The Idea of Teaching about Religion:

An Inquiry into the Problem of Meaning in Education in a Secular Age

by

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Abstract

What started out as a neat little argument for teaching about religion (AR) in public schools has become a wide-ranging essay asking why so many big ideas for education keep falling flat. The new argument, unifying the added themes, is that modern education is caught in self-defeating patterns of rationalizing and over-articulating its own meaningfulness and legitimacy. Thus, self-deception distorts the fulfillment of intergenerational responsibilities. The original topic has become a first example that leads into and illuminates the problem. As an educational idea, AR claims to address secularization for our times. If upon further thought the idea seems hollow, it becomes necessary to look again at the real world of secularization. AR reflects the contemporary obsession with diversity and the compulsion to turn education into a parade of possibilities. What is taught is merely a rationalized stance. Indeed, given that the legitimacy of an education system depends on locating authority within a recognizable source of meaning, and given that modernity foregrounds incommensurable diversity, there is an apparent obviousness to grounding the educational enterprise in bare proceduralism and then topping it up by tenuously claiming association with various deeper sources. But George Grant's characterization of the religious education of an earlier generation still holds: "a few thin platitudes." In religious contexts, a distinction is sometimes made between religious instruction and formation within thick tradition and community. Even in a secular age, the young deserve some kind of thick formation. Yet that seems unimaginable, because contemporary common sense is caught in what Hubert Dreyfus calls theoretical holism. Secularization presents education not with an array but with a dilemma: To go on trying to manage meanings for the young, or to allow them to find meaning in strong practices? Facing this dilemma will entail facing the disenchantment generated in our deepest Western educative impulses. Rediscovering

true sources of educational authority for our times will entail going back to the origins of modern schooling in the breakup of the apprenticeship model and rethinking an institutional solution that so fundamentally denies the way in which human beings become oriented to meaning through strong practices.

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A casual reader who has much invested in the modern education system, as we all do, could quite understandably glance at this thesis and come to the hasty conclusion that the author has no sense of gratitude. It might help that reader into the spirit of the present inquiry to know that I am indeed still grateful, in the end, and deeply indebted, in many different ways, to all my past teachers.

To my brother and sister, and to the memory of my mother and father.

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Preface

A few words may be in order here to forestall misunderstanding of what this thesis is about (meaning in education) and to explain why it takes the form it does (quite essayistic). To argue that we are caught up in self-defeating, meaning-destroying patterns of rationalization and theoretical over-articulation in education is essentially to highlight the need for a paradigm shift. One of the hazards in doing this is that expectations for that argument—how it should be set out, what kind of purpose it should serve—will inevitably tend to come from within the already dominant paradigm. Even my use of the word *paradigm* here risks being misinterpreted, according to the most common usage, as referring to one of a number of alternative theoretical approaches from which to choose for guiding one's own research, while the nature of the larger project of the expansion of knowledge goes on unquestioned in the background. I am referring, rather, to that larger project going on in the background and to the common sense view of the world within which that project makes sense. The distinction is perhaps better captured by Hubert Dreyfus, in "Holism and Hermeneutics," with the terms *theoretical holism* and *practical holism*. For those enclosed in theoretical holism, theory comes first: come up with a theory and then apply it within the constrained space left for practice. But with practical holism, practice comes first, and theory takes its place as merely one form of practice amongst others. Within practical holism, therefore, expectations for theory (specifically, social theory) and what it can do need to be limited. Theory cannot do what it claims to do within theoretical holism, which is to provide its own grounding of complete or sufficient guidelines for practice, because even in doing that it is already itself engaged in practices that escape its theorization.

Hubert Dreyfus and Charles Taylor , more recently, have together explained the hold of this theoretical holism on the modern world, in terms borrowed from Wittgenstein, as our being

held "captive" by a picture or, rather, by a diagram of human understanding that makes a mediating representation or theorization always necessary. Quite to the contrary, they suggest, the understanding and meaning that make the theory possible happen much more immediately, and they happen largely in and through the pre-conceptual coping skills involved in practice. One of the concerns addressed in their joint work is the stubbornness of the mediational picture of understanding, noting that even most philosophers and theorists who try to recognize and deal with the problems inherent in that picture nonetheless keep getting pulled back in by it. Our thinking is dominated by a common sense that precedes it, and this common sense is a distorted picture of how human beings understand the world (16). By implication, if we were able to manage to punch our way through this distorted picture, a whole new way—a truer, more just way—of seeing the world would open up. It is entirely possible, for instance, that some problems on which society is currently fixated and on which it expends massive intellectual effort, would simply disappear as other ways of proceeding become the new common sense.

This thesis, in being concerned with the over-articulation of meaning in education, is concerned with the captivity of modern educational thought to the mediational picture, with the very real effects of that captivity, and with eliciting adumbrations of what it might mean to break free from it. This is, to say the least, a complex and multifaceted problematic in itself, and one not ultimately separable from the much larger, philosophically identified question of the modern era's captivity to the mediational picture in general. But there are many different angles and theoretical modes through which it can be approached. What can be said is that, if we are to begin punching our way through this picture, it will not be by following detailed top-down directives from Taylor and Dreyfus, or from any other philosopher. It will be through the intuitive but concrete recognition of ordinary people within the various fields of human

endeavour in which the picture has its securest hold that something simply isn't working, that meaning, for instance, is somehow missing.

While this is a theoretical thesis, it is not written from within the academic field of philosophy and does not deal in analytical detail with the philosophical hermeneutics of representation and reality. Rather, it approaches the problematic from an angle much closer to that which will be taken by the man on the Clapham omnibus—perhaps a teacher on his way to work—when it suddenly occurs to him, gazing out over the bustling street of which he is also a part, that the way we go about educating the young in the modern world doesn't make as much sense as he had always assumed. Or it approaches it from the angle of someone trained in history to immerse herself in the sources who is then let out into the welter of the contemporary world where everything is a source and every source is evidence of something. It becomes a lot harder to discern what all the evidence is pointing to, but the trick is to just keep looking. That is what this thesis tries to do, and it is, in the end, what ordinary people concerned about education need to do: to just keep looking at the way we habitually think about education, at how that is entwined with the dysfunctionality of what we actually do in education, and at various intellectual and intuitive attempts to articulate what is wrong. It tries to read the signs of the times. The touchpoint with the philosophy is the basic claim of practice theory that says practice is always prior to theory. This provides sufficient orientation from which to notice that our educational thought, in contrast, is always trying to set up representations of what we should be doing. It is always mediating, putting up a screen of theory and self-justification, between the adult world and the young. In the starkest of terms, if practice theory is right, then the sheer amount of theoretical effort endlessly put into improving education would seem a sure sign that we have it all wrong.

It follows from these considerations, firstly, that the argument developed here does not fit the normal mold of providing a contribution to a particular literature. It is precisely the paradigm within which such education research literatures are generated—in order always to improve, and so further entrench, the education system—that is in question. Now, one way I might have tried to engage with a particular literature as a way of arguing for the kind of paradigm shift I am talking about here would have been to take up Joseph Dunne's would-be seminal *Back to the Rough Ground* for close philosophical analysis and to have developed my own case in opposition to his, where I see his going astray. As I say in Chapter 5, Dunne's closely reasoned work deserves this kind of close treatment in response. However, when the problem is being lost in the trees, the immediate imperative is to try to see the forest. Dunne already has it mostly right when he shows how his philosophical analysis leads to the conclusion that education should not be approached through the "objectives model" (1–8). Where he gets lost is in assuming that this model is limited to theories—such as Bloom's taxonomy—and research methodologies—particularly quantitative ones (368–69)—that explicitly deal with the importance of setting out hard behavioural objectives. I want to suggest, rather, that a paradigm that depends on objectives and theoretical pre-articulations reigns throughout the system of modern schooling, and currently by means of its dominant legitimating ethos in the contemporary world. Thus I focus precisely on the apparently softer face of contemporary educational thought—the kinds of things that Dunne would let pass, in line, for example, with his call for teachers to be more "reflective" (368–69)—and I try to show how, especially here, the compulsively rationalizing, manipulative imperative of the mediational picture is secretly at work. I engage with Dunne, in other words, by going off and doing something else—in another mode than that of a close reading of the philosophers on practical judgement—in order to show

what he has missed. But in doing so, of course, I am also doing more than addressing Dunne: I am addressing the dominant educational paradigm of our times. That is, admittedly, a tricky thing to do, because there is no one literature in which that paradigm is exclusively represented. The target is a moving or a nebulous one, but it is nevertheless one that needs to be identified and engaged. I have already briefly indicated how I intend here to identify it and to challenge it.

The second curb to expectations that follows quite directly is that I cannot, without self-contradiction, provide a plan of action for building a new educational paradigm or draw up a blueprint for new institutions. I cannot tell people what they should do. That would be, precisely, to follow the old paradigm by engaging in a kind of social theory that presumes to be able to adequately represent our practices, to identify how they need to be tweaked for improvement of the system, and then to create the necessary instructions for practitioners to follow. This has been the common-sense modus operandi of educational research over the last century, and this is how both educational thought and practice have been bound by a picture that doesn't work. The social thought I am engaging in here is itself a practice, and it is a practice with its own aims and limits. Simply put, I am puzzled by some contradictions I see in the world of education, and I want to try to see more clearly what is going on. I have immersed myself in the abundant sources of contemporary educational discourse, and I have drawn on quite a wide variety of authors to help make sense of them, within the broad theoretical parameters already outlined. If I should succeed in getting a clearer view of the conceptual mess we are in, it does not follow that I should be able to create instructions for clearing everything up. But neither does it follow that having nothing more than a few insights into what is going on is entirely useless. Seeing the world differently means acting in the world differently. And I am asking the reader whether he or she does not see what I see.

What I would say to the man on the Clapham omnibus—who may happen to be a teacher or an education administrator or a parent or a master of any practice that a young person might be interested in learning, and who wants to know what he should do—is that he should be bothered by the kinds of educational contradictions that I puzzle over in this thesis, but that he might want to puzzle them out in different ways, in more concrete ways. But I must underline that, just as I am not responding to any particular literature within the education research field, I am not speaking to the man on the Clapham omnibus in his role as a teacher or administrator within the current system, nor as a parent or citizen from whom the present institutions might deign to take input. I am speaking to him simply as a person capable of seeing and of responding to what he sees. What I have in mind here is something like what Charles Spinoza, Fernando Flores, and Hubert Dreyfus talk about in *Disclosing New Worlds*:

> The entrepreneur, virtuous citizen, and culture figure find in their lives something disharmonious that common sense overlooks or denies. They then hold on to this disharmony and live with intensity until it reveals how the commonsense way of acting ought to take care of things and how it fails. (162)

History-making, as they discuss it, is well served neither by the modern stance of rational detachment that presumes to control human action nor by the postmodern stance of "surfing" or adapting to continual change. In both ways, history inevitably eludes our grasp. We need to learn to re-engage with it in more immediate ways by engaging with the world in more immediate ways (1–15). I can't address the what-to-do question any better than to say that the future of education is in the hands of people who are willing to engage with it in immediate ways—which today, paradoxically, means a wariness of the tendency to compulsively look for representations. Latching on to disharmonies and not being willing to let go of them is the key, and this thesis is devoted to bringing out many of those disharmonies. The necessary negativity here does not

mean resignation to despair. Quite the contrary. But visions and adumbrations of something more positive should not be confused with plans and mission statements. I will return to the questions of what to do, of what lies ahead, of what to avoid, and of what it might all look like in the final section of the thesis, because it is not only valid but also important to ask and to keep asking. Just don't expect a straight answer.

Here is an outline of what *can* be expected in the thesis: Chapter 1 recounts the change in focus of the thesis from the idea of teaching about religion (AR) to meaning in education, and, along the way, examines some fundamental paradoxes in the nature of education and in the logic of meaning. In effect, these paradoxes amount to a warning that the harder you try, the worse it is going to get. It is a warning worth considering, given the magnitude of the effort that goes in to "improving" education. Along related lines, this chapter will begin to introduce the significance of practice theory, which is a loose categorization of much post-Heideggarian and -Wittgensteinian social thought by its awareness of the limits of theory and the priority of practice. Some Christian scholars have shown a much more sophisticated grasp of the educational significance of the concept than mainstream education has, noting the crucial role of formation by social and cultural habitus, rather than by explicit teaching, in anchoring the young to a meaningful world. On the same principles, the foregrounding of religious difference as a civic problem that can or should be dealt with explicitly in the education of the young can be seen as misdirected. This is the point on which the thesis takes its crucial turn, dropping the problem of religion, as such, into the background and picking up on the problem of meaning in education. The ultimate quest of this inquiry thus becomes a bit more well-defined: some kind of thick formation or anchoring in a meaningful world for the majority, in this secular age, who have no strong connections to religious traditions.

Chapter 2 could be described as the last remaining vestige of the original thesis on AR. It looks at the extensive argument in favour offered by Warren Nord, and examines his struggles with the two intertwined but conflicting aims entailed in the very idea of such a program: civic harmony and educational meaningfulness.

Chapter 3 asks, What is secularization and where has it brought us? The real story, as told by Charles Taylor, traces back to the Axial revolution and the role of an impulse to Reform characteristic of post-Axial history in the West. The impulse to Reform is, in essence, an impulse not only to educate but to change society through education (hence the capital *R*). It has its bright side and its dark side. Jumping back to the contemporary world, I suggest that Eva Illouz's analysis of today's dominant therapeutic/communicative ethos provides insight into how the bright and the dark are intertwined. Finally, bringing the discussion of the dominant ethos down to questions of legitimacy (James Nolan) and authority in education, Richard Sennett's early work on authority is contrasted with the kind of liberal approach to authority that supports that ethos (Amy Gutmann).

Chapter 4 endeavours to take a bird's-eye-view of the contemporary world of education and look at some of the ways it is continually concerned with meaning and is always trying too hard. But nothing is as telling of the uneasiness with our rationalizing of education than the spectre of boredom—ever present, and yet never noticed, or, if noticed, never tolerated. For Adam Phillips the child, in a certain sense, *is* boredom. Meaning for the child is a free relationship to possibility. But the authority, and power, of education today is based on the ability to manage possibilities. Childhood boredom is turned into chronic boredom (Paul Goodman), possibilities are paraded before young people endlessly, and options are kept open

for as long as possible. Even a potentially interesting subject of study like religion is turned into a humourless insistence that children appreciate that there are different possibilities of meaning.

Chapter 5 continues to look at the plight of the child in the Church of Reason, with an emphasis here on the logic of rationality in contrast to the logic of meaning. The rationality of the whole system is traced back to its supposed source in education research, but education research is shown to lack considerably in comparison with scholarship in the humanities (at least in terms of the ideals of each). This leads into consideration of what a practice is and is not, how practices serve as seedbeds of the virtues and of meaning, and why educational research and thought has such a difficult time recognizing the real significance of practice theory (i.e., because management of possibility and diversity is essentially abstract and theoretical).

Chapter 6 returns to the question of whether formation—as opposed to what, in the final analysis, could be called the unintentional *religious instruction* of AR and countless modern efforts at moral education—is possible for the majority that secularization and the education system have left in moral and spiritual confusion. Modern education emerged as a theoretically generated response to the breakup of the apprenticeship model, and, so, when the modern education system begins to break up from the working out of its own contradictions, there will be something to revisit. Richard Sennett, Matthew Crawford, Hubert Dreyfus, Albert Borgmann, and Milhaly Csikszentmihalyi, all in different but related ways, show how meaning depends on practices that can free us from the knots into which over-articulation and over-theorization has tied our efforts to fulfill our inter-generational responsibilities.

Chapter 1: The Logic of Meaning

This was originally envisioned as a master's thesis, to be got out of the way quickly in the form of a relatively straightforward argument in favour of teaching *about* religion (AR)[1] in public schools. But, instead of getting out of the way so I could move on to bigger and better things, the topic just got out of hand as I came to recognize how big it really was. A topic that even only touches on ultimate things is a topic that needs to be squared with everything. How does one make a neat little argument out of that? Saving it for the PhD, I found, does not solve the problem. The pressures in a doctoral program for making a neat little argument and getting it out of the way are just as great, if not greater. Of course, in the humanities the whole point is to try to expound an argument with a light touch, making a concise case for what is seen while qualifying claims as well as can be done and maintaining some sense of the vastness of the questions being dealt with. In the field of education, however, even in philosophical and social foundations, the whole point is the neat little argument—no acknowledgment need be given of everything beyond the immediate scope of its intended interventions. Instead of tentatively describing what is seen, one is supposed to self-assuredly tell people what to do.[2]

The trouble I have had in trying to figure out how to deal justly with my topic, once I had decided on it, is inseparable from my growing sense of the troubled state of things, I won't

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[1] I will use this abbreviation, when helpful, not because I want to create a new acronym that rolls off the tongue, but because it provides a way of avoiding the need to continually re-emphasize the emphasis on the *about*. And the policy-oriented emphasis of AR as an idea, for reasons that will become clear in my discussion, really is on that prepositional element of the term.

[2] I am simplifying quite a bit. Academics in education generally (as in other fields, especially "applied" ones, although I am talking as well about the crisis in the humanities, a background theme in this thesis, for which see Kronman) tend to present themselves as producing research rather than arguments, even to the point of implicitly assuming that the argument only comes in later, when everyone decides, with astonishing matter-of-factness—by committee or at a board meeting, for example—how to "apply" the research. This overemphasis of the research element is one way, although not a very good one in the long run, of trying to add weight to neat little arguments (see Mills 205–06; Graff, *Clueless* 32–35). There will be much more on the contradictions in, and convolutions of, methodology in education research in Chapter 5. But I should emphasize here that I am not denying that I am making an argument in this thesis, only pointing out the inadequacy for my purposes (in dealing with educational purposes) of the *neat little* variety of argument that the research imperative leads one to expect.

say merely in, but rather reflected by the world of education and educational thought. Having come to the field of education after considerable graduate study in the humanities, it has been a fathomless puzzle for me all along how thoroughly absent the humanities are in the thought and speech of people concerned with primary and secondary education, within systems still nominally teaching humanistic subjects like literature, languages, history, social studies, and now, in some cases, religions. At first I thought it was only a matter of redressing an imbalance, of reasserting the importance of the humanities, and the idea of implementing AR programs, where school children could sit and contemplate the meaning of life, seemed to be a way of doing that.

Doubts soon began to creep in, however, undermining the plans I had for my own work and for unsuspecting children everywhere. One of the first big annoyances was that everyone seemed already to agree with me. Something had to be wrong there. Graduate students are notoriously paranoid about having missed something that has already articulated what they want to say, or about the possibility that some scholar out there, as yet unknown, is simultaneously working on the same thing and will beat them to it at the last minute. In this case, everyone seemed already to have beaten me to it. I would tell people that I was working on the topic of religion and public schools and, quite understandably, they would show signs of concern for my sanity. They might even look around for an exit, just in case I was about to try to convert them on the spot. But when I would further explain that I was looking into teaching *about* religion, their relief was immediately visible. They got it. They need not necessarily agree with actually going ahead and doing it, although most people in education were more than ready to give their spontaneous support, but they definitely saw the point. There was, and there is, something

undeniably obvious about the idea. That was worrying to me, and it should be worrying to those who propose AR.

Of course, there is something that is properly obvious at the heart of the idea of teaching about religion: the negative point of the injustice of leaving religion out of education. I have no quarrel in the abstract with curriculum theory that puts religion back in its rightful place as an unavoidable subject in humanities studies. Nor do I have a quarrel with religion purely as an academic subject in universities, and, in principle, the extension of this purely academic study to high school and possibly even earlier. But to launch a policy campaign on some finer points of what should be included in a humanities education upon an education world that has lost its sense of the significance of the humanities is inevitably to get pulled back in by the numbing forces of day-to-day obviousness from which the humanities are supposed to give some degree of freedom. The mere fact of everyone already agreeing with me I could conceivably have dealt with in the same way I was prepared to deal with the fact that some good arguments for AR had already been made: simply by digging into the details of the argument, finding something that had been overlooked but needed to be emphasized, and spinning a thesis out of that. It was not, however, the mere fact of agreement, but rather the baggage that went with that agreement, that promised to co-opt anything I would want to say. This is what finally made it impossible for me, in good conscience, to continue trying to make a case for teaching AR.

This left me with what is, admittedly, an odd sort of topic. I did not want to simply turn the whole thing around and make a neat little argument *against* teaching AR. What was bothering me was everything that made the idea seem so obvious, and this called for a different kind of approach, a willingness to just step back and look at everything that was there. This was a different everything than the everything I had initially envisioned having to deal with. I had

assumed that in the process of developing a knock-down argument for teaching AR I would myself, as a matter of course, need to learn more about religion. That would have to become a part of my project. However, I wasn't quite sure what that meant. Should I try to learn as much as I could about all the major world religions? Was that wise or practical at this stage in my studies? I had never majored in religious studies, and only taken a few courses here and there. Should I try to learn more deeply about one religion: for instance the Roman Catholic tradition, in which I was educated, but which had never entirely taken with me? So, where to begin? How much should I know about *religion*—whatever the definition of that notoriously tricky and potentially open-ended concept and whatever it might include—before I can legitimately make the argument that young people in school should be taught *about* religion? If I wasn't sure what I should know about religion, could I tell others why they should know about religion? Was I being presumptuous? If so, where was that presumption coming from? I was coming to see my whole vague plan of study as just another problematic aspect of the obviousness of the idea. When you got right down to it, it wasn't so obvious at all.

So, I have ended up having to take on another, and certainly equally overwhelming, everything, the everything that makes the idea of AR an idea that fits so well with the educational discourse of our times. This does some odd things to my topic. In fact, it has often felt like a constant struggle against a relentless centrifugal force destined to blast the whole thing apart. My starting point is the idea of teaching about religion. But my doubts about that idea lead me well beyond that idea to the broadly educational and social context in which that idea makes sense to many people. This, in some ways might better be described as a critique of modern or contemporary education, because there is nothing wrong with religion being a subject in education as such, I am saying, but rather it is the whole educational background that makes it

wrong. Moreover, the critique necessitates at least some sort of gesture in the direction of an alternative, which might be regarded as the ultimate point of the whole exercise. Is there still a thesis here? Or am I incoherently trying to deal with everything? Which is the real topic: the critique of the educational idea, the broad critique of contemporary education and society, or the sketching out of an alternative way?

Although the idea of AR is, in some sense, a starting point that will need to be left behind, it will also, I hope, provide a continuing focus to the broader critique and the suggestions toward getting things right. One of the reasons I have not been able to just drop the idea of AR entirely is that, despite all of its confusions and contradictions (on which I will elaborate), it is still a poignant instance of people trying to hang on to the kind of overarching meaning, or source of meaningfulness, that the idea of religion represents. More to the educational point, it is an instance of people still trying to meet the responsibility that human adults perennially have of passing on some sort of meaningful world to the next generation, and, because it is taken to be such an obvious way to do this for our times, it is also a way that can be seen to well represent our confusions and the nature of our entrapment in a sense of meaninglessness. It is worth just stepping back and contemplating in some detail and with some persistence the ways we get tangled up in our own best efforts to live up to our educational responsibilities. The idea of AR, as a policy-oriented idea, indeed cannot live up to it, and is, at the same time as it is an easy attempt to meet it, an evasion of it. But that fundamental impulse that AR instantiates, how it is gotten wrong, and what kind of turn is required in order to be able to begin to get it right, will remain the focus of my concern throughout this thesis.

Not My Idea

I have begun in a first-person mode because my own struggle to find a light touch with my thesis topic presents in microcosm what the argument that I have to struggle to try to make is about, which, in the end, is that in claiming and grounding authority for fulfilling our intergenerational responsibilities we need to find a lighter touch. Thus, my own crisis in having to choose between the educationist's way and the humanist's[3] way reflects a larger looming crisis of meaning in education, one that I think will eventually need to be faced. Without coherent meaning there is no authority, and without authority there can be no light touch. Almost everything that is done in education today (especially in primary and secondary education and its supporting thought and research, but also in post-secondary education, with the crisis in the humanities) seems to be done with a heavy hand, which is to say, with a compensatory need to overstate or overemphasize the significance of the objectives and the authority with which they are asserted. AR fits the same pattern. Simply put, to foreground the problem of religious difference in a secular society is to invite a heavy hand. It is to try to appear to deal easily with the difficulty of making sense of incommensurables that cannot straightforwardly be made sense of. This is why I cannot endorse the idea that AR programs should be implemented. I do not deny that implementing them would indeed create some space for people who know and love the study of religion to teach something of what they do and of what they know in just the right kind of way to young people. How much of this actually would take place I cannot say, and so I cannot say whether the good would outweigh the bad, and I cannot say that such a program definitely should not be implemented. This is not a neat little argument against AR. What I can

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[3] As confusing as it may be in a thesis about both education and secularization, I will be using the terms *humanist* and *humanistic* simply in the sense pertaining to study in the humanities.

say is that where it is implemented it is implemented for largely the wrong reasons and within an educational context that is all wrong to begin with. It would, indeed, be difficult to state publicly today the right reasons, and certainly to do so without having them misinterpreted, because a single educational program intended somehow to address meaning cannot exist within a vacuum of meaning.

When I say that this thesis is about everything, I mean that what started with the idea of teaching about religion needs to go beyond that idea to the social and educational context in which, for the current moment, it might seem to make sense, to a still broader perspective from which we can ask whether the idea and its context really do make sense, and then further still to intimations of a new direction, a new way of thinking about society and education, in which meaning (hence, "everything"—including the academic study of religion) might be able to find more favourable conditions. It is perhaps redundant to hope that the idea of AR should become a historical marker along the way to something else, because if one thing is obvious about the current education world, it is that such policy ideas come and go with disconcerting predictability. But we don't seem to know where we are going or what we want, and we certainly have trouble articulating a satisfactory response to the perennial question of moral and educational responsibility toward the next generation. The idea of AR is for me one that has already been left behind, as I have continued thinking about the confusions and contradictions in the way it is articulated. And so for purposes of introduction to the complex of themes and problems raised by AR it might be useful as an introduction to continue with the personal narrative a bit further, recounting something of how I came to be convinced by the idea for a time, how doubts arose, and how I began to see, in seeing the nature of the problem in the foregrounding of religious difference, the way around and past its confusions and contradictions

on the question of intergenerational responsibility. I will blend this in with a discussion of the key intertwining themes and problems, which discussion is the core purpose of this introduction, and then end with an overview of the chapters themselves.

I came to the field of education, as I have said, from a background in the humanities, having studied history, art history, and philosophy, in particular. Admittedly, I still often wonder what I thought I was doing in taking this leap into quite another world within the academic world. But here is a stab at pinpointing my intentions. Better education in the humanities, liberal arts for all, it seemed to me, held the key to addressing the vast array of problems associated with modernity and the technological society, but also, beyond the scope of discrete "problems" to be solved, the matter of being, of orientation, of meaning, that had gone askew in the modern world. With George Grant's musings on the North American aversion to thought implanted indelibly in my mind,[4] and with a vaguely Heideggarian vision of some kind of possible turning of society toward a more contemplative mode of thoughtfulness, I thought that these things could use more thought, and, I suppose, hoped that I might be able to come up with some sort of plan to help nudge things in the right direction.

An example with which I had been very much impressed was the President's Council on Bioethics, formed under George W. Bush, but the brain-child of Leon Kass.[5] The idea was to take some of the moral problems being generated by innovations in biotechnology and, instead, of coming up with straightforward answers for policy makers, as committees of bioethicists

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[4] "To exist as a North American is an amazing and enthralling fate. As in every historical condition, some not only have to live their fate, but also to let it come to be thought. What we have built and become in so short a time calls forth amazement in the face of its novelty, an amazement which leads to that thinking. Yet the very dynamism of the novelty enthralls us to inhibit that thinking," Grant (15). These musings are, in fact, one way of describing what the present thesis tries to wrestle with.

[5] Kass offers observations from within the belly of the beast in his "Reflections on Public Bioethics."

generally try to do, to form the committee out of a wide variety of intellectuals from different fields, including the humanities, and then to give the problems the kind of broad and deep thought they deserve. A Nathaniel Hawthorn short story might thus serve as the focus for thinking about the desires and motives behind a particular path in biotech innovation. This seemed to me at once exactly the kind of thing that was called for in our times and exactly the kind of thing that was doomed to failure, to the extent the intent was to have a real, moderating effect on the mindless proliferation of biotech innovation. People simply would not have time or inclination to really listen to any of it, let alone to take the example set by a limited committee and to keep thinking further about these things. General education, in other words, had not managed to bring about a society in which it is generally expected that innovations bearing on huge questions of the meaning of the human condition and the world will be given the careful thought they deserve. I did, and still do, find this quite frightening.

So, the longer term answer, I thought, was to turn back to education. It had to be education that would form an educated public capable of dealing with problems generated by technology, and educated persons capable of finding more meaningful lives under the conditions already created by modernity. My aims being both vast and vague, however, I was naturally drawn in to the categories of investigation already dominant in the field, particularly moral education. This literature was ultimately disappointing. What I had in the back of my mind was something more like an approach to moral philosophy as a humanities subject for high schools, in the same way that I myself was interested in moral philosophy, or like Kass's idea transposed to the classroom. But what I found was not often in the spirit of humanities study.[6] Even

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[6] An exception might be a proponent like William Bennett with his affinity for the Christian classical education movement in the United States (for the latter, see Clark and Jain).

character education (Lickona), which had a nominal link to the virtue ethics that seemed to me much more sociologically sophisticated than the standard utilitarian and deontological alternatives, was inevitably given frustratingly literalistic interpretations, like the arbitrary and mindless declaration of a "virtue of the month."[7] No one seemed really to be offering the humanities-based approach I was looking for, and I was quite uneasy about all that was on offer.

And then I discovered James Davison Hunter's *The Death of Character*, which confirmed me in my doubts. Here, Hunter is concerned with the problem of moral education in a pluralistic society. In looking at all of the various approaches on offer—which he categorizes under the psychological (81–106), the communitarian (112–14), and the neo-classical strategies (109–12)—he finds that they are all sucked in, to varying degrees, by what he calls the "paradox of inclusion."[8] When we see fragmentation in public life and diversity in moral views, we naturally seek cohesion, and this is especially the case when it comes to facing the responsibility to pass on a stable moral orientation to the young. Recognizing that morality is social and that moral education must be addressed publicly, we seek inclusive answers. But morality, if it is social, points out Hunter, arises from "particular moral cultures [that] define the horizons of our moral imagination in ways that we are not fully conscious" (22). Moreover, "particularity is inherently exclusive" (12). The inclusive answers, therefore, are necessarily abstract and

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[7] Virtue of the month is a very popular approach (see Goodman and Lesnick), but it is just one example of the kind of curricular gimmick that seemingly inevitably gets generated by efforts to get serious about moral education: there is also virtue vouchers (Docksai) and Ethical Fitness® (Kidder 3), to name two more. It is easy enough to interpret one or the other such approaches as superficial, but the question is how not to go from one moral-education fix to another: "To post a virtue of the month or to hold a one-day character education assembly is not equal to providing for a school's faculty and staff intensive professional development," says Bernice Lerner (135), for example. But then does professional development square with moral formation either?

[8] Says Hunter on the paradox of inclusion: "This tension between accommodating diversity in public life [inclusion in one sense] and establishing a working agreement in our moral life [inclusion in another sense] is a defining feature of our national life; indeed, our collective history. *The problem is where our long-standing aspiration to sustain some inclusive moral order now leads us*" (*Death of Character* 9, emphasis in original).

distorting attempts to finesse consensus at a depth where consensus cannot be finessed. You can

say that consensus, where it is achievable, is fine, as long as everyone recognizes that, as in

Jacques Maritain's famous account of human rights, they are agreeing for different reasons.[9]

What Hunter is bringing to light, however, is the tendency, the significance of which is

intensified in education, to take the consensus and forget the reasons, which will always hold

lingering doubts, questions, and ambiguities. When moral education is education *in* the

simplified consensus, there really are no reasons being passed on. The morality being taught is in

its essence watered down. Moral education itself, in all three contemporary strategies, and

despite the best of intentions, is empty. As Hunter puts it, "we want the flower of moral

seriousness to blossom, but we have pulled the plant up by its roots" (13). Moreover, even the

effort to be inclusive is proven to be counter-productive, because all that has been achieved is a

generic, homogenized substitute for moral formation.

       Hunter's book hit me like a ton of bricks and came as a breath of fresh air, both at the

same time. It was a breath of fresh air, because, even at this still fairly early stage in my turn to

the field of education, I was already beginning to sense a deep-seated aversion among

educationists to the kind of thing Hunter was doing. Hunter is a sociologist looking at education,

and, as I see it now and sensed then, it is almost unthinkable for people with a more official role

in thinking about education (i.e., within education faculties) to be able to approach education the

way he does, to simply step back and look at it, to notice paradox and contradiction, and to

simply be willing to contemplate it. This is a paradox in itself, that education as a field of study

can't seem to liberate itself enough to take the kind of detached look at itself that should be the

natural outcome of the humanities subjects it is still nominally concerned with promoting. In the

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[9] For a brief summary of Maritain on human rights, see Sweet.

broadest of terms, what I want to do in this thesis is to take the problems raised by Hunter, or implicit in what he says, to draw them out with more of an eye to the secular nature of modern society, and just look at them, contemplate them. I do so from a more secular angle than Hunter himself, and therefore suggest a different focus of the problem and different direction toward resolution, but my blunt message to the education establishment is just to see the homogenizing effects of the common-sense response to secularization.

To get back to the narrative, the ton of bricks, and there were still more bricks to come, was that Hunter's critique of moral education seemed to apply equally well to my own efforts. I had turned to the field of education out of a sense of our inability to deal as a society with the questions raised by technology on the level of seriousness which they require. People like Daniel Callahan and Leon Kass, internal critics of the bioethics profession and its acquiescence in a de facto system of ethics by committee, had crystallized in my mind the difficulty of getting a real moral grip on important social questions within a pluralistic and technological society.[10] I had retreated back to education, thinking I might find an answer there. But now Hunter was pointing out essentially the same predicament: attempts at coherent moral education within a pluralistic society were ending up as, essentially, moral education by committee. Put another way, the attempt to locate a source or sources from which to deal with the problems of a technological society by means other than merely managerial and technical was proving more elusive than I had hoped. The education system, of course, is itself a technological system, and so cannot provide an easy solution.

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[10] For example, Callahan begins one of his assessments of bioethics soberingly, although really it shouldn't come as a shock to professionals in wisdom, with the reminder "that the field of bioethics as we now know it is a creature of its time and history" (2).

But I was not yet ready to give up on looking for the right program. While still reeling from Hunter, I came across, or, actually, re-encountered, the idea of teaching about religion in Neil Postman (151–57), soon discovering that there were others making the same case, and realizing that it was not an idea that would necessarily be entirely unacceptable in the education establishment.[11] Now, the whole question for me, of course, was whether teaching about religion could be said to fall, along with moral education as such, under Hunter's devastating critique, or whether it could still provide a workable means for the kind of moral education and the re-invigoration of liberal-arts and humanities education in high schools that I had in mind. My inclination was to go with the latter, even though for Hunter himself the solution to the moral education paradox seemed to be in the direction of education within particular religious traditions, as is implied in his emphasis on the importance of the thick, character forming habitus of particular traditions.[12]

Hunter's whole case is built on the inherent particularity of moral orientation and of stable grounding in a sense of a meaningful world. This goes beyond the particularity of different doctrines, to the particularity of habitus, the embodied, pre-intellectual absorption of meaning from the cultural surroundings in which one is socialized. I recognized the persuasiveness of Hunter's sophisticated sociological case, but also its limitations in today's largely secular and secularist society. I thought, and still would say, that simply plugging back into a religious

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[11] In this thesis I am taking Warren Nord as the main proponent of AR, but see Chapter 2 for others and for the debate around it.

