justice’ (McClintock, 2004, pp. 72–99) McClintock contrasts formative justice with the more familiar, distributive justice as follows:

Issues of justice arise when a need or desire for something exceeds its supply, forcing deliberation about what each recipient is due. Issues of distributive justice stem from having to allocate a finite supply of public goods among a larger multiplicity of claimants. Issues of formative justice have to do, not with public goods, but with human potentials. In education, possibilities exceed feasible achievement, forcing choices. A person cannot actualize all her possibilities; nor can a group. Which ones will receive what effort? By exercising formative justice, a person selects among her possibilities and allocates a finite supply of talent and energy, of motivation and discernment, in pursuing these goals (p. 77).

McClintock traces this concept of formative justice back to Plato’s *Republic* but warns that we will not find it there if we come to the text with presentist notions of politics, education, and justice. As Jonathan Lear has pointed out, Cicero’s translation of *Politeia* as *Res Publica* was a fateful one, shaping its reception as a work about the ideal state.²¹ In contrast, Lear argues, it is a work about *Constitutionality*, about what it means to be well constituted, about how complex unities such as selves, groups, and cities hang together and fall apart. Readers who approach the *Republic* already convinced that justice means distributive justice and education schooling, will be prone to see the work as a work of political theory about the ideal state, structured around a questionable analogy between *polis* and *psyche*, with sprinklings of psychological insight and educational policy. For McClintock, the educational import of *Republic* is not found in Plato’s specific curricular recommendations. The entire work concerns the search for an ideal of formative justice, an ideal by which an individual or a group might decide how to do justice to its possibilities and potentials. There is indeed a coherent question of justice on both sides of the isomorphism. Answering Socrates’ question requires deciding what parts of yourself you will cultivate and what parts you will, by choice or necessity, ignore or stifle. Like the ruler of a city, you must find a way to do justice to the various parts of yourself. ‘Guided, well or poorly, by formative justice’, McClintock writes, ‘each person exerts educational effort to bringing his or her mix of aptitudes to their full employment in pursuit of sustainable fulfillment’ (McClintock, 2004, p. 78). The word ‘employment’

serves as a nice reminder that work in particular figures prominently in Plato's definition of justice. Justice, Socrates tells his interlocutors, is 'doing one's own work', practicing that 'for which he is naturally best suited' (Plato, 2004, p. 119 [Bk. IV, 433a]). How one chooses to make a living, or even what forms of work one chooses (paid and unpaid) hardly exhausts the range of questions relating to formative justice. But that they are central is not hard to see.

Still, someone might object that though all individuals must confront Socrates' question and though their choice of work is relevant to that question, such extra-moral, existential-vocational reflection is still something separate from professional ethics. The skeptic might insist that after work I am free to reflect on my career choices and any other existential questions as I please, but during work I must worry about the moral norms guiding and constraining my practice. To head off this objection, we need first to recall two related points.

First, ethical reflection requires that one try to grasp the unity of his or her life. Second, this is precisely what is so difficult in modernity, which works in myriad ways to obscure that unity. As MacIntyre has noted, part of what makes modern life so inhospitable to eudaimonistic ethics is the way it invites us to carve up our lives into developmental stages, to divide our time between labour and leisure, to hive off public roles and private selves (MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], p. 204).

With these reminders in hand we may now read the objection itself as one more example of such partitioning, in which the agent is asked to be moral from 9 to 5 and ethical on the weekends, to develop a public morality and a private ethics. After all, while it is important that it is *my* choice to be an engineer, lawyer, or social worker, the choice is not just about me. What makes the choice a good choice for me is in part the way it allows me to join a community of practice where, and perhaps only where certain features of the good life become visible and realizable. It is in the midst of our communities of practice that we can fully realize and reckon with what it means to think of ourselves *as* an engineer, lawyer, or social worker.

Let me close this preliminary case for the ethical significance of vocation by returning to Williams and taking up his notion of a 'ground project'. It was this idea—that personal projects played an important role in ethics—that helped Williams launch his assault on morality's monopoly in modern ethics. Personal projects are neither fleeting and lowly impulses, nor abstract and impersonal principles, meant to constrain the former. Rather they are a concrete expression of an individual's understanding of and attempt to lead an excellent and meaningful life. Williams' argument is that morality must but cannot accommodate this idea of ground projects. The argument begins with a thought experiment concerning what Williams calls 'categorical desires'.²² He asks us to 'imagine a person rationally contemplating suicide, in the face of some predicted evil' who nonetheless chooses to go on in life (Williams, 1981c, p. 11). In this case, Williams observes, he must be 'propelled forward into [life] by some desire (however general or inchoate)' (*ibid.*). This suggests the existence

of a class of 'categorical' desires and a reversal of the conventional wisdom that being alive is a condition of having desires:

Most people have many categorical desires, which do not depend on the assumption of the person's existence, since they serve to prevent that assumption's being questioned, or to answer the question if it is raised. Thus one's pattern of interests, desires and projects not only provide the reason for an interest in what happens within the horizon of one's future, but also constitute the conditions of there being such a future at all (*ibid.*).

Certain interests and desires develop in the course of leading a life and as a result of exploring the world, but here Williams reminds us of the transcendental function of care and concern. As Jonathan Lear, paraphrasing Heidegger, writes: 'The 'fact' that we care, then, is not simply an important fact about what we are like; it is a structuring condition of the universe of our possibilities' (Lear, 2000, p. 33).²³ That some desires serve this transcendental function does not make them rare or mysterious. With his concept of the 'ground project' Williams shifts from the level of logical possibility and function to that of psychological reality and detail. As Williams points out, it is not uncommon for 'a man [to] have, for a lot of his life or even for some part of it, a *ground* project or set of projects which are closely related to his existence and which to a significant degree give a meaning to his life' (Williams, 1981c, p. 12).

Thus, Williams upbraids moral philosophy for forgetting to take into account the crucial factor of what makes life worth living, of neglecting 'the question of why we go on at all' (p. 10). It is this basic existential fact that shows the limits of the idea (in its consequentialist or deontological variants) that impartiality is essential to morality. Williams explains:

A man who has such a ground project will be required by Utilitarianism to give up what it requires in a given case just if that conflicts with what he is required to do as an impersonal utility-maximizer when all the causally relevant considerations are in. That is a quite absurd requirement. But the Kantian, who can do rather better than that, still cannot do well enough. For impartial morality, if the conflict really does arise, must be required to win. And that cannot necessarily be a reasonable demand on the agent. There can come a point at which it is quite unreasonable for a man to give up, in the name of the impartial good ordering of the world of moral agents, something which is a condition of his having any interest in being around in that world at all (p. 14).

And yet, it is precisely this idea that partiality could be of ethical importance which morality finds impossible to digest.

To this end, Williams works to distinguish the partiality of ground projects—that it matters crucially whose projects they are—from the potential egoism of such projects:

Ground projects do not have to be selfish, in the sense that they are just concerned with things for the agent. Nor do they have to be self-centered, in the sense that the creative projects of a Romantic artist could be considered self-centered (where it has to be *him*, but not *for him*). They may certainly be altruistic, and in a very evident sense moral, projects; thus he may be working for reform, justice, or general improvement. There is no contradiction in the idea of a man's dying for a ground project—quite the reverse, since if death really is necessary for the project, then to live would be to live with it unsatisfied, something which, if it really is his ground project, he has no reason to do (p. 13).

What Williams is pointing to is that it is not only selfish and self-centered ground projects to which morality must object. Modern morality will struggle to value even philanthropic ground projects. To be sure, the philanthropist wants the philanthropic results, but he also wants to be the person achieving these results (or the person making this particular contribution to a larger collaborative project). In the framework of morality, this fact is either to be regretted (since many would say that the true altruist always works anonymously) or ignored as irrelevant.

In contrast, Williams points out three different levels on which it matters ethically whose project a project is (pp. 12–16). First, even if someone's array of projects is not particularly distinctive, the fact that it is this particular individual pursuing them still gives him or her 'distinctively, a reason for living this life, in the sense that he [or she] has no reason to give up and make room for others' (p. 15).²⁴ Second, one's choice of projects does typically differentiate one from others thus helping one answer not only the question 'Why go on?' but also the question 'Who am I distinctively to become?' Third, Williams points out that such individuation is not only a good for the one individualizing but is a collective good since it is a pre-condition for love and friendship, two indisputably precious human goods predicated on the non-interstitutability of human beings (pp. 15–17).

Certainly not all ground projects are professional practices and not all professions (or all parts of any single profession) suit themselves equally to becoming a project in this ethical sense. Nonetheless, we have now made a preliminary defence of the notion that professional ethics, if it is not to be reduced to mere moral professionalism, must include the question of the place of the practice in the practitioner's own quest to lead a good life. In the next chapter, we will extend this analysis of the relation of work and flourishing through an examination of MacIntyre's conception of a practice. In the subsequent chapters of Part I, we will turn to Hannah Arendt, John Dewey, and Hans-Georg Gadamer to further fill in our answer to the question 'How

does work contribute to the quest to lead a good life?’ One important question raised about this eudaimonistic conception of professional ethics will have to be deferred until the beginning of Part II. For when it comes specifically to the practice of teaching, this analysis of the first-personal dimension of ethics raises a specific objection: even if there is a place for eudaimonistic considerations in professional ethics as a whole, isn’t teaching—as a helping profession, a profession built around the needs of others and often demanding self-sacrifice—best understood as an altruistic calling? The question of why self-interest can and must be defended precisely in a ‘helping profession’ such as teaching will be the topic of Chapter 5.

NOTES

1. Other notable attempts to expose the peculiarity of modern morality include: Pincoffs, 1971; Stocker, 1976; Wolf, 1982; and Taylor, 1989, esp. pp. 78–90.
2. On the priority of the good, see, e.g.: Murdoch, 1985b [1970]; Sandel, 1998 [1982], 1984; and Taylor, 1989, esp. Part I. On the concept of a life as a whole, the reader may want to consult: MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], chap. 15; Williams, 1985, chap. 1; and Annas, 1993, chap. 1. On happiness or eudaimonia, see, e.g.: Akrill, 1980; McDowell, 1980; Williams, 1985, chap. 3; Annas, 1993; Lear, 2000, Lecture 1; and Kraut, 2007. Some important works in the general revival of virtue ethics are: Foot, 1978; McDowell, 1979; MacIntyre, 2007 [1981]; Nussbaum, 1986; Sherman, 1989; and Slote, 1992. On practical wisdom or phronesis, I recommend: Gadamer, 2004 [1960], pp. 309–319; Wiggins, 1980; Nussbaum, 1990b; MacIntyre, 1989; Taylor, 1995; and Lear, 2006a. Murdoch (1961, 1985 [1964]) was the early champion of secondary ethical terms; see also Williams, 1985, pp. 127ff. On the inseparability of the ethical from the social, historical and spiritual, see, e.g.: MacIntyre, 2007 [1981]; Hauerwas and MacIntyre, 1983; and Taylor, 1989. Two thinkers who have worked to show the relevance of aesthetics to ethics are Murdoch (1998) and Nussbaum (1990a).
3. On the connection of identity and ideals, and a narrative theory of self, see MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], chap. 15, and Taylor, 1989, esp. pp. 25–52. On the ethical importance of partiality and self-regard, see Williams, 1981b, 1981c; Cottingham, 1991, 1996; and Slote, 1997, 1999. For an example of the turn towards greater realism and complexity in moral psychology, see e.g. Flanagan, 1990 and Lear’s (1990, 1998, 2000) important psychoanalytic enrichment of ethics.
4. Though I would like to develop the ethics/morality distinction narratively in the text, the reader may appreciate a methodological discussion up front. In what follows, I will adopt Williams’ terminology, using the term ‘ethics’ for the older and broader conception of thinking about the normative and the term ‘morality’ for the particular sub-system that comes to dominate ethics in modernity. Readers should not be distracted by Williams’ admittedly arbitrary choice of terms here. Ethics comes from the Greek *ethikos*, and morality from the Latin *moralis* (coined by Cicero to translate *ethikos*) but both had a similar range of meanings centering around disposition or custom (see Williams, 1985, p. 6). Hegel made a similar decision, to use *Sittlichkeit* as a term of art for a substantial ethics rooted in communal life in contrast to the thin, rationalistic *Moralität* he saw in Kant (even though Kant himself used *Sittlichkeit* for Morality). For commentary on Hegel’s *Sittlichkeit-Moralität* distinction, see Taylor, 1979, pp. 82–94 and Habermas, 1990; Taylor (1989, p. 64) links Williams’ project with Hegel’s.

The fact is that *both* modern, English terms (and their modern, western equivalents in various languages) will tend to have (what Williams calls) moral shadings if he is right about the widespread modern reduction of ethics to morality. Indeed, when we compare phrases like ‘the moral life’ with ‘Senate Select Committee on Ethics’ (which handles things like disclosure of travel expenses) we see that in modern parlance ethics is sometimes the narrower term. What matters is that we mark the distinction simply and consistently and then develop it in detail.

Thus, Williams’ clear if arbitrary formulation seems superior to those of Taylor and MacIntyre. Taylor’s concern to reopen moral philosophy to questions about identity and ideals, issues of desire, emotion, and attention, and a vocabulary that is richly qualitative or unabashedly spiritual, is not at all dissimilar from Williams’ project. Unlike Williams, though, he chooses to retain the word ‘moral’ to name both the narrower and the broader versions of moral philosophy. This leads Taylor to adopt cumbersome phrases such as ‘morality in a narrow sense’ and confusing formulations such as his claim that ‘morality’ is only one of the ‘three axes’ along which we do our ‘moral thinking’ (Taylor, 1989, pp. 3, 15). MacIntyre, like Taylor, seems to want to keep both ‘ethics’ and ‘morality’ in play as terms admitting of broader and narrower uses. Thus, he uses both ethics and morality in describing the tradition he seeks to recuperate and the enlightenment project he repudiates.

I will sometimes refer to that which Williams, Taylor, and MacIntyre seek to restore as ‘substantive ethics’, but this has it’s problems as well, since I do not mean to suggest that the only narrowness in the morality system is its procedural quality. Meanwhile, as my Introduction and Part titles indicate, I will also use the phrase virtue ethics to mark the older, broader approach to the normative. Here again, though, it is important to get clear on just what sort of distinction this entails. For example, it is not enough to list, as most introductory texts in ethics now do, virtue ethics as one species of ethical theory along with consequentialism, deontology, contractualism, etc. If virtue ethics means simply a modern meta-ethical position in which character is stressed over principles and consequences, most of the important contrasts will be lost. After all, the point of the revival of virtue ethics has been to critique modern meta-ethical assumptions showing how, from (what Williams calls) an ethical vantage point, these various rival moral theories are actually united on key issues. Indeed, another reason to be wary of adding ‘virtue-theory’ to our list of modern moral theories systems is that what unites such disparate figures as Murdoch, Taylor, MacIntyre, Nussbaum, and Williams (who after all disagree on a great many very important issues) may be precisely their anti-theoretical stance (see e.g. Clarke and Simpson, 1989). Meanwhile, it is not just the term ‘theory’ but even the term ‘virtue’ that can be misleading. After all, ‘virtue’ remained a term in currency in modern moral thinking. The English term virtue can sound quite moralistic indeed. The work of philosophical retrieval would be easier if terms were simply lost; instead they become distorted. Schneewind, for example, offers an excellent treatment of the idea that the true ‘misfortune of virtue’ is not neglect, but rather its very uptake by modern moralists (1997). See note 19 of the Introduction for a discussion of examples of narrow virtue-ethical approaches to professional ethics.

With these caveats about both ‘virtue’ and ‘theory’ in mind, I am content to call my project a virtue-theory of work or virtue ethics of professional life (with special reference to teaching). At times, I will opt for the uglier terms *aretai* (an English neologism made as an adjectival form of the Greek *aretē*, meaning excellence or virtue) and eudaimonistic (a neologism from *eudaimonia*, meaning happiness or flourishing—see note 6 for more on this) since these terms evoke virtue ethics while also reminding us to be wary of our parochial conceptions of its key ideas.

5. This is Williams’ translation of *Republic* 352d (see Williams, 1985, p. 1). Cf. C.D.C. Reeve’s translation (Plato, 2004 [c. 380 B.C.E.]).

6. *Eudaimonia* is sometimes translated as happiness, but it is unlike modern concepts of happiness in important respects. *Eudaimonia* does not refer to fleeting moods but to the shape of one's life as a whole. Furthermore, whereas happiness is typically understood as a subjective experience, *eudaimonia* refers to objective qualities of that life. Whereas it might seem strange to challenge a person's self-report about a person's happiness or lack thereof, it might well be others who have the clearest perspective on whether a person is truly flourishing. Williams suggests 'well-being', but this term too seems to have been overtaken by largely subjective connotations (see Williams, 1985, p. 34). In what follows, I will sometimes refer to flourishing and sometimes simply retain *eudaimonia* untranslated to remind us of its distance from our preconceptions. To some, flourishing may sound too naturalistic—after all, we speak of the flourishing of plants. Thus, it may be helpful to keep in mind the phrases 'faring well' and 'living well'.
7. I explore this topic in greater detail later in the chapter (see pp. 31–).
8. Here I refer to Wittgenstein's famous private language argument and to Taylor's helpful application of it to the case of qualitative languages in his discussion of identity and 'webs of interlocution' (see Wittgenstein, 1973 [1953]; Taylor, 1989, pp. 35–39). The private language argument is explicitly treated in §143–75 of the *Investigations*, though Kripke makes the case that it is the sections leading up to §143 that are truly key to the argument (see Kripke, 1982).
9. MacIntyre and Taylor are both excellent on this point (see, e.g. Taylor, 1989, pp. 39–40; 1991).
10. The original position refers to the famous device employed by John Rawls (see, 1999, pp. 10–18 and 102–170). The trolley problem is a famous moral dilemma; see, for example, Thompson, 1985. In what follows, I draw primarily on Williams to characterize modern morality. However, the reader should also consult Taylor's brilliant 'portrait of a wide trend in modern moral philosophy' and MacIntyre's powerful indictment of the culture of emotivism (MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], chaps. 2–3; Taylor, 1989, pp. 78–90).
11. For this reading of Aristotle's *phronesis*, see Gadamer, 2004 [1960], pp. 309–319 and my discussion of practical wisdom in Chapter 4 (below, pp. 130–139).
12. Here I mean conversation both in its literal sense, i.e. talking with someone who tells different kinds of stories or belongs to another community of discourse, and in the metaphoric sense described by Gadamer encompassing encounters with texts, times, or aspects of the world which are partially alien to our sensibilities (see Gadamer, 2004 [1960], pp. 313–322).
13. If Williams is right that we cannot live without confronting Socrates question, and Taylor is right that to lead a life requires some sense—even if entirely tacit—of what is highest and where we stand in relation to such substantive ideals or 'hypergoods', then critics of morality face a riddle. For if modern morality truly invalidates and excludes such ideals, then how do modern moralists get on with their lives? The solution for both Williams and Taylor is to show how morality's preferences for thin universalisable rules and principles, and for altruistic duties and obligations, reveal an attachment to hidden ideals of true substance and unmistakable historico-cultural origin. The reference here to cosmopolitanism comes from Taylor's discussion of Habermas' discourse ethics (Taylor, 1989, p. 85). Williams points out another hidden ethic lurking within morality, the ideal of purity (a fact noted by Taylor in the passage just cited) (Williams, 1985, p. 195). Compare MacIntyre's discussion of the unmistakable stamp of Lutheran Pietism on Kant's moral philosophy (MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], pp. 43ff.).
14. Williams outlines this basic scenario, asking the reader to fill in the detail, which I have done (see Williams, 1985, p. 180).

15. For MacIntyre's critique of emotivism, see MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], chaps. 2–3. For Taylor's critique of projectivism and his defence of 'moral ontology' and the independence of hypergoods, see Taylor, 1989, Part I.
16. Thanks to Katie McMillan Culp for this memorable way of capturing the essence of Calvinism.
17. On *ataraxia*, or freedom from disturbance, in skepticism and other schools of Hellenistic ethics, see, e.g. Nussbaum (1996, esp. chap. 8). For Rousseau's distinction between healthy self-regard and that which is artificial and corruptible see his note in the *Discourse on Inequality* (Rousseau, 1997 [1754], p. 218; quoted in Neuhauser, 2008, p. 30) and his definition in Book I of *Emile* (Rousseau, 1979 [1762], pp. 92–93); Rousseau develops the distinction and its implications throughout *Emile*, but see especially Book IV; helpful commentaries on Rousseau's concepts of self-love include: Bloom's introduction (in Rousseau, 1979 [1762], pp. 3–28); Dent, 1988, chaps. 2-3; O'Hagan, 1999, chap. VII; and Neuhauser, 2008. For the definitive exploration of what it is like to live inside a bubble of structural misrecognition, see Ellison, 1995 [1952].
18. Here I have taken the liberty of formalizing Williams' narrative description of this argument (see Williams, 1985, p. 49).
19. Again, I have taken some liberties with an example provided by Williams (see Williams, 1985, p. 50).
20. I think Sullivan hedges here, mixing in some of what he hopes professionalism will mean with his statement of what it has meant. Though apprenticeship surely has been a crucial means by which all practices have sustained themselves, it is this codification of knowledge that has been key in earning the prestige of a profession. To have a body of detachable, transferrable knowledge standing behind you lends prestige. This idea has tended to valorize knowledge *that* over *know-how*, forcing practices to redescribe how they actually operate and to generate a body of research to legitimize themselves. If the key to success in a practice is practical wisdom, an idea we will consider later, than this can be learned only through experience and apprenticeship, and this idea is hard to reconcile not only with the huge apparatus of the professional schools but especially with the basic logic of professionalization as the rhetorical strategy for establishing, in Andrew Abbot's term, jurisdiction (see Abbot, 1988). I return to these issues in Chapter 8 (see below, pp. 254–256 and 273–278).
21. Seminar presentation, Fudan-UIUC Advanced Training and Research Seminar on Philosophy of Education, College of Education, University of Illinois, Champaign, IL, July 7–9, 2008.
22. In what follows, I am drawing primarily from Williams, 1981c. However, an equally important source for this line of thought is Williams, 1981b. Compare Williams, 1981a; and 1973, chaps. 3–4 and 15.
23. I explore this theme in detail in relation to Dewey's concept of purposiveness in Chapter 4 (see below, pp. 121–125). See also Lear's brilliant exploration of what it might mean to live one's way through to a new horizon of possibilities when one's cultural frame has collapsed (Lear, 2006a).
24. For a fascinating investigation which makes this need to make room for oneself central to its philosophical anthropology, see Becker, 1997.

2

Worlds of Practice: MacIntyre's Challenge to Applied Ethics

What the dominant conception of applied ethics partially conceals from view is a rediscovery of morality as such (MacIntyre, 1984b, p. 512).¹

The question which is perhaps the most important that you could put to me is that of how the concept of a practice must be further developed, if it is to be as philosophically fruitful as I hope it may be. In *After Virtue*, I provided a general characterization of practices and I gestured towards some examples. But a great deal more needs to be said (MacIntyre, 1991, p. 71).

INTRODUCTION

Our aim is to understand in a more robust way what professional ethics means, and in the last chapter we took our first step. The question of what a profession means to its practitioners, often overlooked, is in fact central to professional ethics. Following Williams, we have suggested that any conception of professional ethics that excludes from its view the role of work in the practitioner's own quest to lead a flourishing life is not truly or fully an *ethics* of professional life, but rather belongs to a narrower field we have called moral professionalism. If we can recover an expanded conception of ethics, one capacious enough to encompass self-cultivation and self-interest, then it follows that our understanding of applied ethics can and must be similarly expanded.

What, then, does it mean to apply these neo-aretaic ideas to professional practice? As it turns out, the next step in articulating our robust conception of professional ethics is precisely to reject the premise of this question. Ethics does not need to be *applied* to professional practices; it is fundamentally practical. Practices do not sit at the endpoint of ethical reflection, passively awaiting ethical understanding to guide them, but are themselves formative of ethical understanding. To understand why this is so, we need to take up, in detail, the contribution to virtue ethics made by Alasdair MacIntyre.

With the publication of *After Virtue* in 1981 (2nd edn. with a new postscript, 1984; 3rd edn. with a new prologue, 2007; henceforth MacIntyre, 2007 [1981]), MacIntyre shocked the world of moral philosophy with his version of the road not taken. After a damning critique of liberalism and the Enlightenment, MacIntyre unveiled his flamboyant solution: return to

Aristotle. Those not put off by his apocalyptic history usually find one of his positive claims unpalatable. Indeed, it may be MacIntyre's special distinction to strike half of his readers as an old-fashioned, universalising metaphysician (since he defends a version of tradition and teleology) while striking the other half as a dangerous relativist (since he offers a radically pluralist conception of moral practices). In the rush to debate this or that provocative claim, though, what has remained too obscure is the complex architecture of MacIntyre's theory as a whole. This chapter is devoted to explicating and extending this theory.

In the first part of the chapter, I rehearse the basic structure of his theory, focusing on one element needing clarification and development. MacIntyre posits two closely related moral entities, virtues and goods, arguing that both receive a crucial part of their meaning and substance in each of three interdependent moral contexts: that of practices, individual life narratives, and moral traditions. While much has been made of his account of the moral virtues and his defence of tradition, the crucial dimension of goods at the level of practices deserves further study. The concept of 'goods internal to a practice' itself admits of a complex structure, and in what follows I develop a typology of such 'internal goods', building on MacIntyre's suggestive examples. This close engagement with MacIntyre's concepts of practice and internal goods will help us in our search for a true virtue ethics of the professions in two ways. First, showing how practices are themselves ethical sources helps us reject the application model that plagues professional ethics. Second, the concept of internal goods helps us to flesh out the conclusion of Chapter 1. Understanding internal goods, which are goods for the practitioner, helps show how the *eudaimonia* of the practitioner is a central concern of professional ethics. Putting these two points together, we may say that MacIntyre helps us to see that and how a truly aretaic professional ethics is concerned with professional practices as sites where practitioners not only do good, but where they encounter the good.

Of course, all of this hinges on the assumption that any given profession counts as a practice in MacIntyre's special sense. In Chapter 6, I will take up the question of whether teaching counts as a practice, especially in light of MacIntyre's own surprising claim that it does not. But before we get to this point, there is more work to be done in clarifying what counts as a practice for MacIntyre. Thus, while the first half of this chapter introduces a quick and workable definition of practice as part of explicating MacIntyre's overall theory, the second half is devoted to a close reconstruction, from MacIntyre's discussions of practices, of criteria for determining what counts as a practice.

THE ARCHITECTURE OF MACINTYRE'S MORAL THEORY

Let us begin by getting clear on how MacIntyre understands goods, virtues, and their relation. A good is something we judge to be worthwhile to have,

achieve, attend to, or participate in. As such, goods are what provide us with reasons for acting (see, for example, MacIntyre, 1999, pp. 64). In other words, a good is the *telos* of an activity, or *that for the sake of which we act*.² This also means that MacIntyre will define goods as the ‘characteristic objects of human desire’, but only if he can add two caveats (MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], p. 196). First, we desire them because they are good and not the other way around. Second, while the achievement of goods is satisfying, this is not why we pursue them (p. 197). If I paint because it pleases me, then I am pursuing the good of pleasure and not the goods of painting (even though the realisation of such goods can be quite enjoyable). Finally, a good is something that we simultaneously value for its own sake while also judging that it ‘contributes to or is partially constitutive of [our overall] well-being’ (MacIntyre, 1999, p. 64).

Like any Aristotelian, MacIntyre understands the virtues as acquired excellences of persons, as dispositions to act for the good. On one level, then, virtues are instrumental to goods. At the same time, since the virtues are partly constitutive of our well-being they themselves constitute goods. We want to be courageous, for example, because this is part of the fabric of a good life, and not merely because courage will enable us to attain some good. Even though the virtues are eminently useful for achieving the good, one must, paradoxically, deem the virtues intrinsically valuable in order to possess them and thereby derive their usefulness (see e.g. MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], p. 273; cf. 1983, p. 463). One final point about the virtues: MacIntyre tends to restrict the word virtue to moral excellences of character—dispositions to do the right thing or qualities that help sustain communal projects—and to treat non-moral excellences of persons (e.g. wit, grace, perseverance) as goods.

According to MacIntyre, it is a mistake to try to say much more about goods and virtues in general, since goods and virtues do not exist in general. It is MacIntyre’s innovation to point out that we strive for the good in three interdependent but distinct domains where goods and virtues receive their meaning and substance (see Figure 1). The primary sphere in which human

	Goods	Virtues
Moral Traditions	Communal goods and cultural-epochal horizons that serve to generalize and prioritize the variegated goods found at the other levels.	Virtues which sustain community and generalized versions of the virtues below.
Individual Life Narratives	Each person’s understanding of his or her own <i>eudaimonia</i> or flourishing.	Some virtues such as constancy enter at this level but these are basically the virtues below, synthesized and inflected by individuals.
Practices	Internal goods, or goods internal to each particular practice.	Those virtues, or aspects of virtues, which help practitioners of a particular practice realize its internal goods by enabling them to cooperate and to otherwise maintain the integrity of the practice in the face of institutional expediency.

Figure 1: Goods and virtues defined at three levels of the moral life

beings encounter the good is in the range of activities MacIntyre calls ‘practices’.³ In this category, MacIntyre includes the performative and the productive, the vocational and avocational. What interests MacIntyre is the way that long-standing, complex human activities—arts and sciences, sports and games, trades and professions—activities that grow out of social life and remain cooperative in execution, tend to develop into distinctive ethical worlds.⁴

Each genuine practice becomes home to distinctive goods, and distinctive understandings of common goods. Practices such as architecture, baseball, and chemistry do more than produce buildings, pennant races, and periodic tables: each discloses a different aspect of human flourishing. It is inside such worlds of practice that practitioners encounter thick and distinctive notions about what it is worthwhile to participate in, excellent to achieve, and admirable to become. Both painters (of a certain stripe) and priests (cut from a certain cloth) strive for contact with the transcendent, though what this means is different in each case and only possible to articulate within the terms of the given practice. This is why MacIntyre calls goods at the level of practices ‘internal’.

MacIntyre considers practice the primary moral context because it is only through learning to pursue the good *qua* doctors, dancers, and diplomats that we acquire enough moral knowledge to begin reflecting on the good as such. Reflection on the shape of one’s individual life or on the human *telos* is a later, synthetic activity which makes use of the more determinate *tele*—the philosopher’s quest for wisdom or the pitcher’s ‘perfect game’—that we encounter as members of this or that practice.

If virtues are dispositions to act for the good and the good reveals only aspects of itself through the prism of practices, then we should expect to find the virtues similarly refracted at the level of practices. Indeed, it is MacIntyre’s position that in each genuine practice the moral virtues put down roots, flourishing in distinctive ways. Honesty, for example, takes on new meanings in the contexts of parenting, portraiture, and psychotherapy. Specifically, MacIntyre suggests that at the level of practices the virtues are those dispositions which enable practitioners to cooperate and maintain the integrity of the practice in the face of institutional expediency. In serving these functions within particular practices, the virtues gain further definition and particular inflections.

This is not to suggest that MacIntyre is a moral nominalist. When we speak of patience in astronomy, bird watching, or child rearing we are talking about the same virtue. On the other hand, we are talking about it at a fairly general and uninformative level. As MacIntyre explains:

Patience is the virtue of waiting attentively without complaint, but not of waiting for anything at all. To treat patience as a virtue presupposes some adequate answer to the question: waiting for what? With the contexts of practices a partial, though for many purposes adequate answer may be

given: the patience of a craftsman with refractory materials, of a teacher with a slow pupil, of a politician in negotiations (MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], p. 202).

What prevents this multiplication of varieties of patience from fracturing the very concept of patience itself is the work done at the second level of valuation, that of the individual life narrative.

As we discussed in Chapter 1, ethics is rooted in the practical predicament of each individual who must decide what to do in concrete situations and how to envision his or her life as whole. Thus, while I may have a philosophical impulse to inquire into the good life for human beings as such, the question that is inescapable for each individual is ‘what is *my* good as a human being?’ (MacIntyre, 1990, p. 128). Here MacIntyre follows Aristotle who writes that ‘Human beings . . . should pray that what is unqualifiedly good should be their good, but it is their goods that they should choose’.⁵ To understand and pursue my own flourishing, I must evaluate, order, and synthesise the plurality of goods and virtues encountered at the level of practices. Here is how MacIntyre describes the relation between the first two levels:

To be excellent at achieving the goods of this or that particular practice is to be good *qua* member of a fishing crew or *qua* mother of a family or *qua* chess player or soccer player. It is to value and make available goods that are worthwhile for their own sake. Yet for each individual there is the question whether it is good for him or her that the goods of this or that particular practice should have this or that place in her or his life (MacIntyre, 1999, p. 66).

Even if I have learned well what it means to be a good mother, musician, and mechanic, I will still face the further questions of what place each practice should have in my life and how to integrate their distinctive modes of perception and valuation into one perspective. To help us gain a vivid picture of the dangers of thoughtless transpositions of goods from one practice to another, MacIntyre asks us to imagine a great explorer bringing ‘the ability to be ruthless and relentless in driving oneself and others’, a prime good internal to wilderness exploration, into the practice of nurturing a family (MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], p. 275). Virtues must be commensurated as well. If I learn honesty in painting and courage in wrestling, I will find myself—whenever I am away from the studio and the wrestling mat—having to decide whether a given situation calls for honesty, courage, neither or both. Even if I have determined which virtue is the one in demand, there is still work to be done. I will, for example, have to synthesise the different understandings of patience I have gained as a parent, potter, and politician if I am to be not only a patient person but also an integral one.

These examples point to a further feature of MacIntyre’s theory. For it is not only the need to prioritise and synthesise that leads to distinctive development of goods and virtues at the level of the individual life narrative.

Working through practical predicaments and confronting Socrates' question—selecting, synthesising, and ordering our ethical commitments—itself calls for particular types of excellence. As we have just seen, to act virtuously in a concrete situation requires the ability to judge what virtue (or virtues) the situation calls for. It also requires us to be open enough to the irreducible details of the situation to let them instruct us about what that virtue means in this particular context. Such judgment is of such central, ethical importance that it constitutes its own virtue, indeed the keystone of the virtues, namely *phronesis* or practical wisdom. In situations of any complexity, i.e. life, there is no recipe or decision procedure to indicate the right course of action and rescue us from the burden of judgment. Even in the patience example, when the virtue in question was certain, there was still the work of reconciling different aspects of patience. That this can be done admirably and less than admirably is marked by terms of approbation and disapprobation such as tact, integrity, and simple-mindedness.

Indeed, often there is no right course of action. As we noted in the last chapter, life rarely confronts us with textbook moral dilemmas, where we can identify the moral ought and avoid the moral error. It is more likely, MacIntyre suggests, that we will find ourselves confronting 'tragic' dilemmas involving a choice between conflicting goods, both of which are 'authentic and substantial' (p. 224). In such situations, 'whatever I do, I shall have left undone what I ought to have done' (*ibid.*). In deciding what goods to prioritise, we define ourselves and give shape to our lives. And it is not only which path we take at the fork in the road that matters, but how we deal with ethical conflict itself. Our caution and our decisiveness, our resolve and our regret, all of this speaks to our character and excellence. How one copes with such existential dilemmas reveals whether we are indecisive or overhasty, rigid or open-minded (I explore this point in detail in Higgins, 2009b). As MacIntyre points out, certain virtues (or meta-virtues) such as Kierkegaard's 'purity of heart' or Jane Austen's 'constancy' could only come into play at this level where the unity of an individual life is in question (pp. 182–183, 242–243).

In MacIntyre's third and broadest domain, we inquire into the good *qua* human beings and the virtues are understood as those 'qualities the exercise of which leads to the human *telos*' (p. 184). Such inquiry is bound by the moral horizons of a tradition. Within the ethos of a culture and age, one finds a hierarchy of fundamental goods guiding its sense of what is worth striving for in human life. Likewise, the meanings of virtue terms will vary across traditions. Temperance, for example, meant something quite different in the Christian tradition than what it had meant to the Ancient Greeks. Indeed, what counts as a virtue in one tradition may count as a vice in another tradition and vice versa. Here MacIntyre offers the example of the tension between the Greek virtue *megalopsuchia* (magnanimity, great souledness) and the Christian virtue of humility (p. 182).

Though there may be tensions between the meanings of moral terms across the three levels of valuation, MacIntyre's three moral domains are ultimately

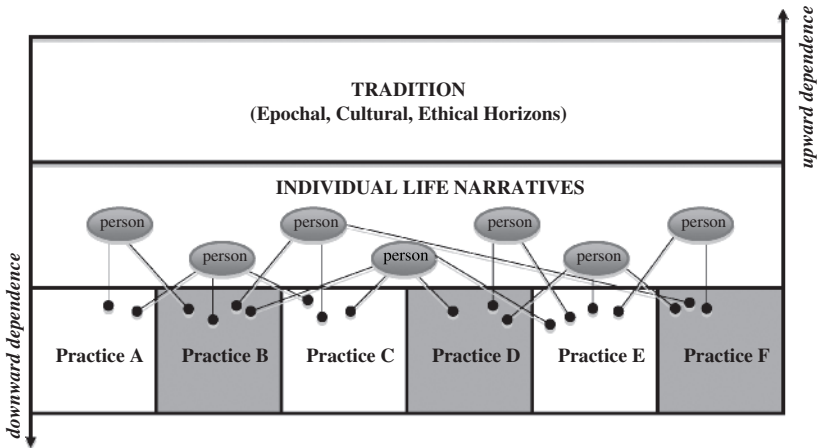


Figure 2: Two forms of interdependence among domains of ethical life

complementary, indeed interdependent (see Figure 2). In fact, we can detect both what we might call an upward and a downward dependence among the three levels. The upward dependence can be seen as one moves from the level of practices, where goods and virtues are specific and multifarious, through the level of the individual, where some work of synthesis and hierarchisation is already necessary, to the level of the community where fewer, more general goods and virtues are endorsed by all. Here is how MacIntyre describes this upward dependence:

Individuals characteristically find themselves participating in a number of types of activity, each with its own set of goods. When therefore they seriously ask themselves the question ‘what is my good?’ one of their concerns in answering it must be to become able to put in order the various goods which they acknowledge, finding for each its due place in relation both to other such goods and to their own overall good. And this they can only succeed in doing in company with those others who participate with them and with each other in various practices, and who also participate with them in the common life of their whole community (MacIntyre, 1994, p. 288).

MacIntyre describes his three levels as interdependent, each nested within the next as one moves upward in generality. The goods of practices need to be evaluated, synthesised, and ranked by individuals and this work is constrained and guided by communal norms. If the good were only disclosed at the level of practices, we would encounter a relativity of parochial goods and a ‘certain subversive arbitrariness [would] invade the moral life’ (MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], p. 203). This potential incommensurability is checked at the second level where individuals order competing goods, and the parochialism of the first two levels is corrected at the third level where ethical

reflection involves our communal projects. ‘For every society’, MacIntyre remarks, ‘there is the question of whether it is good for that society that the goods of this or that particular practice should have this or that place in its common life’ (MacIntyre, 1999, p. 66).

There is also a downward dependence across the three levels of valuation. For MacIntyre, individual and communal ethical reflection depend on the existence of practices in three ways. First, communities rely directly on practices such as parenting, teaching, and city planning to pursue their communal goods (MacIntyre, 1994, p. 288; cf. 2007 [1981], pp. 187–188). Second, these overarching goods are themselves ‘integrative of and partly structured in terms of the goods internal to particular practices, and never to be understood as wholly independent of them’ (MacIntyre, 1994, p. 288). Third, ‘the work of integrating those [internal] goods into individual and communal lives itself has the structure of a practice’ (*ibid.*).

It is worth elaborating on the second of these points. While it is only in light of our deep traditional commitments that we are able to decide what place the good of a particular practice is to be accorded in our overall conception of the good life, it is practices which generate ‘new ends and new conceptions of ends’ (MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], p. 273). MacIntyre describes practices as ‘precisely those ongoing modes of activity within which new ends emerge, are revised, are lost from sight, are rediscovered . . . while new sets of means have to be devised and redevise accordingly’ (MacIntyre, 1984a, p. 36). Without the original discovery of goods within the many practices, there would be literally nothing for individual and communal ethical reflection to work with.

Perhaps even more important is the fact that such reflection relies on the constant rediscovery of these goods in their spark and substance. Ethical ideals that speak to everyone regardless of their location in and across some variety of local practices are likely to be banal. ‘Concepts’, MacIntyre writes, ‘are embodied in and draw their lives from forms of social practice’ (MacIntyre, 1991, p. 69). Practices feed our moral imagination, giving us new ideas about what is worth striving for and re-embodiment, re-vivifying longstanding ideals. In other words, if the upward dependence is driven by a need for coherence in our moral vocabulary, the downward dependence is driven by the constant need for innovation in and reinvention of our ethical language.

I think this helps us understand the last part of MacIntyre’s famous definition of a practice in *After Virtue*:

By a ‘practice’ I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to practices are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, *with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended* (MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], p. 187, emphasis added).

This last phrase is an ambiguous one since it seems to refer to two different types of systematic extension or ethical progress at the same time. The first concerns progress within the practice. To excel in a practice, MacIntyre argues, is always both to achieve what current standards dictate as excellent and to go beyond existing standards. To excel is to show how our existing standards could be improved in light of the ideal ‘of fully perfected work’ (MacIntyre, 1990, p. 66). According to MacIntyre, this means that practices are marked by ‘sequences of . . . progress toward and beyond a variety of types and modes of excellence’ (MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], p. 189). Thus, to be an excellent architect is both to design excellent buildings according to current standards of excellence and to help the community break through the crust—to adapt a phrase of Dewey’s—of current architectural conventions (see Dewey, 1954 [1927], p. 183).

So far, so good, but this seems to be at most only part of what MacIntyre means when he defines practices as activities which lead to the result ‘that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended’. Our architect has (by building well and questioning how current conceptions of the perfect building relate to a truly perfect building) so far extended only the ability of architects to strive to create the perfect building. Notice though that MacIntyre speaks of ‘human powers’ and ‘human conceptions’, not only those of practitioners. We can understand this word ‘human’ if we connect it with MacIntyre’s statement noted earlier that practices are where ends are ‘discovered and rediscovered’ (MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], p. 273). A true practice is not entirely a world in itself but communicates with the rest of society. It has the power to teach all of us something new about what is worth striving for and about the forms of excellence.

This suggests that when an outstanding practitioner—Muhammad Ali for example—becomes a cultural hero, two things are going on. It is not only that we contemplate Ali as an example of greatness in boxing, but also that we have begun to learn from greatness in boxing something new about greatness in general.⁶ We extend, concretise, and reanimate our notions of human flourishing. Without the generativity of practices, we would inhabit a shrunken and gray moral universe with only a couple of known things worth striving for and these existing not as palpable purposes but as prosaic ideals. Practice, MacIntyre teaches us, is the poetry of the moral life.

A CLOSER LOOK AT INTERNAL GOODS

So far I have been working with an overly simplified conception of internal goods, equating them with the *tele* of practices. While this captures the spirit of MacIntyre’s position, it is important to qualify and expand on this statement. Internal goods, while intimately tied to the *telos* of a practice, are not identical with it. Furthermore, the concept of internal goods turns out to

be quite variegated. From MacIntyre's examples, if not always in his explicit formulations, we can reconstruct an interesting taxonomy of types and sub-types of internal goods. First, let us look more closely at the idea of *telos*.

This much still stands: inside each practice is a distinctive vision of what it is worthwhile to achieve. 'Every craft', MacIntyre writes, 'is informed by some conception of a finally perfected work which serves as the shared *telos* of that craft' (MacIntyre, 1990, p. 64).⁷ These standards of excellence particular to practices are embodied in rich, idiosyncratic evaluative languages. Each practice has its own way of talking about better and worse and its own way of picturing best. However, we now need to make two distinctions.

First, it is important to see that this evaluative teleology is closely tied to but not reducible to the more literal aims that structure the practice. A fishing crew, to use one of MacIntyre's favorite examples, aims at catching fish, but that for the sake of which the crew members act is 'never only to catch fish', but 'to do so in a manner consonant with the excellences of the craft' (MacIntyre, 1994, p. 284). When I head down the seafood aisle of the supermarket with the aim of getting fish, this activity hardly puts me in touch with the goods internal to the practice of fishing. This distinction, by the way, does not apply only to productive practices. An archer aims at the bull's-eye, and without this aim the practice of archery would not have its characteristic structure. Still, the *telos* of archery is not the bull's-eye itself, but some set of ideals including accuracy. Here is how MacIntyre makes this distinction in response to a critic:

The goods internal to practices . . . are not the ends pursued by particular individuals on particular occasions, but the excellence specific to those particular types of practice which individuals achieve or move towards in the course of pursuing particular goals on particular occasions (MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], p. 274).

Having distinguished the literal aim from the *telos* of a practice, we now confront a second complication. Typically, MacIntyre speaks of internal goods as something 'realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence' definitive of a practice (p. 187). In other words, internal goods cannot be the same as the standards themselves. This ambiguity is resolved by making a distinction between ideals conceived and excellence achieved (cf. MacIntyre, 1990, p. 62). The *telos* of a practice, the vision of the fully perfected work, recedes like the horizon as we approach it; by definition it outstrips our ability to realise it. (Even though the *telos* is revised as the practice evolves, each form of the *telos* serves as a horizon for actions within the practice, just as sailors may choose to set course by a different star without having reached the first star or expecting to reach the second.) But it is in light of that *telos* that we can name the kind and degree of actual achievements made by outstanding if fallible practitioners. Internal goods are not the distant points on the horizon but the journeys toward the good. So,

each practice has literal aims which structure the activity and a vision of complete excellence which gives practitioners reasons for acting. This vision, though itself unrealisable, enables practitioners to realise some modicum of excellence in the form of finite achievements. We may define internal goods, then, as the partial realisation of the excellence definitive of a particular practice.

Though this is workable as a general definition, MacIntyre's own examples suggest a more finely differentiated account, with a variety of specific types and subtypes of achieved excellence. The first distinction involves where internal goods are found. For MacIntyre, all internal goods are something 'realised' by practitioners, constituting part of what makes the practice a 'rewarding reality' for its practitioners (MacIntyre, 1994, p. 286; 1991, pp. 71–72). However, not all internal goods are realised *in* practitioners. One crucial type of internal good is found in the works created by productive and performative practice. Some of the goods internal to the art of the novel are located in *Mrs. Dalloway* or *Fanny and Zoey*. On October 30, 1974, a good internal to the practice of boxing was realised by the entire boxing community as it witnessed a transcendent performance, Muhammad Ali's epic upset of George Foreman in Kinshasa.

If the first type of internal good is located in the work or performance, the second type is realised in the character, life, and experience of the practitioner. Here as elsewhere MacIntyre draws on Aristotle who not only holds that 'every good is the *ergon* of a *techne*', but that 'what a *techne* produces in those who practice it is some particular capacity, a capacity to be achieved' (MacIntyre, 1990, p. 61).⁸ In learning how to transform material into something excellent, the practitioner must also transform herself. The practitioner's self is the second *ergon*, if you will, of any practice. MacIntyre explains that apprentices to practices have to overcome 'inadequacies of desire, taste, habit, and judgment' (p. 62). To overcome such limitations—to hone one's perception, deepen one's sensitivities, and develop one's powers—is good. One of the internal goods of dance, for example, is the development in the dancer of (dance-specific forms of) poise, power, precision, and grace.

As it turns out, excellences of character are only one sub-type of internal good located in the practitioner.⁹ In MacIntyre's discussion of portrait painting in *After Virtue* we find another sub-type. After triangulating the *telos* of portrait painting between two aphorisms—Wittgenstein's 'the face is the best picture of the human soul' and Orwell's 'at fifty, everyone has the face he deserves'—MacIntyre tells us that in striving to achieve this *telos* 'at least two different kinds of goods internal to the painting of human faces and bodies are achieved' (MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], p. 189). The first is 'the excellence of the products, both the excellence in performance by the painters and that of each portrait' (*ibid.*). The second 'is the good of a certain kind of life', 'it is the painter's living out of a greater or lesser part of his or her life *as a painter*' (p. 190). Here MacIntyre contrasts the excellence of the product not with the cultivation of personal qualities and capacities,

but with the good of what we might call a 'biographical genre'. The idea is that, while Warhol is not Whistler and Picasso not Pollock, there is meaning in the idea of living as a painter. Painting offers its practitioners resources for shaping their lives. The painterly life is like a genre and just as writers may say something new and distinctive within, say, the short story form, so too may an individual painter write their own life narrative within the genre of the painterly life.

In addition to excellences of character and the good of a biographical genre, MacIntyre occasionally evokes a third sub-type of goods internal to practices located in practitioners. When MacIntyre discusses the goods internal to chess, for example, he speaks of 'the achievement of a certain highly particular kind of analytic skill, strategic imagination, and competitive intensity' (p. 188). While the first two items in MacIntyre's list probably fall into the category of excellences of character, the third points toward what I will call a practice's 'moral phenomenology'. Just as Thomas Nagel (1991 [1974]) famously asked of bats, we can ask, What is it like to be a cellist (a chef, a chemist, a character actor)? What is it like *for the* cellist to be a cellist? Or we could borrow from Hans-Georg Gadamer's theory of play to help us capture this idea (see Gadamer, 2004 [1960], pp. 102–129). 'Every game', Gadamer says, 'has its own proper spirit' (p. 107). In order to experience its special form of freedom—shall I dribble around the defender, lay the ball back to my trailing midfielder, chip the ball into the box?—one must subordinate one's purposes to the purposes of the game and accept its boundaries and rules. Thus, each sphere of play, Gadamer concludes, demands and offers its players 'one kind of comportment . . . among others' (*ibid.*). Internal to practices are distinctive modes of experience, ways of being, in which practitioners deem it good to participate. Such moral phenomenologies are another aspect of what makes practices a 'rewarding reality' for their practitioners.

I am not sure MacIntyre would approve of this way of putting things. He might insist that there are only two things here, the achievement of excellence, including the chess player being able to be intense to the right degree and in the right way, and the pleasure which supervenes upon such achievements. In my view, this leaves the concept of pleasure doing too much work. MacIntyre himself acknowledges that it is not pleasure in general one experiences when one makes something excellent or reveals an excellent character but a specific 'kind of enjoyment that supervenes upon such excellence' (MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], p. 274). What I am calling moral phenomenology is both more and less than pleasure. It is more than pleasure in that it is participation in a particular state of being that one deems worthwhile. It is less than pleasure because what I am calling moral phenomenology may very well be pleasurable, painful, both or neither.

Let us consider an example. When the chef yells at the waiters to get the hot food out while it's still hot, he usually experiences pleasure along with his annoyance. When he sees plates coming back to the kitchen with unfinished

food on them, his curiosity about how anyone could stop midway through his lobster ravioli is laced with displeasure. When his vendor arrives with wonderfully fresh spring garlic, his dreaming up of a new soup is pleasurable; when he burns his hand (in the one spot with nerves left), he feels pain. In other words, pleasure and pain are somewhat beside the point. The whole sequence—garlic, burn, ‘hot food’, uneaten ravioli—as experienced, is the very substance of being a chef. To participate in this mode of being, with its haggling, economising, crafting, haranguing, risk taking, and pressure cooking, is deemed good by those who know it from the inside out. The distinctive moral phenomenology of a practice offers its practitioners an insight into how it is excellent to be in the world by teaching us how to be in a particular world.

Thus, we have identified a range of internal goods, distinguishing those located in the products of a practice from those in the practitioner, and we have identified three sub-types of the latter type: moral phenomenology, excellences of character, and biographical genre (See Figure 3). We could understand this as a spectrum, from excellences experienced more synchronically to those experienced more diachronically. Outstanding performances are tied to their present and can only be preserved in memory. Moral phenomenology is almost as ephemeral. Each time one steps into the flow of practice, one may contact again the distinctive mode of being the practice affords. The matter is similar with the tangible products of practices. Like a dance performance or brilliant surgical procedure, a sculpture or mathematical proof is encountered in an unfolding present. The reification of the sculpture and proof, however, enable them to travel through time; each time a new audience initiates a serious encounter, the forms of the sculpture and the logic of the proof are reactivated. Excellences of character are more diachronic still. Acquired over time and ready to be called on when situations in the future—whether inside or outside of the scene of practice—demand it, they exist as stable dispositions and capacities in any present. Finally the

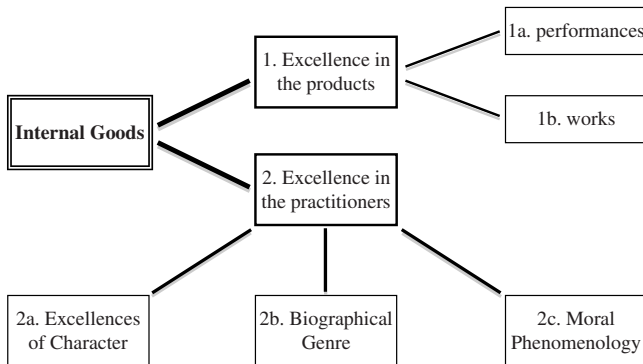


Figure 3: A typology of internal goods

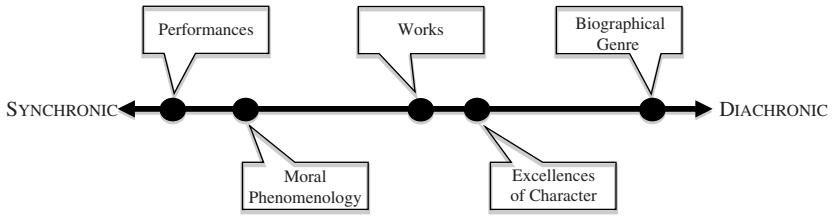


Figure 4: The temporality of internal goods

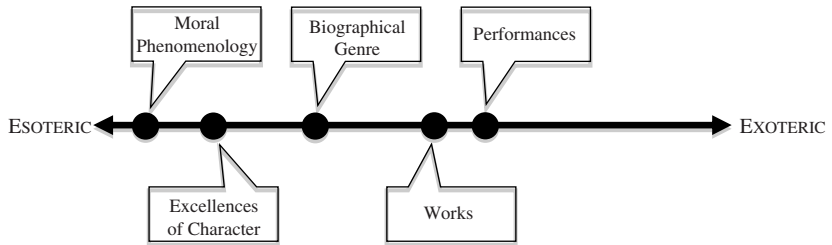


Figure 5: The opacity of internal goods

biographical genre exists only insofar as it is diachronic. It is a flexible narrative structure for linking our past, present, and future in meaningful ways (see Figure 4).

It might be useful to organise these internal goods along one final axis, noting that some appear to be more internal than others. Moral phenomenology would seem to be the most difficult to put into words, to convey to someone outside of the practice. It is the most likely to cause us to say ‘you have to be there’. Someone who wants to convey to you the goodness of a good cast in fishing is likely to be all gestures and sounds until eventually he just takes you to the lake. Excellences of character, on the other hand, seem to be more communicable. There will still be a lot of ‘he moves . . . well . . . like a dancer’, or ‘she thinks like an architect’. At the same time, excellences of character, like the moral virtues, do seem to get grouped and generalised. The power of a mathematical proof and of a home-run hitter are different but the word ‘power’ at least begins to convey something of each idiosyncratic excellence. Biographical genres are less esoteric still. The painter, the chess player, the nurse: these are part of our cultural stock of characters. The biographical genre is inherently communicative, suggesting the story of a kind of human life. This may make it easier for outsiders to grasp, even if at some level only a gardener knows what it is like to lead the gardening life. Finally, the excellence of the products of practices may be the most open to those outside of the practice since in many cases they are produced for a client, performed for an audience, created to be communicated.¹⁰ (See Figure 5.)

THE PRACTICALITY OF ETHICAL REFLECTION

According to this analysis, practices offer their practitioners distinctive goods of at least four types: outstanding works or performances to appreciate, a rich moral phenomenology to experience, excellences of character to display and on which to rely, and a biographical genre through which to shape a meaningful life. In contrast to Plato's utopia, where we emerge from the cave of culture to behold the good itself, MacIntyre's view is that we learn substantive if partial intimations of the good inside the various human practices. This primary, multifarious ethical education is where we find the raw resources, as it were, for answering the basic ethical questions: what kind of person is most admirable and who should I become? What is worth striving for and what should be my projects? What makes life excellent, meaningful, or rich and how should I give shape to my life as a whole?

One of the most striking implications of this aretaic, practical philosophy—and in particular this notion of internal goods—is the way in which it requires a fundamental rethinking of professional ethics. As MacIntyre points out, according to the standard conception, applied ethics means 'application to cases falling in particular social spheres of what are taken to be rules of morality' (MacIntyre, 1984b, p. 500). In Chapter 1, we said that this working out of principles of professional conduct and investigation of moral dilemmas in practice might better be dubbed 'moral professionalism'. In such work, the good—and this is especially true in the helping professions—is typically understood to be the good of the client, or of society at large. And, of course, one might be inclined to read MacIntyre simply as a late champion of the moral virtues, in which case his theory would not be hard to assimilate to this conception of professional ethics. Rather than outline principles with the deontologists or consequences with the utilitarians, on this reading, MacIntyre simply reminds us of a third way, the virtues, of ensuring that professionals do the right thing by others. Such a reading of MacIntyre, however, involves two serious distortions.

The first distortion is to reduce MacIntyre's practical ethics to *applied* morality. This distortion arises if we miss the fact that the very idea of application runs counter to MacIntyre's fundamental insight about practices. For MacIntyre, practices are not simply local contexts where general dispositions may come in handy; they are themselves moral sources. They are sites, perhaps the key sites, of our moral education. For MacIntyre, we learn the point and substance of the virtues within particular practices. If we are interested in goodness, MacIntyre avers, then we must turn to the contexts of practices for insight. The alternative, meanwhile, is an emotivist culture and an arid, technical moral philosophy:

When by contrast 'good' and its cognates are abstracted from any such context . . . they inevitably degenerate into what appear to some as no more than generalized expressions of approval, voicing either what we feel or

what we want to feel, and to others as naming peculiar properties [in nature]. So philosophical controversies between moral realists and anti-realists are themselves perhaps symptomatic of a particular type of social condition.

To have understood this, of course, is no more than to have learned how to go back to the beginning in enquiries about good and 'good' (MacIntyre, 1991, p. 72).

Investigation of practices lies at the beginning of ethical enquiry, not at the end of a process of application. 'It is almost always the case', MacIntyre elaborates, that:

... when physicians or nurses for instance discuss truth telling, honesty, trust, and allied subjects ... —I speak from experience of such discussions in a number of hospitals—they are doing nothing other than reopening that general discussion of truth-telling in which Aristotle, Maimonides, Aquinas, Kant and Mill are among their predecessors. Their questions concern what the rules are and whether they need to be extended or reformulated, questions perhaps occasioned for them by peculiarly medical issues and questions peculiarly urgent for physicians and nurses, but not at all peculiarly medical questions (MacIntyre, 1984b, p. 512).

If the first distortion is to read MacIntyre's practical ethics as *applied* morality, the second is to reduce it to applied *morality*. This distortion is easy to remedy if we avoid focusing on MacIntyre's theory of the moral virtues to the neglect of his conception of internal goods. As we saw, internal goods are goods for the practitioner. In practices, we not only have occasion to do good, but to encounter (aspects of) the good and pursue our *eudaimonia*. Inside each practice are singular resources for answering what MacIntyre calls 'that most fundamental of questions, "What sort of person am I to become?"' (1982, p. 292). Thus, MacIntyre helps us extend more fully to professional ethics the general conclusion of Chapter 1 that ethics includes more than inquiry into right action in moments of decision and it deals with more than our duties to others. If Williams and Taylor showed us why we should expect the intersection of work and substantive ethics to be a fruitful one, MacIntyre helps us begin to harvest that fruit.

Here it is important to head off a potential misunderstanding of MacIntyre, one already considered in our discussion of Williams. That practices are sites of self-cultivation, offering goods for the practitioner, hardly makes them 'self-serving' or their practitioners possessive. This is the moral prejudice we discussed earlier, the tendency to see desire as inherently corrupting and to reduce all self-interest to selfishness (see above, pp. 31–35). Many practices are focused on the welfare of others and all practices direct their practitioner's attention to something beyond their own ego needs. It must feel wonderful to win a chess tournament or create a magnificent

painting, but one achieves such things by an intense absorption not with oneself, but with pawns and pigments, with tactics and strategies in each field of play. Meanwhile, a good realised in a practitioner's person, work, or performance will be a good for all in the community of practice and may even, under the right conditions, become a good for some outside of the practice. Once we have noted these facts, we may embrace the conclusion that a genuinely aretaic professional ethics would connect the question 'why practice X?' (carpentry, nursing, law, teaching, etc.) with the question 'how should I live?' It would strive to understand the place of the practice in the practitioner's own quest to flourish. If this sounds odd to our ears, it may be because the professions generally, and the 'helping professions' in particular are wedded to an altruism so severe that it always borders on asceticism. What Williams, MacIntyre, and other critics of modern morality offer are resources precisely for avoiding this dichotomy between base self-interest and self-sacrifice in the name of others.

With these potential distortions averted, it is clear how MacIntyre helps us advance our construction of a virtue ethics of the professions. MacIntyre's ethics is richly eudaimonistic and fundamentally practical. His theory is not an application of goods and virtues to practices since MacIntyre turns the very idea of application on its head. And he gives us a fuller sense of the connection between Socrates' question and practical life, a fuller sense of why professional ethics would do well to attend to how practitioners, *qua* practitioners, answer this question.

WHAT COUNTS AS A PRACTICE: THE PROOF, THE PUDDING, AND THE RECIPE

At this point, we must address a question which I have largely glossed over until now: what counts as a practice? After all, the conclusions just reached hold only for those forms of work that qualify as practices. Which are these? To answer this question adequately, we need to explore MacIntyre's conception of practice in greater depth. As an epigraph, I quoted MacIntyre's remark that he sees the concept of practice as both philosophically central and philosophically underdeveloped. 'A great deal more needs to be said', he admits, 'particularly in order to throw light on how normative concepts and evaluative concepts have application' (MacIntyre, 1991, p. 71). Even when it comes to the seemingly basic question of how many and which activities count as practices, MacIntyre sees his own efforts as provisional, noting that 'the precise range of practices is not at this stage of the first importance' (MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], p. 188). As is often the case with MacIntyre, however, his initial sketches of a territory, even while leaving much to work out, also provide much to work with. Let us turn then to the task of reconstructing the set of implicit and explicit criteria on offer in MacIntyre's account. This is crucial for the goals of Part I—where we are attempting to

articulate the general dimensions of an aretaic, eudaimonistic professional ethics—and the results of this inquiry will also prepare us for Chapter 6, where we will specifically pursue the question of whether teaching is a practice.

Unfortunately, the most important criterion is the hardest to apply. Practices are those activities which become home to distinct understandings of the good, but as we noted earlier, the goods disclosed by a practice are, for MacIntyre, importantly ‘internal’. Only those who have committed themselves to a practice over time are able to appreciate and articulate the goods of that practice. As MacIntyre, using the example of the internal goods of chess, puts it:

We call them internal for two reasons: first, as I have already suggested, because we can only specify them in terms of chess or some other game of that specific kind and by means of examples from such games (otherwise the meagerness of our vocabulary for speaking of such goods forces us into such devices as my own resort to writing of ‘a certain highly particular kind of’); and secondly because they can only be identified and recognized by the experience of participating in the practice in question. Those who lack the relevant experience are incompetent as judges of internal goods (pp. 188–189).

To understand MacIntyre’s position here, we might contrast it with the standard view of expertise. On this view, while non-experts (or the unskilled) freely admit that they cannot *do* what the expert (or virtuoso) does, they typically maintain that they *appreciate* what the expert or virtuoso does, and all the more because they lack the ability. After all, I do not have to be able to hit a home run like Ryan Howard to be able to appreciate a 496-foot blast to dead centre. The point is, however, that I cannot truly appreciate the art of hitting if I have never practiced, say, detecting in a fraction of second the spin of the ball as it leaves the pitcher’s hand. MacIntyre’s point is that practitioners learn not only how to achieve a given end but what ends are worth achieving. The spectator who appreciates the moon-shot may not know how to appreciate the short home-run to the opposite field, or how a hitter can direct a ground ball to a hole created by a base-runner being held on first base.

As we noted earlier, apprenticeship to a practice is a protracted process because it aims at nothing less than self-transformation. The apprentice not only must hone technical skills, but also needs to learn new habits of vision and judgment. As MacIntyre explains:

A practice involves standards of excellence and obedience to rules as well as the achievement of goods. To enter into a practice is to accept the authority of those standards and the inadequacy of my own performance as judged by them. It is to subject my own attitudes, choices, preferences and tastes to the standards which currently and partially define the practice (p. 190).

When an outsider asks of a practice—for example, a student encountering a new discipline—‘what’s this good for?’, it is really a trick question. The only real answer is ‘come on in and, after a somewhat lengthy process of initiation, see for yourself’. To answer now is to evaluate the practice in terms of how it satisfies wants the questioner already has, when in fact a key value of a practice lies precisely in how it can teach us new ideas of what is worth wanting.¹¹ By accepting the terms of the question, we allow the student to mistake, as it were, how a ledge looks from the ground for the view from the ledge achieved after slowly working one’s way up the slope.

However, here is precisely where we encounter a problem for developing a test for practices. Because the goods of a practice are internal, because it is difficult to articulate what a practice achieves to those outside of it, it also becomes unclear how we could ever arrive at a perspective from which we could determine just how many practices there are and what activities are deserving of this status. Though MacIntyre does seem to offer some external criteria for what counts as a practice, the proof remains in the pudding. That is, we will know that an activity is a practice if it generates a rich context for pursuing, and a rich vocabulary for articulating, aspects of human flourishing. Practices, we said earlier, are those activities that contribute to the ‘poetry’ of the moral life. But here’s the catch: we can only know such things from the inside out.

This problem, though far from intractable, does carry some specific methodological implications. First, it implies that in order to do this particular type of ethics well requires a diversity of participants each of whom is herself or himself practically polyglot. MacIntyre, for example, can speak with authority about the practice of philosophy, and with apparent familiarity about chess, fishing, portrait painting, and house-holding (his typical examples). Practical ethics is not, however, the type of inquiry to be advanced by the lone thinker or narrow scholar.

Second, the only way to proceed would seem to be to shuttle back and forth between internal and external descriptions, between views from the practice and depictions of the practice from the outside. A good starting point, then, is to collect internal descriptions of putative practices. Here we are looking for thick, phenomenological evocations of the world *of* the activity (settings, goals, episodes, communities, and traditions) and of *the* world from the perspective of the activity. To be clear, what this will not provide is a statement in universal terms of the specific ethos of the practice. If it were that simple to translate, then internal goods would not be that internal after all. What such first-personal reports offer is an introduction to the vocabulary and sensibility of the practice, something akin to an immersion course in a foreign language. Without joining the practice, and on the basis of such reports alone, we cannot truly know what it is like to participate in the practice.

By attending to the way insiders talk about and from a given activity, we can infer whether it seems to represent a practical world with the sort of dimensions MacIntyre predicts (even if we must join the practice to know for

sure that, and in detail how, it fills out these dimensions). Still, one must proceed here with caution and a special kind of humility. There is the danger that we will expect carpenters, say, to be eloquent about carpentry, when they are much more eager to talk about wood. Indeed, they may not be eager to talk at all since carpentry is after all about being eloquent *with* wood. When it comes to practice, talk is cheap. Some practices do place a premium on verbal articulateness, but they are the exception.

Allow me to illustrate this last point with an extended example. The danger is that in judging such insider reports, we will fall prey to what Jonathan Lear calls the ‘Socratic prejudice’ (Lear, 1990, pp. 9-10). And if the historical paragon of humility can commit an error here, we should take special notice. Lear is referring to a specific moment in the *Apology* (Plato, 1961 [c. 399 B.C.E.]). Socrates relates how he first got into the habit of questioning his countrymen about their lives and beliefs. His friend, Chaerophon, had asked the Delphic oracle if there was anyone wiser than Socrates, and the oracle had answered in the negative. This puzzled Socrates, who knew both that the oracle could not lie and that he was bereft of wisdom. Thus, he conceived a plan. Like a (social) scientist trying to disprove a null hypothesis, Socrates actively sought a counter-example, knowing that his failure to do so would prove the oracle’s message, however mysterious, that much more certain. Questioning his fellow Athenians, group by group, he found that neither the statesmen, nor the poets, nor the craftsmen knew very much about ‘the most important things’ (p. 8 [22c]).¹² From this, Socrates drew his famous conclusion that, like him, his fellow Athenians lacked wisdom; but that, unlike him, they were ignorant even of this fact. Thus, Socrates does take the prize, but only for the peculiarly humble sort of wisdom available to humans, the knowledge of how little we know.

Socrates’ prejudice emerges in his interaction with the poets. Here is Socrates’ description of this stage of his experiment:

After I had finished with the politicians I turned to the poets, dramatic, lyric, and all the rest, in the belief that here I should expose myself as a comparative ignoramus. I used to pick up what I thought were some of their most perfect works and question them closely about the meaning of what they had written, in the hope of incidentally enlarging my own knowledge. Well, gentlemen, I hesitate to tell you the truth, but it must be told. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that any of the bystanders could have explained those poems better than their actual authors. So I soon made up my mind about the poets too. I decided that it was not wisdom that enabled them to write their poetry, but a kind of instinct or inspiration, such as you find in seers and prophets who deliver all their sublime messages without knowing in the least what they mean (p. 8 [22a-c]).

Here Socrates reaches the incredible conclusion that the poets lack wisdom because they are not good at literary criticism. In point of fact, there is little

correlation, and possibly even an inverse proportionality, between gifts in one of the several arts and the gift of the gab. Artist's statements are (generally) bad for a reason: if the artist could have said what she was trying to say just as well in words as in sax solos or paint, then she would have.¹³ Even in the literary arts, it is very different to try to use words to disclose something about inner and outer worlds than it is to use words to make sense of poetry and prose.

Socrates' error, then, is to confuse knowledge of the world with the ability to articulate verbally what one knows. It is to conflate intelligence with reflectiveness, reflectiveness with articulateness, and articulateness with expository, meta-discourse. In contrast, some of the most valuable types of knowledge are embodied and mute. Or they may be deeply expressive, but then this takes the form of showing more than saying, and of showing in media other than the reflective, verbalised account prized by Socrates.¹⁴

Our first step, then, in the attempt to determine what activities constitute practices is, in an ecumenical spirit, to receive first-hand, phenomenological descriptions of various activities. From such accounts, we can begin to generate a list of candidate practices. Such a list in turn can help us begin to identify certain common, external features of practices. As a method, this is akin to trying to determine a recipe not in advance of the cooking, but by studying successful examples of a dish. These third-personal criteria can then point us toward activities that did not emerge in our first search or return us to one of the candidate activities for a closer look. Given the defining, intramural quality of practices, this inside-out/outside-in approach would seem to be the only workable method for determining what counts as a practice.