[12] In *Death of Character*, Hunter is concerned with describing the cultural realities of secularization, particularly in reference to Warren Sussman's historical account of the replacement of character with personality, so, as I say, the direction of any potential solution is implicit. Hunter's Christian perspective is put front and centre in *To Change the World*, where the theme is how living within communities of tradition can have its effects on the broader world. It should also be noted, however, that he may well have anticipated the more secular direction that I am taking in my focus on practices as such: He is, for example, executive director of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture, of which Matthew Crawford has been a fellow.

tradition is not an authentic option for many or most people in modern western societies. As well, having at the top of my mind the more civically oriented question of how to achieve a sufficiently educated public that it can create a space for dealing more wisely with technological innovation, I was inclined to take a more abstractly philosophical approach, and to be satisfied with less than the stable social grounding of meaning that Hunter was after.

On one level, I was just looking for a way to get people to stop and think, and to form in young people the habit of doing so. Like Kass with his anti-committee committee, I wasn't going to pretend to supply a meaning base for people through the education system, but was merely looking for a way of holding up some of the various possibilities of meaning, to show that there are other possibilities, thus putting into question the self-assured scientistic, technical, managerial default approach of our times and creating a space for deeper and more serious thought, even in the public sphere. The *about* in *about religion* seemed to me equivalent to the intellectual detachment ideally fostered by humanities disciplines, and I thought that, by introducing the subject of religion to schools, because it raises the issue of pluralism, this humanities approach would have to be taken in the classroom, the habit of humanistic detachment would rub off, and it would have some needed effect on our society and its public sphere, and on individuals.[13]

While being drawn to Hunter for the sociological sophistication offered by the concept of habitus and the whole realm of background structures and unarticulated assumptions that that opens up, I was actually still being very naive and ham-fisted. Perhaps falling into the same kind of trap as Kass (however worthy of admiration his efforts), I was simply saying if we hold up

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[13] I would, of course, distinguish humanistic detachment from rationalistic detachment, the former being concerned with contemplating and the latter with manipulating.

examples of meaning, of religious views of the world, they will somehow "take," and a greater

sense of meaningfulness and of the fullness of meaning will be established in society and in

individuals. What I wasn't giving enough consideration to was that it was not exactly a matter of

a complete vacuum of meaning just waiting to be filled. There is a lot to be said for the view that

contemporary culture is a culture of no culture. Hunter, I think, tends toward this view with his

insistence that it is traditions that hold the possibility for meaningful orientation, and that true

moral education requires taking these back up. But it is a tricky question. There is also a very

strong tendency to forget that as human beings we still live against a background of structures

and unarticulated assumptions that establish in us a habitus and that relate us, in one way or

another, in a meaningful way toward the world. It is just that this is the very thing that is least

visible to us and the hardest to keep remembering. In the contemporary world this natural

orientation takes an odd turn. It is not today a matter of being able to rest comfortably in a sense

of the meaning on which we lie, or within which we breathe. Rather, there is always that list of

traditions out there, discouragingly distant and separate from our culture, or non-culture, itself,

that hold the real meaning. Our tenuous hold on meaning is achieved more by association with

than by tapping into those real sources of meaning. There is something very odd about this. It

seems to be a sort of orientation toward meaning that resists meaning, or at least that wants to

remain non-committal toward meaning.

      I am trying to gesture here toward some very broad and abstract considerations, but my

point is that these are the concerns that began to build up in me slowly and concretely now that I

had decided on AR as my thesis topic. I was not only taken aback by the assurance of everyone I

met that they already understood my thesis topic better than I did and by the implication that

there may not really be all that much to delve into and draw out, but, more significantly, on a

daily basis I was gradually coming to understand how fundamentally the background of the education world, from which these assurances of understanding my topic were coming, was opposed to my very purpose. I had started out in education studies mainly taking directed readings courses in philosophy of education, so my becoming familiar with the over-arching themes and concerns of the broad field of education research and getting a sense of obsessions lying in the background was indeed a gradual process. But I was going to have to admit, sooner or later, that my purposes had been stymied. I had led myself into an impossible situation. It did not make any sense to propose a discreet program, like AR, for purposes that would not allow it to fit within the prevailing educational context. It would be pointless to put my efforts into working out how such a program could further the purpose of giving meaning a foothold in the technological society, when it would not be able to get its own foothold within an education world that so well reflected the technological society. I had been incredibly naive, although in good company with Postman, in thinking that it could. The idea of AR was really neither mine nor Postman's; it belonged to the background of already established educational concerns, assumptions, and practices, as well as the larger context of societal concerns, assumptions, and practices, from which it had arisen. It was not that I had changed my underlying purposes, but I had come to appreciate the traps of inevitable co-optation that await any ham-fisted technological or managerial attempt to find a solution and implement it. My topic had gotten a lot bigger and a lot more complicated.

Articulation and Paradox

I have begun with a brief first-person narrative of my struggles with my topic in order to give a sense of how, through pursuing my underlying purposes and through gradually

changing my mind, this odd sort of centrifugal topic—nominally on teaching about religion, but really more concerned with the problematic context in which its aims and objectives arise, and trying to point toward an educational and social turn that is a better way to address the underlying impulses—has come about, and of how it might, with some effort, still end up as a relatively coherent whole. Indeed, the only way to keep it all together is to let it take the form of a long essay. Because the topic is so big, all I can do is make an *attempt* to deal with it as best I can. The pretense that we can deal neatly with all of the problems raised by religion in a secular age by simply implementing a program and giving it to young people, actually creates a mess that needs to be faced in all of its messiness. That cannot be helped. Nevertheless, if I am compelled to struggle with an indefinitely broad array of thought and scholarship in the humanities, it is because there is a sharp point to doing so. It is not just that educational thought and research has lessened its emphasis on the humanities, as if the balance could easily be restored by implementing another humanities program or two. It is, rather, that educational thought and research has itself so fundamentally lost touch with the orientation that underlies so much of the best thought in the humanities—making it, in effect, extremely difficult or impossible to implement humanities programs without them turning, on the whole, into something else. As I now begin to draw out the problems raised by the idea of teaching about religion, I will at the same time be showing something of the inner necessity of my own topic troubles.

Although I am calling this thesis an "essay," that does not mean that what I have been presenting is merely a "personal view," as if that designation entailed that, because the reader also has a personal view, he or she need not be overly concerned with mine, other than to politely acknowledge it. Rather, in tracing my struggles with my topic, I have also traced the basic

outlines of the logic that stems from the confusions inherent in the idea of AR, as it has arisen and become a viable idea in the contemporary education world. My sense of a malaise in the public sphere and in culture and our technological society generally is part of a shared sense of unease. My expectation that education can be used to cure it is everyone's expectation of educational panacea. My latching on to the idea of teaching about religion as a way of passing some degree of transcendent meaning on to the next generation, despite our secular and secularist times, is, it seems, everyone's conviction of the obviousness of AR. My sense, nevertheless, that there is something wrong in the way we are educating the young is everyone's sense that something is wrong with the education that is taken, at the same time, as a panacea. My search for a light touch with my topic is a struggle to see some way through all of the contradictions that frustrate our desire for a meaningful education for the young within a meaningful society.

There is, admittedly, a degree of arbitrariness in the relation of the idea of teaching about religion to most of what I actually want to deal with in this thesis. I could have chosen any number of other currently fashionable educational ideas as my starting point. But that fact is really the way in to appreciating the whole puzzle. What bothered me more than anything when I was toying with AR, and what should trouble those who do propose it, is that in so many ways it was just another educational program among those being continually generated by the system. With such a hodgepodge as we have, it is inevitable that AR, no matter how clearly its serious aims are set out in advance, will end up blending in with the others—social-justice, diversity, anti-racism, civic, and moral education programs, to name just a few—and taking on the impulsive, distracted tone that characterizes so much of what it is claimed we need to teach the young. Of course, many have noted how we seem to be grasping at straws with all of these

educational fads, and the multiplication of socialization tasks and purposes. It is hard to deny the emptiness of the compulsion, and equally hard not to keep doing it anyway. Why we keep doing it is that it is at bottom a grasping for meaning, however confused, frantic, and usually counter-productive. AR, I want to suggest, falls into that typical pattern. But, if AR is just another educational idea, is also a particularly poignant one, because it raises the problem of how in our secular society we can pass on to the young something comparable to the meaning that was in the past passed on to them by teaching them *in* and *through* religion.

Of course, AR does not necessarily make too loud a noise about the question of meaning. To do so too explicitly would be to problematize the obviousness of the idea as a great way for achieving some of the discrete objectives of contemporary educational discourse. This does not imply that the meaning issue is not there in the background. As I have said, it is not possible to raise the subject of religion without raising questions of ultimate concern or over-arching coherence, questions of meaning. The slippery logic seems to be, though, that because the idea is supposedly obvious for dealing with, for example, diversity and making sure kids get along, it is an obvious way to deal with religion as such. Implement AR and consider large questions of the meaning of life and the world dealt with. This is related to the vicarious picking up of a sense of meaningfulness by association with religion and with the whole tradition of religious education that I have already hinted at. But the idea of AR does not, in fact, begin to deal with meaning. It does not even begin to deal with religion in the sense that religion is first and foremost a context of meaning for people. It might deal with the ways people find meaning through religion, but it does not deal with how we, who find meaning problematic, are supposed to pass meaning on to the young. In its attempt to take religion seriously, I want to suggest, it fails to take religion seriously. There is the heavy hand again.

So far, this is Hunter's paradox of inclusion, as I would interpret it for AR. For Hunter, as I understand his position, the solution to the moral education problem is education within traditions that, as opposed to the debased contemporary generic culture or non-culture, are the only sources for habitus rich enough to ground meaningful moral life. It might be argued that this is also the proper way to counter the AR arguments—education *in* religion, instead of teaching *about* religion.[14] But I am not sure that this solution is not, to a large extent, a reshuffling of the problem. Of course, a lot depends on what is meant by tradition and its maintenance. If it means the Christian idea of belief within a tradition, then this is clearly not going to cover everyone, or even the majority of people today. Many today still consider themselves affiliated with the mainline traditions, but, when it comes to the basic doctrines of those traditions, like to think for themselves, as they say. Charles Taylor (*Varieties* 56–60) has pointed out that in modernity the very conditions of belief entail the awareness of other possibilities—of not believing for the believer, and vice versa. Similarly, if the religious tradition is regarded as more toward the cultural end of the spectrum, there is still the need to face the fact that the hold of any such tradition, apart from generic non-culture with its compelling hold on all, especially on the young, is becoming tenuous at best.

The intellectual approach of the humanities works as a way of appropriating traditions and keeping them alive. This is really what scholarly detachment in the study of the humanities is all about, and it is suited well to the modern conditions of belief. One can doubt, or recognize the vast array of, other possibilities, while still delving deeper into the meanings of a tradition, and thus also *having* meaning, of a kind, in that very delving. But, whatever may be believable, it is not believable that AR as a general program will be a program of serious intellectual study in

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[14] See James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, for a fully developed case for religious formation.

schools. It will be a program based on inculcating superficial respect as opposed to deeper recognition. It will accept any available cachet to be taken from the slightest association with humanistic study as much as from the association with religion, but will not be willing or able to actually take that path any more than it will take the path of religious formation. It is fine for Hunter and Smith to counsel serious intellectual study within a tradition, and within faith-based institutions, but that presupposes the ability and willingness to identify strongly with the tradition, and so is not a general response. This is fair enough, and Hunter argues in *To Change the World* that minorities with serious-minded and well-educated elites, grounded in strong traditions, can indeed influence the larger culture. But, even if he is right about that, the question raised by AR remains of what is to be done in the meantime with the majority of kids in the wishy-washy middle ground of modernity. Giving them substitutes for meaning, or parading options before them without the ability to purchase, hardly seems conscionable, and this is why I insist on pressing through on Hunter's paradox of inclusion with them in mind. How to think generally of the generality without forgetting that meaning comes from particularity?

I do not want to give up on the humanities, nor do I want to deny the genuinely obvious core of the AR idea: that it is unjust to leave religion out of a liberal education, or to avoid the topic because it is too messy. But to propose the implementation of a humanities-based program for schools against a background which has lost all appreciation of the point of a liberal education is to fail to take the humanities seriously just as much as it is to fail to take religion seriously. Again, this is about more than just AR, and this is why the issue needs to be pressed as far as it will go, so that the same thing does not just keep popping up in one proposed program after another. I may be taking on a ridiculously huge topic here, but this is because in the larger frame I also want to be economical in my efforts. Paul Goodman identified the paradox that

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really gets to the heart of problems with the humanities: that it seems impossible "to *teach* the humanities without killing them" ("Present Moment" n.pag.). He tells of discovering *Macbeth* on his own in the library and devouring it, "but in class I could not understand a word of *Julius Caesar* and hated it; and I think this is the usual experience of people who read and write well. The survival of the humanities has seemed to depend on random miracles, which are becoming less frequent." To set out to give everyone everywhere the knowledge and skills undergirding the kind of light touch, the openness to meaning, that the humanities offer, is already to have used a heavy hand. This is a paradox that, like most social paradoxes, deserves contemplation rather than an obvious solution. Perhaps, though, a willingness to see the paradox can lead to seeing better how to ask the young to become educated without turning that expectation into a dead weight. A part of my larger purpose in this thesis is to point in that direction.[15]

The other part, as I have indicated, however, is to do exactly what we are so averse to doing, to step back from the educational-program generating machine from which AR has come and simply look at what we are doing. Paradoxes are a good way to focus such attention, and there is no shortage of them in the education world. These knotty things may not be as good for focusing neat little arguments as for focusing more contemplative thought, but I will try to maintain cogency in discussing them and to persist in searching for insight through them. So far, I have mentioned Hunter's paradox of inclusion and Goodman's paradox of teaching the liberal arts. And I have suggested that AR makes a self-contradictory claim to take both religion and the humanities seriously by making a proposal apparently for both while not really caring enough to think through its relation either to the context of religious formation or to the context of a liberal

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[15] And it is to point essentially in the same direction as Goodman, particularly when he suggests that "ancillary rather than prior schooling" is the way that will always make most sense for most young people ("Present Moment" n.pag.).

education for the young people themselves. Is there a connection between these paradoxes? Is there something about education in our times that generates contradiction and paradox? My own visceral clue is the difficulty I have had in trying to find a light touch with my topic, within a field that expects answers and programs instead of intellectual contemplation.[16]

Frank Furedi, in *Wasted: Why Education Isn't Educating*, brings us closer to putting a finger on it more analytically. His term is simply "the paradox of education," which suggests a formulation broad enough to encompass many manifestations. This is indeed what he provides with his wide-ranging critique of politicized and over-institutionalized contemporary education. "The paradox of education," he says,

> is that the more we expect of it, the less it is valued for its own sake. . . . Strictly speaking, the idea that education is in crisis is inaccurate. As an institution, education has never enjoyed so much cultural and political support. Its social weight and economic role is on the increase and more and more people spend a greater amount of their life in education institutions than in previous times. (19)

The crisis is a crisis specifically of liberal education. And so, as he suggests, Tony Blair's three priorities of "education, education, education" is symptomatic of the endless talk about and effort put into education, that nevertheless makes liberal-humanist education impossible (17).[17] Further, "one of the most striking symptoms of society's obsession with education is the speed with which new policies are introduced, implemented and then modified or withdrawn. The compulsion to invent new policies and initiatives dominate the educational landscape" (21). And "education is continually in search of meaning. This is demonstrated by the constant attempt to formulate new

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[16] These expectations are part and parcel of the methodological presuppositions of educational thought and research that I discuss in Chapter 5.

[17] To underline the emptiness of all the education-talk hyperbole, Furedi could have mentioned John Major's quip that he had the same three priorities as Blair, but in a different order (as recalled by Blair, "Full Text" n.pag.).

goals and objectives for it" (58). In the welter of enthusiasm over education, and the

self-perpetuating need to create more enthusiasm and more participation, the real aim of

education—an educated people and society—becomes impossible. Pinpointing the

source of the trouble even further, he suggests that the current waste of educational

efforts rest on a failure to put adult authority behind the need of education for its own

sake (84–87), and, underlying this, a failure to grasp the meaning of true education "in

its own terms" (62).

Furedi's critique is incisive, yet, like Hunter, his implied solution still leaves much to

be desired. The implication is that we just need to be more decisive, recognise that meaning lies

in liberal-humanistic study, and then implement policy initiatives to support such an approach to

education. There is a bootstrapping problem here. How can we decide to take education seriously

for its own sake within an instrumentally oriented society that is simply not able to recognize

collectively, publicly, the significance of humanistic study? AR might be one such program for

the re-affirmation of liberal-humanistic education. Yet, as I have been suggesting, there seems to

be something inherently unworkable in that approach, something heavy handed and likely to kill

the liberality of the subject by teaching it.

Am I back where I started? I don't think so—although I am still only setting out to

where I want to go. The thing to do is to keep contemplating the kinds of educational paradoxes

that I have introduced from Hunter, Goodman, and Furedi. AR, by its very existence as an idea

that keeps religion in education viable, attests to the continued grasping for meaning that can

serve as the basis for authority in education and as the background to meaningful life for the

young themselves. It is worth stopping and thinking very carefully about what it is we really

want when we propose a program like AR, and what it is we are really doing. It is only by

stopping in this way and just contemplating, just looking, that we can become aware of the traps that await our further efforts.

My first premonition of the nature of these traps was in my sense that by arguing for the implementation of AR I was somehow being heavy handed, and perhaps ultimately undermining my own efforts. The three formulations of educational paradox (Hunter, Goodman, Furedi) that I have introduced seem united in a similar sensitivity toward the dangers of trying too hard: trying too hard to include all meaning, leads to thin homogeneity; trying too hard to teach everyone to be intellectually awake, leads to chronic boredom; trying too hard to find more and more purposes for education, leads to empty, purposeless talk. Of course, I do not want to deny the differences between these thinkers, much less between all of the others on whom I will need to draw eclectically. It might be found odd that I am equally appreciative of Hunter, in his emphasis on tradition and the crucial role of cultural background, who might be considered, on balance, to be culturally conservative, and, on the other hand, someone like Goodman, who might be considered socially very liberal. However, they are both, as are most of the thinkers toward whom I am drawn, hard to classify on the hackneyed left–right scale. Though I will not always be able to take the time to spell out differences between one thinker and another on whom I will be drawing, I do not want to appear to be putting them all into the same blender either. By the nature of my task here, though, I will be drawing freely from where I can, in order to help piece together my puzzle.

Wendell Berry puts it best when, through his Mad Farmer persona, he says, "come all ye conservatives and liberals / who want to conserve the good things and be free, / come away from the merchants of big answers" ("Mad Farmer" 326). One of the things that helps keep contemporary political talk, including education talk, and thereby education itself, on the surface,

is the obsession with left versus right, or with one variety of liberalism or conservatism versus another. Just like a committee that is assumed to be able to deal with the profound questions raised by biotechnology but inevitably ends up with lowest common-denominator ethics, an educational program like AR, which takes on a profound subject like religion, can be hamstrung by the assumed need to speak to all in their pre-established (or *uneducated*) political positions. As Berry makes clear, it is not a matter of choosing between the package deals of liberalism and conservatism—although a person is permitted to have his or her disposition. The real task is to discern what the good things are that deserve conserving and can serve as the basis for freedom, and for guidance in avoiding the traps of false freedom, slavish effort. This is a radical task, a mad task.

This is to dig down to the essence of education, because the good things that need to be conserved are the things that need to be passed on from one generation to another, and freedom too must have its intergenerational entailments. Thinking well about education, especially, means thinking down radically to what we have that is good, or that can be recovered (genuinely recovered, rather than arbitrarily picked up on like another fad), and that can serve as the reliable basis of the freedom of the next generation. For the epigraph to his introduction, Furedi quotes a wonderful passage of Hannah Arendt on education as the play of authority and freedom in the relation between the generations:

> Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable. And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world. (Arendt 193)

But, of course, this all depends on being clear-eyed about our world, about what it is that is good enough to serve as the basis of our (pre-political) authority in the education of the young. And these are hard things to articulate. They are not entirely articulable. How do we, then, work out the purpose of education without using too heavy a hand? How can we take a sufficiently honest and critical view of what we have, and don't have, without undermining all sources of adult educational authority? Where *do* we find meaning in our society that is worthy of being passed on to the young, serving as the basis of something new? We grasp at the straws of one educational purpose after another, one program after another, but have to show for it only a confusion of various attempts at adult self-flattery (e.g., Easter-egg and folk-dance multiculturalism or "inclusion" interpreted as the inclusion of everyone in that segregated institution known as school), and, in the end, both setting out meaning too slavishly and leaving the young to their own devices.

My initial misgivings about the idea of teaching about religion, to come at stating them once more, centre on the likelihood that, within a context where it seems that all new ideas are a grasping at straws of meaningfulness, even an idea that associates itself with religion—with all its connotations of authority, tradition, spiritual fulfillment, and so on—will turn out to be another straw. AR is too easy an answer to a perplexing background situation (the looming crisis of meaning and thus of pre-political authority, of legitimacy) that we can hardly trouble ourselves to recognize as problematic or to think about. It is, on a superficial glance, an obvious way to replace the traditional role of religion in the education of the young with one more suited to a secular age: instead of education in one religion, it is simply changed to education about a lot of religions. But there is a slight of hand at work here. Diversity is something we like to brag a lot about. But, to whatever extent we can indeed be said to be a diverse society, it is not

something that we *have* in any strong sense, not in the same way one can be said to *have* a

tradition in which one is situated, not in a way that can be passed on between the generations as a

heritage. To have, as the city or Winnipeg does, a multi-cultural festival like Folklorama, is not

the same as, or an adequate replacement for, having the strongly particular and rooted traditions

on which such a festival depends. Heritage is easily declared, but less easily held on to in a fully

meaningful sense. Principles of diversity, respect, and recognition are easily stated, but, once

they are stated, give very little of substance from which broadly to generate the new. That is not

the purpose of such principles. As Hunter (also Kronman; Wood) makes clear, diversity talk is

thin stuff and can't itself serve as the basis of a good education, of an adequate exchange

between the generations. To teach about religion with a major purpose of diversity promotion is

to use a heavy hand indeed, under the guise of liberalism or liberal education—even under the

guise of radical thought as it is often presented in the education field, although diversity talk

provides nowhere to dig down. It is people desperately trying to express diversity by

compulsively proclaiming how wonderful diversity is (Wood). The idea of AR, in its worst

aspect, can serve as a happy face pasted over what used to be considered the serious

philosophical and sociological puzzle of pluralism. Beneath the surface, as Hunter concludes in

Death of Character, "we actually fear diversity of a deeply normative kind" (230). We need to

think more honestly about our secular predicament, and about what, if anything, we might have

that is good and that can serve the deeper underlying impulse to educate the young justly, to give

them something meaningful.

But this whole question of what we might *have* that can serve as the basis of legitimate

pre-political educational authority itself points to a realm of paradox beneath the educational

paradoxes. Meaning itself is paradoxical. It both is and isn't something that you *have*. This is the

kind of theme that can be found set out for contemplation in the humanities—in poetry, religion, philosophy. Not to be sarcastic, but it is hard not to note the irony that there is no better place to hide insights into the nature of meaning from our earnest educational efforts than within the humanities.

Wendell Berry, again, is a good guide to these paradoxes of meaning and how to find the elusive light touch in regard to them. *Life Is a Miracle* is his response to developments in biotechnology and to the dominance of scientism in our thinking about what we call "the environment" and its problems. These concerted efforts in the service of life, he points out, are oddly dead and mechanistic. The pursuit of health through biotechnology has somehow become unwhole, generating all kinds of troubling ethical problems, and the pursuit of sustainability has become questionable in the sustainability of the very effort required to plan it all out and forever keep adjusting or revising those plans. Underlying these frantic displays of hope, Berry suggests, is a deep, self-feeding, and systemic despair that results inevitably from our efforts because of the nature of life and of meaning.

He draws on the example of Gloucester's failed suicide attempt in *King Lear*, to which Gloucester's son, Edgar, responds, "thy life is a miracle. Speak yet again." Suicide is an attempt to gain control of life that is a giving up on life. Similarly, in an extension of this logic, "we can give up on life also by presuming to 'understand' it—that is by reducing it to the terms of our understanding and by treating it as predictable or mechanical" (6). He further explains, following the poet and Blake scholar Kathleen Raine, that

> life, like holiness, can be known only by being experienced. To experience it
> is not to 'figure it out' or even to understand it, but to suffer it and rejoice in it
> as it is. In suffering it and rejoicing in it as it is, we know that we do not and
> cannot understand it completely. We know, moreover, that we do not wish to
> have it appropriated by somebody's claim to have understood it. Though we

have life, it is beyond us. We do not know how we have it, or why. We do not know what is going to happen to it, or to us. It is not predictable; though we can destroy it, we cannot make it. It cannot, except by reduction and the grave risk of damage, be controlled. It is, as Blake said, holy. To think otherwise is to enslave life. . . . (8–9)

What Berry describes here as the logic of life is also, at the same time, the logic of meaningfulness, of hope and despair. And hope and despair, as Arendt attests, is ultimately an intergenerational affair. Berry is very much aware of this as well, as reflected in his choice of *King Lear* to help him say what he has to say. "Most farmers know," he says, transitioning from his opening discussion of Gloucester and Edgar, and their reversal of roles in life education, "that any creature that is sold has in a sense been given up on; there is a big difference between selling this year's lamb crop, which is, as such, all that it can be, and selling the breeding flock or the farm, which hold the immanence of a limitless promise" (5–6). He is implying, I think, that not only do Gloucester and Lear both lead themselves into despair by presuming to be able to understand, predict, and control, but that this also leaves nothing to pass on as a basis for longer term hope and renewal.[18] It is to sell the farm.

Berry would seem to understand education as falling into two modes. There is, on the one hand, schooling and the liberal education that should take place there, and in which he certainly believes. He sees culture as a repository of wisdom that is always ready to throw unexpected light on the problems in which we are entwined ("Damage" 8). Liberal education, therefore, is for opening people up to this conversation with culture. He evidently doesn't think we are doing a good job of this, as revealed in a characteristically biting quip. To the idea of

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[18] "Understand that no amount of education can overcome the innate limits of human intelligence and responsibility. We are not smart enough or conscious enough or alert enough to work responsibly on a gigantic scale. In making things always bigger and more centralized, we make them both more vulnerable in themselves and more dangerous to everything else" ("Futility" 156.).

teaching the Bible as literature, he responds that he wouldn't even teach literature as literature.[19]

We have become very good, in other words, at teaching the content of a liberal education without

allowing it to be freeing, meaningful, spiritual. The point is similar to Goodman's about the

seeming impossibility of teaching the liberal arts without killing them. It makes no sense to add a

program to shore up the humanities when the problem is the misunderstanding of what the

humanities are for.

Berry does (like Goodman in his own way) point to the way out of this predicament,

however difficult and tricky. *Life Is a Miracle* opens with a discussion of *King Lear*,

exemplifying the way that written culture can illuminate contemporary experience. But the book

closes with an image of the other mode of education, an image of Berry with his son and

grandson walking through the fields of their farm, and Berry very much aware of the middle

position he occupies between these two that are with him, and his father and grandfather, whom

he had followed through the same fields many years ago. Though his grandson is not yet aware

of it, it is here that "the most essential part of his education" (151) has begun. But it is an

education within something that is inarticulable. Berry, of the three present, is the one who

knows the most about where they are and what they are doing there. Yet he can't just tell his

grandson or his son what they need to know. Much less simply say what this family procession

means, or what it is he is passing on. It is all much too particular to make public by articulation.

Yet this is where the most essential part of his grandson's education begins, and, Berry implies,

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[19] "We could not consider teaching the Bible 'as literature' if we were not already teaching literature 'as literature'—as if we do not care, as if it does not matter, whether or not it is true. The causes of this are undoubtedly numerous, but prominent among them is a kind of shame among teachers of literature and other 'humanities' that their truths are not objectively provable as are the truths of science. . . . We will study, record, analyze, criticize, and appreciate. But we will not believe; we will not, in the full sense, know" ("Loss" 92–93).

the most essential part of this is, perhaps, the beginning of a sense that what is most essential is not in the end articulable (151–153).

Another Berry axiom is that there is no culture without agriculture ("Use of Energy" 285). He means what he says, of course, but it is also permissible to generalize from that, for present purposes, in line with what he says generally about meaning. The more general point would be that there is no liberal education, no truly liberating conversation with the written records of culture, unless there is already an openness to meaning in the background, established by experience and by the experience of others that touch directly but inarticulably on one's own. For a culture as a whole, its life and meaningfulness may well depend on the meaningfulness allowed agriculture; but for people, they can acquire a healthy sense of the nature of meaning, a sense that can prepare them for liberal education, even for spiritual meaning, from many practices other than farming.

Chapter 2: Nord's Case

One of the more remarkable signs of the education world's entanglement in the invisible strings of obviousness is the way that in education research and scholarship people are almost invariably understood to mean what they say—and to mean merely what they say.[20] In study after study, for example, the "perceptions" of this or that stakeholder group on this or that education topic are straightforwardly reported, and what needs to be done in response is claimed to follow just as straightforwardly. This matter-of-fact approach to the continual "improvement" of education is trained into education researchers.[21] To guard against the great project of educational progress getting lost in the messiness of human motives, they are taught in their graduate-school methods courses how to use mechanical substitutes for thought, such as how to sort out what the research subjects say into "themes." And, indeed, familiarity with education research shows that it characteristically makes a point of following the rules of method quite rigidly.[22] Although a significant portion of these researchers must presumably be ex- or practising English or history teachers, this doesn't show through in any ability to play with nuances of meaning.[23] Whatever they may, one would hope, teach their own students about

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[20] The observation no doubt applies to contemporary work in many other fields as well, particularly in the applied social sciences, but even in the humanities. Eva Illouz, for example, in her review of *Prom Night*, by Amy Best, quips of the formulaic race, class, gender, and sexuality approach taken there that "perhaps the greatest drawback is that the author adds very little to her interviewees' responses. She usually simply summarizes the content of her interviewees' speech without providing a broader institutional and historical framework to make sense of that speech. This is because the author—as well as many cohorts of students trained in cultural studies—seems to be unaware of the large body of sociological and anthropological literature on culture" (244). My point, though, is that, while this may represent a creeping problem in the main social science and humanities fields, it is something that is integral to the very idea of a collective research agenda in education. Under the imperative to keep improving education by means that include finding out what people are saying, it is equally imperative that there be no time, or inclination, to become aware of literatures that can indirectly help illuminate what people are saying. There is no reverberation. There is only what is said.

[21] On the "improvement" imperative, see the discussion of Furedi in Chapter 1.

[22] This is all part of what I would call a slavish textbook approach to research, which I discuss further in Chapter 5.

[23] I am referring here mainly to research carried out within faculties of education under the guiding assumption that to think about education is to think about how to improve education.

interpreting the self-deceptions, confusions, and contradictions of the characters in novels, or about contemplating the ironies of history, they are evidently not in the habit of noticing such things in the real world when they try to make sense of it. In the day-to-day of the classroom, things are merely what they appear to be. Disenchantment, it seems, is the pre-condition for educational improvement.

I will return in Chapter 5 to a fuller examination of the methodological and conceptual underpinnings of education research, and I will look as well, in Chapters 3 to 5, at the entrenched styles of rationalized meaning-making and legitimation that education research lends to the whole education system. For now, I just want to underline the choice I have made in regard to my topic. I am not interested in arguing either for or against teaching about religion; my purpose is to think about what AR is, about the idea itself, and about the messy human motives and desires of which it might be a sign. I need to emphasize that this is to go against current expectations that constrain thought about education. Education is a public concern, and it seems to follow quite commonsensically that its aims must be publicly articulable, which is to say, straightforward. If one has anything to say about education, then one needs to set it out in the form of a definite proposal, and to construct a neat little argument for the proposal, marshalling a cluster of reasons that support it, especially reasons established as fact by rigidly following research methods. Others, no doubt, will disagree with the proposal, and they will need to construct their own neat little argument against, with its own supporting research and cluster of reasons. Either one or the other position will win and be implemented, or there will be a stalemate and the dispute will go on without resolution. In any case, whether implemented or not, the hope held out by the straightforward proposal will soon be forgotten, and will be pursued instead through a new-seeming proposal.

These are the dynamics behind the appearance of grasping at straws of education policy that I referred to in the previous chapter. The seeming obviousness of each of the straws as we pass by them in our free-fall, I would suggests, has a lot to do with the dysfunctionality of the effort to keep finding strong sources of educational authority. Nothing good can come from the systemic refusal to give a question the thought it is due, to think it down to its roots. When educational thought is reduced to almost arbitrarily staking out a position, and to agreeing or disagreeing with whatever opinions happen to be on offer that day, then the circle is bound to remain vicious. As Mortimer Adler warned, "to disagree before you understand is impertinent. To agree is inane" (159). The imperatives of the public sphere leave very little opportunity to reach for understanding beyond the obviousness of declared positions and their rejection. To the extent that educational thought is committed to justifying itself and its practical initiatives in readily acceptable public terms, it is faced with a choice between impertinence and inanity. The expertise it claims, in other words, is belied by the laying of the claim.[24]

If for the more important public issues it may be questioned whether newspapers really stick, as reputed, to a Grade 6 reading level, certainly the unwritten rules of public argumentation keep things to no more than the most introductory critical-thinking or argument-writing level. You state your position and you list your reasons. Then you step aside for the next participant to

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[24] On the staking-of-positions style characteristic of the contemporary public forum, see Richard Sennett, *Together*, who offers the much needed distinction between dialectic and dialogue (18–20). Part of his larger point is that the capacity for dialogue—which has to a considerable extent been lost—and all that it entails—sitting back and listening, seeing irony in things, empathy, and working with rather than against the resistance of the interlocutor—is strengthened in "the workshop," which is to say in practices. "Craftsmen who become good at making things develop physical skills which apply to social life. The process happens in the craftsmen's body . . . ," and Sennett discusses three forms of such embodiment of social life: "How the rhythms of physical labour become embodied in ritual; how physical gestures give life to informal social relations; how the artisan's work with physical resistance illuminates the challenge of dealing with social resistances and differences" (199). *Together* is the second part of the trilogy, of which *The Craftsman* is the first. My going into all of this is to provide something completely different to hold in the back of the mind as we start to consider AR, and so to foreshadow something of where we are headed in trying to sort out the search for meaning in education that underlies AR.

have a turn. But this game is bound to leave a nagging sense of dissatisfaction. That is not how people really grasp the meaning of things. Modern technology (in the broad definition, technique) works in a similar way, seeming to provide well-defined, matter-of-fact means for whatever ends might be desired, making it the perfect object for convincing public arguments.[25] Kass tried to form a committee that would make room for another kind of thought about technology, for wisdom. But wisdom is not really the kind of thing that can be orchestrated, let alone set out in a straightforward argument for public consumption. It is more a matter of who people are and the habits their education has instilled in them. Not surprisingly, Kass has since gone on to general-education initiatives (Amy Kass et al.). But modern education too is ensnared in the need for public justification of what it claims to be doing. It too is a technology holding out the powerful means it can provide, for whatever our ends might be. It is as if the whole system were set up to entice and then thwart all desire for something more.

All of this is to underline that I don't want to play the game of arguing for or against. I want to try to escape from that and all it entails, if I can. Given AR as my topic, this means just thinking about what the argument for AR is, what it is really saying, what it might be a sign or symptom of. Richard Sennett in an interview has given a definition of sociology that encapsulates the light touch of its proper practice, in contradistinction to the rule following and research method of a more hard-headed approach to sociology and applied social research, including education research. With deceptive matter-of-factness he says that doing sociology is just talking to people and reading between the lines of what they say (Cayley, "Flesh and Stone"). Now, I won't presume what education researchers would actually say to Sennett in response. But, to the extent they buy into and remain consistent with the prevailing

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[25] See my discussion of Darin Barney in Chapter 6.

understanding of education research, they would have to react with either incomprehension or horror. Reading between the lines would have to seem like reading in something that is not there. That is invalid and unrigorous, and it is surely unfair to the research subjects who are being misinterpreted. So, for example, research conducted under the flag of the student voice movement has the aim of being fairer to young people by listening to what they have to say. Not coincidentally, what they have to say invariably takes the form of adult nostrums.[26] Kids are by their very nature inarticulate, and will tend to latch on to whatever articulations are on offer. In order to really listen to them, to really be fair, it is *necessary* to read between the lines. In fact, human beings are by their very nature imperfectly articulate, and this is why the straightforward argument in education policy is never going to be fair to the people concerned or to the matter in question, never satisfying in and of itself.

Of course, on one level it is indeed unfair to approach the idea of teaching about religion in the way that I intend to do. It is to extract the argument from the game of agree-or-disagree within which it was formulated, and to judge it by other criteria from another game. To try to win an argument over who is the best hockey player by bringing in big philosophical concepts with which to mystify your opponent would be unfair. But if education, as I am suggesting, has been pulled into the wrong game to begin with, then fairness requires precisely trying to step back out of it. If all of our educational program and policy proposals are various ways of trying to get right the nuances of adult responsibility toward the young and to identify

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[26] I won't cite a specific example for my claim here. I found 954 results in Google Scholar for articles with "student voice" in the title alone, so it is hard to choose. This is one of those usefully nebulous concepts that, attached to anything that one might have been doing anyway, particularly education research, lends a stamp of democratic and moral credibility. It has been picked up by the Ontario Ministry of Education, for example, in an initiative that "is about you—Ontario's students—having a voice in your learning." For an idea of the range of uses of the concept, see Czerniawski and Kidd.

the proper basis of educational authority, then the forum and the level may not be adequate to the purpose, and the thing to do may be to try to find a way to open up other games or other levels of discourse in order to get a better grasp of what we are doing. If the AR proposal, in particular, is based on a desire to give young people access to meaning where we sense meaning to be lacking, then it is only fair to the desire, not to mention the young people, to try to look at the proposal in the full extent of its meaning.

Articles of Peace for Kids

Reading between the lines of the AR idea can best be done through a close reading of one particular version of the argument. The extensive review of the literature that would have been necessary had I persisted in trying to find a niche for my own contribution begins to make little sense once that ambition is dropped and an essayistic approach taken up. A lot of ink has been spilled in arguing for AR from many different angles,[27] but they all, I do think, end up saying much the same thing.[28] I have chosen to focus on Warren Nord's *Does God Make a Difference?* because I think he says it best, and makes the most comprehensive case.[29] As a

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[27] AR encompasses different approaches that can take such various forms as Bible as literature, world religions, and religion across the curriculum.

[28] Suffice it to suggest a few useful entry points to the literature on AR. A philosopher of education who makes the case for AR, and who thus is able to highlight the connection with common concerns in the education world, is Nel Noddings, in *Educating for Intelligent Belief and Unbelief*. Robert Nash, in *Faith, Hype, and Clarity*, makes the case from the teacher's practical perspective—that is, he shows that the difficulties that one would expect to encounter in the classroom can be negotiated—and so at the same time also gives glimpses into how the idea of AR ends up being manifested in the classroom. Stephen Prothero, in *Religious Literacy*, focuses on the civic education aspect that, as far as I can tell, flows through, and even dominates, virtually all of the cases that have been made for AR. There is, certainly in the US literature and through its influence, a pervasive legalism to the arguments that have been made. It is as if, suddenly around the early 1990s, everyone realized that religion was not entirely excluded from the classroom by the First Amendment, and then jumped immediately to the conclusion that meaning, whatever that means, could relatively easily be reintroduced. The work of Warren Nord, I think, well represents the literature in this respect.

[29] *Does God Make a Difference* is Nord's final work, and his comprehensive summation of his case. His two earlier works were *Religion and American Education* and *Taking Religion Seriously across the Curriculum*.

philosopher, he also gives the critical reader some handles on the implications of what he is saying. This will begin to become apparent presently, as I demonstrate that Nord is struggling, very close to the surface, with exactly the kinds of tensions I have identified in the idea of AR. Having sketched out these tensions in my personal account, it still remains to give them more substance by looking more closely at AR. Justification of this choice of text as an example and validity in its interpretation can only come out in how fruitful it proves to be in seeing into the motives behind the idea of AR, and as an entry into the broader explorations of the rest of this thesis.

I find Nord interesting because, on the one hand, he has done pretty much the same thing which I was going to do merely another variation, and, on the other hand, he represents what everyone is doing when they try, however inarticulately it most often might be, to introduce meaning into an education system where they sense meaning to be lacking. His target, really, is the cold, rationalistic, but not necessarily reasonable, world that we are left with under a regime of hard secularism. Even the blurbs and bios for his books emphasize that he makes his case for teaching about religion from the broad perspective of the humanities. Indeed, the core of his case is that the humanities without religion are missing something without which they cannot fulfill their educational role. At the same time, however, he is making the kind of argument that I am suggesting strays from the true humanities way. He is not arguing for how something might fruitfully be seen, but for what people should do—in fact, for a large-scale policy initiative that will need armies of teachers to apply it, in no uncertain terms. So, the question is whether or not there is a real contradiction here and, if so, how Nord either deals with it or fails to deal with it.

If Nord himself puts the humanities at the core of his argument, there is nevertheless a rationalized policy orientation that is written into the very structure of the book. The chapters are

grouped into three parts: problems, solutions, and implications. It is under "implications" that he outlines his suggestions for AR policies and programs, along with specific pedagogical and curricular considerations, while "solutions" is actually where he gives his reasons for taking AR policies and programs to be the solution. In any case, the basic framework of problem and solution suggests a technical approach, despite Nord's humanistic aims, and I will be concerned mainly with how he identifies the problems and the reasons he gives for considering AR the solution. This is the real puzzle that perhaps Nord can help us contemplate: How, in our efforts with education, do we get pulled in to self-contradictory ways of trying to articulate and fulfill our best intentions?

Now, in making his case for AR, Nord, as I have suggested, has to touch on a lot of huge questions, such as secularization, modernity, the humanities, metaphysics, and meaning. Another way of posing the question with which we approach him is whether his project allows him to address these things adequately or forces him to tailor these considerations to predetermined conclusions. It may seem unfair to try to formulate a tentative answer, and even to formulate such a leading question, right from the beginning, but the problem is that the very nature of what Nord is doing and the things he is touching on make it very difficult to get a grip on his argument without taking this step to try to situate what he is saying and how it needs to be understood. It is necessary, then, to start with a tentative and very rough assessment.

I will put it this way. Nord says much about education and the place of religion in education that, in itself, is true enough and that speaks in part to our modern educational predicament. He does also, though, cut his broader considerations short, or constrain his thought, so as to support his position, and allow for an argument of a kind that suits contemporary expectations. In other words, it is hard to get a handle on Nord's argument precisely because the

broad humanities perspective he tries to bring does not, in the end, put things in perspective very well. It does not really do what a humanistic study should do. His insights do not necessarily cohere in themselves, and, instead, tend to take on the character of marshalled "reasons" for AR policy, the argument imperative being the real glue for what coherence there is. In fact, his organizing principle for the second part of the book is to present "clusters of reasons." As we will see, these are somewhat arbitrary, certainly not very integrally convincing, groupings of any and all considerations that will strengthen the case.

But there are paradoxical elements in play here. If it is hard to get a handle on what Nord is *really* saying, it is also very easy to get a handle on what he is proposing, by starting where Nord ends up, with the third part of his book and his basic policy suggestions, which we can then unpack and trace back into his earlier consideration of all the various reasons. The basic suggestion can be stated quite simply and has two components: required courses about religion, at least one in high school and one in university; and a religion-across-the-curriculum approach, in both high school and post-secondary, whereby religion and religious perspectives are acknowledged in other disciplines (*Does God* 197).

Courses devoted to religion are necessary, Nord says, "because taking religion seriously requires that religion is understood from the inside, studied in sufficient depth to make sense of it, treated as a live option in its most compelling forms, and allowed to contend with secular traditions, narratives, worldviews" (196). "Taking religion seriously" is a phrase used in Nord's subtitle and it carries significance that is worth exploring. Here he is using it to emphasize the depth of understanding and of meaning that comes with the study of religion in its own right. But also present, as it always seems to be for Nord, is awareness of actual or potential (or imagined?) controversy, from which the phrase takes on the note of a plea for recognition. This basic

suggestion, of course, has other policy implications, particularly that religious studies

departments be created in all universities and that it be regarded as a legitimate field of study in

faculties of education, with required courses for teachers to gain competence in teaching it. The

suggestion of only one course at each level, he regards as simply "being practical": "Why not

two? An even better idea to be sure, but even more controversial . . ." (197).[30]

As regards the across-the-curriculum component, and why discrete courses are not

sufficient in and of themselves, Nord explains it this way:

> Any course that addresses religion or subjects that are religiously important
> and controversial must at least acknowledge the relevance of religion to what
> is being discussed. This follows from the nature of critical thinking and liberal
> education. A liberal education must be a conversation, not a series of
> monologues. . . . When any course deals with religion or matters that are
> religiously controversial students should be given some sense of what is at
> issue religiously, and they must have some sense of the contending
> interpretations and be involved in the broader curricular conversation. (197)

Here again, of course, there is a substantive aspect to what he is suggesting: for example, to

recognize religion within a science course would be to acknowledge that there are weighty

metaphysical questions with which science can't deal. His historical chapter reveals the scale of

what he thinks he can do here: address the void left by the vanished idea of unity of truth (62).

But the emphasis here is more on a sort of setting out of conditions or terms within which the

course in religion has a place. In other words, this component is essential to Nord's plan because

it addresses the tendency within a secular society to compartmentalize religion, to consider it a

private matter about which one can make a personal decision, but which has little relation to

everything else.

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[30] Of course, he is speaking to the US context. In parts of Canada, such as Quebec or Newfoundland and Labrador, where courses have been implemented on AR principles, more is quite possible. In both cases, however, regardless of what is possible in a given policy jurisdiction, AR policy itself has an underlying pre-occupation with managing controversy—the implications of which will be discussed shortly.

We will look more fully at what Nord says about secularization shortly, but first I just want to underline his approach to the two basic aims of his proposal: the civic and the meaningful. He does this himself by rephrasing it like this:

> I might put it in terms of two kinds of fairness. First, the curriculum must be *robustly* fair by requiring that students take at least one course that takes religion seriously. Second, all courses must be at least *minimally* fair by acknowledging religious interpretations of the subject matter, even if they aren't taken seriously. (197, emphasis in original)

He is playing here with different senses of the idea of taking religion seriously. Against his overarching purpose of taking religion seriously, in the sense of giving recognition or allowing a place at the table, he is also taking the sciences seriously by acknowledging that, methodologically, they are not required to take religion seriously in any hard sense within their courses, only to acknowledge other possible ways of looking at conclusions arrived at through their disciplinary approach. This point actually goes right to the heart of Nord's post-secondary recommendations, and so to the intellectual heart of his whole proposal, in that it is possible to not take religion seriously in a hard sense even within religious studies. This is why he holds, against Russell McCutcheon and Donald Wiebe (212–215), that religious studies *do* need to take religion seriously in a harder sense, even while allowing a place for the scientific methodological approaches that some religion scholars will take, because there has to be a place included within the mainstream of the university for theology to be substantively articulated from within theology. It should be noted, however, that in another way Nord is out-socializing the sociologists: namely, in his insistence on setting out the ground rules for fairness. Our own question can be rephrased in terms of Nord's concept of *robust fairness*: To what extent might there be a tension in the very term, such that a foregrounding and policing of fairness entails a recession and repression of meaning?

Nord clearly wants to show how we can have both, and throughout his book he gives equal emphasis to both. In the introduction, for example, he says that the "most important" of his considerations in looking at problems and solutions is that "the study of religion is essential to liberal education, and both secondary and undergraduate education must be liberal (unlike elementary, graduate, and professional education)" (6). And then he goes on to make a somewhat confusing, and perhaps confused, but certainly significant, declaration of his commitment to fairness, which is clearly most important as well. It deserves quoting at length:

> Perhaps a confession is in order at this point. Some readers may already wonder if my position is beyond the pale, less then [sic] fully respectable. They may suspect that I am a political and religious conservative—maybe even (gasp) a fundamentalist. I am none of the above. I am a liberal in my politics and in my religion—though I hasten to add that it will not be my purpose to convince you that either my political or religious views are the right ones. In fact, I will try very hard to be neutral in matters of politics and religion. However, I *am* going to try to convince you that my views on education are the right ones.
>
> In fact, I will argue for what I take to be a middle way in our culture wars over religion—though it is an indication of how far we have gone astray that efforts to point it out inevitably prove controversial. Although my primary concern is with what counts as a good education I also regard my proposal as "articles of peace" (to use John Courtney Murray`s fine phrase) in our culture wars. Americans are deeply divided over religion, and the battles will continue so long as public education takes sides in matters of religion as is now the case. Peace requires, I suggest, that religion be taken seriously but not privileged. Of course, not everyone will agree. (6–7, emphasis in original)

The notorious fluidity and ambiguity of the terms liberal and conservative muddy the waters here, and perhaps in a way that helps Nord's case, but let's look carefully at what he is saying. He starts out by declaring his own position as a liberal within the terms, the commonly understood framework, of the culture wars. Another possibility would be to put the terms of the culture wars into question, to suggest the framework could be flawed, or at least to recognize that a liberal-arts perspective can and should seek detachment from vulgarly conceived controversies.

But instead he takes the culture wars at face value, he takes the given framework of public debate seriously. It should also be noted that he defines conservative and liberal religion a few pages later (along with the other possible positional stances of fundamentalism and spirituality), and he does so in a way that is determined by the culture wars, rather than by a more philosophical perspective. Thus, religious liberalism (i.e., Nord's own position) is described as progressive and socially conscious, while conservatism is described, rather unfairly and caricaturishly, as committed to maintaining "theological orthodoxies grounded in Scripture and tradition" (11). Conservatives cling to tradition, he implies, while liberals build on it. This is far too simplistic. Completely sidestepped here, for example, is the question of whether such liberalism gives itself sufficient foundations on which to build and the philosophical appreciation of tradition as inherently dynamic and dialogical.[31]

But, to return to the passage, once he declares his own positioning within the culture wars of the contemporary public sphere, he declares that not to be important and quickly moves on to the next step (although he has at the same time legitimized culture wars, and so remains bound to their terms).[32] What is important (maybe not "primary," but not secondary either) is that his AR proposal *is*, at the same time as it *is* a blueprint for the restoration of a good education, the "articles of peace" for the culture wars. The move is a tricky one, because, in saying to his readers that it doesn't matter to his proposal whether they are conservative or liberal in culture-war terms, he is saying that, though "not everyone will agree," most will in fact agree, most will be thoroughly and fundamentally liberal enough to agree, that keeping the peace in the culture wars is of something close to primary importance—certainly the most important thing

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[31] See, for example, Basil Mitchell, *Faith and Criticism*, especially the chapter on religious education (131–50).
[32] See Nord's "taxonomy" of the culture wars (12–15).

that can be agreed upon.[33] But, if education is a public project, then what can be more important than what is agreed upon? And what happens to the primary importance of a good education? The question of compatibility of purposes keeps popping up, and we will keep noting when it does and keep trying to probe its significance, as we go through Nord's discussion of problems and solutions.

Replacing Authority

Nord begins his introduction, understandably but significantly, perhaps, with the news—a *Time* cover in the 1960s and an *Economist* headline as late as the eve of the twenty-first century—of the death of God, and then with the now growing evidence and increasing willingness to admit, in the news media and public sphere, although he alludes to the scholarship as well, that those reports had been greatly exaggerated.[34] Duly noting a slight increase in atheism in the United States, the trend of militant atheism, and the growth of the spiritually

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[33] We are all liberals now. See John Grey, *Liberalism* (82–83). As George Grant said, "the impossibility of conservatism in our era is the impossibility of Canada" (*Lament* 67). Grant, like Grey, would also say that if liberalism is our fate, that needn't prevent us from thinking about it. See *English-Speaking Justice*.

   In relation to the idea of keeping the peace, see William Cavanaugh on liberalism's founding myth of religious violence. Nord reveals the continuing force of this myth as he is compelled to make a case for religion's reasonableness by arguing that it can be brought to the table, along with the secularist world-view itself. The question, of course, is what kind of rationality that imposes on religion.

[34] Central to the revisionist scholarship on secularization is David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization*, and then, *On Secularization*; and José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, along with numerous spin-offs of that project, serves as, among other things, a major philosophical synthesis of the revisionist literature. Steve Bruce, *God Is Dead*, keeps the debate going over the nature, extent, and meaning of secularization.

   Along with the first-tier revisionism, and accompanying what to my eye seems clearly a renewed presence of religion in the media, post-September 11, there has been a significant revival of theoretical and philosophical interest in and attention to the question of the place of religion in the public sphere: for a dialogue between four philosophers, see Butler, Habermas, Taylor, and West; for a debate between a Christian who wants religion in the public forum and a holdout of the strong liberal-secularist position, see Audi and Wolterstorff; and for a pragmatic approach to religious participation, compare Stout with the countercultural resolve of Hauerwas. One generalization that it may be fair to make is that those who argue for more religion in the public forum seems to share a sense that something is missing in the public forum that religion can address. If this desire is based on such an intuition of a lack, then it might pay to consider why the public forum has this problem with meaning in the first place, before simply trying to add religion to it. Hauerwas and Audi both have their points, in other words.

uninterested, he nevertheless suggests that, not only is God back, but never really went away.

There is, nevertheless, a tone of hesitancy to his revisionist claims. He says that "the vast

majority of Americans, like the vast majority of people around the world, believe in God," but

not without adding that "even if much of this belief is nominal, much of it is sincere" (3).[35]

Again, "religion makes a difference to most people—to the ways in which they find meaning in

their lives, to their moral and political judgments, to how they make sense of the world" (4).

Variation in the way it makes a difference, he further suggests, is evident in the culture wars.

And yet, students learn nothing of this: "American education proceeds on the assumption that

God is either dead or irrelevant" (4). This he calls a "scandal,"[36] and thus he argues "that with

regard to religion American education is superficial, illiberal, and unconstitutional" (5).

The first part of Nord's book, after the introduction, consists of four chapters, breaking

down how he sees the problem to which AR is the answer. The first two, which I will summarize

relatively briefly, are meant to create a strong sense of incongruity by means of mutual contrast.

Chapter 1 revisits the secularization thesis and challenges its easy assumptions. Despite earlier

predictions, most people in the United States still believe in God (20). Although, relatively

speaking, academe is a bastion of hard secularism, and the further one goes in one's education

the less likely one is to believe in God, still the statistics indicate that belief and religiosity is

surprisingly high in these educated groups (22–23). While it is possible in the modern world to

maintain a meaningful moral orientation without belief or religion, there is a strong case to be

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[35] In support of "nominal," see Bruce on "indifference" (240–41) and Hunter on church "accommodation" (*Change* 235–36).
[36] Perhaps he is alluding, without citation, to Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, and implying a similar self-blinkering of the secularist mind. But, again, and ironically for an argument on how to address secularization, Nord just doesn't sufficiently acknowledge the scholarship that can help illuminate the complex texture of secularization, either in *Does God* or in *Religion and American Education*.

made that religious traditions provide more profound sources of hope, of meaning, and of alternative vision (23–25). The secular worlds of domestic and international politics are unavoidably pressed by the need to deal with issues and tensions of religious significance (26–28). The economy, which is one of the most thoroughly secular spheres, nevertheless gives religions the opportunity to prove their importance by their ability to stand up with some weight against the dominance of purely economic and consumerist values (29–32). Science may appear to provide all the answers humanity needs, but, in fact, its disciplinary approach is incomplete, and its reasoning, which is unable to deal with purpose, needs to be pursued in dialogue with religion, whose reasoning does deal, precisely, with purpose (33). The technological imperative creates endless problems of a moral and spiritual kind that technology cannot solve (36). Finally, although it can no longer be uncontestably claimed that "the glory of art [is] the glorification of God," religion remains crucial in the sphere of art and culture, because, even for those artists who do not continue to grapple, as some do, with their religious traditions, it remains necessary to grapple with loss of meaning and transcendence in the modern world (37). Nord sums up the case so far:

> While particular religions were often oppressed in the past, there is no equivalent in history to this kind of general assault—sometimes intended, sometimes not—on religion. And yet, most people believe in God and religion continues to shape their lives and the world. Given its vitality, and given the importance of the claims that religion makes, one might think that students should be educated about it. (39)

Nord's last sentence here pinpoints the incongruity that forms the basis of his whole argument, and that, admittedly, makes it quite a compelling one. Religion has not disappeared or gone completely private, and yet it is ignored by the education system. There is indeed a deep injustice here. He continues on in his second chapter, examining standards and textbooks in various

subjects, and highlighting what is being missed by leaving out religion or dealing with it only superficially. He concludes that, though there must be exceptions, most students will learn nothing of the continuing claim to relevance of religion in intellectual life. "They will," he says,

> not be taught that God doesn't exist, but they will inevitably learn to interpret whatever they study in secular categories. They will not unreasonably conclude that God is irrelevant to the subjects they study, to how they understand the world, and to how they live their lives. They will certainly not learn to take religion seriously. (60)

Again, as far as he has gone so far, he is very compelling in his statement of the unsatisfactory situation of contemporary education with regard to religion and the orientation of young people in a meaningful world. But where he will go wrong is in the assumption that because the incongruity can be stated so starkly, so obviously, there must therefore be a solution correspondingly as straightforward as the problem seems from this particular way of formulating it. In the next chapter, his intention is simply to look at how this avoidance of religion in American education came about historically. But it is here in his historical chapter that he will need to break away from his usual reason-upon-reason approach, and we will finally be able to begin to break through to get a better glimpse of how he deals with some of fundamental concepts that underlie what he is trying to do. He draws on good sources here—e.g., Reuben, Elson, and McClellan—so we can focus on how he is using them.

Nord begins his historical chapter with a sketch of the world we have lost. It was a world in which the authority underlying the education of the young was, though not entirely untroubled by relatively minor sectarian disputes, based in a fundamental assurance about, in Elson's phrase, "the moral character of the universe" (61). The *New England Primer* and the *McGuffey Readers* reflect this assurance: "the values taught in the books were 'absolute, unchanging, and they come from God'" (61, quoting Elson). This assurance was anchored

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intellectually in the idea of the unity of truth, which was the fundamental principle behind higher

education. It is worth quoting Nord's appreciative description, drawing on Reuben:

> Through the middle of the nineteenth century most scholars and college
> professors accepted the idea of the unity of truth that, as Julie Reuben explains
> in her superb history of American higher education, "entailed two important
> propositions. First, it supposed that all truths agreed and ultimately could be
> related to one another in a single system. Second, it assumed that knowledge
> had a moral dimension. To know the 'true,' according to the ideal, was to
> know the 'good.'" The unity of truth made sense because everyone believed
> that the world was God's creation, and that God's world is a moral world, one
> in which the truths of science, human nature, and moral philosophy all cohere.
> Nature reveals the intricacy of God's handiwork, and history reveals God's
> plan for humankind. By the end of the eighteenth century, and for most of the
> next hundred years, most colleges required a senior capstone course in moral
> philosophy, typical taught by the minister-president of the college. The course
> in moral philosophy would draw out the implications of the curriculum for
> virtue and help students orient their lives in terms of their Christian vocation.
> (62)

He then sums up this section by quoting Roberts and Turner's characterization of the function of

the nineteenth century college as "the intellectual arm of American Protestantism" (*Does God*

62), on behalf of which it integrated knowledge from all of the various fields.

If Nord in his first two chapters had seemed just to be throwing observations at the

reader in the hope that they will be taken as reasons to believe there is a problem that needs a

solution, we begin to see here already a much stronger sense of the urgency and significance of

that problem. There was once a relatively unproblematic source of authority behind the whole

educational endeavour. It gave a role and purpose to pure intellectual inquiry, and therefore to

the introduction of Christians, through a general education, into the intellectual world. And there

were political implications as well: the unity of truth served also as the necessary basis of social

solidarity, a context in which politics as well could make sense. The second chapter, it now turns

out, was not just making more claims about yet more aspects of the contemporary world that

should be dealt with in schools. When Nord says, "our question now is what happened," he is saying we urgently need to look at why religion disappeared from public schools and universities and whether or not that loss has sufficiently been dealt with. Nord looks at this through a number of different lenses: first the political and economic factors influencing primary and secondary education in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and then the more complex sets of issues in higher education.

In terms of the politics of education and pluralism in nineteenth century America, Nord tries to identify the underlying "logic of secularization" that worked itself out in the introduction and development of public schooling. Horace Mann and many fellow reformers, he suggests, were liberals in their own terms: "Their foe was traditional revealed religion, which they took to be divisive and socially dangerous" (63). Still, given an assumed shared Protestantism, they could allow a role to public education in the "acquisition of religious truth" even while leaving "the decision of the question, what religious truth is, to the arbitrament, without human appeal, of each man's reason and conscience" (Nord quoting Mann, 63). In effect, this meant Bible reading and an emphasis on "a liberal religion of moral duty and enlightenment." The complicating factor, of course, was Catholic immigration and the Blaine Amendments, which, by denying public support for sectarian purposes, pushed Catholics into the public schools. The logic of secularization needed further ratcheting. This logic, Nord suggests, was based in large part on the need to eliminate causes of disunity: "In a religiously pluralistic culture, peace is achieved by eliminating what is divisive from public institutions, and religion was clearly divisive" (64). Take note of this as an interesting statement, in light of Nord's own attempt to set out articles of peace.

The other part of the logic was that what was being first watered down and then eliminated from public schooling needed to be replaced with something. What Nord is essentially setting out here is the paradox that the whole idea of public schooling, in its pursuit of "peace," had been based on something that itself still seemed to be proving inherently divisive. Something else had to be found to serve that same perceived social function:

> The goal wasn't simply eliminating what was divisive, it was teaching what we had in common; and in an increasingly pluralistic and individualistic frontier society the need for a shared ideology was deeply felt. In a world swept by nationalism after the French Revolution, it is not surprising that Americanism became that ideology. . . .
> Americanism took on new educational importance with the growing waves of immigrant during the twenty years on either side of the year 1900. In 1909, 58 percent of children in public schools in the thirty-seven largest American cities had foreign-born parents. Public schools became the cultural factories of Americanization, transforming the raw material of foreign cultures into good American citizens. As Sidney Hook described it, public schools provided the common institutional ground for those "shared human values which must underlie all differences within a democratic culture if it is to survive. Where churches and sects and nations divide . . . the schools can unite by becoming the temples and laboratories of a common democratic faith." (64)

Now, Nord is a philosopher, but he is a philosopher making what is ultimately a policy argument. He is, therefore, not terribly insistent on maintaining conceptual clarity at all times. But it is clear enough, despite his being less than explicit about the conceptual significance of the history he briefly traces in this chapter, that given his aim of explaining what happened to religion and deeper sources of meaning in education, he is saying that public education got off to a bad start in its emphasis of moral duty at the expense of the intellectual side of religion, and that, in its "democratic faith," it ultimately adopted a false, or at least a superficial, god.[37] The

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[37] But Nord is, again, ambivalent here. He quotes the term "democratic faith" from Deweyite philosopher Sidney Hook (*Does God* 64), who would have been quite serious about it. For the connection of the false god interpretation of this faith with modernity and the larger process of secularization, see Patrick Deneen, *Democratic Faith*.

question we want to try to stick with is whether or not (and perhaps, if not, it is enabled precisely by his being so inexplicit about what he is doing conceptually) his own commitment not only to a "peace" of apparently quite the same kind as that of the nineteenth century reformers in the first place, but also, unquestioningly, to common schooling as such (itself a technology of unity), does not, in the end, lead back to such superficiality, despite his considerable efforts to the contrary.

Before moving on to consider higher education and secularization, which he considers to have had its own broad influence on primary and secondary education, he looks through two more lenses (or sources of replacement for religion)—economic and scientific—to show how the political forces of secularization in common schooling were supported by broader forces. In terms of economics and markets, Nord has at least two observations on how commerce supported secularization in the schools. The first extends the peace theme by noting the connection between commerce and tolerance: "The merchants of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were often the most vocal advocates of tolerance, for they recognized that orthodoxy isn't good for trade" (65). As the American economy grew throughout the nineteenth century, therefore, so did the willingness to put religion on the side for the sake of a convenient sort of peace.

The economic revolution, Nord says, also provided its own alternative purpose for education: namely, utility. By the end of the nineteenth century, high schools were being created, in part, in order to provide an educated workforce. But Americans had little interest in high school as intellectual training for the masses. Bookish general education was de-emphasized in favour of comprehensive high schools that allowed for specialization. Vocational education was supported, beginning with the Smith-Hughes Act, 1917. Increasingly, the "social efficiency"

conception of educational purpose created a hostile environment for the training of the mind, and

continuing "in our own time the economic purposes of schooling have been paramount—for

students, their parents, policymakers, and the educational establishment" (66). Given the general

distaste among these stakeholder groups for intellect, it is not surprising, Nord concludes, that all

of the reform efforts of the twentieth century "have said nothing about religion."

In terms of science, Nord's main point here is the replacement of religion and custom

as sources of authority with science. The evangelizers of the mid-nineteenth century were

replaced by the administrators of the early twentieth (following Tyack and Hansot). By then, he

says,

> the dominant paradigm of education was Progressivism—which combined
> individualism, a practical or utilitarian orientation, and modern science and
> social science. Scientific testing, educational psychology, classroom
> management, and scientific administration quickly became integral parts of
> education, and as public education was professionalized it was reconceived in
> scientific categories. (66)

Nord emphasizes, by using the word three times in these six paragraphs on science, that it was

indeed the very foundations of *authority* that were being re-engineered and replaced. "The old

religious consensus had completely fallen apart," (67) and ". . . to some considerable extent,

modern science increasingly came to provide the standards of intelligibility—the worldview—

that shaped the content of the curriculum more generally [i.e., beyond the science curriculum

alone]" (68). Yet, because he is making what is primarily a policy argument, he can sort of glide

over the deeper implications of this, even while ostensibly being troubled. Something of the

incongruity of problem and solution can be glimpsed here. The whole foundation of

intelligibility, the whole orientation to the world has shifted and been thoroughly taken up by the

education system. And a course planned out and offered within that system, it will be argued, can

redress the loss of meaning that massive historical shift entailed. But the very idea of such an intervention is actually, in some respects, another manifestation of scientistic, managerial thinking in education.

Nevertheless, and even though the nature of his project keeps him from more than touching on the underlying conceptual questions, Nord shows he is quite aware of what is at stake in his story of secularization as he continues that story at the level of higher education and again at least touches on all of the important themes. Thus, having somewhat puzzlingly dealt with Darwinism in the previous sections on scientism in primary and secondary educational research and administration, he now, albeit in his almost-in-passing manner, puts his finger on the locus of the broader intellectual significance of Darwin for the late nineteenth century and beyond, that being his challenge to the very idea of an explanation. "Scientific method made it illegitimate to appeal to God's purposes, or to design, in explaining nature. Natural theology was no longer respectable" (70). And in emphasizing the "deeply and profoundly theoretical" nature of the new scientific method, he seems to be pointing to the reasons for exchange of roles. There were now two types of stories that humanity could tell itself: one appeared to be "open, tentative, questioning, self-corrective, progressive, often revolutionary"; the other was based on "dogmatic or commonsense convictions, religious or otherwise." The upshot was not only the Deweyan shift of educational aims from "acquiring a body of classical or theological knowledge to thinking scientifically" (70), but the secularization, in the hard sense, of the social sciences themselves: "In this intellectual context explaining human behavior is a matter of setting it in the context of a network of causes and developing social or psychological or physiological laws that then allow us to predict (and perhaps to control) future behavior" (71). Though Nord does not

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underline or draw much from the point here, he is no doubt acknowledging that these fields devoted to prediction and control are where thought about education also found its new home.

The other "methodological or epistemological manifestation of secularization" that, in turn, had its own effects on the world of education was disciplinary specialization. As Nord puts it, the "turn to specialization—and with it the autonomy of the disciplines—was the death knell of the traditional ideal of the unity of knowledge, and it severed the connection between religion and the developing scholarly disciplines" (71). It wasn't only the German influence and the adoption of the research imperative, but also that this influence was itself seen as a part of the imperative of modernity. Bureaucracy, business, technology, and the harnessing of useful knowledge required specialization. And this had its effects on education in the destruction of the idea of a unified curriculum and the growing dominance of the elective. "Not only scholars would specialize; so would students. It was now possible to completely avoid religion" (72). Of course, the trickiness in the predicament, which Nord is slipping past, is that this new methodology and epistemology of rationalization and specialization might have its own unity— and therefore its own force, its own grip on everything we do. The question Nord evades is, How is one course or even program of courses going to counter this historical fate? It is a matter not only of the relative scale of problem and response but, more significantly, of the response remaining part of the problem.

It seems that Nord, in his historical chapter, is inadvertently undermining his own argument by acknowledging the profundity of our immersion in secularization, in all of these aspects, many of them inherently rationalizing and disenchanting. He underlines the immensity of significance of loss of the unity of truth, which means also loss of solidarity, of authority, all of these things being grounded at a level much deeper than can be just neatly articulated or

reduced to something that can be easily set right. The notion that a single program, set of rules, articles of peace, plea for recognition of deeper meaning can provide a simple solution has to seem unlikely. Key here is that Nord, while acknowledging the problems that emerge right from the beginnings of common schooling, cannot himself put in question, or subject to a humanistically detached perspective or negative capability, the idea of common schooling as such. The purposes of the philosopher thus remain tied to, subservient to, the purpose of modern schooling. They have to be publicly articulable, immediately intelligible to all, which is to remain within the very problem described historically. In other words, he commits himself to finding a solution within the terms of the problem. I will revisit secularization in the next chapter and underline Nord's difficulties in addressing the enormity of secularization by bringing in Charles Taylor's concepts of the *Reform impulse* and *conditions of belief*. I will also deal more conceptually with meaning in the public sphere, liberalism and authority, and Sennett on authority and recognition (which points the way to a real alternative through the concept of a practice).

So, that is how I assess the difficulties that get opened up in Nord's historical chapter. But, having shown how the problems he sees for religion in education have arisen historically, how does he sum them up conceptually in the last chapter in his first part? Given what may seem like such a daunting predicament (or "fate" à la Grant), how does he attempt to maintain and further his position? With the proviso that the interrelated problems of religion in public schools and universities can only be appreciated in light of the conception of education that he will be dealing with more substantively in the second part of his book, he classifies them this way:

> First, education leaves students religiously ignorant. No doubt this is already
> obvious from chapter 2; here I will distinguish between two kinds of
> ignorance. Most important, I claim that very few students encounter religion

> as a live option for making sense of the world or living their lives. Second,
> public schools and universities are not religiously neutral; rather, they take
> sides, privileging secular over religious ways of making sense of the world
> and living our lives. This will turn out to be important given the U.S. Supreme
> Court's interpretation of the First Amendment. Third, public education
> borders on secular indoctrination. It will take a little philosophical work to
> make this last claim plausible, but a part of my argument is that we teach
> students to accept secular ways of making sense of the world largely as a
> matter of faith rather than reason. . . . (81)

Again, we see evidence of a blending or blurring of civic concerns and concerns with meaning. This plays out in his attempt at conceptual clarification.

The two kinds of religious ignorance to which Nord refers are religious illiteracy and lack of religious understanding. Battling the former is often the focus of public arguments for AR, as in Stephen Prothero, who Nord cites as his example. We can't talk to one another in the public sphere, the argument goes, if we don't know even the most basic facts about one another's religions. "But," says Nord, "even if students acquire a basic religious literacy as a result of their courses in history and literature, they are unlikely to develop any significant religious understanding—the kind of *understanding* that people within a religious tradition have of their own tradition and of the world as it appears from the vantage point of their tradition" (82, emphasis in original).

So, knowledge of facts is necessary but not sufficient, either for an education worthy of the name or for the civic concerns raised here. What about understanding, then? This is a lot trickier. Nord relies on two rather ambiguous concepts—"inside understanding" and understanding religions as "live options"—as well as his running theme of "taking religion seriously." In moving from the religious illiteracy contemporary education fosters to the lack of inside understanding of religious ways of seeing the world, Nord could be seen as moving from a superficial civic basis for his AR case to a deeper humanities-based case. But the civic case is

still very much present in what he says about understanding, and our question is whether the former adversely effects or dominates (or kills, in Goodman's terms) the latter. He says that

> *inside understanding* requires that religion be studied in some depth, using primary sources that enable students to get inside the hearts and minds of people within a religious tradition. Apart from a few high school and undergraduate courses in religion students have little opportunity to acquire such understanding. Yet such understanding, I suggest, is necessary if students are to appreciate religions as live options for making sense of the world. (83)

Live options for whom? And why is their appreciation important? Or, to put it differently, is Nord talking about meaning for the students themselves, or their recognition of the different kinds of meaningfulness brought to the table in the public sphere, or both? What exactly is being promised and what merely suggested? This is precisely what Nord leaves ambiguous, although we have seen indications elsewhere that he likely wants both. He further stipulates that AR cannot in public schools and universities make the options so "live" as to merge into "when one encounters God in the practice of religion" (83). But students can, nevertheless, and especially through art, literature, and primary sources, imaginatively acquire that inside understanding.