So, the proof is in the pudding, but MacIntyre does list a number of ingredients, beginning with two formal and four social-organisational features typical of those activities that have tended to become practices. As you will recall, in his main definition of practice quoted earlier, MacIntyre includes the formal criteria of coherence and complexity (2007 [1981], p. 187). Dismounting from the rings with a double-back salto is certainly complex, but it is also only a fragment of the larger practice of gymnastics. Conversely, tic-tac-toe, while coherent enough, is too simple to become a practice (*ibid.*). Only activities that are both coherent and complex develop into practices.

In addition to these formal criteria, MacIntyre offers four social criteria. First, practices must be social in origin. An individual who invents some coherent and complex ritual for rotating winter and summer clothes in his closet has not invented a practice. Second, practices must be social in execution. For example, while the activity of keeping a private diary of subjective impressions is social in origin—arising in early, modern Europe with the growing equation of personhood with interiority and individuality, changes in gender relations and notions of public and private space, the rise of the bourgeoisie, and so on—it is not a practice since it remains individual, and indeed individualistic, in execution. For MacIntyre, practices are always communities of practice.

This communal aspect of practices may take two forms. Sometimes it takes the form of direct cooperation. You cannot be a fire-fighter without a station and a company. In other practices, such as cabinet making, practitioners may well work alone. In such cases, however, we still find a community of practice whose presence, if not literal, is surely felt by the practitioner at work. The point is that for a practice to flourish, there must be some avenues for practitioners to share problems, breakthroughs, and stories of practice. This is a place—without making every practice sound like a moral philosophy conference—where a practice carries on its deliberation about what the proper goals and high achievements of the practice are.

The third social criterion is closely related to the second, stipulating that practices tend to be structured not only as contemporary communities but also as historical *traditions*. ‘To enter into a practice’, MacIntyre writes,

... is to enter into a relationship not only with its contemporary practitioners, but also with those who have preceded us in the practice, particularly those whose achievements extended the reach of the practice to its present point (p. 194).

Tradition, MacIntyre is quick to add, must not be confused with traditionalism. Traditionalism is signified by stale rituals and dusty tomes. It suggests a uniformity of belief and a reverence toward the past precisely because it is past. Such attitudes, MacIntyre points out, tend to become prominent precisely when a tradition is ‘dying or dead’ (p. 222). In contrast, MacIntyre says that ‘traditions, when vital, embody continuities of conflict’ (*ibid.*). To participate in a practice is to join ‘an historically extended, socially embodied argument ... about the goods which constitute that tradition’ (*ibid.*).

For MacIntyre, then, all genuine practices are living traditions, ongoing arguments over what the practice is, what it is for, and what it can achieve. One implication of this is that history has a special place in practical life, whether the practice in question is hockey, harp playing, or history itself. This is because, as we noted earlier, ‘excellence—the very verb “excel” suggests it—has to be understood historically ... [in] sequences of development ... toward and beyond a variety of types and modes of excellence’ (p. 189). MacIntyre’s etymological point is that ‘to excel’ means more than meeting existing standards; it means going beyond, helping the community *grow out of* standards that now seem weak, narrow, arbitrary, or dead.¹⁵

The fourth and final social criterion concerns not simply the past and present social fabric of the practice, but its future. In order to keep this ongoing pursuit and unfolding conversation going, the practice needs new recruits. As already mentioned, apprenticeship is a structural feature of practices. We have already approached this topic from the point of view of the apprentice and what she will undergo, but we can also note that this means that each practice includes acts of initiation and training—in a word,

teaching—as part of its purview. No individual doctor is required *qua* doctor to work in a teaching hospital, nor is a carpenter required to take on an apprentice, but that such institutions and relationships do exist somewhere is a necessity of the practice as a whole.

BOUNDARY CONDITIONS: PRACTITIONERS, MANAGERS, INTERPRETERS, AND FANS

Earlier we identified a rough method for determining whether or not an activity constitutes a practice. Practices, we noted, have both an inside and an outside, both a distinctive way of looking out and certain common features that can be seen from the outside. And I noted that the best we can do is shuttle back and forth between these perspectives, in an attempt to triangulate and separate the practical wheat from the chaff of ethically insignificant activities. From insider reports we glean insight into the proof of the pudding—the key criterion of whether the activity has become home to a distinctive set of internal goods—but we gather this in the form of mere intimations. From the outside, the information gathered is clearer but it only tells us whether an activity fits the general profile of a practice. Between these two perspectives we have now identified in passing eleven different tests of practice-hood.

We may ask whether an activity seems to have grown into a rich and idiosyncratic ethical world, marked by: (1) an evaluative teleology (or distinctive way of understanding and vocabulary for articulating what is worthwhile to do, achieve, and become); and a distinctive set of internal goods realised by practitioners striving to live up to those standards, including (2) the excellence of the activity's characteristic products or performances, (3) a moral phenomenology, (4) excellences of character realised in the practitioners, and (5) the good of a biographical genre. Second, we have the external criteria, both formal and social, including: (6) coherence; (7) complexity; (8) social roots; (9) a community of practice; (10) tradition; and (11) rituals of apprenticeship.

Though this recipe is already growing complex, there are three further criteria that must be mentioned and a simplification in my account so far that must now be corrected. In arguing that the study of practices must make use of both internal and external perspectives on practices, I have suggested that when it comes to practices there are only insiders and outsiders. The amendment I would like to make is that there is a complex border zone between the inside and outside of practices and it is in moments of boundary maintenance and border crossing that we discover further characteristics of a practice.

In a rough way, we can divide practices into four types, based on the degree to which persons outside of the practice have a role in the definition, appreciation, or pursuit of internal goods: autonomous, client-dependent,

client-centered, and communicative. Autonomous practices are, when it comes to their internal goods, more or less self-enclosed. If you are a monk or a mountain climber, non-practitioners are not a functional part of your pursuit of the goods internal to your practice.

Client-dependent practices offer their product to a client who, while not participating in the practice, does have some say in whether the goods of the practice have been achieved. Consider the case of architecture. Each time the architect takes a commission, she must work out what will make a good building, and she must work this out in dialogue with at least four interlocutors (as it were): the site, the materials, the tradition of architecture, and the client.¹⁶ The commission fails if the architecture delivers something that won't stand up, leaks, or is atrociously ugly just because that is what the client asked for. But there are limits to the normativity of the architect in relation to the client. The architect has morphed into some other animal if when the client says, 'but we don't need a separate dining room, it is not how we live', the architect replies 'but this is how you should live'. When Robert Venturi put an ornamental TV antenna on top of a senior citizens centre (Guild House) in Philadelphia to poke fun at the amount of TV old people watch, a line had been crossed. When the commission is accepted, the architect says in effect, I see the good in what you want and will serve you, though not slavishly since I will also be bringing into the dialogue goods of building of which you might not be aware. Indeed, the point only becomes stronger when one considers a commission for a museum or hospital or school since then other practices must enter the equation. Doctors, nurses, and indeed patients have an important perspective on whether the hospital was built well.

In client-centered practices, the goods of the practice are not only co-constructed by the client but also realised in the client. Imagine a doctor trying to work out whether the good of health had been achieved without any reference to the patient. Still, when all is said and done, a healthy heart is a healthy heart. By contrast, the goals of psychodynamic psychotherapy cannot even be stated except in an exceedingly broad way without reference to the particulars of a patient's history and experience. The analyst may be guided by the general goal of freeing the patient from frozen conflicts and increasing his capacity for love and work, but to do so means learning, as it were, the unique language and laws of a foreign country, what Lear calls a patient's 'idiopolis' (Lear, 1998, pp. 69-73). Can these laws be made more humane? The answer lies deep within the history and terms of this strange land.

Finally, there are communicative practices. The sculptor, the journalist, and the comedian each Janus-like performs both for their fellow practitioners and for their audiences. There are of course comedians' comedians but a comedian who never made audiences laugh would not be much of a comedian. It is difficult to know what journalism means without readers, or comedy without an audience, painting without viewers. One could even argue that though sports are intelligible without an audience—a pick-up game of

basketball if played at a certain level and by the rules is still basketball—they are incomplete without their fans, which play a structural role in each sporting practice. As we observed of a baseball fan, being a fan does not mean being an insider in the same way as being a player does. At the same time, such performative practices must find a way to make some of their goods available to their public. MacIntyre acknowledges as much when he says that we should recognise one of his points about practices ‘as we are all familiar with it already in our actual lives, whether we are painters or physicists or quarterbacks or indeed just lovers of good painting or first-rate experiments or a well-thrown pass’ (MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], p. 191).

Appreciating the goods internal to a practice when you have only one foot, or toe, in the practice as a fan is no mean feat, but it is for this very reason that we find, attached to many practices, what I will call ‘para-practices’. Many practices, and especially those that have communication built into them, attract cultures of criticism, interpretation, and commentary. These are situated neither wholly within nor wholly without the artistic and athletic practices (to choose the most obvious examples) they serve to explicate. Such para-practices tend to be interstitial: an architecture critic may be part newspaperman, part architect, and part art-historian; a baseball broadcaster will have one foot in the world of baseball and one foot in the world of broadcast journalism. Indeed, a broadcast team is usually composed of two commentators, a play-by-play announcer (in the UK, the commentator) who comes from the culture of broadcasting and a color commentator or analyst (in the UK, the co-commentator) who is almost always a former player or coach. Between the two of them, they try to find words to evoke the achievements and real drama of the practical episode before them.

Even play-by-play, it should be noted, requires more than technical speech and broadcasting skills. On a recent call-in show, a play-by-play announcer, who covers both baseball and hockey, was asked by a caller to compare the two jobs.¹⁷ The answer was illuminating. He stumbled at first, and then, surprising himself it seemed, answered that the two experiences had very little in common. The dramatically different pacing of the games meant that in one case he is painting a picture of rapidly unfolding action and the other he is telling a slowly developing story. Even though this announcer was by training more of a broadcaster than either a baseball or hockey player, it was the gravity of each sport that determined the weight and measure of his commentary.

Similarly, every US city has its AM talk-radio station devoted to sports. The call-in shows run by these stations are precisely about fans cultivating greater hermeneutic expertise as participant-observers of a given practice. A topic is floated: for example whether a certain coach should be fired. Calls are taken, statistics proffered, the value of various measures debated. The hosts take on a pedagogical task, instructing callers in the relevant epistemic virtues. For example, a typical rebuke in this milieu is to tell a caller to ‘calm down’ because they have overreacted to a particular piece of information or

single episode, showing a kind of presentism toward the history of the sport or inability to stay in the hermeneutic circle where part informs whole even as whole informs part. The hosts of such shows will typically have picked up a degree in broadcast journalism, but what is patently clear is that these people speak with the authority of being outstanding fans, perceptive and experienced students of the game.

Whether or not there are distinctive goods of broadcast journalism, there do seem to be, for example, baseball-specific goods available to those whose job it is to interpret the game. A gifted baseball announcer knows not to try to counteract the slow pace of the game or fill the silence with chatter. There is an ethos here of calm attentiveness and of devotion to waiting patiently for true drama to emerge rather than hyping the ordinary. Heaven forbid a play-by-play man should over-hype an event, calling an ordinary victory as if were a four-game sweep of a hated rival, or the sweep as if it were a playoff win.¹⁸ If a commentator calls a good but not spectacular diving catch like it is one for the ages, or calls each home-run like it is a grand slam, then you had better believe that he will hear about it the next day as the talk radio community rebukes the announcer for his lack of perception, self-possession, and sense of tradition.

As we noted earlier, we may not be able to rely solely on first-person reports about a practice, for words may fail, and we may expect that even—or especially—the best practitioners are those whose knowledge will be shown more than told, thought from the inside out rather than the outside in, exemplified as lived experience in the specific medium of their practice. In other words, what we want to know about a putative practice is phenomenological and there are limits for anyone, *but especially for participants themselves*, to capture felt experience in words. We may now add to these perspectives those of a variety of participant-observers, whether critics, commentators, or the audience proper of a communicative practice.

This helps with, but does not entirely remove, the danger of the Socratic prejudice. ‘Aesthetics’, the artist Barnett Newman famously quipped, ‘is for art what ornithology is for the birds’. Aesthetics may be about art, Newman suggests, but, precisely for this reason, is nothing like it. You should just as soon expect a bird to lecture on the four-chambered heart as you would a painter to hold forth on the meaning of line and color. And yet, there is art history, or better, art criticism, a second practice that though distinct from, is symbiotic with, the visual arts. It is part of the nature of art to speak to an audience. Of course, if criticism replaces the painted or sculpted message with its own verbal one, then it has failed. But if it succeeds at opening art to its audience and opening us to new experiences with novel forms, then it has achieved not only its own distinct *telos*, but advanced the purposes of its host practice, art. So in trying to track down practices, we need descriptions from the doers and descriptions from those who, while keeping one foot in the role of observer, learn how to participate in the experience itself.

The existence of such para-practices is not the only reason to consider the membrane enclosing practices as semi-permeable. To see why is to add three

final criteria to our growing list. First, (12) practices must coordinate with, but also protect themselves against, the institutions that house them. And this points to the further fact (13) that a crucial subset of the excellences of character particular to a practice are the moral virtues instrumental in preserving the integrity of practices in a world of institutions. These moral virtues ensure that external goods do not get mistaken for internal goods. At the same time, it is another feature of practices, one we noted earlier, that (14) their goods find their way into communal life outside their confines, enriching our general 'human conceptions of ends and goods'. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to understanding, in some detail, these three final boundary conditions of practices. We turn first to the institution-practice distinction and the distinction between internal and external goods on which it depends.

MacIntyre argues that practices need, but 'must not be confused with', the institutions that sustain them (MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], p. 194). Up until now we have been concerned chiefly with internal goods. To understand fully the relationship between practices and institutions, however, we now need to introduce a second class of 'external goods'. MacIntyre explains:

Institutions are characteristically concerned with what I have called external goods. They are involved in acquiring money and other material goods; they are structured in terms of power and status, and they distribute money, power, and status as rewards. Nor could they do otherwise if they are to sustain not only themselves, but also the practices of which they are the bearers. For no practice can survive for any length of time unsustained by institutions (*ibid.*).

Whereas internal goods are realisable only in the course of specific activities, external goods may be procured through a variety of means (p. 188); whereas internal goods require the exercise of the virtues for their realisation, the virtues may 'perfectly well hinder us in achieving external goods' (p. 196); whereas internal goods tend to be accompanied by a distinctive form of pleasure that is a reward but only because it was not sought as itself a goal, other forms of pleasure are themselves external goods pursued directly (pp. 197–198). For the final difference between the two types of good, I quote MacIntyre:

External goods are . . . characteristically objects of competition in which there must be losers as well as winners. Internal goods are indeed the outcome of competition to excel, but it is characteristic of them that their achievement is a good for the whole community who participate in the practice. So when Turner transformed the seascape in painting or W. G. Grace advanced the art of batting in cricket in a quite new way their achievement enriched the whole relevant community (pp. 190–191).

Perhaps MacIntyre is a bit too black and white on this last point, but I believe his basic point is sound. When one tennis player vanquishes another easily, the players separate quickly and the scene shifts to the dispensing of external goods. The victor receives the cup, the cheque, the applause, the interviews. But we notice that after a special match has just concluded, one where the opponents draw out of each other memorable shots and sequences that reveal the beauty of the game, often the opponents want nothing to do with tournament officials and color commentators. They seek each other out and embrace, each thinking ‘I don’t even know whether I just won or lost but what *we* just did was amazing’. The spectators, too, stand to applaud them both, savoring the moment and delaying the presentation of the trophy.

On the other hand, one of the goods internal to a practice, we discovered, is the good of a biographical genre. If we add that seeing oneself as really belonging in a practice—as truly a paleontologist, pianist, or plumber—depends on recognition from fellow practitioners, then we have reason to question MacIntyre’s matter-of-fact categorisation of fame as an external good. Perhaps *fame* is external, but recognition would seem to be a more complex good which can tip in either direction. And recognition is bound up with excellence which, as MacIntyre himself points out, is not only about performing well but about performing better. Thus, he seems to gloss over the challenges of enjoying the communal victory when one has just suffered a personal defeat. Yes, Salieri, *qua* composer, can appreciate Mozart’s fluency and fecundity, but it is also like a dagger in his heart. Similarly, consider Pete Townshend’s reaction to the arrival of the supreme guitarist Jimi Hendrix. In an interview, Townshend recounts:

Seeing Jimi Hendrix for the first time was a Hell of a lot of pain. That’s what I felt. I still feel it . . . And you have to see him to know what I’m talking about. He did things which were magical . . . He took the drug culture and made it into something by demonstrating that there was actually such a thing as physical poetry in rock, something that was very close to ballet. I’m not saying he danced cause he didn’t, but he was very beautiful to look at, and you felt pain in his presence and in the presence of that music. You felt small and you realized how far you had to go (Townshend, 1995).

According to vocalist Eric Burdon, after first seeing Hendrix play, Townshend called up guitar legend Eric Clapton, whom he had never met, asking for a meeting. When they got together, Townshend declared, ‘I’ve just seen this guy who’s gonna put us all out of work, man’ (Burdon relates this anecdote in Peisch, 1995).

Now that we have a feel for MacIntyre’s distinction between internal and external goods, let us return to the question of the relationship between practices and institutions. Because practices focus on the realisation of internal goods, and institutions concentrate on the procurement and

distribution of external goods, the relationship between them is symbiotic but delicate. Practitioners must eat after all, and the distribution of goods of recognition may enhance the striving after internal goods. Wanting to be a great baseball player, even wanting to see your picture on a baseball card, may be part of the motivation for entering the practice. Such external motivations later yield to or meld into more internal goals, whether it be the greatness of a pitcher's perfect game or the more humble good of a being a team player who makes a 'productive out', moving the runner into scoring position while lowering his own batting average. 'Indeed', MacIntyre declares,

... so intimate is the relationship between practices and institutions—and consequently of the goods external to the goods internal to the practices in question—that institutions and practices characteristically form a single causal order in which the ideals and creativity of the practice are always vulnerable to the acquisitiveness of the institution, in which the cooperative care for common goods of the practice is always vulnerable to the competitiveness of the institution (MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], p. 194).

Even though practices depend on institutions, institutions can exercise a corrupting influence on practices. There is always the danger that the cart will wind up before the horse, that internal goods will become confused with their external counterparts. It is the job of hospital administrators to ensure that the hospital is not vulnerable to huge lawsuits that could put the hospital and its doctors and nurses out of business. At the same time, there is no point in staying in business if the practice of medicine is compromised by this hedging of liability. The 'business' that matters here is healing. Or consider another example. No one doubts that a college or university needs to recruit students, collect tuition, move them through programs, grant diplomas, and so on. And it is true that professors left to their own devices might well keep their eyes so internally focused on their worlds of practice that heating bills would go unpaid. Still, it must be said that many institutions of higher learning have become so caught up in the complex, competitive business of making ends meet that they lose touch with the real ends of teaching and learning. Students are not 'instructional equivalents', teaching is not 'a load', and accumulating credits is not the same as becoming educated.

It is important to note, however, that MacIntyre does mention two ways in which institutions go beyond being a necessary evil, a crutch on which practices must lean. The first is that, in many cases, one would be hard pressed to distinguish institutions from that key element of practices mentioned earlier, of ongoing conversation over the nature and aims of the practice. The university, for example, is itself constituted by 'a continuous argument as to what a university is and ought to be' (p. 222). Perhaps, though, we want to maintain that there is a real difference between, say, the activities of doctoring and nursing, and that of running a teaching hospital, where the disparate goods—of healing, research, teaching, employee

retention, patient satisfaction, facility upkeep, public relations, etc.—must all be worked into one complex equation. In this case, though—and this is MacIntyre’s second concession that institutions are often something more than a necessary evil from the perspective of practices—we have reason to believe that (in this case) hospital administration may be a practice in its own right. For MacIntyre acknowledges that ‘the making and sustaining of community—and therefore of institutions—itself has all the characteristics of a practice, and moreover a practice which stands in a peculiarly close relationship to the exercise of the virtues’ (p. 194).

If community making is a practice, and practices require the virtues for their success, then community making depends on the virtues. What makes this relationship ‘peculiarly close’, though, is that virtue and community are intertwined in two further ways, both apparent when we recall that community for MacIntyre means a moral and political community, an Aristotelian *polis*. The *polis* is not simply the *result* of ‘poliscraft’, to use Max Fisch’s term, but its *embodiment* (see Fisch, 1974). Coming together to deliberate about how best to come together is what community means here; deliberating about how best to live is an important part of the substance of a good life. Community exists not only *because* of the virtues of its framers and shapers, but also *in* the ongoing exercise of the virtues by its members. The second special link between community and virtue is that the *polis* is a chief vehicle for moral education, cultivating the virtues in the young.

Thus, we see that the relationship between institutions and practices is a complex one, and we can sum up this complexity in the form of two tensions built into MacIntyre’s account. The first is that while practices need institutions, institutions can also become bloated, officious, and disconnected from their corresponding practices. Mistaking themselves as ends in themselves, institutions can end up corrupting or destroying the very practices that spawned them.¹⁹ Here I should add that this is not simply a contingent fact about certain institutions. It is one of the key claims of *After Virtue* that modern virtue terms have become largely empty because of a general trend toward the disintegration of practices, and indeed of their dissolution into institutions. Let us explore this historical point briefly before returning to the formal tensions in MacIntyre’s conception of the practice-institution relation.

If MacIntyre’s theory of practice is inspired by Aristotle (and Aquinas), his account of the modern fate of practices is inspired by Marx. For example, consider these lines from the Communist Manifesto: ‘The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honored and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage-labourers’ (Marx and Engels, 1994 [1848]). MacIntyre echoes this idea when he observes:

As, and to the extent that, work moves outside the household and is put to the service of impersonal capital, the realm of work tends to be separated

from everything but the service of biological survival and the reproduction of the labour force, on the one hand, and that of institutionalized acquisitiveness, on the other. *Pleonexia*, a vice in the Aristotelian scheme, is now the driving force of modern productive work (MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], p. 227).

Thus, MacIntyre concludes, ‘practices...have been removed to the margins of social and cultural life’ (ibid.). Some practices remain, but for most of us engagement comes only in the form of ‘aesthetic consumption’ (p. 228).

With the decline of practices, we find capitalist modernity focused on a new set of stock characters (those ideals of personhood we find embedded in familiar social types): the aesthete, the manager, and the therapist (pp. 24–31 and 228). The very notion of a manager suggests already that the notion of generic skills in tending to external goods in institutions has begun to eclipse the idea of specific virtues in the conduct of the several practices. The idea of the modern aesthete is captured nicely in an ancient image Horkheimer and Adorno read as pre-figuring our modern predicament: Odysseus is tied to the mast as his crew, their ears stuffed with wax, row him past the island of the Sirens, to whose song Odysseus may listen at the price of utter immobility and non-participation (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1991 [1944], pp. 32–36). Alienated labour by day and spectacle by night may begin to sap not only our *pleonexia* but also our very appetite for life. For ethical junk food induces a kind of bulimia or anorexia; whether we binge or fast, we remain malnourished. If this occurs, we may turn to the therapist or, more likely, the psycho-pharmacologist²⁰ to restart the motor of labour/consumption.²¹

Returning to the formal features of the practice-institution relation, we note a second tension. On the one hand, practices aim at one set of (internal) goods, while institutions aim at another set of (external) goods. On the other hand, we have seen important ways in which this distinction becomes fuzzy. If practices and institutions indeed form together a ‘single causal order’ then it will not always be easy or profitable to make a clean distinction between the two types of goods. To be sure, running a laboratory requires attention to external goods, but surely there are also many moments in the life of a laboratory about which it would be not only difficult but also pointless to decide whether it was part of the science as practiced or as institutionalised.²²

As we have discovered, this ambiguity becomes particularly acute in matters involving the past, present, and future aspects of the communal life of the practice. In many practices, it is precisely these tasks of staying connected to the history of the practice, of maintaining a dialogue among contemporary practitioners, and of initiating new practitioners that inspire institutionalisation. While all practitioners must be interested in the core activity of the practice, the practice itself requires that some practitioners also be interested in creating spaces where excellence is recognised, where lore is shared, and where new initiates are apprenticed. Here we encounter an interesting fork in the road, but it is important to see that whichever path we take, the conclusion is the same. The work of institutions—at least insofar as it

involves the formation and preservation of community—itself involves the pursuit of internal goods.

One path to this conclusion is simply to say that this part of institutionalisation is still part of the practice in question. So, we might want to say that a painter, for example, not only pursues the goods of painting when standing before her canvas, but also when studying an exemplary painting in the museum, arguing with a fellow painter about what is living and dead in contemporary painting, or helping a student realise why he has so far failed to find anything that needs to be said *in paint*. The other path is to conclude that the building of such communities—of memory, of practice, of learning—is a distinct practice or set of practices. In this case to foster community is still to pursue internal goods, even if distinct ones.



This discussion of how practitioners maintain the integrity of practices, while navigating the ‘single causal order’ of their practice and its host institution, sets us up for a brief concluding discussion of the final two criteria of practices.

First, we should add that, in addition to the broad category of excellences of character, we should expect to find in a practice that the specifically moral virtues have put down roots in the in the unique soil of the practice, yielding distinctive embodiments of honesty, justice, and courage. As you recall, what makes the moral virtues worth singling out for MacIntyre within the broad array of ethically relevant features of personhood, is that they are not only internal goods to be sought as ends in themselves—like a brain surgeon who shows what precision, control, and self-possession might mean, or a comedian who develops an ironic sensibility so concentrated that it becomes an instant solvent for Frankfurian ‘bullshit’ and Orwellian ‘newspeak’—but are *also* essential for achieving these and other internal goods (see Frankfurt, 1988; Orwell, 1950). In particular, MacIntyre postulates that what marks off the moral virtues is their unmatched ability in protecting the practice from the corrupting influence of its own institutions and the wider world. Honesty, justice, courage, and practical wisdom are the key: for creating islands of cooperation in the sea of competition; for emboldening practitioners to resist short-cuts and facile translations; for enabling practitioners to maintain the crucial internal relationship between means and ends that makes both genuine goods, while fending off the instrumentalism that turns means into mere tools and ends into mere performance indicators; that enables practitioners to persist in a practice when its ‘pay-off’ becomes unrecognised by others. It is via the moral virtues that the practitioners navigate the complex and shifting relation between practices and institutions, and between how a practice looks from the inside-out and from the outside-in.

The final characteristic also sits on the border between internal and external criteria, but is in one sense the mirror image of the last since it concerns not the integrity of a practice in the face of institutional and other external

depredations, but the openness or expressiveness of a practice. As we noted earlier, MacIntyre's definition of a practice concludes with the statement that through the achievement of internal goods '*human* powers to achieve excellence, and *human* conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended' (MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], p. 187, emphasis added). As we said, practices have the capacity to 'generate new ends and new conceptions of ends' (when the moral life of a community has become impoverished) and to rediscover the live ethical insights (recovering the richness and thorniness of what have degenerated into slogans and pieties) (p. 273). While these ends are by definition only fully appreciable by participants internal to the practice, it is also the mark of longstanding practices that at certain points these esoteric goods become exoteric to some significant degree, enriching the moral life of the larger community.

This could be because a practice produces someone who is not only excellent at the practice in question but gifted as a translator or ambassador. Or it could be because the practice is accompanied, as we saw earlier, by a flourishing para-practice of amateur enthusiasm, expert commentary, and criticism. Or it could be because society has for its own reasons turned its attention toward a given practice, and invested in learning enough to become what I called participant-observers. Finally, recall that some translation and cross-fertilisation is built into MacIntyre's scheme as individuals inhabit more than one practice and must reconcile conflicting goods, weigh competing goods, and synthesise the intra-practical variants of common goods and virtues.

Indeed, MacIntyre follows Aristotle in suggesting that precisely because of the diversity of goods located within the various practices, there must be a mastercraft that organises these goods into the collective life of the *polis*. Even if ethics proper is a meta-craft, in which the individual, in striving to understand the good of a whole life, must order and synthesise the goods of the various *technai* and *praxeis* in which he participates, so poliscraft (or ethics at the level of collective flourishing) is an even more meta meta-craft. It must not only work to understand how the various activities and their goods fit together into one common life, but also how the individual visions of flourishing so fit together. Thus, Aristotle introduces the need for poliscraft by saying that there must be some:

... most authoritative art ... which is most truly the master art. And politics appears to be of this nature; for it is this that ordains which of the sciences should be studied in a state, and which each class of citizens should learn and up to what point they should learn them; and we see even the most highly esteemed of capacities to fall under this, e.g. strategy, economics, rhetoric; now, since politics uses the rest of the sciences, and since, again, it legislates as to what we are to do and what we are to abstain from, the end of this science must include those of the others, so that this end must be the good for man. For even if the end is the same for a single

man and for a state, that of the state seems at all events something greater and more complete both to attain and to preserve; for though it is worth while to attain the end merely for one man, it is finer and more godlike to attain it for a nation or for city-states. These, then, are the ends at which our inquiry, being concerned with politics, aims (Aristotle, 1984b, p. 1729 [Bk. 1, 1094a18-1094b11]).

Regardless of the exact mechanism, the results of the ethical laboratories that are practices do find their way to a broader public. And in this way our ideas of purity and precision, grace and generosity, wit and wisdom, are undergoing constant revision. Thus, our final criterion is that practices will on occasion become more porous, enriching the broader communal understanding of what is good and why.



The question of whether any given occupation counts as a practice has proven to be a complex one, made methodologically challenging by the fact that while some trustworthy external criteria can be found, the key feature of practices is that they generate their own criteria. How do we know a practice when we see one? We may well not, for the mark of a practice is how the world looks from inside the practice, not how the practice looks to an uninitiated observer. However, we have learned how to attend to the internal landscape, the external features, and the border conditions of potential practices. If MacIntyre provides no simple test for practice-hood, he has offered us a rich anatomy of practices helpful in guiding the detailed, case by case approach for which this question calls. It is just such an approach I will take in Chapter 6 when we return to MacIntyre's conception of practice, this time in the specific context of the ethics of teaching. In the next chapter, though, we turn to another thinker, Hannah Arendt, who can enrich further our understanding of the ways in which our practical activities respond to and effect our humanity.

NOTES

1. As I indicated in Chapter 1, note 4, while MacIntyre shares Williams' desire to return to a broader conception of ethics, beyond the confines of modern morality, he often uses the term 'morality', as in this epigraph, to name the broad domain. When possible I will stick to the nomenclature developed in Chapter 1, though this will sometimes prove impossible when quoting MacIntyre.
2. Though lengthy, the translation of *telos* as 'that for the sake of which' is much less misleading than end, aim, goal, or purpose. MacIntyre uses this phrase frequently and it is the preferred translation of several scholars including Jonathan Lear (see Lear, 1988, p. 35).
3. Here for simplicity I leave institutions and external goods out of the account. I treat the distinctions between internal and external goods and between practices and institutions in detail later in the chapter (see pp. 73–78).

4. Specific examples of practices mentioned by MacIntyre include: architecture and carpentry [alternately, furniture making in particular and craftsmanship in general], portrait painting and chamber music [specifically, he mentions string quartets; occasionally, he refers to painting or music as a whole as practices], biology, chemistry, and physics; history and philosophy [for a discussion of moral enquiry as a master-craft see MacIntyre (1990, pp. 61–63)]; baseball, chess, cricket, football, hockey, marathon running, soccer, and wilderness exploration; farming, shepherding, and deep sea fishing; doctoring and nursing [sometimes medicine generically]; parenting and politics [regarding parenting, he ranges from specific aspects of early maternal care (see MacIntyre, 1999, chap. 8) to the ‘making and sustaining of family life’ (see e.g. MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], p. 188); regarding politics, MacIntyre (2007 [1981]) includes ancient, medieval, and (some) modern versions of politics, listing variously Aristotelian *poliscraft* (p. 188), ‘the making and sustaining of communities—and therefore of institutions’ (p. 194) and ‘a politician in negotiations’ (p. 202)]. Though MacIntyre includes ‘making and sustaining the communal life of the school’ in the category just mentioned (MacIntyre and Dunne, 2002, p. 9), and twice includes teaching in a list of practices (MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], p. 202; and 1999, p. 89), he later explicitly denies that teaching should itself be considered as a practice (MacIntyre and Dunne, 2002, pp. 5–9). This list (drawn from MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], pp. 187–194, 202, and 275; 1988, pp. 140–141; 1990, pp. 61–63; 1991; 1994; 1998 [1979]; 1999, pp. 65–66 and 89; MacIntyre and Dunne, 2002) is undoubtedly incomplete.
5. This is MacIntyre’s translation of Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1129b4-6 (see MacIntyre, 1988, p. 125).
6. Which is not to suggest that Ali was a paragon of moral virtue. For a look at one troubling side of Ali, his racist baiting of Joe Frazier, see Dower, 2009.
7. In his Gifford Lectures, MacIntyre refers to practices as crafts.
8. The first quote is MacIntyre’s translation of Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VII 1152b19; the second is his gloss of *Nicomachean Ethics* VII 1153a15. He leaves *ergon* and *techne* untranslated. In Aristotle, an *ergon* is an outcome of a process, variously a work, achievement, or product. It can also refer to the function or characteristic task of an activity, or even to the soul of an animate being. A *techne* is an art, craft, or applied science. As Squires (2003), paraphrasing Nussbaum (1986, pp. 94–121) explains, ‘there is no real modern equivalent of *techne*: art is too vague (and has too strong connotations of beaux-arts), craft too narrow, science too systematic’. The term refers to activities such as shoe-making, flute-playing, house-building, medicine, and maritime navigation, and especially to the craft knowledge that guides each such activity. Aristotle specifically defines *techne* as the intellectual virtue appropriate to *poiesis*, ‘productive’ activity that aims at some end beyond its own processes. To this he contrasts the pair *praxis/phronesis*, ethical conduct and the practical wisdom that guides it. This is one of several places where MacIntyre suggests that his concept of practice, which he calls a craft in some works, is the descendant of Aristotle’s *techne*, and certainly the range of activities each includes under these terms is similar. Importantly, though, MacIntyre is rejecting Aristotle’s separation of moral conduct and reflection (*praxis/phronesis*) from *poiesis/techne*. For this reason, many commentators have read MacIntyre rather as widening Aristotle’s conception of *praxis*. As Dunne notes:

It is one of the interesting, though perhaps too little noticed, features of MacIntyre’s concept of practice that it elides Aristotle’s distinction between *poiesis*, where the end is separable from the activity, and *praxis*, where the end lies in the very activity itself. Thus he recognises as instances of practice what, in Aristotle’s categorisation, would count as *poiesis*. Consider, for example, architecture, which he counts as a practice, though—unlike dancing, music-

making or virtuous action—its end lies not in the activity of the craftsman or agent but in separate products brought into being by this activity, buildings (Dunne, 2003, p. 354).

The key distinction for MacIntyre is between two types of means-end relationship, internal and external. An external means is taken up because it leads to the end in question. An internal means is of value because it is a part of the substance of the end in question. For example, paying the bursar and discussing a novel are both means of getting an education, one external and one internal. For MacIntyre, it is less important to distinguish between purely processural activities which aim at nothing beyond their own performance (e.g. flute-playing), those that aim at changes in states of affairs (e.g. navigation), and those that aim at a tangible product (e.g. house-building). On the translation of *ergon* and *techne*, see ‘function’ and ‘craft’ in Irwin’s glossary appended to Aristotle (1985, p. 404, 392).

9. Earlier, I mentioned that MacIntyre considers the extra-moral excellences of character goods rather than virtues. Incidentally, I do not follow MacIntyre (and Aristotelian tradition) as characterising this as a distinction between intellectual and moral virtues, and this for two equally compelling and in my view thoroughly convincing reasons. First, only a subset of the extra-moral excellences of character primarily concern the intellect, as the example of the dancer indicates. Second, the virtues, the moral excellences of character, are inextricable from the ‘intellectual virtue’ of *phronesis*. This traditional distinction implies needless and problematic divisions between thought and feeling, mind and body.
10. Later in the chapter, I return to the question of the audience’s ability to participate in a practice (see pp. 70–72).
11. This is what makes pedagogical beginnings so important and fraught as I show in Higgins, 2009c.
12. Socrates finds that all three groups are prone to pronounce on weighty matters, but when pressed show little understanding of them. The statesmen and poets have only this pseudo-knowledge about the good life. With the craftsmen, the case is different. Socrates finds them truly knowledgeable about their special province—how to make a good shoe or saddle or house—but prone to think that on this basis they are wise in general. In the first two cases, Socrates concludes, he possesses wisdom which they lack. In the final case, each side possesses knowledge the other lacks, but Socrates still scores the encounter in his favour as his awareness of his ignorance is the more important kind of knowledge.
13. For a counterexample, see the interviews with Andy Warhol. These are exceptions that prove the rule, though, since what makes them interesting is that Warhol refuses to make *statements* about his work. In his refusal to adopt his role in the game of interviewing, in his dismantling of the interview genre, a new, artful anti-interview genre emerges in which new things are *expressed*. For the distinction between statement and expression, see Dewey, 1980 [1934], pp. 84–91. For a good example of Warhol the anti-interviewee at work, see the opening interview in Goldsmith, 2004. I first learned of these anti-interviews in an interesting presentation by Jesse Dillon on how identity exceeds and resists interpellation.
14. For an example of an interviewing practice diametrically opposed to that of Socrates, where to an extraordinary degree the voices of the interviewees are allowed to emerge in all their idiosyncratic glory and their occupations represented not as failed attempts at theoretical wisdom but as distinctive practical worlds with their own attractions and distractions, avenues and dead ends, see Terkel, 1972.
15. Indeed, MacIntyre goes so far as to suggest that all reasoning takes place within the context of some traditional mode of thought, transcending through criticism and

- invention the limitations of what had hitherto been reasoned in that tradition; this is as true of modern physics as of medieval logic' (MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], p. 222).
16. For a fascinating glimpse into one such dialogue see Pollan, 2008 [1997]. The interlocutors here are the site, the materials, the design vision of the architect, the craft knowledge of the builder, the aesthetico-ethical vision of the client (Pollan), and the craft of writing (the structure in question is to be a Thoreauvian cabin, a writing retreat, a primitive hut).
 17. Jim Jackson, Phillies versus Red-Sox, rain delay coverage, WPHT (Philadelphia), 13 June, 2009. I am reconstructing the conversation from memory.
 18. This para-practice is not only traditionally, but also still to this day, heavily dominated by men.
 19. Adding to the complexity here is MacIntyre's approval of John Anderson's comment that regarding social institutions, it is better to replace the question 'What end or purpose does this serve?' with the question 'Of what conflicts is it the scene?' (quoted in MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], p. 163). Anderson's Sophoclean point, MacIntyre concludes, is that 'it is through conflict and sometimes only through conflict that we learn what our ends and purposes are' (p. 164). Thus, it may be that one of things that a practice needs from its institution is precisely the friction we have identified as a corrupting influence. Certainly, the good of the moral virtues only exists because the integrity of the practice is threatened from without.
 20. Already in 1997, Harper's reported that there had been 27,000 gallons of one flavour of one form of SSRI—peppermint flavoured, liquid Prozac—dispensed in that year alone. [Accessed electronically at <http://harpers.org/index/?q=Prescription+Drugs> on July 1, 2009.]
 21. The therapist as stock character also signals that we are now prone to take up a technical relation to the existential task of understanding and realising the unity of our lives. Of course, depth psychotherapy practiced with integrity does just the opposite, precisely helping us to deal with the narrative work of selfhood indicated by MacIntyre. But the self-help culture, where MacIntyre's stock character of the therapist belongs, does seem to offer the fantasy that we might become managers of our own *eudaimonia*. (On the rise of a therapeutic attitude in education, see Smeyers *et al.*, 2007; and Smith, 2002, 2008.) That MacIntyre does not tar all of the psycho-therapeutic tradition with one brush—how could any philosopher do so since Socrates is after all the first to offer a form of *psyche*-analysis—is evident in his treatment of Winnicott in *Dependent Rational Animals* (see MacIntyre, 1999, chap. 8). On Socrates as the first psycho-analyst, see Lear, 2006b. On the relationship of Aristotelian ethics to the psychoanalytic project, see Lear, 2000; and, Lear, 2005, pp. 82–85 and 151–153.
 22. On the intertwining of practice and institution, I have benefitted from discussions with Ben Blair; for a sympathetic and perceptive treatment of institutions in MacIntyre's theory, see Blair, 2009, pp. 62–86.

3

Labour, Work, and Action: Arendt's Phenomenology of Practical Life

Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is (I Corinthians 3:13)

INTRODUCTION

No study of the relationship between work and human flourishing would be complete without consideration of the singular theory of Hannah Arendt. In *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]) Arendt offers us an ethics of practical life, one closely related to that of her fellow neo-Aristotelian, Alasdair MacIntyre. In the last chapter, we explored MacIntyre's idea that practices (including vocational practices) constitute ethical sources, sites of our ethical education. One of the interesting features of this view, we noted, is its studious agnosticism toward the question of the relative worth of each practice. The key question about practices is not the worth *of* them but the worth *in* them, their ability to disclose new aspects of the good and enrich our vocabularies of valuation. This does not mean that MacIntyre holds a Pollyanna view of practical life, as if any and all forms of doing are equally enriching. Not all activities, as we have taken pains to show, count as practices in MacIntyre's special sense. Further, we noted MacIntyre's view that it has become increasingly difficult to sustain any practices in late capitalism. Western modernity has largely obscured the key distinctions of practical ethics: between practices and institutions, internal goods and external goods, excellences of character and technical skills.

Arendt too is deeply concerned by the modern transformations of practical life. But in marked contrast to MacIntyre, Arendt wants to develop a hierarchical model of practical activities, which she divides into three broad categories: labour, work, and action. Though each is inescapable, given our human condition, they contribute unequally to our flourishing. A life of sheer labour would not be a fully human life. A life of work, while more humane, would still be incomplete. Only a life that makes a significant space for what Arendt calls action fully expresses our humanity. (I unpack the meanings of labour, work, and action in detail below.)

This division of practical life into three basic modes makes Arendt's theory, in one sense, less fine-grained than that of MacIntyre.¹ After all, Arendt

collapses the diversity of individual reproductive and productive practices into the categories of labour and work. At the same time, Arendt's tripartite model emphasizes two distinctions that MacIntyre himself blurs. First, there is this distinction between reproductive labour and productive work. For MacIntyre, farming and fishing count as practices every bit as much as architecture and tailoring. Arendt, by contrast, sees a key difference, since the latter pair produce durable artefacts while the former yield only consumables. Second, there is the Aristotelian distinction between *praxis* (life-leading, ethico-political conduct, or more generally any activity whose end lies within the activity itself) and *poiesis* (any activity pursued for the product it yields).² Indeed, Arendt may be said to cleave to this distinction more forcefully and consistently than Aristotle himself.

It is the very strictness of these distinctions that gives Arendt's theory its enduring fascination. Few readers can stomach her stark divisions, which imply that many of our vocations are but futile labour and that no vocation at all constitutes action. At the same time, in reading Arendt one becomes suspicious of our desire to dignify all toil as work and all work as *praxis*. Arendt makes a powerful case that if the classical divisions in practical life have indeed become blurred it is not because we have extended work, let alone action, to all, but rather because we have become a society of labourers. In the end, while we may still feel that Arendt has carved things up too neatly, we may also begin to suspect that it is we who are engaged in wishful thinking.

Thus, while we may ultimately want to question the exclusiveness of her concept of action, we should begin by admitting that its purity is part of its appeal. By separating out action from other aspects of practical life, Arendt is able to help us recover a powerful and untimely concept. In her notion of action we find a conception of positive freedom and public happiness largely missing in our modern liberal republics and a stirring vision of interpersonal responsiveness and self-enactment that transcends our modern moral talk of duty and interest. It is this fusion of the existential and the political, this vision of practical life as individuating but not individualistic, that promises a rich addition to our evolving virtue ethics of the professions. As framed, however, the category of action excludes all concrete occupations. Action for Arendt is reserved for largely unforeseeable encounters in which one suddenly confronts oneself and others with unpredictable results. Occupations, by contrast, all seem to require relatively high degrees of foresight and predictability. In our labour and work practices, Arendt reasons, ends are conceived and pursued in a way that violates the radically ateleological character of the deed.

Despite this problem, Arendt offers us one of the fullest and most acute statements of what it means to seek our *eudaimonia* in the practical realm. The power of Arendt's account lies not in the number of categories she offers, but in the richness and normative force with which she develops them. She describes each aspect of practical life with phenomenological depth and stages

their interaction in a grand historical drama. We turn now to a reconstruction of her account with an aim toward understanding how the practical life may comprise and compromise our search for a fully human existence. In Chapter 7, we will build on the results of this inquiry to ask whether teaching constitutes labour, work, or action in Arendt's scheme.

ARENDT'S SINGULAR PROJECT

The Human Condition is equal parts normative social history, philosophical anthropology, and phenomenology of practical activity; in other words it is *sui generis*. By way of introducing Arendt's project, I will discuss each of these elements of Arendt's unique genre. Philosophical anthropology is the study of the essential features of our make-up and our situation, and the question whether there are in fact any such invariable human features. Arendt's first move in this terrain is to distinguish between human nature and the human condition (Arendt, 1998 [1958], pp. 9–11). The premise of Arendt's account is that while there is no invariable human nature, there are a number of inescapable conditions which limit, shape, and inspire what humans do and become.

We might think of Arendt's conditions as analogous to the rules of games. Within the world of soccer, for instance, there are endless variations, and a true freedom of choice and movement. But these freedoms are predicated on observing the boundaries of the pitch and the rules of the game. You would not be able to devise a new corner kick set-play if there were no goal on which to strike, if the field were circular or without boundaries, if both teams suddenly could use their hands, if there were only one team, and so on. Human life, with its endless variations, has its own boundaries, its own fundamental conventions. In particular, Arendt identifies six basic, somewhat overlapping conditions of human existence (pp. 7–9).

The first two—and most fundamental—conditions relate to birth and death. But Arendt is not after the literal events, two points staked out on an objective timeline. Everyone is born and everyone dies, but what interests Arendt is what we make of these facts throughout our lives. What Arendt calls *natality* refers to the fact that all human beings have made at least one radical beginning and thus have the potential to do so again. Similarly, *mortality* refers not to a single event but to a fact with which we must contend from an early age to our last days. These first two, temporal conditions underwrite the next three, practical conditions enumerated by Arendt.

The third condition, *biological survival*, is directly related to our mortal nature. As beings with this sort of body on this earth, we must engage in certain activities. Not to put too fine a point on it, we must eat or die.

The fourth condition, *worldliness*, is also closely related to our looming mortality. Given the constant threat of individual and collective perishing, we constantly strive for some measure of permanence. We have an inescapable

need to inhabit human environments, all of those structures and spaces we build out of bricks and stories. Thus, making is part of our make-up. We make tables and tapestries roads and rituals, sonnets and steeples, laws and lemonade. Some of these items may seem more solid than others, but all of culture from the bulkiest building to the most ideational of our inventions, contributes to our sense of the solidity of human life. To find oneself alone on the plain at dusk, one cheers at the sound of song no less than at the sight of shelter.

It is one of our curious features that we are prone to bouts of existential vertigo, like Elizabeth Bishop's narrator from 'In the Waiting Room' who speaks of the 'sensation of falling off/the round, turning world/into cold, blue-black space' (Bishop, 1984 [1976], p. 160). What is it that anchors us when we begin to feel unmoored? According to a famous passage in Hume's *Treatise*, the remedy is so common it is easy to overlook. His sceptical speculations have 'heated his brain' and made him 'ready to reject all belief and reasoning'; he has begun to ask 'where am I, or what', leaving him 'affrighted and confounded with that forlorn solitude' (Hume, 2007 [1739–40], p. 175, 172). What does Hume do in such a state?

I dine, I play a game of backgammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when, after three or four hours' amusement, I would return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strained, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any further (p. 175).

In other words, Hume returns to the fold of the ordinary, encircled by the rules of backgammon, the rituals of food and drink, and the conventions of conversation. The searching, the scepticism, and the vertigo are essential to our humanness, but so too is the tavern where Hume reconnects with his worldliness.³

Fifth, we are conditioned by *plurality*, which Arendt defines as a special combination of equality and distinctiveness (pp. 175–176). Humans all equally share in their ability to distinguish themselves, revealing someone different from anyone in the past, present, or future. It is an inescapable fact of human life that it is lived out in the presence of others who are different from ourselves.

If the first five conditions help to explain some of the regularities across diverse cultures—for example, every human being has some understanding of shelter—the sixth helps explain the radical open-endedness and contingency of human life. This condition may be stated as a recursive extension of the fourth: we are conditioned to make things and the things we make turn around and condition us further. Take, as an example, the car and the highway. The car was shaped by our condition as embodied and worldly beings: our need to get to work and the store; our urge to invent and design. At the same time, we have now been deeply shaped by the car. Sidewalks are replaced by highways; public squares by office parks, cities by sprawl.

Arendt does not name this final condition but here we might borrow some language from Charles Taylor and Michael Oakeshott. Taylor aptly describes us as 'self-interpreting animals', creatures whose lives are significantly built out of our interpretations of our lives (see Taylor, 1985). 'The world [a human being] inhabits is not a world of "things"', Oakeshott writes, 'but of occurrences, which he is aware of in terms of what they mean to him and to which he must respond in terms of what he understands them to be' (Oakeshott, 1989 [1975], p. 23). Thus, we cannot help but inhabit constructed worlds, whether it is the world of Concord, Massachusetts, circa 1850, or the world of Thoreau's exurban experiment on Walden Pond. Humans cannot help but make nature into culture. But, conversely, we also have a propensity to treat our cultural worlds as if they were natural forces: our cultures become second natures.

This philosophical-anthropological framework is the starting point for Arendt's analysis of practical life into the three modes of labour, work, and action. Labour arises because of the biological necessities attendant upon our embodiment. Work is necessary because of our worldliness. Meanwhile both labour and work can be seen as responses to our mortality. Action is both made possible and necessary by the fact of plurality and is expressive of our natality. In any time and place, Arendt's model suggests, we will find some form of these three basic modes. Here, however, is where Arendt's sixth condition comes in. The worlds we build and the stories we tell condition us in turn, shaping among other things these very forms of practical life in contingent but fateful ways. Thus, Arendt must proceed dialectically. On the one hand, she wants to identify certain defining features of each mode and the experience it affords. This is what I earlier called the *phenomenological* aspect of her project. At the same time, her account predicts shifts in the meaning of labour, work, and action over time. Chronicling such changes is what I termed the *social-historical* part of her project, social because a culture's changing constructions of these basic modes of activity tells us a great deal about whether it is animated by a robust or attenuated vision of collective flourishing. Let us take each of these aspects of her project in turn.

By phenomenology, I simply mean an account of the common conditions and recurring structures of felt experience. In this sense, phenomenology concerns subjectivity rather than brute physical objects, causes, and effects. At the same time, phenomenology rejects the idea that experience is purely private, irreducible, and ineffable (cf. Lear, 1990, pp. 3–6 and *passim*). Certainly, we do not want to say that all rock climbers, for example, have the same experience of climbing, even if they follow the same route up the same formation. However, it is equally false to say that all rock climbers have a completely distinct experience of climbing. There is something that it is like to be a rock climber. And this is what Arendt wants to understand in *The Human Condition*: what we are being when we are doing this or that activity.

This is not at all unlike the species of internal good in MacIntyre's theory we earlier termed the 'moral phenomenology' of a practice (see above,

pp. 58–59). A key difference, however, is that while MacIntyre wants to stress the plurality of practices and abundance of distinct phenomenological landscapes, Arendt is working at a level of higher generality. It is her contention that despite their diversity, human activities (peeling a potato, fixing a leak, framing a house, writing a poem, making a public statement, and so on) can be divided into three practical modes. Whether it is you hoeing the garden or me washing the dishes, Arendt suggests, labour has common features. To labour is to relate to the world in certain characteristic ways. Similarly, work and action have their own defining conditions, common features, and experiential regularities. It should be clear that such an analysis of practical life has significant ethical implications. There is not only the question of how I will divide my time among the three practical modes, but how each shapes my very being. In the midst of labouring we become, in Arendt's classical yet colourful designation, *animal laborans*. We run the risk of forgetting that we are also a being that works, that we are also *homo faber*. Or we may lose ourselves in this definition and forget that we are also a being capable of action or deeds, a being capable of revealing distinctive personhood in the finding of common cause.

Though part of Arendt's project is phenomenological, determining the defining features of each of these basic modes of activity, she does not view these categories as timeless and unchanging. On the contrary, she offers a history of the subtly shifting conceptions of each practical mode in the West. And though her project bears on individual flourishing, it is certainly not individualistic. Arendt is above all a social philosopher and one who believes that we can learn a great deal about a culture or epoch by seeing what place it affords each of these modes of human activity.

Arendt's history contains two layers of analysis. The first, broader level concerns the ancient distinction between the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa*, the life of the mind and the life devoted to worldly, practical pursuits. She leaves these terms in Latin, as it is precisely the history of our translations and transformations of these concepts that she is after. While we moderns may seem to rely on similar distinctions, such as that between theory and practice or between the ivory tower and the real world, it is Arendt's contention that we have in fact grown almost completely estranged from the notions of intellectual and practical life on which the ancient distinction was based (cf. Pieper, 1998 [1948]). What Arendt offers in *The Human Condition* is the slow and painstaking work of retrieving these untimely ideas so that we might have the language for genuine translation. Any immediate substitution of modern phrases would simply be misleading.⁴ Take the *vita activa* for example: the 'practical life' is too utilitarian, missing the existential thrust of ancient conceptions of action (*praxis*); the 'active life' is no better, suggesting a life of hiking and jogging rather than the public, political stance Arendt has in mind; and even 'political activity' and 'public service' are off the mark since the *vita activa* has nothing to do with modern electioneering and everything to do with being a citizen in a

kind of republic that may no longer exist.⁵ The first layer of Arendt's history, then, traces how the meaning and value of these two basic conceptions of the good life shifts over time.

What interests Arendt, though, is not only the distinction between these two ways of life but especially the distinctions within them. Both the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* can be analyzed into their core components and, as we have seen, *The Human Condition* offers just such an analysis for the *vita activa*.⁶ Thus, the second layer of Arendt's history involves tracing the shifts internal to the *vita activa*. She wants to understand how our conceptions of labour, work, and action have changed over time, what spaces we have allotted for these activities, and what this says about our shifting estimation of each.

Having distinguished these two layers in Arendt's account, we can now state her historical thesis in terms of their relation. Arendt contends that as the *vita contemplativa* rose in our estimation (in late antiquity), the *vita activa* came to be understood simply as the non-contemplative life which 'blurred the distinctions and articulations within the *vita activa* itself' (Arendt, 1998 [1958], p. 17). This meant that by the time the *vita activa* had regained pride of place (in early modernity), its internal hierarchy had been reversed and its values distorted.

Arendt sees this modern valorisation and inversion of the *vita activa* occurring in two stages and in close concert with changes internal to the *vita contemplativa*. The first stage is marked by the ascendance of *homo faber* (see chap. 42). In other words, the *vita contemplativa* was displaced not by action *per se*, but by work. Meanwhile, it was only contemplation proper that was displaced, since the ideal of fabrication gave new impetus to cognitive pursuits in the direction of natural science, that special form of inquiry in which knowing is intimately tied to making (since scientific progress relies on and makes possible the crafting of ever more elaborate tools).

This first reversal, however, quickly paved the way for a second. For work had always relied on action to escape the infinite regress of its unremitting instrumentalism. Without meaning-making words and deeds, *homo faber* no longer knew how to produce 'for the sake of' but only 'in order to' (p. 154). Elevated to the principle of production, utility provides not a new sense of meaning but a pervasive meaninglessness since 'there is no way to end the chains of means and ends and prevent all the ends from eventually being used again as means' (*ibid.*). It is here, Arendt says, that *animal laborans* claimed the throne. Life, fertility, and abundance were the new values rescuing us from the utilitarian regress. Just as acting had collapsed to making, the making of durable things now collapsed into the procuring of commodities. Arriving back in the present, the ancient *vita activa* has become unrecognisable: action has been all but forgotten, work has largely become an extension of labour, and labour itself, once held in contempt, is now valorised. Meanwhile, modernity has also transformed the *vita contemplativa* into something narrowly practical. Once torn between the demands of

thinking and acting, human life has now been reduced to labour and the scientific-technological pursuit of aids to that labour.⁷

With the broad contours of Arendt's project in place, we turn next to a more detailed examination of the *vita activa*, with special attention to the category of action.

DEFINING THE DEED

Under the category of labour, Arendt groups all of those frustratingly repetitive activities driven by our needs as embodied creatures living on the earth. What makes labour repetitive, Arendt notes is its peculiar combination of urgency and futility:

It is indeed the mark of all laboring that it leaves nothing behind, that the result of its effort is almost as quickly consumed as the effort is spent. And yet this effort, despite its futility, is born of a great urgency and motivated by a more powerful drive than anything else, because life itself depends on it (p. 87).

The most familiar of such Sisyphean tasks is probably our daily efforts to feed ourselves. Again and again, we must buy and prepare food, put away leftovers, and clean up the dishes. Perhaps it is also time take out the trash or clean out the fridge. In any case, the next meal is never too far off, and soon we will be using the energy from the last meal to repeat the cycle. Most of us have felt the absurdity of this, wondering at some point whether we are truly nothing more than a furnace that must constantly be stoked with sandwiches.

Arendt contrasts her view both with the ancient, negative view of labour as painful toil and with the modern, positive view of labour as heroic effort. What unites these seemingly opposed perspectives is their focus on the subjective experience of the labourer. In contrast, Arendt urges us to focus on the products of labour, on their 'location, function, and length of stay in the world' (p. 94). If we do this, she asserts, we will conclude that in fact labour is not productive. It yields not lasting things but commodities: things designed not only to be used, but also to be used up.

In contrast to the labourer, Arendt sees the worker, 'from the humblest craftsman to the greatest artist, [as] engaged in adding one more, if possible durable, thing to the human artifice' (p. 93). To say that the products of work are added to the world is not quite right since they in effect create the world. As Arendt explains:

It is this durability which gives the things of the world their relative independence from men who produced and use them, their 'objectivity' which makes them withstand, 'stand against' and endure, at least for a time, the voracious needs and wants of their living makers and users. From this viewpoint, the things of the world have the function of stabilizing human

life, and their objectivity lies in the fact that—in contradiction to the Heraclitean saying the same man can never enter the same stream—men, their ever-changing nature notwithstanding, can retrieve their sameness, that is their identity, by being related to the same chair and the same table (p. 137).

A purely instrumental view of fabrication would suggest that humans already possess various needs and purposes and then go about creating tools to aid them. This view is misleading in at least two ways. First, it conceals the fact that things (and the customs and purposes embedded within them) shape us. Individuals take shape in the context of a human world of artefacts that necessarily precedes them. Second, suggesting that all objects are created to address a specific need obscures the fact that the sum of all human artefacts as a whole speak to a more fundamental need: the need for a world of things and meanings to structure our experience and to give us mortal creatures a sense of permanence.

We have spoken of durability and permanence, but of course, things fall apart. Thus, even as work (whose products includes tools) helps lighten our labour, it creates a ‘second task of laboring’: maintenance. Arendt describes this secondary form of labour as the ‘constant, unending fight against the processes of growth and decay through which nature forever invades the human artifice, threatening the durability of the world and its fitness for human use’ (p. 100). The monotonous chores of cleaning, upkeep, and repair—though removed from bodily needs—share labour’s essential structure of a futile, repetitive battle against the forces of decay. It does not matter to Arendt whether one is cleaning a toilet or a priceless oil painting: maintenance is labour. Her distinction between labour and work does not map on to our distinctions between skilled and unskilled labour, intellectual and manual labour, or blue-collar and white-collar professions. The cobbler, machinist, and architect all engage in work by Arendt’s definition. Meanwhile, Arendt would not hesitate to describe most modern, white-collar jobs as labour, as ‘care for the upkeep of the various gigantic bureaucratic machines whose processes consume their services and devour their products as quickly and mercilessly as the biological life process itself’ (p. 93).

The crowning dimension of Arendt’s *vita activa* is that mode of activity she calls simply action. Since this concept is the hardest of the three to grasp and the most important, I will unpack it with particular care. The first step is to set aside some misreadings her treatment of action seems to invite, beginning with the notion that what Arendt is talking about is ‘political action’. It is certainly true that Arendt considers action to be the hallmark of the political life, but she is not talking about politics in any ordinary sense, and her notion of action cannot be equated with activism or even with civic participation. What we call politics, she refers to as ‘political action . . . , in the narrower sense of the word’ (p. 190). Arendt develops the concept of action precisely to give us new terms with which to understand the political. To understand what politics means for

Arendt, we must first understand what action means, and this is a concept that she develops in existential, not political terms. Thus, we will bracket off the notion of the political until we have better understood what Arendt means by action itself.

To make matters even more difficult, we must also bracket off our normal range of associations to the word 'action'. As we noted earlier, if some philosophers use technical terms, and others work in ordinary language, Arendt unfortunately falls into a third category of thinkers who use ordinary words as technical terms (see note 4). Arendt reserves the word 'action' for only a small subset of the full variety of human doings and efforts. To help us get a feel for her restricted meaning, we could start by noting that what she calls action is closely connected with speech. However, this compounds our problem as only a small portion of human talk warrants her honorific term 'speech'. What is more, there is an ambiguity in Arendt's account concerning the relation of speech and action. She seems to waver on whether speech and action are separate (if closely related) phenomena, or two aspects of the same thing.

That Arendt sees them as separate is suggested by two points: first, by the simple fact that she coins separate terms and then constantly conjoins them in the phrases 'action *and* speech' and 'words *and* deeds'; second, by a passage where she suggests that action is more closely related to initiative and speech to self-disclosure (p. 178, emphasis added; cf. p. 184). However, the first point is mitigated by the fact that though she pairs action with speech she also uses the term action, metonymically, to name the entire complex of speech and action. For example, the fifth chapter of *The Human Condition* is titled 'Action' even though it largely concerns speech. The second point is mitigated by Arendt's admission that 'the disclosure of who somebody is . . . is implicit in both his words and his deeds' even if self-disclosure is more strongly linked to speech (p. 178; cf. p. 193). After all, even if action could be pegged to initiative and speech to self-disclosure, initiative and self-disclosure are united in Arendt's controlling concept of natality, suggesting that speech and action are themselves inseparable. In any case, Arendt herself knits them together closely enough as is evident in this key passage:

Many, and even most acts, are performed in the manner of speech. Without the accompaniment of speech, at any rate, action would not only lose its revelatory character, but, and by the same token, it would lose its subject, as it were; not acting men but performing robots would achieve what, humanly speaking, would remain incomprehensible. Speechless action would no longer be action because there would no longer be an actor, and the actor, the doer of the deeds, is possible only if he is at the same time the speaker of the words. The action he begins is humanly disclosed by the word, and though the deed can be perceived in its brute physical appearance without verbal accompaniment, it becomes relevant only through the spoken word in which he identifies himself as the actor, announcing what he does, has done, and intends to do (pp. 178–179; cf. p. 26).

Here Arendt clearly establishes the inseparability of speech and action. She tells us that most acts are actually 'performed in the manner of speech' and that, in any case, all acts require and inspire commentary.⁸

Thus, Arendt leaves us juggling three senses of 'action' and 'speech': (1) the everyday sense, comprising any or all of our doings and sayings; (2) the restrictive category of speech-acts that constitutes the crowning dimension of the *vita activa*; and (3) the theoretically separable physical and verbal sides of this speech-action complex. Following Arendt, let us reserve the pair 'speech and action' for this third sense, avoiding these terms when it comes to our run-of-the-mill efforts and talk. In the interest of clarity, however, rather than follow Arendt in also using 'action' for the second sense, I will use another of Arendt's terms of art. For evoking the kind of rare, heightened speech-acts that interest Arendt, I prefer her slightly archaic term 'deed'. Though Arendt herself pairs 'words' and 'deeds' in the same way she does 'speech' and 'action', I think it is clearer to express the relation of (2) to (3) to say that all deeds accomplish results and make statements, even if some are more wordy and some more silent, some more kinetic and some less so.

Let me offer two vignettes to provide a sense of how I am reading Arendt's simultaneous insistence on the distinction between, and inseparability of, speech and action, and also to give us some working examples of the deed:

- (i) Without moving an inch, a juror finds the words to convince her peers that they have overlooked a key piece of evidence, thus avoiding a serious misjudgment. Though she accomplishes her deed with words alone, no one would deny that she has done something: she has averted an injustice.⁹
- (ii) Without uttering a word, Jackie Robinson walks onto Ebbets Field in his new Dodgers uniform on 15 April 1947. Though he accomplishes his deed with bat and mitt, no one would deny that he makes a statement. His silent deed unleashed a torrent of words. Indeed, we are still talking about it today.

As these examples suggest, what distinguishes deeds for Arendt is not only the way they melt the distinction between doing and saying, but two further features of their effects/statements: their singularity and their theatricality. Take the example of Jackie Robinson's Major League debut.¹⁰ What type of act is this? To call it 'taking the field for batting practice' is accurate but wildly incomplete. Nor does it fit very comfortably in the category of 'civil disobedience' (a category which already obscures the differences between the actions of a Gandhi and a Rosa Parks). We could invent a category called 'athletes crossing the colour line' but this category would tell us little about it. To grasp a deed, we write histories and essays; we have conversations and arguments. To grasp taking out the trash, we just use the phrase that names the task. Categories help us bring new iterations under existing patterns. But deeds are singular and therefore surprising. They do not continue a pattern.

They initiate something unexpected, something that shows up the inadequacies of our existing categories. This is what sets us talking about them. It is a sign of the singularity of Robinson's deed that we are still trying to digest what happened that day.

Another key feature of the deed is its theatricality. Arendt notes that actors derive their name from the fact that, while all the arts represent or reify, theatre is the art that represents deeds (pp. 187–188). Just as actors must act in front of an audience (even if only the ensemble), so do we human beings require the presence of others to become the author of deeds. It is this presence that occasions and catalyzes the deed. Talking with Branch Rickey, signing the contract, trying on the uniform: none of these was yet the deed. Robinson's deed required the stage of Ebbets Field and those assembled. We can say that the crowd that day witnessed the deed as long as we add that had they not been there, there would have been nothing to witness.¹¹

What about the example of the juror who averts injustice with her speech act: how is this event either singular or theatrical? Granted, I have treated the jury incident as if it were a generic event, but just like calling someone a person doesn't mean that we then know everything about them, this description would be only the beginning. Unlike tooth brushing or trash disposing, we would want to, indeed have to, know the details of the jury incident to understand it. Once we looked into the matter we would be struck by the impossible contingency of the chain of events that unfolded when these twelve different individuals confronted each other, the evidence, and themselves in an unfamiliar role. The black arts of jury selection notwithstanding, no one can predict how such an interpersonal alchemy will unfold. After the fact, we can try to craft a narrative that will make sense of the chain of events that led to the moment of the one juror's successful intervention. But no one, not even the juror herself, could have predicted that she would be the one who really saw the importance of the particular piece of evidence or that she would be capable of moving a group of her peers to reason more acutely.¹²

In speaking of the unpredictability of action, it may seem that Arendt is simply pointing to the limits of our ability to solve equations with too many variables. Perhaps in a small enough group, the effects of a deed would be predictable. Arendt rejects this idea for two reasons. First, there is the 'boundlessness' of the deed, its power to resonate beyond its immediate context. 'No matter what its specific content', Arendt writes, the deed 'establishes relationships and thus has an inherent tendency to force open all boundaries and cut across all relationships' (p. 190). What started as a conversation between Branch Rickey and Jackie Robinson, for example, rippled outward to affect not only the Dodgers and Major League Baseball, but also all of sports and US race relations. But even if the number of participants could be fixed in some way, Arendt would reject the idea that the effects of a true deed could be predicted in the way the results of a collision of billiard balls can be calculated. Indeed, human beings do act like billiard balls

much of the time: this is what Arendt calls 'behavior'. If this were all we were capable of, Arendt quips, a 'computer would be able to foretell the future' (p. 191). Unlike a complex causal equation in which the forces are known in advance and the trick is to manage all of the variables, the deed makes its impact through meaning. This force is not given ahead of time since the meaning of a deed continues to be shaped by those who respond to it with stories and further deeds.

What distinguishes the deed from our everyday behaviour is not merely the unpredictability of its effects, but a crucial difference in its origin. The deed springs not from our learned habits and customs or our instinctual responses, but from our natality:

With word and deed, we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance. This insertion is not forced upon us by necessity, like labor, and it is not prompted by utility, like work. It may be stimulated by the presence of others whose company we wish to join, but it is never conditioned by them; its impulse springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative . . . Because they are *initium*, newcomers and beginners by virtue of birth, men take initiative, are prompted into action . . . This beginning is not the . . . beginning of something but of somebody, who is a beginner himself (pp. 176–177).

For Arendt, there is something miraculous about children. They might inherit their mother's eyes or their father's flat feet. And we might predict that the child who grows up in a bear-hugging family will adopt different rituals of affection from the child of an air-kissing family. Multiply such examples of inherited traits and learned attitudes however you want. Something remains radically unpredictable in this equation, because it is not something at all but *somebody*. If our deeds seem to come out of nowhere, it is because they come from a 'who' not a where, and a 'who' that is only there in the doing and saying. Children are expected, of course, and one would be wrong to discount the weight of such expectations. Still, in their natal moments these newcomers perform a kind of magic trick, inserting themselves in the spaces between our categories, each claiming a space we didn't know was there. This radical beginning each of us makes, Arendt suggests, vouchsafes the possibility that however much we may later find ourselves being creatures of habit, running lines from the family script, hiding behind cliché and convention—however much we may fall into mere continuing—we may always surprise ourselves and others and begin again, with a deed.

In the end, the heart of this complex concept is, for Arendt, the idea of self-disclosure. All deeds contain the 'answer to the question asked of every

newcomer: “Who are you?” (p. 178). Thus Arendt turns to Dante for her epigraph to the chapter on action:

In every act, what is primarily intended by the doer . . . is the disclosure of his own image. Hence it comes about that every doer takes delight in doing . . . since in action the being of the doer is somehow intensified Thus nothing acts unless [by acting] it makes patent its latent self (p. 175).¹³

Having already stressed the theatricality of the deed, it should be clear that self-enactment is not a private process, like writing in one’s diary. In fact, Arendt maintains that who we are is most hidden from ourselves:

The ‘who’, which appears so clearly and unmistakably to others, remains hidden from the person himself, like the *daimon* in Greek religion which accompanies each man throughout his life, always looking over his shoulder from behind and thus only visible to those he encounters (pp. 179–180).

What catalyzes our self-disclosure, however, is not simply the presence of others. Crammed together into a subway car with forty rush-hour commuters, we are no more stimulated to act than in the solitude of the woods. The deed requires a special kind of space, which Arendt terms alternately ‘public space’ and ‘the space of appearance’. Public space requires not a given number of people but a plurality of perspectives, and this in turn requires, paradoxically, a common object of concern. Arendt illustrates this idea with a striking image:

To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time.

The public realm, as the common world, gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other, so to speak. What makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people involved, or at least not primarily, but the fact that the world between them has lost its power to gather them together, to relate them, and to separate them. The weirdness of this situation resembles a spiritualistic séance where a number of people gathered around a table might suddenly, through some magic trick, see the table vanish from their midst, so that two persons sitting opposite each other were no longer separated but also would be entirely unrelated to each other by anything tangible (pp. 52–53).

The table is a nice metaphor for public space, the space where we find ourselves suddenly separated by something that we have in common, something that by its very commonality draws us together from different directions. It is because we sit at the same table, that we sit on different sides

of it. It is because we confront a rival view that we suddenly realise our own angle on the matter. Too much of modern life is like a crowded subway ride or like Arendt's *séance*. We are disoriented and distanced both from our own natality and the plurality around us: conformists without a community.

HIERARCHY AND INTERDEPENDENCE IN THE *VITA ACTIVA*

Having distinguished labour, work, and action, we turn now to the relationships among them. The first point to make is that each is a necessary part of human life. As embodied creatures, we must labour. As mortals who crave durability, we need a stable world, fashioned for us by work. As distinctive persons among other distinctive persons, we need a space to appear as ourselves. Not only is each mode of activity firmly rooted in an escapable feature of our condition, but there are also important forms of interdependence among them. Labour, work and action are bound together by moments of collaboration (in which one practical mode contributes to the efforts of another) and forms of complementarity (in which one mode fills a void in another).

In the following passage we find Arendt making the case for complementarity while mentioning one form of collaboration along the way:

We have seen that the *animal laborans* could be redeemed from its predicament of imprisonment in the ever-recurring cycle of the life process, of being forever subject to the necessity of labor and consumption, only through the mobilization of another human capacity, the capacity for making, fabricating, and producing of *homo faber*, who as toolmaker not only eases the pain and trouble of laboring but also erects a world of durability. The redemption of life, which is sustained by labor, is worldliness, which is sustained by fabrication. We saw furthermore that *homo faber* could be redeemed from his predicament of meaninglessness, the 'devaluation of all values', and the impossibility of finding valid standards in a world determined by the category of means and ends, only through the interrelated faculties of action and speech, which produce meaningful stories as naturally as fabrication produces use objects ... From the viewpoint of *animal laborans*, it is like a miracle that it is also a being which knows of and inhabits a world; from the viewpoint of *homo faber*, it is like a miracle, like the revelation of a divinity, that meaning should have a place in this world (p. 236).

Arendt's idea is that each mode of activity is animated by a core value, but also plagued by a defining predicament that threatens to undermine that value. As we noted earlier, the core values of labour are fertility, abundance, and the life process itself. Even as we are tempted to say that life is the highest good, we find ourselves forced to admit that living hand to mouth is no life at all. Without a place to hang your hat, without being able to leave some lasting

mark on the world, the life of getting and spending is empty. Without the durable objects provided by work—the grain silo, the bakery, the café—the efforts of *animal laborans* do not even seem to lead to a true abundance, but to a mere piling up, indistinguishable from the shifting of sand dunes. At the same time, work cannot itself singlehandedly make good on its promise of worldliness. The world requires not only durable things but also the web of relations. Without speech and action, the instrumentality of *homo faber* always threatens to become an end in itself. A world created by work alone would be like a stage set after the show has been closed. As Arendt points out, what each practical mode needs to fully redeem its own values lies paradoxically outside it, external not only to its control but even to its sense of what's possible. The saving power of the complementary activity, she says, enters in like a miracle.

As Arendt makes clear in other passages action is the one mode of activity that possesses the resources to cope with, if not entirely to solve, its defining predicament. The predicament of action, its 'frailty', lies in three interrelated features: its unpredictability, its irreversibility, and its evanescence. When the world of things is inhabited by speech and action, it is transformed from the stage-set world to a genuinely human world. Deeds generate and rekindle meanings, the various for-the-sake-of's that rescue us from the meaningless regress of in-order-to's. As we saw, though, the outcome of our deeds cannot be predicted in advance. They elicit idiosyncratic re-actions, and the upshot of these re-actions are themselves only to be found in a set of later and contingent responses. This ripple effect means not only that you cannot predict the outcome of an action, but also that you cannot reverse the process you have initiated if you don't like where it is headed. You may be able to reverse the film of the pebble dropping in the lake or of the jar of milk smashing on the floor, but in life actions are irreversible. Finally, the meanings created by action are fleeting. The web of relations must be rewoven as soon as it is woven. Deeds are either quickly forgotten or made more durable through the *work* of remembrance. Action, however, contains a partial remedy for these frailties within itself. Arendt points to two special genres of the deed, promising and forgiving, which represent means by which action can ameliorate at least two of its three shortcomings (chaps. 33–34). By promising, we hedge against unpredictability; by forgiving, we gain a power to release actors from the irreversibility of their actions.

But there remains the evanescence of action and for this, action must rely on work which reifies its deeds and meanings. This leads us from the category of complementarity to that of collaboration. For action, work performs certain key tasks. Not only the task of reification and remembrance, but also that of framing political structures within which action can flourish. In the passage above, Arendt mentions another form of collaboration: work fabricates tools that ease our labours. Meanwhile, we saw earlier that labour, in its secondary form as maintenance, contributes to work when it cleans, repairs, and preserves the durable objects work fabricates. Thus, the three modes of activity are

strongly interdependent, interlocked by a series of essential complementarities and key collaborations.

What has also become clear in this discussion is that though these practical modes are individually necessary and mutually reinforcing, Arendt does see a clear hierarchy among them. This is already apparent formally in the way each mode is redeemed by the complement of the activity 'above' it. Work rescues labour and is rescued in turn by action, which, alone among the three, does not find its remedy 'in another and possibly higher faculty, but [in] one of the potentialities of action itself' (pp. 236–237). Notice too that while there are forms of collaboration between work and action and between labour and work, there are none between labour and action. This further suggests a hierarchical series of steps rather than three neighbouring spheres of equal jurisdiction.

In the end, Arendt is quite explicit about this hierarchy. While each practical mode is rooted in inescapable features of the human condition, our *humanity* is tied more closely to some than to others:

Through [speech and action], men distinguish themselves instead of being merely distinct; they are modes in which human beings appear to each other, not indeed as physical objects, but *qua* men. This appearance, as distinguished from mere bodily existence, rests on initiative, but it is an initiative from which no human being can refrain and still be human. This is true of no other activity in the *vita activa*. Men can very well live without laboring, they can force others to labor for them, and they can very well decide merely to use and enjoy the world of things without themselves adding a single useful object to it; the life of an exploiter or slaveholder and the life of a parasite may be unjust, but they certainly are human. A life without speech and without action . . . is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men (p. 176).

Thus, for Arendt, labour, work, and action are all parts of a human life, and they rely on each other in various ways, but in the end it is action that is the pinnacle of human activity, the *sine qua non* of leading a fully human life.

PRAXIS IN THE PROFESSIONS

With her concept of the deed, with her rich notions of natality and self-enactment, Arendt seems to offer us the perfect addition to our emerging model of a eudaimonistic professional ethics. Yet Arendt nowhere offers an example of an occupation that counts as action. She seems to think that all occupational activities can be divided up between labour and work, leaving only civic and existential enactments in the sphere of action. The distinction between labour and work alone already counts as a contribution to our inquiry into the relation of occupational life and the good life, but if Arendt's

theory is to contribute its full measure we must examine this restriction of hers and see if it truly proves both reasonable and inflexible.

Why does Arendt exclude occupations from the category of action? We get a hint in 'Reflections on Little Rock' when Arendt remarks that occupational pursuits are inherently social (Arendt, 1959, p. 51). The social is Arendt's term for the sphere that arises in capitalist modernity as traditional distinctions between the public and the private begin to break down. It is where we moderns mass together to attend simultaneously to needs that nonetheless remain essentially private. It is private life lived under crowd conditions. As such, the social affords us neither the shelter we need from the 'glare of the public', the pressure of being seen and heard, nor a true public space of communal concern and self-enactment. It is like the rush-hour subway car I described earlier. There is an overlapping of private interests—we are all going downtown—but no truly common concern. The social manages simultaneously to lump us together, de-individualising us, and to invite discriminations about what each of us is. By contrast, the public realm is both equalising and individualising as each member of a public is seen for who they are. Arendt sees occupational pursuits as social since we are choosing to focus on matters of particular concern to ourselves and to associate with others who share like interests. By contrast, deeds are performed in the public realm where one suddenly finds oneself dealing with others whom one did not choose about matters of truly common concern. To be a doctor or a diplomat is to act according to a socially defined role (indeed, in many lines of work one joins a 'professional society') and against a relatively stable context of institutions and the traditions of practice. Meanwhile, the context for action is 'the space of appearances', an ephemeral, transitory context as much created by, as it is supportive of, action. For all these reasons, Arendt excludes occupational activities from the part of the *vita activa* she most esteems.

The closest Arendt comes to locating a job in the sphere of action is when she refers to political oratory and jury duty as possible sites of deeds. But of course Arendt is not talking about professional politicians, and the whole point of jury duty is that it asks you to step outside of your usual daily role. The bike messenger sits next to the social worker who sits next to the copier repairperson who sits next to the deli owner and all of them must work together at a task at which none of them is an expert.

Most surprising, Arendt excludes even the fine arts from the realm of action. Of all modern vocations, the artist would seem to the most devoted to self-disclosure and the cultivation of one's distinctive voice. Acknowledging the appeal of such an idea, Arendt nonetheless makes a deliberate case that artworks are just that, the product of work. At first glance, this might sound strange given that paintings and poems may seem less object-like than tables and chairs. To this, Arendt counters that:

Works of art are thought things, but this does not prevent their being things
 . . . The reification which occurs in writing something down, painting an

image, modeling a figure, or composing a melody is of course related to the thought which preceded it, but what actually makes the thought a reality and fabricates things of thought is the same workmanship which, through the primordial instrument of human hands, builds the other durable things of the human artifice (Arendt, 1998 [1958], p. 168–169).

Even poetry in an oral tradition, Arendt contends, shows the reifying powers of work. The poet transforms thought and feeling into form; he makes something durable by finding the concentrated images and rhythm that will bind the poem in memory.¹⁴ Accepting the reification argument we may still find such ‘thought things’ too ephemeral to be classed among the durable artefacts of work. However, because of their special non-utilitarian status artworks turn out to be some of the most durable of any objects. The typical products of work are meant to be used (though not to be used up as with commodities) and this use wears them out eventually. Thus, while Sophocles’ stylus is long gone, his plays are still with us.

Here we might press Arendt, pointing out that what is represented in the plays of Sophocles are not only thoughts and feelings but especially deeds. After all, Arendt herself calls theatre ‘the most political of arts’ and points out the etymological connection between the modern word drama and the ancient Greek word *dran*, to act. Arendt’s response is that the reifying of deeds into lasting art, while crucial to our memory of and understanding of deeds, is nonetheless a very different sort of activity than performing deeds. While speech can be central to the performance of the deed itself, this is very different from the narration of the storyteller who aims to capture the *meaning* of the deed. Since the meaning of the deed is found in the chain of events that radiated out from it, the deed doer herself is never able to attain the needed perspective to reify her own deeds. The storyteller has this distance and has the action, natality, and self-disclosure of another as his material. In framing and preserving the deed, however, the storyteller is not himself acting.

Still, our question persists: why can’t we say that Picasso’s *Guernica*, for example, is both a response to the deed of the Nazi bombing of that Basque town and itself a deed, revealing something distinctive about its maker, indeed exhibiting a kind of greatness? Arendt does acknowledge the temptation to blur work and action here:

The modern age’s obsession with the unique signature of each artist, its unprecedented sensitivity to style, shows a preoccupation with those features by which the artist transcends his skill and workmanship in a way similar to the way each person’s uniqueness transcends the sum total of his qualities (p. 210).

Nonetheless, Arendt insists that ‘the essence of who somebody is cannot be reified by himself’ (p. 211). She insists on a firm distinction between the genius

in invention or craftsmanship and the kind of greatness possible in the sphere of action. “Great people”, Arendt says borrowing a line from Isak Dinesen, “are judged by what they are” not by what they have produced (*ibid.*). Still following Dinesen, Arendt suggests that those who attempt to substitute work for self-revelation in the space of appearances find that ‘they become the “slaves and prisoners” of their own faculties’, locked in a kind of “competition with [their] creations” (*ibid.*). Switching to an aphorism from Paul Valéry, Arendt concludes that it is the predicament of the true artist “to feel that he becomes the son of his work,” in which he is condemned to see himself “as in a mirror, limited” (p. 212).¹⁵ In sum, no line of work, not even that of the artist, counts as action for Arendt.

Perhaps, paradoxically, we can best solve this problem by compounding it. For as Freud once observed, when ‘we come upon a problem which is difficult to solve, it is often a good plan to take up a second problem along with the original one—just as it is easier to crack two nuts together than each separately’ (Freud, 1953 [1900], pp. 135–136). Let us table for a moment the question of whether any occupations fit into the category of action and ask the more general question of how well any occupation fits into any one of Arendt’s three modes. Arendt’s assumption seems to be that each activity (teaching, tennis playing, or tax law) will occur in one and only one mode. However, we can imagine two amendments to this view, one weak and one strong. The weak amendment is simply to note that even contrasting categories admit of borderline cases. Two categories can be as different as night and day and still there remain the fuzzy cases like dusk and dawn to consider. The strong amendment is to say that labour, work, and action are like separate ingredients that can be variously combined in the recipe that is each activity. We can also imagine a compromise position, in which labour, work, and action are understood as ideal types, abstracted from the complex activities in which they are sometimes found together. On this view, some activities would occur solely in one of Arendt’s modes; others may have a dominant mode while still occasionally changing key; still others might present a relatively even mix of the two or three aspects of the *vita activa*. Such revisions would certainly make it easier to apply Arendt’s system to real-world, complex activities but are they reasonable amendments to her view?

We can start by ruling out the strong amendment which fails to capture the tensions between Arendt’s categories. Labour, work and action are not just any three descriptors such as living, green, and soft which surprise us neither when disjoined (cacti, green pillows, people) nor when conjoined (grass). After all, Arendt develops the categories through a series of distinctions. Is the activity structured as a process leading to a product? If yes, then it is work. If no, then we must ask further questions, such as whether it reveals or blurs the distinctiveness of the person engaged in it. If it is processural and de-individualising, it is labour. If it is processural and individualising, it is action. And so on. What makes Arendt’s analysis so powerful is precisely the way her distinctions do seem to line up to reveal three distinct phenomenological

modes. If we found that labour, work, and action blended freely in most actions, we would have reason to doubt the worth of Arendt's framework.

However, the weak amendment and compromise position may still have merit. Consider the example of carpentry, a paradigmatic example of work. In its defining activities, carpentry fits well the phenomenology Arendt describes. There is the envisioning of the *eidōs*, or mental model, that guides the crafting of a product that increases our sense of world, our sense of being surrounded by objects that are simultaneously bearers of inter-subjective meanings and tangible, durable things. At the same time, the carpenter must frequently engage in that species of labour we called maintenance. He must pause his work (proper) to clean his shop, fix a tool, remove rubbish from a building site, and so on. How would Arendt explain such labour-like episodes in her paradigmatic example of work? She appears to have four options, only the last of them plausible:

1. Carpentry as a whole ceases to count as work because of the inclusion of these labour-like episodes.
2. In the context of carpentry, maintenance counts as work even though it does not fit Arendt's phenomenology of work.
3. The carpenter ceases to be a carpenter for the duration of his labouring.
4. Carpentry is an activity that includes multiple aspects. Typically it is conducted under the aspect of work, but sometimes it is conducted under the aspect of labour.

The first option is clearly unacceptable: carpentry is a paradigmatic example of work.

The second option, though better, also proves untenable. Some of the carpenter's labours are closely woven into the flow of work. So we might see vacuuming sawdust as part of the activity of sawing and sawing in turn as part of the activity of building the cabinets. Even if this argument works for routine clean-up in the process of building, though, other parts of a carpenter's typical week are harder to subsume under work in this way. Carpenters may take a day to repair tools, buy supplies, clean out their truck, bill customers, go back to an older job and dry out a flooded basement that was to have been sealed, and so on. Such maintenance chores are part of a carpenter's regular routine, but not an integral part of building proper.

Perhaps, then, the third option is best. We could say that such activities force off-days for the carpenter, days when he becomes in effect a repairman, janitor, or clerk. Surely, though, this is too nominalistic. This amounts to saying that carpentry is a good example of work, except for the parts of it that are not. If in order to count something as work we need to remove all of its non-work-like aspects, then we are simply saying that work counts as work. Work then becomes not a category of activities and occupations, but a pure type of activity that some activities and occupations include to a greater or lesser extent. Thus, we arrive at the fourth option.

Consider, in this light, another example. When a pastry chef conceives and creates a wonderful new cake, we might want to say that there is an element of work here, even though the cake is made to be consumed and food-related activities typically fall in the category of labour. We might even want to say that the inventiveness of the cake discloses something about who the chef is and thus counts to that degree as action (cf. Benhabib, 2003, p. 131). Meanwhile, the work of the kitchen clearly involves much labour. The carrots must be bought, stored, cleaned and grated; the flour must sifted; the coconut toasted; the cake pans scoured; and so on. Thus, we can view the classical culinary stratification of roles in terms of Arendt's categories. The task of the dishwasher is pure labour. The lowest prep-cook, who never gets to see a culinary product through to creation while endlessly cracking eggs and grating carrots, is again only a labourer. When this prep-cook is promoted to line cook, a glimmer of work is to be found. The line cook completes an entire dish even if this 'end-product' is to be whisked away and consumed. The *sous-chef* in turn may create the dish that the line cooks prepare. And the *chef de cuisine* creates not only dishes but also whole menus.

These examples would thus seem to confirm both the importance of Arendt's distinctions and the wisdom of softening them. The stratification of roles in the kitchen echoes Arendt's analysis of the *vita activa*. Scullery labour shows only a weak kinship with the culinary arts and a strong kinship to labour in general. And her conception of work helps us to appreciate why a carpenter creating a cabinet and a chef creating a menu might experience similar satisfactions. At the same time, these show the wisdom of what I called the compromise position. On this view, while some activities will closely resemble Arendt's ideal types, others will occupy borderline positions between two types, and still others will be marked by more or less even balance of Arendt's three practical modes. Thus, it is difficult to see the culinary arts as work and work alone. We would not be surprised to hear that a *sous-chef* felt that his work rose at times to the level of self-enactment nor that the *chef de cuisine* has her portion of labour to perform.¹⁶ As with the carpentry example, Arendt is forced into an untenable nominalism if she denies this fact. She is forced to say that the kitchen's labour is labour, and its work work (she would exclude action), while ignoring the integrity of the activity of the chef in which labour, work (and perhaps action) are intertwined. This position also allows us to see the artist as straddling the boundary between work and action, rather than joining Arendt in her somewhat tangled attempt to explain away all of art's actional elements.

This amendment to Arendt, that some activities cut across the categories of the *vita activa*, is not only an improvement in itself, but as Freud predicted, points to a solution of our earlier problem. For now we may claim that an occupation contains elements of action, without needing to fit the model of action entirely. We need not deny the labour-like and work-like aspects of a practice in order to establish its praxial dimension. This then helps us to explain the curious fact that Arendt excludes all occupations from the realm

of action. Given her assumption that every activity occurs in only *one* mode of activity, and the fact that no occupation can be *entirely* actional, Arendt had to conclude that no occupation belongs in the category of action.

However, there is still the possibility that while activities sometimes admit of more than one aspect, no occupational activity admits of action. Recall Arendt's rationale that occupations are inherently bound up with the discrimination and conventionality of the social whereas action occurs in the public realm where we meet as equals and break with custom and expectation. There is something to this idea. Self-disclosure is not the norm at, for example, the annual convention of actuarial science. The delegates have assembled as actuaries, not as citizens confronting each other with a *res publica*, a public thing, between them. Instead of an assembly of 'I's', the group forms a 'we'. Instead of we the people, it is we the actuaries. Thus, Arendt sees occupational choices as social ones at a remove from our genuinely public lives.

In the end, though, all this example shows is that the most guild-like moments of a guild have this social quality. Most professions put the professional in touch with materials or clients, and not simply or primarily with like-minded professionals. The doctor spends his time with patients; the engineer with girders and beams. Indeed, in the case of teaching (to anticipate the argument of Chapter 7) we find a kind of radical non-selectivity. Martin Buber makes this point in dramatic fashion when he writes:

Eros is choice, choice made from an inclination. This is precisely what education is not. The man who is loving in Eros chooses the beloved, the modern educator finds his pupil there before him. From this unerotic situation the greatness of the modern educator is to be seen—and most clearly when he is a teacher. He enters the school-room for the first time, he sees them crouching at the desks, indiscriminately flung together, the misshapen and the well-proportioned, animal faces, empty faces, and noble faces in indiscriminate confusion, like the presence of the created universe; the glance of the educator accepts and receives them all (Buber, 1955 [1926], p. 94).

What Buber points to is the interesting elasticity of the concept 'my student'. There may be pride, protectiveness, and possessiveness in this phrase, but the phrase also stands open, ready to include any new occupant of the classroom. If this analysis is correct, then occupational activities are not as such removed from the realm of action by their social cliquishness, and teaching in particular displays a kind of openness in this regard. Thus, we add a second amendment to Arendt's view: not only may activities be pursued under more than one aspect of the *vita activa*, but occupational activities are also not solely social.

With these two key amendments Arendt's phenomenology of practical life becomes much more useful for our program of constructing a virtue ethics of

the professions and much truer to the diversity across and internal variegation within occupations. This lays the groundwork for Chapter 7, the project of which will be to determine how teaching fits into Arendt's *vita activa*. Whether or not teaching will prove to have a praxial dimension or be better classified as labour, work, or some combination of the two remains an open question. But with these amendments, a *praxis* reading of teaching is not ruled out *tout court*.

Meanwhile, with this amended version of Arendt's theory of practical life, we have added a crucial layer to our developing virtue ethics of the professions. In her broad but deep categories of labour, work, and action, Arendt gives us a framework for thinking about how our work practices are rooted in fundamental human needs and aspirations. One who would seek her *eudaimonia* in the practical realm must be aware of the attractions and limitations of each of these fundamental modes of practice. Our practical engagements shape us in fundamental ways. They are key structuring elements in our ongoing, informal education. But how does work educate or miseducate us? To answer this question, we turn in the next chapter to the theory of John Dewey.

NOTES

1. Though Arendt first introduces labour, work, and action as 'fundamental human activities' (Arendt, 1998 [1958], p. 7), she then confusingly goes on to refer to them simply as 'activities', leaving us no easy way to ask talk about how various specific activities (gardening, jury duty, singing, architecture, marriage brokering, etc.) fit into her three overarching categories. (It is best not to call the specific activities practices since this risks confusion with MacIntyre's term.) Thus, in what follows, I will reserve the word 'activity' for the specific variety, referring to labour, work, and action as 'modes of activity' or 'practical modes'. I will also coin adjectives for each, so that we may ask to what extent a given activity is 'labour-like', 'work-like', or 'actional'.
2. I discuss how MacIntyre blurs the *poiesis/praxis*, *techne/phronesis* distinctions in Chapter 2 (see above, pp. 81–82, n. 8)
3. This movement between sceptical withdrawal and return to the ordinary has been the central concern of the work of Stanley Cavell; for the import of Cavell in education see especially the work of Naoko Saito and Paul Standish (see e.g. Cavell, 1979, esp. Part Four; 1992 [1972]; 1988, chaps. 1–4 and 6; 1990, lecture 2; Saito, 2006; Standish, 2004, 2006).
4. In fact, phrases such as *homo faber* and *vita activa* are exceptions to the rule for Arendt who typically uses everyday words to name her technical concepts. This may well impose a greater burden on readers than the intrusion of foreign and technical terms. Arendt asks us to hear highly specific and idiosyncratic meanings in the most general and ordinary terms. So, for example: 'labour' has nothing to do with fabrication; 'power' is contrasted with 'force'; the 'social' is closer to the 'private' than to the 'public'; and in there almost no room left for 'action' in our hyper-busy modernity. Some of Arendt's readers have found this practice arrogant if not solipsistic as if she may merely bend ordinary language to the service of her peculiar meanings. [See, for example, her exchanges with critics during the 1972 York University conference (Arendt, 1979, pp. 322–323).] Arendt's response to this would be that she is not grafting new meanings

onto existing terms, but restoring essential meanings displaced in modern usage. Whether or not she always succeeds at this is an open question, but her idea is precisely to show that it is these so-called ordinary language terms, and not her reconstructions, which are the true neologisms.

5. Arendt says that Augustine (354–430 CE) was the last to know what it meant to be a citizen in the ancient sense (Arendt, 1998 [1958], p. 14).
6. Though she does trace some of the modern distortions of the *vita contemplativa* in *The Human Condition*, the full project of retrieval and analysis was reserved for her unfinished *Life of the Mind* (Arendt, 1978). In this edition, what stands in for the third unfinished volume on judging is a short appendix based on her lectures on Kant. For the complete lectures, with a helpful interpretive essay from the editor, see Arendt, 1982. Meanwhile, Arendt scholars have worked toward a fuller list of writings which might be considered preparatory for the volume on judgment. D'Entrèves (2000, p. 246 ff.), for example, includes Arendt (1953; 1977a [1958]; 2003 [1964]; 1977 [1968]; 2003 [1971]). Young-Bruhl (2004, pp. 470 and 393) helpfully reminds us that in addition to the specific articles and lectures theorizing the faculty of judgment, our best resource may be the many writings of Arendt that show judgment at work, whether in the exemplary figures described in *Men in Dark Times*, the eponymous counter-example of *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, or her own exercises in political judgment (see Arendt, 1970; 1977a [1963]; 2003, Part II).
7. I have here significantly streamlined Arendt's account, omitting two key factors in her explanation of the ultimate victory of *animal laborans*. The first is the way the way the modern utilitarian alliance of work and applied science leads to a detached perspective on human life that speeds the nihilism implicit in homo faber's instrumental regress (see Arendt, 1998 [1958], chap. 43). The second is the double movement from the ancient embrace of worldliness and immortality through political association, through the Christian equation of unworldliness and eternal individual life, to the modern secularized reversal in which we return not to the public but to the social world where we can bid for eternity not as citizens or individuals but only as members of a species and participants in the endless cycles of reproduction of life itself (see chap. 44).
8. If one wanted to make a case for the primacy of the physical in the deed, one might consider the dramaturgical practice of Constantin Stanislavski, e.g. as reported in Toporkov, 2004, a text I discuss in detail in Chapter 7. Jonathan Lear also offers an interesting psychoanalytic argument that something like Arendt's natality is rooted well below our 'secondary' conceptual, linguistic, and ethical thinking (Lear, 2000, pp. 114ff.). Lear suggests that 'the possibility for new possibilities' is anchored in an inherent tendency of our mind's 'primary process', a tendency to disrupt patterns and interrupt itself with self-surprising 'breaks' (p. 118). Just as action for Arendt (1998 [1958], p. 205) is extra-moral, aiming at greatness rather than goodness *per se*, so Lear sees 'break' as 'before good and evil' (Lear, 2000, p. 119) Pursuing the parallel between natality and break would not only help develop Arendt's intuition that an important component of action is extra-verbal, but also help de-romanticize her account. As it stands, Arendt's is open to the criticism that her concept of natality is only a romantic invocation of individuality rather than an argument that such an individualized and individualizing capacity exists in human beings.
9. Arendt mentions jury deliberations as one of the last spaces 'where a non-spurious public still exists' (Arendt, 1979, pp. 317–318).
10. Robinson was already a professional ball-player, of course, as a star from the Negro leagues. The 'major' league was major only in relation to its own white, developmental or 'minor leagues'.
11. Robinson was called up to the Dodger's from their triple A, international league affiliate, the Montreal Royals. Though I focus on the more famous and important

- moment at Ebbet's field, his debut in the International League was itself an important breaking of a barrier. For a good treatment of Robinson's career in the context of the color barrier in baseball see Tygiel, 1997.
12. For a fascinating glimpse inside the jury deliberation process, see Burnett, 2002.
 13. The ellipses are mine, though the third contains an ellipsis of Arendt's as well. This is Arendt's translation of Dante, *De Monarchia*, Book I, §33. Arendt calls the last sentence untranslatable, hence her bracketed interpolation to make the sentence work in English (Arendt, 1998 [1958], p. 208, n. 41). Several scholars have recently pointed out that Arendt has packed a critique of Dante's philosophy into her translation of this passage on action. On her extremely creative rendering of the last sentence, see Gottlieb, 2003, pp. 161–163 and Markell, 2006, pp. 8–11.
 14. To be exact, for Arendt, art begins in feeling but this must be transformed by thought before it can be reified by work. Feeling by itself, Arendt argues, would have trouble entering the world, but thought transforms its 'mute and inarticulate despondency' into something 'world-open and communicative' (Arendt, 1998 [1958], p. 168).
 15. Arendt is quoting from Dinesen's 'The Dreamers' in *Seven Gothic Tales* and from Valéry's *Tel quel II*.
 16. For an interesting look at the culinary labour, work, and action from the point of view of an apprentice in a famous restaurant and a butcher shop, see Buford, 2006.

4

A Question of Experience: Dewey and Gadamer on Practical Wisdom

Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth that around every circle another can be drawn; that there is no end in nature, but every end is a beginning; that there is always another dawn risen on mid-noon, and under every deep a lower deep opens (Emerson, 1985a [1841], p. 225).

INTRODUCTION

Our task in Part I has been to gather resources for articulating a virtue ethics of the professions. In Chapter 1, we distinguished the broader tradition of ethics from the narrower concerns of modern morality, and we showed that an occupational virtue ethics would not only emphasise character over principles and consequences of conduct, but insist that the impact of one's work on one's own flourishing is a crucial but typically overlooked aspect of any professional ethics worthy of the name.

In Chapter 2, we established with Alasdair MacIntyre the intimate connection between the worlds of work and the quest for the good life. It is not merely a matter of choosing work in accordance with one's sense of what is most valuable to do, admirable to become, or fulfilling to participate in. For it is *inside* practices that we learn some of our most substantive lessons about what is good, admirable, and meaningful. Professional ethics, we said, has been narrowed not only by its unexamined moralism, but also by its very constitution as an applied field. Practices, rather, are themselves ethical sources and central sites of our moral education. Building on MacIntyre's account, we offered a typology of the various kinds of goods a practitioner may find in his or her practice, all directly or indirectly bearing on the practitioner's self-cultivation.

In Chapter 3, we turned to Hannah Arendt to enrich our sense of the eudaimonistic dimensions of practical life. We saw how vocational pursuits might reflect a range of fundamental human needs and aspirations, and deepened our sense of what it might mean to speak of an occupation as a space for self-enactment. We also deepened our sense of caution, begun when we encountered MacIntyre's diagnosis of the waning of practices in modernity, by considering Arendt's own historical narrative of the disappearance of public life and the substitution of making for action, and of the further collapse of work into labour.

Such caution is important since without it the assertion that work is connected with the flourishing of the practitioner tends toward mere sentimentality. Each of the theories we have considered enable us to pose both constructive and critical questions of professional life. With Williams, we may ask how professions might constitute ‘ground projects’ for their practitioners; but we must also consider how the very idea of professionalism is intertwined with our modern, moral myopia. With Macintyre, we may view each vocation as home to a distinct set of goods; but we must also consider whether a given vocation really counts as a practice. With Arendt, we may ask both how our work connects us with, and how it distances us from, our natality. We must be open to the possibility that some occupations offer fewer resources for answering Socrates’ question, some practices have been swallowed up by their own institutional machinery, and some forms of labour and work rarely afford space for self-enactment. Work may be the scene of our growth and flourishing; equally, it may be a site of ethical miseducation.

In this chapter, we will pursue further this question of how work promotes or stunts our growth, turning to a thinker who put this question at the centre of his work: John Dewey. Opinions differ on where the keystone lies in Dewey’s diverse writings: community, experience, evolution, inquiry, meaning, value? Is Dewey above all the philosopher of democracy and deliberation, of art and culture, of science and inquiry, of education and growth, of tools and technology?¹ Starting from any of these points, vocation is never more than a step away. For Dewey, occupation or vocation (he uses the terms interchangeably) is simply ‘a concrete term for continuity’ or in another formulation, ‘a continuous activity having a purpose’ (Dewey, 1916, p. 307). From these two concepts, continuity and purpose, we find ready connections to virtually every facet of Dewey’s philosophy.

If Dewey is the philosopher of democracy, then we need simply note how the first of his two criteria for democracy as a ‘mode of associated living’ is ‘how numerous and varied are the interests which are consciously shared’ (pp. 87, 83). That this criterion relates to the purposive dimension of vocation is brought out when he later characterises what makes the United States of his day (and ours) undemocratic:

The great majority of workers have no insight into the social aims of their pursuits and no direct personal interest in them. The results actually achieved are not the ends of *their* actions, but only of their employers. They do what they do, not freely and intelligently, but for the sake of the wage earned. It is this fact which makes the action illiberal, and which will make any education designed simply to give skill in such undertakings illiberal and immoral (p. 260).

Further, when Dewey speaks of the importance of community life it is often the community’s repertoire of ‘conjoint activities’ and ‘social occupations’ he stresses. When he develops his ‘instrumentalism’, vocations figure centrally

since they both serve as cultural tools themselves (e.g. anthropology and journalism as means for informing ourselves about ourselves) and help to generate and reify literal tools (printing presses, cameras). Meanwhile, the concept of continuity is crucial to Dewey's theories of art, inquiry, and experience. And if Dewey is above all the philosopher of education, we need only note the importance Dewey himself attributes to the project of redefining both the liberal and the vocational so as to overcome what he calls 'the most deep seated antithesis which has shown itself in educational history' (p. 250).

Thus, while the search for the Deweyan keystone continues, the concept of vocation appears to be a mortar holding Dewey's varied writings together. In what follows, then, I retrace the twists and turns of Dewey's account of vocation in *Democracy and Education* leading up to his famous conclusion that we learn through vocations rather than for them.² When read closely, Dewey's argument still has the capacity to surprise, challenging our received ideas about vocation and revealing a concept with existential, aesthetic, and educational dimensions.

Later in the chapter, we will connect Dewey's ideal of continuity to Aristotle's concept of *phronesis* or practical wisdom, especially as it has been taken up by Hans-Georg Gadamer. Both Dewey and Gadamer share a conception of human experience as running in circles, both vicious and productive. Experience may spiral outward in breadth or become routinised and pinched. If Dewey helps us see the connection between work and practical wisdom, Gadamer helps us deepen our understanding of practical wisdom as an openness to new experience. In particular, with his philosophy of the question, he points the way toward what it might mean to prepare professionals to be educated through their vocation. This will round out the investigation into work and flourishing that has been the task of Part I, and it will set us up to consider teaching as a mode of experience in Chapter 8, asking: how educative is the vocation of educator? What is pedagogical practical wisdom? Finally, what is the role of questioning in teaching and teacher education?

THE CONSTANT GARDENER

We have good reason to be impressed with Dewey's views on liberal and vocational education. He refuses to take sides in the tired debate over whether education should prepare students for a life of 'getting and spending' (to quote the poet Wordsworth) or lead them to higher things. Instead Dewey tries to weed out the very opposition between 'education in preparation for useful labour and education for a life of leisure' (p. 250). Like an experienced gardener, he knows that weeds must be pulled up slowly if one is to get all of the roots. As it turns out, the roots of this hardy educational dilemma are especially deep and tangled. As Dewey points out, 'the separation of liberal education from professional and industrial education goes back to the time of

the Greeks' (p. 251). Meanwhile, the 'whole subject matter of vocational education', Dewey finds, is 'deeply entangled' with a host of other 'philosophical dualisms' (p. 307).

Thus, Dewey locates a series of mutually supporting 'oppositions in education [between] labour and leisure, theory and practice, body and mind, mental states and the world', noting that they all 'culminate in the antithesis of vocational and cultural education' (p. 306). For example, while it is not wrong to associate liberal learning with culture,

Culture has also tended, latterly, to be associated with a purely private refinement, a cultivation of certain states and attitudes of consciousness, separate from either social direction or service. It has been an escape from the former, and a solace for the necessity of the latter (*ibid.*).

By linking liberal learning with culture, we trigger a chain reaction of associations and dissociations. Liberal learning is associated with leisure not labour, the mind rather than the body, theory instead of practice, the private over the public, spirit not matter, interest rather than duty, and so on. If these other dichotomies maintain their grip on us, we will find the liberal-vocational split inevitable. Given the importance and difficulty of this task of rooting out the liberal/vocational dichotomy, it is no surprise when it turns out to be the organising project of *Democracy and Education*, a book that was not only Dewey's greatest work on education but one which he said remained 'for many years that in which my philosophy . . . was most fully expounded' (Dewey, 1996 [1930], p. 156; quoted in Garrison and Good, 2010, page 59).³

It would be reasonable to find this dire report of dichotomous thinking overblown. After all, we could point to many curricula and programs that are neither entirely liberal nor entirely vocational. In such examples, though, Dewey finds anything but a cause for optimism. When faced with a long-entrenched dualism, he suggests, we have three basic options. Here is Dewey's description of the first two:

Solution comes only by getting away from the meaning of terms that is already fixed upon and coming to see the conditions from another point of view, and hence in a fresh light. But this reconstruction means travail of thought. Easier than thinking with surrender of already formed ideas and detachment from facts already learned, is just to stick by what is already said, looking about for something with which to buttress it against attack.

Thus sects arise; schools of opinion (Dewey, 1996 [1902], p. 273).

The best course, then, is to undertake the hard work of reconstructing the concepts that have come to be defined as binary opposites; but this requires a 'travail of thought' leading many to accept the opposition, and champion one side in a polemical battle. For Dewey, there is yet a third option, even worse than polemics. For those who balk, not only at the travail of thought but also

at the idea of drawing either sect's fire, there is compromise. When we combine terms without redefining them, Dewey suggests, we really create a mess of things.

It is hard not to agree with him as he reveals just how fundamentally the modern school has been shaped by such compromises:

Our actual system is an inconsistent mixture. Certain studies and methods are retained on the supposition that they have a peculiar liberality, the chief content of the term liberal being uselessness for practical ends . . . But on the other hand, certain concessions must be made to the masses who must engage in getting a livelihood and to the increased role of economic activities in modern life. These concessions are exhibited in special schools and courses for the professions, for engineering, for manual training and commerce, in vocational and prevocational courses The result is a system in which 'cultural' and 'utilitarian' subjects exist in an inorganic composite where the former are not by dominant purpose socially serviceable and the latter not liberative of imagination or thinking power (Dewey, 1916, p. 257).

The last line is the key one, for it shows what is so deadly about these 'inorganic composites' and also signals the direction in which Dewey would like us to head via the travail of reconstruction. Ordinarily, we don't think of compromises as such a disaster. Someone has always wanted to visit Madrid, Grenada, and Barcelona and now finally has worked it out to go. The catch is that she only has the time and money for nine days in total. The compromise: three days in each city. In this case, the traveller gets something of the feel of each place, even if not the immersion experience she might prefer. In Dewey's example, however, the compromise results in getting *none* of the desired goods. In the 'inconsistent mixture', everything is represented by its shadow. Our strange but familiar reasoning goes something like this: if liberal education (concerning the cultural) is the opposite of vocational education (concerning the practical), then in order to ensure balance we need only create a curriculum that is just as narrow, crude, and mechanical as it is useless, decorative, and effete. The disastrous result, Dewey concludes, is an education that fails to prepare one to be truly useful to one's society while also failing to be genuinely 'liberative of imagination or thinking power'.

In fact, Dewey sees such compromises not only within the curriculum, which is fractured into 'liberal' and 'vocational' precincts, but even within individual subjects. 'It would be hard to find a subject in the curriculum', Dewey writes, 'within which there are not found evil results of a compromise between the two opposed ideals' (p. 258). He elaborates:

In the inherited situation, there is a curious intermingling, in even the same study, of concession to usefulness and a survival of traits once exclusively attributed to preparation for leisure. The 'utility' element is found in the

motives assigned for the study, the ‘liberal’ element in methods of teaching. The outcome of the mixture is perhaps less satisfactory than if either principle were adhered to in its purity (p. 257).

For example, Dewey continues:

Natural science is recommended on the ground of its practical utility, but is taught as a special accomplishment in removal from application. On the other hand, music and literature are theoretically justified on the ground of their culture value and are then taught with chief emphasis upon forming technical modes of skill (p. 258).

Indeed, this game of grabbing things by their shadows has gotten so confusing that some parts of the curriculum have ended up not only distorted but also completely mislabelled. It is, for example, bad enough to see precisely the narrowness and mindlessness of certain forms of training as the sign of their vocational status, but even stranger is that some forms of narrow job training get classified as liberal education because of their special cultural status. Dewey explains:

By a peculiar superstition, education which has to do chiefly with preparation for the pursuit of conspicuous idleness, for teaching, and for literary callings, and for leadership, has been regarded as non-vocational and even as peculiarly cultural. The literary training which indirectly fits for authorship, whether of books, newspaper editorials, or magazine articles, is especially subject to this superstition: many a teacher and author writes and argues in behalf of a cultural and humane education against the encroachments of a specialized practical education, without recognizing that his own education, which he calls liberal, has been mainly training for his own particular calling. He has simply got into the habit of regarding his own business as essentially cultural and of overlooking the cultural possibilities of other employments (pp. 312–313).

Composition class is no more liberalising than metal shop if pursued only with an eye to a future white-collar job. Meanwhile, one shudders to think just how many undergraduate classes in history and religion, philosophy and poetry—even in the ‘best’ liberal arts colleges—are really just preparing one to apply to graduate school in these subjects. Of course, this doesn’t mean that narrow training for white-collar professions would be better classified as vocational. As Dewey rightly argues,

... instruction which, in aiming at utilitarian results, sacrifices the development of imagination, the refining of taste and the deepening of intellectual insight—surely cultural values—also in the same degree renders what is learned limited in its use. Not that it makes it wholly unavailable but that its applicability is restricted to routine activities carried on under

the supervision of others. Narrow modes of skill cannot be made useful beyond themselves; any mode of skill which is achieved with deepening of knowledge and perfecting of judgment is readily put to use in new situations and is under personal control (pp. 258–259).

When it comes to liberal and vocational aims in education, Dewey demonstrates that we can afford neither to choose sides nor to adopt a ‘one from Column A and one from Column B’ approach.

If there is no educational sense to this arrangement then why does it persist? Can we simply chalk this up to our unwillingness to take on the work of conceptual reconstruction? While not discounting the human aversion to the travail of thought, we can also simply note that when a distinction is woven this deeply into the fabric of thought, it becomes hard even to notice it. Like a man wearing bifocals, we begin to mistake the dividing line on our lenses for a division in nature. Or recall, from the last chapter, Arendt’s sixth human condition and the way in which culture tends to become a second nature (see above, pp. 88–89). To shock us out of this naturalness, Dewey declares:

If we had less compromise and resulting confusion, if we analyzed more carefully the respective meanings of culture and utility, we might find it easier to construct a course of study which should be useful and liberal at the same time. Only superstition makes us believe that the two are necessarily hostile so that a subject is illiberal because it is useful and cultural because it is useless (p. 258).

Here Dewey exaggerates to make his point: were it a matter of mere superstition we would have long outgrown it. A better word for this deformation in our thinking would be ideology, or the ‘structures of obviousness’ which enable a society to hide from itself the gap between its real and imagined social and economic relationships (see e.g. Althusser, 1971, pp. 162ff.).

For those who associate Dewey with American optimism and can-do pragmatism, such Marxian language may seem out of place. It is true, Dewey was critical of Marx’s social theory and forthright about ‘orthodox and official Communism’, the dishonesty and dogmatism of which he found ‘extremely repugnant’ (Dewey, 1996 [1934], pp. 95, 94).⁴ Still, there are remarkable affinities between Marx and Dewey, and this is nowhere clearer than in Dewey’s analysis of our educational schizophrenia. All of these philosophical and educational distinctions, Dewey suggests, ultimately grow out of another type of distinction: class. Anti-democratic social arrangements are a kind of tap-root sprouting dichotomies in all directions. In epistemology, we find the separation of mind from world; in social philosophy, the individual is pitted against society; in ethics, we are torn between duty and self-interest. And in education we find the distinction

between ‘two types of education: the base or mechanical and the liberal or intellectual’ (Dewey, 1916, p. 253).

Dewey’s point is that these distinctions only make sense against the backdrop of a social world, the activities of whose citizens are similarly divided:

The bare terms ‘useful labor’ and ‘leisure’ confirm the statement already made that the segregation and conflict of values are not self-enclosed, but reflect a division within social life. Were the two functions of gaining a livelihood by work and enjoying in a cultivated way the opportunities of leisure distributed equally among the different members of a community, it would not occur to any one that there was any conflict of educational agencies and aims involved (p. 250).⁵

The paradigmatic instance of this split for Dewey occurred in Ancient Greek society, which sorted human beings into two categories:

Those capable of a life of reason and hence having their own ends, and those capable only of desire and work, and needing to have their ends provided by others. The two distinctions, psychological and political, translated into educational terms, effected a division between a liberal education, having to do with the self-sufficing life of leisure devoted to knowing for its own sake, and a useful, practical training for mechanical occupations, devoid of intellectual and aesthetic content (pp. 260–261; see also p. 255).

But, we moderns protest, surely we have progressed beyond this Greek inheritance. Dewey’s response is a measured one. He acknowledges ‘the abolition of legal serfdom, and the spread of democracy, with the extension of science and of general education (in books, newspapers, travel, and general intercourse as well as in schools)’ (p. 255). And he acknowledges that:

... the increased political and economic emancipation of the ‘masses’ has shown itself in education; it has effected the development of a common school system of education, public and free. It has destroyed the idea that learning is properly a monopoly of the few who are predestined by nature to govern social affairs (p. 257).

Nonetheless, he insists, ‘the revolution is still incomplete’ (*ibid.*). Sometimes accused of being an apologist for science, industry, and capitalism, here Dewey soberly points out that ‘there remains enough of a cleavage of society into a learned and an unlearned class, a leisure and a laboring class, to make [the Greek] point of view a most enlightening one from which to criticise the separation between culture and utility in present education’ (p. 255). Much as we saw in our discussion of Arendt, we moderns would seem to have inverted

rather than dismantled the hierarchy between knowing and doing (see above, pp. 90–92). Thus, Dewey insists that the needed change *cannot* be ‘secured by a change of sentiment regarding the dignity of labor, and the superiority of a life of service to that of an aloof self-sufficing independence’ (p. 256).

In this way, Dewey unearths the deep and tangled, historical and philosophical roots of the liberal/vocational dichotomy. Having exposed how the contrast with the liberal distorts the meaning of the vocational, Dewey turns to the task of reconstructing the concept of vocation so that it requires no contrast with leisure, culture, and liberal education. His goal is ‘to construct a course of study which should be useful and liberal at the same time’, thereby planting an educational seedling for genuine democracy.

THE EXISTENTIAL AND AESTHETIC DIMENSIONS OF VOCATION

The words we use have a history and their meaning is always inflected by the projects and points of view of those who have already spoken them.⁶ Were it not for this fact, Dewey might have been able to sum up his entire educational philosophy with the single phrase ‘vocational education’. Instead, he finds the concept of vocation not only haunted by age-old philosophical dualisms but also narrowed and distorted further in his own time by the interests of the industrialists. Believing that education and life should be infused with the ‘practical attitude’, Dewey has to distance himself from a narrow utilitarianism. Believing that a genuine vocational education is part and parcel of a truly democratic pedagogy, he has to distinguish his position from those whose call for ‘vocational education’ merely announced a new elitism.

Thus Dewey sets out to reconstruct the concept of vocation and his first task must be to help us break some linguistic habits that imply a narrow and distorted view of the vocational. First, we tend reflexively to equate vocations with paying jobs. For Dewey, though, if we are ‘to define the meaning of vocation with some fullness’ we must work against ‘the impression that an education which centers around it is narrowly practical, if not merely pecuniary’ (p. 307). This impression supports and is supported by a second reductive assumption, ‘the notion that vocations are distributed in an exclusive way, one and only one to each person’ (*ibid.*). If someone has a calling as a doctor, for instance, this does not preclude further vocations, say as a parent, socialist, photographer, and town member. Indeed, Dewey’s point is stronger than this. It is not that we simply happen, on average, to have more than one vocation; the very idea of having a single vocation is incoherent. In a passage that will prove important for our discussion of teaching in the next chapter (see below, pp. 152–153), Dewey explains:

As a man’s vocation as an artist is but the emphatically specialized phase of his diverse and variegated vocational activities, so his efficiency in it, in the

humane sense of efficiency, is determined by its association with other callings. A person must have experience, he must *live*, if his artistry is to be more than a technical accomplishment. He cannot find the subject matter of his artistic activity within his art; this must be an expression of what he suffers and enjoys in other relationships—a thing which depends upon the alertness and sympathy of his interests. What is true of an artist is true of any other special calling (p. 308).

Against the business-card conception of vocation, Dewey insists that each of us engages, at any point in our lives and across the life span, in ‘diverse and variegated vocational activities’, most of them unpaid (*ibid.*).

For Dewey, any well-defined social role could count as a vocation. One might object that this definition is so inclusive as to trivialise the concept. After all, does anyone who snaps a few pictures have a vocation as a photographer? Does every inhabitant of each locale feel a calling as a member of their community? Certainly not, but, Dewey might add, neither does everyone employed as a doctor have a vocation to be a doctor. In other words, whatever the test for vocation turns out to be, it is only our materialism and bias for specialisation that leads us to limit its application to one paid activity per person.⁷

Next, Dewey targets a somewhat deeper habit, the habit of negative definition. The easiest way to get a palpable feel for something is to contrast it with what it is not. The catch is that it is only in formal logic that each proposition has only one negation. For every natural language concept, *x*, there are countless things to which the predicate ‘not *x*’ applies. The thesaurus, with its range of antonyms, does not so much determine which applications are proper, as record the history of contrasts drawn for particular purposes. These contingent contrasts do not define the essence of a concept for all time, but they do mark it indelibly. The traces they leave are like handles, making it easy to pick up the concept in a hurry, but hard to avoid using it as the handle indicates. Thus, Dewey fears, we may ‘grab’ the concept of vocation too hastily and find ourselves automatically understanding vocation through one of several misleading, stock contrasts.

For example, it is conventional and convenient to contrast the vocational with the cultural, but this is only the beginning. For, as we saw, dichotomies appear in mutually supporting networks, and the utility/culture distinction draws further distinctions in its wake. Vocation is seen as labour, not leisure; work, not play; duty not inclination; social service not self-interest. Dewey is not denying that vocations require serious, practical labours or may involve a sense of service to others; his point is that such descriptions become distorting when understood in contrast to leisure and play, inclination and self-cultivation.

For our purposes, it is particularly important to note how Dewey attempts to rethink vocation outside of the duty/inclination and altruism/self-interest dichotomies. Early in his discussion, Dewey offers this telling definition: ‘A

vocation means nothing but such a direction of life activities as renders them perceptibly significant to a person, because of the consequences they accomplish, and also useful to his associates' (p. 307). Notice that he mentions service to others almost as an afterthought, giving pride of place to the ways in which vocations shape the lives of their practitioners. This flies in the face of the traditional connotations of vocation or calling, according to which one is called away from ordinary life and asked to abandon one's worldly desires and comfortable existence (compare Hansen, 1995, pp. 1–3). By refusing to construe vocation as service alone, let alone as self-sacrifice, Dewey echoes the theme of Part I, first sounded by Williams, and foreshadows the critique of teaching's service ideal I will launch in Part II. In the meantime, we may note that Dewey's emphasis on the interests of the practitioner cuts against the historical grain, making his focus on the *existential* meanings of vocation the first of several striking reversals in his account.

Debunking reductive assumptions and negative definitions, Dewey clears the way for his positive reconstruction. The revised, broadened definition he offers is deceptively simple: 'An occupation is a continuous activity having a purpose' (Dewey, 1916, p. 309). The simplicity is deceptive because a whole philosophy is packed into these two words, continuity and purpose; and we will have to unpack each carefully, starting with purpose. We already have our first clue in Dewey's linking of vocation to direction and perceptible significance. Here he is drawing on his earlier discussion of aims and interest in which he suggested that goal setting creates a gap "between" the agent and his end' (p. 127). It is only because of this in-between space, Dewey argues, that things can be of interest (literally, *inter-esse*, be between) for us. Without interest, we would only experience the world, in William James' famous phrase, as a 'blooming, buzzing confusion'. Framed by our purposes, though, bits of this confusion congeal into what Dewey in the passage above calls 'consequences'. Thanks to our striving, we find ourselves in 'situations' where we can suffer setbacks, achieve victories, or even just experience boredom. In other words, as desiring beings we are able to experience life as episodic and not merely chaotic in James's sense. In Chapter 1, following Bernard Williams and Jonathan Lear, we noted how our purposes and projects serve a transcendental, world-structuring function (see above, p. 40). For Dewey, too, we could say that purpose and, by extension, vocation are transcendental conditions. We do not find ourselves and our world ready-made and then adopt various vocations. Our vocations are 'structuring condition[s] of the universe of our possibilities' (Lear, 2000, p. 33). As Dewey puts it, 'self and interest are two words for the same fact' (Dewey, 1916, p. 352).⁸

Now, while it may be intriguing to note that there is no such thing as a person without purposive interests, the true import of Dewey's discussion lies somewhere earthward of this transcendental level. The point is not to show that purpose (in general) effects experience (in general), but to understand how the purposes embedded in particular professional practices affect the

lives of practitioners. This is where Dewey's account of vocation dovetails with MacIntyre's conception of practice. To take part in a practice, as we saw in Chapter 2, is to act not with an isolated aim but with a complex purposive frame, a distinctive evaluative teleology. Here is how Dewey describes the existential role of such a frame:

A calling is also of necessity an organizing principle for information and ideas; for knowledge and intellectual growth. It provides an axis which runs through an immense diversity of detail; it causes different experiences, facts, items of information to fall into order with one another. The Lawyer, the Physician, the laboratory investigator in some branch of chemistry, the parent, the citizen interested in his own locality, has a constant working stimulus to note and relate whatever has to do with this concern. He unconsciously, from the motivation of his occupation, reaches out for all relevant information, and holds to it. The vocation acts as a magnet to attract and a glue to hold (pp. 309–310; see also Dewey, 1997 [1938], p. 37).

The line of thought in this important passage seems to go something like this. The world itself, if we can speak of such a thing, is infinitely complex and frighteningly chaotic. We all have our different ways of organising the chaos and no one takes in all there is to take in. Thus, no one lives in *the* world. We all live in *a* partial and contingent world, a world defined by what we notice out of the blooming-buzzing-confusion, and how we organise what we notice. (This, by the way, entails no solipsism since there is extensive overlap in our perceptual sensitivities and purposes, and therefore in the worlds we inhabit.) Occupations, as complex purposive frames, are one of the chief organising factors. They define an axis of concern, orienting us in the chaos. Like a magnet, they help to determine what is salient to us and what has weight for us. Thus, if caring is a condition for there being a world for us at all, what we care about determines what sort of world we live in. In this way, we approach a refinement of our idea that vocation is an existential concept: a vocation constitutes an axis of salience that defines an *environment* for the practitioner.

While vocations often constitute environments on a literal level, insofar as they dictate the kind of place where practitioners spend a lot of time, this is not what Dewey has in mind. Dewey instead calls such places 'surroundings', proposing a subtler, perceptual view of environment in this memorable passage:

Some things which are remote in space and time from a living creature, especially a human creature, may form his environment, even more truly than some of the things close to him. The things with which a man varies are his genuine environment. Thus the activities of the astronomer vary with the stars at which he gazes or about which he calculates. Of his immediate surroundings, his telescope is most intimately his environment. The environment of an antiquarian, as an antiquarian, consists of the

remote epoch of human life with which he is concerned, and the relics, inscriptions, etc. by which he establishes connections with that period (Dewey, 1916, p. 11).

To identify a person's surroundings, a GPS device will do. To identify his environment, however, we need to know a good deal about his history and intentions, hopes and fears, habits and practices. Otherwise, we cannot know what aspects of the surroundings are salient and effective. Imagine the case of a businesswoman who recently started telecommuting from her seaside home. As she plugs in her laptop by the window overlooking the ocean, she may certainly feel happy to have left behind the 'environment' of the big city office building. Dewey's point, though, is that important aspects of her true environment remain unchanged. It may be that her computer and phone are the most salient aspects of her surroundings, transporting her virtually far from the beach house. Despite appearances, the things with which she varies may be the latest email; it may be the crash in the market rather than the crashing of the waves outside. If so, Dewey reasons, these constitute her true environment.

With this felicitous phrase, 'the things with which one varies', Dewey opens up a productive new way of thinking about vocation. When I ask myself, 'Is this occupation worth putting at the centre of my life?', I am considering what sort of environment I want to inhabit. I am determining, to some extent, the very aspects of the world I will notice and with which I will vary. Thus, to choose a vocation is to make a fundamental existential choice: it is to choose the very world I will inhabit. But how should we make discriminations among the various vocational environments? The word 'vary' is curiously neutral here. This is where we need to turn to Dewey's other key term, continuity, and to Dewey's aesthetics where we will find resources for describing the richness and poverty of environments.⁹

Earlier I noted that we understand concepts by means of contrast. This is true of Dewey's concept of continuity, which he defines in opposition both to the capricious and the mechanical. In one of many illustrations of this double contrast, Dewey writes:

The continuity of the work of the carpenter distinguishes it from a routine repetition of identically the same motion, and from random activity where there is nothing cumulative. What makes it continuous, consecutive, or concentrated is that each earlier act prepares the way for later acts, while these take account of or reckon with the results already attained (p. 337).¹⁰

Notice that even when pursuing a *via negativa*, Dewey is careful to avoid digital logic. Instead of another either-or, he offers us an analogical spectrum. Continuity names a quality applicable to all experiences to a greater or lesser extent, describing the degree to which experiences form a complex unity over time. Thus the quality of experience decreases both when there is too much

change, compromising the unity of experience, and when there is too little change, limiting the complexity of experience. With the word 'continuity', then, Dewey names an ideal in the middle of a qualitative spectrum shading off in two directions. On one side, experience deadens into monotony; on the other, it fragments into chaos.

Just as with Dewey's concept of purpose, there are something like transcendental conditions at the very limits of this spectrum: events could be so random, or so routine, that they do not even constitute experiences. Again, though, what matters are not only the extremes but also the rich discriminations one can make along the way. In other words, Dewey's conception of vocation is qualitative. Vocations help to frame a world for their practitioners, and our inquiry into these environments concerns the quality of experience they afford. This constitutes the second striking reversal in Dewey's account. The study of vocations, as it turns out, is not primarily a matter for economists or sociologists: *it is a matter of aesthetics*. To understand the full significance of this claim, we must understand Dewey's distinctive approach to aesthetics.

In *Art as Experience*, Dewey famously sets out to knock art off its 'remote pedestal' and to re-root aesthetics in everyday life (Dewey, 1980 [1934], p. 5). He rejects the notion that works of art are 'products that exist externally and physically', insisting that 'the actual work of art is what the product does with and in experience' (p. 3). We tend to think of aesthetics as the study of art, but according to Dewey art only became a focus for aesthetics because great works of art represent 'refined and intensified forms of experience' (*ibid.*). Dewey rejects the idea that aesthetic inquiry could or should be limited to these 'ultimate and approved forms of aesthetic experience', insisting that it concerns the quality of experience wherever it occurs (p. 4). To bring out this experiential meaning of aesthetic, Dewey coins an inspired term. The opposite of the aesthetic, according to Dewey, is neither the ugly nor the utilitarian but the 'anaesthetic', a term which conveys numbness and somnolence (p. 39 and *passim*). This suggests that the aesthetic refers to any experience in which we feel 'fully alive' (p. 18). Art may be the catalyst for such an experience, or it may not. We may well have anaesthetic experiences in the museum or concert hall. And we may find the aesthetic in nature or in the rituals of everyday life.

Is Dewey such a romantic as to believe that our everyday experiences are full of such intensity? On the contrary, he freely admits, and wants us to recognise, just how much of our experience is anaesthetic. At one point, for example, he conducts a thought experiment comparing human beings to two stones falling down a hill. The first is a normal stone. It bounces down, knocked this way and that, before coming to rest, oblivious of the whole journey. Dewey then asks us to imagine a second stone, this one imbued with a rudimentary consciousness. This stone 'looks forward with desire to the final outcome', and as a result finds itself 'interested in the things it meets on its way' (p. 39). These things now have a significance 'according to the hindering or helping function [the stone] attributes to them' and the bottom

of the hill, Dewey suggests, signifies ‘a consummation and not a cessation’ (pp. 39, 35). As a result, the trip down the hill constitutes, for this mindful stone, ‘an experience, and one with aesthetic quality’ (p. 39).

Now, another philosopher might go on at this point to consider why the second stone, despite its powers of apprehension, still lacks essential human qualities. Not Dewey; his punch-line is that *we* too often lack even this rudimentary consciousness, making us more like the first stone than the second:

In much of our experience we are not concerned with the connection of one incident to what went before and what comes after. There is no interest that controls attentive rejection or selection of what shall be organized into the developing experience. Things happen, but they are neither definitively included or excluded; we drift. We yield according to external pressure, or evade and compromise. There are beginnings and cessations, but no genuine initiations and concluding. One thing replaces another, but does not absorb it and carry it on. There is experience, but so slack and discursive that it is not *an* experience. Needless to say, such experiences are anaesthetic (p. 40).

Here we find Dewey distinguishing the aesthetic from the anaesthetic by means of the exact two concepts, purpose and continuity, that he used to define vocation. When it is vital or aesthetic in quality, experience has guiding interests leading to a kind of attentiveness and significance. It involves continuous activity, avoiding both the ‘slackness of loose ends’ and ‘constriction proceeding from parts having only a mechanical connection with one another’ (*ibid.*). We began with the split between the liberal and the vocational, the cultural and the utilitarian. The concept of vocation, we now see, is actually an ally of the aesthetic. Whether we are in a museum or workplace, our experiences may be anaesthetic, but true art and true vocation alike share a capacity to make experience continuous, concentrated, and cumulative, and to make life episodic and enriching. ‘It is not possible’, Dewey writes, ‘to divide in a vital experience the practical, emotional, and intellectual from one another’ (p. 55).

OUR DOMINANT VOCATION

We have shown how the central components of Dewey’s definition of vocation are rooted in aesthetics, but it is important not to misunderstand this. For Dewey, aesthetics goes well beyond the traditional activity of defining art and beauty. With his concepts of continuity and purpose, he offers us a vocabulary for the appraisal of vocational environments that is not only qualitative but also normative; ethics and aesthetics are here intertwined. For example, when Dewey offers a critique of moralism (not unlike that of Williams considered in Chapter 1) he makes the point in aesthetic terms: ‘The

great defect in what passes for morality is its anaesthetic quality. Instead of exemplifying whole-hearted action, it takes the form of grudging piecemeal concessions to the demands of duty' (p. 39). Without diminishing the *Ethics* (Dewey and Tufts, 1989 [1932]) or *Human Nature and Conduct* (Dewey, 2007 [1922]), *Art as Experience* may constitute Dewey's most substantive ethical statement. For it is here that we get our clearest glimpse of Dewey's idea of what makes life worth living and find his most colourful vocabulary of disapprobation.¹¹ In *Art as Experience*, we see ourselves redescribed as sleepwalkers, mired in routine and numb to the needs of others.¹² We cringe as he points out how we revel in banality and conventionality, bathing in saccharine sentiments and ducking under the cover of received ideas. The key to a thinker's utopia usually lies in his or her dystopia, and as Maxine Greene has often reminded us, Dewey's critique of the 'anaesthetic' implies an ethical aim, an ideal of wide-awakeness (see e.g. Greene, 1978a, chaps. 3 and 11–12).¹³

Greene situates Dewey in the ethical tradition that runs from the Thoreau who went to Walden Pond to 'throw off sleep' because he had 'never yet met a man who was quite awake', to the Camus who gave us powerful images of moral somnolence in works like *The Plague* and *The Stranger* (Thoreau, 1986 [1854], p. 134; quoted in Greene, 1978a, p. 42). Greene takes the phrase 'wide-awakeness' itself from Alfred Schütz who describes an 'attitude of full attention to life and its requirements' (Schütz, 1967, p. 213; quoted in Greene, 1978a, p. 163). 'Experience in the degree it *is* experience', Dewey writes, 'is heightened vitality It signifies active and alert commerce with the world' (Dewey, 1980 [1934], p. 19). In developing this existential-aesthetic ethic, Greene points to Dewey's view that the self is not ready-made but 'something in continuous formation through choice of action' (Dewey, 1916, p. 351; quoted in Greene, 1988, pp. 21–22; see also Greene, 1978a, p. 47). 'The richness, the complexity of the selves people create', she writes, 'are functions of their commitments to projects of action they recognize as their own' (Greene, 1988, p. 22). This leads Greene, as Dewey before her, to an articulate recognition of the ethical import of vocations:

Working, or the diverse modes there are of gearing into the world, can signify many things and, indeed, *ought* to signify many things beyond what we associate with 'white-collar' or 'blue-collar' jobs. To have experiences of carrying projects into effect has to do with being an adult. It has to do with dignity and the quest for ways of expressing a vision, defining a commitment—achieving a sense of freedom and responsibility (Greene, 1978a, pp. 152–153).

Greene and Dewey here join Williams, MacIntyre, and Arendt in demonstrating the inseparability of ethical and vocational questions. He teaches us to see vocations as environments and to ask of any particular occupation whether it allows for experiences that have wholeness and complexity, continuity and development. He teaches us to be wary of callings

that might lull us into a ‘conventionalized and routine consciousness’ (Dewey, 1954 [1927], p. 183). With Dewey and Greene, we now realise an important corollary to Socrates’ question: what sorts of work offer us projects we can recognise as our own, and provide experiences leading to wide-awakeness?

At this point, however, a puzzle arises: from what point of view do we assess the relative quality of experience afforded by different vocations? If I am a carpenter (and perhaps also a soccer player, playwright, and uncle) I will tend to notice things made salient by these concerns. What kind of concern is it, though, that enables me to notice aspects of the pursuits themselves and to realise the aspects of the world they ignore, so as to evaluate the kind of life such pursuits shape? As we saw earlier, MacIntyre faced a similar problem (see above, pp. 50–54). Were the good only defined at the level of practices, he realised, a ‘certain subversive arbitrariness [would] invade the moral life’ (MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], p. 203).¹⁴ It appears to be this same concern that prompts Dewey—right on the heels of the passage in which he suggests that each vocation acts as ‘an organizing principle for information and ideas’—to make the following declaration: ‘The dominant vocation of all human beings at all times is living—intellectual and moral growth’ (Dewey, 1916, p. 310). Thus, for Dewey, preceding and organising our later choice of vocations is our fundamental purpose, to grow.

In my view, this constitutes a third striking reversal in Dewey’s discussion of vocation, and one that ties the first two together. The study of vocations involves both existential questions, about life-choices and lived worlds, and aesthetic questions, about the quality of experience, because this is an *educational* study, an inquiry into the conditions for human development.¹⁵ To choose a vocation is to choose an educative environment for oneself. This completely upends the traditional notion of vocational education. Education is not a preparation for vocations; vocations themselves are (more or less) educative, preparing us for more complex vocations, wider experience, and a richer life. This is the live insight that gets lost in the progressive slogan ‘learning through doing’. We have undertaken this close reconstruction of Dewey in order to recapture the force and freshness of this claim. (For some recent discussions of liberal and vocational aims in education, see Williams, 1994; Lewis, 1997; Winch, 2002; Lum, 2003.)

Thus, in following the twists and turns of his reconstruction of vocation—in teasing out its existential, aesthetic, and educational dimensions—we have arrived by a different route back at the intersection of work and flourishing, now adding a new dimension to our construction of a eudaimonistic professional ethics. Dewey helps us see how the continuous purposive activities that are vocations help frame experiential environments, enriching our sense of what in Chapter 2 we termed ‘moral phenomenology’ (see above, pp. 58–59). Further, he has helped us extend MacIntyre’s point that ‘applied ethics’ puts the ethical cart before the practical horse (see above, pp. 61–63). If you want a profession, conventional wisdom dictates, get a professional education. If you want an education, Dewey retorts, get a profession. Adding

a class in business ethics—even one based on the virtues—to pre-professional education would be for Dewey just further proof that ‘our actual system is an inconsistent mixture’ (Dewey, 1916, p. 257). Occupations are themselves educative (or miseducative) environments and for Dewey ‘we never educate directly, but indirectly by means of the environment’ (p. 19).

For Dewey, then, vocational education is not preparatory professional training but a kind of practical/liberal education through vocations. But we cannot entirely dispense with the question of preparation. For we will still want to know how one prepares for vocational education in Dewey’s sense. How do we find the specific callings through which we may pursue our dominant vocation? ‘Nothing is more tragic’, Dewey remarks, ‘than failure to discover one’s true business in life, or to find that one has drifted or been forced by circumstance into an uncongenial calling’ (p. 308). How do we find continuity in a world of cubicles, purpose in a world of PowerPoint, and growth in a world of ‘professional development’ workshops? After all, Dewey cannot and does not maintain that all trades and professions as practiced are vocations in his special sense. In late modernity, as he himself noted, many workers work only for a wage and have no real sense of the purpose of their work. Meanwhile, the wholeness of craftwork has been fractured by the division of labour. Modern workers rarely have the chance to see a job from beginning to end, let alone the luxury to follow a chance path where it leads. Thus, Dewey’s conclusion raises this further question: How do we learn how to learn through work?