The answer to our question, to be completely fair to Nord, could go either way. It all depends on what is foregrounded and what is left in the background. And this is precisely why I can't categorically be anti-AR or tell anyone not to proceed with it. It is also why, in the end, the significance of AR rests more on the context in which it seems to make sense and in which it will be implemented than on Nord's intentions, however clear or ambiguous they turn out to be. But, what can be said is that Nord doesn't seem to have a sufficient appreciation of the need to make a distinction. So, yes, a student could study one or a number of religious traditions and gain an intellectual and imaginative appreciation of it theologically, but still detachedly, without the whole thing turning into either religious practice or indoctrination, *and* this could be meaningful

to the student simply for the understanding it opens up or for opening up live options for religious practice. I would suggest, however, that the possibility of humanistic study of religions being meaningful to the student depends on that humanistic study being humanistic study, not something else. It would have to be undertaken for its own sake, for the sake of the knowledge and the contemplation of that knowledge. Even to open up a range of "live options" before the student that, for the student, are not actually live options (i.e., not likely the student will actually adopt any religion), could still be meaningful to the student given that the intention is simply to contemplate something of the range of human forms of life. There would no doubt be civic effects from such study—understanding of others, recognition of others, niceness—but that would not be the explicit purpose. If the context is not one that puts contemplation of knowledge first, however, but puts civic purposes first, then the parading of live options before the student would be meaningless rather than meaningful. It would give the student nothing more than a set of explicit rules ("a few thin platitudes," in Grant's terms; "the code," for Taylor and Illich, as discussed in Chapter 3), while holding up examples of meaningful worlds that are actually beyond the grasp of the majority of students, and, truth be told (against the optimism of diversity talk), the majority of citizens in Western societies. But the attempt would be to add some cache or the appearance of richness of meaning to the rules merely by association with religious or intellectual traditions. Meaningfulness and putting the education of the student first, depends on relatively unmeaningful rules and civic purposes not being foregrounded. It is one thing to recognize the good of having liberally educated citizens; it is another to turn education into the making of citizens. So, by the logic of meaning, it is difficult for Nord to have it both ways: a program encoded in explicit rules and also rich in meaning. Chapters 3 through 5 will show the overwhelming pressures of the social and educational context that make it so difficult for AR to

have it both ways. Any attempt to open up "live options" of meaning for students is up against deeply entrenched patterns of thought and action. In any case, though Nord's attempt to give the first problem of religion and education a spin in the direction of educational meaningfulness may be in doubt from the beginning, it remains to be seen what he actually says more substantively about what constitutes a good education.

In the meantime, the second and third problems are both much more explicitly civic in their emphasis—although, again in fairness to Nord, it must be remembered that what he wants to achieve civically is, somehow, a more meaningful recognition of religions and religion in the public sphere, so meaning does come first in that sense, in terms of the impulse driving him. So, with the second problem—lack of neutrality in public education—the formulation is explicitly legal/civic. The essence of the argument is this: there are different interpretations of virtually all of the areas covered in schooling—"history, art, morality, nature, or psychology"—and some of these are religious interpretations; "to ignore the religious interpretations is to take sides" (84); and, as he has shown in his second and third chapters, religion is indeed ignored in public education. Therefore, public education is not, in fact, neutral. The argument is a political one, and, to the extent one starts from a political understanding of education, it is a good one, a pretty obvious one.

But at the same time, Nord himself is clearly stretching for something beyond mere procedural fairness, while keeping his conceptual argument here very brief and to the point. This comes out in his distinction between two types of neutrality: neutrality between religions, and neutrality between religion and non-religion or hard secularism, following the United States Supreme Court. A main thrust of neutrality between religions today, of course, is to ensure that Christianity is not privileged over other religions (see his historical qualification of this, 223), but

it speaks to management of the culture wars (each of the wars) generally. Again, here we have another instance of it potentially going either way, but of the context being such that it is bound to go mainly one way. Different religions and particular traditions, we can grant, will have much that is worth studying, contemplating, taking seriously in that sense—in their own right and for their own sakes. But to take the culture wars as a starting point and to try, through education, to add depth of understanding, is to fail to appreciate that the game of demand for explicit statements of recognition is inherently directed toward superficial ends. What is it that people want when they want recognition? They want something substantial, meaningful, real solidarity, but there is a dysfunctionality to the game, based as it is on a logic of stand-off.[38] To start with the "conflict" is to be stuck with the conflict, in however *managed* or *rationalized* a new form.

Perhaps sensing this, Nord here chooses to focus on the second type of neutrality. He seems to want to take it in the direction of meaningfulness and the imperative to pursue what a good liberal education requires:

> The problem cuts deeper than the violation of neutrality with regard to particular issues, texts, courses, or religious traditions. The more basic problem is that schools and universities systematically privilege secular over religious ways of making sense of the world. (85)

Nord, as we have seen, for example, in his introductory remarks, wants to fight the meaninglessness of the disenchanted world, the unreasonableness of dry rationality. Yet he is constrained both by his commitment to try to remain neutral and by the nature of his proposal, based on neutrality in education. The passage continues:

> After all, in dealing with religiously contested questions, public schools and universities: 1) never require students to study contending religious ways of making sense of what is at issue (from the inside, in any depth, as live options), 2) often do not even give students the opportunity to learn about religious ways of making sense of what is at issue (by way of elective courses,

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[38] See Sennett on the virtues of indirection (*Together* 22–24).

for example), and 3) usually do not even tell students that there is a controversy. To leave religion—as a live option—out of the curriculum cripples the ability of students to understand what is at issue; it makes secular ways of thinking the victor by default. It implicitly suggests that religion is a dead option, that students need not understand religion to understand their various subjects, that it is irrelevant to being an education person. This is to take sides. (85)

All he can say in the interest of what a good liberal education requires and in the interest of re-enchantment, given the starting point of controversy and the need to manage controversy, is to expand on the problem by reiterating that students are not required to seriously acknowledge, are not given the opportunity to seriously acknowledge, and are not even informed of the range of possible positions. A bit like Kass trying to make an anti-committee committee and having to settle for a committee-committee that might at least point to the possibility of more meaningful ways of dialogue and a better grasp of technological innovation, Nord, while wanting to challenge secularist rationality, can only do so by laying out the rules of fairness according to secularist rationality. He wants to save humanities education from this rationality, but, again, can only seem to do so by bringing it more explicitly under those very rules. He wants to make education more meaningful for young people, but seems so far able only to send them a memo that such meaning is possible.

Nord's third problem may well be simply a restatement of the second. To not give a fair hearing to all views is, one would think, to privilege or promote a particular view. But it is restated in a way that at least permits him to have another go at meaning. Making the case that public schooling, as we have it, is indoctrinatory permits him, in fact, to have a good go at secular rationality and the way it constrains meaning, even while maintaining his neutrality (which is why he can't go into too much detail or make this too explicitly the focus of his case). It is in this fairly brief section at the end of the second part of the book that Nord is probably at

his most compelling for anyone concerned about a place for the study of the humanities in a modern pluralistic, technological society. Yet, precisely because he lays out the vision quite explicitly, his case raises troubling questions about how realistic it is, not only for his AR scheme, but, by extension, for the idea of a liberal education generally as a publicly promoted good. How to teach the liberal arts without killing them? How to give the young freedom without leaving them to their own devices?

Nord's case about the de facto indoctrination that occurs in public schooling stems out of his historical account. The various academic disciplines having developed their own methodological frameworks without reference to a greater unified truth or even to each other, schools and universities inevitably pass on these restricted disciplinary frameworks, and, Nord would seem to be suggesting, the minimalistic secular framework that at least allows each of these rationalities its place and its authority. The disciplinary frameworks are restricted in that their nets for catching truth are set up to deal with certain kinds of considerations and to let others go. The humanities, precisely because they are less methodically rigid than the natural sciences and hard social sciences, are able to capture more subtle meanings. Still, Nord is suggesting, there are unspoken rules that keep even humanities scholars from addressing the larger questions of truth and going beyond methodological boundaries in the interest of wisdom. Much like indoctrination in a fundamentalist religion, which is actually indoctrination in a very narrow rationality (e.g., straightforward rules of Biblical interpretation), contemporary education indoctrinates students in a variety of narrow disciplinary rationalities, and in the secularist rationality that allows no place for anything beyond those. Nord characterizes this beyond that is being denied as a greater reasonableness, as distinct from the narrow rationalities. He is on to

something here. But everything depends on the quality of that reasonableness and what we think

we need to do with it.

He sums up the third problem in this way:

> Perhaps we can at least say this: being reasonable is inevitably less a matter of
> being rigorously logical or methodological or rule following, than it is of
> being open to new patterns of meaning, of being deliberative, even creative. It
> requires an analytical sensitivity to the basic assumptions of a point of view,
> but it also requires empathy, being able to think (and feel) oneself into
> different ways of making sense of the world. It may require the ability to see
> or to experience the world differently, drawing on aesthetic or symbolic forms
> of expression for insight into reality. It is multicultural, interdisciplinary, and
> comparative. Perhaps more to the point here, it proceeds by way of
> interdisciplinary conversation and exploration. We might even say that it
> aspires to a transdisciplinary understanding of the world—one that recognizes
> the limitations of all of the disciplines and searches for new syntheses. . . .
> Our question is this: is it sufficient for schools and universities to teach
> students how to be rational within the conceptual frameworks of the secular
> disciplines, or do they also have an obligation to encourage and enable
> students to be reasonable as well, exploring alternative religious
> interpretations? (96)

Now, of course, part of Nord's difficulty, as I am arguing, is that by focusing on the solution, he

is not allowing himself to steep sufficiently in the problem.[39] By the time he comes to this

summary of his relatively brief statement of the third problem, it is difficult to put a finger on

what he is saying, even though it is hard not to like the idea of a greater reasonableness. This

does seem to speak to what we need. There seems the possibility here of a genuine response to

the loss of the unity of truth with a lighter reasonableness. But we need to be careful that this

reasonableness doesn't turn into another rationality, as Nord's emphasis on solution threatens to

do—as his liberal commitment to peace making and neutrality threatens to do. Again, we get a

sense here that he is saying something that could go either way. There is, on the one hand,

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[39] Paul Valéry: "Une difficulté est une lumière. Une difficulté insurmontable est un soliel" (as quoted in Murdoch viii).

"openness to new patterns of meaning" and allowing students the space to be reasonable, and, on the other, some already very jaded education talk of the need for multicultural, interdisciplinary conversations and explorations, as if kids could be sent off as armies of ecumenical delegates on a mission to sort out all of the world's problems, and all of humanities intellectual mysteries, from scratch and on their own.[40] Is Nord invoking a light touch or flailing around a heavy hand? What can be said is that, to the extent he wants to address not only his educational problems but also the problems of the modern secular world *directly*, it is going to be heavy handed. I will be arguing that a light touch to the problems and puzzles of the secular world requires a certain way of putting those problems in the background.

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[40] This is a prevalent motif in both popular and educationist culture today, despite its ridiculousness. Far from saving the world with their "voices," what they will do is simply repeat the nostrums that are expected of them, that are theoretically stipulated from the beginning—about how wonderfully diverse we all are, the importance of being nice, and so on.

Chapter 3: The Real World of Secularization

Nord's case in its basic outlines takes the form of a contrapuntal story within a story: something essential has been unjustly taken away from modern education and needs to be put back in. The quasi-mathematical logic behind this call for restoration is influenced by and takes support from the larger story in which something was supposed to disappear, but, in fact, hasn't disappeared at all. While Nord cites key sources for the education story, he does not do so for secularization as such, and simply makes the case in his own way that religion has not disappeared. Clearly, though, he is basing his whole argument on recent revisionist scholarship in the theory of secularization, and perhaps particularly on Charles Taylor, who has characterized his monumental retelling of the history of secularization in *A Secular Age* as a challenge to what he calls the "subtraction theories" (26–29). Taylor's key point in this is that the simplistic arithmetization of the story obliterates all of the nuances, complexities, and ambiguities of the real history of the emergence of, and meaning of, modernity in the West.

Of course, Nord does not want to put religion back in to education just as it was before it was taken out. He acknowledges that secularization has complicated and changed things. One can no longer *teach religion* in public schools. So, his case is that AR is different but equivalent. But the question is how and why it is equivalent. If there is a sense that meaning or meaningfulness has somehow been lost from education, then that may indeed be the million dollar question. But it is not one to take too literally, as if we could get enough of a grasp on meaningfulness in the first place to be able to start with a large subtraction, take something else and multiply it into a school program, then add it back in and presume to know exactly what we have. What I am suggesting about Nord's case is that there is a bit of subtle number magic going on there. Secularization itself has given us a fairly broad consensus on procedural liberal

neutrality, which, Nord suggests, can be the base of shared meaning in a secular world. We need the neutrality, but this liberal neutrality isn't entirely neutral, he admits. In fact, it has a certain amount of moral weight of its own, and contemporary styles of discourse are certainly prepared to back him up on this: peace-keeping, being nice to one another, talking about diversity, popular therapeutic culture, and so on, are the best grasp on ethical reality we often seem to be able to articulate collectively. In fact, we can hardly stop talking about them, perhaps for fear of finding that there is nothing else. Still, Nord recognizes that there is something insufficient about all this proceduralism. It is not enough on its own, and needs topping up.

So, religion is brought back in, in a different way than before. The AR approach has something insufficient about it as well, it is recognized, but together with the minimalist base of liberal morality it is supposed to add up to a functional equivalent of what has been lost in the bringing up of the young and in contemporary Western culture. The obviousness of the idea of teaching about religion, I would suggest, rests in this quasi-arithmetical maneuver. But the arithmetic only works through the force of the desire that it should all add up. It only works if the idea of "religion" can be imagined to carry the public significance that religions once had, only if the sheer quantity of possible ways of making sense of the world, as represented by the liberal table, can be willed into the conviction that the world does make sense. But, of course, this is to remain within the liberal paradigm and to try to bring out of it the kind of significance that it was sensed to have lacked in the first place. It is, in short, to take the profound philosophical problem of pluralism and deny that it is a problem, or at least to turn it into a technical problem, the solution of which is to magically turn the problem into a solution by celebrating it as "diversity."

The whole point of Taylor's critique of the subtraction theories is that they vastly oversimplify history. And my point in this chapter is that it is not so easy to get out of the

pervasive subtraction/addition mentality, and, moreover, that this has consequences for the

pursuit of meaning and a just grounding of authority in education. To suggest an easy formula

for adding religion back in to education even if it was never actually subtracted from society, as

some had thought, is still to oversimplify history: it is to create an abstract solution to an

abstracted problem and gloss over how secularism is actually experienced by people, and

particularly how this experience is shaped and reflected in contemporary society by its dominant

structures and styles. Taylor himself does fall into this very self-contradiction when he supports[41]

the Quebec course in religion and ethics.[42] On the one hand, he just wants us to look at the

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[41] Taylor participated, along with Gérard Bouchard, in Quebec's Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences (Bouchard and Taylor). "Promotion" of diversity is a strong theme throughout the resulting report, and it is this promotion part that makes me uneasy philosophically, while fully recognizing that Taylor was working under a mandate to deal with the exigencies of the Quebec situation of the present day. They both clearly support Quebec's new Ethics and Religious Culture program: "We strongly recommend to the government that it vigorously promote the new Ethics and Religious Culture Program that is to come into force in September 2008. It is important for the public to be aware of the program's precise purposes and content and the essential role that this teaching is to play in the Quebec of the 21st century" (260). See also Maclure and Taylor (57–60).

[42] Quebec's Ethics and Religious Culture program is mandatory and spans elementary and secondary schooling in the province. According to the curriculum documents from Éducation et Enseignement supérieur, the program's objectives are "recognition of others," which is spun out to include "self-knowledge," and "pursuit of the common good," which "not only involves the greater welfare of the collectivity, but also that of each individual" (n.pag.). These objectives are in turn "instrumental in attaining the three aims" of "the construction of identity, the construction of world-view and empowerment." And the three measurable and monitorable competencies are "reflects on ethical questions," "demonstrates and understanding of the phenomenon of religion," and "engages in dialogue" (the last is for the secondary level alone). In virtually every paragraph of these documents can be seen the same de facto emphasis on civic purposes we have seen in Nord, with always the apparently balancing presence of the language of meaningfulness in terms like "reflection" and "dialogue." As we will see shortly in discussing Eva Illouz and the therapeutic/communicative ethos, however, when reflection and dialogue are compelled, facilitated, and monitored, meaning is inevitably affected.

In historical context, the Ethics and Religious Culture program is the result of Quebec's long process of trying to secularize education since the Parent Commission in the 1960s. Constitutional hurdles to abolishing the denominational system and setting up a system of linguistic boards were finally overcome by 1997. The question then was how to replace the religious education—with Catholic, Protestant, and ethics-course options—that had always had a place in Quebec education. It took until 2008 to implement the new program, and not without a lot of prior and subsequent controversy (my unpublished paper on Canadian policy, Marce "Religion in Public Schools," provides a fuller documentary account of the process up to 2006). One challenge for the right of parents to opt their children out was ultimately denied by the Supreme Court of Canada in SL v. Commission scolaire des Chênes. The same court, in Loyola High School v. Quebec, has decided in favour of a private Catholic school seeking exemption to offer its own equivalent, essentially allowing that it can teach about Catholicism and Catholic the perspective from a Catholic perspective. In both cases, of course, the court starts from the legitimacy of the state's objectives of shaping citizens within the currently recognized ethos: "The state has a legitimate interest in ensuring that students in all schools are capable, as adults, of conducting themselves with openness and respect as they confront cultural

nuances of the real story of secularization in all its ambiguity and paradox, and, on the other, he

suggests there is a simple, secularized, up-to-date, programmatic replacement for Quebec's old

straight religion courses. In a sense, he might be seen here as trying to turn his philosophical

inquiry into something "useful" by contemporary standards of usefulness, and in consequence, at

least within the parameters of this particular issue, to end up losing the whole point of his

philosophical inquiry by trying to sum up a little too neatly its implications for education. I

would suggest this points to a blind spot in our thinking about the crucial question of the relation

of philosophy and the humanities in general to policy, of which, ironically, Taylor can also help

us to see the source. How does one square seeing—just seeing the complexity of something,

seeing more than can be articulated, even seeing, or having a sense of, how much cannot be

seen—on the one hand, and making "educated" public pronouncements about education, which

would seem to presuppose straightforward articulacy, or straightforward additions and

subtractions, on the other? How is one supposed to educate the young into the sort of capacity for

nuance cultivated in the humanities when that purpose must be publicly articulable in policy, and

increasingly bounded by centralized and inclusive curriculum objectives? The question of AR is

really just a part of the much larger puzzle of how we have become tangled up in our own

educational desires in such a way that in struggling for them we are continually working against

them. We want to pass on a meaningful world to the young, and at the same time we

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and religious differences. A vibrant, multicultural democracy depends on the capacity of its citizens to engage in thoughtful and inclusive forms of deliberation" (Loyola High School v. Quebec). My point in this thesis is that, not only for AR programs but also for all attempts to shape students according to whatever recognized civic or moral objectives, there is a looming crisis of legitimacy beyond the merely legal.

    Quebec is only one province within Canada. For a taxonomy of the historical models by which the different provinces have dealt with religion and public education, see Ronald Manzer, *Public Schools and Political Ideas* (52). That work was written in 1994, and I have assessed the direction of subsequent trends in my unpublished paper "Religion in Public Schools."

compulsively want to spell out for them exactly what that fullness amounts to—no more and no less.

While keeping in mind the various ways Nord sums up the potential meaningfulness of AR—its role in forming social solidarity, its functional role in replacing the religious authority behind earlier education, its holding out of "live options" and possibilities for the young themselves—I want to turn in this chapter to secularization as we really experience it, once we drop the arithmetical metaphors and look at what it means for the question of authority and meaningfulness in bringing up the young. I will start with Taylor and his philosophical synthesis of the revisionist scholarship on secularization. Here as much as anywhere in this thesis, its essayistic, groping nature becomes apparent. Many theses could be devoted solely to bringing out the implications of Taylor's work on secularization. Here I only want to draw on a few of his themes to underline the point that history, and contemporary social reality, is more than arithmetic. In particular, the themes and concepts of the Reform impulse, the modern conditions of belief, the supernova effect, and the public sphere as a means and expression of human self-possession will be highlighted. Once I have drawn from Taylor some concepts for understanding something of the complexity of the broad historical background, I can then turn to contemporary manifestations of their ever-shifting forms.

The Reform Impulse Today

Taylor, as I have already suggested, is hard to summarise, but what he does offer is a nuanced, dialectical sense of the tensions at play in modernity, tensions that keep coming back up in new ways and changing and complicating the modern world. In fact, if it were necessary to sum up the significance of his challenge to the subtraction theories of secularization, it would

probably be his point that there is no single modernity, but, rather, "multiple modernities," which can be masked by delusions of a single line of modern progress. Of course, this point too contains its tensions. There may not be a single true story of emerging human self-possession, but, on his own account, there are characteristic impulses and preoccupations of modernity that engender such delusions. These tensions may well be present, for example, even in Taylor's own concluding reflections in *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Thus, after talking about the modern emergence of something he calls "political identity" (a qualified version of self-possession) and about the various ways that different political identities (in the West, let alone the rest of the world; and in the various takes on those identities by people from within) interpret modernity, he invokes "the real positive work . . . of building mutual understanding."

Now, what exactly Taylor himself may mean by "mutual understanding," I am willing to leave open. But, as a social aim toward some sort of solidarity that needs to be built, and one that has a ring of familiarity or cliché to it, it is also open to suspicion, and this suspicion needs to be pressed. It is one of those concepts, like "democracy" (Orwell), with which everyone is going to tend to agree without knowing exactly what they are agreeing to. It is a lot like the idea of AR in this respect, and, in fact, ties in nicely with the contemporary background assumptions that make the idea of AR seem so obvious. So, I want to follow the lead of Richard Sennett on this point, when he says that "mutual understanding" is precisely the kind of thing that should not be foregrounded as a social aim. And substantiating this rather counter-intuitive claim, with regard to AR in particular and more generally to educational aims and the search for inter-generational authority, is where this chapter is headed. But in order to appreciate what this means, we can do no better than start by picking up much support that we need from Taylor himself and his account of secularization. The suspicion not only of Taylor's broader political

aim but also of his support for the Quebec program is justifiable in his own terms—and these

provide valuable sources for the present inquiry.[43]

Taylor calls his retelling of the story of the emergence of modernity in the West the

"Reform master narrative." He contrasts it not only with the subtraction theories of secularization

but also with the "intellectual deviation" story, a version with which he has a lot of sympathy and

which he regards as compatible with his own, though not sufficient for understanding what has

happened. The latter narrative (see, for example, Milbank) is told almost exclusively through the

history of theology and philosophy, and it centres on the turn taken in nominalism, leading to

modern science and "the growing force of the new instrumental stance of human agency" (773).

The assumption is that there was somehow a trickle-down effect, through which society was

gradually transformed. In a sense, Taylor could be interpreted as concerned with tracing the

trickles, and that would capture something of the quality of his work on secularisation. But really

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[43] My suspicion of Taylor's policy in the terms of his philosophy centres on the role of Ivan Illich in his work on secularization. On the one hand, Taylor acknowledges a very close parallel between what he is saying on Reform and what Illich is saying about the corruption of Christianity in *Rivers North of the Future*: "Indeed, I have learned a lot from him" (737). On the other hand, he distances himself somewhat from Illich by saying he "was a thoroughgoing radical, and I don't want to blunt his message. I can't claim to speak for him, but this is what I draw from his work . . ." (743). David Cayley recounts in his written introduction to his "Charles Taylor: Malaise of Modernity" interviews (Taylor, Interview series) that Taylor had not thought very much of Illich's work until he heard him speak about the corruption of Christianity.

Cayley had been disappointed in Taylor's initial position on Illich, and I continue to be disappointed whenever Taylor's intricately textured thought seems to lead only to some banal policy suggestion that has already become obvious anyway. Is his backing for the Quebec Ethics and Religion course the final word for him on secularization and education? Is that all there is? I would hope not. But certainly any influence that Taylor has had on educational thought has been in a backup role to already obvious approaches to recognition and diversity, and, indeed, not without considerable support from Taylor's own writings. The locus classicus for Taylor as a proponent of diversity promotion is his essay "The Politics of Recognition." For a thorough instance of Taylor's appropriation by the education world, see, Anthony Joseph Palma's dissertation, *Recognition of Diversity: Charles Taylor's Educational Thought*.

My Taylor, then, is a thoroughly radical Taylor, and, while admitting that this may not be Taylor's Taylor, I do see in his account of Illich, and in the implications of many parts of his own philosophy, including the major theme of his history of secularization, something that is potentially quite radical, something that can quite completely overturn education as we currently understand it or take it for granted. But perhaps that overturning is something that can only be worked out in history. And perhaps it is there in that process of working out that is to be found the meeting point of the radical and the publicly useful intellectual, as well as the meeting point of philosophy and policy. For Taylor on Illich see, with considerable overlap, both his forward to *Rivers North of the Future* and *Secular Age* (737–44).

he is changing the metaphor, and asking what it is that has *driven* the relationship between the intellectual history and the actual transformation of society.

He pinpoints an impulse to Reform, which he has described in an interview as a kind of compulsion always "to get everyone on board" that is set "deep in the cultural DNA of the West" (Interview with David Cayley). In its essence, the impulse to Reform is the powerful desire, persisting and ever mutating through Taylor's dialectical view of history, to complete or fulfill the Axial revolution.[44] That original revolution, he explains, opened up unstable equilibrium in the post-Axial world. On the one hand, there were now spiritual virtuosi who could see the possibilities for the individual person to transcend the taken-for-granted of the everyday world, by having themselves, as Taylor puts it, developed "buffered identities" through "disciplines of thought and conduct" (*Secular Age* 146). And, on the other hand, there was still in the everyday world the prevalent carry-over of pre-Axial "embeddedness" in the forms of life given in a culture. In the post-Axial world, then, there was this tension between the good of mere human flourishing as conventionally defined, and of a good beyond human flourishing, or at least beyond the conventional conceptions of flourishing. The unstable equilibrium was part strain and part the finding of ambiguous "hierarchical complementarity," an image of which, for the latter, Taylor finds in the feeding of Buddhist monks by the laity, who exist at a much lower "speed" than those they support (*Secular Age* 62; see 146–158 for Axial revolution).

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[44] *Axial revolution* is Taylor's term, which refers loosely to what Karl Jaspers called the Axial Age, "the extraordinary period in the last millennium BCE, when various 'higher' forms of religion appeared seemingly independently in different civilizations, marked by such founding figures as Confucius, Gautama, Socrates, the Hebrew prophets." Taylor continues: "The surprising feature of the Axial religions, compared with what went before, what would in other words have made them hard to predict beforehand, is that they initiate a break in all three dimensions of embeddedness: social order, cosmos, human good" (*Secular Age* 151), and it is this break and the long term working out of its consequences with which Taylor is concerned.

But it was only in Christianity, he suggests, and in particular Latin Christendom, that the gap on which this post-Axial equilibrium was based was felt to be intolerable enough to drive history in the attempt to overcome it (62). "Although the aim at first was not to abolish the difference altogether," he explains, "serious attempts were made to narrow the gap between the fastest and the slowest." (62) While a "two-tiered religion . . . made much sense in the Dark Ages," for the newly converted tribes, who largely interpreted Christianity in their own terms, and while it remained in place for much of the Middle Ages, the gap in fact became "steadily smaller, and that in a number of ways" (64). He traces out some of these ways as they developed from roughly 1000 on, coming from both top and bottom, in growing concern with "more inward and intense personal devotion, a greater uneasiness at 'sacramentals' and church-controlled magic," and then mounting anxieties about judgment and salvation turning over into salvation by faith and the Reformation proper.

But underlying these developments was the impulse to Reform. The key distinction Taylor is making here will be important for a distinction I will want to make later on, from a more strictly (or secularly) educational perspective, so I quote in full:

> What I'm calling "Reform," with a capital "R," is to be distinguished from attempts by more dedicated people to spread their forms of practice and devotion, by preaching, encouragement, example. These reform movements (with a small "r") may even be organized or sponsored by the official hierarchy, without this amounting to "Reform." Proselytizing and renewal movements have cropped up periodically in all the higher civilizations. What distinguishes them from Reform is that they do not try to delegitimate less dedicated forms, but only to convert more people from these to the higher "speeds."
> Now there was also lots of reform in late mediaeval Europe. Think only of the preaching of the mendicant friars. But what is peculiar to Latin Christendom is a growing concern with Reform, a drive to make over the whole society to higher standards. I don't pretend to have the explanation of this "rage for order," but it seems to me to be a fact about the late-mediaeval and early modern period, and moreover one which has carried over into the

modern period in the partly secularized ideal of "civilization." I want to argue that this "rage" has been crucial to the destruction of the old enchanted cosmos, and to the creation of a viable alternative in exclusive humanism. (62–63)

To describe it as a desire to complete the Axial revolution, despite Taylor's claim above not to have an explanation, gives some insight into the unshakable hold that it has on Western culture. It is, at bottom, a desire to do good, and to do good on a grand scale, spiritually and transformatively, however the interpretations of what exactly that means may shift and permutate over time and between Western cultures. But, by the same token, "rage for order" hints at the dark side, with "order" pointing forward to the rationalization and instrumentalization of modern society, and "rage" suggesting the kind of blind, unthinking behaviour that is supposed to be characteristic of the pre-Axial mode. With this underlying tension, there is little wonder that the working out of what completion of the Axial revolution does mean has, so far, taken over two millennia.

To pick up a few more essential elements in my greatly abridged retelling, the Reformation itself was a key moment in the partial fulfillment of the post-Axial project that Taylor calls the Great Disembedding and also forms the basis of modern secularity. The "Reformation as Reform" had two major consequences for modernity. The first was disenchantment (78–80). Calvin's "radical simplification," by which he meant to break the hold of previous compromises, was that "we are depraved; and thus in the work of our salvation God does everything," the doctrine of grace. This leads to the rejection of sacramentals, and the equation of all magic with black magic (drawing on Thomas here). Some paradoxical intensification of belief in magic had to be worked through, but there was also another paradox, that, despite God doing everything, disenchantment made room for humans to re-order society.

And of course disenchantment of the world was already tied in with doing that: now "we can rationalise the world, expel the mystery from it (because it is all now concentrated in the will of God)" (80)

This second consequence of the Reformation, the intensification of the drive to re-order the world, came about through the particular way in which it re-worked the old tension between the demand to love God and renounce everything else, and the good of ordinary human flourishing, which, in fact, the former often serves, through works of charity, and so on. It is a workable compromise for the "holy renouncer" to serve these worldly ends, rather than more strictly austere ends. The twist here is that "radical Protestantism utterly rejects the multi-speed system, and in the name of this abolishes the supposedly higher, renunciative vocations: but also builds renunciation into ordinary life" (81). In other words, higher demands, that formerly would have been taken up by the religious elite, were now placed on ordinary life, "because if we really must hold that all vocations are equally demanding, and don't want this to be a levelling down, then all must be at the most exigent pitch" (82). But those higher demands spilled over from personal spiritual discipline to a general demand for order that included social order. Taylor puts it this way:

> The justified, sanctified person eschewed disordered conduct, put his/her life in order, made an end of drunkenness, fornication, unbridled speech, immoderate laughter, fights, violence, etc.
> Moreover, Calvinists shared with many people of the day, particularly elites, a strong sense of the scandal of social disorder, that the general behaviour was sinful, . . . and that society as a whole was given over to disorder, vice, injustice, blasphemy, etc. It was an important goal to remedy this, on the social and not only the personal level.
> Here is where it becomes significant that Protestantism is in the line of continuity with mediaeval reform, attempting to raise general standards, not satisfied with a world in which only a few integrally fulfill the gospel, but trying to make certain pious practices absolutely general. (82)

But beyond the personal and social levels of concern with order, there was, according to Taylor, a third level, aware of and concerned with the implications of the intensified concern with order itself. It was imperative that everything be done with the right attitude, because, of course, it was God who was doing the re-ordering, and people were merely "empowered by God to build the godly order" (83).[45] The tricky thing in Puritan spirituality was negotiating the need, on the one hand, to show a certain degree of confidence in one's salvation and its manifestations, so that one was not sinking into despair and inaction, and, on the other hand, to remain humble and avoid any hint that this was one's own doing. It was inevitable, however, in Taylor's retrospective telling, that there would be a gradual slide into just what was most feared. With increased work on the ordering of the human world, it was only a matter of time before it was seen as human work. And, not only did it come to be seen as human work, but also as human work in a human domain, in the service primarily and fundamentally of human flourishing, indeed, the birth of "a new conception of human flourishing" (84). This is the key "reversal," in Taylor's telling of the story, which opened up the whole "modern moral order," the "immanent frame," within which human agency would soon gain its full autonomy (though not necessarily without new possibilities for transcendence, as Taylor wants to show).

A complement to the Reformation, and intertwined with its upping of the Reform impulse and providing a key path for the secular reversal, was the Renaissance revival of the

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[45] The whole point of this thesis can be taken as making the case that the need now is for a similar kind of awareness of where we are—that the need is not so much for the right attitude (e.g., political correctness, as a distorted, often debased, reformulation of this core Puritan imperative) as for a *light* attitude in education, the need to relieve some of the long-building habit of always insisting that everyone get on board for this or that educational initiative, the taken-for-granted belief that we can set out and plan an education, the need of a grace to counteract the paradoxical long-term effects of grace. Lightness, freedom from our vicious circles, can be found only by seeing what we are already doing. The ideal of education for everyone won't be lost by relaxing our insistence on it; rather, it has already been obscured, can only be re-found by relaxing our insistence on controlling it and controlling everyone's attitudes through it.

ideal of civility. At first a matter of the elite distinguishing themselves from the rest through self-discipline and education, that very distinction, following the post-Axial pattern, itself became increasingly intolerable, and led (through developments in the military, bureaucracy, and public education) to increasing state concern with the lives and mores of ordinary people. "Civility requires working on yourself, not just leaving things as they are, but making them over. It involves a struggle to reshape ourselves" (101). That impulse, of course, is easily scalable. Types of programs and developments to which this gave rise include the reformulation and rationalization of charity; humourlessness and a rejection of popular culture, of carnival; improvement of the people and the rise of modern schooling; government structures; new methods and disciplines in the military, schools, hospitals, and factories (108–112)—all setting stage for Nolan and Illouz on therapeutic state and management styles, the basis of our contemporary legitimacy and authority, to which I will be turning shortly.

In all of this, the great thing about Taylor is his acute awareness of tensions and ironies twining through all of the nuances of his account (and underlying his dialectical view of history). This is what makes his work so full of hope. Yet his own policy pronouncements, such as his support of the Quebec Ethics and Religious Culture course, can fall with a bit of a clunk by comparison, to the extent that, by entering policy debate more or less as it stands, it loses sight of all of the nuances and tensions, and the hidden impulses, the perspective from without, that he can bring.[46] I want to try to hang on to these in relation to AR and the questions we are pursuing. It is telling in this regard that where Taylor brings the larger ironies of his Reform master narrative to his sharpest point, he relies on Ivan Illich for support. We can only get a grip on AR

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[46] It probably would have been a great loss for philosophy had he beat Pierre Elliott Trudeau in his riding in 1965!

and what it really means if we are willing to see how the whole project of modern education is itself pervaded by the very tensions and ironies of the Reform master narrative.