Dewey’s concept of continuity also helps us knit together the arguments made by MacIntyre and Arendt. With MacIntyre’s theory of practice, we stressed the way in which work contributes to our ethical self-formation. Through apprenticeship to a practice, we said, one cultivates excellences of character, overcoming deficiencies in taste and vision and learning new habits of judgment and perception. Such self-formation enables us to undertake the quest to understand what flourishing means and to lead a good life. However, self-formation always runs the risk of eventual calcification. Here is where Arendt’s theory of action is helpful. She has helped us to appreciate how one register of practical life can put us back in touch with our natality, our capacity for new beginnings, no matter how settled our self-formation may seem. She reminds us of the force of the moment in Augustine’s *Confessions* when he declares ‘a question have I become for myself’ (Arendt, 1998 [1958], p. 10).¹⁶

Dewey’s concept of continuity forms a hinge between these two ideas. Continuity, we said, is Dewey’s name for finding our way between two extremes. We avoid, in one direction, repetition and deadness, the cutting down of present possibilities to fit comfortably with expectations based in past experience.¹⁷ In the other direction, we avoid an equally problematic extreme, where we are unable to draw on the fund of past experience to frame the present as a meaningful episode. Thus, Dewey combines in a single concept the MacIntyrean idea of self-formation through the virtues and the

Arendtian virtue of unsettling our self-formation. Indeed, continuity unites two of Dewey's own ideals. On the one side, there is his conception of the educated person as one who has apprenticed himself to human arts—of inquiry, making, expression—and approaches experience with the perspicacity these arts make possible. Here I refer to Dewey's idea that in order to be intelligent, engagement with the world must be funded by past experience, and that this fund is never merely individual. On the other hand, there is Dewey's vision of human flourishing as a 'conscious life' and 'a continual beginning afresh' (Dewey, 1916, p. 360). There are close connections between Arendt's conception of natality and Dewey's claim that one of the main tasks of the educator is 'to keep alive plasticity, initiative, capacity to vary; to prevent induration and fixation in fossilized automatic habits' (Dewey, 1996 [1911], p. 466; see also Dewey, 2007 [1922], Part Two, § 1–2; and Dewey, 1916, chap. 4).

While the reader may grant that Dewey's theory of vocation concerns the *eudaimonia* of the practitioner, and even that Dewey is offering an existential-aesthetic ethics of practice, the question may arise how this constitutes a *virtue* ethics. With all of this talk of plasticity, natality, and continuity—talk of existential frames, aesthetic experience, and educative environments—we may seem to have drifted rather far afield from the virtues. In point of fact, though, we have moved to their very heart. We have wound our way from vocations to the dominant vocation to the central virtue: practical wisdom. Or so I would argue, pointing out the close affinity between Aristotle's conception of *phronesis* and Dewey's understanding of continuity. We can establish the connection between them in few quick steps. First, let us define practical wisdom in a basic way as that variety of understanding conducive to right conduct. Next, let us recall that 'conduct' does not occur only in those moments sanctified as moral dilemmas. As Dewey points out:

The recognition that conduct covers every act that is judged with reference to better and worse and that the need of this judgment is potentially coextensive with all portions of conduct, saves us from the mistake which makes morality a separate department of life. Potentially conduct is one hundred per cent of our acts. Hence we must decline to admit theories which identify morals with the purification of motives, edifying character, pursuing remote and elusive perfection, obeying supernatural command, acknowledging the authority of duty. Such notions have a dual bad effect. First they get in the way of observation of conditions and consequences. They divert thought into side issues. Secondly, while they confer a morbid exaggerated quality upon things which are viewed under the aspect of morality, they release the larger part of the acts of life from serious, that is moral, survey. Anxious solicitude for the few acts which are deemed moral is accompanied by edicts of exemption and baths of immunity for most acts. A moral moratorium prevails for everyday affairs (Dewey, 2007 [1922], pp. 279–280).

Dewey helps us recover a fuller notion of conduct, simultaneously revealing our tendency to carve up life into moral and amoral precincts as itself a moral failing. Moral conduct is not a 9–5 job. The key to moral conduct is not simply knowing what to do in morally charged situations, but being able to perceive such situations and their morally salient aspects amidst the ceaseless flow of everyday life. Imagining morality as ‘a separate department of life’ not only attenuates our responsiveness to others, but compromises the continuity of our experience and, by extension, our own growth.

What does practical wisdom look like if we avoid the moralistic reduction and view conduct as ‘potentially one hundred percent of our acts’? The answer, in Deweyan terms, is continuity. Continuity is practical wisdom when conduct is extended to the full range of doings and sufferings, and when the agent’s own flourishing is given a central place in ethics. Like practical wisdom, continuity describes the ability to bring past experience fruitfully to bear on new situations, to bring generalisations into dialogue with concrete cases. On this expanded, ethical reading, practical wisdom is synonymous with experience itself. Or so I shall argue as I turn now from Dewey to Hans-Georg Gadamer who picks up just where Dewey leaves off. What is more, Gadamer will provide resources for answering our earlier question about what it might mean to think of professional education not as education for professions but as preparation for education through professions.

PRACTICAL WISDOM AND THE CIRCLE OF EXPERIENCE

A discussion of virtue ethics might seem out of place in a study of interpretation and human understanding, but Gadamer’s treatment of Aristotle in *Truth and Method* is far from tangential (Gadamer, 2004 [1960], pp. 309–319). Indeed, when he turns to Aristotle’s concept of *phronesis*, the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom, it is with the intention of recovering what he calls ‘the fundamental hermeneutic problem’.¹⁸ Gadamer recasts Aristotle’s account in the form of a dilemma:

If man always encounters the good in the form of a particular practical situation in which he finds himself, the task of moral knowledge is to determine what the concrete situation asks of him—or to put it another way, the person acting must view the concrete situation in light of what is asked of him in general. But—negatively put—this means that knowledge that cannot be applied to the concrete situation remains meaningless and even risks obscuring what the situation calls for. This state of affairs, which represents the nature of moral reflection, not only makes philosophical ethics a methodologically difficult problem, but *also gives the problem of method a moral relevance* (p. 311, emphasis in original).

Aristotle, on Gadamer’s reading, draws our attention to a circularity at the heart of ethical reflection. In order to see what a situation demands, I must

view the particulars of the situation in light of my general notions of good and right. Without the aid of such generalisations, which make salient and organise the particulars I notice, I would confront only chaos. And yet my generalisations remain vague and uninformative until I encounter them in a 'particular practical situation'. Without a general sense of justice, for instance, I would not be able to understand a particular event as an injustice, but at the same time, it is not until I work through whether or not this really counts as an injustice that I begin to grasp what justice can mean. This renewed, concretised conception of justice then helps me see more of what is demanded of me in future situations (on Gadamer's reading of Aristotle, compare Mackenzie, 1991, and Dunne, 1997, chap. 4; for other interpretations of *phronesis*, see Sorabji, 1980; Blum, 1991; Mackenzie, 1991; Dunne, 1997, part 2; Noel, 1999b; 1999a; Hager, 2000; Wivestad, 2008), and the works cited in Chapter 1, note 2.

Thus, moral reflection is 'methodologically difficult' even if the circle it entails need not be a vicious one. For Aristotle, and Gadamer following him, pursuing the good requires a special kind of perception and openness. The moral life would be easier if we could cleave to a few simple maxims and apply these straightforwardly to the situations we encounter. Conversely, it would be easier if openness meant simply dispensing with all generalisations, proceeding like an ethical empiricist. But for Aristotle there is no short-cut. One must enter, as Martha Nussbaum puts it, into a 'a process of loving conversation between rules and concrete responses, general conceptions and unique cases' (Nussbaum, 1990b, p. 95). Opening one's mind proceeds only through the slow and sometimes painful process of extending, refining, and amending one's generalisations, not through jettisoning them.

Consider an extended example. Imagine an accomplished wrestler from a family of wrestlers and wrestling coaches who is contemplating leaving the sport around which so much of his family membership and personal identity has been woven. Now in college, he no longer enjoys the way it dominates his life and is struggling with whether his desire to quit the sport is better characterised as wimping out or as finally coming to his senses. Because he has a commitment to, and a rough understanding of, courage (one largely formed not incidentally in the practice of wrestling), he is able to perceive this moment as a situation calling for a courageous response. But which response is the courageous one? This is the question, and it is one that can only be answered through consideration of the particulars of this concrete situation. Courage means giving fear neither more nor less than its due in one's deliberations, but what is the pertinent fear? Is it the fear of suffering through gruelling practices, painful weight control, and the angst of competition? Or is it the fear of writing letters to your father and your current and former coaches saying that you have decided to pursue a path contrary to their expectations and hopes? And in either case, how does one decide what is cowardly and what foolhardy in relation to such fear? The devil here, as elsewhere, is in the details. And what a careful conversation with the

particulars can reveal is not simply what one should do, but what courage means. Discovering what courage means in this concrete situation helps this grappler concretise, revise, and extend his understanding of what courage means in general.

As we saw in the passage quoted above, Gadamer turns to *phronesis* not only to bring out the methodological difficulty involved in ethical reflection, but also to give ‘the problem of method a moral relevance’. He is observing an isomorphism between his theory of interpretation and Aristotle’s account of moral deliberation, one that deepens the significance of both. To see why, we must recall an earlier moment in Gadamer’s account, his description of ‘the hermeneutic circle’ (see Gadamer, pp. 268ff). The circularity we observed in relation to ethical conduct characterises all interpretive processes, in which we can only understand the parts in terms of the whole and vice versa. Consider the following thought experiment:

We are reading a poem. Struck by some morbid references, we think that it must be a poem about death. This gestalt then helps us notice more details. Someone is digging a hole in one line which we now read as a grave. Darkness is mentioned several times, something we had missed before we were pointed in this moribund direction. But also, we now notice that the poem is full of endings. And what occurs to us, despite our growing structure of expectation, is that not all of these endings are final. This is not a poem about death *per se*, we realize, but about all sorts of endings in human life. Suddenly, with this reframing, new details of the poem become salient. There is a reference to the end of a visit, the end of an illness, the ‘final straw’. This leads to a further reframing and the process continues.

By itself, this might seem like a relatively unimportant point, of interest only to teachers of literature and scholars of interpretation. But linking this circularity with the one in Aristotle’s ethics paves the way for Gadamer’s most important and provocative claim: the hermeneutic circle describes the human condition itself. Thrown into existence—and therefore into the particularities of history, culture, language, etc.—we notice certain aspects of the world and are blind to others. The question is whether, given that each new situation we enter is framed by our generalisations from past situations, we are able to notice some of the newness of the new situation. Can we let our generalisations frame the particular situation, and make it readable, while at the same time reading carefully enough that our generalisations become informed and reformed by the very particulars they stretch to encompass?

For Gadamer, to initiate a dialogue with the other (a text, a novel situation, a distant epoch, another person) means risking our prejudices by putting them in play, while trying to remain open to those moments in which we find our ourselves noticing just a little more than we thought we knew how to notice. Gadamer calls these moments being ‘pulled up short’ (Gadamer, 2004 [1960], p. 270; see also Kerdeman, 1998, p. 249ff.). To call such moments

'surprises' would not do them justice. A surprise is something we half-expect without knowing whether or when it might happen. Being pulled up short is more like experiencing something that we didn't know could happen, something that cannot be, until we slowly and painstakingly re-wire our sensibilities to allow it its due. For some, even surprises are unpleasant; but for all of us, being pulled up short is a deeply disconcerting experience. Indeed, Gadamer, quoting Aeschylus, describes the phenomenon as 'learning through suffering' (Gadamer, 2004 [1960], p. 351).

It may sometimes feel liberating and enriching to discover the exceptions to a rule or the limitations to a theory. However, what is at issue is not simply our conceptions, but our self-conceptions, and especially our 'cherished self-assumptions' (Kerdeman, 2003, p. 296). As Deborah Kerdeman observes, it turns out to be 'the self-perceptions . . . we try hardest to protect [which] are most vulnerable to being pulled up short'. Why? Because they are typically 'self-deceptions', beliefs crafted precisely to protect us against certain realisations (*ibid.*). As Kerdeman puts it, 'being pulled up short discloses attitudes, qualities, and behaviours we would prefer to disown, deny, or recognise only insofar as we project them onto others'; it 'disrupts self-inflation, betraying false pride, invincibility, or exaggerated desire for control' (*ibid.*). To glimpse your vanities and failures—to confront the emptiness of your promises, the contingency of your projects, and the mortality of your existence—is to feel exposed, disoriented, empty.

Being pulled up short is, in sum, no fun at all, and human beings have unsurprisingly developed an impressive repertoire of ways to avoid it: ignoring that which does not fit with what we expect to find, assimilating the strange to the known, reducing the repleteness of the real to bullet points, etc. More than we might like to admit, we are *all* 'shut-ins'. We circle through the same few rooms of one dwelling in one settlement in a vast and wondrous world. Northrop Frye offers a different metaphor: 'In ordinary experience, we are all in the position of a dog in a library, surrounded by a world of meaning in plain sight that we don't even know is there' (Frye, 1964, p. 79).

It is for this reason that both Dewey and Gadamer make it a point to distinguish between the generic and normative meanings of experience. In the generic sense, experience is simply whatever happens to us. On this model, we are like informal data collectors: experiences are that which 'conform to our expectation and confirm it', and an experienced person is someone who has seen enough of something to be able to make trustworthy generalisations about it (Gadamer, 2004 [1960], p. 347). According to this logic, the longer you have lived the more 'experienced' you are. In point of fact, though, we routinely meet younger people 'wise beyond their years' and older people who strike us as lacking the breadth of perspective, keenness of insight, equanimity and perseverance of an experienced person. Thus, we also use experience in a normative sense. For example, when we remark, 'Now that was an experience', we are using the same word to talk about precisely that which stands out from the banal, everyday impress of sensations and events that we

ordinarily call experience (compare Dewey, 1980 [1934], pp. 35ff.). Here, the defining quality of an experience is not confirmation of expectations leading to trustworthy generalisations but precisely disconfirmation. As Gadamer puts it, 'every experience worthy of the name thwarts an expectation' (Gadamer, 2004 [1960], p. 350).

To bring this point home, let us consider another thought experiment. When one friend asks another how her day was, it would be odd indeed if this were the answer:

Well, let's see. I left for work at 8AM as usual. I got into the car and it was pretty cold, so I turned on the heat. I buckled my seat-belt and pulled out of the driveway. I put on my turn signal and turned right on McHenry. A blue car was going by in the other direction. There was a red car in front of me. I lowered the heat and turned on the radio. The radio was too loud, so I lowered the volume. The red car made the left turn on Vine and I pulled up to the stop sign. OK, so that brings me up to 8:04.

Though everything mentioned here would count as experience in the generic sense, the answer is absurd because the question concerns what significant (inward and outward) events the day held. Driving to work might be an experience, but only if the person experimented with a new route to avoid traffic, ran over a squirrel, had an epiphany, was caught in a hailstorm, and so on.

As we saw from Gadamer's idea of being pulled up short, true experience is not simply disconfirmation but insight. It has the dialectical structure of alienation and return.¹⁹ We depart from ourselves—leaving behind a belief (as it was) to encounter the anomaly that would challenge it or the repleteness that would expand it—and then return to ourselves with our ideas revised and enlarged. And as we have seen, we live life in circles, both productive and vicious. At times our experience spirals outward in meaning and growth, but all too often our lives run in a groove, or even narrow over time. How do we seek the open life, the opening spiral of experience? Gadamer has no recipe to offer. Such a technical conception would contradict the very spirit of the *phronesis* tradition. However, with his theory of the question, he helps understand the 'logical structure of openness' and thus what openness entails (Gadamer, 2004 [1960], p. 356).

THE OPEN QUESTION

According to Gadamer, then, experience comes in two varieties: significant disconfirmations and banal confirmations. True experiences pull us up short, opening up new avenues of expectation. Thus true or 'negative' experiences pave the way for the slow, repetitive tracing of experiential routes that is experience in the banal sense. Negative experiences create the genres which

generic experience fills out. But what leads to experience in this normative, genre-creating sense? Is it just a matter of dumb luck when we come across something that disconfirms our expectations, that opens our eyes to something new? Gadamer's answer is that the capacity for new experiences is a result of our past negative experiences which result in a disposition to a certain kind of openness. By itself the word 'openness' might suggest the idea of getting rid of all preconceptions, of being ready for anything. For Gadamer, though, this is to misunderstand openness in a fundamental way, and to bring out this idea he immediately develops his account of openness in a surprising direction. Openness, he suggests, has a discernable structure: it takes the form of a question. As Gadamer puts it,

We cannot have experiences without asking questions. Recognizing that an object is different, and not as we first thought, obviously presupposes the question whether it was this or that. From the logical point of view, the openness essential to experience is precisely the openness of being either this or that. It has the structure of the question (*ibid.*).

At first blush, this claim that one cannot have experience without asking questions may seem like the worst sort of intellectualism. We imagine a scholar looking for a central question and thesis statement in every life situation. But consider a very ordinary example.

You are driving down a road with a good many lights. For a while, the lights are with you, and the fact that each light you pass is green registers only subconsciously. Then, you approach a red light. If this is utterly predictable, you may again react to the information only subliminally, decelerating on auto pilot. If it is unusual for this particular light to be red, or you have caught a couple of reds in a row, you may take note of the fact as you stop. However, what is most likely to provoke an experience is a yellow light. If the green represents 'this' and the red 'that', then the yellow light signifies precisely 'either this or that'. In other words, it confronts us with a question and forces us to make a decision: What does this particular yellow light mean, shall I treat it as 'Stop!' or 'Go!?' This state of indeterminacy snaps us out of our reverie. Suddenly certain aspects of our environment pop from ground to figure: our distance from the car in front of us, the presence of nearby pedestrians or cyclists, the light rain slicking down the roadway, the possibility of a police car nearby, our memories of how long this particular yellow lasts, and so on. It is the most indeterminate of the three options that is the most likely to yield an experience.

There is, then, no reason to assume that by linking experience, indeterminacy, and the open question, Gadamer is wishing the whole world were an academic conference. Indeed, he makes a point of distinguishing the true question from its imposters, many of whom flourish in academia. By

considering the various pathological varieties of question—rhetorical, leading, pedagogical, and floating—he builds up a set of criteria for true question-hood (pp. 357–358). The rhetorical question is the most obvious and least dangerous imposter. It adopts the interrogative mode just for a moment before revealing its true nature as a declarative statement. The leading question tries to pull the charade off. A less honest version of the rhetorical question, the leading question invites us to choose one of two sides in a debate that is clearly rigged. It calls for a response, but there is no object of inquiry. Things are somewhat more complicated with the pedagogical question. For example, a teacher asks his students, ‘What were the causes of World War I?’. This question has two distinct advantages over its fellow pseudo-questions. For here there really is an object of inquiry, and the question admits of multiple answers. What, then, does it lack? Gadamer’s answer is an interesting one. The ‘paradoxical difficulty’ of the pedagogical question, he writes, ‘consists in the fact that it is a question without a questioner’ (p. 357). The teacher may want to know whether the students did the reading and whether they understood it, but he is not really trying to understand the causes of the war. Questions do not acquire their interrogative force from the question mark or the rising tone. A true question, Gadamer insists, has a person behind it, someone with a genuine desire to understand something.

This brings us to the floating question, the most difficult of the pseudo-questions to diagnose and the most important to understand. Someone asks ‘What is justice?’, and let us assume that she is asking because she really wants to know. In this case, then, we have both an object of inquiry and an inquirer. Further, the question seems to be entirely open, begging no preliminary questions about the nature of justice. But of course this is precisely the problem. Gadamer explains:

The openness of a question is not boundless. It is limited by the horizon of the question. A question that lacks this horizon is, so to speak floating. It becomes a question only when its fluid indeterminacy is concretized in a specific ‘this or that’. In other words, the question has to be posed. Posing a question implies openness but also limitation. It implies the explicit establishing of presuppositions, in terms of which can be seen what still remains open (p. 357).

An open question means one that opens up the phenomena in question, but to do this a question must have a definite structure, a structure of expectation that the answer will be either this or that. Those who have taught writing will recognise this idea. Nothing kills an essay faster than a vague central question or a truism for a thesis. When a student paper begins, ‘What is the nature of teaching and learning?’, we brace ourselves for the inevitable pain that is about to be inflicted. It is not just that the question is too large to address in eight pages—this topic could not be exhausted in eight books or eight lifetimes—but that the question is too equivocal. As it turns out, the problem

will not be running out of room too quickly, but running out of things to say. A floating question may be asked in earnest but it will be too vague and equivocal to provide a 'horizon of inquiry' to frame and drive the investigation.

To bring this point home, let us try another thought experiment:

A class is reading Plato's *Meno* together and has begun to focus on Socrates' biting sarcasm and brusque refutations of Meno. One group argues that teachers should avoid sarcasm with students because teaching involves a special trust. They add that you don't need to demolish someone's existing ideas to get him or her to think better.

Another group counters that good teachers show a kind of tact, tuning in to each student and their situation. Socrates, they say, knows who he is dealing with here. First, Meno is an adult and therefore doesn't require the same protections a younger student would. Second, Socrates recognizes that Meno is stuffed full of stock answers and puffed up with vanity and that he must relieve Meno of his received ideas and hot air before genuine inquiry can occur. It is a good thing that Socrates is not overly concerned with Meno's feelings, they will conclude, since going through life arrogant and ignorant is a worse fate than having one's pride wounded.

The two camps will go back and forth, couching their arguments in the particulars of this rich but also quite particular pedagogical case study from 4th century BCE Athens. Now, when someone in this class asks herself, in the specific terms I have just sketched, whether discomfort is essential to learning, whether a harsh tone could ever be pedagogically appropriate, and whether there is a difference between supporting a student's learning and making the student feel supported, she will be asking a real question.

As this example demonstrates, it takes work to open a question and motivate an inquiry. True questions require real controversy and their openness does not take the form of open-endedness. The question the group develops here is precisely pointed, loaded up with all sorts of rich and arguable assumptions. The truly open question does not sit there inscrutably before all answers, but exists because substantive, conflicting answers have already been developed. A good question closes off many possibilities, but in its positivity (in all of the claims it makes in posing itself) it has the power to explode clichés and put an aspect of the world back into play.

In this way, Gadamer helps us move away from a notion of openness as freedom from assumptions to ask what assumptions can be productive. What makes this idea of Gadamer's somewhat difficult to grasp is the way it challenges our conventional notions of tradition and prejudice. Since the Enlightenment, we are prone to see tradition as a body of unquestioned rituals and beliefs. The Enlightenment itself, Gadamer provocatively asserts, was itself predicated on a prejudice: the prejudice against prejudice. The Enlightenment mistakes one class of pre-judgments, those that distort reality

and short-circuit inquiry, for the whole of pre-judgment. Against this view, Gadamer argues:

It is not so much our judgments as our prejudices that constitute our being. This is a provocative formulation, for I am using it to restore to its rightful place a positive concept of prejudice that was driven out of our linguistic usage by the French and English Enlightenment. It can be shown that the concept of prejudice did not originally have the meaning we have attached to it. Prejudices are not necessarily unjustified and erroneous, so that they inevitably distort the truth. In fact, the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something—whereby what we encounter says something to us (Gadamer, 1976 [1966], p. 9).

As speakers of particular languages, shaped by particular communities, living in a particular time, we all have particular dispositions toward the world. Certain parts of the world are more salient for us, others less so, some entirely invisible. Even our access to the parts of the world to which we are open is biased: that is, we ask only certain questions of even that which we notice. To have prejudices or predispositions is to approach the world from a position. This spatial language helps us to see why Gadamer rejects both the Enlightenment dream of clarity, and its nightmare of an impenetrable shroud of tradition and prejudice. To be positioned is to have access to certain views on the world, just as surely as it is to be bounded by a horizon beyond which we cannot see. To say that we are always bounded by a horizon does not preclude movement and expanded horizons. But it does suggest that we must let go of the epistemological fantasy Merleau-Ponty called '*la pensée de survol*' or 'thinking which looks on from above' (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. 160).

Tradition, for Gadamer, is a dynamic process, a large-scale hermeneutic circle. We are historical beings but we are not trapped in history. We approach the world with '*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein*', a phrase which Gadamer says is deliberately ambiguous between 'the consciousness effected in the course of history', and 'the very consciousness of being thus effected and determined' (Gadamer, 2004 [1960], p. xxxiv). To be human is to inhabit a particular time with a contingent set of weights and measures, if you will, for taking stock of the universe. We inherit a tradition of approaching the world which limits the possible range of our approaches; but it also equips us to engage with what is not us, what is alien in certain ways. Our pre-judgments are the conditions by which something speaks to us in the first place, and in attending carefully to what we hear, we stand to notice something of our own prejudices. As we turn back toward the world with this bit of self-knowledge in hand, our openness to the world has increased, and circle widens.

Gadamer's paradoxical teaching is that the best route to the unknown is through the known, and that if you want to be truly open-minded, you must be willing to risk exposing your close-mindedness. If I shy away from foregrounding my commitments and presuppositions, I short-circuit the very process by which I might see what is distorted or narrow in my way of approaching the world. But this means risking exposure and the jolt of being pulled up short. As Gadamer observes, to put ourselves into genuine dialogue with the other (text, time, belief, person) 'has little to do with a mere explication and assertion of our prejudices; rather, it risks our prejudices—it exposes oneself to one's own doubt as well as to the rejoinder of the other' (Gadamer, 1989, p. 26).

If Dewey shows us how vocations themselves, when in good order, constitute productive hermeneutic circles, Gadamer describes the existential posture needed to keep such interpretive, experiential structures from collapsing. Dewey helps us move beyond the idea of professional education as pre-professional preparation to see how work might itself constitute an ongoing education. Gadamer helps us to see how learning to pose interesting questions prepares us to be educated through our vocations.

RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT

With this treatment of Dewey and Gadamer, we have completed the work of Part I, laying a conceptual groundwork for a virtue ethics of work. In Part II, we turn to the project of working out what a virtue ethics of teaching might look like. Together Dewey and Gadamer have given us a rich set of questions to pursue on the terrain of teaching. If vocations are educative (or miseducative) environments for their practitioners, what sort of environment is teaching? In what ways, is teaching a continuous, purposive activity defining an axis of salience? What do teacher's notice? What kind of effective world is the classroom *for the teacher*? Is the teaching environment a rich one, enabling a widening of experience over time? How can teachers use their practice to cultivate wide-awakeness? What would a questioning posture look like in teaching? And how might we conceive of teacher education as an introduction to such questions and a preparation for the productive circles of pedagogical experience? Such questions will be the focus of Chapter 8.

Before we get to these questions, however, we have a more immediate issue to tackle. Helpful as Dewey's distinction between environment and surroundings may be, it risks veering into a dangerous idealism unless supplemented by a more materialist account of brute working conditions. In addition to exploring the teacher's axis of salience and effective world, we also need to investigate the teacher's surroundings. The desert is dry regardless of one's occupational frame. The question we must consider, then, is how the classrooms and schools may disrupt the continuity, attenuate the purposes, and constrain the experience of teachers. This question is akin to one raised

by MacIntyre's account about the relation of institutions and practices. We will therefore take up both questions together in Chapter 6.

NOTES

1. For Dewey as the philosopher of democracy, see Westbrook, 1991; for the aesthetic Dewey, see Alexander, 1987, and Jackson, 1998; for Dewey the philosopher of science and inquiry, see Johnston, 2006, 2009; on the centrality of education to his work, see pp. 114 and 140, n. 3; for the instrumentalist Dewey, see Hickman 1990, 2001. And there are other 'undiscovered Dewey's' constantly emerging: for the erotic Dewey, see Garrison, 1997; for the Emersonian Dewey, see Saito, 2005, for the Hegelian Dewey, see Good, 2006; for the Darwinian Dewey, see Popp, 2008; for the idealist Dewey (religious, moral, humanistic), see Rockefeller, 1991, Kestenbaum, 2002, and Rogers, 2009.
2. Though my reading will concentrate on *Democracy and Education*—and in particular on Chapter 23—I will also draw on other works, most notably *Art as Experience* (Dewey, 1980 [1934]). Please note that the Perigee/Penguin Trade Paperback printing of 2005 has slightly altered the pagination of the previous Perigee printings.
3. Dewey goes on to offer the following interesting observation about the neglect of *Democracy and Education* and the relation of philosophy to education:

I do not know that philosophic critics, as distinct from teachers, have ever had recourse to [*Democracy and Education*]. I have wondered whether such facts signified that philosophers in general, although they are themselves usually teachers, have not taken education with sufficient seriousness for it to occur to them that any rational person could actually think it possible that philosophising should focus about education as the supreme human interest in which, moreover, other problems, cosmological, moral, logical, come to a head. At all events, this handle is offered to any subsequent critic who may wish to lay hold of it (Dewey, 1996 [1930], p. 156).

Briefly, the argument for the claim that the dismantling of the liberal/vocational dichotomy is the organising project of *Democracy and Education* goes as follows. As noted, Dewey says that the philosophical dualisms discussed in chapters 15 and 18–22 'culminate' in the liberal/vocational dichotomy (Dewey, 1916, p. 306). Then, he remarks that his treatment of occupation extends his earlier discussion of aims, interest, and thinking in chapters 8 and 10–12 (p. 309). Next, he points out that his social critiques of narrow vocationalism 'practically resume the main contentions of the previous part of the work' (p. 315), which I take to refer to the book's opening chapters which culminate in chapter 7 on democracy. Finally, we see how the concept of vocation frames the book's two final chapters. The discussion of epistemological binaries in chapter 25 is introduced through the concept of continuity and the example of the carpenter (pp. 336–337). The final chapter employs the concept of vocation and the example of the doctor to attack the dichotomy between dutiful service and self-interest (pp. 351–353). Thus, Dewey's critique of philosophic dualisms, his psychology of learning, and his defence of a democratic educational ideal all intersect in this one chapter on vocation.

4. Though Dewey faults Marx for severely downplaying the degree to which superstructure reciprocally shapes base, he does give Marx credit for deepening our understanding of how 'economic conditions [determine] political and legal forms' (Dewey, 1996 [1939], p. 118). And while Dewey is 'profoundly skeptical of class war as *the* means by which . . . genuine

social advance [is] made', he acknowledges 'the existence of class-conflicts as one of the fundamental facts of social life' (Dewey, 1996 [1934], p. 93, emphasis in original). The end of this essay, 'Why I am not a Communist', with its typographic nuance, is a nod to his friend Sidney Hook and perhaps more:

For this reason, too, I am not a Communist.

I have been considering the position, as I understand it, of the orthodox and official Communism. I cannot blind myself, however, to the perceptible difference between communism with a small *c*, and Communism, official Communism, spelt with a capital letter (p. 95).

5. In the interest of clarity, I have here corrected a typographical error, an extraneous comma found in the original before the word 'distributed'.
6. This idea is powerfully developed in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin (e.g. 1981).
7. Dewey also suggests a third bias which supports the first two: we have a natural urge to count as vocational only those of a person's activities which distinguish him, ignoring those he has in common with others. However, whether one's primary, paid profession is a distinguishing mark depends on context. When our doctor is at the hospital, her socialism distinguishes her; on an airplane with a sick passenger, it is her medical training that stands out. Dewey has a point here. When someone asks, 'What do you do?', we are not in the custom of answering with a list of eight activities, and this may facilitate forgetfulness about and eventually erode our vocational variegation. At the same time, what we called in Chapter 2 the good of a biographical genre applies here (see above, pp. 57–58 and 59–60). By emphasising my primary vocation, I may be proclaiming a way of life and claiming an identity.
8. Here Dewey anticipates the arguments of Oakeshott (1989 [1975], p. 23), MacIntyre (MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], chap. 15), and Taylor (Taylor, 1985; 1989, chap. 2) that we are self-interpreting animals, that the self is structured through narrative, and in particular through quest narratives about our standing relative to what is good. This was part of a broader narrative turn in the 1980s in psychology and philosophical anthropology with various roots and precursors such as Heidegger, Proust, and Augustine (see e.g. Schafer, 1980; 1983; Wollheim, 1984; Spence, 1984; Ricoeur, 1984–1988; Bruner, 1987).
9. In what follows, so as not to distract the reader with variant spellings, I have substituted 'aesthetic' and 'anaesthetic' where Dewey writes 'esthetic' and 'anesthetic'.
10. Dewey employs this contrast in seven different chapters of *Democracy and Education* (see Dewey, 1916, pp. 77–78, 85, 146, 154, 309, 341, and 350).
11. Another work in which Dewey's vision of *eudaimonia*, his ethics of contact with qualities of nature, emerges more vividly than in the officially ethical works is *Experience and Nature* (Dewey, 1929).
12. A keyword search of *Art as Experience* reveals some 40 references to the mechanical, 34 to numb and its cognates, 17 to automaticity, 16 to deadness, and another 35 to the routine, rigid, and blind.
13. Another way to show the inseparability between aesthetics and ethics for Dewey is to point out that the concept of imagination is central to Dewey's aesthetics and to his ethics via his concept of 'imaginative rehearsal' (see e.g. Fesmire, 2003, Part II).
14. For a study of overlaps and divergences between Dewey and MacIntyre, see Carden, 2006.
15. Another way to say that Dewey thinks the vocational and the educational together is to say that he is a philosopher of practical *Bildung* in the tradition of Hegel. This is the claim recently advanced by Jim Garrison and James Good (Garrison and Good, 2010; see also Garrison, 1995; and Good, 2006). I discussed Hegel's conception of practical *Bildung* in the Introduction (see above, p. 7).

16. This is Arendt's translation of '*mihi quaestio factus sum*' (Augustine, 2000 [397–401 CE], p. 182, line 40 [Bk. 10, §50]) which she mistakenly transcribes as '*quaestio mihi factus sum*' (Arendt, 1958, p. 11, n. 12). *Quaestio* here is also sometimes translated as 'puzzle', or as R. S. Pine-Coffin has it, 'problem' (Augustine, 1961 [397–401 CE], p. 239 [Bk. X, Chap. 33]).
17. Here I have simplified the story so that the rigid person is a captive to his past, missing the opportunity each present offers to revise his sense of where he is heading. Dewey actually holds a more complex, dialectical account. What constrains the rigid person is not his past *per se*, but his current organisation of his past experience. His vision of the possibilities in the present is narrowed because his personal history is clichéd. The fullness of the present offers a chance to revise our sense of where we should be heading by helping us clarify and expand our sense of where we have been.
18. This is the title of section 4.2 in the Continuum Impacts edition. Formerly, this was Part II, section II, subsection 2.
19. Alienation and return—as you recall from my discussion of Gadamer's reading of Hegel in the Introduction (see above, p. 7)—is the hallmark of *Bildung*. That Dewey and Gadamer both draw inspiration from this aspect of Hegel's philosophy is further reason, if any is needed, for linking Dewey and Gadamer in this chapter. (For a discussion of the similarities between Dewey and Gadamer, see Jeannot, 2001).

PART II

A Virtue Ethics for Teachers
Problems and Prospects

5

The Hunger Artist: Pedagogy and the Paradox of Self-Interest

They pushed the straw around with poles and found the hunger artist in there. 'Are you still fasting?' the supervisor asked. 'When are you finally going to stop?' 'Forgive me everything', whispered the hunger artist. Only the supervisor, who was pressing his ear up against the cage, understood him. 'Certainly', said the supervisor, tapping his forehead with his finger in order to indicate to the staff the state the hunger artist was in, 'we forgive you'. 'I always wanted you to admire my fasting', said the hunger artist. 'But we do admire it', said the supervisor obligingly. 'But you shouldn't admire it', said the hunger artist. 'Well then, we don't admire it', said the supervisor, 'but why shouldn't we admire it?' 'Because I had to fast. I can't do anything else', said the hunger artist. 'Just look at you', said the supervisor, 'why can't you do anything else?' 'Because', said the hunger artist, lifting his head a little and, with his lips pursed as if for a kiss, speaking right into the supervisor's ear so that he wouldn't miss anything, 'because I couldn't find a food which tasted good to me. If I had found that, believe me, I would not have made a spectacle of myself and would have eaten to my heart's content, like you and everyone else.' Those were his last words, but in his failing eyes there was still the firm, if no longer proud, conviction that he was continuing to fast.

'All right, tidy this up now', said the supervisor. And they buried the hunger artist along with the straw. But in his cage they put a young panther. Even for a person with the dullest mind it was clearly refreshing to see this wild animal prowling around in this cage, which had been dreary for such a long time (Franz Kafka, 'The Hunger Artist', 1924).

In my opinion, if you really want to know, half the nastiness in the world is stirred up by people who aren't using their true egos (J. D. Salinger, *Franny and Zooey*, 1991 [1961])

A BLIND SPOT IN THE EDUCATIONAL IMAGINATION

In Part II, we turn to the practice of teaching to concretise, test, and further develop each of the conclusions of Part I about the relationship between working life and the good life. In this chapter, we pick up the thread of

Chapter 1, where we concluded with Bernard Williams and Charles Taylor that modern morality was a ‘peculiar institution’ within an older, broader tradition of ethical thought. What makes morality peculiar, we saw, was that its search for universalisable norms of right conduct led it to exclude—as merely personal, or aesthetic, or religious—questions at the very heart of ethics. These practical, first-personal questions concern the shape of one’s life as a whole: what is excellent to achieve, worthwhile to participate in, admirable to become? Morality, with its narrow conception of rationality, is apt to treat such questions as hopelessly fuzzy and subjective. With its stringent conception of duty, it discounts them as mere self-interest. Thanks to the revival of virtue ethics, however, such moral restrictions have come to seem dangerously myopic, and the central ethical questions about human flourishing and what makes life worth living have come back into view.

The ethics/morality distinction also helps us expand our view of the normative dimensions of education. Without this distinction, we will be led to conclude that there are but two areas of concern: as with any profession there are questions about professional conduct, and with education there is the added question of how to educate students with an eye to their future conduct. As important as such questions are, it is clear from the analysis of Chapter 1 that these two areas are far from exhausting the full range of normative, educational questions. For ‘professional ethics’ and ‘moral education’ are typically construed in a narrowly moral way, leaving crucial ethical questions out of account. Thus, to generate a complete map of ethico-educational inquiry, we need to cross the ethics/morality distinction with that between education and teaching (that is, with a distinction between the overall educational enterprise—viewed from the perspective of its aim, the development of students—and the practice of teaching in particular). This generates four categories of normative, educational questions (see Figure 6).

First, Williams’ expanded view of ethics explodes the typical understanding of moral education as the attempt to cultivate in the young the emotional dispositions and cognitive capacities to do the right thing. Educational philosophers inspired by the recovery of virtue ethics have worked to show

	SUBSTANTIVE ETHICS	MODERN MORALITY
THE AIMS OF EDUCATION	Educational Ethics	Moral Education
THE PRACTICE OF TEACHING	The Ethics of Teaching	Moral Professionalism

Figure 6: Four areas of ethico-educational inquiry

how this understanding of moral education has been narrowed by two assumptions: one, that it is a distinct activity, intentionally pursued in its own time and place; and, two, that it involves only the development of the desire and capacity to treat others well (see, for example, Carr and Steutel, 1999). There has been a good deal of work targeting this first assumption in particular, work detailing the pervasive indirect moral education which occurs in schools (for a review of this literature, see Hansen, 2000). Unfortunately, many writers—even some of the same ones who challenge the first assumption—still fall prey to the second kind of narrowness (see, for example, Fenstermacher, 1990, pp. 133–136). It is as if we can speak of an implicit moral curriculum only insofar as a teacher models, or classroom interactions embody, virtues like kindness, tolerance, and justice. Though most of us will find such other-regarding virtues necessary for answering the paradigmatic ethical question ‘How should I live?’, they are hardly sufficient in themselves (see Slote, 1999; see also Cottingham, 1991). Even character education—with its supposed links to virtue ethics and its occasional inclusion of virtues like courage—seems much more concerned with the narrower questions of moral conduct than with the broader ethical question of ‘what is it excellent to become?’

Rooting out these forms of narrowness that have plagued moral education, we are left with the conclusion, already reached by John Dewey early in the last century, that the word moral in the phrase ‘moral education’ is virtually redundant. Dewey was clear to distinguish ‘ideas about morality’ from ‘moral ideas’ (Dewey, 1996 [1909], p. 267). The latter are those ideas—whether they concern the Quran, quarks, or Queen Victoria—that shape our character and conduct. In contrast, ideas about morality may leave us quite unchanged. Dewey recognises that ‘direct moral instruction, even at its very best, is comparatively small in amount and slight in influence when the whole field of moral growth through education is taken into account’ (p. 268). For Dewey, all educational moments are shot through with ethical import, leading him to declare: ‘In the largest sense of the word, morals is education’ (Dewey, 2007 [1922], p. 280).²

The idea that one can talk about educational goals apart from visions of the good is a modern development. The very fact that we now have a special name for ‘moral education’ suggests our new default assumption. Educational goals are understood to be ‘value-neutral’, and the exceptions which prove the rule always involve such other-directed virtues as tolerance or empathy. To this notion, Dewey counters that only a ‘narrow and moralistic view of morals’, prevents us from recognising ‘that *all* the aims and values which are desirable in education are themselves moral’ (Dewey, 1916, p. 359, emphasis mine). Anticipating Williams’ critique of modern morality, Dewey explains:

We may say that our conceptions of moral education have been too narrow, too formal, and too pathological. We have associated the term ethical with certain special acts which are labeled virtues and are set off from the mass

of other acts, and are divorced from the habitual images and motives of the children performing them. Moral instruction is thus associated with teaching about these particular virtues, or with instilling certain sentiments in regard to them. The moral has been conceived in too goody-goody a way (Dewey, 1996 [1909], pp. 284–285).³

If we resist this narrowing of the ethical to the moral (in Williams' terms) or of the ethico-moral to the moralistic (in Dewey's terms), then it becomes clear that education simply is applied ethics, the enactment of more or less explicit visions of human flourishing (some of which, of course, we will find wrongheaded or impoverished). Moral education thus stands revealed as but a small part of the larger domain of educational ethics, by which I mean the study of the thick conceptions of human nature and excellence animating all educational theories and practices. (I develop this idea further in Chapter 8; see below, pp. 256–266). Such study has been a mainstay of educational philosophy from Plato and Rousseau to Freire and Greene.

Looking now at the bottom row of Figure 6, we note that even some educational philosophers who are determined to avoid the reduction of educational ethics to moral education still fall prey to reductiveness in the area of professional ethics. Consider how R. S. Peters approaches the topic 'Ethics and the Teacher':

There are two main aspects of education which stand badly in need of ethical foundations. These are its matter and manner . . . On the one hand, arguments must be given for initiating children into activities and forms of awareness such as science and poetry rather than bingo and horror films; on the other hand, arguments must be given to justify some procedures of initiation rather than others (Peters, 1967, p. 22).

By defining education as 'initiation of others into worthwhile activities', Peters puts eudaimonistic questions—questions about what makes life worth living—at the centre of educational ethics (p. 71). Moral education simply follows as a matter of course. Students learn to participate in worthwhile activities in which certain behaviours are understood as praiseworthy and others blameworthy.

When Peters turns from 'matter' to 'manner', however, he adopts the narrower, moral view. He speaks of justifying our procedures of initiation, and later in the same essay argues that the role of 'teacher will demand certain modes of conduct . . . as well as certain attitudes to children' (pp. 22–23). Peters' focus here is what we might call 'moral professionalism': principles of professional conduct, duties incurred through roles and relationships, and moral dilemmas occurring in practice. If Williams and the other critics of morality are right, though, there must be more to professional ethics than this. This is not to say that moral professionalism is unimportant. We all hope that teachers will, more often than not, do the right thing, and I applaud those

philosophers of education who work to remind teachers just how complex moral problems can be. If we care about children, we should worry about thoughtless, cruel, unfair, lascivious, or dictatorial teachers.

But if we care about teachers, we cannot accept that such issues define the ethics of teaching. Between Peters' ethics of aims and his morality of means, a crucial range of questions gets squeezed out. To see what the ethics of teaching must involve, we need only recall Peter's own claim that ethics deals with what we prize, that it examines the worth of activities. The ethics of teaching, then, must be that domain of inquiry concerned with whether and why the activity of teaching is worthwhile to the teacher. This last phrase, 'to the teacher' does not entail that notions of the good are entirely subjective nor does it suggest that teacher motivation is egoistic in a crass sense. As we noted with Williams in Chapter 1 (see above, pp. 22–25), though, ethics must be at least formally egoistic since it begins and ends with first personal reflection about the shape of one's life (Williams, 1985, pp. 32, 50; see also Annas, 1993, p. 291). Ethics, we concluded, has its roots in the perpetual practical question 'what should I do next?' and flowers, in our more contemplative moments, into questions such as 'what do I want to become?', 'what does it mean to be fully human?', and 'what would make my life meaningful, excellent, or worthwhile?'

A virtue ethics of teaching must then involve a similar set of questions. Why teach? Why is this practice worth putting at the centre of my life? What is the life of the teacher and how does this relate to my sense of what makes life worth living? What are the goods internal to the practice of teaching and how does this inform my sense of what it is most worthwhile to experience, excellent to achieve, and admirable to become? How does tending to the growth of others advance my own growth?

So far, though, we have derived only the logical possibility of a virtue ethics of teaching. We have located a *potential* overlap between eudaimonistic ethics and the practice of teaching, but what if this turns out to be a null set? Perhaps speaking of the 'flourishing of the teacher' is like talking about 'the coast of Kansas' or the properties of 'oilwater'. Consider, for example, this famous eudaimonistic statement made by Thoreau on his decision to set up a new sort of life on Walden Pond:

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, to discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practice resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life (Thoreau, 1986 [1854], p. 135).

Thus, we must ask ourselves, can we imagine a teacher heading to the classroom to 'suck out all the marrow of life'? Or do we find instead all too many teachers having to 'practice resignation'? And why should this concern us in any case?

Let us tackle the last question first. In Chapter 4 (see above, pp. 127 ff.) we noted with Dewey that all specific vocations have to answer to our ‘dominant vocation’ of living, by which he meant not subsisting but flourishing (Dewey, 1916, p. 310). To be fully alive, for Dewey, means retaining our ‘interest in learning from all of the contacts of life’ and moving toward a ‘more intense, disciplined, and expanded realization of meanings’ (Dewey, 1916, p. 360). Our dominant vocation is growth and increased capacity for further growth. ‘Conscious life’, Dewey wrote, ‘is a continual beginning afresh’ (Dewey, 1916, p. 360). And here Dewey’s vision joins that of Arendt with whom we asked how our practical pursuits connect us with or estrange us from our natality.

Can teaching pass these Deweyan and Arendtian tests, and if not does it deserve some sort of exemption? Indeed, this eudaimonistic requirement is a tall order for any vocation. We may want our life to be a continual beginning afresh and our work to reconnect us with our natality. But we may well find that our work is draining and greying, for example, as captured in this excerpt from Studs Terkel’s *Working*:

Nobody likes to grow old, but I’m afraid I grew old at a very early age. The years went by quickly when I was very young, and all too quickly in the years when I should have been having fun. I became a concerned old man at a very early age. I began to grow gray when I was twenty one . . . (Terkel, 1972, p. 513).⁴

Surely, though, teachers fare better than this? After all, teachers literally work with youth! In fact, though, it is not clear to what extent teaching enables one to enact fresh beginnings and stay in touch with one’s natality.⁵ As John Goodlad has remarked, building on a famous observation by Philip Jackson:

Is it realistic to expect teachers to teach enthusiastically hour after hour, day after day, sensitively diagnosing and remedying learning difficulties? During each of these hours, according to [Philip] Jackson [in *Life in Classrooms*], teachers make more than 200 decisions. During each day of the week, many secondary teachers meet hour after hour with successive classes of as many as 35 students each. As one teacher said to me recently, ‘It is the sheer emotional drain of interacting with 173 students each day that wears me down’.

Even if the best pedagogy is practiced for a few years, the demands on teachers are such that some will turn to routines that make the least physical and emotional demands (Goodlad, 1984, p. 194).

What Dewey and Arendt offer, in their theories of vocation and action, are regulative ideals. Thus, while Dewey may well be right that vocations have the *potential* to frame educative environments for their practitioners, Rainer Maria Rilke also has a point when—in one of his famous letters to Franz

Kappus (a military officer struggling to stay in touch with his natal, poetic side)—he writes:

I know, your profession is hard and full of contradiction of yourself, and I foresaw your complaint and knew that it would come. Now that it has come, I cannot comfort you, I can only advise you to consider whether all professions are not like that, full of demands, full of enmity against the individual, saturated as it were with the hatred of those who have found themselves mute and sullen in humdrum duty. The situation in which you now have to live is no more heavily laden with conventions, prejudices and mistakes than all the other situations, and if there are some that feign a greater freedom, still there is none that is in itself broad and spacious and in contact with the big things of which real living exists (Rilke, 1954 [1901–8], p. 47).

Here Rilke paints a fairly dark picture of professional life. Is teaching an exception to this rule? Consider Jonathan Kozol's candid description of the teaching life:

Many of these teachers [I've talked to] have labored for decades to confront the myths, the tedium, and the repetitive humiliations of archaic textbooks and preposterous conventions long-embedded in the written or un-written rule books of the schools in which they teach I listen to the voices of extraordinary people with a deep tradition of persistence in the face of system-wide timidity and intimidation—teachers who have worked from day-to-day, and year to year, with neither the glamour of book publication nor the short-lived glow of press or media attention, seldom rewarded in any way at all except perhaps in the one and only way that decent teachers ever find reward: in the gratification of a difficult job done well and in a very basic kind of private dignity courageously upheld (Kozol, 1981, pp. xi–xii).

Kozol echoes Rilke's concerns, acknowledging that teaching is a profession where conventionality and routine can overwhelm freedom and spontaneity, where old-timers may grow 'mute and sullen' and begin to wear their 'humdrum duty' on their sleeve.

Thus, the question persists: Is the flourishing teacher an oxymoron? Can teaching be an existential project like Thoreau's or must it be a practice of resignation? Is the call to teach essentially a call for service and indeed self-sacrifice? Can we imagine someone working with youth in both senses, someone who by tending to the young stays in touch with the green and growing parts of herself? Or is teaching one of those activities in which we realise that it is time to put away childish things? Can we imagine a teacher in her prime who is also a prime example of a teacher?

This last question, I take it, is precisely the one posed to us by Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (Spark, 1999 [1961]).⁶ Set in a private girls school in Edinburgh between the wars, it is the story of an eccentric

schoolteacher and the clique of students she attracts and cultivates. Brodie is, she repeatedly tells her students, in the prime of her life. 'It is important to recognize the years of one's prime', Brodie announces at one point, 'always remember that' (Spark, 1999 [1961], p. 6). Later, she declares: 'You girls are my vocation. If I were to receive a proposal of marriage tomorrow from the Lord Lyon King-of-Arms I would decline it. I am dedicated to you in my prime' (p. 22). Clearly Brodie is no paragon of human flourishing: she spends her prime talking about her prime; she can be vain, petty, and cruel; she regales her pupils with tales of worldly romances while remaining 'in many ways an Edinburgh spinster of the deepest dye'; and so on (p. 25). And yet, Jean Brodie is relatively awake and alive, and her students are drawn to this vitality. Compared to 'Miss Gaunt' and the other teachers at the Marcia Blaine School, Brodie stands out as a teacher who is in touch with a wider culture, as an adult who is still taking a passionate interest in life. For all her foibles, and they are many, she is, if she does say so herself, 'a leaven in the lump' (p. 6).

The problem is that she seems to maintain this spark by abandoning not only the official curriculum but also the basic ethos of teaching. She infamously moulds students in her own image and replaces the standard curriculum with stories of her exploits. Rather than attending to all of her students equally, she cultivates a special coterie, the 'Brodie set', and does so as a tribute to herself. Indeed rather than attending to her students and their growth, and encouraging them to attend to ideas and texts, she demands that they focus their attention on her:

'Hold up your books', said Miss Brodie quite often that autumn, 'prop them up with your hands, in case of intruders. If there are any intruders, we are doing our history lesson . . . our poetry . . . English grammar'.

The small girls held up their books with their eyes not on them, but on Miss Brodie.

'Meantime I will tell you about my last summer holiday in Egypt . . .'

(Spark, 1999 [1961], p. 7, ellipses in original).

It was in moments like this that Jean Brodie would begin to reflect on her prime:

'Attend to me girls. One's prime is the moment one was born for. Now that my prime has begun—Sandy, your attention is wandering. What have I been talking about?

'Your prime, Miss Brodie' (p. 8; see also p. 6).

Though Jean Brodie is a woman 'in her prime', Spark's novel seems to suggest, she is far from a prime example of a teacher. Or perhaps we should say that she is a mixture of pedagogical virtues—she is awake and alive, full of passionate interests—and serious pedagogical vices.

I am not suggesting that all or even most teachers are narcissists like Miss Brodie. Consider, though, a complementary example: the case of Jessica

Siegel, the New York City public school teacher chronicled by Samuel Freedman in *Small Victories*. Siegel is a caring, courageous, and resourceful teacher who not only answers but goes beyond the call of duty. In her effort to help the poor, minority students in her Lower East Side high school find a connection to writing and school, and thus have a chance to go to college and escape the cycle of poverty, Siegel battles each year for scraps of resources to keep the school paper going, and devotes most of her waking hours after school to reading student writing.

And yet, as Freedman relates, this pedagogical responsiveness means that Siegel no longer has time for dinners with friends, learning Spanish, or her own writing, leaving her with 'lonely alleys in her own life' (Freedman, 1990, p. 68, cf. p. 42). She has become so absorbed in teaching, Dewey would say, that she has forgotten her 'dominant vocation'. As we saw in the last chapter (see above, pp. 119–120), Dewey warns of precisely this 'tendency of every distinctive vocation to become too dominant, too exclusive and absorbing in its specialized aspect' (Dewey, 1916, p. 308). Dewey's argument, as you recall, is not only that over-specialization narrows one's life but also that each occupation itself suffers when pursued too single-mindedly; paradoxically, having multiple vocations is a condition of having one. Ultimately, all forms of work require more than technical skills. This 'humane sense of efficiency', he argues, 'depends upon the alertness and sympathy of [our] interests' (*ibid.*). Without 'diverse and variegated vocational activities', our sympathies narrow; we become myopic and obtuse (*ibid.*). As Dewey puts it: 'The scientific inquirer shall not be merely the scientist, the teacher merely the pedagogue, the clergyman merely one who wears the cloth, and so on' (*ibid.*).

When confronted with the pressing needs of their students, caring and idealistic teachers like Jessica Siegel may feel moved to put their students first. To put off one's own 'diverse and variegated vocational activities', though, not only betrays one's 'dominant vocation of . . . intellectual and moral growth', but ultimately hollows out one's teaching as well (p. 310). Fortunately, Siegel realises this before it is too late: it is too late to avoid burn-out but at least she does not head down the dangerous path of 'burn-in', to coin a term for the situation where teachers burn-out without dropping out. Siegel realises that she is 'grinding herself to dust' and 'sacrificing her life', all for a salary under \$30,000 and constant negative press for her profession (Freedman, 1990, p. 16). *Small Victories* closes with Jessica Siegel tearfully leaving teaching to renew herself.

If these strike the reader as extreme cases, the dichotomy is even more extreme in Hollywood movies about teachers. Indeed, one could divide teacher movies, of which there are many, rather neatly into two contrasting genres: the idealistic teacher melodrama and the cynical teacher comedy. In the first genre—e.g. *To Sir with Love*, *Stand and Deliver*, *Dead Poets Society*, *Mr. Holland's Opus*, *Freedom Writers*—teachers are pedagogical saints, heroes beyond all proportion and martyrs to the cause. In the second—e.g. *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, *Election*—teachers are schoolroom scoundrels:

narcissists, lechers, and petty dictators of their little classroom worlds. In hagiographic portrayals, the desire and self-interest of the teacher are simply evacuated from the tale. In more realistic representations, the desire of the teacher appears only to be exposed as pitiful (e.g. *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*) or pathological (e.g. *Election*). Indeed, the question 'What do teachers want?' has sprouted an entire sub-genre of the horror film portraying teachers as zombies, aliens, and other monstrosities (e.g. *Disturbing Behavior* and *The Faculty*). Never known for its subtlety, Hollywood seems particularly black and white when it comes to portraying teachers, suggesting a sharp divide in our idealistic and cynical takes on teacher motivation.

And if this split is most clearly spelled out in film and fiction, it is no harder to locate in the day-to-day culture of schools. Teachers are recruited with slogans like this one: 'You've made your own dreams come true. Isn't it time you got started on somebody else's?'⁷ And they are welcomed to the profession with sentiments like these words from a former Chancellor of the New York City schools: 'You're not in it for the money; you're not in it for the glory . . . you're in it because you have a sense of duty' (Harold Levy, quoted in Goodnough, 2001). Duty and interest seem as bifurcated in the discourse around teaching as they do anywhere. Given such a stark choice, it is no surprise that teaching is usually figured as selfless by necessity if not by principle. When it comes to the flourishing of the teacher there seems to be a troubling blind spot in the educational imagination.

THE HUNGER ARTIST

We began by deriving the idea of a eudaimonistic ethics of teaching from Williams' critique of morality, and this led us to look for images of the flourishing teacher, wondering how teaching flows from the teacher's interest and feeds a teacher's growth. What we found instead were images of teachers putting aside self-interest in the name of duty, or conversely putting aside teaching in the name of self-interest. At this point, we can imagine the following objection arising:

Rather than call this a troubling blind spot, why not call it a predictable and not at all lamentable void? Just because some occupations fit this ethical model doesn't mean that all do. Indeed, this is why some professions are called 'helping professions'. Those interested more in their own intellectual development should become professors. Those primarily interested in their own existential quest should become artists. Those interested in having a starring role should become actors. Meanwhile, the next generation needs teachers. Shouldn't we be happy that there are some at least that feel called to serve, to give something back?

The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to answering this objection. After revisiting the argument of Chapter 1 that human beings can neither

avoid Socrates' question, nor relegate it to their leisure hours (see above, p. 39), I will show that altruism cannot alone serve as an answer to the question, how should I live?, and thus tends to devolve into asceticism. Then, I will trace this progression in teaching to its inevitable conclusions of teacher burn-out and burn-in. Finally, I will show why the very idea of a helping profession is incoherent.

Charles Taylor makes a powerful case for the inescapability of Socrates' question. To be a person, Taylor argues, is to have an identity, which in turn is to have an answer to the question, who am I (see Taylor, 1989, chap. 2)? Following MacIntyre, Taylor sees identity formation as a narrative achievement: we tell ourselves stories about who we are and where we are going, even as we find ourselves part of pre-existing familial, cultural, and historical narrations. Though Taylor is impressed by the diversity of the stories people narrate and enact, he maintains that there is something like a genre of the existential narrative as such. Taylor suggests, again following MacIntyre, that we understand our lives as quests, and that quest narratives have two inescapable features: a seeker and a sought for. Thus, we cannot give a satisfactory account of who we are without indicating where we stand in relation to what is most important to us. Whether it is purity, justice, authenticity, or some other ideal, each of us has an ethical trump suit, something we deem inestimably valuable or incomparably higher. We cannot estimate the worth of such 'hypergoods' as Taylor calls them, since they provide the very framework for ranking our other goods and orienting our lives (on hypergoods, see Taylor, 1989, pp. 63–73). We may see ourselves as approaching, falling away from, or frustratingly stuck in relation to this overarching good, but regardless of the variations, each existential narrative will feature these two terms, 'self' and 'good'.

Thus our question becomes, can we imagine an ethical, existential narrative of this type centred around altruism? The answer, in my view, hinges on how we understand altruism. Certainly, most ethics involve other-regarding ideals of some sort. I may, for instance, count justice and friendship among my highest ethical ideals. This will mean that I strive to treat others fairly and lovingly, but, it is crucial to remember, this will also mean that I make use of these ideals for thinking about who I am and where my life is going. I will wonder whether I am becoming a just person or a good friend, and I may take pride in my growth in these areas. Furthermore, I will enjoy contact with the ideal of justice when I behold it and I will savour my friendships. And I will desire other aspects of a good life in addition to justice and friendship.

As we saw in Chapter 1, though, distrust of these exact staples of ancient ethics—desire, pride, and pleasure—is the hallmark of modern morality (see above, pp. 31–35). As we retraced Taylor's intellectual history, we saw how the Christian doctrine of love, with its charity/concupiscence distinction hardened into the enlightenment calculus of self-interest and altruism, leaving desire as precisely our guide to the immoral. We also saw how, for Kant, the moral actor must not only act in accordance *with* duty but *from* duty. An act

cannot be moral, Kant (1997 [1785]) famously argued, when prompted by ‘direct inclination’ (p. 13), be it some ‘selfish purpose’ (p. 13) or even ‘the promotion of happiness of others’ (p. 17). Moral actions must be motivated solely by respect before the moral law. Clearly, Kant’s moral actor evinces excellences of character, virtues such as attentiveness, rationality, and dignity. For Kant, though, any awareness of this fact changes the action from a moral one into something self-serving. The question that then becomes inescapable for us moderns is ‘were my motives genuinely good or was this somehow motivated by self-interest?’ We find ourselves defining duty in opposition to inclination and judging altruism by its distance from self-interest.

For this reason, we must conclude that (modern) altruism does not meet Taylor’s two requirements for personal identity narratives. It is not that altruists lack a vision of the good, but rather, in modernity’s strange twist, they lack themselves. Altruism cannot serve to ‘orient the self in moral space’ since we feel obliged to leave ourselves out of the very stories of our altruism.⁹ The genuinely altruistic donor marks her donation ‘anonymous’. This conclusion presents us with a puzzle: if altruism is not itself an ethical ideal, what ideal does animate the ethos of service in education and orient teachers in moral space?

To solve this puzzle, we must turn to Nietzsche, who remains our most acute moral psychologist. Starting from the principle that desire and ego are always implicated in our actions, Nietzsche added a crucial chapter in the history of moral psychology by refusing to take the peculiar institution of morality at its own word, asking instead: ‘What kind of ego is involved in selfless actions?’ or, ‘What kind of desire leads one to mortify his desires?’. In this way, Nietzsche unearthed the personal ethic that has covertly accompanied the seemingly impersonal system of modern morality. Nietzsche calls morality’s silent ethical partner, ‘the ascetic ideal’, referring to the ways in which we secretly take pleasure in our mortifications or pride in our sacrifices. This is not to say that all moral actions are really ascetic actions in disguise, but, while there are more or less selfless actions, there are no selfless lives. For the attempt to live by moral ideals alone eventually founders and the self’s need to be on some sort of quest, for achievement, recognition, knowledge, or some such prize, leads to the adoption of some ethical ideal. Everyone remains the centre of her own experience in some way, and someone who seems to be entirely living for others probably lives for herself in the strangely inverted ethos of asceticism. Asceticism is altruism’s hidden ethic.

Thus, asceticism in this sense is to be distinguished from those anti-hedonistic ethics which are also commonly described as ascetic.¹⁰ Scholars, for example, may cloister themselves away from distractions and idle pleasures to finish their books; spiritual adepts may deny themselves food and water to experience heightened religious states. Though such decisions are to a greater or lesser degree anti-hedonistic, they are still clearly ethical.

Both the scholar and the yogi are pursuing their own development in light of what they deem highest. The scholar chooses some pleasures over others, and even endures a certain degree of discomfort, because she loves knowledge or the act of creation. The yogi may seek out pain deliberately, but precisely because this is the route to God or Nirvana. In contrast, what I am calling asceticism begins when one distances oneself from one's own project of becoming in the name of the good of others. This form of asceticism flourishes in cultures of service where altruistic ideals are coupled with difficult working conditions, when the needs of others lead us not only to eschew particular pleasures, but also to sacrifice opportunities for our own development in important ways. For the ascetic I am describing, who can no more exist without a developmental narrative than any other person, such sacrifices start to become the key plot points in this narrative.

Consider, for example, *To Sir with Love*, a long-standing exemplar of the heroic teacher genre (Clavell, 1967). *To Sir with Love* is the story of man named Mark Thackeray (Sidney Poitier) who aspires to be an engineer. When we meet Thackeray, he has completed his training and is on the verge of tasting the fruits of his labour. When he has trouble landing his first job, he decides to teach while continuing the search for an engineering position. At the end of the film, after the school year has ended and Thackeray's seniors have graduated, the job offer he has been waiting for finally comes through. In the film's denouement, Thackeray is sitting alone in his classroom, quietly pondering his good news, when two juniors barge in in a burst of roughhousing and raucous behaviour. When the students realise they have interrupted a teacher, their hilarity only increases as they adopt their usual rebellious stance. Then, as they realise that Thackeray is the senior-class teacher they have been hearing about, they announce that he is to be their teacher next year. With this gesture, their defiant attitude softens slightly, suggesting an invitation to Thackeray to tame them as he has the wild class before them. After they leave, in a dramatic reversal, Thackeray rips up the letter and decides to remain a teacher.

Though multiple readings of this scene are certainly possible, the ripping of the letter suggests that during the interaction with the juniors Thackeray becomes convinced that there is still too much important work to be done at the school for him to leave. On this interpretation, Thackeray still wants to become an engineer but decides that the needs of the students outweigh his own desires and ambitions. If the film had wanted to suggest that Thackeray simply sees teaching as a better opportunity for himself, it would have been better to show him so thoroughly caught up in his teaching that he does not even bother to open the letter. As it is, the violent tearing of the letter suggests an act of renunciation, a tearing away from his former aspirations.¹¹

The recruitment slogan mentioned earlier—'You've made your own dreams come true. Isn't it time you got started on somebody else's?'—must have had in mind some as yet undiscovered pocket of humans whose dreams are all already in the bag and who can therefore turn to the needs of others without conflict. In the fictional world of the film, as in our own, people such

as Thackeray always stand at some remove from what they deem highest, straggling behind, stuck, or lost in their quest for the good life. Because the movie ends at this point, we do not know what flows from this fateful decision of Thackeray's; but, in wondering, we find ourselves interestingly asking of teachers the same question Langston Hughes (1994 [1951], p. 426, emphasis in original) so famously asked in 'Harlem [2]':

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

For all the variations Hughes envisions for a dream deferred, the possibility that the dream will simply disappear is not even entertained. If Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor help us see how being on some sort of quest seems to be essential to the human condition, Hughes offers a crucial addendum: for humans living under inhuman conditions, ambition and hope must be put off, shoved underground. But Hughes's poem stands in agreement that there is no life without hope, expectation, and striving; at most we defer our dreams. While MacIntyre and Taylor would have us believe that in every human life we will find some sort of project or striving if we only look, Hughes adds the moral psychological insight that such quests, once deferred, may show up under many guises, as a sore spot, a sentimental confection, a sigh, an explosion.

Following Taylor, MacIntyre, and Hughes, we can rule out a purely moral interpretation of Thackeray's decision, namely, that he simply chooses something good for his students. His own life and flourishing, and thus some sort of ethical ideal, must figure somewhere in the equation. He may defer the question of what he should become, but he cannot avoid it altogether. The danger in deferring his dream is that in choosing no ethical ideal explicitly, he may come to labour under morality's hidden ethic, the ascetic ideal. In other words, if Taylor and MacIntyre are right about human moral psychology, there can be no reading of Thackeray's decision in which his self and its good, his self-becoming, is irrelevant. The closest we can come to a purely moral reading of his decision is to read it as a self-sacrificial act. In this case, the words of Hughes should give us pause as we ponder the impact that

Thackeray's deferral might ultimately have on Thackeray, on his teaching, and on his students.

The result, I want to suggest, is teacher burn-out, or worse yet, what I have called burn-in. The problem is well-documented, and there are no doubt many factors which make teaching a difficult activity to sustain for long. But it does often turn out that it is precisely the teachers we respect the most, those whose selfless dedication to making something happen for other people is an inspiration, who burn out the fastest. I would propose the following very general explanation for such cases: it is precisely because the work is selfless that it cannot be sustained. There is a period during which seeing others flourish is such an intrinsic reward that we are buoyed up for one more week, or one more marking period. But if the activity fails to feed the self in some more direct way, the energy for the activity will be spent sooner rather than later. Our best teachers propel their practice on the fast-burning fuel of a discerning and loving altruism only to find their tanks mysteriously empty long before they are ready to give up the fight. Moral concerns, while crucial in navigating certain dilemmas and interactions, cannot guide a life's pursuit. At some point, our projects must tap into our desires and aspirations. In other words, they must be *our* projects.

Consider the following hypothetical progression from altruism to asceticism, from idealism to burn-out and burn-in:

1. I recognise that teaching is a deeply moral task. I strive to keep foremost in my mind that my chief concern is my students, their needs, their development.
2. But when I do this job well, thinking only of their welfare, I am not able to give much to myself in terms of satisfying my own desire to have rich and stimulating experiences, to keep growing and changing. In trying to live up to this moral ideal I find that I demand an endless giving of myself, which leaves me spent and exhausted.
3. There is not enough time outside of work to rejuvenate myself, but it is one of the worst betrayals of teaching to try to meet my own needs through my students, so I will have to content myself with the fact that one must sacrifice in order to do good.
4. The more I accomplish for others, the more I have to sacrifice.
5. The more I sacrifice, the more I must be accomplishing for others.
6. I am a dried-up shell of a person, therefore I must be a good teacher. I'm certainly not here for me, so I must be here for them.
7. My students should be grateful, but they are so selfish and self-centred. I'll teach them a thing or two.

What starts as energetic idealism begins to fade, so that, after spending some time at step 3 or 4, dedicated teachers reach a crisis point in which they either leave the world of education to renew themselves—as we saw with

Jessica Siegel—or watch as their idealism subtly metamorphoses into something else. One possible conclusion from this is that teaching is simply not the sort of activity one should attempt to do for long. If teaching is inherently altruistic and altruism has a short shelf life, this might just be a bullet we have to bite. While I will ultimately contest this view, I do agree that burn-out is the lesser of the two evils. The thought that we must lose our best teachers after a short career is certainly discouraging, but the story that continues from step 4 is indeed the more tragic. The teachers who burn out without dropping out may undergo a dangerous transformation under the influence of the ascetic ideal.

In step 3, the altruistic teacher reasons that her sacrifice is a necessary and worthwhile price of the good she is doing. In step 4 she moves on to imagining a rule of inverse proportion between the amount she is stultified and what she accomplishes. The crucial moment in this progression occurs in the transition from step 4 to step 5. Having imagined an inverse proportionality, the focus switches from altruism and its costs to the costs themselves, as if we need only ensure we are depriving ourselves to be sure we are helping others. Put another way, the teacher who assumes the conditional ‘If I give more to others, I will have to neglect myself more’, is not entitled to derive the converse that ‘If I neglect myself more, I will thereby give more to others’. This move follows neither *modus ponens* nor *modus tollens*, but an alternative logic. It is the *modus operandi* of the ascetic ideal.

In steps 5 through 7, the ascetic ideal finally consumes the last of the altruism that spawned it. From a selfless pursuit of the other’s good, one winds up with a bizarre form of vanity in which one demands honour precisely for how little is left of oneself. Thus, as Nietzsche taught us, the ascetic ideal turns out to be an honour ethic turned upside down. Or as he puts it in one epigram, ‘The man who despises himself still honours the despiser within’ (Nietzsche, 1966 [1886], §78; quoted in Arrowsmith, 1971, p. 12). If we cannot take pride in what we have become, our vanity takes refuge in the one part of us of that continues to grow, our self-loathing. What begins as a means to the end of the other’s good becomes an end in itself, a Kafkaesque hunger strike of the soul for no cause higher than one’s own greater glory as a sacrificer. To say that this has the ironic effect of making the ascetic lose his focus on the other’s welfare is an understatement. For the ascetic, wrapped up in his own suffering, comes to experience his obligations as what Charles Taylor—following Nietzsche and Dostoyevsky—calls ‘benevolence on demand’ (see e.g. Taylor, 1989, pp. 516–518). The ascetic teacher will eventually come to envy the robust selves of his students, to feel their appetites as an affront, turning his envy into contempt. His ‘service to others’ will become nothing but an extended guilt-trip, his benevolence a barely concealed weapon, his teaching a toxic mix of insecurity and aggression, self-pity and condescension.