We need to get into this by returning to Taylor's characterization of the Axial revolution. We have seen that he is concerned with the tension created between the ideals of transcendence and ordinary human flourishing, and with how this tension plays out in the post-Axial West. A central example for him here, in interpreting what is really going on, is Carnival, or the Festival of Misrule. The functionalist safety-valve explanation does not seem to him to quite capture its full significance, as experienced, so, after drawing some hints from the order-and-chaos language of the Roman Saturnalia and from Bakhtin's reflections on laughter and utopia, he turns for help to Victor Turner and his principles of structure and anti-structure. "In its general form," as he summarizes Turner,

> all structure needs anti-structure. By "structure," Turner means, borrowing a phrase from Merton, "the patterned arrangements of role-sets, status-sets and status-sequences" consciously recognized and regularly operative in a given society. We could perhaps rephrase this, and speak of the code of behaviour of a society, in which are defined the different roles and statuses, and their rights, duties, powers, vulnerabilities.
> Turner's point is that in many societies where this code is taken perfectly seriously, and enforced, even harshly most of the time, there are nevertheless moments or situations in which it is suspended, neutralized, or even transgressed. (47–48)

Where this goes beyond functionalist explanation is in the recognition that there is a very real struggle going on here that has to do with the very nature of meaning in human life. "The code relentlessly applied," he suggests, "would drain us of all energy; . . . the code needs to capture some of the untamed force of the contrary principle" (49). Taylor begins to describe the power of anti-structure:

> The sense of "communitas" is the intuition we all share that, beyond the way we relate to each other through our diversified coded roles, we also are a

community of many-sided human beings, fundamentally equal, who are associated together. It is this underlying community which breaks out in moments of reversal or transgression, and which gives legitimacy to the power of the weak. (49)

But even this social formulation could still be seen in a functionalist light, serving toward the improvement of society. Taylor is essentially suggesting that the real creative and history-generating power of the Axial revolution comes from purifying, abstracting the transcendent principle, and insisting on its integrity, at least in principle, as a point of reference:

The pull to anti-structure can come from beyond the society, and even from beyond humanity. From this point of view, it would be legitimate to see the first tension I mentioned above, that between ordinary flourishing and the higher, renunciative vocations, as another example of structure versus anti-structure. The structures of power, property, warrior dominance, are challenged by a life which claims to be higher, and yet which couldn't simply replace the established order. They are forced into co-existence, and hence some kind of complementarity. (49)

That complementarity for medieval Europe was represented in part by Carnival, in a way that, to our modern eyes, gave striking articulation to the principle of anti-structure. But Taylor emphasizes the multivalency of the play of structure and anti-structure, which can be taking place on different levels at the same time. Thus, while the church could be taken as representing the anti-structure of Christianity in relation to secular power, "it is this whole complementarity of state and church together which plays the structural pole to the anti-structure of carnival" (50). It could be said that Carnival was a backup anti-structure, recognizing the inevitable failures of the church in that role. But the other strain in Latin Christendom, the one that as we have seen focused on the discipline first required in order to see the anti-structure, and that then wanted to create new forms of order, came to see Carnival as exactly the sort of thing that had to be stamped out (87). This is the tragedy in Taylor's story of secularization, although, of course, Taylor is anything but anti-modern and the dialectics of history still leave other avenues for

transcendence to find. The modern sense of the creative potential of human agency emerged

precisely from an overly intense insistence on order that tended to kill the context of

meaningfulness for that agency, that precipitated what he refers to as "the eclipse of anti-

structure in modernity" (51). In short, we moderns take ourselves far too seriously, and have lost

our sense of embeddedness in order beyond our ordering that can remind us of our limitations.

This is where illich comes in, to help Taylor underline the paradox with his

understanding of the "corruption of Christianity." The Great Disembedding, as Taylor calls it,

was both a development of Christianity and a corruption of it:

> Powered by it, because the gospel also is a disembedding. [Taylor mentions above] . . . the calls to break away from the established solidarities. But this is there even more strongly in a parable like the story of the Good Samaritan, as Illich explains it. . . . If the Samaritan had followed the demands of sacred social boundaries, he would never have stopped to help the wounded Jew. It is plain that the Kingdom involves another kind of solidarity altogether, one which would bring us into a network of agape.
>
> Here's where the corruption comes in: what we got was not a network of agape, but rather a disciplined society in which categorical relations have primacy, and therefore norms. But it nevertheless all started by the laudable attempt to fight back the demands of the "world," and then make it over. . . .
>
> It might have seemed obvious that one should build on this defensive victory [of Hildebrand and the medieval church against the secular world] with an attempt to change and purify the power field of the "world," make it more and more consonant with the demands of Christian spirituality. But this naturally didn't happen all at once. The changes were incremental, but the project was somehow continually re-ignited in more radical form, through the various Reformations, and down to the present age. The irony is that it somehow turned into something quite different; in another, rather different sense, the "world" won after all. Perhaps the contradiction lay in the very idea of a disciplined imposition of the Kingdom of God. The temptation of power was after all, too strong, as Dostoyevsky saw in the Legend of the Grand Inquisitor. Here lay the corruption. (158)

One of Illich's key concepts is the ill effects of the need to "ensure" and institutionalise what is

not ours to ensure, and this is really another way of putting Taylor's concept of the impulse to

Reform (and the modern compulsion to mobilize and "get everyone on board").

To be sure, the play of structure and anti-structure has not completely disappeared in modernity, it is just that Taylor is conveying an Illichian ("the corruption of the best is the worst," *Rivers* 197) sense of the ramping up of the stakes. Alongside the supposed privatization of religion, public space in particular has felt the deadening hand of the rage to order. Indeed,

> it was the eclipse of this sense of necessary complementarity, of the need for anti-structure, which preceded and helped to bring about the secularization of public space. (*Secular Age* 50)

And so "the temptation to put into effect a code which brooks no limit" leads to totalitarianism and to totalitarian attitudes publicly expressed in the coded "tunnel vision" of political correctness (51). The difficulty in saying anything meaningful in the public sphere, of breaking through the coded tunnel vision of public reason, is part of what I want to pick up on and explore, in the spirit of the questions Taylor raises, in the realm of education, and with AR as just one example.

The other side of this public pall, though, is that anti-structure has indeed, in many ways, shifted to the private realm. The idea of the "retreat" conveys something of the modern sense of anti-structure's continuing power:

> We still feel the need to "get away from it all," to cut out and "recharge our batteries," away, on holiday, outside our usual roles. There are certainly carnival-type moments: public holidays, football matches—here, like their predecessors, hovering on the brink, sometimes over the brink of violence. Communitas breaks out in moments of exceptional danger or bereavement, as with the crowds mourning Princess Di.
> What is different is that this need for anti-structure is no longer recognized at the level of the whole society, and in relation to its official, politcal-jural structure. (50)

But it is not just that anti-structure has attenuated into a functionalist, re-charging role. It has also exploded into the genuine creativity of modernity. And there is certainly a fulfillment of the Axial opening up of possibilities here, on a certain level and, again, not without its ironies.

Taylor goes on, later in *SA*, to speak of the "nova effect" (299–313) and the post-WWII "super-nova" (377), in which the articulation of possibilities for ways of seeing the world and making meaning have expanded and then exploded in mind-boggling magnitude. Still, there are qualifications to be made here, and, in moving on from Taylor, another thing I want to take and further explore is the very problem for meaning that this explosion of meanings creates—the psychoanalyst Adam Phillips has used the phrase "marooned in possibility" (interview), which would seem to apply here. And this makes it into an educational question, because the passing on of mere possibilities may be a disguised inter-generational passing of the buck or cop-out.

The explosion of meanings in modernity has actually been largely on the intellectual and theoretical levels, and so they seem always to remain stubbornly closed, in a sort of extended private realm, to people who do not take up intellectual inquiry as a major focus of their efforts and, indeed, to the public sphere, which relies on much more straightforward, matter-of-fact forms of reasoning. So, in some ways we have as large a gap as ever between the intellectual elite and ordinary people, yet, especially since 1960s (with the emergence of spiritual seeking, self-fulfillment, etc.) on Taylor's account, as a result of centuries of Reform people have come to be saddled with much of the responsibility for themselves and their own "views" that has traditionally been taken on only by the elite. We have not only the pluralism of major traditions but of thousands of personal intellectual articulations of meaning and possibility in the world, and, supposedly, people should be making sense of these possibilities for themselves. It can be seen how easily, through schooling and the presumption of its authority, this can turn into a very distorted charade of intellectual engagement. In common forms of classroom discussion, students are coerced, subtly or not so subtly, into deciding on issues and declaring themselves (see Revell, "Circle Time"), and it would not be farfetched to suspect a proportional relationship between the

pressures put on children to make sense of things and the anxieties of adults over the very possibility of doing so. Against the array of possibilities of belief and worldview that seem to be on offer to people, including young people, what is the real background, then, that is already in play? Taylor, despite his backing of the Quebec course, on the one hand, and his attunement with Illich, on the other, does not take his history of secularization into the history of education as such. But Reform is without a doubt an inherently educational concept, and it will be helpful to keep this troublesome little bit of our cultural DNA in mind as we continue to puzzle over what education has become and the kinds of things we have come to expect from it.

A couple of grand-scale paradoxes can be noted here. First, a part of the reversal to which the Reform master narrative leads is that the impulse to order and the compulsion to keep ordering continues, even increases, while the sense of meaningfulness in the modern world attenuates or at least becomes more uneasy: more action with less certainty about and insight into what actually needs doing, teaching, spreading. Second, the public sphere, an important part of the growing sense of human self-possession in Taylor's account, itself becomes a focal point of the need to find meaning by (paradoxically) articulating it, capturing it, setting out the code for spreading and solidifying it, and so on. The public sphere is also, in the modern world, where we try to articulate what education is for. Again, the harder the effort, the more elusive become the aims.

Taylor deals with the public sphere as a major field in the modern social imaginaries, which set out the imaginative parameters within which we understand our relation to the world, given that we are now post-Great Disembedding, post-Reformation. For our purposes it is important to see that the public sphere carries the tensions of the Reform master narrative. It has its dark side. In a word, the temptation it presents is that it can seem that there is only the code,

that the rules and standards we articulate and set out are the only sources of meaning that are needed. No doubt there are many levels to the public sphere—from art and high-brow periodicals to Oprah and the *National Enquirer*—but, to the extent it is directed toward "what to do," and legitimating our acts, there is today a sense that something is missing, that we can't quite get a sufficient grip on the meaning of what we do collectively and politically.

Our very public understanding of education is caught up in all of this. Education—our responsibility to the young—is what we set out, what we make it, what we say it is. That is a troubling thought, and it may be that it makes us get to work all the harder on setting out what to do. AR is an example of this.

Now, the public sphere, as Taylor says (following Habermas), originally emerged from the modern recognition of the significance of ordinary life, and the sense of possibility, the generation of meaning that could come from the private realm. I will not pretend to try to trace historically the interrelations, blurring of boundaries, and tensions between these two realms. Instead I want to jump to the rather odd contemporary permutation in this relationship, in which we have what has become the dominant language of the public sphere—the language of therapy culture—again, originally a private concern, directed now from the public back upon the private realm and, in a sense, claiming to set out the parameters of meaning that can be found there.

The therapeutic ethos functions, I want to emphasize, as the contemporary background system through which most people, most of the time, tend to make sense of the world. To be sure, we have a pluralistic society—especially pluralism of beliefs or positions, of theories and identities—but what people are saying when they claim to be expressing their beliefs and identities often sounds quite similar to what the next person is saying, while claiming to be expressing another identity. That background consensus is the therapeutic ethos. Certainly, it is

pervasive enough that it has now come to serve as the taken-for-granted normative basis of

legitimacy for government and its actions, including its expansion (Nolan 45). As James Nolan

describes it, this ethos has now grown to a level of pervasiveness that it can (legitimately) be

externalized and codified into institutional policies and laws—and then, of course, these policies

can be expected to "act back on society" to further shape and entrench the ethos (24).

   This whole therapeutic regime—that is, the ethos taken up into institutions and policies

as their main purpose or justification—fits into the story of secularization, because until fairly

recently, say the 1960s, there was still the presence of religion in the lives of the people and so

that common source of meaning could play a part in legitimation. So, all the while the modern

state and institutions were being highly rationalized, it was still possible to manage saying that

this was done in the name of general values based in faith. Nolan, following Seligman, refers

here to "the twin pillars of revelation and reason" (37). But, of course, religious faith has been in

decline—or, at least, people have become more aware of the modern conditions of belief and the

uncertainty and sense of arbitrariness this unleashes—and so too has faith in reason itself. Add to

this the continual growth of the state, not to mention big business, and a new source of

legitimation is desperately needed. The therapeutic culture fits the bill (22–46).

   The regime presents itself as the humanization, or the holistic make-over, of institutions

and the state. Nolan quotes Hillary Rodham Clinton saying that "'all of us face a crisis of

meaning' and that 'the signs of alienation and despair and hopelessness' can be seen 'popping

through the surface.' We need a system, Clinton argued that 'gets rid of micromanagement, the

regulation and the bureaucracy, and substitutes instead human caring, concern, and love'" (22).

But, in fact, this supposed alternative to, or "substitution" for, rational coldness is more of an

attempt to add meaning back in to the rationalization that is already in place. Bureaucratic

rationalization and therapeutic culture are by no means opposed or incompatible. In fact, the new

regime requires that prior rationalization. Looking at this through a Taylorian lens, the impulse to

make everyone over therapeutically requires the structures through which that can be done,

through which everyone can be "brought on board." Hence, Frank Furedi's encapsulation of

what the regime is about:

> The distinguishing feature of therapeutic culture is not an openness toward
> emotions, but the unusual interest it takes in the management of people's
> internal life. It transforms the private feelings of people into a subject matter
> for public policy-making and cultural concern. But at the same time it adopts
> a selective attitude towards what emotions can and what emotions cannot be
> displayed. The cultivation of certain emotional attitudes and the repression of
> others is systematically pursued by institutions and professionals devoted to
> the management of how people ought to feel. (*Therapy Culture* 197)

The quest for meaningfulness, for a deeper sense of social solidarity, for a source of legitimate

and just authority, turns, somehow, into the suppression of meaning. And I want to underline

here the more abstract point about meaning, which both Furedi and Nolan make, but which tends

to get lost in their emphasis on examples, which show how people are continually being coerced

by this supposedly open regime. Coercion and suppression of individual freedom are certainly a

part of it, but the slide from this basis of critique into a liberal individualist take on the problem

would be not quite to get a grip on what is going on here and to potentially slide back into the

therapeutic ethos, which, after all, bases its authority on managing and harmonizing the mess of

individuals all with different emotions, views, and desires that modernity seems to have left us

with. In other words, the important point is that it is not that this or that person's "voice" is being

suppressed (itself a common therapeutic theme), but rather that meaning as such is somehow

being suppressed or tamped down. "Getting the message," "having the right attitude," and the

like objectives, are pre-determined, formulaic. This bolsters an ethos that from the beginning,

and despite claims, is not conducive to the flourishing of meaningfulness. To the extent that

modern education has come to rely on this ethos to help establish the legitimacy of its

compulsory system and to ground educational authority in sources of recognized meaning, the

system will face a growing legitimacy crisis as the shortcomings of the ethos begin to reveal

themselves over time.

       Eva Illouz in *Saving the Modern Soul* takes the critique of therapeutic culture a step

further by examining how it works. It has evidently been sufficiently successful to take hold and

dominate, so, she argues, it is worth looking at how it functions as a system of meaning—

although, as it turns out, a system of meaning with ironic tendencies to attenuate meaningfulness.

She starts out with the purpose of challenging the naive (though held by classical sociology)

assumption that rationalization, on the one hand, and emotion, symbolic richness, meaning-

making,[47] on the other, are completely separate and mutually incompatible (58–61). Instead, she

sets out to trace how they are intertwined, and this is a story of the influence of the psychological

profession in forging a new ethos across "the four most powerful institutional sites of American

society—the corporation, the family, the mass media, and the state" (243). On her asymmetrical

institutional model, the process and dynamics of the psychological influence have been different

in the different spheres, but they have all come to coalesce in the therapeutic ethos. Clearly,

though, she sees the corporate turn, from the 1930s on, to psychologists for help with "the human

factor" as the crucial front in the whole process.[48] And just as clearly, from our Taylorian

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[47] Illouz notes a recent addition to the soft-side list: spirituality (81). See also Lofton on Oprah's spiritual turn.
[48] Illouz's question of how human relations became a problem is parallel to the Illichian question of how teaching became a problem. And there is need here (beyond Lagemann on the history of education research) for detailed historical and sociological examination of how these two problems have come to meet up. But in this thesis I am concerned with the fact that they quite evidently have met up: that is, the problem of teaching has shifted from the problem of fitting students to the academic mold to the problem of teaching them the therapeutic code. The question now perhaps is whether it really is a problem anymore, why it needs to be taught, when it can just be soaked up, when kids might just as well stay home and watch Oprah. Luckily for the sense of mission of those obsessed with

perspective, Illouz is talking about a successful example of the Reform impulse at work, of an elite trying to make over everyone by teaching them a certain form of discipline—with the negative side of the consequences also being what Taylor would lead us to expect. And, in fact, she does trace the pattern of the elite work she is analyzing back to the civility ideal (63).

The discipline she is describing has two main parts or aspects. At once it is a communicative code that in coding communicativity also emphasizes it, and a method of self-discipline that in disciplining the self also emphasizes the self. In both cases, Illouz ultimately concludes, the emphasis amounts to over-emphasis. But let's dip, at least a little bit, into what she describes. The first place where psychoanalysis brought its expertise to bear, of course, was the intimate domain of the family, and there was, to be sure, already a rationalizing tendency in play. But it was the call of the corporate world to help control and deal with "the human factor" within its already highly rationalized structures that required psychology to take up explicitly the rationalistic imperatives of instrumentality, efficiency, and self-interest, and it was this call that also allowed the psychological professions to solidify their claims to a position of authority within modern society. Essentially, the psychologists were able to appear to soften corporate life by bringing in what they had learned in dealing with the family and treating employees as a family, which gained the feminist buy-in (72–75). Of course, by doing this they were at the same time entwining their codes for emotional well-being with the rationalistic imperatives of the corporation, and the eventual result was a doubling back of influence of this heightened rationality into the family and personal life, along with the mass media and the state, that Illouz refers to in its entirety as "emotional capitalism" (60).

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the need to spread this largely androgynous ethos, there are resisters: particularly among working class males. And perhaps, if we are prepared to look anew at education, the resisters hold the key to escaping the contemporary ethos and moving forward.

The other influence was the Deweyan democratic ideal, which led to a model that Illouz suggests can be found solidified in consensus in the managerial self-help literature by the 1970s, based on communicativity. In reformulating corporate rationality the psychologists had shifted focus from success as a scarce resource to the family/democracy model of balancing everyone's needs and desires. In the process, of course, it is the very skills involved in such balancing that become valuable. As Illouz puts it,

> the model of "communication" aims at providing linguistic and emotional techniques to reconcile diverging imperatives: namely to assert and express the self, yet cooperate with others; to understand others' motives, yet manipulate oneself and others to reach desired goals; and to be self-controlled, yet personable and accessible. Communication is thus an "ethical substance" in which it is impossible to separate self-interest from attention to others, language being essentially the main technique through which the two are to be presumably reconciled. (89)

Essentially, the psychologists were suggesting that managers should behave more like psychologists, that the new basis of authority was in being able to take a posture of active, empathetic listening, while attaining a degree of personal discipline that would allow an insulating distance. So, there is a strong moral component to this reconfiguring of authority as well, involving the appearance of caring for others. But caring itself is rationalized. The caring requires a detached, moving-but-unmoved, calculative approach, and the cultivation of a personality to carry that out. The caring involves coaching of that personality, because everyone's self-interest is, at bottom, what is at stake—and pursuit of self-interest is, by definition, healthy. Indeed, with an eye to our present purposes, we can say that there is an educative side to this reconfiguration of authority. Success depends on the cultivation of this self-control and these communicative skills, but pursuing them and exercising authority through them is not a crass grab for power or the keeping of power to oneself, not a zero-sum game (83).

In communicating in these ways, one is also educating the other in how best to pursue his or her own self-interest.[49]

Illouz goes on to retrace how these innovations in management were spread into the other institutional spheres of family and, in less detail, of media and government, forming the pervasive system of meaning she calls "emotional capitalism." It is indeed a "rich" system of meaning, in the sense that, as evidenced by its success, it has been taken up not only by institutions but by ordinary people in helping them navigate the perils of modern life. "The self has become the prime site for the management of the contradictions of modernity," she says,

> and psychology has offered techniques to manage those contradictions. . . .
> For, in becoming democratized, both the workplace and the family became
> more "chaotic," that is, endowed with a normative structure in which the self
> had to perform many more, contradictory tasks to monitor social relationships:
> become self-reliant, yet attuned to others' needs; conduct relationships in a
> highly rational way, yet be highly focused on its own and others' emotions; be
> a unique individual, yet constantly cooperate with others. Psychology played a
> crucial role in providing dialogical models of interaction that could
> presumably manage these tensions, inside the workplace and the family.
> These dialogical models became all the more efficient in that they were not
> only a set of cultural themes and prescriptions but also a narrative with which
> to perform the self in a variety of social and cultural platforms, such as
> therapeutic sessions, television talk shows, support groups, and a wide variety
> of for-profit workshops aimed at making the self better adapted to its
> environment and more functional in it. (243–44)

So, the therapeutic/communicative ethos has been successful because it "works," and this is part of the conclusion of Illouz's pragmatic sociological approach. But she also wants to show the inherent contradictions and the losses that come with the so-called success.

At the basis of Illouz's critique is a critique of how this system of meaning deals with meaning. In reifying personality and the self, through now common, but highly rigid and procedural, techniques of "reflexive self-monitoring" combined with the imperative to

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[49] See, for example, the married couple who "educate" one another by leaving memos around the house (144).

communicate everything, the background assumption has become that the self and its emotions

are entirely articulable—which leaves little by which anyone can ever be surprised. As she puts

it,

> I would argue that culturally the therapeutic persuasion may have been
> responsible for a vast process of verbal overshadowing that makes linguistic
> self-introspection a substitute for nonverbal ways of functioning in social
> interactions. What I call a cultural process of verbal overshadowing is the
> broad process by which increasingly verbality comes to interfere with
> decisions that require us to use our "intuition," insight," or snap judgment.
> (245)

In Taylor's terms, it is a rather troubling realization (and such a realization is surely to come) to

work to set out for everyone how they can achieve fulfillment, only to realize that there is

nothing besides what one has articulated.

Illouz also notes that the emphasis on the problems of the self has, precisely by creating

a rigid method for dealing with them, created more sufferings of the self with which these

methods then have to deal: "The more causes for suffering are situated in the self, the more the

self is understood in terms of its predicaments, and the more 'real' diseases of the self will be

produced" (246–47). Thus the regime perpetuates itself and the status quo is rationalized.

Redefining Authority

I came to education studies naively thinking that somehow the humanities subjects only

needed a boost and such a boost would then both give people sources for more meaningful and

thoughtful lives and, with the same shot, give a boost to the public sphere which seemed to be

very much in need. I ended up latching on to the idea of AR, along with Nord and many others,

thinking that it would be a great way of doing just that: in a word, of addressing the problems of

secularization with one course. But the real world of secularization is a lot more complicated.

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Today it manifests itself, more than anything, in the background of the therapeutic/communicative ethos. It is an ethos that has come to dominate in the public sphere and, therefore, in education insofar as its purposes are publicly articulated. The disciplines of the humanities have, in effect, been replaced for general educational purposes with the disciplines of therapy and communicativity. And beyond the obsession with the spreading and perpetuation of these new disciplines can be sensed that old impulse of which Taylor speaks. AR is not essentially an "academic" subject, but one more way among countless ways of educationally exercising the kind of authority that we have come to take as legitimate. The therapeutic/communicative ethos is almost impossible to escape in education today, as in the broader world. Nolan has a whole chapter of examples drawn from education (128–81), and I will deal with some others in the next chapter.

But in the remainder of this chapter I want to look a bit more closely at the problem of authority that secularization leaves us with and at how this is tied in with the problem of meaning. Given the nova, and now the super-nova, effect—given, in other words, the unavoidable reality of pluralism in the modern world—how are we supposed to know what to pass on to the next generation that will give them the right kind of induction into the world and the right kind of freedom in relation to it, the just authority that Arendt is after? And why should the young listen to or trust the older generations in this? Why should they recognize that authority, if, as is obvious to all, including the young themselves, who don't need any further education in relativism and the arbitrariness of power, there are so many conceivable positions that could be taken on what and how they should be taught?

It is, indeed, a bewildering problem. And the basic liberal response is quite understandable as an attempt to find a way out of the difficulty: stake the ultimate authority

claim in the management of the array of different authority claims. AR is a good example of an educational program that comes out of this approach to authority. The general therapeutic/communicative ethos is its contemporary manifestation. Illouz has shown how, even as the sense of emptiness leads to more and more incorporation of the apparently meaningful— first of emotion and then of spirituality and anything else that may seem to hold or be associated with meaning—it is still essentially a rational, procedural way of dealing with the world. The emotions or other sources of deeper meaning, in being incorporated, are themselves rationalized and thus emptied of the meaning that was sought. To continue to insist that the meaning is still there is to engage in and to try to get everyone else to play along in histrionics. It is to try to make meaning by sheer effort.

Amy Gutmann, in "The Authority and Responsibility to Educate," exemplifies the problem. She identifies three sources of traditional claims—the family state, the state of families (and, by extension, identity groups), and the state of individuals—and she suggests that "democratic education" is to be found in the balancing of these claims:

> Unlike a family state, a democratic state recognizes the value of parental education in perpetuating particular conceptions of the good life, consistent with the future freedom of children to choose their own way of life for themselves and to share as free and equal citizens in the political life of their society. Unlike a state of families, a democratic state recognizes the value of professional authority in enabling children to appreciate and to evaluate ways of life other than those favored by their families. Unlike a state of individuals, a democratic state recognizes the value of political education in acculturating children in ways that are consistent with living the life of free persons and sharing the rights and responsibilities of democratic citizenship.
>   Democratic education is committed to the sharing of educational authority so as to provide all children with an education adequate to their becoming free and equal persons and citizens. They should be educated in a way that they can choose (or not) to participate as equals in democratic politics, choose among good lives (which include raising children, if they so choose), and join (or not) the many associations that partly shape the identities of free people. (406)

The ideal behind all of this is what Gutmann calls "conscious social reproduction," and, indeed, the consciousness requirement here would seem to present an overwhelming burden. The negotiation between the different claims is, in principle, ongoing, which makes everything ongoingly procedural, rationalized, theorized. How does one keep in mind the real young person in the real world and not get lost in abstractions about what young people need to know and who gets to decide, as if anyone could actually be so wise and articulate as to know these things? Moreover, the whole scheme leaves the young themselves with an overwhelming burden. Gutmann, echoing the common liberal approach to authority in education, in the confusion over who gets what authority, ultimately passes the burden along to them. The democratic state must, above all, "teach children in ways that help them develop their capacity to understand and to evaluate competing conceptions of the good life and the good society. . . . Teaching the skills of reasoned deliberation remains the educational aim most distinctively critical to a democratic society of free and equal citizens" (407). Chances are that most are going to end up "choosing" variations on the ethos that already has them well in its clutches. If the good life and the good society is a meaningful life and a meaningful society, then a vicious circle is simple being perpetuated here. Surveying the array of options and then choosing does not by any means guarantee becoming embedded in a world of meaning.

I don't know whether or not Gutmann has declared a position on AR specifically, but she certainly mentions it in a way that indicates it is a possibility within her setting out of the rules of authority (*Democratic Education* 108–09). This is all that need concern us for present purposes. Her scheme can serve as representative of the liberal conceptualization of authority that not only supports AR, but that generates the endless educational straws at which we are

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continually grasping. Now, the question I have raised is what about the real kid at the receiving end of all of this carefully arbitrated authority. It is entirely conceivable that being made to sit through something like a required AR course could be experienced as unduly oppressive, as a minor tyranny in the life of a young person. Indeed, it would be the more tyrannous the more that young person was made to sit through an entire course for the sake of a fairly straightforward principle that an over-theorized approach to educational authority was able to sanction: say, the "basic" democratic aim that young people should be taught "mutual respect" between diverse views and diverse religions and cultures ("Authority" 410). And, ironically, it would be all the more tyrannous the more that young person was already predisposed to assent to such a principle without having to sit through such a course.[50]

Gutmann, then, acknowledges that democratic education is not simply neutral, but that it has its own aims, its own principles in need of promotion. She advances this strong position against what she calls "civic minimalism," and it is in her caricatured presentation of that range of options that we can begin to get a sense of what she, and the contemporary ethos, might be blind to:

> By minimizing the civic component of schooling, civic minimalists suggest they can avoid the problem of achieving consensus about civic education. Civic minimalism seeks not to contribute to democratic deliberation but rather to offer an alternative to it. Even if democratic majorities support educational standards that are more than minimal, civic minimalists oppose their authority to implement those standards even in publicly supported schools. . . .
> Paradoxically, civic minimalists must still rely on democratic justifications: any legitimate law or constitutional amendment that defined and enforced the civic minimum would require democratic support. This creates a serious problem for civic minimalists, since there are so many competing conceptions of the civic minimum, some defending no more than literacy and numeracy, others teaching civic virtues such as toleration, racial and gender

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[50] Political correctness always assumes this need of everyone to be "educated," even though the ethos has already taken care of that education in most cases. I am quite sure that this heavy-handedness is the source of much of the so called "resistance" to political correctness that gets misinterpreted as demonstrating the need for more effort.

> non-discrimination, and mutual respect. Who has the legitimate authority to impose a contestable conception of a civic minimum as a ceiling as well as a floor on democratic authority in the face of democratic disagreement? (409)

The assumption here is that there are always different views that need to be balanced. And, of course, she is right, as long as it is also assumed that everything depends on articulating views and positions in the first place, that everything needs to be theorized, rationalized, and planned as a basis for proceeding with action of any kind. It is this very assumption that Gutmann, along with most people today, has overlooked, has failed to take into her theoretical perspective.

What else is there? What kind of authority other than a balancing and managing authority can there possibly be? Peter Winch, in his essay titled "Authority (2)," written as a counterpoint to "Authority (1)" by R. S. Peters, draws out the implications of the latter's distinction between being *in* authority and being *an* authority ("Authority [1]" 96). Winch argues that it should not be taken as a tool with which to go around looking at examples of authority and then classifying them into one category or the other. His point, rather, is that authority as such is properly about being *an* authority—or, at risk of italicized prepositional confusion, authority is authority *on* something—because it is a matter of "*internal* relation" ("Authority [2]" 98) in areas of endeavour where there is an "*established* way of doing things" (100). He doesn't use the word, but in more recent social theory these established ways of doing things are called practices (see Stern). By contrast, Winch sees Peters, just as I would see Gutmann, as caught up in a confused notion of authority that depends on always trying to figure out who is in authority, and why. "Authority," Winch says, "is not a sort of influence. It is not a kind of *causal* relation between individuals, but an *internal* relation." It is not about "the success of the individual in getting his decisions accepted by other individuals" ("Authority [2]" 98), although, again, this is very much the presumption behind the kind of liberal view of facilitative authority we have seen

represented by Gutmann. Rather than depending on an array of opinions, authority actually

depends on there being "a right and a wrong way of doing things" (99), on practices. He further

explains why authority is an internal relation:

> It is so because of its connexion with the *ideas* embodied in the form of
> activity within which it is exercised. (I use the notion of a "form of activity"
> here in an extended sense to include not merely activities like tree-felling,
> chess-playing, etc., but also moral and political behaviour, which constitute
> forms of activity in a somewhat different sense. . . .) If *N* is trying to teach me
> chess and I am trying to learn, *N* and I are internally related by way of my
> acceptance of his authority on the right way to play chess. (101)

What Winch is getting at here is crucial, not only because it provides an alternative to

the common liberal, facilitative kind of authority based on balancing of claims, but

because it addresses the arbitrariness and attenuation of meaning that plague such

liberal authority. "An authority can be allowed to make mistakes (up to a certain point)

about what is the right course to follow, and still retain its authoritative character; but

for it to be thought that it no longer cares about what is right and what is wrong (in the

sense appropriate to the context in which it operates) *is* for it to degenerate from

authority into force" (106). To be concerned with the balancing of claims to authority is

to risk falling into not caring about what is right or wrong. It is to risk losing sight

completely of the form of activity in which there is a right and a wrong, in which there

is meaning.

Winch's discussion of authority, although full of immense implications for education, is

very general and very brief. Before closing this chapter, I want to underline the connection

between practices and this other way of seeing authority. Perhaps I could put that a bit more

precisely: I want to underline how, in starting from practices, it is possible to come to see

authority differently, and I want to do this by turning to Richard Sennett. Sennett's writing is,

much like Taylor's in its own way, very textured and difficult to summarize. I will take from it

what I think can be useful for present purposes, but I would also consider my job done in this

thesis if it could be successful in sending the reader interested in a new basis for rethinking

education to Sennett. The most immediately relevant path to trace through his work is from the

relatively early *Authority* to the first two books in his in-progress trilogy, first *The Craftsman* and

then *Together*. I want here just to introduce his early thought on the shifting, dialectical nature of

authority and something of his vision of a new form of authority.

In *Authority*, Sennett starts from the general fear of authority that we have today, when

authority tends to be conflated with authoritarianism. Yet we still rely on it and accept it:

> The dilemma of authority in our time, the peculiar fear it inspires, is that we
> feel attracted to strong figures we do not believe to be legitimate. . . . The
> formally legitimate powers in the dominant institutions inspire a strong sense
> of illegitimacy among those subject to them. However, these powers also
> translate into images of human strength: of authorities who are assured, judge
> as superiors, exert moral discipline, and inspire fear. These authorities draw
> others into their orbit, like unwilling moths to a flame. Authority without
> legitimacy, society held together by its very disaffections: this strange
> situation is something we can make sense of only by understanding how we
> understand.
>   . . . In the very way this illegitimacy is perceived, in the process by
> which it is articulated, lies also the way a bond is forged with these peculiar
> masters. (26–27)

Sennett then goes on, in the first half of his book, to identify the various constellations of

deception and self-delusion that form vicious circles of authority, the way the slave ends up

becoming more tightly bound to the master in the very act of rejecting the master's authority, and

so on. This is what he says in particular about the kind of facilitative stance that, as we have seen

from Illouz, is so prevalent today:

> The point of these ideologies of influence is that the effective manager is
> never tied down, never committed. And this is precisely how he or she

maintains autonomy. The expertise of a "coordinator" or a "facilitator" is never to be caught in a position. (115)

It sounds a lot like the kind of expertise that the teacher of AR is supposed to have! Indeed, it sounds a lot like the way that the educational system exercises its authority, by always facilitating, coordinating. The insight Sennett can provide here, I think, is the insight that even though people have a sense that there is something wrong, even illegitimate going on here, or that it all somehow lacks meaning, they are still bound to the facilitator's way of making sense of the world. The facilitator's freedom in evasion represents freedom to them.

How to negate all of this without being pulled more deeply in? Sennett's starting point is, essentially, in practices. Drawing heavily on Hegel here, he explains that,

the irony . . . begins in the fact that the lord needs a bondsman in order to experience pleasure and confirm himself. . . . The irony culminates in the fact that the work the bondsman does for his master ultimately takes him outside the terms of pure dominance and obedience. "Through work," Hegel says, "the bondsman becomes conscious of what he truly is." The first step outside bondage is the inferior's discovery, through thinking about his work in relation to himself, "that he has a mind of his own." At that moment he has begun to cut free. (128)

Now, the point should not be lost in the historical terminology that this is ultimately about the long and tricky struggle to, "in Hegel's words, drive out 'the master within,'" and find legitimate sources of authority, of meaning, and, indeed, of social solidarity. The task in negating is to create at the same time, to have the imagination to see a real alternative, and it is enough to note for now that Sennett, following Hegel, sees this imagination emerging out of work, out of practices.

Chapter 4: Marooned in Possibility[51]

In his reflections on our other lives, located somewhere in the realm of possibility, the

child psychoanalyst Adam Phillips quotes Graham Greene:

> Perhaps it is only in childhood that books have any deep influence on our
> lives. In later life we admire, we are entertained, we may modify some views
> we already hold, but we are more likely to find in books merely a
> confirmation of what is in our minds already . . .
>   But in childhood all books are books of divination, telling us about the
> future, and like the fortune-teller who sees a long journey in the cards or death
> by water they influence the future. I suppose that is why books excited us so
> much. (quoted in *Missing Out* 118–119, with ellipses by Phillips; from
> Graham Greene, "The Lost Childhood")

And then Phillips goes on to expound:

> The desire in childhood reading, Greene tells us, is for experiences we haven't
> yet had; as children we are not just lacking these experiences, we are not yet
> ready for them; because they are what we want, they are what we want to
> know about. What the child divines in the book is what he may be capable of;
> childhood is the developing of an appetite for future possibility. We know
> more about the experiences we don't have than about the experiences we do
> have.[52] (*Missing Out* 119)

He is speaking here not about reading skills, conceived abstractly as the tools that need to be

developed in children for them to reach their abstract potential for achieving an abstract array of

possibilities. And he is speaking not about "love" of reading as something to be diligently

encouraged in children so that they will be more inclined to master and maintain these abstractly

important skills. Rather, he is using the child who does love reading as an example from which

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[51] The phrase is from Adam Phillips in an interview on the CBC.

[52] Yes and no, of course. As with everything Phillips says, there are qualifications. And what I am arguing in this chapter is that we tend paradoxically both to fear childhood boredom and to exaggerate the child's being as potential, and to treat not only childhood but youth, and the newly separate realm of "emerging adulthood" (Smith; Arnett), as solely the realm of possibility, or of a "preparation for society" so long and unfocused that it amounts to the same thing, and serves as an excuse for not having anything in particular to teach them. Or, rather, we teach them a catch-all discipline, a debased practice in the form of therapeutic rationality that will supposedly prepare them for all possibilities. So, in youth at least, that development of appetite is a moment, but eventually has to start moving into engagement with reality where real possibility, real meaning, is opened up (see Chapter 6).

to generalize about what the child is. The child is open to possibilities in a sort of immediate and

necessary way that the adult is not, and can no longer be. That is what childhood is. It is a certain

kind of fecund boredom. Yet, in pointing out that the child knows more about the possibilities

than about experience, Phillips is ironically foreshadowing his exploration of how this can turn

into the empty adult presumption of certain knowledge, not only about what is possible, about

what the possibilities are, but also about the meaning of present reality.[53] Much can be said for

being open to possibilities and much can be said for learning to be satisfied with, and finding

meaning in, what one has. As abstract concepts, one is not bad and the other good. But, I think

Phillips is suggesting, an honest search for *how* to be open and *how* to be satisfied, is cut off by

presumption about what it is that one is open to and about the meaning of what is already

present:

> We can get out only by presuming an omniscience about what we are getting
> out of which is always, whatever else it is, an omniscience about the
> satisfactions we seek. And it is the written, spoken and sung arts—the verbal
> arts—that are the arts of omniscience. Only in words is anyone ever
> omniscient. And omniscience, as we shall see, is the enemy, the saboteur, of
> satisfaction. (136)

The trickiness of the tendency for self-deception in these things is what we have already seen so

finely focused in the question of educational authority and intergenerational relations by Arendt:

> Education . . . is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to
> expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike
> from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something
> unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a
> common world. (193)

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[53] And—my extension here—along with the empty adult presumption about possibilities goes presumption about
what lessons the young need to be taught, about what "moral of the story" needs to be drummed in through high
school and beyond, and, indeed, that this possibility is itself enough to teach. Possibility is the moral.

The whole question here is *how* to steer clear of presumption and self-deception. How can we "prepare them in advance" for renewal, for the unknown possibilities they represent, without presuming to know in advance exactly what we are preparing them for? Yet, to evade the responsibility of authority, to claim not to know anything, to not be able prepare them for anything, even to claim to be able to prepare them for possibility only in a distanced abstract way, is to "expel them from our world," a position from which they will certainly be unable to renew that world. So, again, it is a question of how to assume authority in the right way. The possibilities are beyond our grasp. How not to either evade the daunting responsibility of preparing children for them or respond heavy-handedly from our bewilderment?

My suspicions of AR as a program that has emerged, and come to seem in a certain way obvious in the particular historical context of contemporary society, are based on the sense that the context is all wrong to begin with, that we are already all mixed up in how we deal with authority and with childhood and youth as possibility, and that AR is just one more manifestation of our self-deceptions in this regard. I have been trying to suggest that in this contemporary educational context AR provides a way of copping out while appearing to provide a secular substitute for religious education, by at least maintaining religion, and by association a concern with deeper meaningfulness, in the picture. But the effect, I am suggesting, is to dump possibilities of meaningfulness in the laps of the young—just to tell them the obvious, that there are these possibilities—without much help on what to do with them. We are giving them, in other words, an abstracted or reified concept of possibility, an abstract freedom, and little more.

Of course, the dark side of possibility is risk. To say that a worker has a world of possibilities open to her, if only she can learn to be "flexible,"[54] is another way of saying that she is on her own. The world of education and the ways in which we talk about childhood today are permeated by upbeat language of openness to possibility—diversity, creativity, dreams, changing the world, the wisdom and vision of youth, innate talent, achievement, precocious competence, transferable skills, individualized education plans, and so on, and so on (i.e., all ways of exaggeratedly celebrating future possibility as such and of expressing a desperate faith in the capabilities of the young to somehow realize possibility as such, which is to say, vaguely). The irony of the educational talk of the possibilities we are opening up for the young is that, when it comes to meaning or making sense of the world, young people today are very much on their own. My unease with AR is, at bottom, that it seems more than anything else to paste a smiley face of merely possible meaningfulness over a much harsher reality. In this chapter I want to look more closely at the underlying anxieties about authority and uncertainties about meaning that constitutes the context of AR and all our educational efforts.

In the first of his *Decalogue* series of films, Krzysztof Kieślowski, working with the theme of "no other gods before me," creates a haunting image of the child in the risk society. Krzysztof is a professor of computer science, and he believes in the power of mathematical methods to make sense of and improve human life. In one scene at the university, for example, he makes the case to his class for his new computerized method of interpreting literature. At home, he is a loving single father (the mother is vaguely "away") to his son Paweł, who is maybe about 11 or 12. The relationship is expressed largely in the form of master and apprentice.

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[54] See Richard Sennett, *The Culture of the New Capitalism*, on the imperative to be flexible in the workplace and to market one's "potential ability" and the decline of craftsmanship as a result (103–30). It goes without saying that these ideals will be reflected in the education of young people.

Krzysztof loves the work he does and Paweł is his eager protégé. They have together, for example, set up the computer to automate certain household functions. While to a mid-1980s audience there may still have been something slightly creepy about a computer that appears to talk to you and ask what you want, the relationship of father and son itself is very touching, human, and even natural. The father wants to teach his son what he knows how to do, and to see the world as he has learned to see it; the son just wants to take it all in, and begin to give form to a life that, at least in relation to the adult world, is still undefined potential.

Now, the educational question that Kieślowski implicitly raises here is about what happens in the inter-generational relationship when what we ourselves know how to do, the only thing that we have to pass on to the young, has itself become fundamentally skewed or distorted, devoted to a false god. The story develops as Paweł discovers the pair of skates he has been wanting, which his father had hidden away for Christmas. Krzysztof lets his son keep his early gift, and the problem now becomes one of determining whether the pond in the apartment complex is yet frozen solid enough to be safe for skating. Master and apprentice go to work on the problem: Paweł collects the data, in the form of temperature records; and together they do the calculations. The findings of the research (to echo a common refrain today in inter-generational relations) are that the pond is safe for skating. In reality, it isn't. But this is not a story of simple carelessness. After Paweł has gone to bed, his father goes out to check for himself by walking on the pond and tapping the ice. Of course, it is dark and vision is limited. And, beyond the consideration that Krzysztof himself perhaps doesn't quite know what signs he is looking for, there is at work an odd unconscious unwillingness to see, as revealed in his stopping and turning back, leaving a part of the pond unchecked, when he comes up to the light cast by the bonfire at

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which the ragged witness figure is huddled.[55] In the end, despite sincere gestures toward

acknowledging that his methods may not be perfect, he does in effect place all of his faith in

those methods. Unable and a bit unwilling to see the real conditions of the ice, he leaves his son,

even in the broad light of the next afternoon, ironically unprepared to intelligently see the

dangers of the frozen pond.

Let me suggest a larger irony, in the way people today, particularly education

professionals, will be inclined to react to this film. Contemporary society is obsessed with risks

to children. A reflection of the collective imagination can be seen in quite literal terms when, on

any given day, a list of top news headlines is likely to contain at least a few stories about harm to

children or about efforts to prevent harm to them. So, typical reflexive responses to "Decalogue

I" are easy to imagine and can be almost pulled out of the air. Someone, for example, might tisk-

tisk at the father for putting blind faith in his calculations, and then suggest that Paweł's school

should have "educated" him about the dangers of playing on ice, that going near the ice should

have been prohibited altogether in the rules of the apartment complex or in the law of the land, or

that the school should have had a policy of not allowing children to leave unless picked up by a

parent with ID. But note that this would be to subtly misidentify the father's mistake: his faith in

his calculations is here regarded as misplaced only because the calculations weren't thorough

enough, and these suggestions are all intended to be more thorough, increasing the chances that

no child will ever fall through the ice by trying to ensure that no child ever goes near the ice.[56]

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[55] The witness figure appears occasionally throughout the different films of the *Decalogue* series, each time in a different guise. Of the figure in "Decalogue I," Kieślowski says, "I don't know who he is; just a guy who comes and watches. He watches us, our lives. He's not very pleased with us" (*K on K* 158). In a sense, of course, the witness is the child himself. See my further comments of the child and vision in Chapters 5 and 6.

[56] In other words, it is easy to appear to criticize what the father does, even while being pulled further into doing exactly the same thing. Another example would be critics of the medical/educational collaboration in diagnosing attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD): inevitably, the criticism will be in terms of further risks of overtreatment and so on, rather than backing up and looking at the expectations we place on children, because that is

A child falling through the ice is a terrible thing, a matter of life and death. One might well want to consider some such way of laying down the strictest of rules to try to prevent it ever happening. To truly consider it, though, would not be to consider safety alone; it would be to take into consideration the whole context of what one is doing, to see what one is giving up in order to ensure safety. In terms of Kieślowski's film, any one of the above typical responses would be an intensification of the father's selective blindness and of his passing on of that blindness to his son. Even to "educate" children *never* to go near frozen bodies of water is to preclude their ever learning how to see the ice and give it due respect, learning how still to be over-cautious but without leaving a dark hole in their understanding of their environment. It is difficult to put a finger on what exactly would be given up. But that is the point. The reflexive response to risk of setting out rules and articulating procedures to prevent risk, by the very nature of what is being done, precludes subtler, inarticulable forms of meaning. If meaningfulness arises from sources beyond our plans and codes, beyond our reflexive rigidities, then things do not bode well educationally for a society obsessed with the risks lurking not just on frozen ponds but everywhere, in everything, even behind cheery talk of possibility and potential—and especially in childhood.

The Spectre of Boredom

Taylor's Reform master narrative, as outlined in the last chapter, is the story of the long struggle to work out the sense of possibility that arose from the Axial revolution. The complex and paradox-ridden nature of the dialectic that has unfolded comes out of the paradoxical nature

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the available public language; the critics have insights, but no way to get a real grasp of the spiral further into the rationalization of children's lives.

of the initial situation: new meanings are uncovered by new intellectual and spiritual disciplines, but the temptation is always to over-articulate, over-encode those meanings and the possibilities they hold out, forgetting that human beings derive meaningfulness primarily from the inarticulable background. Another way of putting it might be to say that there is detectable in Taylor's story an uneasy, though inexhaustibly fruitful, relationship between intellect and meaning. And to put it this way helps to bring out the implications for education, for seeing the predicament that we are in with education. Judging by Taylor's support for the Quebec Ethics and Religious Culture program, he may not have fully worked out these implications himself, or he may have worked them out in another way. Regardless, it seems important to try to think through these implications and bring a much broader perspective to contemporary education than we currently seem able to achieve. The task from Arendt is to be sensitive to contexts of meaning that are either conducive to or detrimental to rightly balanced authority, so that the child is neither effectively cast out nor over-burdened with our instructions. This kind of sensitivity means stepping back and looking somewhat detachedly at what we are doing, taking a long view. Taylor's dialectical perspective can help us hold contradictions together in order to see how they come about and what they are really doing, beyond what we tell ourselves we are doing.

One of the great ironies underlying the developments seen in Taylor's Reform master narrative down to the present, and the source of a real predicament for education as we have come to conceive of it, is that a big part of that original sense of meaning and possibility resulting from the elite spiritual and intellectual disciplines has finally come through as a world of possibilities for the contemporary everyday individual: an individual who nevertheless, now as much as ever, tends to be resistant to the imposition of spiritual and intellectual disciplines. Thus, the modern age has given rise to what Taylor calls the supernova effect, the explosion of

countless theories, articulations of worldviews, personal reactions to and re-interpretations of traditions, and so on. Indeed, the whole romantic articulation of the expressive individual was first an intellectual articulation, and has only recently, since the 1960s, to give it a date, been truly transposed to the masses, to all individuals. But, and this is the educational predicament that Taylor sets up but does not really draw out, the ordinary individual now has countless possibilities for realizing a meaningful life from which to choose, the only problem being that they are all in origin highly intellectualized possibilities, and the ordinary individual, for the most part, is not an intellectual, not really interested in the rather daunting, even rather absurd, responsibility of making sense of all those possibilities.

Taylor makes William James's heroic intellectual on a mountain top, now choosing belief, now unbelief, the emblem of the modern individual under modern conditions of belief: that is, the condition of having the rather absurd responsibility for thinking oneself into what one is to believe. Whichever way the modern individual chooses—belief or unbelief—he chooses knowing that the other is still an option. That was still the heroic individual for James. Now it is everyone who is in this position, and it is not just belief/unbelief, but countless ways of articulating how the world makes sense. How is the ordinary person to make sense of all the possible ways of making sense? When it comes right down to it, even the intellectual must, in the end, acknowledge that the intellect is never on its own going to make complete sense of the world.

The child falling through the ice and the autonomous individual precariously slipping from side to side on a mountaintop are one and the same. Both images show the *risk society* in its failure at the most basic level of meaning: that is, where individuals are left to their own devices to make ultimate sense of things—from scratch, as it were. Taylor's account of secularization

shows the absurdity of this task, when the very background against which the individual is working emphasizes the limitless possibilities for making sense of things. This is where Illouz's analysis of the therapeutic/communicative ethos comes in and is, I think, nicely informed and supported by Taylor's account. It is not entirely accurate to say individuals are left to their own devices, however. There is always already that background providing orientation and sources of meaning. Individuals today are in some ways—they are certainly seen to be, in a cheery, full-of-possibilities way, and are indeed ultimately, in a much darker way—on their own in making sense of the world. But there is also the therapeutic/communicative ethos telling everyone quite exactly and procedurally how to make sense of the responsibility to make their own sense of the world. Secularization has left us with the apparent need for everyone to be his or her own intellectual authority, and the therapeutic/communicative ethos, with its rationalizing discipline and its emphasis on articulacy, provides the appearance of intellectuality.

But if the therapeutic ethos serves as the background understanding of meaningfulness on which claims of legitimacy rest, from the state down through interpersonal relations in particular fields like education (Nolan), then these claims, I am arguing, are believable because they rest on the deeply entangled ambiguities in that background. What is acknowledged to be an obvious, straightforward, and merely procedural approach to mediation between various positions or possibilities, nevertheless is able to take on by association some of the cache of the presumably thicker, more substantive meanings over which it claims a certain kind of mastery. At an earlier stage of my work on this thesis, I was able to claim, in a way immediately convincing to many, that AR programs were needed in public schools. I didn't really need to know anything about religion in order to make this claim that everyone needs to be taught about religion. It was enough that religion was associated with the plan. That plan, thereby, appeared to

be addressing the need for meaningfulness that religion addresses. My growing fear, however, was that AR would inevitably come to serve as yet another manifestation of, and means of entrenching, the procedural approach to everything, with just enough facts about religions thrown in so that the students could self-assuredly claim understanding of the various positions and possibilities for meaning that they were being taught to mediate, to be procedurally fair to, to manage, and even somehow to choose between for themselves as "live options." The desire to give the young something meaningful in their education would turn into handing them a list of possibilities of meaning, teaching them tricks for doing things with that list, but never telling them how to enter into the possibilities that the list supposedly represents. We think that secularity calls for some such rationalizing of possibilities as the solution to what would otherwise be a bewildering jumble, but that is actually more a part of the problem than we care to admit, abstracting and distancing those very possibilities from people who keep exaggerating their importance as possibilities the more unattainable they become.

How does this self-deception work? Again, Phillips provides insight into the connection between the big story of secularization as the growth of human self-possession and sense of grand possibility, on the one hand, and the meaning predicament that goes unnoticed in the ethos of the psychological regime, on the other.[57] Once "belief in God (and providential design) was replaced by belief in the infinite untapped talents and ambitions of human beings (and the limitless resources of the earth)," he says,

> it became the enduring project of our modern cultures of redemption—
> cultures committed above all to science and progress—to create societies in
> which people can realize their potential, in which "growth" and "productivity"
> and "opportunity" are the watchwords (it is essential to the myth of potential

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[57] *Psychological regime* is James Davison Hunter's term (*Death of Character* 81–106). I am using it broadly to cover Illouz's analysis as well.

that scarcity is scarcely mentioned: and growth is always possible and expected). (*Missing Out* xiv)

And yet, he suggests, the inevitable effect of this heightened sense of potential is a profound sense of waste, of unfulfilled potential, and "our wished-for lives, the lives we miss out on, are at once both an acknowledgement of, and part of our toolkit for dealing with, the unavoidable waste" (xiv). The culture keeps stoking this very problem in an attempt to compensate, because after Darwin, when human beings are

> nothing special—on a par with ants and daffodils—it is the work of culture to make us feel special; just as parents need to make their children feel special to help them bear and bear with—and hopefully enjoy—their insignificance in the larger scheme of things. In this sense growing up is always an undoing of what needed to be done: first, ideally, we are made to feel special; then we are expected to enjoy a world in which we are not. (xv)

In the modern world, we have difficulty with that second task, "we become obsessed . . . by what is missing in our lives," and so we keep insisting more and more on the first task, on the importance of possibility and potential, and, of course, the attendant risk of not achieving those things. One of the implications is that children end up on the receiving end of the over-compensation.

Phillips has said that "frustration should be taught in school" (interview). It is an odd but penetrating statement that deserves our meditation. It is odd not least because school is the cause of so much frustration and boredom for young people. It already *is* taught in school, in that sense. But Phillips is playing here on the "X should be taught in school" expression, where X can be any important trait that needs to be instilled or object of knowledge that needs to be acquired, whether in school or out of school. What he is saying is that it is of crucial importance, especially for children, to be able to deal well with frustration, to face boredom. "Frustration," he says, "is where we start from; the child's dawning awareness of himself is an awareness of something

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necessary not being there. The child becomes present to himself in the absence of something he needs" (*Missing Out* xix). And it is only in such presence to self that the child can learn the logic of reality, the logic of realistic choice, and real possibility: "We choose by exclusion. The right choice is the one that makes us lose interest in the alternatives; but we can never know beforehand which the right choice will be. We never know if one frustration will lead to another" (xix). So, Phillips is not literally saying that the child needs to be taught a lesson in frustration, but that he needs to be surrounded by adults who intuitively recognize the nature of childhood:

> Is it not, indeed, revealing, what the child's boredom evokes in the adults? Heard as a demand, sometimes as an accusation of failure or disappointment, it is rarely agreed to, simply acknowledged. How often, in fact, the child's boredom is met by that most perplexing form of disapproval, the adult's wish to distract him—as though the adults have decided that the child's life must be, or be seen to be, endlessly interesting. It is one of the most oppressive demands of adults that the child should be interested, rather than take time to find what interests him. Boredom is integral to the process of taking one's time. ("On Being Bored" 69)

What I am arguing in this chapter is that our adult frustrations, and the entire ethos that has come about to help us deal with those frustrations, make us uncomfortable with childhood properly understood. All our lessons are so many ways of trying to forestall childhood frustration and boredom, rather than face it—which is not to say that we don't just end up creating more and more frustration.

"Frustration is always, whatever else it is," Phillips says, "a temptation scene; something we are tempted to get rid of, something we crave false solutions to, something that lures us into the more radical self-deceptions" (*Missing Out* 13). In getting rid of it, frustration is not acknowledged, which means that the self-deceptions and vicious circles only deepen: "addiction is always an addiction to frustration (addiction is unformulated frustration, frustration too simply met)" (14). Phillips's use of Lear as an example is illuminating. Lear is terrified by

the uncertainties of old age, terrified (by the childhood-like situation) "of not knowing what he wants at this stage of life" (12), and his reaction is to pretend to know, to articulate exactly what he needs to hear from Cordelia, to cling to authority by being certain and rational.

The ability to deal with frustration, Phillips suggests, is to be found in the "ability to think" (25). But he means *thinking* in a particular way, which is not the contemporary way. Thought can be given to thinking up ways to evade frustration, ways to keep the children amused, ways to teach "critical thinking" about all the choices on offer, and so on. In this chapter and the next, I will be enumerating and analyzing some of the ways in which thought is massively misapplied to the false problems of contemporary education. What Phillips means by thought, though, is quite literally the facing of reality with all of its frustrations:

> Thought is what makes frustration bearable, and frustration makes thought possible. Thinking modifies frustration, rather than evading it, by being a means by which we can go from feeling frustrated to figuring out what to do about it, and doing it . . . If thinking is a way to modify it, then attacking one's capacity to think would be an evasion; failures of imagination would be the unwillingness to bear with frustration. . . .
>   What is at stake in these problems and solutions [i.e., in dealing and not dealing with frustration] is contact with reality. And reality matters because it is the only thing that can satisfy us. We are tempted, initially, to be self-satisfying creatures, to live in a fantasy world, to live in our minds, but the only satisfactions available are the satisfactions of reality, which are themselves frustrating; but only in the sense that they are disparate from, not in total accord with, our wished-for satisfactions (the most satisfying pleasures are the surprising ones, the ones that can't be engineered). (24–26)

We have in this understanding of thinking, I want to argue, a basis for seeing how the world of contemporary education is caught up in vicious circles of frustration and in teaching unthinking forms of thought. We have here also the basis of a return to a better understanding of what liberal education and the humanities are all about, which I will be trying to articulate in this and the next chapter. But it also needs to be noted here, and to be picked up on again in the final chapter, that

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Phillips is talking about a very humble, everyday way of thought. One way of developing it would indeed be through the intellectual practices and disciplines of the humanities. But part of the problem education in a secular age presents us with is that not everyone is an intellectual, and that certainly not everyone will want to pursue intellectual pursuits beyond an introductory or general-education level. The other part of the problem is the intensification in modernity of the impulse to Reform, especially in the form of over-confidence in our ability to change society in accordance with our re-imagining of its possibilities.

We get frustrated in our unrealistic expectations of the intellect, in the belief that rationalism and method can sort everything out and set it all straight. We inevitably get frustrated over trying to manage the vast array of possibilities that have come out of the modern imagination, trying continually to get everyone on board with methods of managing and making sense of these possibilities, trying to insist on how wonderful diversity is while also insisting everyone sing from the same lowest common-denominator hymnal. This can all be seen as misplaced intellectualism. The best corrective might be simply to recognize that there are other than intellectual practices for people to follow, and perhaps the most important thing in Phillips's understanding of thinking is that it is a kind of thinking that can be seen to underlie all practices, understood also as ways of dealing with reality and its frustrations.[58] This will be further explored in Chapter 6. For now, we just need to ponder the oddity that school—compulsory schooling, modern schooling as we understand it—effectively precludes youth from emerging from childhood boredom and frustration by precluding for most the possibility of learning a practice, whether intellectual or non-intellectual. It certainly effectively precludes for most the

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[58] On the thinking involved in practices, even the supposedly lowly trades, see especially Matthew Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, and Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman*.

time needed to learn a practice properly—10,000 hours, a good chunk of one's daily life. It also, by its public nature, precludes for most the presence to self by which a child can in her own time and her own space make the right choice.

Contemporary schooling is far from "teaching frustration," in the sense of giving room for the kind of thought that children and youth need in order to learn to face frustration realistically, to face reality. It teaches instead—in countless manifestations, seemingly pervasively throughout the system, and certainly throughout everything that we say about education—a pathological evasion of frustration that can only lead to a pandemic of what Goodman called "chronic boredom" (*Absurd* 70–71). In a paradigmatic statement, Michael Fullan has said that "there's only one thing worse than being bored, and that is teaching the bored" ("Michael Fullan on Schools"). Now, to be fair here, we are dealing with ambiguities, different kinds of boredom tending to blur together under the one word. He is not directly saying that the kind of boredom Phillips says is proper to childhood is the penultimate in things to be avoided. He is actually being quite honest to the extent he is saying that the kind of boredom found in school—train-station boredom, where the train is 12-plus years away—is the worst thing. The self-deception comes in with the reflexive insistence that, rather than think about boredom in its various kinds, about how school boredom becomes chronic boredom, the entire system be improved so as to become the opposite of boring, perpetual excitement.[59]

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[59] Cesar Milan, in his television show, *The Dog Whisperer*, often tells dog owners not to treat their dogs like kids and whip them up into excitement in order to assure themselves that their dogs are happy. Dogs are happy when they are calm. He could also turn this around and tell educators not to treat kids like dogs, not to try to whip up excitement, activity for sake of proving that the lesson plan or the pedagogical theory is working. The same goes for educationists who expect the teachers to be enthusiastic and passionate about implementing their pedagogical theories and programs. There is in this framework of plan and expectation a false finessing of what educators want to see reflected back at themselves going on. Very Lear-like. The imperative to fan excitement is inherently demoralizing and therefore exhausting. Consider this in light of Arlie Russell Hochschild (7–8) on the concept of emotional labor. It is not only enthusiasm but caring and coded signs of caring that are expected, and thereby rationalized, and so back to Illouz and management in and through emotion.

This is not just Fullan. It is the paradigm. The only thing worse than student boredom is teachers or educationists seeing boredom reflected back at them, seeing the emptiness of their lesson plans, programs, theories. Everything, every educational initiative and formulation of purpose, is at the most visceral level based on the need to avoid that worst thing. Endless ironies spring from Fullan's typical mistake in the assessment of the more important of the two worst things. If teaching the bored is the worst, then all that is needed is to keep trying to ensure that no-one looks bored. If student boredom is the worst, then one is forced to ask what it is about compulsory schooling that generates a particularly bad kind of boredom. This is why it is so crucial that Goodman and Illich not be ignored.

Astra Taylor, in a talk about her experiences growing up unschooled, touches on both childhood boredom, in Phillip's sense, and school boredom. She says that when she was at home as a child she would often do nothing all day, but that (as people are sometimes heard to say) she never got bored. Another way of putting the same thing, though, might be to say that she didn't mind being bored, doing nothing, not having an action plan. (Perhaps it is not a coincidence that she went on to graduate study in philosophy, and then became a filmmaker.) On the other hand, when she did attend school for a few years as a teenager, the boredom was excruciating. What was the difference? What is it about school boredom that is so unbearable and that, when born, as it must be, leads to Goodman's chronic boredom? It could be said that the teaching was bad, that not enough student input was allowed into what was taught when, and so on—all of which would be to try to find ways around the boredom.

But there is in school boredom something more fundamental to the nature of modern schooling. To begin to approach this, consider Mark Edmundson's general reflections on attention as a demand:

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> Paying attention is not unrelated to discharging a debt, to offering a tribute, to giving the entity that demands the attention something akin to cash. When you tell someone to pay attention, you are trying to take something from him, something that, one might assume, he does not wish to give: his focus, his presence of mind, his full being. Is it possible that paying attention is akin to paying tribute? When someone asks you to pay attention, he is imposing authority on you. Perhaps it is not that we can't get ourselves to focus on this or that matter, but simply that offering attention is felt as a challenge, a burden. (30)

Though Edmundson is not here questioning modern compulsory education, the implications are hard to avoid: "If all you ask people to do is pay attention, they will almost inevitably rebel. Attention is an imprisoning of the mind" (31). They will rebel or, as Goodman says, become chronically bored, go through the motions and lose all sense of real meaning as a result. That compulsory education has to be a compulsory demand for attention is a bad sign, right from the very start of the project of modern education. Why the need to insist ("guarantee," as Illich would say [*Rivers* 145]; "compel," as Anthony Esolen would say)? Once this insistence and presumption is set up and entrenched institutionally, then it is hard for every effort to get the balance right not to be just a further pressing of the insistence. Teaching what one knows to the young has always been something that people naturally do. But in modernity education becomes a problem—the problem of overcoming the intuitive resistance, based on the intuition that the demand is somehow wrong, distorted, presumptuous, coming from the wrong place, particularly from adult frustration, bewilderment. And the presumption and distortion come from the self-deceptions about authority and establishing control of the meaning of things. Awareness of this kind of presumption on the part of her father, Lear, is why Cordelia can't co-operate and tell him what he wants to hear.

Edmundson may be to some extent quibbling over words and keeping his essay relatively innocuous when he says that attention is bad and that its real opposite, absorption

(rather than distraction), is good.[60] But, if he doesn't draw the radical conclusions, he is going in the right direction with his observations:

> No one ever tells you to "pay absorption." Absorption is what occurs when you immerse yourself in something you love doing. . . . When that happens, time stops and one lives in an ongoing present. One feels whole and at one with oneself. The little boy drawing with his pad on the floor, tongue sticking out from one side of his mouth, is a picture of absorption. He is not really paying attention. He is being absorbed. What is happiness? W. H. Auden answered the question quite simply: Happiness comes in absorption.
>
> Happiness is losing yourself in something that you love and that will also, in all probability, come to benefit others. Happiness is working in an honorable vocation. Happiness is helping others, or protecting others, or enhancing the stock of humane knowledge. Happiness is absorption.
>
> Sure, when you're involved in absorbing tasks, you sometimes have to "pay attention." You've got to proofread the novel again; you've got to check and re-check your patient's chart. . . . (30–31)

The suggestion is that educational authority can only truly be based on something that involves this kind of absorption. But Edmundson doesn't keep pressing the tricky problem. The fact is that, given the institutional setup already in place, the primacy of the expectation to pay attention, it is the easiest thing in the world for teachers to demand that their students "pay absorption." Teachers will typically say "look at my students—they are all absorbed in their work, in activity, in conversation with one another, and so on," and that is taken as sufficient evidence of the effectiveness of one's authority. All the nice word distinctions tend to blend together in the classroom: absorption, enthusiasm, excitement, activity, and so on.[61] How does even the English professor, who loves literature and teaches from that love, not end up saying to at least some of his students that they have to pay absorption, or slipping into entertainment

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[60] See also Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow*, for another stream of thought going in the same direction.

[61] It is difficult to get critical foothold in the field of education, because the response is always, "yes, that is what I do in the classroom." The words are already taken. *Theory* is not about contemplation, but about planning how to get things done. Even *philosophy*, despite the efforts of foundations courses, is commonly used in phrases like "my philosophy of classroom management." What I thought was an interesting idea for shoring up the humanities gets hijacked or turns out to have been something else all along. See Chapter 5 on how educational thought is constricted by the research imperative to improve the system.

mode, or at least implicitly supporting a system that does this? The question of how to find true authority in education needs to be pressed and pressed. In other words, frustration needs to be met with thought, because the whole system that has entrenched itself within our society is based on that initial desperate, and, so, never quite convincing, demand: show up and pay attention.

A big part of what makes this evasion so easy in today's world, what makes it so difficult to take back that initial founding demand, is the therapeutic/communicative ethos, which as Illouz shows has been geared through its very development to a fluid, flexible maintenance of authority in institutional contexts and within the larger modern context of pluralism and individualism. It is possible to appear soft, emotive, open while in fact being highly rationalizing. I want in rest of this chapter to look particularly at how preoccupation with diversity and recent ways of approaching the moral and meaning part of education's task together fit in and enable educators to keep insisting on actually very rigid kinds of authority claims, while only appearing to loosen things up, open up to different meanings, and use a lighter touch.

A Place Apart

Anthony Kronman, in *Education's End*, tries to get a handle on what it is that is that constitutes the crisis in the humanities today. The story, as he tells it, is fairly straightforward, but affords some interesting insights into the origins of the present preoccupation of many in the humanities and social sciences, including applied social sciences like education research, with politically correct and heavy-handed efforts at being socially useful. The main overall transformation is one that we have seen concerns Nord: namely, the disappearance of the unity of truth and its replacement by the research ideal. But it actually took the research ideal time to make its influence felt in the humanities, at least, and what more immediately replaced the unity

of truth regime there was secular humanism. With the breaking up of the unity of truth and the

emergence of pluralism in antebellum American society, the job of the humanities was no longer

straightforwardly to prepare students for a certain kind of life with a well-defined course of

study. "Humanities teachers who wanted to continue the tradition of offering instruction in the

meaning of life in the age of the research university" responded with a philosophy of secular

humanism (*Education's End* 76). As characterized by Kronman, it tended to recognize 1) that

pluralism does not necessarily entail that there is no human nature, 2) that human nature

nevertheless allowed for many different manifestations, the job of making sense of falling to the

humanities (79), and 3) that, while keeping the question of God open, even if there is no God,

meaningful human lives depend on more than "we are able to create for ourselves, as

individuals," and require "structures of meaning . . . in order to have purpose and value" (81).

Within these new parameters, which tried to save as much as could be saved, the humanities tried

to help students make sense of the choices they faced as young people between the various kinds

of lives that were possible. The response was not perfect, Kronman admits, but, as "a balance

between the authoritarianism of the antebellum college and the radicalism of the ideas that have

dominated the humanities since the 1970s" (138), it worked pretty well. The fatal mistake was

the abandonment of this not entirely stable compromise position for the prestige promised by the

research ideal. It was only then that political correctness and the politicization of research could

come to dominate the humanities.[62] Now, under the regime of political correctness, it has

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[62] Kronman makes an interesting point in linking the now dominant diversity theme of political correctness to
Regents of the University of California v. Bakke, 1978. By a very odd process of reasoning, he suggests, the court
decided that the effects of past racial discrimination could not be compensated for by adding new racial
discrimination for program entrance. But another justification was found. It was based on the pedagogical value of
campus diversity as such. The humanities, in desperate need of something to give its research purpose, latched on to
this idea of the pedagogical value of diversity and took it from the campus into the classroom. But "by comparison
with the diversity that secular humanism affirmed, today's diversity is so limited that one might with justification
call it a sham diversity, whose real goal is the promotion of a moral and spiritual uniformity instead" (156).

become next to impossible for the student personally to encounter "the question of life's meaning" and the various responses that have been articulated. Instead, the student of today encounters an "an oppressive uniformity of moral purpose" (157).

As with Nord, I can't simply quash Kronman's whole case for secular humanism, let alone secular humanism compromise itself. There is much to be said for it. But, presented as Kronman mostly presents it—as addressing the student with an array of choices—it presents its problems. And perhaps these problems have played their part in the continuing crisis in the humanities as well. The problem really is in taking the secular humanist mission too literally and too seriously. If the purpose of a liberal education is to take a few leisurely years to read about a lot of different possibilities for a meaningful life, and then deciding on one of them and living it, then there are going to be a lot of problems, because it won't work that smoothly. In an important way, human nature doesn't agree with the secular humanist program taken this seriously, because arrays of possible meanings are not so easily articulated and chosen between. Kronman calls himself a liberal in politics and a conservative in education, but he is presenting a very liberal view of education here, as a setting out of an array of possibilities.

Intellectuals hardly know how to decide on a philosophy that will guide their lives, so how are ordinary people to know how to decide? That imperative can only lead to confusion, frustration, disappointment, and anti-intellectualism. To say to an undergraduate "Here is Nietzsche. Are you a Nietzschean or not?" or "Here is the Bible. Are you a Christian or do you just respectfully disagree with Christians?" is to put the cart before the horse. It may well be the honest student who dejectedly says "I don't understand either of them." At what point does one understand Nietzsche or Christianity, or any of the other options within the super-nova enough to agree or disagree without impertinence or inanity? And the absurdity only increases the younger

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you go. If the humanities and their importance in general education are to be saved, the problems that secular humanism, at least as characterized by Kronman, presents for real people need to be recognized along with the problems presented by diversity mania. It is necessary to find a new way of justifying the place of the humanities within a liberal education, and this will be difficult, because the justification will need to reach beyond what will be immediately recognizable as a justification.