Therefore, if we accept the premise that the best teaching requires a high degree of selflessness, we must add the caveat that such selflessly altruistic

practice is not sustainable. An educator who always puts students first may achieve wonderful results for a time, but ultimately the teacher's own thirst for development will reassert itself. Regardless of whether the teacher chooses to leave teaching for something revitalising or attempts to slake her thirst on the bitter draught of the ascetic ideal, the benevolent teacher vanishes. In the former case, we confront perhaps only the problem of where to find fresh personnel; the latter situation is more sinister, as the teacher carries on, demanding reverence for selflessness and doing damage in the name of altruism.

THE VERY IDEA OF A HELPING PROFESSION

Why does the 'flourishing of the teacher' sounds so different to our ears than the flourishing of the surgeon, the architect, or the jazz musician. The complex surgery, the important building, the sublime jazz solo: each of these reflects some of its glory back on its doer or maker. We see the excellence in the performance or the product, but we also see the surgeon's focus, composure, and grace under pressure; the architect's ability to find novel forms that resonate in tradition; the guitarist's dexterity and depth. Of course, had the surgeon been glorying in his own skills during the surgery, the architect setting out to build a monument to her own ego, or the guitarist soloing to stand apart from the group rather than to join it, then obviously their work would be compromised. But in these and many professions, we are comfortable with the idea that the professional is devoted to something beyond herself *and at the same time* making herself into something interesting, accomplished, and exemplary in the process.

Things stand differently, we have come to discover, when it comes to teaching. What does it look like when someone sets out on a venture to help others set out on their ventures, when a person occupied with the growth of others grows in the process? Here we become relatively inarticulate. The obvious reason for this would seem to be that teaching is a helping profession. Like nursing and social work, teaching might simply be more other-directed and thus less wrapped up in reflected glory of the type just outlined. But let us look at this idea more closely. What distinguishes the helping professions?

Certainly, teaching, nursing, and social work all have helping in common, but this can't be what distinguishes them. After all, doctors help patients and architects help clients. Perhaps, then, there is something distinctive about the kind of help the helping professions offer or the way they offer it. For example, in the helping professions, the client is seen and treated as a whole person. When a student suddenly starts failing spelling tests, the teacher does not simply offer more spelling drills. Rather she talks to the child and tries to figure out why his performance has suddenly plummeted. Is something wrong at home? Is she embarrassed to be outscoring her friends? The teacher cannot afford to see this student simply as a speller the way a physician may see us

simply as a body, or even as just a body part. As Andre remarks to Wally in Louis Malle's *My Dinner with Andre* (1981):

You know, it's like what happened just before my mother died. You know, we'd gone to the hospital to see my mother, and I went in to see her. And I saw this woman who looked as bad as any survivor of Auschwitz or Dachau. And I was out in the hall, sort of comforting my father, when a doctor who is a specialist in a problem that she had with her arm, went into her room and came out just beaming. And he said: 'Boy! Don't we have a lot of reason to feel great! Isn't it wonderful how she's coming along!' Now, all he saw was the arm, that's all he saw (Malle, 1981).

This, however, is not a fair comparison. We have compared a holistic, empathic teacher to a medical specialist with a very bad case of tunnel vision. We could imagine another teacher, who sees test scores instead of students, and another doctor who unravels the mystery of a rash through an extended dialogue with a patient about her daily routines, medical history, and current medications. That said, we are probably happy that the spinal surgeon is able to shut out everything in the world other than our spinal cord and the tumour attached to it, knowing that the anaesthesiologist is on top of our sedation, the OR nurse watching our vitals, and so on. But it is not clear how different this is from hoping that our math teacher will really get down to business and teach us math. It might be that just as a good medical team includes specialists but also huddles frequently to ensure the whole picture is being seen, a good school is one that creates time and space where all of the various teachers, coaches, counsellors who see different sides of a student can gather, put the pieces together, and say: how is this person doing overall?

So, neither the sheer fact of helping nor even the holistic, client-centeredness of the helping professions is sufficient to distinguish them. It may be well an essential feature of practices such as teaching, nursing, and social work that they treat clients as whole persons who themselves play a role in defining the aims of the practice. But it is not a distinguishing feature as can be further brought out by another, extended example. Let us compare two therapists. One has a PhD in clinical psychology, a post-doc in psychoanalysis, and a private practice doing talk therapy with mostly high-functioning neurotics. The other has a Master's in Social Work (MSW) and runs group counselling sessions for low-income addicts in a public drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre. Both of these professionals see as the *sine qua non* of their work changes that their clients want to make in their lives, which implies that with each client they have something new to learn about what success or growth means. Neither type of therapist wants to treat a symptom, or a disorder, or a type of patient. They seek to meet their clients as whole persons.

As it turns out, though, if for no other reason than an economic one, it is the psychotherapist who is able more fully to practice the kind of

individualising attention that makes such holistic, client-centred therapy possible. The social worker will always be struggling to see each of her clients clearly in the midst of the group, with patients relapsing and leaving the group, new patients coming in, and so on.¹² What is interesting about this example, though, is that while some might count the psychoanalyst's one-on-one psychodynamic psychotherapy as a borderline example of a helping profession, no one would deny that the social work practice is a paradigmatic one. If the MSW actually turns out to be less person-oriented, why are we inclined to think of social work as a truer example of a helping profession?¹³

The answer, as I have already hinted, lies in economics. By this I mean both the financial resources available to support the work, and the more subtle balance sheet of interpersonal economics. They are closely connected, but let us begin by focusing on working conditions. The psychoanalyst has a room of her own, set up just the way she wants, a room that is designed to feel warm, human, and dependable to the analyst and her clients. The social worker will probably share an office or even lack one altogether. Having little or no control over space, he may end up seeing his groups in a room that appears anonymous and inhospitable (ironically, because located in a hospital). The analyst negotiates the terms of the treatment with each patient: how much will they pay, how often will they come, what sort of notice is expected for cancellations, and so on. She sets the terms of her work and paces her day so that she will have fresh attention for each client during that client's hour. By contrast, the social worker may find his groups overcrowded due to budget cuts, the work constantly disrupted by changes in membership caused by shifts in hospital policy or medicare requirements and by the high rate of burn-out among psychiatric social workers. Whenever the social worker has a break between groups, he will be scrambling to complete the Kafkaesque quantities of paperwork required by the hospital for insurance purposes.¹⁴ Meanwhile, the analyst has left gaps in her week to look over notes from the sessions, ponder difficult and interesting passages in this or that treatment, or even attend or offer seminars where case studies are debated and theories entertained. For the analyst, the working conditions are human and bespeak autonomy and control; for the social worker, the working conditions are severe, compounded by the maddening feeling of helplessness and heteronomy.¹⁵

What I called interpersonal economics is already evident in this discussion about resources. I am referring to the degree to which a therapeutic practice is set up to be reciprocal. In analytic work, this reciprocity is carefully constructed and explicitly thematised. I do not mean that the therapist attends to the patient for a half-hour and then they switch roles: reciprocity here does not imply symmetry of roles, but is sought in other ways. For example, the analyst negotiates a fee being sure that he takes into account both the limits of the patient's resources and her own financial need (to pay rent for the office, make a salary, still leave an afternoon free for attending a seminar, and so on). Both sides of this equation are important to both parties. That is, it is also important to the patient to know that the analyst is able to look after herself even as she

looks after the patient. Throughout the treatment, in countless ways, the patient will rely on and re-verify that the analyst is not giving too much or in the wrong way, leaving her depleted or resentful.

And there is another, crucial layer to interpersonal economics, one already hinted at in my references to the analyst leaving space in her week for reflection and dialogue. This is not just about ease of working conditions or quality control of the sessions. It is one of the virtues of psychoanalysis as a community of practice that it offers analysts a professional identity not only as helpers, but also as inquirers, authors, and seekers of self-knowledge. Psychoanalytic theory and practice are and have been from the beginning in a highly dynamic relation, each pushing and shaping the other. Many analysts have the chance to present cases, debate theories, give talks, publish books. They are learning from their clients. And we could say that any therapist can and should learn from her client, except that this requires special conditions. The analyst has the chance to work with individual patients for extended periods, sometimes for multiple sessions per week, reaching fairly deep psychic strata, and often discovering as a result quite novel problems and surprising resolutions. One way to put the goal of analysis is to say that the analyst strives to learn the unique language of each person's psyche so that she will know how to hear what the patient is saying (in his actions and statements, his symptoms and silences) and so as to be able to offer interpretations which, however related they might be to some portion of some version of psychoanalytic theory, are couched closely enough in the language of the patient's unconscious to be taken in and to be transformative (see, for example, Lear, 1998, chap. 4).

Finally, there is the factor of supervision. The analyst is expected to seek frequent supervisory sessions, working through the personal issues that arise for her as she works with various analysands. This protects the analysand, of course, since it helps ensure that the analyst will not use the analysand's sessions to work out her own issues. But this is also another way that analysis is for the analyst, who prizes the ongoing search for self-knowledge that the analytic life provides. As we saw, the social worker can expect, by comparison, less control over, support for and reciprocity in her work. The opportunity, if not the very expectation, to cultivate herself in, through, and for her practice, will be relatively slight. And here is where the ethos of service enters in. For rather than seeing these deprivations as such, it becomes a badge of honour that the social worker gives everything she has to her clients, leaving no time for luxuries such as the time to reflect on interesting moments in a session or and present cases at seminars.

What this extended example shows is that it is not the fact of, nor the manner of, helping that distinguishes the helping professions, but precisely *the degree of sacrifice involved*. The helping professions are those practices involving a great deal of giving, under difficult circumstances, with very little expected in return. We can make this definition more precise by adding two further observations. First, the very idea of a helping profession is ideological: it is the superstructural rationalisation of the basic disparities in material support available for various people professions. Second, this specific formation draws support from (and

lends support to) the more general ideological structure of gender roles. That is, we can make our definition of the helping professions sociologically more precise by noting that all of these professions seem to be coded female. As many have noted, teaching is ‘the quintessential women’s profession’, rivalled in this regard only by nursing, social work, and librarianship (Green and Manke, 2001, p. 33). By exploring the history of the feminisation of teaching, we can deepen our sense of the roots of, and problems with, the ethos of service.

In the early colonial period in the US, teaching was ‘the province of men’, but as John Rury points out, this is only because women ‘faced discriminatory legal and social restrictions which limited their ability’ to become teachers (Rury, 1989, p.12).¹⁶ As late as 1828, an Indiana man could declare that ‘there was no such thing then as a woman teacher’ (Clifford, 1989, p. 293). Of course, neither the school nor the profession had yet taken its familiar shape. For example, colonial teaching was typically a part-time, even itinerant, occupation. Colonial men often taught school to supplement farming income, added teaching duties to their role as preacher, or held a jack-of-all-trades civic position serving as town clerk, bellman, court official, town crier, and even gravedigger (Elsbree, 1939, pp. 62–67). At worst, Jürgen Herbst suggests, teaching attracted drifters and incompetents (Herbst, 1989, p. 27). At its best, Rury adds, attracting for example the likes of John Adams, teaching was still seen as ‘a way to sustain oneself in the absence of other opportunities, or a stepping stone to other more lucrative or high-status careers, such as law or medicine’ (Rury, 1989, p. 14).

Even as the common school—and its supporting, teacher-training institution, the normal school—were coming into existence, teaching was already becoming rapidly feminised. In 1821, Emma Willard opened the Troy Female Seminary. In her ‘Address to the Public, particularly to the Legislature of New York, proposing a Plan for Improving Female Education’ (1818) she had already made her case for entrusting teaching to women, arguing that nature had given women:

... in greater degree than men the gentle arts of insinuation, to soften [students’] minds, and fit them to receive impressions; a greater quickness of invention to vary modes of teaching to different dispositions; and more patience to make repeated efforts (quoted in Fraser, 2007, p. 30).

Catherine Beecher launched the Western Female Institute in 1833 and published her *Essay on the Education of Female Teachers* in 1835, arguing that women were ‘necessarily the guardians of the nursery, the companion of childhood, and the constant model of imitation’ (quoted in Fraser, 2007, p. 37). In his Eighth Annual Report (1844), Horace Mann, echoing Willard and Beecher, officially married the common school movement to the feminisation of teaching with this benediction:

Is not woman destined to conduct the rising generation, of both sexes, at least through all the primary stages of education? Has not the Author of

nature preadapted her, by constitution, and faculty, and temperament for this noble work? (quoted in Herbst, 1989, p. 28).

Historians disagree over just how decisive such arguments were for the changes that followed. Some suggest that economics played a greater role, arguing that the feminisation of teaching was driven by the fact that men were lured westward by new opportunities and that women were a cheaper source of labour. Whether these arguments drove or rationalised the change, however, teaching rapidly became—both statistically and in the public’s mind—‘women’s work’.

In 1834 there were already more female than male teachers in Massachusetts; by the 1860s, the national average had tilted toward women, never to be reversed.¹⁷ By 1905, women held 98% of all of the elementary teaching positions in the US (Tyack and Hansot, 1982; quoted in Herbst, 1989, p. 191); by 1920, women held 86% of all of the nation’s teaching posts (Elsbree, 1939, p. 554). Nancy Hoffman sums up the story in this way:

By 1860, young women . . . had a profession of their own. The ‘sacred office’ gave them public status, the claim to decent income, freedom to marry only for ‘pure affection’, and their own institution of higher education. But like many victories for women, this one was contradictory and qualified By the end of the nineteenth century, the profession of teaching had moved to the position that it would hold for the next century and beyond; less than equal status to male professions . . . (Hoffman, 2003, pp. 43–44, final ellipsis added; quoted in Fraser, 2007, p. 42).

For centuries, women’s domestic labour has been largely invisible, unrecognised, and unremunerated. Thus, when a profession becomes feminised in a sexist society, it suffers on all of the economic registers: pay, prestige, self-determination. The doctor commands support staff and demands deference. Teachers are ordered about not only by administrators—who sometimes talk to teachers over the P.A. system in a voice that would make one cringe even if it were directed at children¹⁸—but also by school boards, curriculum experts, parents, politicians and pundits. The college professor takes sabbaticals, teaches relatively small numbers of small classes on topics over which he has a fair amount of control, and receives some measure of recognition through presentations and publications. The schoolteacher—like the social worker and the nurse—labours in relative obscurity with less autonomy and authority, less recognition and remuneration.

This inequality is vividly present in the physical environment in which teachers work. When a society values a form of work, it provides resources for it and sets aside a special place, lovingly adorned, where such work can be conducted with self-respect. In contrast, Susan Moore Johnson, argues:

Because it is an outgrowth of childcare, teaching has historically been women’s work. Since women and children are granted little respect or power

in our society, teaching remains low in status, with teachers paid far less than workers with similar years of training who hold more socially valued jobs. Schools are often shabby, barely adequate facilities, with broken windows, unpainted walls, and sub-standard equipment, reflecting society's low regard for teacher's work and children's learning (Johnson, 1990, p. 6).¹⁹

Indeed, until such inequalities in status were rhetorically turned into a virtue with the phrase 'helping professions', teaching, nursing, and social work were sometimes simply called 'semi-professions' (see e.g. Etzioni, 1969). What we have begun to realise, though, is that this rhetoric of service offers a strange form of alchemy. It says, in effect:

Yes, I know that the *literal* economics of your profession are problematic, but this is redeemed by the fact that the *interpersonal* economics of your profession are *also* imbalanced. You are a helper: you attune yourself to others and what they need, offering a lot of yourself without expectation of return.

I hope that my account of educational asceticism and teacher burn-out has already gone some way toward revealing the kink in this logic. However, there is a further line of critique we should consider, one suggested by the status of teaching as a feminised profession. By turning to feminist, psychoanalytic theory we can now bring together our psychological and sociological accounts of the helping professions. Thinkers such as Nancy Chodorow, Dorothy Dinnerstein, and Jessica Benjamin have helped us understand the causes and effects of our tendency to divide people and professions into the gendered categories of for-oneself and for-others (see, for example, Dinnerstein, 1991 [1976]; Chodorow, 1999; Benjamin, 1988). They offer us a way to get clear both on what sort of help the helping professions are supposed to offer and why, and indeed whether, such helping requires the relational asymmetry we find in these professions.

If there is a distinguishing feature of the helping professions other than sacrifice it would have to lie in the idea of recognition of human subjectivity. Both nurses and doctors aim to heal sicknesses, but what the nurse offers in addition is that most crucial part of the healing process: making space for a whole person in their subjectivity within the treatment. Similarly, any instructor has subject matter to cover and skills to cultivate, but at the heart of true teaching is the recognition of one's student as a becoming subject. All sorts of people meet in classrooms and all sorts of exchanges occur but when a teacher *qua* teacher reaches out to a student *qua* student it is to say, in effect: Hello there, person in the making! Who are you? How can I help you continue to grow and take your place in the world? As Max van Manen puts it, at the heart of teaching is a special form of recognition, 'seeing children pedagogically' (van Manen, 2002, pp. 23–39; see also, van Manen, 1991, esp. chap. 7). 'Every child needs to be noticed', van Manen writes, 'to be known' (van Manen, 2002, p. 29). 'Lucky is the child', van Manen continues, 'who is

being seen regularly with pedagogical discernment' since 'it means being confirmed as existing, as a unique person and learner' (p. 31).

Once we see that recognition is central to teaching, we stand in need of a fuller understanding of the dynamics of recognition. Here we can turn to Jessica Benjamin's well-known discussion of recognition, which reveals two crucial facts. The first is that recognition is dialectical; the second is that it is highly unstable. Recognition is dialectical because the realisation of one's subjectivity requires recognition from another, but this other must be another subject. If we tell someone when and how to give us feedback, we have created a puppet who cannot offer us the feeling of being taken in by another. In such a situation, in a real sense, there is no other; we are trapped in a hall of mirrors. The feedback from our compliant friend will lack the key ingredient of recognition, the difference that makes the difference. As Benjamin puts it:

Recognition is that response from the other which makes meaningful the feelings, intentions, and actions of the self. It allows the self to realize its agency and authorship in a tangible way. But such recognition can only come from an other whom we, in turn, recognize as a person in his or her own right (Benjamin, 1988, p. 12).

Let us imagine two people important to one another; we will call them Adam and Eve. To realise himself as a subjective being, Adam requires recognition from another and so he seeks it from Eve, his significant other. But what Adam needs specifically is recognition from another subject, an independent locus of agency and control; this requires in turn that Eve assert herself in the relationship as an equally sovereign subject and be recognised as such by Adam. This brings us full-circle and the dialectical knot is tied. Thus, Benjamin's analysis reveals that recognition is mutual where it exists at all; intersubjectivity is actually more fundamental than subjectivity. There is no selfhood without recognition, and there is no recognition without mutuality. It takes, if you will, two persons to make a person. And for Benjamin, this holds true even in asymmetrical relationships such as parenting or teaching.

It is this circular logic that makes recognition, and by extension relations of mutual recognition, so unstable. Not all circles are vicious ones, however, and Benjamin does offer us a vision of how this circle might be a productive one. Over time, Adam and Eve may develop an increasing sense of separateness from each other, and thereby take an ever-greater delight in the increased richness that contact with the differentiated other brings. This is not to suggest that Benjamin thinks that relationships of mutual recognition are at all easy to establish or maintain. In her view, the search for relations of mutual recognition is as fraught as any part of human life. Why? Because in the very moment we seek to establish our independence, we must acknowledge our dependence on the other whom we need to recognise us.

This is not easy for us. We tend instead to disavow our dependence and assert ourselves imperiously, making a bid to place ourselves at the centre of the world

and turn the other into a mere satellite. This strategy is self-defeating for the reasons noted above. In Benjamin's ideal scenario, 'assertion and recognition become the vital moves in the dialogue between self and other' (p. 22). However, it is rarer than we might hope that we find a balance or a rhythm in this dialogue. Often our dialogues lack vitality, as when we exchange hollow pseudo-recognitions; or, they may break down altogether in a cycle of mutual negation and ever louder but emptier assertions. As Benjamin richly details, relationships of mutual recognition are hard to set up and even harder to sustain, collapsing more often than not into relations of misrecognition and domination.

There is however a way to arrive at a more stable, less anxiety-ridden homeostasis. It is, tellingly, precisely to deny the subjectivity of one of the participants. Rather than live with the paradox that each of us exists for ourselves and for others, we have instead tended to create what Hegel (in the inaugural account of the dialectics of recognition) called lords and bondsmen (Hegel, 1977 [1807], pp. 111–118). Thus, we find players and cheerleaders, executives and secretaries, and other sundry relationships whose seeming diversity belies the same fateful arrangement: since we cannot figure out how to be two independent subjects in relation, why don't we opt for a division of psychological labour in which together we add up to something like a person?

What is more, as these examples already hint, there is a consistent thematics to these social roles. The fundamental arrangement lurking behind the myriad arrangements is the gender system itself. Thus, it is in the cultural construction of mothering that Benjamin finds the most telling symptom of the human flight from the demands of intersubjectivity, and the most dangerous one, since this is where the dynamics are reproduced. This is the point, as Dinnerstein would say, where we can see ourselves rearing a new generation of semi-human mermaids and minotaurs. What Benjamin finds rightly alarming in her review of the literature is that 'no psychological theory has adequately articulated the mother's independent existence' (Benjamin, 1988, p. 22). In one developmental theory after another, the mother is not 'regarded as another subject with a purpose apart from her existence for her child' (p. 23). In this way, Benjamin puts her finger on a dangerous conspiracy perpetuated not by a cabal, but by all of us. It is a broad cultural strategy for coping with the challenges of mutual recognition.

It is certainly problematic that psychology represents mothers as mere appendages of their children, but what is most troubling is that 'often enough, abetted by the image of mothering in childrearing literature and by the real conditions of life with baby, mothers themselves feel they are so confined' (p. 24). 'This is no simple enterprise', Benjamin reminds us, for mothers to hold on to their own sense of self—their own quest to experience, develop, and achieve—during childrearing. And yet, as Benjamin eloquently insists, the stakes here are enormous:

It is too often assumed that a mother will be able to give her child faith in tackling the world even if she can no longer muster it for herself. And

although mothers ordinarily aspire to more for their children than for themselves, there are limits to this trick: a mother who is too depressed by her own isolation cannot get excited about her child learning to walk or talk; a mother who is afraid of people cannot feel relaxed about her child's associations with other children; a mother who stifles her own longings, ambitions, and frustrations cannot tune in empathically to her child's joys and failures. The recognition a child seeks is something the mother is able to give only by virtue of her independent identity (pp. 23–24).

What Benjamin says of mothering applies equally well in feminised, 'helping professions' such as teaching.²⁰ Benjamin enables us to see just how self-contradictory, how dangerous is this very notion of a helping profession. For the 'help' they promise can only be offered by robust subjects, not by mere helpers, servants, satellites revolving around their clients.

THIS RIPENESS OF SELF

We have been advancing an argument for the importance of first-personal, eudaimonistic concerns for an ethics of teaching. The first step was launching an argument against the ethos of service that would seem to block its path. We concluded that selfless teaching is unsustainable: as she burns out, the selfless teacher must either drop out or risk becoming a creature of resentment. We then observed that there is something awry in the fundamental logic of the helping professions: the helper cannot be a helper if she sees herself as mainly a helper. What is needed is another self, a separate locus of agency and subjectivity. This deepens our critique of selflessness while also marking the beginning of a positive case for pedagogical 'self-fulness'.

I have coined this word 'self-fulness' because once we let the discourse of service set the terms, the game is rigged. It is one thing to challenge the sustainability of altruism, but how can one challenge altruism itself without thereby advocating selfishness and obliviousness to the needs of the other? Consider the following argument for teaching as altruistic service:

- i. Teaching is a deeply moral endeavour in which the welfare of other human beings, their current vulnerabilities and their future possibilities, is the teacher's primary concern.
- ii. Unfortunately, acting on this concern requires a high degree of selflessness and sacrifice. Teachers who are self-absorbed, or trying to meet their own needs vicariously through their teaching, betray the moral core of teaching.
- iii. Ultimately, then, good teaching is a selfless labour of love. The best teachers simply decide that the good they accomplish for others makes

their own sacrifices worthwhile, and carry on indefinitely in the name of benevolent service.

The final step of this argument should no longer give us too much trouble. We have seen that, even if we accept the first two premises, the conclusion represents at best a piece of wishful thinking. Only devotees of the ascetic ideal will accept such sacrifices for long, and by then their selfless benevolence will have become a harsh and egoistic self-mortification. But should we accept the first two premises? As stated, they seem incontrovertible. It seems absurd to suggest that teaching should be self-centred from the start in order to avoid this disguised, inverted selfishness later? Perhaps we must simply conclude, as Freud was fond of saying, that teaching is one of the impossible professions (see, for example, Freud, 1961 [1925]; and Freud, 1964 [1937]). Perhaps we must adopt a tragic vision of the practice, acknowledging that only teachers who embody the rare and short-lived virtue of selflessness will succeed and then only for a short while (on the tragic dimensions of teaching, see Burbules, 1990, 1995, 1997; Arcilla, 1992; on teaching as an impossible profession, see Britzman, 2009; Pitt, 2010; and Higgins, In Press).

In the space remaining, I want to strengthen the case for self-ful teaching and challenge the very idea that selflessness is a virtue in the practice of teaching. I do not want to contest the first premise, that the welfare and development of students is a defining concern of teaching. A teacher who thinks of his students as existing primarily for him—for example as potential disciples or as punching bags on which to vent his anger—is not worthy of the name. But does this necessarily lead to the second premise, that we think more or better about our students' interests when we look beyond, or work contrary to, our own interests? Let us look more closely at these last two examples.

We do not hesitate to denounce the teacher who uses the classroom as a space to vent her own aggression because such behaviour violates accepted moral codes of decency. The harm that befalls students is less clear, though, in the case of the teacher who thinks of his students as potential disciples. Indeed, some students may even find such a situation beneficial. Nonetheless, there is an educational betrayal here which goes beyond the more run-of-the-mill indecency of hurting someone's feelings. Teachers, we want to say, should be promoting autonomy, not encouraging emotional or intellectual dependence. Similarly, the first teacher's venting not only brings something bad into the student's world, but simultaneously precludes something good since it destroys the sense of safety needed to do important learning or growing. The lesson of both examples is that one should not live vicariously through one's students.

What we have in such examples, though, is precisely a reason *for* teachers to pay attention to their own needs and desires. To avoid vicarious entanglements requires cultivating an awareness of the needs we are likely to try to meet through our interactions with others. It requires self-

knowledge—not obliviousness to self—and self-knowledge is not easily won. Indeed, I suspect that much of our explicit commitment to selfless service is an attempt to avoid having to look at how our self is implicated in our dealings with others. To engage in the illusion that we might be purely other-centred is to put off the hard work of interrogating how we often fail to see the other for who they are. To put off such questioning as a ‘self-indulgence’, to pretend that our needs are beside the point, ends up making our needs our students’ business whether we (or they) like it or not. In contrast, a teacher who becomes more interested in herself in this way, who prizes any opportunity she comes upon to learn better the geography of her soul, will end up less likely to forget that her students are ends in themselves.

We can now reject the idea that nurturing the fledgling subjectivities of students requires looking away from one’s own subjectivity, but this argument against self-forgetfulness is still too easily assimilated to the ascetic ideal. We have done nothing to upset the basic equation of teaching and self-sacrifice if we only urge teachers to discover their unconscious impulses for the purpose of weeding them out. This is paying attention to the self only to perform a deeper *askesis*. It is as if we can only advocate the cultivation of self-knowledge in teachers insofar as it helps protect students from the teacher’s self.²¹ Why not simply affirm that self-knowledge is one of the things that make life worth living and recommend it to teachers on that account, as one of the rewards of teaching? Self-indulgence may name one kind of betrayal of the educative good, but it seems to be the case that we are now likely to look upon anything that feeds the self of the teacher as a dangerous indulgence. This is a serious mistake.

The teachers who affect us the most, in addition to what and how they teach, possess what William Arrowsmith calls a ‘ripeness of self’. It takes a developing, robust self to foster self-development in others. ‘To educate a nation’, Arrowsmith writes, ‘is the incomparable priority of the age. And it requires active mind at the top of its bent, flexible intelligence, [and] a positive appetite for complexity’ (Arrowsmith, 1971, p. 14). Perhaps not everything that contributes to a teacher’s self-development pays dividends in his teaching and vice versa, but we have reason to doubt the totalising dismissal of a possible convergence between the teacher’s development and that of the student.

Consider the example of choosing what text to teach. Wouldn’t we want a teacher to choose, out of all the texts that would be valuable experiences for her students, that text which most bears on her current questions and interests? One teacher might take the opportunity to discover a new set of ideas; another might choose to deepen her understanding of a classic. Of course, there are severe constraints in schools operating to limit such opportunities. The budget may preclude the purchase of new texts, standardisation may dictate exactly what books are to be taught, or teachers may be forced to use that non-book known as the textbook. If we have begun to view such forces as constraints, though, this means that we are making

progress against asceticism. It means that we have begun to see it as an ideal that teachers should challenge and enrich themselves through their pedagogy. Compromise of ideals is the norm, but it is already a very different way of thinking to see the sacrifice of a teacher's interest as a compromise of the ideal rather than as the ideal itself.

Thus, the teacher's desire to teach a particular book, while personal on one level, is also pedagogically relevant. *Ceteris paribus*, students are far better served when the teacher is also involved in a learning process, wants something from the text, and is filled with genuine questions of her own prompted or engaged by the text. Without such involvement, as we discussed in the last chapter, students will face that all too familiar fixture of classrooms: the pedagogical question (see above, p. 136). Nothing more quickly convinces a student of the pointlessness of an exercise than when the teacher presents it as just that, an exercise, devoid of any but a pedagogical purpose. Conversely, nothing sends a current through a room of somnolent students more quickly than an actual question or passion on the part of the teacher. In fact, one could argue that we are able to engage with a new text or issue or problem precisely in proportion to the passion our teacher shows for the text. Ultimately the point is to earn our own relation to a text or issue, to bring our own questions to it, perhaps to fall in love with it, but in the beginning, we must rely on the teacher's relation to the text as a sort of bridge supporting us as we establish our own footing.²²

The problem with questions and passions alike is that they require a self to ask or feel them. After years of ascetic service, one tends to become dried out, desiccated like Hughes' famous raisin. A teacher in this state will tend to ask hollow questions devoid of any core of genuine inquiry, such questions being the counterpart of the teacher himself, a person in role without the person. Like clothes worn by an invisible man, the role stays magically afloat though there seems to be no substance behind it. This may seem hyperbolic, but the kind of selfhood we are talking about is not some bare minimum. What catalyzes learning in others is a 'ripeness of self': a bundle of strivings, projects, rich unfinished stories, idiosyncrasies, perplexities, and commitments.²³ And on one important level, at least, to have such a self is to be in process. Without such dynamism, loves wither into hobbies or metastasise into fanaticisms, questions become rhetorical and formalistic, and perplexities become clichéd either-ors.

Good teaching itself requires a first-personal answer to the first-personal question: what am *I* doing in this classroom? If instead, under the intense sociological and psychological pressures of the 'helping professions', teachers lose track of themselves and their 'dominant vocation', then we are left with only the pointless wasting away of the hunger artist, with what Nietzsche, looking at the bigger picture, finds almost funny:

In the so-called vocations of life where everybody must make a choice, men reveal a pathetic *modesty*. They say in effect, 'We are "called" to serve our

fellow men and be useful to them, and the same is true of our neighbor and his neighbor too'. And so each man serves another, nobody has a calling to exist for himself, but always for others. So we have a tortoise resting on the back of another tortoise, etc., etc. When each man finds his own goal in someone else, then nobody has any purpose of his own in existing. And this '*existing for others*' is the most comical of comedies (Nietzsche, 1990 [1874–5], pp. 340–341).

NOTES

1. Franz Kafka (2004) *A Hunger Artist*, I. Johnston, trans. Available at <http://records.viu.ca/~Johnstoi/kafka/hungerartist.htm>, retrieved 5 June 2009.
2. Two points about this statement. First, as will become clear in the discussion that follows, what Dewey calls 'morals' here is a non-narrow, non-moralistic conception akin to what Williams calls 'ethics'. Second, it is not contradicted by Dewey's acknowledgement in 'Moral Principles' that there are 'non-moral ideas' (whether or not they concern morality) or 'such ideas and pieces of information as leave conduct uninfluenced for either the better or the worse' (Dewey, 1996 [1909], p. 267). The point is that it would be a moral and educational scandal should any significant portion of the school day or curriculum leave us so completely unaffected.
3. Dewey makes the same point in almost the same words a decade earlier in 'Ethical Principles Underlying Education', on which 'Moral Principles in Education' was based (see Dewey, 1996 [1897], p. 75; on the relation between the two works, see Boydston, 1996, pp. 351–353).
4. This is a quote from the 'quiz kid' Bruce Fletcher, who interestingly recounts how, his early fame having prematurely aged him, he has since found restorative privacy and, one would think, contact with the green parts of himself, working in a plant nursery.
5. On the challenges of teaching with and for natality, see Levinson, 1997. On the resistance of the teaching profession to the newfound knowledge of the apprentice teacher, see Pitt, 2010. I devote Chapter 7 to determining where teaching fits in Arendt's *vita activa*.
6. See also the classic film based on the novel (Neame, 1969).
7. Recruitment poster, NYC Teaching Fellows Program, New York City Subway, c. 2001.
8. In the Academy Edition of Kant's works, the four phrases just quoted appear in Vol. 4, pp. 397, 397, 400, 398.
9. Though this is not an exact quote, the language comes from Taylor's *Sources of the Self* (1989): orientation and disorientation are the themes of Chapter 2, 'The Self in Moral Space'. As I discussed in Chapter 1 (see above, p. 43, n. 4), while Taylor embraces the substance of Williams' distinction between ethics and morality, and occasionally the language itself (for example, Taylor, 1989, p. 53), he will typically speak of narrower and broader conceptions of the moral as in this phrase. I explore Taylor's theory further in Chapter 8 (see below, pp. 261–266).
10. Thanks to James Stillwaggon for pointing out the need for this clarification. Darryl DeMarzio fails to appreciate this point fully in his critique of my position (DeMarzio 2008). He is right to suggest that a teacher can grow through a practice that involves sacrifices for students, but wrong to see this as problem for my account, since I specify that I am using asceticism to refer to sacrifices of the teacher's becoming in order to better serve students. Thus, I welcome DeMarzio's (2010) treatment of Socrates pursuing an art of self-creation through dialogue as a good example of a non-ascetic ethic of teaching, even if Socrates' practice requires various types of sacrifice.

11. Thanks to Nick Burbules for helping me to develop this reading. For an alternate, non-ascetic reading of the denouement one need look no further than the film's title. In the respectful, loving interpellation, 'Sir', we find precisely an ideal of the self to which Thackeray might aspire.
12. There are, of course, advantages to group therapy that counterbalance the division of the therapist's attention.
13. The point here is only to compare a cushy private, individual practice with a stressed, low-cost institutional position. Obviously, such a group therapist would still be much more person-attuned than say the desk clerk at the department of motor vehicles.
14. Typically in-patient groups require daily progress reports, one per patient per session. This draining homework is more not less onerous for the fact that it is completely absurd that a therapist would have something insightful to say about each patient after each 45 minute session with a 10 patient group.
15. The economics of working conditions reflects the economic disparity of clients, and is also keyed to some extent to the economics of professional training. Longer clinical PhD programs at more elite institutions will make it easier for a psychotherapist to secure the better working conditions if desired.
16. For exceptions and qualifications to this rule, see Elsbree, 1939, pp. 67–70. The number of female teachers before 1830 is much higher, especially in New England, if one includes the so-called 'Dame Schools' operated in the homes of women (see Fraser, 2007, pp. 19–23).
17. For the 1834 date, see Herbst, 1989, p. 27. 1860 is a rough date, as national data before 1880 are sketchy. By 1870, it is estimated that women already held 59% of public school teaching positions in the US (Elsbree, 1939, p. 554; see also Tyack and Strober, 1981, p. 133). Clifford (1989, p. 293) dates the turning point to 1860; Fraser (2007, p. 41) says that teaching had become a female enterprise by 1850. Interestingly, the feminisation of teaching in England and Wales follows an almost identical curve (see Apple, 1985, pp. 458 ff.).
18. My dad, Ray Higgins, who taught in the Delaware public schools for 50 years, has shared with me shocking examples of the infantilisation of teachers in the conduct of administrators.
19. I return to Johnson's account of the working conditions for teachers in the concluding section of Chapter 6.
20. In Higgins, 2003a I put Benjamin in dialogue with Martin Buber, drawing out the implications of her view for the dynamics of the teacher-student relationship.
21. Some arbitrarily selected examples of this broad trend include Britzman and Pitt, 1996; Hamachek, 1999; Bordich, 1999; and Weimer, 2002. For three classic exceptions, see Jersild, 1955; Arrowsmith, 1967b; and Greene, 1973.
22. See below, figures 8a and 8b in Chapter 8 (pp. 245 and 246) for visual models of the multiple relationships among teacher, student, and subject matter. In Chapter 8, I also return to the theme of the teacher's ability to ask questions (see below, pp. 253–278).
23. For the self as a 'parcel of vain strivings tied' see Thoreau, 1977 [1841].

6

Working Conditions: The Practice of Teaching and the Institution of School

Teachers are the forlorn hope of the culture of Western modernity. I use the expression in the original sixteenth-century Dutch sense (*verloren hoop*) of an assault party sent out on some dangerous offensive mission in advance of the main forces, as well as its later English sense of an enterprise on whose success we have to depend, but which is in fact bound to fail. For the mission with which contemporary teachers are entrusted is both essential and impossible (Alasdair MacIntyre, 1987, p. 16).

There is no creature whose inward being is so strong, that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it (George Eliot, 1985 [1871–2], p. 896).¹

INTRODUCTION

In the last chapter we considered how the central claim of Chapter 1—that professional ethics should concern the needs, desires, aspirations, and welfare of practitioners themselves—looks in the specific context of teaching, a helping profession that seemingly demands self-sacrifice. In this chapter we turn to two different problems for a virtue ethics of teaching, one suggested by Chapter 2 and another by Chapter 4.

In Chapter 2, we considered MacIntyre’s arguments for the primacy of practices in ethics. Goods and virtues, we said, are discovered and reanimated in the specific practical worlds where traditions of human striving and excellence grow up. Thus, the implication seems to be, teaching is home to a set of internal goods along the lines of our earlier analysis: those found in outstanding performances, excellences of character, moral phenomenology, and biographical genre. However, here we immediately encounter two problems. First, there is the awkward matter that MacIntyre himself is on record denying that teaching is a practice. Second, even if we can show that MacIntyre is wrong on this point, there remains his general scepticism about the fate of practices in late modernity. As MacIntyre shows, it is the sad fate of any number of practices to be devoured by the institutions built to house them. Thus, even if we can show that teaching is a practice in principle, we will still need to consider how viable this practice has become in the actual context of schools.

The question of how teaching as a practice fares within the institution of the school is closely related to a question raised by John Dewey's account of the vocational environment. As we saw in Chapter 4, a complex purposive frame—such as that acquired by a practitioner in any of the long-standing vocations—transforms one's generic, inert surroundings into a particular, effective environment. Our occupations, we concluded with Dewey, dictate the world of 'things with which one varies'. And yet, it seems clear that this conclusion becomes dangerously idealistic unless we also acknowledge that certain features of one's brute surroundings may affect one quite significantly regardless of one's interests and purposes, expectations and habits. If the floor suddenly dips as I turn a corner, no structure of expectation will enable me to walk on air: no occupation or 'axis of salience' negates gravity. Thus, before turning in Chapter 8 to the question of what sort of environment the vocation of teaching elicits, we must first consider how schools as surroundings shape the way teachers are able to take up that vocation.

A PRIMA FACIE CASE FOR TEACHING AS A PRACTICE

If teaching is a practice and MacIntyre is right that practices offer their practitioners key resources for their quest to craft a meaningful and good life, then we have reason to believe that the self-abnegating tendencies we discovered in this helping profession are not only unfortunate but also unnecessary. But is teaching a practice? To answer this question, let us begin by recalling the fourteen criteria we discovered in Chapter 2.

We concluded there that the ultimate proof for MacIntyre lies in whether the testimony of participants and participant observers of a candidate practice suggests that it has grown into a distinctive ethical world, becoming home to a unique set of 'internal' goods. There are, we said, five aspects to this question: do we find in this activity (1) a distinctive way of understanding and describing what is worthwhile to experience, achieve or become; and, do we find that those who pursue this determinate *telos* tend to realise distinctive goods through their (2) appreciation of achieved excellence in completed works or performances, (3) inhabiting of a meaningful and rich experiential landscape, or moral phenomenology, (4) embodiment of (extra-moral) excellences of character, and (5) their sense of their life as informed by a biographical genre?

Second, we identified a number of qualities typically found in activities that seem to develop successfully into practices. We found that practices tend to develop out of activities that are (6) complex, (7) coherent, (8) rooted in social life, (9) marked by contemporary community, (10) constituted also as a tradition or unfolding conversation, and (11) characterised by rituals of initiation and apprenticeship that go beyond mere training in skills.

Finally, we identified three boundary conditions or typical features of a practice's relationship to its surround. First, we said that practices (12)

depend on institutions from which they must nevertheless be distinguished. Second, we noted that, within the broad category of excellences of character, we should expect to find that (13) the specifically moral virtues have put down distinctive roots in the soil of the practice. Third, and finally, we pointed out that (14) at certain moments in the life of a practice its esoteric goods will become exoteric to some significant degree, enriching the moral life of the larger community.

How then, does teaching look against these tests? MacIntyre himself has said, in an interview with Joseph Dunne, that he would *not* be inclined to count teaching as practice (MacIntyre and Dunne, 2002, p. 5). Before addressing his specific reason for holding this view, I would like to mount a *prima facie* case for teaching as a practice by seeing which criteria teaching is able to satisfy.

Let us begin with complexity, a characteristic in ample evidence in the work of teachers. Consider Richard Rorty's observation that teachers are forced to balance two tasks that pull in opposite directions, socialisation and individualisation (Rorty, 1999).² Kieran Egan goes further, pointing out how modern day educators have found themselves in thrall not only to socialisation and individuation (which Egan calls 'Rousseau's developmental idea') but also to 'Plato's academic idea' (Egan, 2008, pp. 9ff.). According to Egan, while each of these ideas has strengths and weaknesses, contemporary schooling has tied itself in a knot on the misguided theory that combining them would fix the problems of each. Indeed, we could extend this list of educational schizophrenias further: noting how education is expected both to ensure social continuity and to effect social change; noting with Dewey (1916, chaps. 19 & 23) how the modern school represents a series of worst-of-both-worlds compromises between culture and utility; or noting with David Labaree (1997, forthcoming) how the tension between access and advantage has formed and deformed our educational system. If the historical mission of the schools—spanning the academic, aesthetic, moral, and civic—were not complex enough, we are now witnessing an increased 'Educationalization of Social Problems' (see Depaepe and Smeyers, 2008).

Or recall from last chapter Jackson's observation that teachers engage, on average, in some 200-300 significant interpersonal interactions each hour (Jackson, 1990 [1968], p. 149). If Donald Schön is right, all professions require 'reflection in action'; but teaching would seem to take this demand for improvisation to new levels (Schön, 1983, esp. chaps. 2-5). Indeed, this observation not only attests to the complexity of teaching, but begins to evoke its distinctive moral phenomenology as well. Teaching, we could say, is both plagued and blessed by a radical unpredictability. It doesn't seem to matter how many times one has taught. Each time one begins a class, there is that unique blend of excitement and dread caused by the unpredictability of what will unfold. Perhaps this explains the fetishisation of the lesson plan: we want to deny just how much is unplanned. Good teachers of course make sure they are prepared. There is no excuse for not knowing the material, or not having

reflected on how you might help these particular students connect with this material. Experienced teachers, however, also know that as one nears the start of class, one must engage in a final, paradoxical form of preparation: preparing to be unprepared.³

Perhaps, then, we could begin to get an initial sense of the moral phenomenology of teaching by triangulating it between three cognate ideas. The first is the ethos of the theatre captured in the slogan ‘the show must go on’. The second is the ideal of the psychoanalyst known as ‘free-floating attention’. The third is the trademark of post-bebop jazz: the improvised solo. The moral phenomenology of teaching is, it strikes me, rich enough to require at least these three ideas to evoke it.

Unless teaching has become rote, teachers will experience something of the nervous anticipation of a performing artist. Heading into a new school day or getting ready to start a class, the teacher will feel a characteristic blend of excitement and anxiety. ‘In moments the class will begin’, the teacher thinks, ‘but I’m not ready . . . well, like it or not . . . it’s show time!’ Though the teacher may be alone in feeling these pre-class jitters, this is not a solo but an ensemble performance. And the teacher has prepared in part so as not to have to pay such close attention to the material itself. The theme is launched, but now the question is what the students are doing with it and what they can do with it.

Of course, teaching may devolve into a game of guess what’s in the teacher’s head. ‘Does anyone know what Vice-President Bush called this in 1980?’ the beleaguered and benumbing social studies teacher in *Ferris Buehler’s Day Off* asks a group of dazed and disaffected students:

[beat]
 Anyone?
 [beat]
 Something D-O-O economics?
 [beat]
 Voodoo economics (Hughes, 2006).

Here we have a perfect example of the pedagogical question we discussed in Chapter 4 (see above, p. 136). In this scene, the students refuse to play this game of call and response by which the teacher seeks to jazz up what is after all simply more rote instruction of disconnected facts.

Imagine, instead, that a teacher has posed a real question or challenged the student consensus on some issue with a surprising counter-argument. Now we have not jazzed-up rote instruction but a pedagogy truly animated by the ethos of improvisation. And here too is where the teacher’s version of the analyst’s attentiveness comes in. The teacher will weave expectation and patience together in a special way: she is eager to see what will emerge, but she is not counting on a particular response. As with jazz, the theme may be developed by the ensemble in somewhat predictable ways, but no one knows

quite what will happen when an individual steps forth and solos. Thus, the teacher's free-floating attention—her patient expectation—is enlivened by a particular current. For it is not only that she does not presume to know *what* will emerge, but she is also waiting to see *who* will emerge.⁴

Let us review our progress so far. We have shown that teaching is amply complex (criterion 6), and we have started to articulate some of the features of what might be a unique moral phenomenology of a practice of teaching (criterion 3). What else can we say with any certainty about teaching? That teaching has social roots (criterion 8) also seems indisputable. Indeed, as Dewey famously argued, education corresponds to one of society's most elemental needs: survival. Cricket and capoeira each have deep social roots but it is not hard to imagine a society with neither batsmen nor bambas; however, education appears in some form in every society since each must find ways to pass on its knowledge, values, skills and lore. Dewey puts it succinctly: 'Education, in its broadest sense, is the means of the social continuity of life' (Dewey, 1916, p. 2). Were this a matter of sheer physical survival, the group might simply rely on the birth of new members. However, as Dewey points out, the 'life' of the group includes 'customs, institutions, beliefs, victories and defeats, recreations and occupations' and it must therefore not only procreate but educate (*ibid.*). 'Social life could not survive', Dewey writes, 'without the communication of ideals, hopes, expectations, standards, opinions, from those members of the group who are passing out of group life to those who are coming into it' (p. 3). Education is for the social group as basic and necessary as eating and drinking are for the individual.

Though this shows the universality and ubiquity of education as a human activity, a question remains whether *teaching* deserves a more precise genealogy. As Dewey readily acknowledges, education has been informal for most of its history, with the young simply learning the culture's 'emotional set and stock of ideas . . . by sharing in what elders are doing' (p. 7). Dewey elaborates:

In part this sharing is direct, taking part in the occupations of adults and thus serving an apprenticeship; in part it is indirect, through the dramatic plays in which children reproduce the action of grown-ups and thus learn to know what they are like (*ibid.*).

We could certainly call this teaching, this direct or indirect invitation to participate in the rituals of everyday life. Anyone who has spent time with children knows that even the simplest activities become quite different when one is sharing them with a child. However, some might prefer to reserve the term 'teaching' for a more explicit engagement. The irony of Dewey's history is that teaching as a distinct occupation only begins to emerge as education is undergoing a radical and not entirely positive shift from informal to formal education. One of the things we see in the process of modernisation—in that rich and perilous trajectory from serfdom to suffrage to self-help, from Gutenberg to Google, from Bacon and Descartes to antibiotics and the A-

Bomb—is a radical transformation in basic educational assumptions. This, Dewey observes, is because ‘the gap between the capacities of the young and the concerns of adults widens’ and ‘much of what has to be learned is stored in symbols’ (pp. 7–8, 8). As a result, apprenticeship and playful imitation no longer suffice since ‘ability to share effectively in adult activities [now] depends on a prior training . . . Intentional agencies—schools—and explicit materials—studies—are devised. The task of teaching certain things is delegated to a special group of persons’ (p. 8).

While Dewey has no illusion that we could or should turn back the clock, he is eloquent about the ‘conspicuous dangers attendant upon the transition from indirect to formal education’ (*ibid.*). Compared to the ‘personal and vital’ learning made possible by actual participation in social life, ‘formal instruction . . . easily becomes remote and bookish’ (*ibid.*). ‘The material of formal instruction’, Dewey fears is always in danger of becoming disconnected from ‘life-experience’ and ‘social-interests’, rendering it relatively ‘artificial’ and ‘superficial’ (*ibid.*). This leads to what Dewey calls ‘one of the weightiest problems with which the philosophy of education has to cope’ namely how to keep:

. . . a proper balance between the informal and the formal, the incidental and the intentional, modes of education. When the acquiring of information and of technical intellectual skill do not influence the formation of a social disposition, ordinary vital experience fails to gain in meaning, while schooling, in so far, creates only ‘sharps’ in learning—that is, egoistic specialists. To avoid a split between what men consciously know because they are aware of having learned it by a specific job of learning, and what they unconsciously know because they have absorbed it in the formation of their characters by intercourse with others, becomes an increasingly delicate task with every development of special schooling (p. 9).

The challenge, then, is to triangulate the practice of teaching between two extremes. At one end would be the notion that teaching is simply any and all aspects of social life that contribute toward social reproduction. This is clearly too broad. At the other extreme would be the equation of teaching with employment in the modern school. This definition is both too narrow and too functionalist. Its narrowness precludes citing precursors before, say, the middle of the 19th century and its functionalism precludes posing critical questions about the degree to which true teaching is possible in schools of this or that type.⁵ For example, many modern teachers will recognise in Socrates an important exemplar of their practice, one predating the modern school by two millennia. And already, by Socrates’ time, there was a need to combat the functionalism that would equate teaching with the charging of a fee for pedagogical services rendered, as is evidenced by Socrates’ critique of the Sophists.

Thus, teaching has deep social roots, emerging as an explicit craft here and there throughout the history of informal education, before finally consolidating

as a modern, distinct occupation. Depending on your perspective on the relationship between teaching and schooling, then, the rise of the Massachusetts normal schools circa 1840 might mark either the beginning of teaching as practice in its own right, the beginning of the end of teaching as it is increasingly absorbed by schooling, or perhaps both.⁶ If a practice is important enough, it will be institutionalised and this is both a blessing and curse for the practice.

In our exploration of teaching's social roots, we have already begun to see how teaching also qualifies as having a tradition of practice (criterion 10). Dunne makes this point in an exchange with MacIntyre:

And as with each practice, teaching has a history of its own, not only in the lives of individual teachers but also in a wider tradition of exemplary figures and achievements and indeed of fundamental debate, with its proper ends being defined and redefined in canonical writings from Plato and Aristotle, through Cicero and Augustine, Aquinas, Comenius, Rousseau, and Froebel, to Dewey and Freire (MacIntyre and Dunne, 2002, p. 8).

To the objection that teaching means something remarkably different in Plato's *Meno*, Cicero's *De Oratore*, Comenius' *Didactica Magna*, Rousseau's *Emile*, and Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, we need only resort to MacIntyre's own conception of a tradition. A living tradition, we noted in Chapter 2, is marked precisely by a series of supersessions (see above, pp. 55 and 68). It is an evolving conversation the terms of which keep shifting, but which at any one time reveals an overlapping consensus. For example, we can follow Bruce Kimball in reading Plato and Cicero as part of the same educational conversation, the tradition of liberal learning (Kimball, 1986). This tradition, Kimball shows, has been structured around a central dialectic, as the contest between two competing sub-traditions: the oratorical and the philosophical. In the former, we find liberal learning as self-cultivation through internalisation of the truth and beauty inherent in great books. In the latter, we find liberal learning as the promotion of critical distance from received ideas, as learning to think for oneself. Liberal learning can be read as a struggle between these two models with various victories, defeats, and concessions. The tradition swings from Isocrates and oratory to Plato and philosophy only to swing back again to Cicero and oratory. Cicero wants his civic leaders to be educated in letters and for centuries rhetoric will have a place of honour. By the time we get to the 18th century, we find Rousseau urging us to keep all books away from *Emile* until he is twelve years old. A century later, the oratorical tradition—now greatly revised by the millennial dialectic—flexes its muscles again via Matthew Arnold and James McCosh. In the 20th century we find Freire diagnosing education's 'narration sickness', this time for reasons having to do with his fusion of Marxian politics, liberation theology, and existential psychoanalysis. And yet for all of its distance, Freire's problem-posing pedagogy is clearly kin to Socratic *elenchus*, the special form of pedagogical cross-examination on display in Plato's early dialogues.⁷

We have now shown how teaching might meet at least four of the criteria of a MacIntyrean practice. It is a complex activity with social origins and a long and rich tradition. Furthermore, the activity seems to offer its participants a unique way of being in the world; it seems to be tuned to a distinctive existential pitch. Let us turn next to excellences of character. Do teachers *qua* teachers display a distinctive set of excellences of character (criterion 4)? For starters, we have already noted how MacIntyre himself offered teaching as one of several contexts in which ‘waiting attentively without complaint’ gains a rich and specific enough context to become a determinate variety of patience (see above, pp. 50–51). How might we understand patience as central to teaching and teaching as disclosing something new about patience?

Consider what the paediatrician turned psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott says of his discovery of patience. Here Winnicott describes the challenges and rewards of resisting the impulse to offer the patient an interpretation (a statement that seeks to make sense of the personal material the patient has been considering), but it applies equally well to the teacher’s impulse to offer an explanation of the curricular material that a student is working to digest:

It is only in recent years that I have become able to wait and wait for the natural evolution of the . . . patient’s growing trust in the psychoanalytic technique and setting, and to avoid breaking up this natural process by making interpretations . . . It appals me to think how much deep change I have prevented or delayed in patients . . . by my personal need to interpret. If only we can wait, the patient arrives at understanding creatively and with immense joy, and I now enjoy this joy more than I used to enjoy the sense of having been clever (Winnicott, 1989 [1971], p. 116).⁸

MacIntyre says that we don’t really understand what it means to wait attentively without complaint unless we can answer the question ‘waiting for what?’. We might add that we can’t really understand why patience is a virtue unless we have some sense of the sources of impatience. Here Winnicott helps us on both counts.⁹ The teacher (in the pedagogical situation analogous to the therapeutic one described by Winnicott) is waiting for the student to make sense of the material. The teacher is waiting for the student to arrive at insight and not merely to record as facts the putative insights of others. The teacher is waiting for the student to rebuild a cognitive structure so that the new idea has a genuine, productive, and lasting place in the student’s overall understanding. And why does such waiting require patience? It is because the teacher has his or her own ways of understanding the idea in question, of putting the matter; and because it can feel comforting to rehearse and gratifying to display this knowledge.

This is obviously not to say that a teacher should never display his or her knowledge, understanding, and insight. MacIntyre is certainly right when he notes that ‘all teachers have to have in significant measure the habits that they try to inculcate’ (MacIntyre, 1999, p. 89). Thus, on another occasion, the

teacher will want to model how one arrives at subtle understanding, a penetrating analysis, a fresh insight, and so on. There is no contradiction here; rather this points back to the complexity of teaching. For there is no formula that tells the teacher when and how it is time to display one's own thinking and when and how it is better to wait and coax forth the student's own thinking on the matter. Thus, with the example of patience, we have not only gathered evidence of distinctive teacherly excellences of character, but also discovered that teachers have their own special angle on practical wisdom. If practical wisdom is, generically, the ability to learn from the particulars of complex, concrete situations how to inform and reform our general conceptions, then teacherly practical wisdom would seem to include, among other things, this ability to sense when to take and when to yield the stage, when a student needs an outside example of how to structure ideas and when, the challenges of building cognitive structures notwithstanding, the important thing is that the ideas be the student's own. If this somewhat rapid analysis holds, then we have discovered on the terrain of teaching not only a moral virtue (criterion 13), but also the keystone of the moral virtues.¹⁰

Indeed, this line of thought about the patience and practical wisdom of someone who has cultivated a teacherly perception of the pedagogical situation helps us show how teaching meets another of the criteria for practice-hood, that concerning apprenticeship (criterion 11). As you recall from Chapter 2, it is one of the signs of a practice that practitioners must learn new habits of vision and judgment. In this case, we can say that part of what it means to grow as a teacher is to learn to see this ripening of insight and to learn to detect and moderate one's own desire to be clever. The apprenticeship to a practice differs from a purely technical training in that it involves this sort of self-overcoming. Not only are skills being added, but the would-be practitioner must also grow out of ways of thinking and judging in order to participate in the practice. Without this patience and this vision, we could say, one is not yet a teacher, regardless of what it says on one's pay stub.

We can follow this line even further, arguing that it is therefore part of the distinctive evaluative teleology of teaching (criterion 1) to help students achieve substantive, acute, and genuine insights into themselves and the world. And this suggests, further still, that one of the internal goods of teaching, specifically the excellence of a completed performance (criterion 2) is to contribute to and witness the dawning of such insight. A would-be teacher who has still not yet mastered her need to be recognised as smart, who has not yet learned the patience and perception to make a place for the student's coming to know, will not be able to realise this good.

And without other virtues, we can say, teachers would not be able to resist the gravity by which such internal goods tend to collapse into those external goods that mimic them. As Joseph Dunne makes the case to MacIntyre:

The distinction between 'internal goods' and 'external goods', so central to your concept of practice, seems to have strikingly clear application in the case

of teaching. And it seems equally clear in its case that the accrual of external goods (whether test scores or occupational pathways leading to high income and status) is a basis for ‘competition and the creation of winners and losers’ . . . ; that concentration on these external goods threatens reliable achievement of its internal goods; that such achievement requires on the teacher’s part not just technical skills but virtues (a professor grading student assignments *justly* is one of your examples in *After Virtue*); and—poignant fate of all genuine practices—that recognition both of the reality of the threat and of successful resistance to it is reserved to those who are in some real sense insiders, whose judgment, that is to say, is informed by the requisite virtues (as is not the case, with respect to teaching, of parents or policy makers operating respectively as consumers or investors) (MacIntyre and Dunne, 2002, p. 7).

Who will testify to the nakedness of the emperor of standardised testing? Who will insist that graduation is not the same as education, that learning how to get more efficiently what one happens already to want is not the same as learning something of the range of what human beings have found to be worth wanting, or that success on standardised tests is somewhere between unrelated-to and indirectly-proportional-to the kind of genuine insight we have been discussing? Not teachers *qua* employees of a school, certainly. It is only as members of a practice that teachers can learn to sort the real educational goods from the phony ones, finding the community and the courage to insist on such distinctions when powerful forces work to deny them.

It is on this exact point, interestingly, that we can turn to MacIntyre for further testimony. First, consider MacIntyre’s description of the *telos* of education:

What education has to aim at for each and every child, if it is not to be a mockery, is both the development of those powers that enable children to become reflective and independent members of their families and communities and the inculcation of those virtues that are needed to direct us towards the achievement of our common and individual goods (p. 2).

Tellingly, MacIntyre then has to go all of the way back to the middle of the 19th century to find a sensible recommendation for how to measure student progress against such a substantive and therefore ambiguous standard. He quotes some remarks captured by Matthew Arnold on his 1865 tour of Rhenish and Prussian schools:

Long ago Matthew Arnold was rightly impressed with the instructions given to school examiners in Prussia. It was, they were told, the whole cultural formation of the student that was at stake and therefore the examinations should be such that the student could approach them ‘with a quiet mind and without painful preparatory effort’. The instruction in the highest class is to be such ‘that the pupil may have the requisite time to come steadily and without over-hurrying to the fullness of the measure of

his powers and character, that he may be securely and thoroughly formed, instead of bewildered and oppressed by a mass of information hastily heaped together' (MacIntyre and Dunne, 2002, p. 4; quoting Arnold, 1876, pp. 59–60; on Arnold's tour, see Bruford, 1975a, p. 2 and *passim*).

Now, fast forward a century and a half and we find a conception of a school that makes such judgment impossible and nullifies this conception of education. In the contemporary scene, MacIntyre rightly sees 'the baneful influence of an idea of schools, colleges, and universities as engaged in activities the measure of which is productivity' (MacIntyre and Dunne, 2002, p. 4). 'What is this idea?', MacIntyre asks:

It is a highly abstract conception of the school as an input-output machine whose activities are to be understood as transforming measurable input into measurable output. Schools are to be rewarded when the ratio of output to input is high and the cost of producing that ratio is low. Schools are to be penalised when the ratio is low and the cost of production is high. The input consists of the raw material, the entering students. The output is in test scores and examination results . . . It is the application of this input-output model to schools that makes it appropriate and revealing to rename the principal of a school its 'chief executive' (*ibid.*).

Such a model leads us to substitute ersatz for true educational goods. 'What the Prussian educators took to be important', MacIntyre explains, 'is precisely what disappears from view in the input-output model' (*ibid.*). For standardised, high stakes tests cannot possibly take the 'fullness of the measure of [a student's] powers and character'. 'What examinations principally test', MacIntyre reminds us, 'is how good one is at passing examinations. But you can be wonderful at passing examinations and remain both stupid and philistine' (*ibid.*).¹¹

Here we find MacIntyre leading our way in demonstrating how the activity of teaching might fit the model of a practice. Specifically, he seems to show how the relation of teaching to schooling corresponds to the one we expect to find between practices and their institutions (criterion 12). As we noted in Chapter 2, it is a proper and necessary task for institutions to secure external goods. In the current landscape where schools are threatened with closure if the tests scores of their students do not show a specified amount of improvement, school leaders have no choice but to take heed. And yet, such pressures—without and then within institutions—can lead to a mistaking of such external goods for the internal goods that are the *raison d'être* of the whole endeavour.

Indeed, MacIntyre considers teachers as a line of defence against not only this counterfeiting of the true currency of education, but against the very motor of late capitalism that pressures education to produce:

. . . the kind of compliant manpower that the current economy needs, with the different levels of skill that are required in a hierarchically ordered

society. Some few children are to become corporate executives and stockbrokers, some others lawyers and physicians, very many more will occupy the lower ranks of the service, manufacturing and farming industries, and then there will be those destined by their inadequate education to provide an adequate supply of unskilled labour (pp. 1–2).

Teachers must resist this pressure since the very *telos* of education precludes the result here described. This *telos*, you recall, is to help ‘each and every child’ to develop into an independent and practical reasoner capable of seeking, and making communally available, the goods found at the level of practices, his or her individual life quest, and that of community and tradition. Teachers *qua* teachers cannot allow themselves to foster compliant labour power destined for a life on non-meaningful work. ‘Contemporary teachers’, MacIntyre says, ‘have the task of educating their students so that those students will bring to the activities of their adult life questioning attitudes that will put them at odds with the moral temper of the age and its dominant institutions’ (p. 3).

As we noted earlier, however, MacIntyre acknowledges that ‘all teachers have to have in significant measure the habits that they try to inculcate’ (MacIntyre, 1999, p. 89). So teachers have to be able to model this questioning attitude as part of their refusal of the bureaucratisation of and instrumentalisation of both educational outcomes and student futures. In particular, MacIntyre suggests, teachers help to keep alive three specific questions (MacIntyre and Dunne, 2002, pp. 2–3). First, we must keep asking ourselves, what is the good served by this or that activity? To ask this question, though, is to be immediately confronted by another: what do we do about the fact that so many of our activities serve no genuine good but only stoke the engine of the production and consumption of ‘goods and services’? The third question follows quickly on the second, since those who would seek to pose the first two questions find that they are ‘badly in need of discussion and enquiry with others’ but also that ‘our contemporary social order offers almost no opportunity’ to do so (pp. 2, 3). Thus, we are forced to ask: what is to be done about the fact that ‘our conditions of work are such and our institutions are such that there is very rarely any milieu within which, in the company of others, we can step back from the established order of things and raise questions about it *sub specie boni*’ (p. 3)?¹²

What is interesting for our purposes is that MacIntyre sees teachers as having special resources for grappling with these questions. When it comes to the first two questions, teachers have an advantage since their work involves precisely helping students enter practices, learning ‘not only how to play their part in different kinds of complex activity by developing their skills, but also how to recognise the goods served by those activities, which give point and purpose to what they do (p. 2). Teachers are, for MacIntyre, something like the stewards of practices, seeing that students find their way into a variety of practical worlds. This suggests that teachers operate like

the para-practitioners we described in Chapter 2 (see above, pp. 71–72), helping to make the esoteric world of the practice exoteric enough for some to consider entering. Without a teacher to help us glimpse inside, the door that marks the entry to each practice appears to students as just so much scrap lumber or potential firewood. Each day teachers struggle to keep our eyes above the bottom line, to keep questions of meaning, purpose, and value from collapsing again into another piece of instrumental reasoning.

If teachers have a professional advantage in facing the first two questions, MacIntyre says that they also have decent resources for avoiding the dispiriting third question:

Being unsuccessful involves being where the money is not and teachers, although much better off than either the working or the unemployed poor, are still a paradigm case of lack of success. But teachers have one great advantage over many other members of the workforce. Not only do they serve the common good, but even when either the bureaucratic or the economic constraints on their teaching deform it, or when their own defects as teachers prevent them from achieving what they should and can achieve, they generally have colleagues with whom they can enquire together how to remedy matters (*ibid.*).

The idea of a faculty, we might say—unless it becomes debased as it often does—has built into it the idea of a self-governing community whose search for unity of purpose across its several departments (which represent after all distinct practical, purposive worlds) creates just the kind of conversational space MacIntyre is after. Debates about the structure of the curriculum and the development of students constantly force teachers to confront questions about where in the current flux of culture one can detect an ethical heartbeat, where some genuine and distinct form of excellence can be perceived and pursued. In the meantime, this also attests to the fact that teaching seems to meet yet another of the criteria we have laid out—again according to MacIntyre himself—namely the idea of a community of practice (criterion 9).

Through this preliminary survey of the terrain of teaching, we have already shown how teaching can meet eleven of the fourteen criteria. We have found teaching to be a complex activity with social roots. To teach, we said, requires a true apprenticeship by which one joins both a historical tradition and contemporary community of practice. We have found plausible candidates for what might count as an evaluative teleology in teaching and as internal goods of performance, character, and moral phenomenology. Teaching seems to stand to schooling as a practice stands to an institution, and we found evidence that the moral virtues have put down distinctive roots in the activity of teaching. Does this clinch the case that teaching is a practice?

MACINTYRE'S OBJECTION

It is hard to know how much more evidence one might need in abstraction from a specific question posed by an actual sceptic. Perhaps if we knew what reason someone had for doubting that teaching is a practice, we might have a better idea what is needed by way of proof. As I mentioned in the introduction, it is ironically none other than MacIntyre himself who has emerged as this sceptic. Given how heavily I drew on MacIntyre in establishing many of the previous points, it may well seem impossible for MacIntyre to deny that teaching fits his model. Dunne captures nicely the feeling of dismay many of us felt upon learning of MacIntyre's position:

Several philosophers of education, myself included, have made much of claiming—as central to argumentative resistance to the technicist pretensions of the input-output models you have just decried—that teaching is itself a practice. And [it] is disconcerting to discover now that the thinker who has most heavily influenced our understanding of 'practice' disavows this claim (MacIntyre and Dunne, 2002, p. 7; this discovery inspired a valuable volume on teaching and practice, Dunne and Hogan, 2003).

So what leads MacIntyre to deny that teaching is a practice? As it turns out, MacIntyre's objection turns on, of all things, the *coherence* of teaching (criterion 7). As you recall from Chapter 2, MacIntyre stipulated that candidate practices must be the right size (see above, p. 67). Planting turnips and throwing a tight spiral pass are but fragments of the practices of farming and football (MacIntyre, 2007 [1981], p. 187). Conversely, if throwing a pass is too small, sport is too large. There are, of course, strong family resemblances across the various recognised sports, but each sport is its own practical world. You cannot apprentice yourself to sport, or for that matter, to art, science, trade, or the helping professions; but you can apprentice yourself to fencing, poetry, geology, plumbing, and nursing. These are integral, coherent practices.

But on the face of it, so too is teaching. Consider this comparison: teaching is to ballet (practices) what crafting a lesson plan is to pirouetting (elements of practices) and what the school-based professions are to the arts (groups of practices). Crafting a lesson plan is a complex and important activity but it only makes sense in the larger context of teaching. Ditto lecturing, marking papers, leading a discussion, giving an exam. These are, MacIntyre would say, skills that can be put to a variety of purposes, but they are not distinctive purposive worlds. Meanwhile, though teachers, guidance counsellors, administrators, school nurses, and speech pathologists all come together in a common enterprise, 'school-based professions' hardly marks off a distinct world of purposes and personal ideals. Teaching, however, seems to be just the right size for a candidate practice.

However, this may be too hasty. Perhaps teaching is equivalent not to ballet but to dance? That is, just as I had to specify ballet to hit upon a dance

form with its own coherent set of evaluative terms, distinctive phenomenology, and tradition, so too we might have to specify within teaching, sub-traditions such as liberal education, progressive education, or critical pedagogy.¹³ MacIntyre himself is not always clear on this point. It is noteworthy, for example, that in his discussion of the practice of painting, he needs to zoom in on one genre of painting, portraiture, in order to generate an example of an internal good with any thickness. Similarly, in order to make the idea of a practice of teaching plausible in the preceding discussion, I found myself reaching for more specific ideas such as constructivist pedagogy. As we saw in Chapter 2 (see above, p. 68), though, MacIntyre himself defines traditions as ‘continuities of conflict’ as ‘historically extended, socially embodied arguments’ (p. 222). It is part of the nature of a practice to spawn competing visions of, and sub-communities within, the practice. Recall in this regard Kimball’s analysis of the tradition of liberal education as itself an ongoing conflict between the oratorical and philosophical sub-traditions. Or consider Dunne’s rough and ready list of exemplary figures in the history of teaching. Despite their stark differences (Aquinas and Rousseau? Cicero and Froebel!), the sequence does seem better read as a contentious, dynamic conversation than as series of non-sequiturs. Thus, teaching does not seem to suffer the same problem as sport, art, or science. Like painting, it has sub-genres to which we may turn for a thick evocation of aims, but it remains a coherent practice rather than mere grouping of practices.