To warn students from the beginning that they are not likely to understand a book, or a religion, very well, but that it will be worthwhile to persevere with it anyway, is to do something quite different from Kronman's up-front imperative to decide on "the meaning of life."[63] It is to admit that such reading and thinking are practices in themselves, and, as such, can, as suspected by many, be rather esoteric; but it is also to express the faith that it will be worthwhile for the student, however far she may go or not go into these humanities practices, to gain some familiarity with them, to learn from them, at least the difficulty of understanding, and perhaps even learning to "love the questions,"[64] whether or not they are to be further pursued in continued study or simply allowed to ring down other paths of life. How to put that to young people? How to make that intelligible to people who have been taught, in school, that boredom, not doing anything, is a bad thing? The short answer, I think, is that you can really only ask young people to approach the humanities subjects in this way if you have a society that

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[63] Kronman himself notes the Woody Allenish ring to the phrase he has chosen to characterize the meaning of education (9, 16–17).

[64] Rainer Maria Rilke, in *Letters to a Young Poet*: "You are so young, so much before all beginning, and I would like to beg you, dear Sir, as well as I can, to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love *the questions themselves* as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. *Live* the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer" (34–35).

appreciates the difficulty and significance of practices generally, not only the intellectual

practices but the arts, the crafts, the trades, and so on.

So, Kronman is good on the critique of diversity in education, on a part of how it

became so central to humanities attempts to claim legitimacy and social usefulness, but he

doesn't quite see his way out of the liberal predicament. Stanley Fish takes a much firmer stance,

against all attempts to do good through education, and is thus able to get closer to the source of

the problem.[65] Hiding behind the curmudgeonly title *Save the World on Your Own Time*, he is

actually trying to straighten out a lot of confusion about "relevance," and goes a long way in

doing so—certainly with many implications to be drawn out further than he actually does. In

saying that humanities teachers in academe (again, with implications down the system) should

stick to doing what they do and not try to do something else—in other words, challenging

educational actionism—he is rightly putting the focus on practices and the dependence of human

beings on practices in order for life to be intelligible, not to mention meaningful. Simply put,

liberal education is for learning intellectual practices, in the form of the various disciplines (and,

I think he would say, thinking between them as well). You can't foreground other aims and still

expect those intellectual practices to hold up, not to be watered down. This would include the

meaning-of-life aims of Kronman. But note that this is not to say that a student can't become a

better person or find meaning in and through learning intellectual practices, only that the

practices necessarily come first. You can't focus first on effects that are essentially

uncontrollable, and never guaranteed, and expect the practice itself to remain unaffected by the

attempt to finesse these effects out of it with production-line regularity. Again, this may seem at

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[65] It has been said before that Fish, in his penchant for provocation and overstatement, is always open to interpretation, and that is what I am doing here, giving him an interpretation. I see what he says in *Change the World* to be largely in line with Alasdair MacIntyre on practices in *After Virtue* (187).

first blush like an inhumane view of the humanities, but if to try to give the young a moral education, or to make their lives more meaningful, or to improve society through study of the humanities, it is to lose sight of practices themselves that can actually have these effects, and replace them with distorted, rationalizing, thin substitutes. So, Fish is in fact speaking up for the truly humane. In the most basic terms, you can't learn the practice of letting a novel speak to you if you are coming at it already frustrated and bewildered by the seeming array of possibilities of meaning and determined instead to get pre-codified meanings out of it. As Simone Weil put it,

> in every school exercise there is a special way of waiting upon truth, setting
> our hearts upon it, yet not allowing ourselves to go out in search of it. . . . Our
> first duty toward school children and students is to make known this method
> to them. (592–3)

And Michael Oakeshott said that school, properly understood, must be regarded as "a place apart" (34), in other words, as a place for the pursuit of the disciplines themselves for their own sake, a place that allows the contemplation required by those practices.

Through the Ice of Our Efforts

Schooling today is oriented toward possibility. It is also, quite noticeably, oriented toward excitement and action. But that excitement and action is also oriented toward possibility and the facilitation of possibilities. Students and teachers are supposed to be excited about the promise of meaning. Activity in the classroom—literally, bare motion—is taken as a sign that it is on its way. This is manifested in countless ways. In perhaps the most obvious, and most ciriticized, aspect of the therapeutic/communicative ethos, self-esteem is really about potential. Its significance for those who deal with children is in the promise it shows. And so, in a significant way, that showing of promise is itself the fulfillment of adult responsibility. Give

them potential and, not only will they be feeling good about themselves, but we can feel good about ourselves as well. Almost everything that we are able to say about education—at least, that we are able to say publicly (I am sure some straight teaching of subjects still goes on in the classroom!)—reflects this emphasis on possibility and the development of abstract promise. The very separation of children for school has become for us separation not for the serious pursuit of a practice of contemplation but for an intensified (and yet increasingly deferred: Smith; Arnett) sort of preparation for the real society. They are separated off for mini-democracy, mini-workplace, and so on. As Murray Milner has shown in *Freaks, Geeks, and Cool Kids*, the abandonment of the young to schools leads to the unintended creation of parodic, distorted, consumerist, and caste-system youth culture. Youth, then, become conveniently and perennially in need of fixing, therapy, communication skills. To emphasize potential is to keep the young from reality, to deny them reality, to deny them "our world." And the effects are only being further extended with *emerging adulthood*, what is in effect a new stage of life that has been identified by both Christian Smith and Jeffrey Arnett—the twenties now being devoted to the purpose of keeping options open.

Just as Illouz has shown in her tracing of the effects of the therapeutic/communicative ethos in the corporation and the family, it all makes a certain amount of self-sustaining sense. But the whole system has become distorted by its over-rationalization. And the rationalization is now carried out in and through the pursuit of concerns that appear to be quite the opposite of rationalizing. Nevertheless, if the psychological/communicative regime makes sense for management in corporation, it makes a certain sense also for managing the masses of young people in school, especially for managing the inevitable frustration and boredom. Just like in a corporation composed of ambitious individuals, each student presumably has her own

possibilities and life plan, but everyone's possibilities and plans need to be made sense of together, and each needs to be taught to make sense of her individualism in relation to others: that is, to be rational about her individual goals and emotions in relation to others, to be nice in an individualistic way, be altruistic in an individualistic way, respect other cultures in an individualistic way. All these contemporary ways of teaching morality or promising meaning are all very muscular, militant, hyperbolic, sentimentalist, heavy-handed. It is a sign that something is still missing. Meaning, the ability to see meaning, slips through the ice of our earnest efforts.

What I am suggesting here may be as hard to get hold of as it is hard to get hold of what children are missing by being over-protected from risk. But it is precisely because there is so much talk and overt display of the education system teaching kids to care, to feel (something, anything), to change the world (without understanding what they are doing), to be empowered (if they fall into an unempowered category) or to empower others, to speak with their own voices, and so on, and so on. Surely these are all good signs. Indeed, a new genre of journalism has emerged, within very recent years, as far as I can tell, featuring these educational efforts at giving meaning and instilling morality for a secular world, apparently reflecting in a very public way how we do see ourselves in terms of moral authority in relation to the young and fulfilling our most basic educational responsibility to introduce them into a meaningful world.[66]

To get a grasp of what is going on, Phillips can again be helpful. Barbara Taylor and he, in their book, *On Kindness*, talk about the sorry state of kindness today, which at first blush

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[66] I will develop this public/private theme further in Chapter 6. Suffice it to note here that this new genre of journalism is a sign that educational aims are becoming very public, very obvious in terms of prevailing common sense, the prevailing ethos. In fact, educating the public and educating children tend to blend together in odd ways. Children are often saddled with raising awareness and "educating adults." This reversal is visible everywhere in the mass media today. And, of course, when the therapeutic/communicative ethos itself becomes the object of education in school, it may provide an obvious legitimacy, but it also, on further thought, raises the question of why they need to go to school to be taught what is already in the air. A good question to put to any new educational proposal might be "Why not let them stay home and watch Oprah?"

can seem rather trumped up. How does one say one way or the other whether kindness, on the whole, has thrived, declined, or stayed the same over the past, say, century or two? Again, one can only look at the signs, and Phillips and Taylor start out with the trivializing sort of mass media feel-good story or analysis of which the empowered kids stories are a new sub-genre. Why, they ask, is there this need to feature some simple, sentimentalized, act of kindness, as if to have to remind the reader simply that kindness is good, as if a crucial part of sustaining kindness were such continual encouragements? Why, in other words, is there this need to educate the reader on the "blindingly obvious" (3–4)? On one level, an explanation can be found in turning to Illouz and her elucidation of the need to create and keep reinforcing uniformity of the therapeutic/communicative disciplines. Thus, there is Phillips and Taylor's example of Tony Blair issuing instructions to nurses to smile, and then his following up with a "compassion index" to make damn sure they are doing so (102). What all the idealization, sentimentalization, rationalization, and exaggeration of kindness; all the strenuous exhortations that everyone keep working at being kind; all the congratulations, self-congratulations, and re-assurances; what it all suggests to Phillips and Taylor is that we have lost touch with "ordinary kindness." We in fact fear ordinary kindness, because (linking back to what Phillips says about orientation to reality) kindness in its full light shows us human vulnerability, dependence, and limitations, and it does not shrink from inevitable ambiguity and ambivalence, and the mixture even of hate with kindness. As they phrase their indictment,

> a society that romanticizes kindness, that regards it as a virtue so difficult to sustain that only the magically good can manage it, destroys people's faith in real or ordinary kindness. Supposed to make everything happy and right, magical kindness cannot deliver the realistic care and reassurance that people actually need. Magical kindness is a false promise. (56)

By "magical kindness" they refer to the origins of this approach to kindness in the young child's

"bribe to the parents . . . [as] an insurance policy against deprivation or neglect." "The child's

kindness," they continue, "begins as a magical rescue or cure that invariably fails. Out of this

failure emerges genuine kindness" (55). We continue to persist with the magic, they are

suggesting. Moreover, I would add, we insist on re-teaching it to the young.[67]

Take, as just one example, the phenomenon of We Day that sweeps across Canada's

schools and mass media alike every October in an outbreak of benevolent hyperbole. It uses

celebrity speakers to drum up the over-the-top enthusiasm of kids packed into huge arenas,

telling them that they can "change the world." It shows how unordinary and strenuous educators

think efforts at moral education need to be. And this overcompensation can only come from the

fact that the event, like moral education, like educational and moral authority, today, is itself a

bottomless facilitation effort: doing good as educators by working on kids to get them to do good

(often of a facilitation/awareness kind, often with adults as the object); dealing with the problem

of meaning by making sure kids look like they are embarking on engaged and meaningful lives.

The approach is essentially to get kids to pick a cool, news-worthy issue, any issue from the list.

There is complete lack of evident discernment, of substance, of thought to the whole affair.

Change is good, possibility is good. Above all, the approach requires getting the kids excited and

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[67] See also Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals* (129–146), for what I think is the kind of society in which kindness can be ordinary, or, in his own terms, in which "just generosity" can flourish in and through "networks of giving and receiving" located between the state and family. The modern state operates on a rationality that has no room for truly generous justice and typically the contemporary family does not have sufficient resources to care for the young and the disabled entirely on its own. In the kind of community MacIntyre is talking about "those who are no longer children recognize in children what they once were. . . ." (146). Only from such recognition, free of fear or bewilderment at their openness can there be adequate awareness of what children in their dependence (openness, boredom, frustration) need. In other words, it only comes from personal knowledge, rather than from the education code. MacIntyre, of course, speaking in terms of very broad and social philosophy here, doesn't say much explicitly about education, but the implications are there, and help inform my Chapter 6 discussion of the need for some kind of revisiting of the apprenticeship model as a community responsibility.

motivated.[68] I recall seeing on the We Day website, around 2011 or 2012, an introductory video

for We Day in which the kids were warned very explicitly that "there are cameras everywhere.

Don't let them see you looking bored or yawning." What is this effort at motivation all based on?

How can whatever benevolent behaviour it draws out actually be sustained? Jean Vanier, in a

video appearance that was shown to the crowd at the 2012 event, goes somewhat against the

flow when, in a very understated way, he cautions the young people to find an adult with a lot of

experience and to attach themselves to that person ("Jean Vanier We Day 2012").

In the modern world, we have become fixated on our own "human self-possession," on

our potential to re-order society, on the possibilities, and also, inevitably on the risks, the

possibilities of failure to live up to the apparent demands of self-possession. Paradoxes and

contradictions abound when it comes to the problem of educational authority, where, for all our

modern confidence, we don't seem to have much to pass on, or know how to pass on what we do

have. Within the therapeutic/communicative ethos and its role in establishing legitimacy of

authority, education's role has come to be defined in terms of facilitating the possibilities,

managing the bewildering array—or, more absurdly put, harnessing the supernova. There is no

denying that one of the wonderful things about modernity is the sense of possibility, of wide-

open creativity, and so on, but the fundamental paradoxes need to be recognized as well,

especially for the sake of educating the young. The next chapter will look at how not thinking

about, not seeing, these larger frustrations—the frustrations of being marooned in possibility—

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[68] Cesar Millan, in his television show, *The Dog Whisperer*, often tells people not to treat their dogs like kids. They shouldn't be trying to continually whip them up into excitement, he says, in order to prove to themselves that their dogs are happy. Dogs are happy when they are calm. He could also profitably turn this advice around and tell people, especially educators, not to treat their kids like dogs. See Susan Cain on the presumption of the superiority of extroversion in education today (250–58). For explanatory background she follows Warren Sussman on the twentieth-century emergence of the culture of personality and the decline of character (Cain 19–33).

has become entrenched methodologically in the system, in the ways that we are *supposed* to think about education. At the same time, we will continue to try to think about the reality of intergenerational responsibilities.

Chapter 5: The Child and the Church of Reason[69]

Paweł, in Kieślowski's "Decalogue I" that we examined last chapter, is in a way a sort of sunflower, intensely attuned to the movement of his father and master, an attachment figure, whom he patiently follows and imitates in order to absorb the secrets of a complex practice.[70] If this is a true image of how the child intuitively seeks to work his way out of childhood boredom, then the question becomes one of what is delivered from the other end, of how adults themselves stand in relation to practices in the contemporary secular world. Paweł's father's practices (in relation to both risk and literary meaning) were distorted somehow, claiming a means of control where control can't justly be claimed. Similarly, under the dominant therapeutic/communicative ethos, false practices flourish and, inevitably, are passed on through the education system. The official version of the story underlying Illouz's account of the emergence of the ethos is that psychologists came into corporations and, by doing careful scientific research, came up with guidelines for people to follow for allowing the organizations to function more smoothly, unhampered by interpersonal tensions. Essentially, the claim was that the rational methods of scientific research had produced very soft, humanistic practices. But what Illouz is saying, of course, is that the rationalizing is taking place within these quasi-practices themselves; the seemingly warm and fuzzy talk about feelings is actually a cold and thin rationalization of the social order. And I want to argue that the same illusion is created in the education world, where

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[69] The term *Church of Reason* is here adapted very loosely from Robert Pirsig for my own present purposes. What I have in mind is the idolatry of reason, as represented in Kieślowski's film, in which children are given a distorted formation and the rationalizing ethos thwarts their natural desire for thicker kinds of formation. See also Ivan Illich on the emergence of modern schooling on the secularized model of the worst institutional aspects of the Church (*Rivers* 139–45).

[70] In speaking of the father as an attachment figure, I have in mind Gordon Neufeld's (Neufeld and Maté) interpretation of attachment theory. He doesn't deal with the concept of practice explicitly, but his account of attachment theory is, I think, consistent with and potentially illuminating of how children would intuitively desire to learn a practice through an attachment figure or a designated master. Neufeld also has many insights into the lives of young people today, so suggesting as well many implications for how that desire can be thwarted.

research and theory is supposed to use rational methods for generating meaningful educational objectives and theorize the means of their realization, which is then humanized and adapted into practices by the teachers for delivery. Again, however, the real story is much more complex and convoluted. The barely controllable classroom is highly rationalized, and education research is characterized by fads and grasping at straws. Practices become distorted in attempts to over-rationalize them, even for the sake of humanizing them, and ultimately don't make much sense. At the end of the day, the child is lost in the confusions generated by adults trying to articulate the basis of their moral authority.

Meaning and Method

In the ninth edition of *Introduction to Research in Education*, Ary et al. devote a section (8–12) of the first chapter, "The Nature of Scientific Inquiry," to a passage from Robert Pirsig's *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (129–134). At first glance, this seems to make perfect sense, in a textbookish kind of way. The authors want to broach the topic of scientific method in its most fundamental, but also driest, formulation. As if in grudging acknowledgment of the stereotypical student who starts grousing when things get too abstract (or, to be more precise, the stereotypical practicing teacher doing a graduate degree at night, who is easily annoyed with anything that complicates the acquiring of more credentials), they start with a "narrative" account that describes scientific reasoning as it is applied in the case of troubleshooting a problem with a motorcycle. Then, getting right down to business, they simply remove the supposed embellishments to reveal the underlying skeleton of "five steps that are typical of scientific inquiry": namely, "identification of the problem," "statement of the

problem," "formulation of hypotheses," "prediction of consequences," and "testing of hypotheses" (11).

Ironically, this narrative account of scientific method is extracted from quite early on in the narrative of the novel itself, without any evident acknowledgment of the significance of that larger narrative. The assumption is that the emerging education researcher will be able to take the dry logic of this bare formulation of scientific method, once it has been more or less painlessly administered, and, by applying it through one or more of the particular methods outlined in the textbook's chapters, turn it back into a piece of research that can have living meaning for real people within the structures of the education system. But somehow this use of Pirsig has managed to get Pirsig completely backwards. His concern is not with setting out the steps of scientific method, but, on the contrary, with how fixation on the following of rationalized method can obscure meaning, and with how difficult it is to get the meaning back once you have put method first. "Quality," says the narrator in the novel, "isn't something you lay on top of subjects and objects like tinsel on a Christmas tree" (375). It is hard to know for sure what made Ary et al., who must have had some idea of Pirsig's concern with "Quality," think this passage would be a fitting one for their textbook. My guess is that they saw the word *Quality* and immediately connected it with the qualitative methods to which they devote considerable space. As long as qualitative methods are given their place alongside quantitative methods, then it can't very well be claimed that quality has gone missing. Surely Pirsig would approve of their use of the passage. Going by that assumption, when his narrator later decries the "Church of Reason," within which "the forms of this world are real but the Quality of this world is unreal" (453), he is just expressing a personal distaste for number crunching, and perhaps

appealing for a better balance between the qualitative and quantitative approaches, the latter of which is exactly what Ary et al. are doing.

The presence of something like this kind of thinking is borne out in the next chapter of the textbook, which the authors open with a very brief historical situating of the quantitative and qualitative methods. "Quantitative and qualitative research," they start out, "stem from different philosophical approaches that shape the ways researchers approach problems and collect and analyze data" (25). The story being given here, however, is one of the gradual shedding of these philosophical roots. "Historically," they continue,

> research in education has used the quantitative approach. In the late 20th century, however, scholars began to call for an alternative to the quantitative approach in educational research (Guba & Lincoln, 1988). Believing that using quantitative methods in highly controlled settings ignored the participants' perspectives and experiences, they recommended qualitative research as an alternative for certain investigations. For a time, researchers engaged in a "paradigm debate" that viewed the two approaches as being directly opposed to each other. Opponents of quantitative research described it as being "reductionist," while critics of qualitative research claimed it was unscientific and favored only by researchers who disliked math and statistics. Gradually there was a rapprochement as quantitative and qualitative researchers began to see the two methodologies as complementary rather than adversarial. (25)

The story is then brought up to date:

> Researchers are now moving beyond the quantitative-qualitative debate and addressing the more important goal of improving all educational inquiry. Berliner (2002) wrote that a complex problem like education needs a whole range of methods for study—ethnographic research is crucial, as are case studies, survey research, time series, design experiments, action research, and other means to collect reliable evidence for engaging in unfettered argument about education issues." [sic, Berliner (p. 20) quote begins with "ethonographic"]
> Whether researchers choose quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods should be determined not by philosophical preference, but by determining which method is most appropriate and likely to provide the type of data that will answer the research question. You simply use what will work. (27)

Now, leaving aside the question of just how "philosophical" education research has *ever* been, this account does quite accurately reflect the self-understanding of the field that has emerged and solidified in a consensus on methodology. As the above quotation indicates with perhaps not quite intended candour, it is a consensus on methodology that obviates any need for methodology, let alone philosophy.

In what is presented as a gesture of greater reasonableness, what is actually given is the contemporary common sense in all its obviousness.[71] The war between the paradigms is dropped and all sides are allowed to bring what they have to the table in the interest of "the more important goal of improving all educational inquiry" (27). This peaceful vision of educational improvement is one of the precise study of relationships of cause and effect combined with the "rich detail" that can be added on with more open-ended, interpretive studies. The only price of this vision is that philosophy first be reduced to preference and then philosophical preferences be left at the door. There may be an appearance of some philosophical sophistication in a statement like "you simply use what will work" (27), but it is only an appearance. To the extent they are preparing researchers to work within the consensus, the authors mean what they say. There is no room in education research for philosophical questions about, for example, what is meant by "work." In the interest of effectively bringing about a rich and meaningful vision of education, the researcher is supposed to attend rigorously to the skeletal pattern of steps as laid out in one or another of the textbook's chapters, and expect it to all come to life back in the world of everyday thought about education. If a piece of research doesn't quite work in reality, the common-sense

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[71] It is so obvious that it can be presented as a cartoon (26) with a (rather stereotyped) man and woman driving over a bridge, one remarking on its beauty combined with strength, the other on how it shortens the commute. That both are right is immediately obvious, and so the case for the new consensus is made, as far as the researcher-in-training needs to be concerned with it.

obviousness of educational aims can be relied on to make it work in the end. If qualitative and quantitative methodologies or philosophies don't fit well together, their methods, when rigour is simplistically defined as adhering to the steps, can easily enough be made to fit. And, in turn, if modern education doesn't seem to be working, doesn't seem to be as meaningful as it should be, research can go back to work on what is needed.

Thus education research has come to mediate or dissolve methodological differences in and through development of its main project of, essentially, defining and delimiting the practices of the various actors in the education system. The idea of compulsory schooling comes first, of course, and then the building of the idea into a taken-for-granted institution. Research is an inevitable development from an institution made compulsory on a mass scale, because unquestionable assumption that such compulsion is good means to good ends must be continually justified and re-justified. Education research is the massive project of going to work on what exactly must be done. There are echoes here of Taylor's post-Axial spiritual elite trying to raise the masses and the society as a whole. This still shows up quite distinctly in what at least seems something like the original form: for example, in David Lynch's celebrity-supported program of introducing meditation into schools (featured in Perri), and similarly in academic approaches today to what is called "spiritual education" and to its promotion and articulation through one particular field of education research. But the point here is that education research as such is driven by a permutation and elaboration of the same basic impulse to Reform, institutionalized on a large scale in modern schooling. The big difference is that now the elite, the research elite in this case, don't claim to have already mastered for themselves the discipline that they want to spread. Rather, the researchers pursue through one discipline—as I have begun to suggest, a very abstract and by-the-numbers sort of intellectual practice—the articulation of

guidelines for the practices of other elites, or functionaries of the elite (i.e., teachers), working in other parts of the education system, as well as the masses themselves, represented by the students.

The current academic fad of *reflective practice* (Donald Schön), particularly in teacher education, reveals just how much of a hold theoretical articulation and the connected research program have on the education world. Even when there is apparently an underlying sense that *practice* can bring education more meaningfulness by counteracting the dryness of *theory*, this is inevitably expressed as an attempt to bring into balance or "bridge" theory and practice, which really means, at best, more "nuanced" application of the theory in the practice. "Reflection" still turns out to be thinking as a forcing of one's way through resistances to the application of theory or achievement of theoretically set-out objectives. The reflection that student teachers are taught is highly micromanaged ("take five minutes to reflect") and highly rationalizing (à la Illouz). Teachers are supposed to reflect on how to do what they are doing, not to ask what they are doing, or to contemplate the meaning of life. But the terminology of reflective practice—along with Joseph Dunne's *phronesis*, occasionally—carries an association of the "richness" that is definitely being sought. Given the institutional and intellectual context, however, it can't but be an add-on. What is conceptually most determinative lies in what is already being done prior to these attempts to add back a sense of meaning: that is, in compulsory schooling as essentially an open means—a modern technology—and the research project it requires for supposed completion, a completion which is itself essentially technical and therefore keeps receding in proportion to the effort to identify meaning. Massively and deadeningly, education research produces theory of a kind that, one way or another, needs to be applied, and that in being applied constrains practice, including thinking, and precludes meaning. Practice within the world of

education can hardly escape from theory's controlling influence, because that is how it is all set up.

The Use and Abuse of Theory

A large part of my initial puzzlement about AR and its context was with how absent the influence of the humanities seems to be within official educational thought (especially stemming from faculties of education). To add an AR program to the monolithic education system in order to shore up the presence of the humanities, when any real appreciation of the humanities had somehow already completely vanished, seemed after all not to make much sense.

The field of philosophical and social foundations considered in relation to education research shows how, in the education world, the humanities can be represented in name, in this case within faculties of education, but nevertheless not have much presence as humanities disciplines. No one seems to know quite what the philosophical and social foundations disciplines are there for. The numbers from the Crocker and Dibbon survey on initial teacher education in Canada need interpretation, but they do point to this lack of presence. Crocker and Dibbon themselves take the "very important" category as most significant for their survey of opinions of faculty, principals, and BEd graduates on the different elements of teacher education programs. And these numbers do indeed show up something odd: all three groups are willing to go so far as to acknowledge the *importance* of the philosophy, sociology, and history of education, but the numbers fall drastically for *very important*, unlike virtually all other standard elements of programs, which suggests that no-one really knows even why the philosophical and social foundations disciplines should be important (74–81, 132–33). In theory, in an abstract way, in an abstractly obvious way, the philosophical and social foundaitons disciplines are

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important because they can presumably add the element of depth and richness of thought of which everyone can admit the need—both for the teaching of teachers and in the carrying out of the research endeavor. Invariably, however, that role of adding depth comes out as trying to be helpful in the great task of improving the system.[72]

The uncertainty and ambivalence reflected in the survey are understandable, and even justified. As with the AR idea, the idea of the importance of philosophical and social foundations to the educational system is very much an add-on that turns out not to mesh very well at all with what is already there. Compulsory schooling and its system are already there, and then a space is made for more depth of meaning. The vaguely intended helpful relationship is never going to materialize, because the philosophical and social foundations disciplines are constrained from the beginning by what is already being done, and with ramifications that are barely imaginable when those self-deceptive intentions are taken for granted. The institution that is primary here is something that is essentially a technical vehicle for meaning and the transfer of meaning between generations, but that is concerned first and foremost with the means for that meaning, whatever and wherever that meaning may be. It is supposed to embody the meaningful authority of the older generations in relation to the young, but in fact is full of place holders. To put philosophy in the service of such an institution is surely to turn it into a sort of theology: a theology, however, without the transcendent principle of God, a theology devoted to propping up, with the continually re-affirmed promise of improving, a human construction. And the same can be said

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[72] Justifications have been continually written from within the philosophical and social foundations to those on the other side, but always ending up pleading usefulness in terms intelligible from within what everyone is already doing. Participation in team projects has become the new touchstone of relevance. See Dan Butin's empirical study of the "almost complete lack of attention" from education researchers to social foundations work (286), or any number of philosophers of education trying desperately to explain why their jobs are important. It is hard to find even a philosopher of education (as opposed to an outsider radical like Illich, or even someone in the sociology department) who doesn't take the compulsory schooling system for granted.

for the sociology and history of education, insofar as they are theoretical endeavors concerned with much the same territory as social philosophy. Where the humanities are supposed to show themselves, to bring their wisdom to bear on a massive endeavor to deal systematically with the problem of authority in relation to the young, instead the crisis of the humanities is revealed in its full depth. Philosophical and social foundaions seems capable of little more than supporting the grasping-at-straws actionism of regular education research. Indeed, it is rapidly becoming indistinguishable from the rest of education research, in its effort to grab hold of something, anything, that can readily be identified as meaningful or as associated with meaningfulness, and then to set out the method of efficient dissemination. Again, however, simply reasserting the philosophical and social foundations is no more of an answer or a redressing of the balance than the reassertion of the humanities in schools through AR is an answer. To appreciate this, we need to compare the humanities with education research, note the contrast in modes of thought, and try to see some way down to the bottom of that contrast. I want to look particularly at the parent disciplines of philosophical and social foundations—philosophy, history, and sociology—asking how they differ not only from education research, as a form of social research, but also to a great extent even from philosophical and social foundations proper.

Now, I want to try to steer clear of the internal methodological debates that abound in each of the humanities and social sciences disciplines.[73] Ary et al. are quite right insofar as what they refer to as a methodological consensus points to a pre-methodological realm of practice, where people in a given discipline or field of study just do what they do before they start theorizing about what it is that they do or setting out what everyone in the field should be doing.

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[73] Although, I will myself be looking at this from within the loosely defined practice theory perspective (David Stern), of which I will have more to say shortly.

It is in this realm of basic disciplinary practice that I think the contrast can be most instructive. At the risk of causing confusion by using the word in two different ways, it is the realm of soft *method*, in the sense that a general "philosophical method" or "sociological method" or "historical method" is often spoken of. But the foregrounding of different senses of the word puts the contrast in a nutshell: for the humanities and social sciences the primary thing, the thing that one is already doing just by being a philosopher, historian, or sociologist, is practicing a softer disciplinary method; for education research the primary thing is claiming a hard method, or following the steps. What I want to suggest is that there are two quite different kinds of practices here—in fact, two different implicit understandings of what a practice is and how it relates to theory.

Consider how one becomes a scholar in the humanities and social sciences. I remember the instructor in my introductory philosophy course telling us that "you learn what philosophy is by doing it." This is a common way of expressing what it is people do all day in the humanities and social sciences—or, rather, of evading the question. She did not mean that we would find out soon enough what philosophy is, once we went through the steps in the textbook to see for ourselves. She wasn't saying that she could define what philosophy is but that we just weren't ready to understand it until we had gone through a trial run or made it more concrete and easier to grasp with a few fun learning activities. The method, in the hard sense, wasn't contained in the informal logic book that served as one of the texts. Nor was it in the textbook of themed selections and position summaries, which, if it contained any prescription, contained mutually contradictory ones. Nor was it to be found in the symbolic logic course I would take the following year. The instructor was saying that she, a graduate student herself, was perhaps beginning, after a number of years, to get a sense of what philosophy is, but that she couldn't

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articulate it very well. She was suggesting that even amongst the top philosophical thinkers who had indeed tried to articulate their own understandings of philosophy, no one has been able to define philosophy in a way that wraps up the matter once and for all. Not only do these top philosophers all disagree amongst themselves, as they do in the philosophy textbook, but, rather confusingly, in their very disagreement with one another about what philosophy is, they are already mutually engaged in the practice of philosophy.

Simon Blackburn in his introduction to *Think: A Compelling Introduction to Philosophy* takes a tack similar to my teacher's with his own neophyte readers. After going through a short list of some fundamental philosophical questions, he says that "the queer thing about these questions is that not only are they baffling at first sight, but they also defy simple processes of solution" (3). In other words, he can't tell his reader how to go about solving them, how to do the required philosophy. Well attuned to the uneasiness likely to be aroused in beginning students at this thought, he goes on to try to address their anxieties:

> How is philosophy learned? A better question is: how can thinking skills be acquired? The thinking in question involves attending to basic structures of thought. This can be done well or badly, intelligently or ineptly. But doing it well is not primarily a matter of acquiring a body of knowledge. It is more like playing the piano well. It is a "knowing how" as much as a "knowing that." (5)

A "knowing that," sufficient in and of itself, would be a simple process of solution, a hard method for doing philosophy. But this is not what he means by "structures of thought," which clearly are more like rules of thumb, or slowly acquired habits, that can serve as guidelines in a less certain and more intuitive mode of proceeding toward the goal of "knowing how" to do philosophy well, although still without ever getting a complete grasp on knowing that one is

doing it well precisely because one is doing x, y, and z as necessary and sufficient conditions of doing it well.[74]

The flipside of not being able to say exactly what it is to do philosophy is that it is very easy to say roughly what it is. When philosophers speak of general philosophical method, they usually mean the rigourous formation of arguments or the dialogue itself within which these arguments are formed, and then they will go on to articulate this rigour in various ways—emphasizing logic, linguistic analysis, dialectic, the hermeneutic circle, or whatever the case may be. So, philosophy is based in something that everyone already does, and then it tries to refine that with disciplines, techniques, and tricks of various kinds. On this level, it is the same for all of the humanities and social sciences: it starts with argument and dialogue, and then gets refined by discipline-specific techniques. To refer again to my own undergraduate teachers, I remember the professor in my historiography course telling us that the bottom line in what historians do is that they present arguments to one another about how the evidence should be interpreted. This came as something of a minor revelation to me, in its very simplicity. Historians are not just asserting that such and such is the case about an historical topic, and woe to those who do not see it or get the point of it all; they are much more humanly engaged in trying to articulate what it is they see and testing it out by trying to convince other historians.

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[74] Blackburn's account would seem to fit well with an emerging consensus on what it is to learn to do something, anything, well. It has become a commonplace, amongst those familiar with the research literature, that it takes more or less 10,000 hours of intense practice to learn something to the point of mastery, at which point true creativity can begin to emerge. Of course, this practice needs to be well placed, but the sheer weight of what is involved in this large span of time means that well placed practice must be out of the reach of codification into a hard method. Richard Sennett backs up the 10,000 hours theory in *The Craftsman* (20, 130, 172, 247), as does Hubert Dreyfus by implication in a number of scattered articles: see particularly "How Far Is Distance Learning from Education?" In the education research literature with which educators concern themselves, learning directed toward mastery barely registers as a concern. Putting mastery to one side and taking a look at another aspect of what Albert Borgmann calls "focal practice" (196–209), Matthew Crawford, in *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, deals with the complicity of the modern education system in the separation of thinking from doing, and so ultimately in the impoverishment of modern work and life.

Gerald Graff, in *Clueless in Academe: How Schooling Obscures the Life of the Mind*,

speaks of what he calls "the problem problem," which derives from the undergraduate's sense

that the problem the academic is dealing with is trumped up or arbitrarily asserted to be

important in the first place (45–52). On the one hand, stopping to show how a specific problem

fits into a larger conversation can have the revelatory effect that my history professor's statement

had on me. On the other hand, implicit in Graff's concept is the possibility that the

undergraduate's intuition is right on the money, that the academics are playing a game amongst

themselves, that their problems are self-defined and self-perpetuating. Of course, the cure here as

well is opening up that narrow game to broader dialogue. But the forgetting of that most basic

and fundamental grounding of academic practices in common structures of dialogue is indeed a

major source of distortion creeping in to the discipline. The essential openness of all academic

disciplines regarded as dialogue, including especially the humanities and social sciences, with

which we are concerned, can be expressed in the starkly simple terms of Graff and Birkenstein's

writing guide, *They Say, I Say*. But the basic statement and response, because of the simplicity in

which it is described, branches out in ways that cannot be prescribed or predicted. There is

always the possibility of coming into the conversation with something that was completely

unexpected, with an "I say" from left field, drawing on another "they say" from a conversation

that was previously thought to be completely unrelated.