It turns out, however, that MacIntyre does not at all find teaching to be too large a category. On the contrary, MacIntyre claims that:

Teaching itself is not a practice, but a set of skills and habits put to the service of a variety of practices. The teacher should think of her or himself as a mathematician, a reader of poetry, an historian or whatever, engaged in communicating craft and knowledge to apprentices. It follows that you cannot train teachers well, until they have been educated into whatever discipline it is that they are to transmit (MacIntyre and Dunne, 2002, p. 5).

According to MacIntyre, teaching is but a fragment of other practices. There are teachers of poetry, pottery, and palaeontology, and much else, but there is no such thing a teacher plain and simple. This does not mean that MacIntyre puts teaching on par with planting turnips and throwing spirals. Each of these is a fragment of one particular practice. Teaching, on the other hand is part of every practice because it is an essential function of practices (i.e. criterion 11). Nonetheless, MacIntyre does want to maintain that:

All teaching is for the sake of something else and so teaching does not have its own goods. The life of a teacher is therefore not a specific kind of life. The life of a teacher of mathematics, whose goods are the goods of mathematics, is one thing; a life of a teacher of music whose goods are the goods of music is another (p. 9).¹⁴

Now, our first reaction to this line of thought may be a dismissive one. Here is a philosopher, we may think, who has taught only at the college level and does not realise how different it is to be a professor and to be schoolteacher. Professors may teach subjects, we might be tempted to say, but schoolteachers teach students. However, I think it is well worth taking MacIntyre's position seriously for the following reasons: the author of *After Virtue* deserves at least to be consulted about the correct interpretation and application of its key concept; whether we will ultimately endorse MacIntyre's premises or his conclusion, we will find that there is more to his position than it might first appear; even if his objection proves untenable, it may be productive to work through it; for example, if it turns out that teaching kindergarten, middle school language arts, high-school calculus, and a college seminar on the work of David Foster Wallace are not part of the same practice, knowing that (and where one draws the line) is itself an important result; but, we have over the course of this book had occasion to be sceptical of this pedagogical class distinction between professors and teachers (I first raised this question in the Introduction [see above, p. 6]; the discussion of the ideology of the helping professions in the last chapter also applies here [see above, pp. 164–165]); finally, being out of touch with schools is not always a bad thing, as we should resist our tendency to mistake education for schooling and schooling for the contemporary shape of schools.

Let us begin with the retort that very few teachers, especially at the lower grades could be said to be full-fledged practitioners of the subjects they teach. We might even hesitate to call the high-school calculus teacher a mathematician; certainly the elementary teacher reading poems and getting children to write poetry is neither a poet nor a literary critic. MacIntyre is ready for this complaint, qualifying his position as follows:

Of course this requires a conception of mathematicians, literary scholars, historians and others that does not make it a requirement of being such that one should do or have done original work in one's discipline. But such a conception is needed anyway. Specialist researchers make notable contributions to their disciplines, but they are only one section of the community that engages in and with any particular discipline. Specialists need to make themselves intelligible to and to engage in dialogue with all the members of the community of their discipline (p. 5).

Thus, MacIntyre is prepared to make the concept of a practice more ecumenical in order to ensure a place for teachers, and having done this he sees no reason to stipulate a separate practice for teaching itself.

What if we press MacIntyre further, pointing out that many teachers do not teach a practice: elementary classrooms are home to multiple practices and some teachers teach generic skills useful in a variety of contexts (adding

and spelling, typing and driving, etc.). Again, MacIntyre proves ready with a reply, finessing his position in this way:

Characteristically each teacher is engaged in initiating her or his students into some practice, generally in the elementary stages by teaching them skills, the use for which and the point of which the student cannot yet know . . . At more advanced levels teachers enable their students to deploy their skills in order to achieve the goods of some particular practice of mathematical or scientific enquiry, of reading imaginative literature and responding to it as part of a community of readers, of historical enquiry (*ibid.*).

In other words, MacIntyre is not suggesting that young children be thrust directly into the complexities of actual practice. He acknowledges that some preliminary skill acquisition will be necessary. But he wants to insist that even this be done with an eye toward the practices in which these skills find their point and purpose. The idea is to minimise as much as possible the period during which students must take the teacher's word that a given skill set has purpose beyond being a pedagogical requirement. As soon as possible, MacIntyre wants students to have a chance to experience their efforts not only in relation to external goods (avoiding detention, getting good grades, etc.) but also to the goods internal to practices. And it is here that MacIntyre's position – which may have initially seemed distant from the world of pedagogy – echoes the insight of Dewey's we have been developing, that the most potent form of learning involves direct participation in social practices (see above, pp. 119–128 and 181–182).

Clearly, both MacIntyre and Dewey are pushing against the grain of contemporary schooling. Schools teach reading skills and math skills, or, when the mandate is widened, thinking skills or life skills. The question we have to consider, though, is whether this constitutes a weakness in their position or indicates a problem with contemporary schooling. I concur with Dunne that viewing teaching as initiation into particular practices 'helps to undercut the purportedly domain-neutral expertise, the arsenal of pedagogical methodologies and the bloated discourse of much contemporary "education"' (p. 7). As Michael Oakeshott puts it, in a genuine place of learning:

. . . learning is a declared engagement to learn something in particular. Those who occupy it are not merely 'growing up', and they are not there merely to 'improve their minds' or to 'learn to think'; such unspecified activities are as impossible as an orchestra that plays no music in particular (Oakeshott, 1989 [1975], p. 24).

In my view, MacIntyre is on the right side of this debate. Students and teachers alike sag under the realisation that what they are mainly doing in school is *school* and not chemistry, math, or French. It is no coincidence that

most students recall either drama or sports as the only truly vital or memorable activities of their high school days. These are some of the few places in the high school experience where one apprentices directly to a practice. MacIntyre rightly argues:

Our conception of the school is impoverished if we understand it as merely a preparatory institution, within which the students are contained until they are ready to participate in ‘the real thing’. In good schools students already become practitioners of arts, sciences, and games, participants in such activities as reading novels and poetry with both discrimination and intensity, devising new experiments in which their mathematical skills can be put to use, drawing and painting and making music to some purpose. So the communal life of a school is in good order when it is recognized not only as a place for apprenticeship through training by means of inescapably laborious drills, but also as a place of genuine, if small-scale, cultural achievement within which a variety of practices flourish (MacIntyre and Dunne, 2002, p. 9).

However, even if we share MacIntyre’s vision of the centrality of practices to education, we still do not have to accept MacIntyre’s conclusion that teaching is not a practice. To see why, we turn to Joseph Dunne who I believe ably refutes MacIntyre’s position. Dunne’s refutation of MacIntyre includes a weak and a strong argument. The weak argument concedes to MacIntyre his key assumption that there is nothing to teaching other than helping students learn the skills, habits, judgment, and modes of appreciation of the practice within which one is teaching. Even in this case, Dunne reasons, teaching could and should still be identified as a practice in its own right. To make this point, Dunne offers an argument by analogy. Let us assume, Dunne says, that it is impossible to state the aims of teaching without reference to the aims of the practice one is teaching. If this disqualifies teaching as a practice, then this would also disqualify architecture, one of MacIntyre’s defining examples of a practice. The *telos* of architecture, Dunne reasons,

... is indeed good buildings—but good here is not specifiable solely by architects without reference to the goods of other practices. For, with respect to any particular building, it will matter whether it is, for example, a family home, an office, a cathedral or a football stadium; in each case it will have to serve the practice properly housed in *that* kind of building. Neither the fact of this service nor the considerable heterogeneity introduced into the work of architects through the variety of other practices in which it is thereby implicated makes us deny its status as a practice. I do not see a reason for judging that it *does* so disqualify teaching. In neither case, of course, does this service negate internal goods—which are, in the one case, well-designed buildings and everything in the activity of architects that contributes to them and, in the other, well-educated students and everything in the activity of teachers that contributes to making them so (Dunne, 2003, p. 355).

We might add that designing without reference to function and the specific needs of clients violates the ethos that defines the practice of architecture. Of course, there are ongoing debates among architects about how closely form should follow function, and about how directive one should be with clients in encouraging them to question a building's functions.¹⁵ The point, though, is that this is exactly the sort of continuity of conflict that marks the tradition of a practice. Does the form of the Villa Savoye really reflect its function? Should Venturi really be poking fun at his clients? Finding your place among such debates is part of what it means to be an architect.

As Dunne also points out, MacIntyre opens the door to this sort of objection because he intentionally blurs the *praxis/poiesis* distinction, counting among practices not only activities whose aim is located within their very performance (*energeia*) but also those that aim at a product or state of affairs beyond themselves (*kinesis*). It is in the nature of such kinetic activities that their ends can be nested in this way, as Dunne (recalling the opening passage of the *Nicomachean Ethics*) points out: the tanner makes leather for the harness-maker who makes bridles for the cavalry (*ibid.*).¹⁶ Excellence in each craft is partly controlled by the excellence above it, here terminating in the art of military strategy.

If one follows such nesting as far as it goes, one reaches politics that MacIntyre also counts as a practice, even though its good encompasses the goods of all practices. 'Poliscraft', we noted in Chapter 2, is the master craft or architectonic *techné* for Aristotle (see above, pp. 79–80). It remains to be seen whether teaching is closer to harness-making or politics in this regard, but what Dunne's first argument makes clear is that MacIntyre's system has to allow for this sort of iterative structure. The aims of one practice may inform the *telos* of another without making the latter any the less distinctive for this fact. A practice as a whole can become instrumental in the purposes of a 'larger' practice without making its elements thereby into mere technical skills. Tanning is a practice whose products can be put to the service of harness-making. Negotiating cleverly over the price of materials is a skill of use in many practices including tanning, harness-making, and a variety of others.

To my mind, this is enough already to lay MacIntyre's objection to rest. For those still not convinced, Dunne devises a strong argument, one that challenges the very notion that teaching can 'so easily be made to disappear into practices such as history and physics' (MacIntyre and Dunne, 2002, p. 7). Here Dunne is again able to cite MacIntyre against MacIntyre. In an essay on Aquinas as educator, MacIntyre acknowledges that the activity of teaching is structured by goods of two types: the goods of the specific craft the teacher teaches and the student's own good. A good teacher, MacIntyre admits, shows care not only for a good mathematical proof or short story, but also for whether moving into or further along in the practice in question is a good in this student's life. As Dunne sums up: 'MacIntyre endorses a view of education in which disciplinary accomplishments are not only distinct from

but subordinate to the student's good' (Dunne, 2003, p. 356). As Dewey poignantly observes:

An occupation is the only thing which balances the distinctive capacity of an individual with his social service. To find out what one is fitted to do and to secure an opportunity to do it is the key to happiness. Nothing is more tragic than failure to discover one's true business in life, or to find that one has drifted or been forced by circumstance into an uncongenial calling (Dewey, 1916, p. 308).

Whether one teaches violin or botany or algebra, the work of teaching is united and distinguished from other callings by this imperative (this tragedy must be avoided) and this privilege (the chance to help someone find their true business). Surely education is more than a bazaar where each practice hawks its own wares and the student is left to make all decisions about entry into and exit from practices.

A brief detour into Oakeshott will prove helpful for deepening this point. For Oakeshott, each practical world (or 'voice', or 'mode of imagining' as he puts it) has a tendency to imagine itself as an arbiter of the interaction that ideally goes on between them and that constitutes culture. Ideally, Oakeshott says,

A civilisation (and particularly ours) may be regarded as a conversation being carried on between a variety of human activities, each speaking with its own voice, or in a language of its own; the activities (for example) represented in moral and practical endeavor, religious faith, philosophical reflection, artistic contemplation and historical or scientific inquiry and explanation (Oakeshott, 1991 [1962], p. 187).

Echoing MacIntyre on practice, Oakeshott says that each voice in this conversation 'is the reflection of a human activity, begun without premonition of where it would lead, but acquiring for itself in the course of engagement a specific character and a manner of speaking of its own' (Oakeshott, 1991 [1959], p. 491).

It is important to see that in Oakeshott's view, conversation is not just another activity, one more mode of imagining, but rather a kind of meta-activity, defined precisely by the way it brings together the voices of multiple activities. 'What I have called the conversation of mankind is', he writes, 'the meeting place of various modes of imagining' (p. 497). The term 'meeting place' seems strangely inert. Isn't the conversation what happens in this meeting place? Once the voices have met, don't they then join together in some sort of common effort, for example contributing to a common inquiry or to a project of social renewal? This is the sort of connotation Oakeshott hopes to avoid by choosing an indeterminate word like 'meeting'. For example, at one point he says of conversation: 'Properly speaking, it is impossible in the absence of a

diversity of voices: in it different universes of discourse meet, acknowledge each other and enjoy an oblique relationship which neither requires nor forecasts their being assimilated to one another' (p. 490).

To imagine a conversation as an ongoing inquiry, debate, or strategy session is not really to imagine a conversation at all in Oakeshott's sense, since it assimilates diverse voices into a single activity's 'universe of discourse', for example, a scientific inquiry or a legal trial. When this happens, the conversation is replaced by some form of intramural discussion. There may be some diversity in the tones of utterances, but the crucial diversity among voices as different modes of imagining is lost.

It is just such a loss of diversity, Oakeshott fears, that characterises the current state of conversation both inside and outside the university:

In recent centuries the conversation, both in public and within ourselves, has become boring because it has been engrossed by two voices, the voice of practical activity and the voice of 'science': to know and to contrive are our preeminent occupations . . . And on many occasions all that is to be heard is the eristic tones of the voice of science in conference with that modulation of the voice of practical activity we call 'politics'. But for a conversation to be appropriated by one or two voices is an insidious vice because in the passage of time it takes on the appearance of virtue . . . Consequently an established monopoly will not only make it difficult for another voice to be heard; but it will also make it seem proper that it should not be heard; it is convicted in advance of irrelevance. And there is no easy escape from this *impasse*. An excluded voice may take wing against the wind, but it will do so at the risk of turning the conversation into a dispute. Or it may gain entrance by imitating the voices of monopolists; but it will be a hearing only for a counterfeit utterance (pp. 493–494, emphases in original).

True conversation, for Oakeshott, depends on a radical pluralism. When one or two voices become dominant this is an 'insidious' betrayal of the spirit of conversation. Not only does it kill off the conversation, leaving us with a boring monologue, but it also builds in its own justification of such hegemony. It is hard to refute the claims of the voice of practicality on practical grounds, which are the only grounds one can muster within that universe of discourse. Likewise if one attempts to dispute the claims of science, one has already committed a fatal performative contradiction, since claims and disputation are central to the scientific mode of imagining.¹⁷ Thus, science and practicality have formed a powerful conglomerate monopolizing the conversation. History, philosophy, poetry and the other modes of imagining are not silenced outright—this would be cause for rebellion. Each suffers the worse fate of pseudo-participation, of trading its true voice for a 'counterfeit utterance'.

This helps us understand further why the calling of a teacher, much as it involves initiation into practices, ultimately exceeds that role. Teachers, if

they are to attend to both types of goods MacIntyre lists, must have some interest in the conversation and some skill in the art of this conversation. Another way to put this, recalling my analysis in Chapter 2 of the three levels in MacIntyre's theory, is to say that teachers work not only at the level of practices but also at the level of individual life narratives. Of course, no one can answer Socrates' question for someone else, but teachers help students enter practices and make sense of how the values disclosed in these worlds fit together, how they look in light of communal values, and how they might inform a life.¹⁸ MacIntyre acknowledges that young children need help from parents as educators to become independent practical reasoners, where this means both learning to think for oneself and learning to acknowledge one's dependence on others. At a certain point in a child's life, MacIntyre imagines the task of education being handed over from parents to teachers, as representatives of the several practices. But surely practical wisdom must still be learned in these years, and though aspects of practical wisdom can be learned intra-practically, practical wisdom remains importantly extra- or meta-practical. Teachers, working at this second level of MacIntyre's scheme, foster communities where the myriad voices can be heard, where *phronesis* may be exercised and cultivated. As MacIntyre notes, the making of community is itself a practice. For all of these reasons, MacIntyre is mistaken in his denial of teaching as a practice.

SCHOOLS AS SURROUNDINGS

We turn now to a distinct problem for treating teaching as a practice. For even if teaching is in principle a practice, it might be that it suffers the fate of so many modern practices of becoming lost in the institutions built to serve them, submerged in our instrumental, bureaucratic culture. The above analysis reveals something interesting about the institutionalisation of teaching. Teaching and schooling would seem to form a 'single-causal order' and not merely as a currency exchange for internal and external goods. As teaching has moved over the last several centuries from the guilds and monasteries and salons and laboratories into the school, there is certainly the danger that Dunne and MacIntyre spoke of. We see a rise in bloated rhetoric about teaching techniques and generic talk of excellence and achievement. At the same time, we now have reason to see the modern institutionalisation of teaching as beneficial for the goods of teaching. For it is only in making a community of teachers and students, making a place of learning, that certain aspects of the craft of teaching can be fully recognised. Whether the physics teacher has more to talk about with the history teacher or the physicist is uncertain, but that they have very different things to discuss seems clear. This is not to say that the state of contemporary schools is conducive to the flourishing of the practice of teaching. As with any MacIntyrean practice, there is always the danger that the practical horse will get dragged behind the motorised cart of a modern institution.

Let us turn then to this question of teaching in the context of schooling, making use of Dewey's rather than MacIntyre's idiom. For Dewey, as you recall from Chapter 4, vocations help structure experiential worlds for their practitioners. But talk of a teacher occupying the world of teaching can sound unbearably idealistic if it is not counter-balanced by a consideration of the impact of literal surroundings.

Consider the following example. When we walk into a building with our friend the architect (assuming that architecture is not our own vocation or avocation), we are not walking into the same building. Though a GPS device would show us to be at the same location, the environment each of us inhabits at that location would be significantly different. Our friend knows how to notice a plethora of things about the building—about its materials, structure, style, and so on—to which we are relatively oblivious. This view, as we said, counteracts the brute realist idea that we can understand a person's situation without reference to their purposes and history.

At the same time, if we entirely discount the importance of our surroundings, Dewey's view would lapse into an untenable idealism. Consider this macabre variation on the last example. Imagine that the building we have entered is not only rich in architectural information but also, unknown to us, is rapidly filling up with carbon monoxide. In this scenario, it matters not that our friend is, at the key moment, absorbed with the intriguing way the building's architect has floated the central staircase, while we are absorbed only in the frustration of trying to move through any building with our friend in a timely fashion. Both of us will succumb to the fumes. Indeed, the next day's newspaper will report that people of a wide variety of occupations met their demise that day, making no note of the particular environment they inhabited at the time. Of course, this is an extreme example, and there are many documented examples of emergency situations in which those affected do see and respond to the unfolding events in very different ways. Still, the point remains that our literal surroundings can and do affect us in powerful ways. And the point is not only an epistemological one. We can imagine what would happen if a theory such as Dewey's fell, as it were, into the wrong hands. Do teachers need planning periods, windows in their rooms, a decent salary? 'Don't be so literal', the administrator in idealist clothing replies. 'Time, space, and even your sense of proper recompense are functions of how you interact with the world'.

Think of it this way. In Chapter 4, we considered Dewey's example of the astronomer whose surroundings might seem impoverished to the untrained eye. Her office seems cramped and nondescript, but these are only her surroundings. For her, one feature of those surroundings, her telescope, represents an opening on to a vast and rich environment for her to explore. But notice that if that astronomer is given a schedule too busy for sustained time for sidereal observation, or if, say, the lights of the surrounding developments have now made her telescope useless, her environment will have collapsed back into her more generic surroundings. The questions we need to ask of teaching, then, are: what is the equivalent of this telescope for teachers?

And how well are most teachers prepared to use this ‘device’? Do surrounding conditions enable them to interact with the wider environment that their vocation has the power to activate? We will explore this question of the relationship of the teacher’s surroundings and environment in Chapter 8. In the remainder of this chapter, our task is simply to make a brief survey of the brute working conditions of teachers.

Though schools in the US vary widely, one can make some generalisations about the working conditions of teachers, and unfortunately the news is not good. In *Teachers at Work*, for example, Susan Johnson paints the following portrait:

Schools are often shabby, barely adequate facilities, with broken windows, unpainted walls, and sub-standard equipment, reflecting society’s low regard for teacher’s work and children’s learning. Even in wealthy and prestigious school districts, teachers usually lack offices, phones, and computers (Johnson, 1990, p. 6).

That these facts are familiar makes them no less distressing. Compare Johnson’s description of a ‘lawyerly setting’ as:

... one that is paneled in wood, furnished with leather, and peopled with impartial judges and combative peers, and skilled but subordinate clerks; one that is equipped with tools of the legal trade, such as long yellow pads, volumes of statutes, and sophisticated data bases storing arguments and precedents (p. 1).

In this comparison we get a sense of the range of settings in professional life from the spartan to the luxurious. Unlike teachers, lawyers are surrounded with signifiers of prestige and abundance—even their pads are longer! Of course, we are not talking about optional luxuries either. Only in education would it take a series of longitudinal studies to convince the builders of schools that their inhabitants require fresh air and ample sunlight (see, for example, Zernike, 2001).

When one combines the general disregard for education with the racist disregard for students of colour in the poorest minority schools, the mix is especially toxic. In one of Jonathan Kozol’s famous case studies, a science teacher in East St. Louis reports:

... he cannot wear a tie or jacket in the lab. ‘I want you to notice the temperature,’ he says. ‘The heating system’s never worked correctly. Days when it’s zero outside it will be 100 Fahrenheit within this room. I will be here 25 years starting September—in the same room, teaching physics. I have no storage space. Those balance scales are trash. There are a few small windows you can open. We are on the side that gets the sun (Kozol, 1992, p. 27).

Savage Inequalities came out in 1991 so one might assume that such problems have been corrected. To disabuse us of this notion, Kozol came out with *The Shame of a Nation*, his 2005 portrait of 'The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America' (Kozol, 2005). Here is one of an endless number of equally disturbing examples from the more recent work:

I had also made a number of visits to a high school where a stream of water flowed down one of the main stairwells on a rainy afternoon and where green fungus molds were growing in the office where the students went for counseling. A large blue barrel was positioned to collect rainwater coming through the ceiling. In one makeshift elementary school housed in a former skating rink next to a funeral parlor in another nearly all black and Hispanic section of the Bronx, class size rose to 34 and more; four kindergarten classes and a sixth grade class were packed into a single room that had no windows. Airlessness was stifling in many rooms . . .

In another elementary school, which had been built to house 1,000 children but was packed to bursting with some 1,500 boys and girls, the principal poured out his feelings to me in a room in which a plastic garbage bag had been attached somehow to cover part of the collapsing ceiling (pp. 40-41).

The garbage bag is a potent symbol of the message we are sending not only to these kids but also to their teachers.

While a workplace, as Johnson notes, is defined by more than buildings and materials, schools are problematic environments in these other respects as well. Even in schools where teachers are not starved for light, air, and supplies, they are usually gasping for societal recognition. Thus teachers in the US rarely show up on the public radar unless there is a 'crisis' in the schools, they are severely underpaid, and then there is the dilapidated state of schools. Since every culture consecrates special sites and pleasing spaces for the activities it deems important, the message sent to teachers is clear. Many teachers will lovingly prepare their own classrooms as a kind of oasis, in an effort to protect students from this societal undervaluing of education. But this only compounds the strain of having to hold on, oneself, to the importance of one's work.

Another troubling aspect of the school as workplace is its rigid hierarchy, and the tendency on the part of administrators to infantilise teachers. According to Johnson, teachers 'are explicitly subordinate to school administrators, who are usually male, and who often are removed from classrooms, attending to managerial rather than instructional matters' (Johnson, 1990, p. 6). What is even more worrisome is that this may be but one symptom of a larger problem with historical roots. Contemporary teachers in the US labour under the lasting legacy of the movement, early in the 20th century, to make schools more efficient by modelling them on factories. 'In today's schools', Johnson writes, 'we see the lasting influence of these beliefs and values in the bureaucratized structures of central offices: the rationing of instructional time; and the emphasis on testing

and accountability, departmental structures, heavy teaching loads, and formalized teacher ratings' (p. 7). It is hard to imagine an aspect of contemporary schooling—to pick just one of Johnson's examples—that affects the lives of teachers more than this emphasis on testing and accountability.

Isolation is another problematic feature of the teacher's workplace. The rare exceptions—team teaching, supervision of student teachers, collaboration on the curriculum—only prove the rule that 'teachers have chosen to work between high walls and behind closed doors' (p. 6). While teachers tend thus to work alone in one sense, they are of course surrounded by all too many students. As one teacher in Johnson's study remarks, though, 'teaching's a lot more than just sitting in the classroom and teaching kids If you just do that, you're going to burn out real quick. You just can't do that. You have to talk with people' (p. 157). By 'people', this teacher seems to mean adults. In the previous section, I stressed the rewards of dialogue with the young, but we can also agree with the quoted teacher that adults need contact with other adults. Stolen moments in the teachers' lounge do not add up to true collaboration, and administrative observations, all too often devolving into empty praise or high-stakes criticism, do not count as genuine mentoring.

A final feature of the educational workplace noted by Johnson is just as disturbing as the rest. 'For those who teach', she writes, 'there are few opportunities for formal, professional advancement, and most teachers in the US are called "classroom teachers" from the first to the last days of their careers' (p. 6). In a way, Johnson slips at the end of this sentence, since what she is talking about is precisely the difficulty of making a *career* in teaching. Career implies a sense of movement; to progress in a profession requires benchmarks. Teaching, most commentators agree, has far too few benchmarks of this sort. Indeed, 'teaching is perhaps the only "profession"', John Goodlad writes, 'where the preparation recognised as most advanced [the doctorate] almost invariably removes the individual from the central role of teaching in an elementary or secondary school' (Goodlad, 1984, p. 194). Right now, the closest thing to a career path for teachers in the US seems to be a path *out of* teaching and *into* administration or research.

In sum, the average working conditions of teachers are far from supportive. Accounts like Johnson's provide a reality check on the idea that teaching represents an environment conducive to growth. Even as we strive to avoid a naïve idealism, though, we don't want to revert back to the literalism of the realist view. What we must ask, then, is first, what do teachers *qua* teachers notice? What are, to recall Dewey's definition of environment, the 'things with which they vary'? How does the physical and emotional climate of schools disrupt the purposiveness and continuity of experience, constricting what teachers notice, feel, and learn? These are the questions that will concern us in Chapter 8. First though we return to Hannah Arendt and ask where teaching fits in her tripartite model of human activity and what this entails for the dominant vocation of the teacher.

NOTES

1. Thanks to David Hansen for reminding me of this passage (see Hansen, 1995, p. 90).
2. Rorty believes that a sensible arrangement has evolved with K-12 schooling given over largely to socialisation and universities devoted to individuation. There are good reasons for doubting that this is true and whether it would be sensible. In any case, many contemporary teachers do feel the strain of these conflicting ideals.
3. This idea was inspired in part by a paper of Gert Biesta's, and by the discussion that followed, at the 2009 Annual Meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society in Montreal (published as Biesta, 2010b).
4. Here I am building on the discussion of natality in Chapter 3 (see above, pp. 87 and 97), though see Chapter 7 for Arendt's own reservations about the classroom as a space for action.
5. I refer to the common school movement in the United States spearheaded by Horace Mann, secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education from 1837–1848. Obviously, different timelines and definitions of schooling would apply in other traditions. According to Kuo, for example, Xia Dynasty China (c. 2100–1600 BCE) already had schools devoted to 'the education of the children of the common people' (Kuo, 1915, p. 10).
6. The first publicly-funded teacher-training college or normal school in the US was established in Lexington, Massachusetts in 1839 (Fraser, 2007, p. 51). It moved to Framingham in 1853, later changing its name to State Teachers College of Framingham and, its current designation, Framingham State College. If we shift our focus to Europe, the date is somewhat earlier as l'École Normale Supérieure, which trained teachers, was founded in 1794.
7. Kimball does not discuss Rousseau or Freire. This is my embellishment.
8. Here we could also call on the related testimony of Jean Piaget: 'Every time we teach a child something, we keep him from inventing it by himself. On the other hand, that which we allow him to discover by himself will remain with him visibly . . . for all the rest of his life' (quoted in Piers, 1972, p. 27).
9. MacIntyre himself makes use of some of Winnicott's ideas to understand the nature of early childhood education (see MacIntyre, 1999, pp. 85 and 89–90).
10. I return to the question of pedagogical practical wisdom in Chapter 8.
11. MacIntyre adds an amusing parenthetical remark: 'Sit on almost any university committee, if you wish to verify this claim.'
12. *Sub specie boni* is Latin for 'from the perspective of the good'.
13. This point was first suggested to me by Dan Kramarsky.
14. As I indicated, MacIntyre's objection turns on the question of coherence, but notice that if teaching fails this criterion, it is bound to fail many of the others. If teaching is but a component of various practices, then it lacks distinctive internal goods, including the good of a biographical genre (criterion 5). Without distinctive goods, teaching would also fail criterion 14, which states that practices typically enrich the moral imagination of society at large at certain points in their history. Criteria 5, 7 (coherence), and 14 were the three that I did not cover in my *prima facie* case.
15. For an interesting example of a dialogue between client and architect, form and function, see Michael Pollan's *A Place of My Own: The Architecture of Daydreams* (Pollan, 2008 [1997]).
16. The reference is to Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094a8–1094a12 (see, e.g., Aristotle, 1984, p. 1729).
17. One commits a performative contradiction if one undermines what one is saying in the way that, or the fact that, one is saying it.
18. I am grateful for conversation with Brian Hughes on this point.

7

The Classroom Drama: Teaching as Endless Rehearsal and Cultural Elaboration

The teacher is frequently addressed as if he had no life of his own, no body, no inwardness. Lecturers seem to presuppose a ‘man within the man’ when they describe a good teacher as infinitely controlled and accommodating, technically efficient, impervious to moods. They are likely to define him by the role he is *expected* to play in a classroom, with all the loose ends gathered up and all his doubts resolved. The numerous realities in which he exists as a living person are overlooked. His personal biography is overlooked; so are the many ways in which he expresses his private self in language, the horizons he perceives, the perspectives through which he looks at the world.

Our concern throughout this book has been to make that person visible to himself (Greene, 1973, pp. 269–270).

INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 5, we saw why the flourishing of the teacher is crucial to the educational enterprise, leaving us with the question of how teaching facilitates or frustrates the teacher’s search for self. In Chapter 6, we sharpened this question, showing both the ways in which teaching seems to fit the model of an ethical practice and the difficulty of sustaining that practice in the institution of contemporary schools. We now return to Hannah Arendt in whose concept of action we found precisely a vision of how practical life might be responsive to the basic existential need to cultivate, enact, and disclose our distinctive personhood. If we could now connect teaching with action, our question about the tenability of self-ful teaching would be much more tractable. As it turns out, Arendt herself makes just this connection in ‘The Crisis in Education’ (Arendt, 1977b [1958]), an essay that came out the same year as *The Human Condition* (Arendt, 1998 [1958]).¹ For Arendt, the essence of education lies in its connection to natality and action.

There is only one small catch. Teaching is distinguished, for Arendt, by its intimate connection to the action of *students*. Famously, Arendt argues that

teachers have the task of mediating between the stock of existing conventions and the natality of the young, their capacity to initiate, surprise, and renew. By introducing this newness to the 'old world' with care so that neither is overwhelmed by the other, the possibility of action is preserved. It is not, however, the *teacher's* action which concerns Arendt.

Reading 'Crisis' in light of *The Human Condition*, then, we are led to ask: what is the place of pedagogy in Arendt's *vita activa*? Is teaching itself a form of action or is it simply work, or even labour, ennobled by its connection to the future action of students? How can a teacher preserve her own natality if the central activity of her life is not a form of action? And how can a teacher who has grown estranged from her own natality recognise and attend to this quality in her students?

Thus, there appears to be something of a puzzle about how these two works of 1958 fit together.² In what follows, I will explore the relationship between Arendt's discussion of the activity of teaching in 'The Crisis of Education' and the hierarchy of human activities she offers in *The Human Condition* through two readings: one strict and one revisionist. In the strict reading, I attempt to answer the question, 'What sort of activity is teaching?', without contradicting anything Arendt says in either *The Human Condition* or 'Crisis in Education'. What the strict reading reveals, I argue, is that the activity of teaching, as Arendt understands it, does not fit into any of Arendt's own categories of practical activity. That there are ineliminable tensions between these two works gives us the mandate to revise either Arendt's analysis of human activity, her conception of teaching, or both. My revisionist reading makes use of our conclusion in Chapter 3 that the complexity of real occupations requires us to lift two key restrictions in her account, that each activity occurs in only one mode and that no occupational activities fall into the category of action. I will show that teaching is best understood as containing elements of labour, work, and action.

That teaching even partially occurs in the mode of action, however, entails three significant interpretive burdens since Arendt tells us that action occurs: (a) in the public, political sphere; (b) in the presence of peers; and, (c) in the manner of *energeia* (Aristotle's term for that mode of activity whose aim lies within its very exercise and not at a product or state of affairs outside itself). At the same time she tells us: (a') that we must 'decisively divorce the realm of education from . . . the realm of public, political life' (Arendt, 1977b [1958], p. 195); (b') that education is essentially and importantly an inegalitarian relationship between grown-ups and children, the mature and the uninitiated; and, (c') that education is a deliberate activity, aiming at the simultaneous preservation of the natality of the young and the fabric of tradition, with a definite end point, namely the entry of the young into society. Thus, my revisionist reading will need to show: (1) that the classroom can be a 'space of appearances' or a stage for action without exposing students, as Arendt fears, to 'the glare of the public' (p. 186); (2) that the teacher may find her teaching to be actional even though she acts in concert with others who are in certain

key respects not her peers; and, (3) that there are aspects of teaching that do fit the model of *energeia*.

In attempting to meet these three interpretive burdens, I will explore the idea that teaching is an activity of mediation. As such, its products do not correspond to the reified products of work. In particular, I will show that the classroom is like a theatre where deeds are mediated, but that such mediation is itself part of the nature of the deed. I will further suggest that the curriculum, for Arendt the 'representation of the world as it is' constitutes a form of cultural mediation. In representing cultural forms to her students, the teacher mediates between past and present, amending and remaking our cultural constitution. Here teaching reveals a special form of making that is never complete, again suggesting a borderline position between work and action.

In offering this sympathetic if revisionist reading of Arendt's major and minor texts of 1958, I take myself to be following the lead of one of our finest readers of Arendt, Seyla Benhabib. In her authoritative *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*, she offers two principles of interpretation (Benhabib, 2003). First, she draws on Hans-Georg Gadamer to remind Arendt scholars to avoid two, equally pernicious, interpretive extremes: the disinterested historicism that would have us treat Arendt's texts as if they were only answers to questions tied to her context and alien to ours; and what she calls the 'self-righteous dogmatism of the newcomers', in which historical texts are read as having incorrectly answered our own later questions (p. 4). The challenge, Gadamer and Benhabib remind us, is to bring the kind of question to Arendt's work that lets it say what it has to say anew, transforming our question in the process.

Benhabib introduces her second hermeneutical principle in the specific context of those who pose 'the woman question' in Arendt: how can Arendt, herself a woman, denigrate reproductive, traditionally female activities and celebrate the masculine, agonistic style of politics practiced by the Greeks (ibid.)? The trick in working toward a feminist reading of Arendt, Benhabib says, is not only to avoid the extremes of disinterested historicism (which would object to bringing a question to Arendt that she herself avoided) or a dogmatic presentism (which would seek only to expose Arendt's internalised misogyny) rather than trying to understand in a sympathetic way where her consciousness as a woman was lodged in her work), but also to read from margin to centre. That is, the question of gender in a sexist world has a way of showing up 'in the footnotes, in the marginalia, in the less recognized works' (ibid.). For Benhabib, this means rereading *The Human Condition* in light of *Rahel Varnhagen*, Arendt's early biography in which Benhabib finds a model for a female public sphere which can expand Arendt's better-known masculinist, agonistic model of public space (see pp. 14–21).³

In my reading of Arendt, I aim to follow both of Benhabib's hermeneutic principles. In calling my second reading revisionist, I certainly do not take myself to be correcting Arendt in light of some supposed, latter-day

abundance of wisdom. Rather, I hope to show that the vision of teaching that emerges from my reading is still Arendtian in essence and speaks to, without simply confirming, our current sense of the realities and ideals of teaching. It is my aim to stage an encounter between Arendt's texts and our present intuitions about teaching which yields a better understanding of each.

And it will also turn out that posing the question of the teacher, and her needs, will require just the kind of centripetal, feminist reading that Benhabib calls for. As we saw in Chapter 5, teaching is a paradigmatic feminised profession, and Arendt's two essays on education seem but footnotes compared to *The Human Condition*. Like Benhabib, then, we will be reading from margin to centre (and back again), raising in the process a form of 'the woman question': how is tending to the becoming of others a way of becoming oneself? In this way, we will continue to think our way out of the dangerous illogic of the helping professions.

EDUCATION AS THE DRAMA OF CULTURAL RENEWAL

Is teaching a form of labour, work, or action according to Arendt? To answer this question and test whether a strict reading is possible, we must understand Arendt's conception of teaching.⁴ For this, we turn to Arendt's 'The Crisis in Education'. The first challenge in reading this essay is to get clear on what she means by education. Education might mean K-12 schooling, or higher education, or adult education, or informal learning in any of a number of settings. Indeed, the essay began as a lecture in German, entitled '*Die Krise in der Erziehung*' (see note 1). The German '*Erziehung*' has an even broader range than the English 'education', referring to all aspects of upbringing, including parenting. And something like this notion of *Erziehung* does seem to be what Arendt has in mind when she declares that her concern is 'the relation between grown-ups and children in general' (Arendt, 1977b [1958], p. 196).

On the other hand, both 'education' and '*Erziehung*' seem ill-chosen in other respects. For example, it is jarring to hear Arendt tell us that 'one cannot educate adults' (p. 177; see also p. 195). It turns out, of course, that Arendt does not hold the untenable view that adults are incapable of learning. 'One can go on learning until the end of one's days', she readily admits, and this is in fact just what Arendt herself did (p. 196). The distinction she wants to make here is between education, as a special kind of interaction between the generations, and learning as the study of particular subjects or apprenticeship in particular crafts. For Arendt, this means that education is a subset of learning. All education involves learning since the initiation of the young into the world they are inheriting must proceed through the learning of specific subjects. Otherwise, she argues, education 'is empty and therefore degenerates with great ease into moral-emotional rhetoric' (ibid.). Much of learning, however, extends beyond educating in her special sense, and this for

two reasons: first, because proficiency in specific subjects and skills does not equal an introduction 'to the world as a whole'; and second because many teacher-student relationships do not fit her model of an initiation of the young by adults authorised to represent society (ibid.).

Meanwhile, what makes *Erziehung* an odd name for Arendt's central concept is that she specifically excludes parents from this process of initiation, focusing instead on the space we 'interpose between the private domain of the family and the [public] world' (p. 188). Here the distinction is not between education and instruction/learning, but between education and care/growth. 'The child is a human being in a process of becoming', Arendt writes, 'just as a kitten is a cat in the process of becoming' (p. 185). As a developing creature, 'the child requires special protection and care' (p. 186). In particular, the child must not be thrust too early into the world, where she will not be valued as a living, growing being, but only for the work she contributes. And she must be shielded in particular from the public aspect of the world, that space where she will be asked to declare who she is and what she stands for, where she will encounter the unpredictability and irreversibility of action. Thus as a growing creature, Arendt writes, the child's:

... traditional place is in the family, whose adult members daily return back from the outside world and withdraw into the security of private life within four walls. These four walls, within which private family life is lived, constitute a shield against the public aspect of the world. They enclose a secure place, without which no living thing can thrive (ibid.).

Indeed, as Arendt points out, if all we were was growing creatures, then our upbringing might consist in 'nothing save that concern for the sustenance of life and that training and practice in living that all animals assume in respect to their young' (p. 185).

But this is not all that we are. As Arendt puts it, 'human parents ... have not only summoned their children into life through conception and birth, they have simultaneously introduced them into a world' (ibid.). It is in respect to the world—that complex of rituals, ideas, institutions, things, habits, languages, and ideals that constitute a culture's deep structures of taken-for-grantedness—that the young person is seen under a different aspect: as a newcomer. This is the phrase Arendt uses to highlight the fact that 'the world into which children are introduced ... is an old world, that is a pre-existing world, constructed by the living and the dead' (p. 177). Thus, Arendt concludes, for the schoolteacher, the child has a double aspect: 'he is new in a world that is strange to him and he is in process of becoming' (p. 185).

We are now in a position to understand what Arendt means by education in this essay. Her focus is on the process by which the young are introduced to the world, outside of the home, and in the context of formal subjects of study. In a word, Arendt is interested in schooling. She says as much in a couple of places in the essay, when, for example, she refers to her topic as 'the crisis in

our school system', or when she speaks (as we noted above) of the school as the primary institution we 'interpose' between family and world (pp. 177, 188).

So why didn't Arendt simply call her essay 'the crisis in schooling'? I think the answer is twofold, and both reasons can be introduced through her ideas of crisis and essence. It is Arendt's contention that education/schooling is in crisis (at the time of her writing) and that this presents us with a special opportunity. This is because a crisis 'tears away façades and obliterates prejudices', and thus has the power to '[lay] bare the essence of the matter' (p. 174). When we hear the word 'schooling' we think of specific schools we know and particular features of those schools. One reason Arendt chooses the word 'education' then—even though she is clearly restricting her focus to formal, k-12 education, is that she is trying to step back from the contingencies of curriculum and instruction, policy and debate, to see the school in light of its basic purpose and human significance.⁵ In other words, while she restricts her focus to schools, she interprets what goes on there in light of fundamental human needs and social processes, abstracting away from many of the particulars that would ordinarily form a school's image of itself.⁶ So we can say that by 'education' Arendt means schooling, as long as we add that schooling for her is an ideal type. Not all schools will approximate this ideal to the same degree and some institutions other than schools may turn out to have a schooling function in Arendt's sense.

The second reason Arendt may have chosen *Erziehung*/education over 'schooling' is that even when you winnow away its contingent features, schooling involves more than education. Though Arendt distinguishes education both from instruction in particular subjects and from care for the child as a developing creature, she sees all three as necessary aspects of schooling. Education, however, is the school's distinguishing feature and *raison d'être*. Instruction also occurs outside schools and the primary scene of care is the family. In 'Crisis', then, Arendt considers the essence of formal education, or the fundamental human significance of the distinctive aspect of schooling (see Figure 7).

That said, it is worth emphasising that for Arendt the schoolteacher is someone who must wear all three of these hats at once. The teacher's essential, distinctive vocation may be that of educator, representing the world to the young so that the young may enter and renew it. But she can only accomplish this through instruction in specific subjects and so she must also be accomplished in a subject area and its particular pedagogy. At the same time, she must keep an eye on the student as a developing being. That the schoolteacher stands *in loco parentis* must not be misunderstood. For Arendt, it is crucial that the students have come to a place that is markedly different from their homes, one defined precisely by its being outside this private sphere, but the teacher must therefore take on some of the care of the child in the parent's stead. As a caring adult, the schoolteacher must create a space that provides a buffer between her students and the public world. Arendt sees the school as a

Aspect	Schooling	School	Schoolteacher	Student
1 st	Care	Sheltering environment	Adult <i>in loco parentis</i>	Developing creature
2 nd	Education	Sphere interposed between family and world to gradually introduce the young and the world to each other	Representative of the human world	Newcomer to human world
3 rd	Instruction	Scene of Instruction	Teacher of particular subjects and skills	Learner of particular subjects and skills

Figure 7: Education as the fundamental aspect of schooling

place where students encounter the world in a mediated form, sheltered from direct exposure to the public sphere.

Part of the task of teaching for Arendt, then, is balancing these responsibilities. The schoolteacher must not let her teaching become so specialised that she ceases to be an educator. At the same time, she must not seek to educate directly, lapsing into empty rhetoric about civic virtue or the state of the world. Meanwhile, the schoolteacher must not let the fragility of her charges lead her to abandon teaching and education and just become a mother hen, sheltering her chicks. At the same time, she must not be so eager as educator to expose children to the world that she forgets that these developing beings still need protection against its most onerous demands.

With this sense of the range of functions a teacher plays in Arendt’s theory, we need now to explore in greater detail Arendt’s understanding of the teacher’s distinctive role as educator and to understand how Arendt’s theory of education connects to her analysis of labour, work, and action. In the course of distinguishing education from growth and learning, we have already had occasion to note several of its features: it is the defining interaction between the generations; in which some adults assume responsibility for representing (and thus the authority to represent) the world to the young; who, as newcomers, need a space to learn how to navigate this unfamiliar, pre-existing world of things and events, facts and values without having yet fully to enter it. This picture is accurate but still incomplete. Arendt speaks of education as the process by which the child is ‘gradually introduced to . . . the world as it is’ (p. 189). The two questions we have to ask are what does Arendt mean by introduction *to* the world, and why must this introduction be gradual? First consider this phrase ‘introduction to’. This can mean a beginning exposure to something. And certainly, this is part of what Arendt

means, namely that in education the child receives an introduction in the ways of the world, in the form of representations of it. But this same phrase can also mean an introduction into something, and as it turns out, it is precisely this ambiguity Arendt is counting on. In the discussion above, we stressed how education responds to the human condition of worldliness, and in particular to the need of the young for a world to inhabit. In Chapter 3, we saw with Arendt that it is part of the human condition to need a surround of durable objects and a web of meaningful relationships to inhabit (see above, pp. 87–88). By introducing aspects of the world in the schoolroom, the young gain a world in which to express their worldliness. But the world is also gaining something through this transaction. If literal birth delivers the infant into life proper, education amounts to a second birth as a cultural subject. Education, then, not only brings the world to the student in the form of representations, but also delivers the young, worldly beings, into the world they need to lead a fully human life.

In what sense is this a gain for the world according to Arendt? Perhaps it makes no difference to the world just who enters it. Arendt's answer is that the world, though it is meant precisely to provide us with ballast against our sense of evanescence, struggles to fulfil this function. For one thing, as Arendt stresses in various places, its inhabitants are always changing. As a result, Arendt writes in a related essay called 'What is Authority?', 'the continuity of an established civilization . . . can be assured only if those who are newcomers are guided through a pre-established world into which they are born as strangers' (Arendt, 1977a [1961], p. 92). If rituals and projects are not continuously inhabited, they are lost. Even when their continuity is assured, cultural forms face another threat, namely that they will collapse under the weight of their own conventions. Without new perspectives, expressive languages ossify into hollow symbols. Without fresh infusions of hope, dynamic projects collapse into lifeless habits. Thus, the world is old not only in the sense of pre-existing, but because it is always in the process of decaying. It is this fact that gives education its dynamism, its difficulty, and its import:

We are always educating for a world that is or is becoming out of joint, for this is the basic human situation, in which the world is created by mortal hands to serve mortals for a limited time as home. Because the world is made by mortals, it wears out; and because it continuously changes its inhabitants it runs the risk of becoming as mortal as they. To preserve the world against the mortality of its creators and inhabitants, it must be constantly set right anew. The problem is simply to educate in such a way that a setting-right remains actually possible, even though it can, of course, never be assured. Our hope always hangs on the new which every generation brings; but precisely because we can base our hope only on this, we destroy everything if we so try to control the new that we, the old, can dictate how it will look. Exactly for the sake of what is new and

revolutionary in every child, education must be conservative; it must preserve this newness and introduce it as a new thing into an old world, which, however revolutionary its actions may be, is always, from the standpoint of the next generation, superannuated and close to destruction (Arendt, 1977b [1958], pp. 192–193).

World-building, it turns out, is a very delicate operation. We need structures that outlast us in order to give us ballast against our own sense of evanescence, but these structures must constantly be renewed. The literal objects created through work need constant labour to help them fight the effects of time. And the web of meanings must be constantly rewoven lest our values become saccharine, our rituals turn rote, and our practices dissolve into their institutional machinery. So we can't leave the world alone, but if we are too eager to reform it, we may disturb the very quality we most need from a world: that it be a given, a home, a surround *into* which we may act. We must resist the impulse to treat the world as itself one more object to shape and manipulate.

This brings us finally to the other word I highlighted earlier. We now see that education is an introduction that flows in two directions: the world is introduced to the young and the young are introduced into the world. The world makes its appearance in the classroom so that the young can make their *début* in the world.⁷ But we have also started to see why this introduction must be *gradual*. Education is the drama of cultural renewal, dramatic because of its doubly paradoxical nature. The paradox of natality is that the young need the conventional precisely to express their new point of view. The paradox of tradition is that in order to be extended it must be amended. This is why Arendt speaks of education as conservative in a special sense and why she speaks of the educator having a double responsibility. The educator must be careful not to let the conventionality of the world overwhelm the natality of the young; and she must be equally careful not to let the newness of the young tear the fabric of tradition. As Arendt puts it:

... conservation ... is of the essence of the educational activity, whose task is always to cherish and protect something—the child against the world, the world against the child, the new against the old, the old against the new (p. 192).

The educator watches over this central, delicate transaction of human cultural life. That there might be a world requires that there be new actors. That there might be new actors requires that there be a world. But if the two collide too quickly, too fully, one will be overwhelmed, and both will perish. The introduction of each to each must be gradual and careful.

Thus, we have broadened our original formulation—that education responds to the need of the young, as worldly beings, for a world to inhabit—in two ways. First, education also proceeds from our 'love of the world', from our sense that the world needs renewal (p. 196). Second, it is not

only the human condition of worldliness at stake here, for education is also intimately bound up with the crowning dimension of the *vita activa*, that is the human conditions of natality and plurality and the exercise of action. If we try to conserve tradition by stripping the young of their new ideas, we kill tradition. And if we try to preserve the natality of the young by keeping the young free of conventional influences, we end up paradoxically ‘striking from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us’. So education is where we preserve natality and the future of action.

A FALSE LEAD

With this analysis of Arendt’s theory of education and our earlier reconstruction (in Chapter 3) of Arendt’s phenomenology of practical activity in hand, we are now in a position to tackle our central question: where does teaching fit into Arendt’s *vita activa*? To some, the answer will appear obvious. After all, haven’t I stressed the importance of natality to education, and isn’t natality the hallmark of action? In the end, we may well want to count teaching as action, but this short-cut will not get us there. To see why, let us consider an analogy. A court bailiff has the responsibility of protecting the jury from tampering and intrusion. Without that protection, the jurors would not be able to deliberate amongst themselves as equals, voicing different points of view on the common predicament of what judgment to render in light of the testimony and evidence. In this way, the bailiff has the task of preserving what Arendt calls one of the last public spaces and, therefore, spheres for action in late modernity (Arendt, 1979, pp. 317–318). If all goes well, the jurors will encounter themselves and each other, sharpening their sense both of their distinctness and of what they have in common. If all goes well, they will express their natality and initiate the unexpected. And without the bailiff’s activity, all would not go well. Still, we are not entitled to conclude from this that the bailiff is acting and expressing *her* natality. If this profession were counted as actional, it would be for different reasons, and much more likely would be the conclusion that it is a form of work or labour. The question of where we are to place specific activities such as that of the teacher or bailiff is a phenomenological query about where each activity is socially located and how it structures experience. If our students go on to inhabit public space and enact their natality, then this clearly counts as *their* action. Our question, however, is what teachers are doing in the location of school as they ready students for this future debut. It is important to keep this distinction in mind.

Indeed, Arendt herself is not entirely clear on this point. Consider this important but potentially misleading passage from the beginning of *The Human Condition*:

Labor and work, as well as action, are also rooted in natality in so far as they have the task to provide and preserve the world for, to foresee and reckon with, the constant influx of newcomers who are born into the world

as strangers. However, of the three, action has the closest connection with the human condition of natality; the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting. In this sense of initiative, an element of action, and therefore of natality, is inherent in all human activities (Arendt, 1998 [1958], p. 9).

Arendt is in the midst of offering an initial overview of her philosophical anthropology. As you will recall from Chapter 3, while Arendt does not believe in a fixed human nature or essence, she does hold that there are certain fundamental facts about our condition that limit and shape the genuine diversity and mutability of human lives, cultures, and projects. As we saw, there are the conditions of embodiment, worldliness, and plurality—each linked with a specific aspect of the *vita activa*—and the temporal conditions of natality and mortality which impact all of practical life. Right before this passage, Arendt has explained how each practical mode constitutes a response to our mortality: labour ensures the literal survival of individual and species; work provides a ‘measure of permanence’ against the ‘fleeting character of human time’; and action, insofar as it founds and preserves ‘political bodies, creates the condition for remembrance’ (pp. 8-9). Here she wants to make the parallel case that ‘all human activities’ are ‘rooted in natality’, but there is an important ambiguity in this passage that we need to examine.

First, let’s unpack the opening sentence in which we find a whole, compressed argument:

1. Natality is dialectically related to tradition, to a significant world of objects, statements, and relations that persist over time. Without an ‘old world’, the newcomers have nothing against which to assert their newness: no conventions to renovate, no stability against which their innovations could be felt as such.
2. Labour, work, and action are each necessary conditions for the survival of the world:
 - a. There would be no world without labour, since humans would literally perish and significant objects would rapidly decay.
 - b. Without work, we would not even have the objects that give the world its sense of durability and ‘object-ivity’.
 - c. There would be no world without action, since action constantly weaves and reweaves the web of relations into which the natal actor ‘inserts herself’ and without which our objects would lack any but instrumental significance.
3. Thus all three modes of activity help to provide the worldly, traditional context which is the *sine qua non* of natality.

In the first sentence, then, Arendt is saying that labour, work, and action can each be read as responses to the fact that there is a ‘constant influx of newcomers . . . and strangers’ into the world. Each in its own way helps to set the stage for the continued expression of natality.

What is important to see, though, is that what Arendt here calls being ‘rooted in natality’, is in fact a preparatory and vicarious connection. In this first sentence, not even action is considered as the direct expression of the actor’s natality, but rather as something that prepares the way for the future action of others. This is why Arendt then goes on to speak of an additional, closer connection between action and natality in the second sentence. We must not misread this as if Arendt were saying that (2c) above somehow carries more weight than (2a) or (2b). If anything, action is less suited ‘to provide and preserve the world for’ the young (a fact which Arendt seems to signal when she says, ‘labor and work, *as well as* action’). The point is not that action is a better contributor to preparation but that it alone is also the ‘actualization of the human condition of natality’ (p. 178). The second sentence signals not only a new kind of relation to natality—current expression versus future preparation—but also a change in perspective. Instead of talking about how the current generation’s labour, work, and action will enable the action of the next generation, Arendt is now talking about action from the point of view of the newcomers themselves. Indeed, it is not the new generation as a collective who acts, but unique individuals, each expressing his or her own natality. To capture this point fully, it is best to recast it in the first person: in acting, I express my own natality.⁸ After all, one cannot take initiative or engage in self-disclosure for another. This is what makes the final sentence of this passage so prone to misunderstanding. Arendt must be connecting the points of the first two sentences, saying in effect that labour, work, and action all prepare the way for new actors to take initiative. But she has done her best here to make it seem as if all activities themselves involve the taking of initiative in the special sense that she elsewhere makes definitive of action and clearly excludes from labour and work.

In speaking of ‘my action’ and ‘my natality’, it may sound as if I have struck the wrong note, introducing a possessive, individualistic tone into Arendt’s larger composition about a common world and public happiness. To see why this is not so, we need once again to wriggle free from the modern moral straightjacket and the false choice between altruism and self-interest. Arendt’s theory, like that of the other thinkers we have been considering, is aretaic. It is not self-interest Arendt is after—if this is taken to mean a base angling for pleasure and profit—but self-realisation. With her concept of action, she is trying to breathe fresh life into the ancient ‘conviction that the greatest that man can achieve is his own appearance and actualization’ (p. 208). And it is also not goodness Arendt is after, but greatness, and there are important tensions between the two. Whereas ‘action needs for its full appearance the shining brightness we once called glory . . . which is possible only in the public realm’ (p. 180), ‘the doer of good works’ is a ‘lonely figure’ who must ‘hide

himself' and 'preserve complete anonymity' (p. 180; compare pp. 73–78). In the following passage, Arendt observes a second important tension between action and goodness.

Unlike . . . behavior—which the Greeks, like all civilized people, judged according to 'moral standards', taking into account motives and intentions on the one hand and aims and consequences on the other—action can be judged only by the criterion of greatness because it is in its nature to break through the commonly accepted and reach into the extraordinary, where whatever is true in common and everyday life no longer applies because [action] is *sui generis* (p. 205).

While compatible with moral behaviour, action itself is extramoral. To recognise greatness is to recognise the way true excellence forces us to redefine our sense of the good even as it commands our respect.

I have devoted this section to a single passage because it is easy to misread as an indication on Arendt's part that teaching, as a practice which clearly responds to the influx of newcomers, is a form of action. We have seen, however, that while such responsiveness may take the form of labour, work, or action, action alone goes beyond this vicarious connection to the natality of others to constitute the expression of the agent's own natality. Clearly teaching—like midwifery, parenting, teaching, and storytelling—has a close vicarious connection to natality. Whether the activity of teaching constitutes action for the teacher remains to be seen.

TEACHING AS LABOUR, WORK, AND ACTION

Let us attempt to locate teaching in Arendt's *vita activa* through a process of elimination, beginning with action. As we noted earlier, there are three significant tensions between teaching and action in Arendt's system. First, there is the problem that action requires public space for its execution while the teacher acts in a space that is importantly shielded from the public realm. Private life, Arendt says, used to be understood in the root sense of privation. We lead a private life if for some reason we are unable to attain or maintain a public role. Arendt's teacher is not headed for the fully private realm of the family, but she is accepting a partial privation, setting up shop in the liminal world of the school, a space that is neither public nor private. Like Plato's (2004 [c. 380 BCE], pp. 208–213 [Bk. 7, 513e–519d]) 'Allegory of the Cave', in which the philosopher escapes the darkness of convention for the light of reason, only to feel moved to go back down to tell those still entranced by shadows about the more solid realities outside, Arendt's teacher is an adult who has crossed the thresholds from family to school to the common world and public realm only to then head back into the strange twilight realm of the school. By design, the world appears in school only in a mediated way. The call

to teach is motivated by the love of the world, but it issues in a choice to spend one's time with mere representations of the world.

The second problem for a *praxis* account of teaching is that Arendt conceives action as an activity requiring the presence of peers. I use the word 'peer' to signal the distinction Arendt makes between two kinds of equality, only one of which is required for action. Recall the example of the jury culled from every walk of life. Some jurors will be richer, some poorer. Some will be better at separating argument from rhetoric, judging character shrewdly, or remembering key details. Arendt's point is that equality on such matters cannot and should not be expected as a pre-requisite for action. The equality found in the space of appearances is an equality of status. All of the jurors, from the hot-headed deli owner to the analytically gifted bike messenger, have equal status as citizens and as jurors. They share an equal responsibility for using their own judgment on a matter of concern to all. But Arendt's theory of education is predicated precisely on the notion that teachers and students are not peers. Students may be equal (or surpass) their teachers in wealth, physical prowess, even intelligence, but this is not the kind of equality that matters for action. Education, says Arendt is premised on an inequality of authority, which in turn is premised on the teacher's greater familiarity with the world and, even more importantly, on the teacher's willingness to act as a representative of that world to the young.

The third and final tension between teaching and action concerns Arendt's adoption of Aristotle's distinction between *kinesis* and *energeia*. Fundamental to her distinction between work and action is the idea that work is an example of *kinesis*—a process that aims at something outside itself, the attainment of which marks its completion—whereas action fits the model of *energeia*, as an activity that contains its aim within itself and could be considered complete at any moment.⁹ For Arendt, teaching would seem to be *kinesis* since it has an external aim (the safe introduction of the student's natality into the world, and the consequent renewal of the world) and a definite endpoint (the student's fulfilment of a society's mandatory schooling requirement). Put another way, teaching (which must on this logic be a form of labour or work) is but a means to the future action of students.

We have, then, three different, equally compelling, reasons to doubt that teaching could count as action, given Arendt's conceptions of each. Let us next consider whether teaching fits Arendt's description of labour, recalling the two types of labour we identified in Chapter 3 (see above, p. 93). There is labour proper, all of the repetitive tasks driven by bodily needs, and maintenance, the care and upkeep of the artefacts made by work. It is difficult to see how teaching could be described as labour proper. The deciding point is not that teachers direct their efforts toward others. Arendt acknowledges that labour can be collective and divided. If am cooking or taking out the trash, I am labouring regardless of who I am cooking for or whose trash I am removing. The point is that teaching does not seem to concern even our collective creaturely existence. One might try to link labour and teaching by

pointing out how our very survival depends on each, but this begs the question of what kind of survival we are talking about. Labour proper concerns my survival as an embodied creature and more broadly the survival of the species. Education concerns the survival of the human world of things and meanings. Since the teacher appears to the student as a representative of the world, and of the idea that there is more to human life than creaturely existence, it is hard to see how the activity of teaching could be described as labour proper.¹⁰

The fit with maintenance is somewhat better. Like maintenance, Arendt describes education as a part of the effort to 'preserve the world against the mortality of its creators' (Arendt, 1977b [1958], p. 192). However, the similarity is only apparent. Maintenance involves routine chores for preserving things in the face of entropy. Education, we said, ensures that meaningful expressions do not hollow into empty symbols, that dynamic projects do not harden into rigid habits, that living rituals do not wither into dead traditions. Thus, education fights not entropy but banality, and its goal is not mere preservation, but renewal and redefinition. Furthermore, teaching only indirectly effects this renewal. The educator, by gradually and carefully introducing the natality of the young to existing conventions, helps to create the conditions under which (if all goes well) the young themselves can achieve this 'setting right of the world', in virtue of their capacity not for routine chores but for undertaking 'something unforeseen by us' (pp. 192, 196). In the end, this amounts to pointing out that action is not labour. Both maintenance and education, then, save the world from ruin but this means very different things in each case. The labouring caretaker extends the durability of durable things by protecting, cleaning, and repairing. The educator engages in an activity still to be identified that helps to create the conditions by which the cultural world can be revitalised. Jackie Robinson's Dodger debut was action. Writing a book about Robinson to help us remember and understand this moment counts as work. Shelving this book away from water and pests, or digitising it, are labours of the second variety. And what of Jackie Robinson's teachers, what category best describes their teaching? This we have yet to determine.

Having ruled out both action and labour, we are left only with teaching as a form of work. Since education and work both centrally concern worldliness, this seems *prima facie* like the right designation for teaching within the *vita activa*, but let us take a closer look. Arendt reserves the term work for: (i) activities of fabrication or reification, with (ii) a 'definite beginning and a definite, predictable end' (Arendt, 1998 [1958], p. 143), which (iii) begin with the conception of a mental image or 'blueprint' which 'precedes the actual work process' (pp. 140, 140–141), and (iv) issue in a tangible, reified product that adds to the durability and hence to the 'reality and reliability of the human world' (p. 95), the completion of which marks (v) not only the end of the process but its purpose. Elaborated in this way, our initial assumption of fit immediately seems questionable. Indeed, there are problems with each part of this definition of work as a description of teaching.

First, we tend to think of teaching more as a performative than as a productive practice. What tangible thing could the teacher be said to be making? Our options here seem too modest or too grand. Certainly, the teacher *makes* a lesson plan. If this is the *telos* of teaching, though, then we might as well cancel all of our classes! Indeed, this is a perfect parody of bad teaching: the pedagogue crafts a lovely lesson plan but has no idea how to bring it to life, fails to realise that a good lesson will by definition need to go beyond what is planned, and is unable to take into account the complex and singular situation of real people learning together. The lesson plan is more like the *eidōs* or blueprint Arendt mentions in point (ii) than the *telos* she describes in points (iv) and (v). If the lesson plan is only a preliminary, and the lesson itself is a performance, than what is the product of teaching?

The overly grand option I mentioned is that the teacher's accomplished work is the student herself, or rather the educated person that emerges at the end of the process of schooling. That is, just like a potter works with raw clay to produce a vase, so a teacher moulds the mind and character of her students. In this case, the *eidōs* would be our vision of the educated person, guiding both our lesson plans and lessons as we try to realise this image in the medium of the student's mind and character. The problem is that Arendt makes a point of criticising this very idea.

Her critique of modern political thought is precisely that it has adopted the framework of work rather than action and thus been animated by the dangerous assumption 'that it may be possible to treat men as one treats other "materials"' (p. 188).¹¹ The matter here is slightly more complicated since Arendt views children as not yet political beings. For example, when she makes this same point in 'Crisis', she is specifically referring to adults. There is another passage, however, slightly later in *The Human Condition*, that establishes that while Arendt thinks that education is predicated on a specific kind of inequality, one that makes adult education an oxymoron, Arendt nonetheless considers the metaphor of work to be misguided in the sphere of education. Arendt takes Aristotle to task for inconsistency in distinguishing between 'action and fabrication, *praxis* and *poiesis*' (p. 196). Specifically, she points out part of Aristotle's discussion of friendship in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1167b34–1168a28) where Aristotle equates three relationships: poet and poem, parent and child, benefactor and beneficiary. Aristotle is trying to understand why benefactors love their beneficiaries more than beneficiaries love their benefactors, and he hypothesises that it is because they feel that their efforts constitute a work that they have produced. To remind us that we love the things we've made, he likens beneficence to both the poet's and mother's love for their 'products'. 'This explanation', Arendt concludes, 'shows clearly that [Aristotle] thinks of acting in terms of making, and of its result, the relationship between men, in terms of an accomplished "work"' (ibid.). What is strange about this passage is that here Arendt seems to depart from her general insistence that action can take place only in the public realm. The domestic space of child-rearing is Arendt's

definition of a private space; in 'Crisis', she maps the family on one side of a spectrum and the world on the other (with the school in between). Here though, she seems to want to insist that whenever we are forming human relationships, we are acting.

Even if we were inclined to discount this passage as aberrant, and thus to need further proof that Arendt would not accept an account of teaching as a form of work that produces an educated person out of a growing child, consider these further problems. Work either fabricates an object or reifies something existing but intangible into something tangible. The teacher does not fabricate the educated student as Dr. Frankenstein did his monster, so we must be talking about reification here. The teacher, like the poet, helps find a durable form for thoughts, ideas, and values in the mind of the student. But this can't be right either since the goal of education for Arendt is an acting person with the power to reanimate and revise the dead letters of tradition. This seems at odds with the notion of the teacher creating something reified in the student.

Or consider what would count as the *eidōs* in this model. If we say that the teacher has a blueprint, an idea of the educated person, in hand before the process even starts, then we are violating Arendt's basic point in 'Crisis' that education must be conservative to be radical, that it must not try to impose our old values on the young, even in the form of our ideas about what the future must be like, but must trust that the coming generation alone possesses the newness to revitalise our conventions. Arendt warns against the 'serious misconception' of enlisting education as a direct agent of political change, of the 'dictatorial intervention' of utopianists who 'attempt to produce the new as a *fait accompli*, that is, as though the new already existed' (Arendt, 1977b [1958], pp. 176–177). As Richard Rorty colourfully puts this point:

Any such criterion would cut the future down to the size of the present. Asking for such a criterion is like asking a dinosaur to specify what would make a good mammal or asking a fourth-century Athenian to propose forms of life for the citizens of a twentieth-century industrial democracy (Rorty, 1999, p. 120).

For Arendt, then, the ultimate goal of education is the renewal of the world. But the teacher cannot be said to be making this since it is the students who accomplish it through their own later action. Neither can the teacher claim to have formed the student's capacity to act, for this, according to Arendt, lies already in the child's natality. I do not believe we can even claim that the teacher makes the student's knowledge of the world on the basis of which the student will later act. This state of mind, being knowledgeable about something, is simply too intangible to pass Arendt's test for the products of work. We can say that a teacher makes a student aware of various facts, or makes her practice a language, or makes certain ideas come to life, but none of these are making in Arendt's strict sense.

There is however one option remaining for linking teaching and work. Perhaps the teacher's product is neither the renewal of the world nor some capacity or knowledge in the student needed to effect this renewal, but simply the representation of the world that the teacher provides to her students. A representation, you will recall, counts as a durable thing as much as a table or chair for Arendt. In Arendt's scheme, the teacher provides the student with a representation of the world as it is. She represents our languages and customs, facts and values, rituals and projects. And this sounds similar to that special portion of work devoted to the reification of 'deeds and facts and events and patterns of thoughts or ideas . . . into sayings of poetry, the written page or the printed book, into paintings or sculpture, into all sorts of records, documents, and monuments' (Arendt, 1998 [1958], p. 95). But again we encounter a problem, for the teacher may select (if she is lucky enough to have this much autonomy and creative control over her curriculum), arrange, and explicate such texts and objects but these works of art and documents of history come to the teacher already fashioned by others. Are we then content to call teaching work because the teacher makes a representation of the world in the form of a tangible arrangement of cultural texts? Though this is the best of the options for an educational *eidōs* we have discovered, there is still a significant problem with the temporality of this solution. To say that the teacher's work is done when this representation is fashioned is implausible since in some ways the work has just begun, the work namely of helping students to have an educative interaction with the curricular object fashioned by the teacher. As we noted earlier, when considering problems with counting teaching as action, education for Arendt does have an end point, the historically and culturally contingent and variable, but not arbitrary, endpoint when one achieves the age/maturity level at which a given society deems it appropriate to no longer insist that the youth be schooled.

We have thus reached an intriguing conclusion to our process of elimination. The task of teaching, as described by Arendt in 'The Crisis of Education', does not fit in any of the categories of practical activity Arendt herself lays out in *The Human Condition*. A purely internal reading of teaching in Arendt has proven to be impossible. This gives us license to explore alternatives to her theorisations of teaching, of the *vita activa*, or both. The goal of the revisionist reading will be to find an adequate phenomenology of teaching as close as possible to the spirit of Arendt's visions of education and of practical life.

In the concluding section of Chapter 3 we saw that two strictures built into Arendt's account—that each occupation fits into only one mode of activity and that no occupation counts as action—make it unable to accommodate the diversity across and internal variegation within occupations. Let us hypothesise then that teaching admits of aspects of labour, work, and action. This helps to explain why teaching seemed to fit intuitively but not entirely in each of Arendt's categories. Like labour, teaching has a circular, repetitive structure and a relatively intangible yield. Apropos of work, teaching is

centrally concerned with worldliness and involves the making of representations. But what of action?

Here we must proceed more carefully since the stakes are higher—we are after the self-enactment of the teacher after all—and the obstacles more pronounced. Let us review the three problems that any Arendt-inspired, *praxis* account of teaching must address:

1. Action requires public space, whereas educational spaces must offer protection from the world, and in particular from its public aspect.
2. Action requires the catalysis and witnessing of peers, whereas education requires a differential in authority and status between student and teacher.
3. Action is its own end, whereas education has an external end, the safe introduction of the natality of the young into the world, which marks its completion and fulfilment.

Each of these tensions between teaching and action is formidable, but I believe that if we find the right approach to the public-private question, the way to handle the final two will become clear. I turn now to the problem of teaching and public space.

EDUCATION, SHELTER, AND MEDIATION

If we start with the notion that teaching requires a *non-public* space and action a *public* space, then our problem here will be insurmountable. Therefore we need immediately to shift from a digital conception of the public/private distinction to an analogue one. Meanwhile, there are reasons for thinking that Arendt herself has more of a graduated spectrum in mind (even if she sometimes likes to paint in black and white for dramatic effect). Earlier we noted that, for Arendt, education aims at a successful public debut of each young adult, and that this requires both exposure to the workings of the world, and protection against having to make this debut too early. Thus, for Arendt, we noted, ‘the child requires special protection and care’, the family represents the ‘security of private life within four walls’, and the school represents a chance to be exposed to the common world while still providing ‘a shield against the public aspect of the world’ (Arendt, 1977b [1958], p. 186).

In the following passage, Arendt explains why the school must be sheltered from public life:

Everything that lives, not vegetative life alone, emerges from darkness and, however strong its natural tendency to thrust itself into the light, it nevertheless needs the security of darkness to grow at all. This may indeed be the reason that children of famous parents so often turn out badly. Fame penetrates the four walls, invades their private space, bringing with it, especially in present-day conditions, the merciless glare of the public realm,

which floods everything in the private lives of those concerned, so that the children no longer have a place of security where they can grow. But exactly the same destruction of the real living space occurs wherever the attempt to turn the children themselves into a kind of world. Among these peer groups then arises public life of a sort and, quite apart from the fact that it is not a real one and that the whole attempt is a sort of fraud, the damaging fact remains that children—that is, human beings in process of becoming but not yet complete—are thereby forced to expose themselves to the light of a public existence (pp. 186–187).

Here Arendt is in the middle of her critique of US learner-centred education, which tends, she claims, to imagine childhood as its own educative world, a world whose laws the teacher as facilitator must follow. The true rationale for this, Arendt suggests, is not educational but cultural, expressing a uniquely American ambivalence about granting students and teachers unequal amounts of authority in the educative process. Our passion for equality and distrust of authority is so strong, Arendt reasons, that we fail to realise that the very point of education is to introduce the young to the adult world, and that the teacher necessarily has an authoritative role in this process. The irony, she suggests, is that children end up experiencing an even worse tyranny in this authority vacuum, the tyranny of the peer group. Though not a true public realm, peer pressure amounts to an invasive force, similar to that of the pressure of the public realm, the pressure to say where you stand and disclose who you are. Arendt fears, as she illustrates with the extreme example of celebrity children, that such public scrutiny or pseudo-public peer pressure can fix someone in place, someone who is still very much a being ‘who is in process of becoming but not yet complete’.

Now there are problems with her account to be sure. For one, it cannot be Arendt’s view that once we reach a certain age or maturity level, we become complete and are no longer in a process of becoming. This implies that adults too, ideally, remain in a process of becoming despite the fact that they are forced to take a stand on public matters. If it is possible for adults to perform deeds without irreparably fixing their identities, then why would this not be the case for the young as well? Indeed, if action taps our natality, and natality is our self-surprising, habit-interrupting, growing edge, then why worry at all that premature exposure to the space of appearances will have a petrifying effect? A second problem concerns Arendt’s admission that some forms of pseudo-public, social interaction (where the demands of peer interaction are intense even though the stuff of the common adult world is not at issue) can have the same deleterious effect. This suggests that publicity *per se* is not the issue. And it raises the question of how any version of schooling, progressive or traditional, could be free of the intense pressures of popularity, conformity, and so on.

Clearly, Arendt does not have this all worked out, but her essential idea is cogent enough: growing beings require shelter in inverse proportion to their

age or maturity. The world of the very young is made simpler and safer in various ways, and these buffers are only gradually removed as the growing child becomes both ready for and in need of greater complexity and challenge. Frustration, as Freud taught us, is the motor of human development, (see, e.g., Freud, 1963 [1911], p. 22) but of course this does not mean that we expose people to as much frustration as we can as fast as possible. There is, to adapt the famous phrase from Vygotsky, a zone of proximal frustration (which if adequately proximal will be experienced not as frustration at all, but as enrichment).¹² Arendt worries that the young might suddenly find themselves in the wide and cruel world too soon. This is why she suggests a series of graduated steps from home (private), to school (pre-public, post-private), to full entry in the adult world.¹³

Consider the beginning of Seamus Heaney's Nobel Lecture, *Crediting Poetry*, in which he describes the way the wider world only but trickled into the home of his youth:

In the nineteen-forties, when I was the eldest child of an ever-growing family in rural County Derry, we crowded together in the three rooms of a traditional thatched farmstead and lived a kind of den life which was more or less emotionally and intellectually proofed against the outside world. It was an intimate, physical, creaturely existence in which the night sounds of the horse in the stable beyond one bedroom wall mingled with the sounds of adult conversation from the kitchen beyond the other. We took in everything that was going on, of course—rain in the trees, mice on the ceiling, a steam train rumbling along the railway line one field back from the house—but we took it in as if we were in the doze of hibernation (Heaney, 1996, pp. 3–4).

To this opening description, offering a bucolic match to Arendt's vision of the home as retreat from the wider world, Heaney adds this crucial addendum:

When a wind stirred in the beeches, it also stirred an aerial wire attached to the topmost branch of the chestnut tree. Down it swept, in through a hole bored in the corner of the kitchen window, right on into the innards of our wireless set, where a little pandemonium of burbles and squeaks would suddenly give way to the voice of a BBC newsreader speaking out of the unexpected like a *deus ex machina*. And that voice too we could hear in our bedroom, transmitting from beyond and behind the voices of the adults in the kitchen; just as we could often hear, behind and beyond every voice, the frantic, piercing signalling of Morse code.

We could pick up the names of neighbours being spoken in the local accents of our parents, and in the resonant English tones of the newsreader the names of bombers and of cities bombed, of war fronts and army divisions, the numbers of planes lost and of prisoners taken, of casualties suffered and advances made; and always, of course, we would pick up too those other, solemn, and oddly bracing words 'the enemy' and 'the allies'. But even so, none of the news of these world spasms entered me as terror (pp. 5–6).

As Heaney stands in Stockholm to deliver his lecture and receive his prize, he is reflecting on his journey from a world of sensation, to a world of words floating largely free of their referents, to the world of those referents: from hearing the name 'Stockholm' on the radio to standing there. Heaney affirms Arendt's basic idea of the home as a sheltering space, 'proofed against the outside world'; on the other hand, his description of these early years shows how such a home still allows the wider world to enter through the attitudes, speech, and concerns of parents, through media, and in other ways. But even when the horrific facts of war wiggle their way in through the hole in the corner of the kitchen window, a buffer remains. To the young Heaney, numbers of casualties are just numbers and the 'enemy' is just a word. Even the terror of war is muffled.

Benhabib makes a similar point about Arendt's overly simplistic equation of the domestic with the private:

Are not the walls that Arendt sought to erect between the public and the private more porous and more fragile than she would lead us to believe? If the adult members return to the family from the world outside, how well and how much can they leave behind the world of work and labor when crossing the threshold? (Benhabib, 2003, p. 136).

The world for the child widens and becomes less heavily mediated over time, but where and when was the child ever perfectly insulated from the emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal demands of the world? And what is true at one end of the spectrum seems to be true of the other. If we admit that early, familial life narrows and heavily mediates the world for the child without ever being completely impermeable, so must we conclude that adult life still requires powerful forms of insulation from the demands of worldliness. Some have more stomach for complexity and difficulty than others, but all of us have myriad ways of simplifying and sweetening reality. Adult life is never perfectly worldly: at best it amounts to an ongoing increase in our understanding of how to remove various sorts of blinkers and filters and in our capacity to tolerate their removal. Thus, we can reverse our earlier question, to ask of this end of the spectrum, where and when is the world perfectly unmediated?

This suggests that we can and must understand Arendt's point about schooling and shelter in terms of an analogical spectrum rather than as a digital public/private distinction. The school sits on a spectrum of increasing exposure to the emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal demands of the world, a spectrum between childhood home, which already represents a partial exposure to the world, and adult independence, which still requires powerful forms of insulation. Relative to the home, the school seeks to increase the exposure of the young to the breadth and complexity of the world. Relative to adult life, the school is still heavily mediated. The school should not then be conceived as existing in an interstitial space, neither public nor private, but as a space that allows the right amount of the world to filter into its semi-sheltered confines.

And this further tallies with our intuition that primary schools should be more like the home, secondary schools less sheltered, and colleges places where 18- to 22-year-olds are given the opportunity to put exactly one foot in adult, worldly existence.

This is enough already to move beyond our earlier reading of Arendt's school as a darkened cave where the world, stripped of its public aspect, enters only in the form of shadowy representations. The teacher, like all of us, occupies a mediated, quasi-public realm. Perhaps she will head after work to a town meeting that fulfils even more clearly Arendt's requirements for action, but we have already weakened the notion that in her fundamental project the teacher has chosen to inhabit a privative and therefore non-actional space.

Most importantly, we have traded our paradox (action requires public space for its execution and education requires shelter from publicity) for a pair of productive questions. What does it mean to think of teaching as a form of mediation, and mediation as a kind of action? In this regard, I would like to explore two metaphors with the power to knit together teaching, mediation, and action in a manner true to Arendt's insights into each. First, I will consider the idea of the classroom as a theatrical space and as a stage for action. By means of this metaphor, I will show how teaching can meet both the first and second interpretive burdens. In the final section, I will consider another way in which the classroom constitutes a form of mediated action. In viewing the curriculum as a kind of appeals court where our cultural constitution continues to be founded, we see how we might meet the final burden for an Arendtian *praxis* account of teaching.

TEACHING AS ENDLESS REHEARSAL

Though we have now shown some of the limits of Arendt's metaphor of our starting out 'within the four walls' of private, domestic space, through the mediated school experience, to a wide open adult, worldly experience, let us retain and play with this metaphor a bit. If the home is distinguished by the enclosure of four walls, and the school is a step toward leaving these local precincts, then let us say that the school erects only three walls around its students, opening the fourth as the theatre does to the public world. What makes this analogy interesting to explore is first, that it is barely a metaphor. The classroom is not a theatre, obviously, but it is a *theatrical space*. Second, the theatre has a special place in Arendt's thinking.

For Arendt if art is the portion of work closest to action, theatre is the most actional of the arts, the 'political art *par excellence*' (Arendt, 1998 [1958], p. 188). Arendt's reasoning is that while various forms of art and literature may reify deeds in an attempt to reveal their significance, drama is the only art truly capable of capturing the 'specific revelatory quality of action and speech, the implicit manifestation of the agent and speaker' (p. 187). The self-disclosing quality of the deed cannot be described—this would be to turn the 'who' into a 'what'—but it can be imitated, brought to life in an artful repetition. 'This

indicates', Arendt writes, 'that playacting is actually an imitation of acting' (ibid.).¹⁴ For Arendt, theatre is the only place where 'the political sphere of human life [is] transposed into art', 'the only art whose sole subject is man in his relationship with others' (p. 188).

However, there is a problem with this view of theatre as mere imitation of deeds, as parasitic on true action. When we developed the notion of the deed in Chapter 3, we noted that action itself is inherently theatrical (see above, p. 96). For action, Arendt writes, 'the presence of others is always required', but it cannot be simply the 'casual and familiar' contact of the social realm (p. 49). Action requires the 'formality of the public' (ibid). It requires 'a space of appearances . . . a kind of theatre where freedom [can] appear' (Arendt, 1977b [1961], p. 154). Again, though, this phrase, 'a *kind* of theatre', seems to me to be a misleading one, as if theatre were first and foremost a space for the performing arts that just happens to exist and thereby to supply us with a metaphor for our actional existence. In fact, what is central to our existence is, to use Kimberley Curtis's phrase, the 'theatre of display and witness' (Curtis, 1999, p. 71). This is not a metaphor cooked up to capture a specific aspect of public, political life. There is, rather, a deep isomorphism here. Our political and dramatic inventions are both expressions of this fundamental theatricality in existence.¹⁵

Consider two further specific parallels. Both action and the performing arts, Arendt says, rely on the concept of virtuosity, or 'that excellence with which man answers the opportunities the world opens up before him' (Arendt, 1977b [1961], p. 153). For this sense of virtuosity, Arendt draws on Machiavelli's concept of *virtù*, which Arendt says:

. . . is the response, summoned up by man, to the world, or rather to the constellation of *fortuna* in which the world opens up, presents, and offers itself to him, to his *virtù*. There is no *virtù* without *fortuna*, and no *fortuna* without *virtù*; the interplay between them indicates a harmony between man and world—playing with each other, succeeding together (Arendt, 1977a [1961], p. 137).

Thus, when we speak of public life in terms of performance and its excellence, *virtù*-osity, we are not applying aesthetic concepts to a non-aesthetic realm. Politics and the arts are both expressions of something more fundamental that is at once aesthetic and existential. At a fundamental level, human life involves this attempt to respond finely, flexibly, and fluently to the moment, finding the right words, notes, images, and gestures for the occasion. Just as the drama of human recognition, the call and response of self-display and witnessing the other, is an existential tap-root of drama proper, so we can now say the performing arts as a whole are an expression of these existential fundamentals of play, performance, and virtuosity. In an early article that has become a reference point for those wanting to think through the existential and aesthetic dimensions of Arendtian action, George Kateb put it nicely:

The political actor reveals that he had latent strengths that were awaiting the opportunity to manifest themselves, transformed by stylization as they were in the passage from natural propensity to public display. When the political actor shows these strengths—courage, judgment, self-control, eloquence—in a publicly remarkable style, he has revealed himself as virtuosic, as possessing *virtù* . . . as a distinctive performer He shows himself and others that he is more than he knew (Kateb, 1977, p. 150).¹⁶

A second, related, existential concept that shows up in both specifically aesthetic and political forms is the mask. Specifically, Arendt links the *persona*, the mask worn by actors on the ancient stage, with action in the public realm. Here is Margaret Canovan's helpful distillation of Arendt's discussion of the *persona*: 'Political actors meet on a public stage not just as natural persons, but wearing a legal persona, the mask of the citizen, which disguises and equalises them even as it allows the individual's voice to sound through' (Canovan, 1994, p. 191; for Arendt's discussion of the mask, see Arendt, 1977b [1963], pp. 96–98). What Arendt is pointing to is the paradoxical relation between role-playing and authenticity. She is specifically challenging the familiar contrast between who one really is and a fictitious *persona* projected for social consumption. For Arendt, to make this distinction is to confuse the true self with the 'natural Ego' (Arendt, 1977b [1963], p. 97). It is only when we find ourselves caught up in a genuine scene of inter-action, that we discover with relief that we need no longer identify ourselves with our needs and wants, attributes and records. In our response to others and the irreducible situation, something more or other is called forth. We surprise ourselves. We finally, it feels, remember again to become ourselves.

In Arendt's view, donning a mask in public forums does not make one a hypocrite. Such a mask screens out the merely personal and private so that the real person may sound through on this public matter. We assume a role in order to say something true, something that truly sits at the intersection of *virtù* and *fortuna*, of self and world. The real hypocrite, Arendt writes, is someone who 'pretends to be the assumed role', or constructs an artificial naturalness (p. 98). As Kateb explains:

. . . a hypocrite . . . is one who when unmasked reveals that there was nothing behind the mask: he is a compulsive role-player, changing from one role to another, able to feign even naturalness, and finally succumbing perhaps to self-deception, to being an actor without knowing it, paradoxically filling himself with emptiness (Kateb, 1977, p. 151).

With these notions of virtuosity and *persona* on the table, I think we are now in a position to counter this notion that there is acting and there is play-acting, the second being an imitation of the first. The discussion of virtuosity shows that what makes acting playful is not its make-believe quality, but its responsiveness to what is there in the moment (on imagination as a realist

virtue, see Higgins, 2009a). And this is a quality shared by artful performance, whether it occurs in Arendt's political realm or in the performing arts. The discussion of *persona* shows that the dialectic of concealment and revelation, of playing a part and of being yourself, is more fundamental than is the idea of playing a dramatic role. The performer of a deed is already donning a mask, becoming himself through a special kind of artifice; and the thespian then may in fact be enacting himself through the role he assumes rather than merely evoking a shadow of someone else's action. This leads us to doubt the position we considered earlier that theatre, because the dramatic actor plays a part, must be a second order mimesis parasitic upon true action. The stage, it turns out, is a fundamental existential notion entwining the theatrical and the political. The phrase 'a public stage' captures this entwinement. The dramatic actor confronts a public. This is no mere political metaphor applied to the dramatic arts; conversely, the public person occupies a stage, and this is no mere theatrical metaphor applied to politics. Arendt's work points to a true isomorphism in these realms.

After all, it is not as if we have our own words and gestures, but then, if playacting, adopt the words or gestures of another. We can but borrow the words of others; the phrases we find are already well used. We search for words we can make our own. We search for the phrase that will not ring hollow, that taps into something authentic in us, that we can speak with conviction. So is it not that we exist simply as ourselves and subsequently adopt roles and disguises. We are sons and daughters, teachers and students, neighbours and friends, not to mention fire-fighters, masseuses, and town historians. We search for those roles that finally put us in touch with who we are.¹⁷

Still someone might object that there is a difference between genuinely occupying a social role and merely playing one on the stage or screen. To this we respond first that even these genuine roles carry with them a measure of theatricality. Furthermore, it is precisely the virtue of a good stage actor—at least in one school of thought—to move beyond pretending. Consider this exchange between director Constantin Stanislavski and actor Vasili Toporkov. In Toporkov's memoir of his retraining under Stanislavski in the Moscow Art Theatre from 1927-1938, he relates Stanislavski's response to a scene he had just performed:

Contrary to my expectations, I didn't see a hint of approval on his face. Having watched the scene, he was silent, then he coughed and with a polite smile said:

'Excuse me, but you're using a certain "tone" . . .'

'How so?'

'You're trying to play the part with a certain "tone" which you have already worked out'.

I didn't know what he was talking about. What else was I supposed to do? Of course there was a 'tone'. I had given a great deal of thought to it. After all, he had liked what I had done at the presentation! What was going

on? I told him I didn't understand what he meant. Stanislavski explained that the most valuable thing in acting is to be able to find a living person in every part, to find oneself.

'You've saddled yourself with something you have worked out in your head, and it's preventing you from responding to what's going on around you as a living person. You're playing a character type and not a living human being (Toporkov, 2004, p. 16).

What Stanislavski says to his actor could just as easily apply to us in our everyday lives. We find that we have saddled ourselves with something worked out in our heads, that we are failing to respond in a living way to what is going on around us. The roles we inhabit have become not ways to tap into our real feelings, perspectives, and character, but mere character types. Out of touch with what we are feeling, we draw instead from a repertoire of emotive tones.

Toporkov's is thus a narrative of re-education. It is not the story of someone who grew up, learned to be himself, and then came to learn in the theatre an art of how to appear like someone else. Rather, he comes to Stanislavski having learned in 'the real world' and in his first theatrical training in St Petersburg how to feign action. Under the guidance of Stanislavski he learns to act authentically for the first time. The challenge of finding (as Toporkov attempts) a living person inside the words of Chekhov, Gogol, and Molière is not at base dissimilar from finding something living and real in any of the parts we play, scenes we find ourselves in, expressions we utter.

Returning to Arendt, then, we can assert that the classroom is not a public space proper, but a theatre in which students are introduced to the social-cultural world. Because students are themselves being only gradually introduced into the world, and must not be prematurely cast out into the open, the world is brought to them in representational form. This is especially true of deeds, the most existentially challenging aspect of the world. In this way, teachers and students are like a dramatic troupe, recalling and re-enacting deeds that have formed the web of human affairs, the medium in which students will later act, against which they will define themselves. The question is whether this model of the classroom as a dramaturgical space will satisfy the requirements of action without violating the principle of shelter.

Our first intuition might be that students are not acting, but merely reacting to the actions of others (as represented in the curriculum), and to each other's reactions. But all action takes the form of re-action, of response to the presence and initiative of others. We have just seen that it is necessary to complicate the received idea that there is personhood and there is impersonation, that there is being whoever you are and pretending to be someone you are not. Personhood, we found, is itself a series of impersonations, repersonations, depersonations. When students read the letters of John and Abigail Adams, for example, and try out the ideas, tones,

sensibilities, and norms contained therein, they are not doing anything fundamentally different than what the Adamases themselves are doing when they try to figure out who they are and what they stand for by quoting Cicero, Terence, or Scripture.

Now, though, we may wonder if we have gone too far, failing to do justice to the idea that the classroom is in some way preparatory, preliminary to and proofed against, the real deal, whatever this might be. We want to capture our sense of classrooms as places where students may try out positions, stances, voices, personae. Arendt speaks of the irreversibility of action. There is forgiveness, and this helps us cope with irreversibility, but there is no undoing. You cannot run the film backwards and watch the pieces of the broken vase fly back together. In contrast, the classroom space would seem to offer the chance for a more tentative kind of deed. We are looking for signs of *you* emerging, the teacher signals, but we do not expect this to happen in a straight line. We accept, we expect that you will need to zigzag, backtrack, or meander. Here is a place, the teacher says, where your words will have weight but also where you may write your story in pencil. If all action is theatrical, and involves elements of representation of and response to the scripts of culture, the classroom space seems best described as a full dress rehearsal. Have we then gone too far in the other direction, losing the idea of genuine deeds in the classroom?

No, for what the Toporkov book suggests is that the dress rehearsal is in a certain sense as real as it gets. Torporkov had believed that when rehearsing was going poorly, he could rely on the gaze of his public on opening night to call out of him that extra level of feeling. Under Stanislavski, though, he comes to the realisation that what calls forth his potency and authenticity as an actor is not being watched by the audience, but paying careful attention to his fellow actors. It is their genuine action that catalyzes his own. He is acting for them but he is also acting, if you will, from them. The fourth wall of the theatre may be just another wall, as in a rehearsal space, or the curtain may be drawn back to let the audience observe. But the drama is in an important respect inward turned, already complete. Teaching, like life, is an endless rehearsal, a full dress rehearsal, for an opening night that never quite comes.

In this way we can preserve the crucial aspect of Arendt's requirement that the classroom be a non-public space, while also admitting that action occurs there. The classroom does not expose students to the full scope of worldly concerns nor does it saddle them with the full existential burden of defining themselves through their deeds on matters of adult, common concern. But the classroom can be in another way a space of appearances. The teacher works (and labours) to create a theatro-existential space, a stage where the participants can step forth and become themselves, to the delight of all assembled. If this much is right, then we have shown that the classroom can be a space for the student's action, but you recall it is the teacher's action we are after. To be sure, the teacher's role in this theatre is not the same as that of her students. Rather, the teacher is a like an actor/director, helping the

students dramaturgically with questions of how to interpret and find themselves in the cultural, curricular material. The teacher may comment on the text and on the personations as they are attempted, and the teacher too will don roles and take on voices, searching for the moment and the words to convey something of import about where we are at, what we are about, what we have tried and become.

Earlier, we said that the teacher for Arendt wore three hats: she is caring adult looking to the growing child's needs; instructor looking at the student as learner of a specific subject; and educator looking at the student as a newcomer who must be gradually brought into the world by the world's being carefully brought to him or her. We might now add a fourth dimension. The teacher as actor, whose natality sparks and is sparked by the natality of students as it occasionally reveals itself in the midst of schooling. The classroom, as we have seen, is not solely or purely a space of appearances in Arendt's sense, but it is at times precisely a stage where students can step forth in the presence of others and enact themselves, flash something of their personhood that upends our expectations, cuts against the grain of conventions, and surprises even themselves. It is in these moments that the teacher finds her own natality stimulated, in which her witnessing is not merely pedagogical. It is in these moments that the teacher laughs at the idea of graduation and of preparation for the real world. There is nothing more real than this 'preparation'.

In these moments and in this respect, the teacher is a peer to her students. When the classroom becomes a space of appearances, even if only occasionally and in the ways I have qualified, the 'whats' of age, rank, knowledge and skills give way to the question of 'who', a question which equalises all those present. Thus, in meeting the first burden, we have also met the second. (On teaching as a dialectic between mastery and service, see Tubbs, 2005, Part II).

TEACHING AS CULTURAL ELABORATION

One obstacle remains for this revisionist reading, and this concerns Arendt's adoption of Aristotle's *kinesis/energeia* distinction. The phenomenology of action for Arendt is distinguished by its distance from the process/product mindset, but teaching does seem to be goal-directed even if its aim is the complex one of introducing the world to the students fully but carefully enough that the students are introduced into the world with their natality intact. Teaching grammar, algebra, history, or literature are not ends in themselves for Arendt's teacher. They are ways of representing the adult, common world to the young so that they may join and renew it. In contrast, action contains its end within itself.

In responding to this final interpretive problem for an Arendtian, *praxis* conception of teaching, we can take our cue from the last section, and the idea of teaching as mediation. In mediating the public realm of deeds, we said,

teaching represents a kind of theatrical art that is itself importantly if not purely actional. Now we may add that in mediating the world, in representing the stock of conventions—and introducing the young to what we have tried and done, asked and found, sought and avoided—teaching represents a kind of hermeneutical art that puts it in an interesting grey zone between *kinesis* and *energeia*.

Arendt herself admits the existence of such a liminal zone by drawing our attention to the unique activity featured in the US constitutional conventions. Here we would expect Arendt to say that though the debates in these conventions would count as action, the drafting and founding themselves would be work, since work leads to reified products (here, a document and a republic) that lie outside of and complete the process. In fact, she considers the ‘founding and preserving of political bodies’ to be a form of action (Arendt, 1998 [1958], pp. 8–9). Typically, activities of making and preserving fit into Arendt’s categories of work and labour. Why does she make an exception here?

The answer is found in Arendt’s *On Revolution*, which explores what it might mean for a polity to embody the spirit of revolution (Arendt, 1977b [1963]). What the founders discovered in the congresses leading up to the declaration and in the conventions that followed was ‘public happiness’. Pushed together by the British impingement on their negative freedoms, what they discovered in Philadelphia was a space of positive freedom, a space of appearances. Even amidst these singular and stressful historical circumstances, they returned to themselves: this is who I am, this is what it means to be fully human, this is what it means for words and deeds to have weight, for people to truly be together, but also for individuals to reveal their distinctiveness. In Philadelphia, Arendt argues, the colonial delegates happened upon the deep connection between politics and natality. To be a part of this experience was the greatest privilege they had known and this caused a dilemma: the revolution would either fail or lead to the foundation of a republic. But then success would mean another kind of failure if ‘the principle of public freedom and public happiness without which no revolution would ever have come to pass should remain the privilege of the generation of the founders’ (p. 224). Thus, Arendt is concerned with what it means to found a polity animated by the spirit of beginnings, and the problem is that:

If foundation was the aim and end of revolution, then the revolutionary spirit was not merely the spirit of beginning something new but of starting something permanent and enduring; a lasting institution, embodying this spirit and encouraging it to new achievements, would be self-defeating (*ibid.*).

Translating the question of political foundations back into the terms of the *vita activa*, we can say that if the founders thought of their activity as work, then they risked making a polity that would have space in it only for labouring and working and not for the acting they themselves had discovered. If, however, they thought of foundation as action, an activity that leaves no

tangible trace, then there would be no Republic at all. The solution to the dilemma, according to Arendt, lies in the constitution, or more precisely in our attitude toward the constitution. The US revolution led to something lasting, Arendt suggests, because of our reverence towards the constitution, but there are two very different forms this might take. 'Constitution' she suggests is not simply a document but the act of coming together, of constituting a people. This action is embodied in the document and in the institutions that call for us to continue to come together and re-constitute ourselves. In particular, Arendt quotes with approval Woodrow Wilson's remark that the Supreme Court is a 'kind of constitutional assembly in continuous session' (p. 192). Though Arendt thinks that the founders erred in restricting this ongoing act of interpreting, augmenting and thereby reviving the beginnings inherent in the action of the founders—she favoured a democratic ward system—she nonetheless thinks that this was the genius of the founders: the creation of an entity whose very durability lay in its constant recreation.

As Hannah Pitkin observes, Arendt wants us to distinguish between two forms of reverence for the constitution: one reactionary, one radical. The reactionary gesture is the return to origins as something done; this is to reify the constitution. The radical move, though paradoxically the one that is genuinely preserving of what was set in motion in Philadelphia in the 1770s, is to call for a return 'to the spirit of origins, the human capacity to originate' (Pitkin, 1984, pp. 275–279; quoted in Honig, 1991, p. 111). Building on Pitkin's account, Bonnie Honig suggests that:

Arendt, like Machiavelli, sees that a beginning too firmly rooted in the past is in danger of becoming reified and foundational. Our commitment to augmentation and amendment may derive from our reverence for a beginning that is in the past; but our practices of augmentation and amendment make that beginning our own—not merely our legacy but our own construction and performative. The commitment to augmentation protects that which was glorious because it was a performative from being sanctified and turned into a law of laws, an absolute whose irresistibility would ultimately and necessarily destroy the uniquely political character of the republic. On this reading of Arendt, augmentation is both a necessary condition of politics and constitutive of one form of the activity of politics itself. What Leo Strauss says of Machiavelli applies equally to Arendt: 'Foundation is, as it were, continuous foundation' (Honig, 1991, p. 111; quoting Strauss, 1978, p. 44).

We are now ready to pull together the two threads of this discussion: politics as preservation by augmentation and teaching as mediation. Earlier, we concluded that the teacher must humbly acknowledge that she is part of an old world whose chance for renewal lies in the hands of the young. She puts her faith in the natality of the young and forswears the temptation to outline the new for the young. Utopian schemes and revolutionary gestures dress up

one part of the old world as new, while short-circuiting the genuine renewing power. Thus, she accepts the humbler-seeming task of ‘representing the world as it is’. Recall, though, that we also called this activity ‘mediation’, noting that despite the realism called for by Arendt (as opposed to utopianism), there is also a filtering going on. Certain elements of our cultural life and history are selected and re-presented.

Here Arendt’s theory has close resonances with that of Gadamer, for whom understanding is itself a form of mediation, between past and present, between one lifeworld and another (see, for example, Gadamer, 2004 [1960], pp. 295–310). What Arendt says of the constitution, Gadamer shows to be true more generally: cultural texts and traditions exist because of, not despite, constant amendment and augmentation. For example, Gadamer challenges the received view that an artwork is most fully itself at its moment of authoring, proceeding to degrade, both literally and figuratively, as it moves away from its original time and context and is interpreted and understood by others (pp. 102–171). In contrast, Gadamer argues that traditional objects have historicity built into their very being.¹⁸ They are built to travel, as it were, to new times and settings, seeking out (if you will allow the further anthropomorphism) new interlocutors. Just as you, the reader, no doubt find that new settings and relationships lead you to discover aspects of yourself hitherto unknown, so too do traditional objects experience (what would seem incomprehensible in the familiar ontology of origin and decay) what Gadamer dramatically terms ‘an increase in being’ (p. 135; compare pp. 141–9).

Here, then, is how I would like to suture these two lines of thought together. Just as the constitution requires continuous augmentation and amendment to be itself—a document that expresses natality—so do other extra-legal parts of our polity. In representing the stock of conventions to the young, the teacher mediates, preserves, and elaborates our cultural constitution. Teaching is, to paraphrase Woodrow Wilson’s remark, a kind of ongoing cultural constitutional convention. Teaching is cultural elaboration, a form of preservation through augmentation, and it augments not through invention but through mediation. In trying to find the language through which parts of the past might speak to the present, and how ideas fashioned in one context might resound in another, the teacher preserves and extends culture. And this, we have seen, fits the model of a special sort of activity that sits at the border of *kinesis* and *energeia*, work and action. It is a special, qualified form of making that is de-reifying and self-disclosing.

In a world where spaces for action are few and far between, the teacher, it now appears, has a portion of this most enviable, most human, most noble form of activity: action.

NOTES

1. It may be helpful to the reader to know something of the genesis and publication history of Arendt’s ‘The Crisis in Education’. As Young-Bruehl reports, in late 1957, when *The Human Condition* was in revisions or already in press, Arendt was asked by the editors of

Commentary to comment on school desegregation (see Young-Bruehl, 2004, pp. 278–279 and 313–217). Moved by the incident at Little Rock and in particular by the photos of Elizabeth Eckford surrounded by the jeering, threatening white crowd, Arendt agreed. However, alarmed by her ‘Reflections on Little Rock’, the *Commentary* editors delayed, finally agreeing to publish it if accompanied by a scathing critique by Sidney Hook. Arendt pulled the essay, placing it with *Dissent*, where it finally appeared in 1959 (Arendt, 1959). Arendt wrote ‘Crisis’ during this controversy in an effort to clarify how the conceptual structure developed in *The Human Condition* (particularly the concepts of natality and the private-public-social distinction) informed the view of education and politics offered in ‘Reflections’. Ironically, ‘Crisis’ ended up appearing before the essay it was meant to follow

The specific publication history of ‘Crisis’ is as follows. It was written in German as a lecture—delivered in Bremen in May, 1958—and published as a pamphlet (Arendt, 1958b). It was translated and slightly revised for publication in *Partisan Review* (Arendt, 1958a). It was then further revised for inclusion in the 1961, six-study version of *Between Past and Future*, which was expanded to eight studies in 1968. For a look at Arendt’s editing of the *Partisan Review* version, including the deletion of the information about the Bremen lecture, see the *Hannah Arendt Papers at the Library of Congress*, online at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/arendthtml/arendthome.html>: ‘Speeches and Writing File, 1923–1975 n.d.’; ‘Books—Between Past and Future—First draft—Pages 108–150’; Image 3.

I am aware of only one other thing Arendt wrote on education, an (unpublished) address on higher education at Bryn Mawr College in 1971, a copy of which is in the Bryn Mawr archives. In it, she praises rigorous liberal arts education. I learned of this address thanks to O’Byrne, 2005.

2. The only other person I have found who even notes this fact is Biskowski who mentions in a footnote the ‘curious lacuna’ that Arendt never seems to explain the ‘role and nature of two of [her] own primary occupations, teaching and writing’ (Biskowski, 1993, p. 877, n. 813).

Benhabib devotes her entire book to the careful subversion of Arendtian distinctions and uses child-rearing as an example of an activity that shows why Arendt’s distinctions between ‘work, labor, and action; between politics, the market, and the family’ are too rigid, making it necessary to ‘think with Arendt contra Arendt’ (Benhabib, 2003, p. 136). And while she speaks of ‘child-raising and education’ (p. 135), her arguments seem more geared to parenting than educating in the context of schools. Her argument that educating children is more work-like than labour-like apply if anything better for schooling than for parenting. As it will become clear later in my argument, I think Benhabib is right to read the school and even the home as spaces that are never fully private even if intentionally buffered from the public. And Benhabib also seems right to claim that there is ‘a world-constituting dimension of rearing children and education’ and that such activities bear ‘more the marks of “world-protection, world-preservation, and world-repair” which Arendt normally associated with work, than of the cyclical necessity characteristic of labor’ (Benhabib, 2003, pp. 136, 135; quoting Rich, 1979, p. 205). However, when Benhabib goes on to argue that raising children constitutes ‘not just work but action, in the emphatic Arendtian sense, “of disclosure of the who through speech and action”’ her argument is geared to parenting (Benhabib, 2003, p. 135) [No page reference is given for the Arendt quotation; it appears to be a contraction of a passage she has cited earlier: ‘The disclosure of the “who” through speech, and the setting of a new beginning through action’ (Arendt, 1998 [1958], p. 184; quoted in Benhabib, 2003, p. 126).] She offers two reasons for this. First, in introducing the young to the world, parents ‘teach the child which aspects of the world around us we consider worthwhile to preserve and cultivate, which aspects make us feel at home in the world’.

If Benhabib thinks this also applies to schoolteachers, she does not say how she thinks we should square it with Arendt's injunction to teachers to represent the world as it is rather than as we might wish it to be. The second argument for child-rearing as action is based on a passage from *The Human Condition* where Arendt suggests that having a child can be a kind of action for a couple whose love had alienated them from the common world but who now return to the world to which they add something new (see Benhabib, 2003, p. 135; Arendt, 1998 [1958], p. 242).

3. Compare Biskowski's attempt to soften some of Arendt's distinctions to make room for a social space of appearances (Biskowski, 1993, esp. pp. 876–877).
4. There is a growing literature on Arendt and education, including two edited volumes (Higgins, 2010b; Gordon, 2001). On the question of childhood and shelter, compare Conroy (forthcoming); Elstain (1995); and Masschelein (2001). For two helpful explorations of teaching and natality, though not of the teacher's natality *per se*, see Levinson (1997) and Mackler (2004). For a deconstructive Arendt, see Biesta (1997; 2001; 2006; O'Byrne (2005); and Todd (2008, chap. 9). For the college, political science classroom as a space of appearances, see Gorham (2000). The themes of this essay are most closely anticipated in Hinchliffe (2004) and in the Schutz-Levinson exchange (Schutz, 2002; Levinson, 2002; 2003; Schutz, 2003; see also Schutz, 1999).
5. Arendt vacillates on whether to include college. It seems to depend on how specialised one's college studies are (see Arendt, 1977b [1958], p. 196).
6. In the following statement, Arendt qualifies the ability of a theorist to generalise: 'However clearly a general problem may present itself in a crisis, it is nevertheless impossible to completely isolate the universal element from the concrete and specific circumstances in which it makes its appearance' (Arendt, 1977b [1958], p. 175). Her point seems to be that particulars have a way of laying bare the essence of something, rather than thinking that they pollute its purity with accidental features, but that that means that even in a crisis, we perceive the essence of something as fused with the particular horizon that manifests it. On this point, Arendt's philosophy of history and interpretation is close to Gadamer's (see e.g. Gadamer, 2004 [1960]).
7. Compare Oakeshott's invocations of Valery's phrase 'Un début dans le vie humaine' (Oakeshott, 1989 [1975], pp. 17 and 39).
8. Here we return to theme of Chapter 1 and the first-personal dimension of ethics.
9. Aristotle makes the *kinesis/energeia* distinction in *Metaphysics*, Book IX (Theta), chap. 6 [1048b18–35] (see Aristotle, 1984a, p. 1656) and elsewhere, for example in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I, Chap. 1 [1094a1–5] and Book X, chap. 4 [1174a13–1175a22] (see Aristotle, 1984b, pp. 1729, 1856). It undergirds his key ethical distinction between *praxis/phronesis* and *poiesis/techne* in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI, chap. 4 [1140a1–23] (p. 1799). In putting the distinction to work in her system, Arendt cites the opening of the *Ethics* along with passages from *Physics* and *De Anima* (see Arendt, 1998 [1958], p. 206). For more on this distinction, see Ackrill (1965); Engberg-Pedersen (2002 [1983], pp. 32–36); and Dunne (1997, pp. 247–248).
10. If someone is first and foremost a wage-earner, and just happens to be earning his wage from the local school district, then this would count as labouring, since his efforts could be described as the securing of food and shelter. Here, though, we are considering the person whose daily efforts, paid though they may be, are guided by the aims of teaching.
11. The development of the field of human resource management is one indicator that Arendt's fears are well-founded.
12. D. W. Winnicott captured this insight of Freud's well when he noted the paradox that a perfect parent would not be 'good-enough' (see, for example, Winnicott, 1989 [1971], pp. 10–11, 139, and *passim*). Heinz Kohut made the idea of 'optimal frustration' a central concept in self psychology (see, for example, Kohut and Seitz, 1978 [1963]).

13. Arendt sometimes describes the school in spatial terms as something wedged between public and private, and sometimes in temporal terms, as I have indicated here. For detailed discussions of both of these aspects of her work, see Masschelein and Simons (2010) and Biesta (2010a).
14. Arendt points out that 'drama' comes from the Greek word *dran*, to act. For more on art as a species of work, see above, pp. 102–104.
15. It is interesting on this point to compare Hans-Georg Gadamer's claim that self-presentation is fundamental to all of nature (see Gadamer, 2004 [1960], pp. 105ff).
16. It was Kateb's article that drew my attention to some of the passages I cite in the preceding discussion. This is only one of three overlapping but distinct pictures of action Kateb finds in Arendt. Below I will quote from his second model. I am not sure I see any significant difference between: (1) 'the political actor reveals that he had latent strengths that were awaiting the opportunity to manifest themselves, transformed by stylization as they were in the passage from natural propensity to public display'; and (2) the political actor as one dons a mask and thus 'hides much in order to reveal more' (Kateb, 1977, pp. 150, 151).
17. Interestingly, Arendt herself—just before her death, in her remarks upon acceptance of the Sonning Prize—loosens her distinction between acting persons revealing their distinctiveness among equals in political space and personalities trading on their individual attributes in social space. She allows the possibility that occupational roles—and she mentions teaching explicitly—themselves constitute the masks or *personae* through which something of ourselves 'manifests itself, something unmistakably identifiable' (Arendt, 1975, p. 13). She thus seems open to the idea that there is a form of public space and genuine recognition (not mere fame) in the occupational realm. However, she also seems torn between saying that the role, in this case being a public figure recognised with the Sonning Prize, allows something 'individual . . . to sound through the mask' (p. 14) and saying that she is only accepting the prize because she is confident that she will not be 'seduced by the great temptation of recognition' and she knows that she can take the mask off and reclaim her full humanity. I hope to examine the Sonning Prize Speech in detail in future work. Thanks to Aaron Schutz for drawing my attention to the Sonning speech and its version of the mask.
Arendt's only other remark (of which I am aware) about how teaching might fit into her analysis of the *vita activa* is even more obscure. At the York University Conference in 1972 she was asked whether, as a political theorist, she would count thinking, writing, and teaching in the category of action. 'Teaching is something else and writing too', Arendt cryptically replied before going on to explain why thinking is distinct from action (Arendt, 1979, p. 304). It is impossible to tell whether she means in effect 'thinking is not action but teaching, that's another matter', or as is more likely the case, 'here let's confine ourselves to the distinction between the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa*, but were we to go into teaching, we would then be taking up distinctions with the practical life'. That she treats teaching in the same breath as writing is further reason to suspect that she thinks of teaching as work.
18. 'Traditionary' is the adjectival term coined by Gadamer's translators to render various forms of *Überlieferung*. 'Traditional' suggests something settled and located in the past, whereas the German suggests that which reaches us in the present from the past (see Gadamer, 2004 [1960], p. xvi).

8

Teaching as Experience: Toward a Hermeneutics of Teaching and Teacher Education

These recruits who face teaching as a life work are ready to learn to teach, and they are ready, though they know it not, to be formed by teaching. When teaching has formed them, what shape will it give them? Their daily work will write upon them; what will it write? (Waller, 1932, p. 380).

The general topic of this volume is education on its intellectual side. One main idea runs through the various chapters, and is illustrated in them from many points of view. It can be stated briefly thus: The students are alive, and the purpose of education is to stimulate and guide their self-development. It follows as a corollary from this premiss, that the teachers also should be alive with living thoughts. The whole book is a protest against dead knowledge, that is to say, against inert ideas (Whitehead, 1967 [1927], p. v).

Without the liberally educated man, as witness and seal of what he is, education will become more and more a mug's game, a trade school, a vulgar racket for privileged illiterates. Professionalism, scrappy or fastidious, will not do (Arrowsmith, 1971, p. 14).

TEACHING AS VOCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

In Chapter 4, we followed John Dewey's attempt to rescue the concept of vocation from its distorting contrast with liberal education. Vocations, we concluded, are catalysts in the shaping of 'effective worlds', and the study of vocations is the study of the conditions of growth.¹ From this, Dewey draws an important implication for teachers. Vocations are not principally an end of education but a key means. To facilitate learning one must understand the student's environment which requires, in turn, understanding the continuous-purposive activities by which a given student activates his or her surroundings. Teachers must become, as Dewey once memorably put it, students of 'soul action' (Dewey, 1974 [1904], p. 319). While this is a key pedagogical insight, it is also somewhat surprising that this is the implication

Dewey chooses to emphasise. If we review Dewey's trajectory in more detail, we find an important path not taken.

Dewey starts from an aesthetic and existential redescription of vocation, showing how adult callings constitute learning environments for their practitioners. With this idea in hand, he returns to the scene of formal education, where he reveals that traditional notions of vocational education have put the cart before the horse. The true meaning of vocational education, he concludes, is that students learn best when their own continuous-purposive engagements (kindled or encouraged by the teacher) make effective certain aspects of the classroom world (arranged by and including the teacher). The question we need to consider is: why does the teacher end up in such a parenthetical position in this story? When Dewey discusses carpentry, it is to make a point about the experience of carpenters. When he refers to medicine, it is to consider the development of doctors. When he discusses education, it is to make a point about the experience of students! The analogous question about the teacher's experience and development gets lost. Dewey's account, we noted, is full of surprises, upending received ideas at every turn. At this last fork in the road, however, Dewey takes the road more travelled.

The final twist in Dewey's account, then, is that after having shown that vocation is an essentially first-personal, ethical concept—our 'dominant vocation' being our own ongoing growth—he then offers this insight to teachers as a tool for thinking about the growth of their students.² And of course it is that. However, the question that Dewey's chapter on vocation begs us to ask—if not simply begs—is, what sort of effective world is the classroom *for the teacher*? What do teachers notice, and how does what they notice affect them? Is the teaching environment a rich one, enabling a widening of experience over time? How can teachers use their practice to cultivate wide-awakeness? What are the things with which a teacher varies?

As we have seen, such questions have a way of not getting asked. Even posing the question chafes against the ethos of service and the hidden culture of self-sacrifice we analyzed in Chapter 5. Also at work here is education's special brand of kitsch, something I touched on in the Introduction (see above, pp. 8 and 14, n. 3) and return to below. To consider the classroom as effective world for the teacher is to risk discovering that teaching, at least as institutionalized, can be deeply miseducative for teachers. The rose-coloured glasses that come with the job of educator make it hard to see such a possibility.

However, there is another important factor, one that Dewey's theory of vocation helps us articulate. Teaching is a kind of meta-vocation. The vocational environment of teachers is framed by the purpose of helping students reach out to the world with their purposes. To be a (Deweyan) teacher is to attend to what occupies students and to what sorts of materials would enrich those occupations. In other words, what a teacher notices is what students notice. This uniquely iterative structure makes it hard to wend one's way back to the teacher's experience and ask, how is this teacherly axis

of salience educative? As Bill Ayers puts it, 'teaching is the vocation of vocations, a calling that shepherds a multitude of other callings' (Ayers, 1993, p. 127). It is the project of teachers to help others find and pursue their projects and it is this double reference that seems to be part of the special challenge of viewing teaching in existential and eudaimonistic terms.

If Dewey misses his chance here to correct our blind spot about the teacher's flourishing, it is certainly not because he favours kitsch: 'sentimentality' is one of his favourite terms of abuse. Nor is it because he supports the image of teaching as selfless service, as the following passage makes clear:

Any individual has missed his calling, farmer, physician, teacher, student, who does not find that the accomplishments of results of value to others is an accompaniment of a process of experience inherently worth while. Why then should it be thought that one must take his choice between sacrificing himself to doing useful things for others, or sacrificing them to pursuit of his own exclusive ends, whether the saving of his own soul or the building of an inner spiritual life and personality? (Dewey, 1916, p. 122).

And we do find signs throughout his writings that Dewey kept his eye on this issue of how educating educates (or miseducates) the educator. For example, in a passage from *Experience and Education*—one that echoes the 'axis of salience' passage we considered in Chapter 4 (see above, p. 122)—teaching does make the list of vocational environments:

If a person decides to become a teacher, lawyer, physician, or stock-broker, when he executes his intention he thereby necessarily determines to some extent the environment in which he will act in the future. He has rendered himself more sensitive and responsive to certain conditions, and relatively immune to those things about him that would have been stimuli if he had made another choice (Dewey, 1997 [1938], p. 37).

Even more telling perhaps are those moments where Dewey's sympathy for the experience of teachers surfaces in a discussion of another topic. For example, when discussing the way in which schooling unnaturally immobilises learners and treats knowing as if it were disembodied, Dewey significantly worries about 'the nervous strain and fatigue which result with *both teacher and pupil* . . . [from] the abnormality of the situation in which bodily activity is divorced from the perception of meaning' (Dewey, 1916, p. 141, emphasis added). At another point, lamenting how educationese seems irony-proof, papering over even its most blatant contradictions with gravitas, he observes: 'The effect of this situation in crippling the teacher's sense of humour has not received the attention it deserves' (p. 336). Or consider his sympathetic portrait of how teachers are enmeshed in a massive cycle of heteronomy:

The vice of externally imposed ends has deep roots. Teachers receive them from superior authorities; these authorities accept them from what is current in the community. The teachers impose them upon children. As a first consequence, the intelligence of the teacher is not free; it is confined to receiving the aims laid down from above. Too rarely is the individual teacher so free from the dictation of authoritative supervisor, textbook on methods, prescribed course of study, etc., that he can let his mind come to close quarters with the pupil's mind and the subject matter. This distrust of the teacher's experience is then reflected in lack of confidence in the responses of pupils (pp. 108–109).

At yet another point, Dewey decries teacher education practices that lend teachers 'immediate skill . . . at the cost of the power to keep on growing', and laments the tendency of teachers 'to become submerged in the routine detail of their callings' (Dewey, 1974 [1904], pp. 320, 321).

It is also significant that Dewey is reported to have made a point of asking in his weekly meetings with the staff at the lab school what effects the educational process had 'upon the minds, not only of those who were to be "taught", but upon those who were to be the "teachers"' (Mayhew and Edwards, 1966, p. 367; quoted in Greene, 1989, p. 24). And Dewey occasionally speaks of teachers as co-inquirers, thus stressing in another way the importance of their own growth (for example, Dewey, 1916, pp. 71, 160). What we do not have from Dewey, unfortunately, is any sustained discussion of the nature of teaching as a vocation, of the environment of the teacher *qua* teacher.

Perhaps we can approach the question through a familiar heuristic: the instructional triangle of teacher, student, and subject matter. It is customary to say that pedagogy is a transaction among these three elements, but this leaves out at least two other important relationships (see Figure 8a).

The dashed lines represent the teacher's intentional relationships. The teacher must attend to students, subject matter, and crucially to the student's relationship to the subject matter. Though not strictly pertinent to the matter at hand, I include not only the student's relationship to the subject matter but also a second intentional relation on the student's side of the equation (the solid lines), namely the student's attending to the teacher's relationship to the subject matter. Indeed, this diagram just scratches the surface of the full complex of pedagogical relationships (see Figure 8b). The expanded diagram adds in the complexity of multiple students, indicates further relations to and within the subject matter, and adds in reflexive relationships. Of course, there is no formal limit to the number of relationships that could be added via iteration, but this begins to capture the range of considerations that enter into a typical pedagogical relationship. I did include one third-order relation—the teacher's relation to the student's relation to the teacher's relation to the subject matter—both to indicate the iterative possibilities and because this particular relationship is less artificial and more important than it sounds. Basically, it means paying attention to how students are making sense of how the teacher is relating to the subject matter.

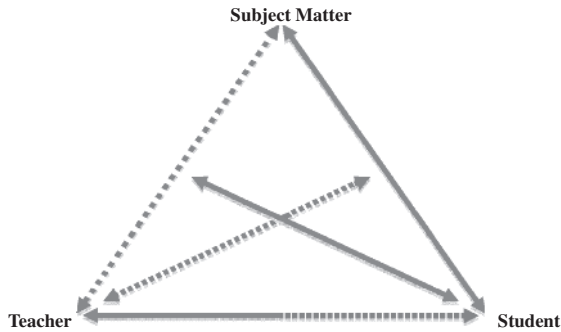


Figure 8a: Five pedagogical relationships
 (Key: dashed = teacher's intentional relationships; solid = student's intentional relationships)

But for the purposes of articulating the basic dimensions of the teacher's environment, let us return to the simplified picture of pedagogical relationships. For even here we find three rich aspects of the world brought into focus by the teacher's special mode of continuous purposiveness. By virtue of their attention to students, subject matter, and the student's relation to subject matter, teachers are invited into three distinct conversations. In taking up a relation to the young, teachers enter the dialogue between the generations we discussed in the last chapter. With the rise of 'the special science of pedagogy', Arendt writes, we sometimes lose sight of the most basic fact about schooling, namely that it concerns 'the relation between grown-ups and children' (Arendt, 1977b [1958], p. 196). As we saw, teachers operate in a space of crucial and fragile negotiations between the mature and the uninitiated, between tradition and innovation. Teachers arrange a conversational encounter between the 'natality' of each generation of newcomers and the world of fading conventions. Thus, teachers work at the very site where human cultures preserve themselves and challenge themselves to grow. To say that teachers notice students, then, is an understatement. Teachers notice the dynamics of cultural life. They notice the resonance of innovation, when an old score is suddenly brought to life by new performers in a manner that preserves the integrity of each. And they notice the tinny sound of these instruments, tradition and natality, when they fail to play in tune.

Through their attention to subject matter, teachers are also invited into a second kind of conversation, one best described by Michael Oakeshott. Oakeshott understands disciplines like history, literature, and science as distinctive voices in an ongoing conversation through which human beings attempt to understand themselves (see Oakeshott, 1989 [1975]; and Oakeshott, 1991 [1959]). As we had occasion to notice in Chapter 6, Oakeshott warns that this conversation, by definition, must not be under-

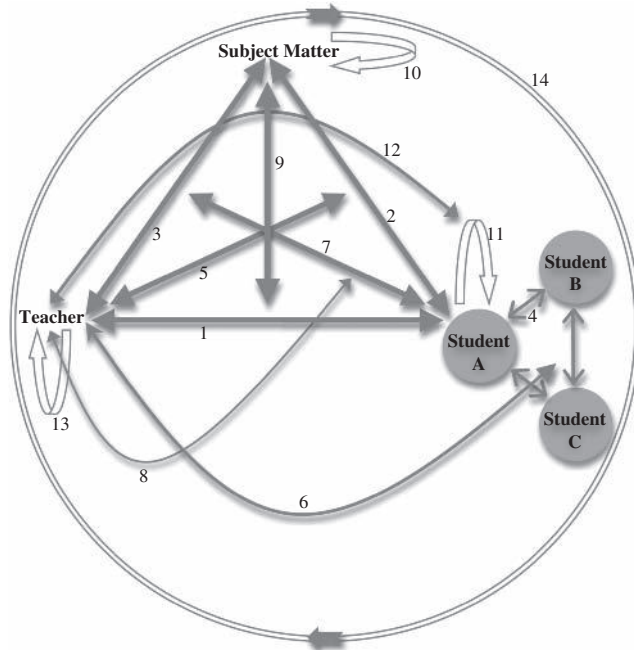


Figure 8b: The complex of pedagogical relations

Key:

1. The teacher-student relationship proper
2. The student's relationship to the subject matter
3. The teacher's relationship to the subject matter
4. The student's relationship to other students, group dynamics
5. The teacher's relationship to the student's relationship to the subject matter
6. The teacher's relationship to group dynamics and the individual student's place therein
7. The student's relationship to the teacher's relationship to the subject matter
8. The teacher's relationship to the student's relationship to the teacher's relationship to the subject matter (one example of a third-order relation)
9. Aspects of the subject matter perceivable only from within the teacher-student dialogue
10. The internal logic of the subject matter (reflexive relationship)
11. The student's understanding of, and relationship to, him- or herself (reflexive relationship)
12. The teacher's relationship to the student's self-understanding
13. The teacher's understanding of what it means to be a teacher and how this relates to her dominant vocation (reflexive relationship)
14. The teacher's cycle of self-reflection about her pedagogical relations and awareness (reflexive relationship)

stood according to the preferred metaphor of any one voice (see above, pp. 196–97). The voice of science, for instance, must not be allowed to reduce the conversation to inquiry; nor should the voice of practicality be allowed to take over the conversation and turn it into a policy session. If members of this conversation are not question-answerers or problem-solvers, however, what are they? In a passage worth quoting at length, Oakeshott offers us his radically non-instrumental answer:

The image of human activity and intercourse as a conversation will, perhaps, appear both frivolous and unduly skeptical. This understanding of activity as composed, in the last resort, of inconsequent adventures, often put by for another day but never concluded, and of the participants as playfellows moved, not by a belief in the evanescence of error and imperfection but only by their loyalty and affection to one another, may seem to neglect the passion and the seriousness with which, for example, both scientific and practical enterprises are often pursued and the memorable achievements they have yielded . . . Although a degree of skepticism cannot be denied, the appearance of frivolity is due, I think, to a misconception about conversation. As I understand it, the excellence of this conversation (as of others) springs from a tension between seriousness and playfulness. Each voice represents a serious engagement (thought it is serious not merely in respect of its being pursued for the conclusion it promises); and without the seriousness the conversation would lack impetus. But in its participation in the conversation, each voice learns to be playful, learns to understand itself conversationally and to recognize itself as a voice among voices. As with children, who are great conversationalists, the playfulness is serious and the seriousness is only play (Oakeshott, 1991 [1959], pp. 492–493).

With his stirring image of self-understanding through serious play, Oakeshott helps us to understand why people seek out schooling at various levels. We go to school initially to learn how to participate in the conversation. Schooling, for Oakeshott, is best understood as ‘beginning to learn our way about a material, emotional, moral and intellectual inheritance, and as learning to recognize the varieties of human utterance and to participate in the conversation they compose’ (Oakeshott, 1991 [1962], p. 188). We may then seek out higher education to deepen our understanding of one or more of these voices, to learn the most famous utterances in its key, and to enjoy the conversation we have learned how to conduct. The danger here is that the very process of deepening our mastery of our chosen idiom will remove us from the conversation. As we progress in our studies, intramural debates may begin to supplant true conversational encounters.³ What Iris Murdoch says of her own field—‘I think it is an abiding and not regrettable characteristic of the discipline, that philosophy has in a sense to keep trying to return to the beginning, a thing not at all easy to do’—is true of other subjects as well (Murdoch, 1985 [1964], p. 1).

In this way, Murdoch and Oakeshott help us to articulate one of the goods internal to the practice of teaching.⁴ When Oakeshott says that children are great conversationalists, he does not mean that they are friendly and chatty, he means that they are interested in the different ‘voices’, that they are interested in self-understanding, and they have not yet learned the pernicious adult distinction between labour and leisure. They still know how to be serious in their play and playful in their seriousness. Thus, working with children enables one to return to the beginning Murdoch describes. Teaching offers a constant check against the dominance of one voice, and against the tendency for the great human questions to become mere academic topics. Teaching forces one to see one’s discipline from the eyes of the uninitiated and to ponder how the voice of one’s discipline contributes to the conversation. Teaching provides teachers with opportunities, as Dewey would say, for ‘growing in childlikeness’ (Dewey, 1916, p. 50).

In addition to attending to learners and to what is to be learned, teachers also attend to learning itself. That is to say that the work of teachers constantly puts them in touch with questions about the ends and means of human development. This interest connects them in turn to a third conversation with educators and educational thinkers past and present. Here we recall Joe Dunne’s retort to MacIntyre that teaching is graced by a long and rich tradition. Scholars such as Dunne and David Hansen point out that to teach is to join a practice constituted in part by a conversation including some of the most important thinkers in Western intellectual history, figures such as Socrates, Augustine, Vico, and Addams (see, for example, Hansen, 2001, p. 63; see also, pp. 9, 119 and 151).

Because of what they notice, then, teachers have access to three of the richest conversations we know. Such conversations expand the world of the teacher beyond the present ‘marking period’ to the precarious future of our cultural projects and the deep past of human debates.⁵ Indeed, if David Blacker is correct, access to these conversations enables teachers to attain a kind of immortality (see Blacker, 1997; for an ethnographic study on the same theme, see Barone, 2001).⁶

BATCH PROCESSING, KITSCH CULTURE, AND OTHER OBSTACLES TO TEACHER VOCATION

This conclusion strikes a hopeful note, but lest it float away like a colourful balloon inscribed with a Hallmark sentiment, we must tether it to the ground with several weighty caveats. Put it this way: the conclusion above—that teaching is a rich effective world whose dimensions are measured by the breadth of our ongoing dialogues between the generations, across the disciplines, and about the means and ends of human development—holds only as long as teaching maintains its purposiveness and continuity. Unfortunately, neither of these basic ingredients of the vocation of teaching

can be taken for granted in the surroundings of schools. (Here we pick up where Chapter 6 left off, with its initial study of the working conditions of teachers; now that we have a sense of the teacher's environment, we may deepen our understanding of school, investigating how the teacher's surroundings impact the enactment of vocation.)

The purposiveness of teachers is assailed from multiple directions. Perhaps it is our society's backhanded way of acknowledging the importance of education that so many struggle to define and control its purposes. In any case, it is no wonder that teachers lose ownership over educational aims amidst the directives and invectives of administrators, parents, politicians, and educational researchers. As Willard Waller put it in his landmark study, 'the school is a despotism in a state of perilous equilibrium . . . threatened from within and exposed to regulation from without . . . resting upon children, at once the most intractable and most unstable members of the community' (Waller, 1932, p. 10). 'The authority of the school executives and the teachers', Waller explains, 'is in unremitting danger from: (1) The students. (2) Parents. (3) The school board. (4) Each other. (5) Hangers-on and marginal members of the group. (6) Alumni.' (pp. 10–11). The radical heteronomy of the teaching profession creates a vicious circle: 'the school is continually threatened because it is autocratic, and it has to be autocratic because continually threatened' (p. 11).⁷

Now one could argue that what matters is not whether teachers have a voice in matters of educational policy writ large but whether they retain contact with the finer-grained purposes embedded in the practice of teaching. Dewey himself stressed this point, drawing his famous distinction between 'ends-in-view' and ideals that are 'abstract or remote' (see, e.g., Dewey, 1916, chap. 8). The former are 'an outgrowth of existing conditions' taking into account 'the resources and difficulties of the situation'; the latter are 'externally supplied ends' which are 'ready-made' and 'foreign to the concrete make-up of the situation' (p. 104). According to Dewey, ends-in-view simultaneously afford a sense of direction, a quickening of intelligent observation, and an increase in flexibility and freedom. In contrast, policy statements or 'theories about the proper end of our activities' lead to various 'evils' such as rigidity, 'haphazard snatching at immediate conditions' (pp. 104, 105, 105), and depreciation of the present (pp. 106 and *passim*).

Later in this chapter, we will test this idea of Dewey's, exploring how teachers might become genuine participants in a conversation about fundamental educational aims. For now, let us simply note that Dewey's alternative does not appear to solve our problem, since the majority of contemporary teachers would seem to be alienated even from the purposiveness embedded in pedagogy. Recall MacIntyre's distinction between practices and institutions (see above, pp. 73–78) and our application of it to teaching (see above, pp. 185–189 and 198–202). In too many schools, teachers spend the majority of their time assisting in the mechanics of the institution. The effort to keep students in school, move them between classes, and maintain order within

classes can be so consuming that the practice of teaching barely gets underway. To a Deweyan eye, the irony of so much of modern schooling is that it seems well described by the following progression: step 1, interrupt the ongoing engagements of the young, which because interested bring with them their own internal discipline; step 2, bring external discipline ('classroom management') to bear on the restless and random poking at their surroundings that inevitably follows step 1; step 3, work to motivate the now docile students. Between the twin tasks of classroom management and motivating students, it is a wonder that any teaching gets done.⁸ And I have not yet even mentioned the elephant in the classroom. Over the past decade or two, with the rise of the standards/accountability/high-stakes-testing movement, we have watched the practice of teaching be even further displaced by the institutional activities of testing and test preparation.

We can extend this analysis of the forces attenuating the purposiveness of teachers by making a distinction between collective purposes and individual projects. As members of a common practice, teachers will share many purposes. Teachers of the humanities, for instance, may share the intention of generating a conversational space in which students think about their own world in the foreign terms of a (historically removed, linguistically novel, or culturally other) text. Teachers who share this purpose will also share a certain kind of attentiveness. They may notice, for example, when the conversation becomes too academic (as if the world of the text were hermetically sealed with no connection to our own) or too self-involved (as if the text were just an excuse to talk about what already interests us in the way we are already accustomed to talk).

On the other hand, all of the long-standing practices have offered, along with such common concerns and sensibilities, the opportunity to distinguish oneself as a practitioner. Distinctiveness tends to accompany excellence in practice, and there is nothing paradoxical about this. In MacIntyre's account, for instance, practitioners must initially submit themselves to the terms, standards, and tradition of practices if they are eventually to use these practical languages in their own quest to lead a distinctive and meaningful life. Here is where we encounter education's nagging asceticism as we considered it in Chapter 5. Finding room for an existential project amidst modern institutions is challenging enough. The ethos of education seems to suggest that the very attempt is beside the point or beyond the pale. This too often leaves teachers, Maxine Greene observes, 'uncertain what it means to realize an ideal of the self' (Greene, 1987, p. 180).

Matters stand no better when it comes to continuity. In Chapter 4, we noted with John Dewey that the continuity of experience can be compromised by repetition or fragmentation (see above, pp. 123–124). A continuous activity avoids both extremes, developing over time through a series of discrete but closely linked episodes reaching a genuine conclusion rather than a mere cessation (Dewey, 1980 [1934], chap. 3). Observers of the teaching profession from Waller (1932) to Jackson (1990 [1968]) and Lortie (1975) have found

teaching plagued by precisely these problems, being too often chaotic, repetitive, and lacking in closure.⁹ The flow of teaching is disrupted every 45 or 50 minutes by the ringing of bells and, as Jackson notes, even within each class the continuity of teaching is compromised by 'countless interruptions and petty delays' (Jackson, 1990 [1968], p. 169). Jackson attributes this problem to the 'crowded conditions of the classroom' offering this honest summary of the classroom experience: 'Here then are four unpublicised features of school life: delay, denial, interruption, and social distraction' (p. 17). As noted in earlier chapters, Jackson once quantified the rapidity with which teachers must change the focus of their attention, noting that teachers had hundreds of interactions per hour resulting in a truly 'kaleidoscopic' (p. 149) experience, finding that the teachers in his study had 'as many as 1000 interpersonal interchanges each day' (p. 11). (For a phenomenology of classroom temporality, see Roth, 2002, chap. 1.)

That the experience of teaching can be disjointed does not stop it from also being monotonous in certain respects. Lieberman and Miller evoke the assembly line feel of modern schooling well when they write:

Because of the large number of students in any given high school, 'batch processing' is the order of the day. So that students can be processed in batches, schools divide their days into discrete units of time for the purpose of distinct subject matter instruction. Students and teachers move through the building in mass, and they move every 50 minutes or so on the average of six times a day. Most students meet with five teachers a day and with any number of students in separate classrooms (Lieberman and Miller, 1984, p. 40; quoting Cusick, 1973).

Decades earlier, Waller had made a similar observation about the 'simple, changeless rhythms' of teaching, surmising that 'teaching, perhaps, exceeds other professions only in the unvarying quality of these rhythms and the tightness with which they are bound together' (Waller, 1932, p. 394). In this 'extreme routinization', Waller sees the seeds of several pathologies to which teachers are prone (p. 395). He worries that these 'routine situations which the teacher confronts give rise to routine habits of social expression' and to a general loss of responsiveness and adaptability (p. 392). It is an occupational hazard of teaching, Waller argues, that one may become rigid, didactic, narrow, and lose one's inventiveness and appetite for learning (pp. 392–395).

Teaching also makes it difficult to attain a feeling of closure. In most crafts, Dan Lortie points out, one has a pretty good sense of what one is trying to accomplish, what is effective to that end, when the work is complete, whether it has been completed successfully, and what one has wrought. By contrast, Lortie writes, 'the teacher's craft . . . is marked by the absence of concrete models for emulation, unclear lines of influence, multiple and controversial criteria, ambiguity about assessment timing, and instability in the product' (since the learner continues to change). Though teachers may see current

students make strides, and may even receive an occasional letter or visit from a former student, the exact effects of their large influence may never be known with any certainty. Unlike, say, carpenters, teachers rarely get to see the ‘end result’ of their work, making it difficult for them to experience the consummatory moments that contribute to the wholeness of experience.

There is a circular rhythm to teaching. At the end of a class, students move on to the next level while the teacher turns back to page one and begins again with a new group of students. And this ‘groundhog day’ phenomenon is echoed by the relative lack of ‘career staging’ in teaching noted by most commentators on the profession (for example, Lortie, 1975, pp. 83–86; McLaughlin and Yee, 1998; Johnson, 1990, pp. 282–284). A recent research review suggests that efforts to add differentiated roles and career ladders to this ‘historically flat, undifferentiated profession’ may not have amounted to a ‘substantive change’ (Johnson *et al.*, 2005, p. 93). Career advancement in teaching still typically means leaving the profession for administration or research.

A vocational frame, an activity with purposiveness and continuity, can call forth an effective environment from our inert surroundings, can put us into conversation with aspects of the world that might have remained mute. And we identified three such conversations afforded by the multidimensional vocation of teaching. However, we have now seen that as institutionalised, the continuity and purposiveness of teachers is often severely compromised. This deactivates the vocational environment and narrows the teacher’s world.

And there is another feature of school culture that we must consider, one that makes it difficult for teachers to find their voice in any of these conversations. The ethos of modern schooling is pervaded by what Maxine Greene, following Milan Kundera, calls ‘kitsch’. As Greene sees it:

Teachers are also afflicted by the pressure of a distinctive kitsch, a kitsch associated with the occupational culture of too many schools. There is a glossing over of too many uncertainties and inequities; there is dependence on received knowledge; there is a felt need, if not to be ‘properly joyful’, at least to seem to be in ‘proper agreement’ (Greene, 1987, p. 180; quoting from Kundera, 1984, p. 249)

Here Greene pinpoints a truly troubling feature of the world of education. Schools are awash in banality and sentiment; educational writing is often thin and ‘inspirational’. This undoubtedly produces its share of teachers prone to sentimentality. As Waller observes, ‘the teacher must live in a world of childish attitudes and values, and comes himself to live in it part way’ (Waller, 1932, p. 392). However, many teachers save themselves from this fate with a defensive cynicism. After all, as Greene notes:

. . . most teachers know the meanings of the slogans and pieties they hear on loudspeaker systems and the proclamations they read on bulletin boards,

reminders of the glorious purposes pursued by the institution. What teacher has seen anything sacred in the corridors? Do the things called 'glorious' have glory (Greene, 1973, p. 271)?

According to Kundera's development of the concept in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, kitsch grows out of the urge to assert one's 'categorical agreement' with existence, leading one to deny all those aspects of reality which are troubling or disagreeable' (Kundera, 1984, pp. 248ff). This leads Kundera to his remarkable definition: 'kitsch is the absolute denial of shit, in both the literal and figurative senses of the word; kitsch excludes everything from its purview which is essentially unacceptable in human existence' (ibid.). What emerges in Kundera's analysis is that kitsch serves the function of keeping the voiceless mute. It accomplishes this not by overt acts of silencing, but by conjuring a world in which there is nothing to say. Political kitsch (for Kundera) and institutional kitsch (for Greene) present a world in which all questions are already answered, all feelings hollow, and all statements tautologous. 'Long live life' says the banner at Kundera's grand march; 'every child deserves a chance' says the school bulletin board. Dewey viewed such slogans, whether or not they mention freedom and equality, as a danger to reflective thinking and thus to democracy. He saw 'social pathology . . . in idealization of the long established, in a facile optimism, in riotous glorification of "things as they are"' (Dewey, 1954 [1927], pp. 170–171; quoted in Greene, 1998, p. viii).

Whether or not educational kitsch threatens democracy, it seems clear that it compromises teachers' ability to find their voice in the three conversations I described earlier. Whistling in the dark, we perpetuate the myths of social progress, content knowledge, and educational science. Afraid to look at what is irrational, impoverished, and lifeless in our cultural inheritance, we fail to notice what might renew that inheritance, the natality of our students. Clinging to stories with happy endings, we overlook the true source of hope, the disruptive beginnings represented by our students (for a helpful discussion of natality, teaching, and hope, see Edgoose, 2010). If it is the myth of social progress that impedes Arendt's conversation across the generations, it is the myth of content knowledge that derails the conversation described by Oakeshott. Afraid to admit that there are no final answers to the important questions, we pile up meaningless facts and reduce the disciplinary conversation to the dull monotone of the textbook. Finally, it may be our fear of uncertainty in practice that leads us to reduce the age-old educational questions to pedagogical methods. Whether or not this assuages teachers' anxiety is not clear, but it certainly alienates teachers from the searching figures in the millennial conversation about how we know and what is worth knowing, about how we grow and what it is worth growing into.

In sum, the environment of teaching is potentially quite rich and capacious, but its purposiveness and continuity are threatened by its modern ethos and institutional home. Teaching involves a series of conversations that have collapsed or threaten to do so. What is needed is practical wisdom, the

hermeneutic art of the dialogue, to help teachers widen the aperture opened by their vocation. In Chapter 4, we saw how such openness had a particular structure, the structure of a question. Thus, our next task is to consider what it might mean to think of education as inherently bound up with questioning. From there, we will go on to consider how teacher education might be rethought with the teacher's questioning stance and ethical prospect as a priority.

THE SYNTAX OF EDUCATIONAL CLAIMS

To see education as a space of questions will require a significant act of reframing since we typically think of education in terms of problems and solutions, nuts and bolts. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that education somehow manages to be simultaneously prone to intellectualisation and anti-intellectualism. The problem of intellectualism is tied up with the dynamics of professionalization. In its bid for professionalism, teaching (like all would-be professions) has staked part of its bid for jurisdiction and autonomy on the idea that it commands a body of detachable, expert knowledge. By detachable, I mean capable of being codified, taught didactically, and so on. In his already classic study of *The System of Professions*, Andrew Abbott points to the importance of abstraction and formalisation in seizing and defending professional turf, (Abbott, 1988, pp. 102–108). As Abbott puts it:

The ability of a profession to sustain its jurisdictions lies partly in the power and prestige of its academic knowledge. This prestige reflects the public's mistaken belief that abstract professional knowledge is continuous with practical professional knowledge, and hence that prestigious abstract knowledge implies effective professional work. In fact, the true use of academic knowledge is less practical than symbolic (pp. 53–54).¹⁰

No one would deny that part of what makes a good teacher is what they *know* about how to teach certain subjects to certain students in certain contexts. But their knowing is closely connected with their doing, and it is a sham to back-order from this tacit knowledge a set of explicit principles which the teacher is supposedly following. I touched on this point earlier, quoting Dunne's distaste for the 'bloatedness' typical of so much pedagogical discourse (see above, p. 193). Pedagogical success, and in this teaching is not particularly different from other practices and learned professions, hinges on one's knowledge of how such explicit principles apply in concrete situations. This requires practical wisdom, that linchpin of the virtues we described in Chapter 4.¹¹ The move from practice to 'theory' typically involves a tremendous loss of nuance, indeed of wisdom, but this is just what intellectualism denies. Instead of being presented as something humble, acknowledging its inevitable simplicity and frequent banality, 'theory' is puffed up with pretensions of scientific exactness or theoretical sophistication. I put 'theory' in quotes

because theory itself is a practice, or set of practices, and true theorists possess their own forms of practical wisdom. Too often what passes for theory in educational discourse is the mere recitation of the names of theorists, theories, and concepts rather than the actual craft of theorising.

Unfortunately, being prone to intellectualisation does not immunise us from anti-intellectualism, and the culture of schools and education departments, it must be admitted, shows symptoms of this malady as well. By anti-intellectualism I mean a marked preference for the cut-and-dried that sometimes reveals itself as an aggressive know-nothing attitude and verifiable delight in the banal. That any learned profession, let alone the one concerned with learning, would be prone to anti-intellectualism is more than a little bit ironic. In part, this attitude may be seen as an understandable reaction to the over-intellectualisation just described. The problem is that over-intellectualisation plus anti-intellectualism does not equal a vibrant intellectual life. It simply makes it twice as hard to be a genuine intellectual in education. What do I mean by a genuine intellectual? I simply mean someone who seeks breadth and depth on matters of genuine human concern, someone who prizes complexity, open questions, and genuine insight. The intellectual has what Keats called 'negative capability' or the ability to remain in a state of doubt and uncertainty 'without any irritable reaching after fact & reason' (Keats, 2002 [1817], pp. 41–42).

To some, the word 'intellectual' may conjure up images of an expert on one brick in the edifice of knowledge or someone prone to discourse polysyllabically on arcana. It should be clear, however, that I am not equating the intellectual and the scholar. Indeed, there is more than a grain of truth in Nietzsche's observation that being a humane intellectual and flourishing in the modern research university are two very different things. Here are a few excerpts from Nietzsche's blistering portrait of the scholarly type: 'keenness of sight for near objects, combined with great myopia for the remote and universal'; 'staid conventionality in his likes and dislikes'; 'poverty of feeling and insensitivity'; 'dread of . . . disapproval'; an approach to ideas that is 'icy or lukewarm'; a passionate interest in 'salaries and promotions'; a 'fear of boredom' that leads the scholar into a 'monstrous' industry and a tendency to 'become compilers, commentators, makers of indices and herbaria'; and so on (Nietzsche, 1990 [1874], pp. 205–207).

In calling for the teacher as intellectual, then, I am certainly not suggesting that schoolteachers should be more like professors.¹² One does find intellectuals, as I have defined them, in academe but that is far from all one finds there,¹³ and the academy is far from the only place intellectuals are found.¹⁴ Intellectuals seem to be spread pretty evenly, and sometimes it seems too thinly, across all departments of the human scene. While we might hope that the profession of teaching would be the exception to this rule, constituting an oasis for negative capability and the appetite for complexity, anti-intellectualism seems to have a strong foothold in the culture of teaching. One partial explanation begins from the observation that teaching tends to

attract ‘people who are favourably disposed toward the existing system of schooling’ (Lortie, 1975, p. 56). This is a system, I think it is fair to say, that on the whole promotes intellectual docility, conformity, and rigidity rather than active, independent thinking and an appetite for ambiguity. Schools have been called ‘sorting machines’ (Spring, 1976) because of the way they reproduce class distinctions, but we might add that schools seem also to select for those with a high tolerance for the clear-cut and the conventional. Held hostage for years by worksheets, textbooks, and multiple-choice tests, the teacher decides to remain in the classroom, suggesting the possibility of a pedagogical Stockholm syndrome.

How can we avoid both this anti-intellectualism and its mirror image, an artificially intellectualised discourse? What does it mean to be a genuine intellectual in education? Based on my definition of the intellectual, the basic answer seems clear. The educational intellectual resists the urge to treat every uncertainty as a problem to be solved and shows a concern for the questions that define our field, questions that stand to put one in touch with the complexity and interest of the practice, and indeed the world. But what are these questions? After all, isn’t education simply a cluster of applied social sciences that have sprung up around a particular instrumental institution (i.e. schools)? It is one thing to talk about open-ended questioning in the liberal arts or even in the basic sciences, but isn’t such talk out of place here?

This is a reasonable objection and to deal with it adequately will require a fundamental rethinking of what education is. Attempting to define education is notoriously difficult. Given the sheer diversity of educational aims and institutions (not to mention the fact that formal education probably constitutes only a small part of education as a whole), one faces a dilemma. If the definition is at all precise, it risks being wildly controversial, excluding by fiat many things that others consider to be prime candidates of ‘educationalness’. However, in attempting to be inclusive, we risk a definition so general that it is completely vague and uninformative. For reasons that will become clear in a moment, I will choose to impale myself on the second horn of the dilemma.¹⁵ Indeed, in order to be sure that my definition is as broad as possible, I will build it not around the noun ‘education’—which may have a built-in bias toward formal processes and institutional structures—but will opt instead for the more open-ended adjective ‘educative’. And here is the definition I propose: *Something is educative if it facilitates human flourishing.*

As you can see, this definition is intentionally formalistic. The most determinate part of it, human flourishing, we have already seen, quite intentionally begs the question. To know that I must pursue my *eudaimonia* is to know that I must seek to understand my *eudaimonia*: it is to confront Socrates’ question.¹⁶ My definition is not meant to answer Socrates’ question but to show that it arises whenever someone sets out to get or give an education. And this is true of the other parts of the definition as well. As a whole, it describes the form, the syntax if you will, of educational claims. It not a substantive, prescriptive definition meant to adjudicate such claims. It

merely foregrounds what we are doing when we claim that something is educative; we are describing a relationship between four terms: *something*, *facilitates*, *human*, and *flourishing*.

To venture an actual educational claim, one must fill in each of these terms with something more determinate. Each of the placeholders I have chosen is provocatively ambiguous, starting with 'something' which is the definition of indefinite. This term reminds us to ask: what (or who) educates?¹⁷ There are many possible claimants to educative power: solitude or relation (parenting, teaching, friendship or therapy?); work, play, study or travel; nature or culture (canonical works or everyday culture? creation or reception? same- or cross-cultural engagement?); language, discourse, or medium; institutions or practices (games, arts, sciences, humanities, or trades?); texts, experiences, environments or exemplars; novelty or repetition, success or frustration; exploration, instruction, observation, creation, conversation or meditation; the logical or the beautiful, the rule or the exception, the mundane or the transcendent.

The term 'facilitate' is also meant to be generic, leading us to ask whether the educative usually comes in the form of freeing or shaping; shepherding or provoking; modelling, witnessing or dialoguing; enriching, preserving or winnowing; instructing, coaching, initiating or curing; or something else altogether?

A moment ago, I looked at 'human flourishing' as a phrase, but now I would like to consider these two words 'human' and 'flourishing' separately, each of which stands as another syntactical placeholder. The word 'human' in this definition explicitly begs the question of who is being educated. How do we understand the student of this proposed education? What are we assuming about what a human being is, can do, or needs? What parts of a human being do we deem educable and in need of education: body or soul; heart or mind; character, desires, emotions, self-understanding, imagination, or reason?

The word 'flourishing' stands to remind us that you cannot educate without some conception of what it means to be educated; you cannot say someone is growing up without some sense, however tacit, of what maturity looks like. Our educational aims are informed by ideals of the educated person which are themselves embedded in broader normative frameworks, in visions of human flourishing. I say visions, plural, because here again disagreements run deep. One person will say that flourishing means security and prosperity; another will counter that it means risk and adventure; a third will contend that it means reducing one's carbon footprint. Do we best realise ourselves through inwardness and contemplation or through relation and practical engagement? Should a human life be measured by richness of experience, generosity to others, depth of insight, purity of motive, excellence of achievement? What is the most important thing to consider when trying to answer Socrates' question: pleasure, virtue, joy, wisdom, freedom, fidelity, open-mindedness, transcendence, urbanity, authenticity?

Thus, far from trying to settle once and for all the question of what education is (as if the question is perpetually open), the point of defining the educative in this way is to remind us to pose the questions which usually get

begged. It is a definition built to stage *disagreements*, a word which suggests neither settled answers nor radical incommensurability. The vagueness of the terms of my definition invites a diversity of replies, but at the same time collects those replies into one conversation. So far we have dealt with the educative, but it is this conversation, I want to claim, that constitutes education itself. *Education is the ongoing conversation taking place in the space opened by the question of what best facilitates human flourishing; it consists of the explicit and implicit answers, described and enacted, by those theorists, practitioners, and theorist/practitioners who feel called to join the conversation.*

To claim that something is educative, then, is to encounter rival claims and to be propelled into a space of questions. I use the plural because clearly one need not explicitly or directly pose the question ‘What facilitates human flourishing?’ to participate. The point of listing the many alternative ways of taking each of the basic terms of the definition was to show that there are an endless number of smaller questions that flow from and illuminate this central question. In order to have a dialogue across differences, though, the participants must share enough in common to constitute their differences as such; otherwise interlocutors merely talk past, and never quite to, one another. On the other hand, if one circumscribes too closely at the outset what there is to disagree about, one risks excluding from the conversation precisely those voices which promise to expand a debate narrowed by its unexamined assumptions. This is where what I called the syntax of educational claims comes in. In defining the educative as what facilitates human flourishing I have tried to pitch, as it were, a tent capacious enough to welcome the widest diversity of interlocutors who nonetheless still have enough in common to converse. This tent, to continue the metaphor, is staked down at three points, corresponding to the three key terms in my definition: ‘facilitate’, ‘human’, and ‘flourishing’ (under facilitation, I am now consolidating what educates and how it does). Each suggests a question, or cluster of questions, implied in all theory and practice: in institutional arrangements, curricular designs, pedagogical strategies, educational policies. To be involved in education means taking a stand on some form of all three of these interconnected questions. It is to ask, ‘what is our nature, what constitutes individual and collective human flourishing, and what moves us toward this good given our condition? This compound question helps us to articulate the broad contours of educational inquiry, as illustrated in a figure I call the educational-philosophical triangle (see Figure 9a).

THE SHAPE OF HUMANISTIC CONVERSATION

According to the model I have proposed, three types of questions often thought to be distinct—the philosophical anthropological, the ethico-political, and the pedagogical—are in fact intimately related for they are all aspects of the basic educational question. To this the sceptical may reply that while it is all well and good to say that educators may want to consider the

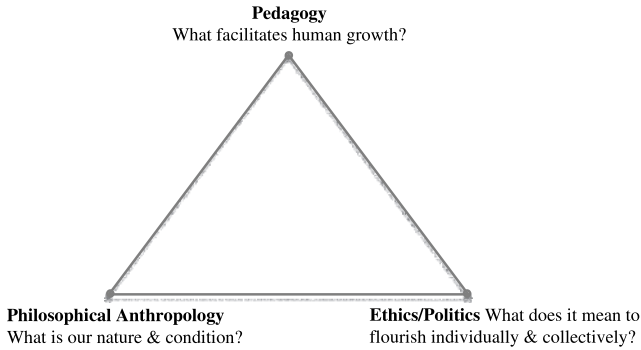


Figure 9a: The educational-philosophical triangle

humanistic questions I've placed on the bottom of the triangle, to call all three categories educational does not seem accurate. My response is that in linking one obviously educational question with two traditionally humanistic ones, I am simultaneously reminding the humanities of their educational roots and reminding education of its humanistic dimensions. To bear this out, let us consider further the nature of each question, why each is inescapable for educators, and how all three are interconnected.

First, let us consider the ethical vertex of the triangle.¹⁸ As we noted above, our efforts to provoke and foster growth in human beings always rely on more or less worked-out notions of what constitutes human flourishing. Without a vision of the good life for human beings, one would not be able to make the countless qualitative educational decisions all educators must make. When teachers decide to adopt this tone rather than that, or to include one activity rather than another, they do so because they think that it will be better for their students. But 'better' is just a way of saying 'closer to good', and about matters of good there are no easy answers. Thus, underneath even seemingly superficial educational choices lie profound normative questions. Without some idea of what one ought to be developing into, how could we say whether a given change is for the better? When we strive to help someone mature, we rely on a vision of maturity. When we instruct, we rely on a vision of what it is important to learn, and therefore on what constitutes a truly educated person. Such issues open out in turn onto the fundamental questions of ethics: What makes life meaningful or rich? What are the most important human virtues and what does excellence in these areas look like? What is the collective good? How ought we best to live together? Whether or not educators pose these questions for themselves, they must at the very least have disposed of them with some received answer, for no one can attempt to foster human growth without the guidance of a vision of human flourishing, individually or collectively.

Does this mean that I am equating education with applied ethics? Yes, but only if we add that ethics is nothing other than 'implied education'.¹⁹ By itself, the phrase 'applied ethics' suggests that education is but an

afterthought, an auxiliary to some sort of pure inquiry into the good. Indeed, philosophical ethics has too often confined itself to such questions about the good in and of itself, as if how we *become* just, wide-awake, true to ourselves, and so on, were just a matter of working out the details. To be clear, I am not saying that there are two separate but equal sorts of questions: educational questions about the means of growth and ethical questions about the ends of growth. Rather questions about our becoming are the very ground of ethical inquiry. Philosophical ethics represents not a purification, but a reification of one part of the full educational-ethical conversation. One cannot truly understand human flourishing in advance of, or abstraction from, our efforts to become someone admirable or foster human development in others. Just as our visions of human flourishing inform our pedagogies, so our knowledge of what brings us closer to the good stands to teach us something about the good itself.

It is for this reason that I have I labelled the top vertex of the triangle ‘pedagogy’ rather than ‘education’: questions about what facilitates growth are just one aspect of the broader educational conversation. As I noted above, there are two closely related types of questions here: questions about what might constitute the prime catalyst of development (relationships, environments, texts, etc.) and questions about what metaphor best captures this catalysis (nurturing, instructing, challenging, etc.). It is one thing to ask what sort of book best instructs us and quite another altogether to ask what sort of relationship provokes us. Furthermore, each of these is likely to be connected with a different vision of the good. For example, we may search for the most instructive books with an aim towards becoming learned, and gravitate toward those relationships most likely to provoke us to insight and self-knowledge. The point is that we cannot know in advance what might plausibly be deemed educative. If someone claims that something is educative—memorising a poem, travelling abroad, interpreting one’s dreams—then we will be interested in whether the person advancing the claim is able to offer a compelling account of how and why.

So far, we have accounted for the words ‘facilitate’ and ‘flourishing’, noting that an educational account must include both an understanding of the principal agent and mechanism of change and a vision of what it is good to become. Here we must add a third coordinate to this map of educational questions. I used the word ‘human’ to refer to, without settling, debates about who or what is being educated, about the nature, needs, and capacities of our intended students. If someone argues that there is no such thing as a ‘student’, only distinct individuals or members of certain identity groups, they are doing philosophical anthropology and proving the point that such considerations are inescapable. Educators may believe that each person is unique and must be so addressed, may hold that humans are cultural animals sharing much within subcultures but little across cultural lines, or may subscribe to a stage theory of human development. Underneath the differences lies the fact that every educational action and document is laden with assumptions about who we are and why we need

education, about which parts of human beings are capable of education and which are recalcitrant. To theorise or practice education is to join the long conversation I am calling philosophical anthropology, wrestling with such questions as: What makes us tick? What are our fundamental capacities, needs, and frailties? What is the human condition? What is human nature? Are we essentially rational, appetitive, or imaginative beings, or are we so essentially cultural or historical in nature that no such generalisations across time and place are justified? This is not to suggest, of course, that educators do or should think about these questions in such abstract and grand terms. Educators are doing philosophical anthropology when they talk about ‘children’, ‘character’, or ‘emotional needs’, or when they justify their actions with reference to what a first-grader can handle, how to teach students with learning disabilities, how boys and girls learn differently, what reaches an angry student, and so on.

In a moment, we will look closely at the relationship between the bottom two vertices of the triangle, but I would like to make one observation straight away. Though all educational theories have both an anthropology and a vision of flourishing, one or the other may be left implicit. For example, developmental psychology is often introduced into educational debates as if data about how we develop could alone settle the question of how we should educate. What we should develop into is left more or less implicit. At other times, it is the ethical or political ideal that is foregrounded with key assumptions about our nature and condition operating in the background. Behind the calls to educate citizens, virtuosos, or critical thinkers lie assumptions about ‘savages’, ‘raw talent’, or ‘false consciousness’. We could say of the educator what we would say of the sculptor, that the tools chosen and the shapes attempted are different if one works in marble or clay. Or we could reject as inherently miseducative this metaphor of teaching as moulding and carving. But notice that our critique will rely on some other vision of the human condition, holding that human beings are essentially free, dignified, guided by an inner *daimon*, or subject to some natural logic of development. One cannot educate without taking some stand in the sub-conversation I have been calling philosophical anthropology.

We have just seen some examples of how conceptions of human nature and human flourishing become intertwined in our educational thinking, but let us consider the matter more closely. After all, contemporary philosophy is divided into sub-fields with some philosophers doing political theory, others working in philosophy of mind, and others specialising in ethics. In Part I of *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor (1989) challenges the tenability of this division of philosophical labour, developing compelling arguments for the interdependence of ethical and philosophical-anthropological views.²⁰ Taylor’s first argument begins with the observation that the ‘most urgent and powerful cluster of demands we recognize as moral’ involves respect for the life and integrity of other people (p. 4). These demands are often experienced on a purely ‘gut level’, but also always involve, according to Taylor, ‘acknowledgments of claims concerning their objects’ (p. 7). This means that in making moral

judgments or in feeling moral emotions we are relying on a variety of rich and complex (though rarely articulated) notions about the way things are. These embedded views are 'ontological' in nature, concerning what exists and how it fits together in the largest sense. Taylor chooses the example of the sanctity of human life to highlight one constant component of these pocket ontologies we carry around, namely, a conception of human beings that helps us to recognise human beings as such and to understand why their lives are valuable. We might think that being human means having an immortal soul, being a locus of reason, or possessing a distinctive voice: the point is that some explicit or implicit assumptions about what makes us human are required to make moral judgments.

Taylor does not rest his case here, though, realising that it begs an important question. If moral judgments involve substantive ideals, relying on thick background beliefs about the way things are, then part of this ontological background will concern philosophical anthropology. But Taylor recognises that this is a big 'if' since many deny that moral judgments require this sort of philosophical heavy lifting. In one common conception—call it philosophical naturalism allied to moral subjectivism—morality is seen as a set of internalised taboos to help society run smoothly, or the projection of subjective preferences onto the world. To proponents of this view, ontological accounts of human nature and flourishing are worse than irrelevant to ethics, they are pre-modern, metaphysical fairy tales that rational people must learn to do without.

In light of this objection, Taylor launches a second argument, shifting from an external question about moral obligation (how ought one treat other human beings?) to an internal, ethical perspective. Like Williams, Taylor thinks that most of the strong evaluations we make in our lives extend beyond morality proper. When we wonder whether our lives are meaningful or rich, worry about our dignity or happiness or virtue, or otherwise wrestle what shape we should give our lives, we are engaged in ethical if not strictly moral reflection. Thus, Taylor is working against the modern 'naturalist temper' that would discount such prime ethical considerations as mere aesthetic preference or spiritual bunk (p. 19). Taylor calls this second argument both phenomenological and transcendental: phenomenological because it proceeds from common elements of felt experience; transcendental because it then asks what must be the case in order for these to be elements of our experience (p. 32).

The phenomenological observation is that people often ask themselves the puzzling question 'who am I?'. It is puzzling because one would think that one wouldn't have to ask or that one would need only recall one's 'name and genealogy' (p. 27). This leads Taylor to the following transcendental deduction: 'the condition of there being an identity crisis is precisely that our identities define the space of qualitative distinctions in which we live and choose' (p. 30). Identity would not be such a salient category for us were it not for the ethical distinctions the notion of identity embodies, if one's identity

was not something that one could be true to, betray, and so on. The question of identity cannot be answered with name, rank, and serial number since it asks not only who one is but where one stands in relation to one what cares about and whether one has devoted oneself to the right things.

Thus, the process of understanding ourselves (philosophical anthropology) cannot be conducted without the use of strongly evaluative distinctions (ethics). As Taylor puts it:

What this brings to light is the essential link between identity and a kind of orientation. To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial or secondary (p. 28).

The point of the transcendental argument is to show the unreality of the naturalist scepticism about whether such thick, background frameworks exist. Human life is already full of doubt, marked by sequences of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation. However, such self-doubt only makes sense in the context of our background assumptions about what matters. Thus, to doubt the existence of the frameworks themselves makes little sense.

Taylor deepens this link between identity and strong evaluation through a second, related phenomenological observation: we make sense of ourselves through stories, we 'grasp our lives as a narrative' (p. 47). 'What I am', Taylor writes, 'has to be understood as what I have become' and in relation to 'what I project to become' (ibid.). Consider an analogy involving three characters, whom we will call A, B, and C. On a GPS device, we can confirm that all three are currently at a gas station in Toledo. But we don't really know where they are until we learn more about their stories. It turns out that A lives in Toledo and works at this gas station every day. B is heading from New York to Wisconsin and just happens to have pulled over for gas. C grew up in Toledo, left after high school and has come back for the first time in twenty years because her dad is dying. My sense of who I am is dependent on my sense of where I am and this in turn requires that I tell myself a coherent narrative about where I have been and where I am going. Or as Taylor puts it, 'our condition can never be exhausted for us by what we *are*, because we are always changing and *becoming*' (ibid.). The question emerges always for humans, 'Becoming what?' When we ask ourselves, 'What have I become?' we do not do so with the cold neutrality of the laboratory scientist. We mean, 'Where do I stand in relation to the good?' Such stories are always ethical stories, even if not always explicitly so. The normative dimension may appear in the guise of humble adverb or vague adjective. However, when we report that we are 'doing well' or 'feeling stuck', ethical ideals are lurking in the background.

Here we need to consider Taylor's distinction between weak and strong notions of evaluation. On the weak theory, we deem things good because we

prefer them; on the strong theory, we prefer things because we deem them good. Taylor describes a ladder of strong evaluation from qualitative distinctions of better and worse, to the goods which help one explain why something is better or worse, to the hypergoods which organise a person's goods (see, e.g., p. 63). 'Orientation to the good', Taylor writes, is 'not an optional extra' (p. 68) for making sense of our lives and there is no such thing as a human life that makes absolutely no sense to the person who lives it (p. 68). What is basic, then, to every human life as it is lived, Taylor concludes, is the operation of, more or less explicit, substantive ethical categories. For Taylor, then, there are two closely related questions that necessarily arise for all persons: 'Who am I?' and 'Where do I stand in relation to what I understand to be good?' We are all 'moral ontologists' in our everyday lives.

At this point, one might object that Taylor has linked ethics and philosophical anthropology through the concept of identity, a concept particular to Western modernity. If Taylor's phenomenology only concerns the modern, Western subject, then his transcendental conclusions would be similarly limited in scope. Taylor welcomes this objection, however, since it is his aim to historicise this initial phenomenological argument. Indeed, the final four parts of *Sources of the Self* are devoted precisely to tracing the shifts in Western moral ontology from the time of the Greeks. In century after century, text after text, Taylor proves the fruitfulness of linking ethics and philosophical anthropology.²¹ Sometimes Taylor joins the conversation from the side of ethics, unpacking the assumptions about body and mind, self and soul, nature and condition which animate the explicitly ethical writings. At other times he turns to thinkers who want to understand, without preaching or prescription, what sort of creatures we are, only to find their explorations of the human condition animated by the deepest of hopes and the thickest of ethico-political assumptions. Thus, widening our historical purview only cements Taylor's case that human beings find both ethics and philosophical anthropology inescapable and that we find it impossible not to pursue them together. That our particular views about our nature and flourishing are bounded by epochal horizons only quickens our interest in learning about the assumptions we have inherited, about the nature of our blinders. Thus, Taylor is happy to acknowledge that while we will always rely on some assumptions about human nature and the good, the exact content of this 'moral ontology' shifts over time. Taylor sums it up this way:

In fact, our visions of the good are tied up with our understandings of the self But this will mean . . . that radically different senses of what the good is go along with quite different conceptions of what a human agent is, different notions of the self (p. 105).

With the help of Taylor, we can now see the inseparability of two of the three questions which define the educational philosophical triangle. But as I have already indicated, the pedagogical serves as an obvious hinge between

these other two basic questions. Given our nature and that which is good for us, the question of pedagogy is: what best facilitates our development? In Taylor's account, this pedagogical hinge between anthropological and ethical questions is left largely implicit, but it is not hard to locate in each of his case studies. Taylor begins with Plato, stressing the interconnection between Plato's ethics of rational self-mastery and his conception of the soul as divided into higher and lower parts, and capable of becoming attuned to the order of the cosmos. Though Taylor does not highlight it as much as he might, he does note how Plato's moral ontology relies on a crucial pedagogical insight, the distinction between instruction and conversion. Central to the famous 'Allegory of the Cave' and to the *Republic* as a whole is the idea that the highest form of education is not that of imparting skills or knowledge but of 'turning the soul' towards objects worthy of our attention (Plato, 2004 [c. 380 BCE], p. 210 [Bk. 217, 516b–d]). And this does not even take into account the dialogical pedagogy enacted in Plato's dialogues. If one reads Plato for what he shows as much as for what he says, then a dialogue like the *Meno* is primarily about pedagogy and only secondarily about the psyche (specifically, its capacity to recollect) and the good (specifically, excellence of character) (Plato, 1961 [c. 380 BCE]).

Or consider Taylor's discussions of Descartes and Montaigne. What Taylor wants us to see about Descartes is the way he heralds the move from substantive reason (a quality of the universe to which we attune ourselves) to procedural rationality (a mental process we apply to the world) (see, e.g., p. 156). But as it turns out, Descartes' famous 'method of rightly regulating reason' proves to be an autodidactic pedagogy, a sceptical, meditative process by which one expels faulty beliefs and builds a firmer foundation for true belief. Descartes explicitly introduces his famous thought experiments as the next step in his ongoing attempt to secure a sound education having tried both formal schooling and travel (Descartes, 1988 [1637], pp. 20–25 [Pt. 1]). Central to Montaigne's project is a different sort of self-educative process. As Taylor shows, understanding Montaigne's ethic of self-awareness and self-acceptance and his vision of the self as inherently unstable goes hand in hand with understanding his novel project, his chronicling of personal impressions and assaying of self (Taylor, 1989, pp. 178–181).

Thus, Taylor helps us to perceive the close connections between these three categories of questions, to recall the centrality of education in the history of ideas, and to deepen our sense of the importance of humanistic perspectives in education. These three questions—'Who are we?', 'What ought we to become?', 'What improves us?'—are the quintessential humanistic questions. They are illuminated by all but the most sterile of humanistic works, including not only texts in a range of modern disciplines but also religious works, *belles lettres*, and the arts. Music, following Susanne Langer, can be said to provide a 'tonal analogue of emotive life', offering insight into the patterns of 'human sentience' (Langer, 1953, p. 27). Autobiography and biography are prime ethical genres, helping us reflect on what's involved in trying to grasp the shape of a life as a

whole, and offering us vivid images of human flourishing and floundering. The *Bildungsroman* (novel of development) and indeed most novels are explorations of how and why we change, and grow, and stagnate. The study of the good is not limited to philosophy, politics, and religion; nor do education departments have a monopoly on the question of human transformation. And of course all of the humanities, as the name itself suggests, are attempts to illuminate what it means to be human. Some approach this question from the point of view of the psyche, some from the socius, while others see our reflection most clearly in our artefacts: languages and laws, art works and buildings, theories and religions, treaties and sexual mores.

The implication of this, as I have suggested, is twofold: to be a reflective educator is to become a student of the humanities; but also, to be a true student of the humanities, to be a humane intellectual, is to be concerned with educational questions. What the triangle reveals is that far from being some recently invented, applied social science tagging along with the institution of schooling, *education is the organising principle of the humanities*. Education is what brings the basic humanistic questions into relation and focus.²² The triangle equally pushes back against the aspects of the current self-image of the humanities. The conception of the humanities as separate disciplines tends to discourage the kind of synoptic thinking that brings the educational dimensions and interconnections among the humanities into focus; and the idea of humanistic work as research tends to discourage the recognition that the humanities are not merely methods of knowing, but modes of self-knowledge which we pursue not disinterestedly but with an eye toward our own individual and collective self-cultivation.²³

HORIZONS OF EDUCATIONAL INQUIRY

At this point, an obvious question arises. Why have I called this the educational-*philosophical* triangle? After all, I myself have insisted that all three questions are educational in focus and that all of the arts and humanities contribute (in principle) equally to helping us answer these questions. Philosophy is no more central to philosophical anthropology than anthropology or psychology, and no more central to ethics than religion or literature. If philosophy has no monopoly on posing or answering these questions, then why does it deserve special billing? The answer lies in the distinction between broader and narrower meanings of philosophy. Philosophy has come to be associated with a set of questions and with the texts that pose these questions explicitly, but I would argue that both of these characterisations miss what is essential and unique about philosophy. There is something dishonest about retrospectively identifying philosophy with a set of questions and the famous attempts to answer them. This makes it seem as if the questions were there already. Although there is some truth to Whitehead's famous comment that all philosophy is a footnote to Plato,

the history of philosophy, in the making, was a history of the discovery of new questions. Philosophy, like (modern) art, is an essentially frame-breaking activity. We can *retrospectively* list, say, Foucault's question 'How are power relations written into our very experience of embodiment?' or Kant's 'What does the human subject contribute through categories and intuitions to the structuring of the world?' as philosophical questions, but this is only because, at the time, Kant, and later Foucault, taught us how to ask a new question. They provoked us to see all that had come before them in a new light by revealing a question that previously had been obscured.

Thus, we should not define philosophy by the type of questions philosophy asks. The modern domain of philosophical questions is simply that which was not taken over by other disciplines. Philosophy is the discipline that takes on the questions that seem too big, too normative, or to stubbornly non-empirical for other disciplines. But there is also an older and broader sense of philosophy captured in the name 'Doctor of Philosophy'. One can receive a PhD in philosophy of course, but also in botany or Slavic languages and literatures. The word philosophy is present in every graduate degree not because every dissertation raises philosophical questions in the modern sense, but because there is, or was, an essential connection between philosophy and learning in general. One cannot claim maturity as a scholar, the idea is, unless one has both mastered the particular methods and canon of one's specific field and also learned how to relate those particulars to the broad circle of knowledge and to the human situation. It is not only knowledge of other fields the myopic scholar lacks, but crucially an external perspective on his own field. Without the breadth of vision that was once the trademark of the PhD, the scholar cannot recognise when his field has become obsessed with trivialities or devolved into an arid formalism. In other words, the myopic scholar cannot really be said to know even his own field.

As it is customary to note, this older sense of philosophy is visible in its etymology, from *philia* (love, friendship) and *sophia* (wisdom). Admittedly, etymological arguments like this are easily abused, as each step in the chain (words have an essential meaning, which is their original meaning, which is revealed by our etymological reconstruction) is suspect. And if the goal is to find the meaning of the practice anew, the phrase 'love of wisdom' is probably too hackneyed and breathless to help. 'Love' is mushy and overused; and 'wisdom' may be even harder to stomach, as it is overtaken by connotations of gurus dispensing pseudo-profundities. However, perhaps we can keep the basic idea—which might help us fight off the hypostatisation of philosophy in this age of scholarship and professionalization—while searching for fresh language to bring the point home. 'There are nowadays professors of philosophy, but not philosophers', Thoreau once quipped, and while this is overstated for emphasis, it contains a kernel of truth (Thoreau, 1986 [1854], p. 57). This is a good start, interrupting our tendency to equate philosophy with the modern scholarly discipline by that name. But how shall we name the broader enterprise? Here I think the poet Rainer Maria Rilke can help,

offering in one of his famous letters to the young Franz Kappus an eloquent description of the philosophical attitude:

You are so young, so before all beginning, and I want to beg you, as much as I can, dear sir, to be patient towards all that is unsolved in your heart and to try to love the *questions themselves* like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer (Rilke, 1954 [1901–8], pp. 34–35, emphasis in original).

One understandable reaction to this passage (indeed, it is the one I typically have) is to think that Rilke has gotten a bit carried away here. It is one thing to warn us against treating questions like itches to be scratched or problems to be solved. But to speak of loving ‘the questions themselves’ suggests a proscription against any sort of looking for, finding, or valuing of answers. And yet questions seem to ask for, point toward, and be fulfilled in answers. Isn’t trying to love the questions themselves like greatly admiring someone’s home-run swing only to be disappointed when they actually drive one out of the park? Thus, upon reflection, there are two dangers to avoid in relation to questions. The first, emphasised by Rilke, is that we are typically all too impatient. Bothered by uncertainty, we have trouble letting a question breathe before smothering it with our initial response. The other danger, though, is that we might fall prey to an idolatrous love of questions. After all, the beauty of a question lies in its power to open up new worlds, new room to think, breathe, and move. A true question, is dynamic, and thus a true love of questions must mean following the action, not parking in front of a shrine to pure question-hood. With that caveat, though, we can appreciate Rilke’s challenge to master our impatience and learn to live with our questions. In this way, Rilke offers us a fresh translation of *philosophia*: philosophy involves trying to become a friend to the open question; it is a love for the openness a true question provides.²⁴ This is why I have called the figure under discussion, the educational-philosophical triangle. Philosophy names our stance toward these three categories of basic educational questions. The educational intellectual or (if you can hear this now in a broader sense than the professional one) the educational philosopher is a friend to these questions and the openness they promise (on the relation of philosophy to education, cf. Tubbs, 2005, Pt. I).

Here another problem for my account becomes clear. I have been arguing that education is an ongoing conversation about human becoming sparked by characteristic questions and sustained by the (philosophical) disposition to value these questions in their openness. The problem arises when we recall one of the conclusions from our discussion of Taylor, namely that the study of questions of human becoming is inevitably historical in nature. The thick,

evaluative, arguable, more or less explicit beliefs about human nature and human flourishing he calls moral ontology find their place within languages of description which are situated in turn in traditions of thought and epochal horizons. The form of the questions available at any given time or within any particular traditions of thought always represents an interpretation of the questions, or a partial answer to them. And as we saw in Chapter 4, a question mark does nothing to guarantee a true open question (see above, pp. 135–137). One of the requirements of the true question we concluded was that a question needs a questioner; it needs to be posed by a flesh and blood person who feels a conflict on some issue of importance to him or her. Questions do not stand open because someone (like me) lists them on a diagram. The open question is the exception. Our everyday life, our habits and perceptions, is a fabric of answers; only to call them that suggests that we still can recall the questions of which they have disposed. We are awash in truisms, beliefs so fundamental to our way of being in the world that they do not strike us as beliefs. When we find ourselves in the grips of a real question, we are foregrounding some aspects of the world, but by definition this means thrusting many others into the background. Rooted in a particular time and place, culture and language, situated in a particular tradition of inquiry, each of us finds that certain questions captivate us more than others, and being open in one direction comes at the price of blindness in others.

This raises two related difficulties for the triangle. First, how can I claim to be naming the questions themselves when they only show up in any particular time and place narrowed and foreclosed, and I myself am situated in such a contingent position? Second, by defining education around such vague questions as what is the human condition, am I not offering educators perfect examples of the floating question, that genre of pseudo-question we identified in Chapter 4?

Let me begin my response by acknowledging my situatedness. Like everyone's, my approach to things is contingent on aspects of my background and surround, many of which operate utterly 'behind my back', as Gadamer would say (Gadamer, 1976 [1967], p. 38). That there is no view from nowhere, however, does not mean that one can make no progress in widening one's horizons. Devoting ourselves to unearthing hidden assumptions and seeing beyond false reductions of broad questions, we can make progress in eliminating some of the myopia entailed by our situatedness. In other words, while my account certainly does not presume omniscience, it does prescribe the project of attempting to free oneself from as much of one's provincialism as one can.

Still, the question remains how I can claim to outline the three fundamental, open educational questions. Am I suggesting that everyone else is slowly struggling toward open-mindedness while I myself am already there, writing back to recommend the view? Clearly not: the triangle is intended as a heuristic device. And notice how, in introducing its three vertices, I found myself resorting to two strategies. On the one hand, I labelled each corner with exceedingly broad and vague placeholders (What is

the human condition? What facilitates our growth? What constitutes human flourishing?). On the other hand, I drew up lists of rival questions characteristic of each vertex. On my definition, education is a space of disagreement, but of course disagreements are rarely just about answers. Most significant disagreements are disagreements about questions. The abortion debate would be a good deal less intractable if it were a debate between pro- and anti-life or one between pro- and anti-choice advocates.

Take the example of philosophical anthropology. No single question can be formulated that is broad enough to define this field of questioning for once and for all. Historically, the philosophical-anthropological question par excellence was ‘What is man?’, a question that now strikes most of us as dangerously parochial and universalising at once. It was good for gathering together and putting into dialogue certain lines of questioning, but it did so at the price of submerging others. Now we are able to see how assuming that one could use the male pronoun as a gender-neutral universal made invisible entire areas of inquiry (concerning the role of gender in human experience), areas now central in our efforts to figure out what makes us tick. Meanwhile, the modern discipline of anthropology could be seen as an attempt to expand the pseudo-universal ‘man’, to learn from a variety of cultural groups what humanity means in its context so as to unlearn our tendency to see contingent features of European cultures as essential. That anthropology itself has had to be circumspect about its own tendency to ‘other’ (to superimpose the not-European on ways of life that are as different from what we are as what we are not) only further proves the point that broad phrases such as ‘human nature’ do not end but only exacerbate the controversy inherent in philosophical anthropology.

To pose the question in any particular manner is to show yourself already knee-deep in the controversy. When we ask ‘What makes humans tick?’, for example, we are already operating on the assumption that the most important thing to know about humans is what motivates them. Perhaps, too, the word ‘tick’ suggests further that this question of motivation is to be grasped as one of mechanical causes, that human beings are being tacitly understood as mechanisms. Compare ‘What makes humans tick?’ with another version of the anthropological question: ‘What is the place of the human being in nature?’. Each question will invite rival answers but there is an important tension in the questions themselves: one presuming that humans are best understood in isolation, the other that we must see ourselves in the context of our environment; one working from the inside out, one from the outside in. Now add a third question such as ‘What is the nature of human society?’, which assumes that we learn best about humans in their collective state, and suddenly assumptions common to the previous two questions come to light, namely that humanness is best understood individually rather than in relation, or in nature rather than in culture.

Therefore, no one single question can stand as the fundamental or general philosophical-anthropological question, for each question already presup-

poses a slew of philosophical-anthropological assumptions, bathing a portion of the field in light and the rest in darkness. We should not search for a single question neutral enough to open every possible question about human beings at once and for all time. This would truly amount to a floating question. A question this general would not open any doors; it would be empty, of little or no import. New vistas on the human are opened by grasping the limits of the older ones, by asking what a given view omits, obscures, distorts. The field as a whole, then, is best signified by a set of related questions that, in their proximity, highlight the truncations in each, all the while pointing to the common ground that must exist in order for these even to constitute rival assumptions. The common ground can be intuited but not, ultimately, named.

Nor could even a long list of questions, stated once and for all, collectively map the full boundaries of the conversation since a genuinely new question does not arrive as one more among the crowd: it shoves the whole lot to one side in a change of perspective. Learning to ask a new question requires more than putting a question mark on the end of some sentence which still remains intellectually declarative for us. One must be able to seriously entertain an alternative to put something in question. Another way to put this is that asking a new question involves a gestalt shift. It is as if one were surveying an elaborate highway system with a choice of many roads leading to a variety of places when suddenly one discovered a new means of transport which took one to places not even on the known map.

Thus the fully-open triangle is a fiction, and the questions I describe are only hypothetically open. I name them with banal, formalistic place-holders, to mark sites for potential expansions and revisions. I have chosen deliberately empty, even awkward, markers (e.g. 'facilitates', 'flourishing', and 'ethico-political') to point toward an openness we can only infer. But if it is a fiction, it is a useful one. Its formalistic openness invites us to put concrete, rival views—from traditions at a critical remove from one another—into dialogue with each other, yielding a fusion of horizons and a more open, substantive question. In any one time and place, we will find ourselves bounded by the horizon of our assumptions. The hypothetically fully expanded triangle will appear to us significantly narrowed in scope. In the next section, I will describe a model of hermeneutic teacher education designed to expose such assumptions and widen our educational horizons. Here, I would like to sketch a few basic variations on the triangle to give a sense of how the heuristic might be useful.

We can begin by reminding ourselves that even the broadest debates about the ends and means of schooling represent a truncation of the broader educational dialogue I have described (see Figure 9b). Many avenues of educational inquiry are foreclosed as soon as we understand the learner as a student of compulsory, formal instruction and accept the whole architecture of classrooms, periods, subjects, credits, grades, and tests. And of course, in practice, the reductions go much further. The full conversation about

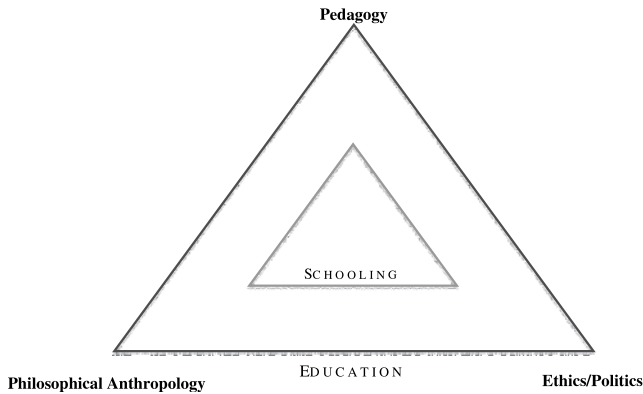


Figure 9b: Horizons of formal and informal education

individual and collective flourishing is almost always represented by the somewhat narrower consideration of our ideals of the educated person. But of course, it is rare to entertain even this broad a discussion of educational aims. Indeed, at one corner of the typical triangle are a handful of curricular objectives. That this represents a scandalously meagre diet of the full regimen of ethical and political questions can be shown in two ways, one formal and one substantive. The formal complaint is that we substitute a nominalistic, bureaucratic ritual (every lesson must have a clear objective which must be briefly stated on the lesson plan and, depending on the school, on the board for students to see) for genuine, interesting, searching inquiry into what it means to be educated and to flourish individually and collectively. The substantive point is that not only are our educational aims reduced to labels and clichés, but also modern, compulsory schooling is organised around a highly attenuated vision of the educated person. Character, emotion, and imagination have never been the strong point of schooling, in which the tendency has been to reduce learning to the memorisation of information and the mastery of skills. In this new era of measurement mania, the reduction goes still further as more and more of the school's energy gets taken up by helping students improve their scores on high-pressure math and reading tests.

Turning from ethics to philosophical-anthropology, we find a similar reduction as evidenced in the typical teacher-education curriculum. The vast and varied conversation about what it means to be human is reduced to a course in educational psychology, a unit on learning styles, and some readings on multiculturalism. Concepts like stages of development and personality types are always on the tip of our tongue, enabling us to make certain claims about what human beings are made of, while at the same time preventing us from enunciating many broader philosophical-anthropological questions. Even on the pedagogical corner of the triangle we find a significant narrowing of concern. Techniques of classroom management and other instructional methods tend to stand in for a more wide ranging consideration of what facilitates human growth.

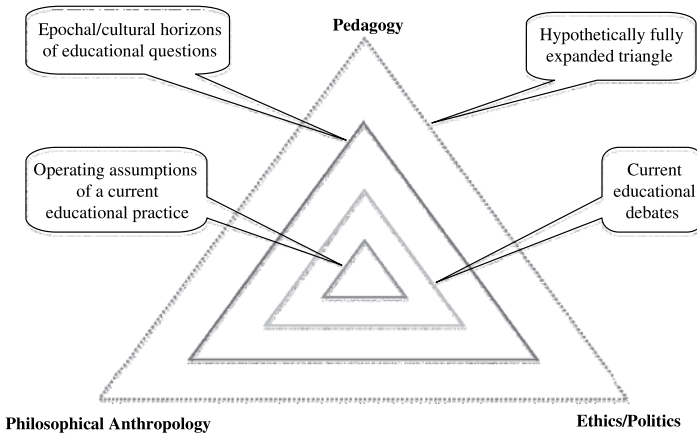


Figure 9c: Horizons of educational inquiry

In all of these areas, we see a tendency to get caught up in a some specific debate whose back and forth conceals the exclusion of a whole range of key considerations. Thus we become mesmerised by the see-saw between whole language versus direct instruction, or of one versus another developmental stage theory, and we fail to notice that the crucial, prior questions have been begged (say, about the meaning of literacy and place of literacy in a good life, and of the place of modern developmental psychology in the broader philosophical-anthropological conversation). And of course even a clichéd either-or represents too much indeterminacy when the class bell rings; in order to teach, the teacher needs workable answers to most educational questions. Figure 9c evokes the nested horizons of educational practice.

TEACHER EDUCATION FOR PRACTICAL WISDOM

The time has come to pull together the several strands of this inquiry into vocational experience and teaching. In Chapter 4, we developed the idea that experience runs in circles. What we take from past situations significantly shapes what we are able to notice in new situations. At times, the circle of experience widens as we pose interesting questions to the world and allow ourselves to learn from those moments in which we are pulled up short. At other times, the circle narrows. Our routines and prejudices narrow what we notice which in turn narrows us further. We have also seen why vocations are a key factor in the shaping of experience, factors in determining the dimensions of the practitioner's world. By vocation here we mean the structures of a craft itself, the way the practice is institutionalised, and the way a practitioner takes up the vocation. Each of these contributes to whether the circle of experience is productive or vicious. In this chapter, we have shown how teaching invites teachers into a

number of rich conversations, promising what might be the ultimate learning environment for ongoing adult education through work. But we have also noted how the institutionalisation and culture of teaching makes it difficult to join and sustain these conversations. Thus, one implication of my argument is that if we want classrooms staffed by *teachers*, schools will have to be rethought in light of the teacher's experience. And, of course, this is—given my earlier argument that teacherly self-cultivation is a necessary condition for education (see above, pp. 2–9)—tantamount to saying that schools must change if they are to be *educational* institutions.

Another implication concerns the way teachers are inducted into the practice. This is why I have been developing the contrast between the teacher as intellectual, with a measure of negative capability and a love for the open educational question, and professionalism in any of its current forms. For it makes little difference whether we deny the inherent uncertainty of teaching by intoning catchwords from educational theory, invoking 'the findings of research', or by suggesting that the last word on teaching is found in the home-spun wisdom of teacher proverbs. Prospects for reversing this trend are bleak, given the current fervour over 'evidence-based practice'. Of course, this is not to call for practice based on faulty assumptions, prejudice and wish-fulfilment. It is only to acknowledge that there is no evidence (but there might well be prejudice and wish-fulfilment) to suggest that there is, could or should be a hard science of educational 'interventions' (Pring, 2005, chap. 11; Smeyers and Depaepe, 2006; Biesta, 2007, 2010c; Bridges *et al.*, 2009).

Thus, in closing, we return in the context of teaching to the question we explored in Chapter 4 (see above, pp. 128 and 130–139): what would teacher education look like were its guiding principles the cultivation of practical wisdom, its goal to help teachers learn how to learn through their practice? To answer this question, it is helpful to begin by observing how teacher education is currently framed. Indeed, let us take a step further back and ask how education is institutionalised in the university. Immediately we note something odd. Given the argument I made above that educational questions are central to the humanities, it is striking that education (as an object of study) is not more highly prized as a vehicle for liberal learning. Although some liberal arts colleges offer a few courses in educational studies, such programs are relatively rare, and even those that exist tend to serve few students beyond those pursuing a teaching certificate. We recommend that undergraduates study music or English regardless of whether they plan to be musicians or writers. Even architecture, an area of inquiry with an eminently practical application, maintains a respected place among the humanities. Whether or not one plans to be an architect, it is assumed that understanding the way we build and dwell sheds light on what it means to be human, and therefore has a place in a liberal, humanistic education. One would think that this same logic would apply to the study of education, but there is surprisingly little interest in studying the educational products of human beings as a means of understanding who we are. We act as if the history of educational thought or

of the changing forms of schooling were somehow less instructive than the history of music or the forms of the novel, and consider these subjects important only for those specifically intending a career in education. Education courses are largely treated by liberal arts colleges as a sort a pre-professional wart on the unblemished skin of the liberal arts curriculum. As a result, we graduate, as liberally educated, scores of students—future policy-makers, managers, parents, and so on—without ever having invited them to join in the rich conversation about human becoming that is education.

If education is thought to be too practical to find a proper place in liberal education, liberal learning does not always seem to be welcome in schools and colleges of education. The foundations of education, long honoured precisely for their ability to convey a broad humanistic perspective on education, are now increasingly marginalised in schools of education. It is not only a matter of dwindling resources for foundations departments, but the overall climate is such that it has become hard to ask educational questions removed by time or generality from today's specific debates and crises in schools of education. The stuff of liberal education—close reading, dialectical thinking, open-ended conversation, existential questions—is liable to look merely irrelevant if not dangerously indulgent in the contemporary education school with its peculiar way of a mixing a scientific research culture, a sanctimonious brand of identity politics, and a schoolsy anti-intellectualism (itself a mix of sentimentality, reductiveness, bureaucratic functionalism, and know-nothing utilitarianism).

What we have then is a perfect example of the 'enduring superstition' we discussed in Chapter 4, the tendency to dichotomise culture and utility (see above, pp. 113–119). In liberal arts colleges, where culture is kept alive so that the young may find a rich variety of languages through which to understand and define themselves, the study of education is marginal. Education is clearly connected with teaching, an art so practical that without it society would collapse. That we let this fact blind us, though, to the cultural richness and cultivating potential of the study of education smells very much like the prejudice noted by Dewey that what is useful must be illiberal. Meanwhile, in professional schools of education, we confront the mirror image, as if it went without saying that a continuing liberal education of the person who teaches is irrelevant to the preparation of a proficient educational practitioner. In other words, we assume that anything liberal is useless.

It is no wonder that we have not been able to rid the K-12 curriculum of dichotomous thinking: we educationists are ourselves caught in the grips of the liberal-vocational dichotomy. The idea of liberal teacher education, I am suggesting, sounds odd because it flies in the face of this enduring superstition. Debates in teacher education typically revolve around two axes. First there is the debate over whether coursework or clinical experience is most important in initial teacher preparation. Do we want our new teachers to be well-versed or well-seasoned? Second, insofar as academic study is deemed important in pre-service teacher education, there is a further debate over what sort of coursework is most important. Specifically, the latter debate

typically turns on the distinction between content and methods. The question becomes whether to prioritise coursework in education or in the arts and sciences. What is more important to pedagogical success: greater understanding of classrooms, students, and techniques of instruction or greater command of the subject one teaches.²⁵ In the 1980s, the coursework pendulum swung toward content knowledge with the publication of a series of high profile reports on teacher preparedness in the United States: *A Nation at Risk* (NCEE, 1983), *A Call for Change in Teacher Education* (NCETE, 1985), *Tomorrow's Teachers* (Holmes Group, 1986), and *A Nation Prepared* (CFEE, 1986). Recently, the pendulum has swung away from coursework in general and towards learning through practice (Smith and Power, 2010). While it is tempting to say 'why quarrel?', when all three types of learning are important for teaching, there are real time limitations to consider. Especially in the context of a four-year, undergraduate teacher certification program, it turns out to be extremely difficult to find enough hours in the program to do justice to fieldwork and both types of coursework.

The point I want to make is that what I am calling liberal teacher education does not show up anywhere in these debates. At first blush, this might seem mistaken since denizens of the content knowledge camp often couch their position in terms of liberal education. *A Call for Change*, for example, declares that 'all prospective teachers, as part of their liberal education, should be educated in at least one academic major' (NCETE, 1985, p. 15).²⁶ However, to equate liberal education with content knowledge in a discipline is to violate two of the fundamental principles of liberal learning. First, liberal learning is by definition about well-roundedness and multiplicity of perspective. Second, liberal learning is more concerned with forming someone into a learner than into someone learned. While always conducted in the context of specific texts, problems, and disciplines, it is not transmission of content but transformation of persons. It is an education in how to think and see and question. To be fair, the 1980s reports do sometimes adhere to the first principle, mentioning the need for teachers to receive liberal education beyond the major. And in one passage the Holmes report offers nice testimony to the second principle:

The reform of undergraduate education towards greater coherence and dedication to the historic tenets of liberal education is thus essential to improving teacher education. Teachers must lead a life of the mind. They must be reflective and thoughtful: persons who seek to understand so they may clarify for others, persons who can go to the heart of the matter (Holmes Group, 1986, p. 47).

Still, on the whole, the conversation over teacher education generally proceeds as if there were goals for coursework: knowledge of content, symbolised by a full major in one of the arts or sciences, and knowledge of

instructional methods. Clearly, this is to reify one's relation to one's discipline.

Even in those cases where the teacher candidate is encouraged to gain not simply content knowledge but a true liberal education, there is a further worry. For the idea seems to be that one will complement one's liberal learning with courses in education. One's coursework in Russian literature, anthropology, and intellectual history serves to cultivate incisive intelligence, reflectiveness and other cognitive virtues, but coursework in education is not generally considered to be part of such liberal education. The Holmes Group, for example, seems to conceive of graduate work in education as clinical experience and supervision enriched by a blend of further work in one's content area, courses in subject-specific pedagogical methods and professional ethics, and study of the findings of educational research. Concerning this last requirement they proclaim that 'the promise of [a] science of education is about to be fulfilled' (Holmes Group, 1986, p. 52). Thus, even those who hope that teachers will have the dispositions of mind traditionally associated with liberal learning, seem content that this be acquired before the teacher actually begins to learn about teaching, learning, schooling, and education in general.

What is unclear is how one's liberal dispositions are to remain intact through a process of essentially illiberal vocational training. After all, one needs to learn how to be liberal *in relation to one's occupation*. It is naïve to think that an introduction to liberal learning in college will be enough to sustain a liberal attitude in one's later life if at the centre of that life is a practice which one has been trained to perform but not educated to understand. Having been taught to question assumptions, define terms, explode clichés, connect ideas, and look at ideas from different angles, and so forth, the liberal learner may be shocked by how often her education courses devolve into cant and cliché, how often they oscillate between a mockery of science (transmission of inert facts) and a mockery of art (talk-show constructivism in which each student shares a personal, experiential truth before heading his or her own way). If we want teachers to be reflective, imaginative, incisive, and non-reductive in their teaching then we ought to introduce their practice to them in reflective, imaginative, incisive, and non-reductive ways.

Through the figure of the educational-philosophical triangle, I have already shown how education is suited to be not merely one more liberal art, but the very focus of humanistic, liberal learning. What Dewey says of the discipline of philosophy seems true of the study of all of the 'pure' disciplines:

The student of philosophy 'in itself' is always in danger of taking it as so much nimble or severe intellectual exercise—as something said by philosophers and concerning them alone. But when philosophic issues are approached from the side of the kind of mental disposition to which they correspond, or the differences in educational practice they make when acted upon, the life-

situations which they formulate can never be far from view. If a theory makes no difference in educational endeavor, it must be artificial. The educational point of view enables one to envisage the philosophic problems where they arise and thrive, where they are at home, and where acceptance or rejection makes a difference in practice (Dewey, 1916, p. 328).

The decision to become a teacher is, or could be, the decision to pursue the richest questions in the way best able to get at these questions: reflective practice. In this respect, the practice of teaching has a real advantage over the traditional humanities, ‘with their impoverished parish of reality and their decorative scholars’ (Arrowsmith, 1971, p. 14). When it comes to the key questions about our nature, growth, and flourishing, the education intellectual by virtue of her practice has a constant way into the hermeneutic circle. But sustaining this dialogue with the world is not easy. One must learn to tolerate uncertainty, cherish complexity, and hold rival views together until their tension sparks a question with the power of expanding horizons.

To conceive of teacher education as a process of ongoing liberal learning about and for education, to organise teacher education around the virtue of practical wisdom, is to call for teachers who will think critically about the social fabric they have been enlisted to renew, teachers who will be able to respond perceptively and flexibly to new situations. And this ability to see the newness in new situations is not only crucial for teaching well but for living well. The education intellectual, the teacher of practical wisdom, pursues her craft as part of her quest to ‘suck out all of the marrow of life’ (Thoreau, 1986 [1854]). In her achieved and ongoing self-cultivation, she reminds her students what it means to be an educated person, some of the ways one may solve the dilemmas of self-hood, what it might be worth growing into. The true teacher embodies the ideal described by John Dewey:

What [one] gets and gives as a human being, a being with desires, emotions, and ideas, is not external possessions, but a widening and deepening of conscious life—a more intense, disciplined, and expanding realization of meanings And education is not a mere means to such a life. Education is such a life. To maintain capacity for such a life is the essence of morals. For conscious life is a continual beginning afresh (Dewey, 1916, pp. 359–360).

NOTES

1. As in Chapter 4, I continue here to use the term ‘effective world’ as a synonym for Dewey’s ‘environment’, or those parts of one’s surroundings with which a person varies. The term actually comes from Martin Buber (or, to be exact, from his translator Ronald Gregor Smith; Buber’s phrase is ‘*wirkende Welt*’). In ‘Education’ [*Rede über das Erzieherische*], his 1925 address at the Heidelberg ‘Development of the Creative Powers in the Child’ conference, he says: ‘What we term education, conscious and willed, means a *selection by man of the effective world*: it means to give decisive effective power to a

- selection of the world which is concentrated and manifested in the educator' [*Was wir Erziehung nennen, die gewußte und gewollte, bedeutet Auslese der wirkende Welt durch den Menschen; bedeutet, eine Auslese der Welt, gesammelt und dargelegt im Erzieher, die entscheidende Wirkungsmacht verleihen*] (Buber, 1955 [1926], p. 89, emphasis in original; 1962 [1926], p. 23).
2. I introduced Dewey's idea of the 'dominant vocation' in Chapter 4, returning to it in the context of teaching in Chapter 5 (see above, pp. 127 and 150–154).
 3. One could define graduate school as the ironic process through which one leaves the conversation by preparing to join it.
 4. For a darker view of why some choose to spend their adult lives in the classroom world in which they spent their youth, see Tompkins, 1996. In her autobiographical exploration of the pedagogical ecosystem with its cycle of authority, evaluation, and anxiety, Tompkins (unknowingly it seems) joins a tradition including figures such as Willard Waller and Arthur Jersild. See, for example, Waller's (1932, pp. 398–408) discussion of typical teacher anxiety dreams and Jersild's (1955, pp. 20–64) chapter on Anxiety.
 5. 'Marking period' is the most common US, K-12 expression for academic term, a phrase which suggests not only a length of time but what that time is thought to be for.
 6. It is Blacker's specific thesis that only if one participates simultaneously in the first two conversations (with subject matter and students), balancing in Blacker's terms the teacher's concern for 'truth' and 'the other', can teachers avoid the pitfalls inherent in the single-minded pursuit of either and make their bid for immortality.
 7. Thanks to Darryl DeMarzio for drawing my attention to this passage. For a recent defense of the integrity of educational practice in the face of institutional expediency and political pressures, see Hogan, 2010.
 8. On this point I have profited from discussion with Dan Kramarsky.
 9. For more recent studies of teacher experience, see Goodlad, 1984, chap. 6; Goodson and Ball, 1985; Johnson, 1990; Yee, 1990; Huberman *et al.*, 1993. The remarkable consistency in observations of teacher experience across the decades may speak to the phenomenon Metz calls the 'common script' of 'real school' and which Tyack, Cuban, and Tobin call 'the grammar of schooling' (see Metz, 1989; Tyack and Tobin, 1994; and Tyack and Cuban, 1995, chap. 4; see also Cuban, 1984).
 10. There is a large literature on the pros and cons and meanings of teacher professionalization (see, for example, Shulman, 1987a, b; Sockett, 1987; Strike, 1990; Burbules and Densmore, 1991; Welker, 1992; and Labaree, 1992).
 11. On practical wisdom in teaching, see the helpful overviews by Smith (1999) and Noel (1999a). Noel follows David Wiggins in distinguishing the three main lines of reception of Aristotle's discussion of *phronesis*—focusing respectively on rationality, perception, and character—and reviews the research on teaching informed by each. The first wave of interest in educational philosophy centred on practical reason, arguments, and syllogisms with Fenstermacher (1986, pp. 43–45) rekindling an idea inspired by Green (1976) and sparking a lively discussion (see, for example, *Educational Theory* 37.4, Fall 1987, a special issue devoted to Fenstermacher's extension of Green) and further research (for example, Fenstermacher and Richardson, 1993; and Hostetler, 1997). The second, perceptual wave began as a reaction to the narrowness and rationalism implied in the first (for example, Buchmann, 1988; Pendlebury, 1990, 1993), flowering in the work of Buchmann (Buchmann, 1989; 1990; 1993), and others (for example, Lyons, 1990; Noel, 1999b; Phelan, 2005). The third strand is exemplified in work on teaching as a moral craft (Tom, 1984), and on the manner (Hansen, 1993; Fenstermacher, 2001), character (Sockett, 1993), and tact (van Manen, 1991) of teachers. Of course, in order for *phronesis* to apply to teaching, teaching must constitute a sphere of *praxis* rather

- than comprising a *techne*, and this point has been vigorously contested, with defenders of the *praxis* conception such as Carr (for example, 1986; 1987; 1989) and Dunne (1997) and critics such as Squires (2003) and Kristjánsson (2005).
12. On the teacher as public, transformative intellectual, see Giroux (1988, especially, chap. 9); on the intertwining of teaching and inquiry, see Schwab (1959 [1978]) and Duckworth (2006 [1986]).
 13. For two perceptive, if broadly comedic, caricatures of academic life, capturing something of the range of academic types, see Amis, 1992 and Russo, 1998.
 14. Antonio Gramsci makes a helpful distinction between intellectual ability, which he interprets very broadly and attributes to all human beings, and having a social role as intellectual (Gramsci, 1971 [1929–35]). Then he distinguishes in the latter class two social types, the organic and the traditional intellectual. Organic intellectuals are tasked (implicitly) by their social group (a vague term suggesting some combination of region, class, generation, and guild) to learn how to help the group understand its situation and articulate its identity. The problem is that organic intellectuals find themselves ‘recruited’ by the hegemonic group, led to think of themselves as joining a disciplinary guild and long intellectual tradition (rather than representing a segment of current society), and employed (in effect) to craft concepts that fuel the social imaginary, concepts that serve to conceal the real matrix of social relations. However, see Edward Said’s Reith Lectures for an important qualification of Gramsci’s view and a brilliant synthesis of Gramsci’s with the seemingly polar opposite view of Julien Benda (see Said, 1996, pp. 3–24; and Benda, 2007 [1928]; for the later development of Said’s vision of the humanistic intellectual, see Said, 2004).
 15. A third alternative, of a more or less Wittgensteinian provenance, is to provide neither a narrow nor broad definition but a geography, as it were, of the word (and its family of overlapping concepts) in use. Robin Barrow, for example, argues that the question ‘What is education?’ makes no sense unless it is calling for this sort of conceptual mapping (Barrow, 1983).
 16. Jonathan Lear suggests that the vagueness of this term, *eudaimonia*, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is a kind of intentional enticement to the audience (of Aristotle’s lectures), as if to say here is the central term around which your life is built, and yet you don’t really even know what it means (Lear, 2000, lecture 1, especially pp. 7–25).
 17. The intellectual historian Robbie McClintock has founded an online community devoted to the question ‘What educates?’ (see http://www.studyplace.org/wiki/What_educates%3F). Compare his essay-in-progress ‘On (Not) Defining Education: Reflections on Historical Life and What Educates Therein’ at http://www.studyplace.org/wiki/On_Not_Defining_Education.
 18. For simplicity’s sake, I will use the word ‘ethics’ alone to refer to questions about the good life, but the reader should remember that these include political questions as well. For some the ethical question ‘How should I live?’ is primary, implying an answer to the political question ‘What is the best way to live together?’. For others, the political is primary. Most would agree, however, that questions of individual and collective flourishing are closely related. Richard Rorty, for one, argues for a separation between one’s private ethical quest and one’s public political stance. However, his ethical and political norms are constructed to be complementary. Both his ethics of irony and his politics of solidarity derive from a common philosophical anthropology, a vision of the human being as a creature built up through contingent acts of interpretation and thus open to both the joys and terrors of redescription (Rorty, 1989).
 19. Here my argument echoes Dewey’s famous definition of philosophy as the ‘theory of education in its most general phases’ (Dewey, 1916, p. 331).

20. As mentioned in prior chapters, though Taylor endorses Williams' distinction, he does not follow his usage, preferring to speak of different layers of the moral life (see above, p. 43, n. 4, and p. 174, n. 9). In what follows, I will refer to Taylor's narrower moral domain as 'morality' and his broader one as 'ethics'.
21. Taylor confines himself to Western thinkers, though he does offer a cross-cultural example to show that the *framework* of moral ontology bridges the divide between cultures which hold incompatible views about human nature, human flourishing, and their relationship (see Taylor, 1989, p. 40).
22. This suggests of course that philosophy of education need not understand itself, as it often does, as an applied subfield, created by directing the attention of a humanistic discipline with no inherent connection to education to set of practical problems. Insofar as philosophy is a humanistic discipline it has always concerned education (for more on this idea, see Higgins, Mackler, and Kramarsky, 2005, pp. 215–216).
23. For a vision of the humanities along these lines, see Gadamer (2004 [1960]); for a powerful protest at the moment the humanist was becoming transformed into a researcher in the modern research university, see Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations* (especially Nietzsche, 1990 [1874]; and the unfinished Nietzsche, 1990 [1874–5]); and see the trio of educational broadsides by William Arrowsmith who shows a century later how prescient Nietzsche had been (Arrowsmith, 1966; 1967a, b).
24. For more on this passage, see Higgins, 2010a. Rilke could not have asked for a more patient reader of this passage than René Arcilla, in dialogue with whom my interest in Rilke has developed over the years (see, e.g., Arcilla, 2007; and Arcilla, 2010, pp. 105–106).
25. This latter debate is only partially mended by the idea, championed by Lee Shulman, that understanding of instruction is subject specific, since the question still arises how we should apportion the teacher candidate's time between, say, History courses and courses in social studies methods. (Shulman first introduced the idea of pedagogical content knowledge in Shulman, 1986, pp. 9–10.)
26. This recommendation appears in a footnote signed by nine of the 16 members of the Commission.

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