And it is not just a matter of arguing with other historians, or conversing with other

fields, but also of the study itself as an entering into dialogue. Michael Oakeshott speaks of the

study of history, and liberal learning generally, as engaging in a long conversation (16). Even

such a straight-laced methodologist as G. R. Elton, who, along with E. H. Carr, remains a staple

of historical methodology courses (Jenkins 2), speaks of the crucial problem of what it means for

the historian to select his or her facts in terms of a dialogue between the historian and the sources. He simply emphasizes (with considerable justification, given the tendency in contemporary academe toward a default relativism) that the historian must first actually listen to what the sources are saying (Elton 55–7). Moreover, while he speaks of historical methods as providing "protection" against bias, he emphasizes that this does not work "automatically" by means of simple application. In fact, "historical method," even for Elton, consists not of hard procedure but of two questions: "Exactly what evidence is there, and exactly what does it mean?" The rest is a large repertoire of *techniques*—paleography, statistics, source criticism of various kinds, textual interpretation, and so on—from which the historian must draw and then use with judgment in light of the particular subject and the task as defined by the orienting questions (57–60). But it must all be interpreted well, and in that lies the craft of the historian.

In *The Sociological Imagination*—and particularly in the appendix, "On Intellectual Craftsmanship," addressed specifically to the neophyte—C. Wright Mills discusses the basic practice of the discipline in ways that bring out, although he does not draw the connection explicitly, its essentially dialogical nature. But what he is focusing on, in talking about how to develop a sociological imagination, is how this dialogical openness is internalized through persistence: "scholarship is a choice of how to live as well as a choice of career," and the character one develops as a scholar "has as its core the qualities of the good workman" (196). To a great extent, it is a self-discipline. Throughout this essay he expounds on habits, such as file keeping and the little tricks by which "you learn how to keep your inner world awake" and to focus on those things that concern you, slowly drawing out their implications and learning to see the relations between seemingly unrelated topics and spheres (197, practical tips passim.). It follows pretty clearly from this description of how a good scholar actually works that "good

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work in social science today is not, and usually cannot be, made up of one clear-cut empirical 'research.' It is, rather, composed of a good many studies which at key points anchor general statements about the shape and the trend of the subject" (202). Most of these studies can usually be found in work, of one form or another, that has already been done. When it comes to addressing factual questions, "there is no more virtue in empirical enquiry as such than in reading as such" (205). Undertaking empirical work from scratch is "a great deal of trouble," and should therefore be done sparingly and judiciously within the kind of broader scholarly "structuring" of the understanding that Mills is talking about. Without adequate attention to such structuring, in any case, the result is "bound to be thin and uninteresting" (205).

It is worth noting that Mills, and certainly his concept of the sociological imagination, remain influential in the teaching of sociology to undergraduates.[75] It is a sign, perhaps, that although the well-meaning utilitarianism he was combating may still be very much present in the discipline, it has not taken complete control. Indeed, the very structure of education within a discipline like sociology dictates that the sociological imagination comes first. For most of their undergraduate studies and much of their graduate work as well, sociology students are reading and thinking theoretically. They are, in other words, working on or structuring their own understandings of the subject in question, and of human affairs more broadly. They are learning to see society through the sociological imagination. And only then do they learn to do research as a more specialized undertaking, but one guided, it is hoped, by real theoretical understanding. That, in the end, is what all the humanities disciplines are about, what the dialogue and the

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[75] In the 1998 International Sociological Association survey of its members, *The Sociological Imagination* came in second as most influential book of the century. The influence can be seen in many introductory textbooks that adopt the term "sociological imagination" and speak of sociology, above all, as a way of thinking, a perspective from which one is able to step back and look at the very society in which one is involved: see, for example, Dalton Conley, *You May Ask Yourself*, and Janet Ruane and Karen Cerulo, *Second Thoughts*.

practice lead toward. As Peter Berger puts it in his own *Invitation to Sociology*, "the sociologist tries to see what is there" (5), and so, of course, do the historian and the philosopher through practices that have been refined in slightly differently ways.

To return to philosophy, Charles Taylor in his article "Social Theory as Practice"[76] discusses how philosophy, as a practice itself, is also always tied in with the practices it is studying, so that in its attempt to articulate what people are doing it shares in the messiness of practice that is never fully articulable. It was one of his great concerns in his early methodological work to stay true to the kind of openness of practice of the humanities and social sciences, and also to the inter-relatedness of these disciplines in this, that I have been pointing toward.[77]

In his Kyoto address on "What Drove Me to Philosophy," after relating the story of his own sudden and unexpected decision to pursue a doctorate in a discipline whose dominant culture he found unbearably dry and lifeless,[78] he tries to put his finger on some definitive advice for the beginner:

> One could almost formulate a maxim for people entering into philosophy: throw yourself into the very heart of what you find puzzling. But I don't want to proffer this advice myself, because I know how much it is a matter for each person, leading their own life, to respond in their own way to the puzzlement they face, either turning away or engaging. (5)

Even his own anti-method directive to throw oneself into one's confusion, he recognizes, risks turning into a sort of hard method, so he takes it back. What Taylor threw himself into in his

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[76] By the "social theory" of the title Taylor really means both philosophy and the social sciences, which, while not identical, are not easily separable. Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science*, is another classic statement of the merging of philosophy and social science, when both are properly understood.

[77] The story of Taylor's early struggles with methodology is related in the first chapter of Nicholas Smith, *Charles Taylor: Meaning, Morals, and Modernity* (18–34).

[78] Taylor has said somewhere in an interview that it was the last dregs of logical positivism that he ran into at Balliol as an undergraduate. He also says in the Kyoto lecture that there were more interesting things going on at Oxford that he was not initially aware of.

early career was a series of inter-related methodology issues in philosophy and the social

sciences by which he kept trying to get beyond the arbitrary imposition of methodological limits

to valid understanding. The Oxford of the 1950s, where he found himself as a Rhodes Scholar

and then obtained his doctorate, was where linguistic method developed as an attempt to follow

ordinary language and common sense where it leads, in direct reaction against earlier, more

method-bound movements in the analytic tradition, such as logical positivism. But Taylor was

still unsatisfied with what he detected to be a lingering tendency to turn even attention to the

particularities of language and common sense into a hard method, and so turned to Maurice

Merleau-Ponty and phenomenology—and, once again, with a similar sensitivity to

methodological presuppositions that can subtly come to dominate the practices of the scholar or

thinker and the practices that are the object of his or her study.

In this early concern with the proclivity of theory to domineer over practice, Taylor can

be seen to be laying down the groundwork for his later concern with the dark side of the Reform

master narrative. He can also be seen as falling within a broad and loose categorization of post-

Heideggarian and -Wittegensteinian thought that has been labelled *practice theory*.[79] Practice

theory is "any theory that treats practice as a fundamental category, or takes practice as its point

of departure" (n.pag.), as David Stern puts it. That includes a lot of different thinkers, and a lot of

different ways of understanding what practice is, what theory is, and how they relate to one

another. But what is crucial for present purposes is the loose categorization itself.[80] What needs

to be recognized is how potentially radical the challenge of practice theory is to modern common

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[79] Or, as Stern points out, to avoid the potential of self-contradiction, one can speak of the "practical turn." But it is a matter of how theory is understood. As I am arguing in this chapter, theory, including the humanities, is properly seen as itself a form of practice.

[80] But, of course, I would hope that one effect of this thesis would be to send the reader to the philosophy itself—to Stern, then Hubert Dreyfus, "Holism," and others.

sense, a common sense that still dominates and still holds on stubbornly to theory as the fundamental category—for improving education, for progress, and so on—after a century of social thought that sees things quite differently.[81] *Paradigm shift* might be a way of saying what is going on here, except that the term is so often taken to refer only to different theories or methodologies and the choices between them.[82] That is still to give theory a certain advantage or priority, and this is exactly the common sense that practice theory puts in question. It is more a matter of running a hand over the picture puzzle of modern social thought and seeing theory and practice in a completely different way.

Stern encapsulates the significance of his loose categorization in these terms:

Perhaps the most significant point of agreement among those who have taken the practical turn is that it offers a way out of Procustean yet seemingly inescapable categories, such as subject and object, representation and represented, conceptual scheme and content, belief and desire, structure and action, rules and their application, micro and macro, individual and totality. Instead, practice theorists propose that we start with practices and rethink our theories from the ground up. . . .

Two of the most important characteristics of the practical turn are a holism about meaning—a holism that serves to undermine traditional [i.e., modern] distinctions—and an emphasis on the importance of close attention to particular practices and the context within which they are located. (n.pag.)

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[81] This is not everyone, of course, but there is a good case to be made that most of the most important and sophisticated social philosophers fall into the practice theory category. In education, this is channeled only by Dunne and Schön—but both already undermine themselves, undermine the essential radicality of the practical turn, and give in to the common sense of theory as dominant.

[82] Taylor and Dreyfus, *Retrieving Realism*, take on how people today are caught up in the representation paradigm even when claiming to be postmodern, and so on. They refer to Wittgenstein's statement that we have been held captive by a picture: that is, by the theory—or rather the matrix of modern theorizing, the background that we don't fully see but that makes us think we make sense of the world by formulating theories—that we understand reality through representations, that we have to theorize and articulate everything in order to understand everything or find meaning in anything. "To identify [to fully see] the picture would be to grasp a big mistake" (2). The solution to the problems this captivity by representation creates is not to create another picture or schematization but to dissolve the picture and just see reality. The implications are huge for modern education, which is fundamentally caught in the picture—that is, it is always trying to tinker with the representations of the young. Hence, the heavy handedness of modern education. It is so difficult to get out of this, to dissolve the picture, because it is so much a part of educational common sense and of the larger common sense.

The key pair of categories, however, is clearly that of *theory* and *practice*. It is this binary

opposition that, when worked through, provides a way in to untangling the dysfunctionality of

the others. When theory is given priority, these knotty problems keep coming up; but when

practice is seen to be primary, everything changes. Stern refers to Hubert Dreyfus's

"Wittgensteinian interpretation of Heidegger" as the best source of illumination for what is going

on here:

> Dreyfus draws a helpful distinction between two kinds of holism about
> meaning and interpretation. Theoretical holism holds that all understanding is
> a matter of interpreting, in the sense of applying a familiar theory, a "home
> language," to an unfamiliar one, the "target language." On this Quinean
> model, we always have to start from our understanding of our own language,
> an understanding that consists in a system of rules and representations.
> Practical holism is the view that while understanding "involves explicit beliefs
> and hypotheses, these can only be meaningful in specific contexts and against
> a background of shared practices" [Dreyfus, "Holism" 7]. The practical holist
> agrees with the theoretical holist that we are always already within the
> "hermeneutic circle"—we have no alternative to starting with our current
> understanding—but argues that theoretical holism mistakenly conceives of
> understanding a language on the model of formulating a theory, or mapping
> an unfamiliar landscape. This leaves out the background practices, equipment,
> locations, and broader horizons that are not specific presuppositions or
> assumptions, yet are part and parcel of our ability to engage in conversation or
> find our way about. (n.pag.)

First, in order to try to maintain our bearings while barely scratching the surface of the

philosophical considerations involved here, note that "our ability to engage in conversation or

find our way about" is fundamentally of educational concern. What one generation owes to the

next, in the final analysis, is a good start in getting its bearings and initiation into a conversation

that is more than a therapeutic/communicative script. What practice theory offers, I am

suggesting, is a way of getting our bearings on the way that human beings get their bearings.

The holism of theoretical holism is a vicious circle. We represent the world to ourselves

theoretically in order to solve its problems, putting on those representations more weight than

they can bear, and then this creates more problems, particularly problems of meaning, which compel more representations. It is this vicious circle that turns the initial conceptual mistake of taking a rule as sufficient in and of itself to guide action into our contemporary common sense of the importance of rules, maps, articulations, objectives, plans, and programs—the distorted habitus, or the background know-how, through which we pre-reflectively try to grapple with social problems, with one another, and with meaning. It becomes common sense that one can just come up with a set of rules, however ridiculously arbitrary or platitudinous, and then expect people to learn them, to adopt them, to find them meaningful, to get onboard—especially the young, who can offer little direct resistance. The Procrustean effects of theoretical holism are more than just theoretical.

The holism of practical holism, by contrast, is more holistic than the holism of theoretical holism. By abandoning the fateful mistake of assuming the sufficiency of theoretical articulation for determining and guiding what we should do, practice can be freed from the Procrustean demands of common-sense theory "back to the rough ground," in Wittgenstein's phrase. Again, I want to emphasize that this return to the rough ground is more than theoretical, more than setting out yet another new plan of action. If practice is indeed primary, then this needs to be followed through to the logical conclusion: theory itself is a form of practice. The trick is to avoid using this insight to keep compulsively feeding back into theoretical holism, to admit that theory is practice while continuing to claim that, by carefully following its own methods, it is capable of setting out the rules for practices. If theory is a form of practice, then it too emerges out of the rough ground, "the whole hurly-burly" (Wittgenstein, again, in Stern), of a habitus, and indeed of a whole reality, that makes the rationalization and systematization of practices impossible. If an orientation to the transcendent is to be rediscovered in this secular

age, then it will be a re-orientation toward the rough ground of practice. If we are to find a truly legitimate source of moral authority from which the young can be educated in a secular age, then it will be in that re-orientation.

As I have suggested above, the humanities and social sciences, even though plagued by self-doubt and going through a crisis of their own, and despite pressures to justify themselves in terms foreign to what they properly do (see discussion of Kronman and Fish in previous chapter), still manage to hold on to some sense of their disciplines as practices that arise from the rough ground. To be sure, many in these disciplines, and perhaps most in some of them, do tend to assume a smooth ground, beneath which there are no unexpected surprises lurking, and upon which their proposals for the progress of society and the enlightenment of other people can predictably and unproblematically be based. But there is still, as I have suggested, in the very way these subjects are taught in the university, something that frustrates that tendency and keeps the discipline, more or less, in the realm of practice. This is simply that students right from the beginning—whether in philosophy, history, or sociology—are immersed in the theory of the discipline. How difficult it is to see what is going on—in society, in the past, conceptually—is something that can't be hidden from them, nor the fact that, if they want to learn to see, rather than just finish the course and get a mark, then they are going to have to adopt the practices of the discipline and make them, to greater or lesser degree, their own. The student is engaged in

becoming a theorist, a thinker, right away.[83] And the kind of theory he or she is engaged in is at

base a very simple and honest kind of theory—theory as trying to see, to understand.[84]

Modern educational thought, on the other hand, is theory that is tied slavishly to the

improvement of schooling and so is caught up almost inextricably in self-perpetuating theoretical

holism.[85] The teaching of educational thought within education faculties is one sign and

symptom. Whatever appreciation for the humanities the undergraduate student teacher might or

might not have acquired, he or she is retaught in learning to become a teacher that theory is not

for contemplation but for application, for the guidance of practice—indeed, for the guidance of a

strange sort of practice that is all about, and perhaps only about, creating guidelines for young

people. The nature of the whole enterprise accustoms the teacher candidate not only to looking to

theory for the rules, but to conceiving of what he or she is doing in terms of further articulations

of course objectives, lesson plans, and so on.[86] It is important to recognize how at the most basic

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[83] What does a general education teach of a discipline? To become an historian, a philosopher, and so on, in the sense of being able to think historically, philosophically. But that doesn't mean training to do research in the discipline, which is something that properly comes later. It is possible to think about what a historian considers evidence without going off in search of it. In fact, it is necessary to think about these things a lot before diving into the archives, or one won't have any sense of what one is doing. Hence, the danger in recent revisionist thought on history teaching, such as that of Sam Wineburg, is of falling into traps of contemporary activity mania and being too "practical" in teaching the practice of history: for example, getting kids to race madly around the neighborhood interviewing everyone. Not that kids shouldn't talk to old people, but that is largely another question from the study of history.

[84] In "What Is Practice?" Hans Georg Gadamer discusses two kinds of theory in relation to two kinds of practice. The older kind of theory, as Gadamer describes it, informed the eye that was "disciplined enough to discern the visibly structured order of the heavens and the order of the world and of human society" (69). This left room for thick practice and freedom of action. The other kind of theory, starting with modern science and spreading to social thought that comes under its influence, is not about seeing but about powerful forms of abstraction that by their nature are geared to prediction and application: that is, manipulation. Practice, conceived of as application, is constrained and impoverished by this kind of theory (69–71).

[85] Ivan Illich quipped in 1992 that "the last fifty years of intensive improvement of schooling . . . have created television consumers" (*Conversation* 68–69).

[86] And so also it accustoms the teacher to the functionary role of the teacher, a role often held up against the critical thinking teacher, but seldom with critical awareness of how normative the functionary role is and how difficult it is to extricate oneself from it, with little awareness of what the teacher is really up against. If authority rests ultimately in some articulation of educational objectives, then "someone" (even common sense or the dominant ethos) is in charge of sorting and ordering the theoretical articulations, and there is inevitably an arbitrariness to this, a corresponding procrustean imperative, and more than a bit of MacIntyre's "histrionics" to make sure it is all convincing (see below).

level this means becoming entrenched in theoretical holism, and correspondingly becoming cut off from practical holism.

The implications of this entrenchment in theoretical holism are vast, all-pervasive, and continually self-reinforcing. It can be seen readily and clearly enough how teaching teachers to teach by showing them how to apply theories will have its constraining effects not only in the realm of practice as commonly understood but, more particularly, on the practice of theory or of disciplined humanistic thought. The teacher going back to graduate school to advance his or her career, and maybe even to become an academic in the field, falls into a situation full of paradox and outright contradiction. Unlike the humanities graduate, and particularly one with a four-year degree, the teacher-become-graduate-student claims to know how to apply theories of teaching but, because of that very orientation to theory, does not have a facility with theory in itself, with the practice of thinking theoretically in a humanistic way.[87] Indeed, it would not be unfair to say that there is in education graduate school, generally, a considerable distaste or at least lack of enthusiasm for philosophical, sociological, and historical thought about education, and an impatience with that kind of theoretical thinking. The graduate student wants to get on with the grown up work of research. So, speaking the letter of the truth, thinking about education is presented to the education graduate student as something one does—and, perhaps here as in other areas, the hope seems to be that the harder, the more "passionately," the more rigourously, and just the more, one does it, the more meaning it will generate. For all intents and purposes education research has come to seem sufficient as the primary mode of thought about education,

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[87] Again, the numbers in Crocker and Dibbon reflect—across the board in BEd grads, faculty, and administrators— what is undeniably less than enthusiasm for philosophy, sociology, and history of education, and presumably for that kind of theoretical thinking; and yet, across the board, these three roles are bound to the authority of theory, which ultimately has to be social theory, for knowing what they should do, justifying what they do, and telling everyone else what to do.

and so this is what education graduate students are taught to do. And philosophical preferences are left at the door, or are at least made a matter of mere preference. Of course, there is a textbook recognition that research must be anchored in theory, and this is indeed met, but not in the way a Mills or any other humanistic scholar would recognize. Education research may be anchored in theories—sometimes grabbed at like straws, sometimes emerging out of a critical mass of academic-fad generated research—but it is not anchored in the imagination disciplined in looking at the social world.

Now, this is very tricky territory. But it is crucial to try to get a grasp of what is going on here, because doing so can serve as that hand over the double-image puzzle, allowing the image that is harder to see to come out. Theoretical holism seems like a common-sense way of making sense of the world, and in seeming to make so much sense it prevents the other way from appearing. The problem is that theoretical holism keeps explaining itself as doing exactly what it is not doing, as having what it most lacks. It keeps presenting itself as practical holism. It keeps producing, through its own rationalizing means, solutions that appear to carry the meaningfulness needed to counterbalance the effects of that rationalism. This should sound familiar by now, because it captures the initial sense I had that the idea of teaching about religion was somehow trying to achieve meaning in education in a less than honest way: by simply setting out a rationalized, administrable program for all children, it would, through its very association with "religion," somehow fulfill perennial intergenerational responsibilities and provide the young with the grounding in meaningfulness associated with religion and religious formation. But I also had the feeling that the AR idea was very typical of the ideas and plans that people come up with for education in the way it seemed to be desperately grasping for meaning, and therefore that it was just an example of something. Now, how the source of this educational

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grasping at straws can itself best be grasped, I want to suggest, is in terms of these holisms or

paradigms. But it is tricky, because of this compulsive tendency within theoretical holism to

claim to be able to address its own shortcomings. This just prevents, despite all efforts, the full

significance of the distinction between paradigms from being recognized.

But the problem of meaning is very much sensed, and that sense can be detected

everywhere, as I have been suggesting throughout this thesis. One of the key signs is found in the

common sense that takes the place of methodological thought in education research. Here, as

noted above, even in the Ary et al. textbook, "phenomenological" or qualitative research is

assumed to be able to add back richness to the whole enterprise. The trouble with this

assumption is that the real methodological thought to which this common sense ultimately

refers—for example, that of Gadamer—is actually a justification of the humanistic disciplines,

making the case that all study of human affairs is grounded in these disciplines or practices rather

than in any following of scientific method. Yet it is just this faith in the humanistic disciplines

that is so remarkably absent from education research. Qualitative research in the field reflects

overwhelmingly an unhumanistic attachment, first of all, to formulaic methods and, more

diffusely, to the matter-of-factness of all articulations. The latter attachment can be seen, for

example, in the refusal to read between the lines in work based on interviews (Sennett,

interview). And it must not be forgotten that young people are ultimately on the receiving end of

all such methodological rigidities. Thus, in "student voice" research, the young subjects

invariably say what they think they are supposed to say, and so the researchers, following the

rules of method but lacking in the disciplines of insight, manage through a sort of ventriloquial

trick to give the latest educational fad the spontaneity and vibrancy of youth.[88] But it is only self-deception to think that anyone in these kinds of studies that focus so literally on what is said has actually been heard, much less that the real social situation of the educational enterprise has been seen.

One particular area of much recent research shows how near, at times, the sense of the lack of meaning can come, and yet how far off any real paradigm shift can be kept. If AR is only an example, but a fruitful one for unpacking the sense that exists only slightly below the surface of the problem of meaning in education, the idea of *reflective practice* that has taken hold in research and thought on the teaching of teachers over the last twenty years or so is fruitful as well for seeing how the most earnest attempts to work educational thought out of theoretical holism eventually get sucked back in. It may seem excessively bleak and unhelpful on my part, to turn my critique on those who, on the face of it, are those in the education world most in tune with my own line of thought. But I have to keep insisting here that the only solution is to keep resisting implementable solutions, and instead just to keep trying to see—which is all that theory can do. And the trap that the reflective-practice contingent falls into is precisely this: its self-contradictory eagerness to turn practice theory itself into a plan of action, another way of getting everyone on board.

Thus, while the general thrust of this body of literature is ostensibly to free practice from the arbitrary technicist dictates of theory, the end effect of most of the suggestions that

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[88] Michael Fielding is one author in the student voice field who sees the idea as promising radical, emancipatory change but acknowledges that the sense of empowerment that it gives is often turned into a "mechanism of control" (100). He notes the presence in this research of "the partialities of presumption and the predilection for, often premature, closure" (107), yet he still seems to remain committed to a model in which inarticulate children team up with facilitators of communicativity. This cannot but lead back to presumption and closure. I would suggest that the same kinds of subtle coercions that Lynn Revell sees in classroom dialogue are inevitable in the student voice movement as well.

come out of it is to tighten that grip, and part of what I am trying to emphasize here is the importance of always keeping an eye on those effects. Otherwise, it is the easiest thing to get lost—I don't want to say lost in theory, which could be a good thing if that means pursuing the practice of theorizing—but lost in the theoretical holism, which is something else. So, for example, there is the insight underlying much of this literature that, if the individual teacher is taught to establish habits of reflectiveness, this should play an important role in freeing that teacher from being a mere functionary who only applies the theories and plans established by someone else. No doubt there is a large basis of true insight here. Certainly it is a key part of the idea of a liberal education that learning to think through the humanistic disciplines can help to free one from the tyrannies of the workaday world. But that is somehow not quite what this literature has in mind. Everything depends on how this learning to reflect is done and (the big theme of this thesis, again) on what background the initial insight or intuition gets plugged into.

Much like AR, teaching teachers to be reflective gets plugged back into the common sense of educational thought. The constraints on practice that emerge are generally not noticed in the literature, because the theory, in terms of what is articulated, serves as sufficient indication that this whole approach to the teaching of teachers is being worked out in the name of practice. The little slips in consistency are evident enough, when one is on the lookout for them. It is not hard to find, for example, suggestions for turning reflection into a planned "activity," by giving the student teachers, perhaps, "five minutes to reflect." Indeed, the overall image of the teacher education classroom that emerges from this literature is, despite the claims on behalf of practice, one of intensified micro-management of practice, including what amounts to the invention of new techniques for encroaching on and managing the very thought processes of student teachers. Much as in the students in the student voice literature, the student teachers subject to this regime

always seem to end up unreflectively reflecting their way to just the insights that the teachers of

teachers have in mind, which, again, is usually constituted by the material of already

theoretically tainted educational common sense and background ethos. Central to this common

sense is simply the assumption that everything must be articulated in order to get it under

control. The whole idea of teacher education is based on the need to foolproof the system, to

ensure that everyone does it properly. It is no wonder, then, when attempts to add reflective

meaning back into the whole endeavour turns into the teaching of teachers to continually

articulate what it is they are doing and to continually formulate their own rules and mini-theories,

which are bound to cling desperately to the authority of the theories provided by the teachers of

teachers or by the essentially rationalizing educational common sense and

therapeutic/communicative ethos of the times.[89]

It is the stickiness of this background that, ironically, seems to have been overlooked in

the serious theoretical work behind the reflective-practice fad. Now, the work of Donald Schön

and, I would say, especially of the philosopher of education Joseph Dunne deserves to be

engaged in its own terms. The bulk of Dunne's book is a thorough and quite excellent analysis of

the concepts of *phronesis* and *techne* in a handful of key philosophers. It might be argued, in

retrospect, that the present thesis should have taken the form of just such an engagement with the

substance of Dunne's work, trying to pinpoint exactly where he went wrong in an analysis that

is, on the whole, an honest attempt to get at exactly the right thing. This engagement with Dunne

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[89] There is a considerable literature of critique of the idea of reflective practice, most of which, while highlighting one aspect or another (e.g., the coercive side of getting people to reflect; for which, see Revell), is internal and gets pulled back in through the concern with improving teaching of reflective practice, and so on.

is something that certainly deserves further attention, but not before stepping back from the trees of his analysis to see the forest surrounding his interpretation of its implications.[90]

Dunne himself relegates his reflections on implications for education to the introduction and epilogue of his book. Here we see that, despite the problem being the all-pervasive technical rationality of modern culture, the blame is hung on particular theories and research methods. This tends to preclude recognition of the generative background that everyone is already wrapped up in before coming up with their theories. Thus, in his introduction to what, it must be remembered, is a general work of hermeneutical philosophy rather than specifically of philosophy of education, Dunne takes his example of technical rationality from the world of education and identifies "the behavioral objectives model"—and most notably Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy—as representative of the problem. And then in the epilogue, when he returns to education to draw out the implications of what he has been talking about, the illusion evidently remains that all that is needed is to get rid of the faulty theoretical models and replace them with theoretical models more compatible with practical rationality.

The few pages that he gives to the topic read very much like a plan of the reflective-practice research agenda that was, at the time, still just emerging under the main influence of Schön. This agenda is, in the end, simply about improvement of teaching and of education through emphasizing methods that can add meaning back to the whole enterprise. It emphasizes the meaning side of things, but it fits quite well into the peaceful vision of education research. So, having gone through an arduous solo journey of philosophical analysis for 350 pages, it is as if his colleagues and the whole teaching profession have shown up to meet Dunne at his

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[90] All I can say, at this point, is that I suspect the problem lies in an over emphasis on the role of deliberation in phronesis, in such a way that allows for technical theory to come in again through the back door. But, as I say, this requires a close reading, which I cannot provide here.

destination and to make sure he comes to the right conclusions. Those conclusions are centred on

teaching as a profession/practice and on the importance of reflection/deliberation/articulation to

that profession/practice. I am deliberately trying to capture the interchangeability of the

terminology here, because there is some fudging going on. A modern profession, as teaching is

supposed to be, depends on the authority of a body of professional knowledge and theory based

in solid research. Dunne, though trying to fight the "Procrustean advances from technocratic

'educationalists,'" isn't fundamentally enough challenging that modern, technicist conception of

a profession. Rather, he is suggesting ways of improving it and making it more meaningful by

treating it as a practice, with all that that implies about freedom from the arbitrary dictates of

theory. But we have seen that that rationalization pervades everything in the education world,

even where it is not immediately apparent. And so too, somehow, in Dunne's work, the

deliberation associated with practice gets turned into the theory that constrains practice. Even

here we find instructions inadvertently provided for tightening rather than loosening the reigns,

right at the very heart of the educational enterprise, where teachers are taught:

> In being initiated into the practice of teaching, student-teachers need not only
> experience in the classroom but also the right conditions for reflecting on this
> experience—so that reflectiveness (which we have all the time been clarifying
> under the name of "phronesis") can become more and more an abiding
> attitude or disposition.
>   The main aim of "educational studies" should be to contribute to the
> development of this disposition. (369)

And this disposition comes down, in the end, given that most teachers aren't going to be

philosophers (or humanistic intellectuals), to the articulation of what is to be done, a disposition

to always be articulating what one is doing:

> A good teacher might find that a work such as this did little, directly, to
> improve her practice—other than to help her to articulate it better. The value
> of such articulation, however, is not to be underestimated. (368)

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It's certainly is not to be underestimated in a culture whose ethos carries the imperative to always be communicating and articulating. It can, as Illouz points out in her work, allow one to get along. Still, to learn to be a teacher by learning to always be articulating what one is doing is to learn to be highly rationalized in what one does. And it is not only the teacher and her own practice, but everyone affected by her practice, every student in her class, who becomes the object of this rationalization. But Dunne sees it simply as an extension of his attempt to make room for practical wisdom in the modern world. And, because education research is the form taken by educational thought, research is also a key form for a teacher's reflection to take:

> Teachers will be encouraged to see themselves much more as researchers—
> and thus to become member of a profession that reflects on itself with a higher
> degree of universality and explicitness—rather than being simply *consumers*,
> and often indeed simply *objects*, of research carried out by experts (the word
> "expert" would thus recover something of its original meaning of
> "experienced"). (369)

It is doubtable how much the teacher's experience is returned to her through this highly theoretical prescription that she become a researcher and turn her own experience—not to mention that of the young people in her charge—into what, even for action research, will be a rationalized object. The fundamental problem has never been only that the teacher has to apply the theories or achieve the objectives of those above her. This does not go deep enough. The problem is in the compulsion for someone, anyone, even the teacher along with her students, continually to be formulating those objectives and theories, continually trying to articulate what to do with the massive and apparently powerful means provided by schooling. So, the suggestion, which is now a commonplace in education faculties, that the teacher becomes her own researcher only underlines and intensifies these already well-entrenched patterns of meaning

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anxiety and desperate search for what to do, what to provide that fulfills that responsibility, a desperation so well reflected in education research.

This attempt to describe where Dunne has gone wrong has, so far, relied on showing his intimate connection to the reflective-practice agenda that has emerged and flourished in teacher education and teacher-education research from around the time of Dunne's book, and the contradictions and paradoxes evident there, especially the attachment to articulation and, ultimately, the underlying impulse to get everyone on board, even in the freeing of practice from the constraints of theory. I want now to try to say a bit more about what is involved here in the problem with education and schooling and to do this by bringing in Alasdair MacIntyre. MacIntyre had praised Dunne's book in his foreword to the second edition, but when Dunne in turn interviewed MacIntyre for the *Journal of the Philosophy of Education* a point of dispute emerged between the two: whether or not teaching is a practice. We have seen through Stern's treatment of practice theory that the very concept of a practice is open to different interpretations, and MacIntyre himself during the interview at one point admits that it is difficult to hold on to the point of the dispute, so this is a tricky question to take up. But, as long as we keep in mind the rough and ready nature of the concepts involved, it is a question that is well worth taking up again, trying to see its significance.[91]

We need to begin with MacIntyre's definition of *a* practice in *After Virtue*, which introduces a crucial distinction into what is admittedly (even for Stern) a hard to define concept. While practice in general may well include the patterns of behavior and habits that form the ethos or social background—for example, the tendency to view all social problems as

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[91] It was actually taken up in a special issue of the *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, edited by Joseph Dunne and Pádraig Hogan, without MacIntyre's participation. There was not much effort to draw out what one of the great philosophers of our time might have been getting at in the original interview.

ameliorable through quasi-therapeutic discussion—there are also practices which are set somewhat apart from the more general social background and that take considerable focused effort to master. It is this class of practices that MacIntyre has in mind, and that I want to suggest are of particular significance for education. As he puts it,

> by "a practice" I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity 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. Tic-tac-toe is not an example of a practice in this sense, nor is throwing a football with skill; but the game of football is, and so is chess. Bricklaying is not a practice; architecture is. . . ." (187)

Now, there is considerable room for dispute here about what does and does not constitute a practice. The point is to be ready to recognize that, in this sense, at least, a practice is complex enough to have its own internal standards, which are not judgeable by those who have not mastered or at least developed an appreciation for the practice. The social significance of practices is huge, because it is through the development of such appreciation of these excellences for their own sake, and the virtues involved in respecting them, that one begins to form the more general virtues. For MacIntyre practices are the seedbeds of the virtues. They win, from the person learning the practice, recognition of standards internal to the practice, by which that person's performance is judged; and in so doing they win a crucial acknowledgement of sources of authority beyond oneself (190). It could also be said, though I don't know that MacIntyre has ever said it in these words, that they are the sources of the sense of meaning, because practices demand attention to the fine distinctions of meaning within their own worlds.

But if practices are concerned with excellences, virtues, and meaning, there is also the possibility of distortions and debasements creeping in. MacIntyre's brief but incisive discussion

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of the relation of institutions and practices is instructive. "Practices must not be confused with institutions," he says:

> Chess, physics and medicine are practices; chess clubs, laboratories, universities and hospitals are institutions. Institutions are characteristically and necessarily 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 practices can survive for any length of time unsustained by institutions. Indeed so intimate is the relationship of practices to 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 the 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. In this context the essential function of the virtues is clear. Without them, without justice, courage and truthfulness, practices could not resist the corrupting power of institutions. (194)

So, practices and institutions provide much opportunity for things to go wrong! And what I want to suggest is that it need not only be any literal kind of "acquisitiveness" on the institution's part that sets the corruption in motion. It can also be ideals, good intentions, social reform initiatives taken on by institutions above and beyond what practices are capable of actually doing.

To return now to the Dunne interview, MacIntyre has been talking about the need in the early years for children to get lots of practice at the basic academic skills and then in the higher grades the need for teachers to "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 or responding to it as part of a community of readers, of historical enquiry. And part of what such students need to learn is to value, for example, the activities and outcomes of scientific enquiry for their own sake and not just for the technologies that result from such enquiry" (5). He then goes on to make a point, no doubt remembering what Dunne has said in his book:

> . . . What I have said implies 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. 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. . . . (5)

At the risk of favouritism, I am going to skip over Dunne's quite lengthy objections and pick up again on MacIntyre's final response to them:

> It is not clear to me how far we disagree. You say that teaching is itself a practice. I say that teachers are involved in a variety of practices and that teaching is an ingredient in every practice. And perhaps the two claims amount to very much the same thing; but perhaps not. For it is part of my claim that teaching is never more than a means, that it has no point and purpose except for the point and purpose of the activities to which it introduces students. 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; the life of a teacher of music whose goods are the goods of music is another. . . . (9)

Now, what MacIntyre is doing here, above and beyond what he is actually saying, is to reveal the other paradigm, the other way of seeing education that is precluded by educational common sense and all the baggage that that carries. I may be expanding on this further than MacIntyre would want to take it—or maybe not—but note that his characterization of teaching is quite similar to his characterization of institutions. Both are merely means to the achievement of ends external to themselves. It would be worthwhile tracing historically the ins and outs of the decline of practices, in MacIntyre's sense, in modern schooling, which is yet another thing that cannot be done here. Suffice it to say that the institution of modern schooling created the profession (or claimed practice) of teaching (e.g., to prevent boredom through improved teaching), and that

reified teaching, in turn, supports the aspirations of the institution. That is to say, both are powerful means, ever in search of, and ever trying to articulate, ends. Teaching as a profession or quasi-practice forgets the practices which it properly serves and goes off elsewhere in search of meaning and pursues its project of Reform even while continually losing and reasserting the purpose of that Reform.

Contemplating the Child

I opened this chapter by comparing Kieślowski's Paweł to a sunflower, because if we can see that in a child then there is hope that we can see our way out of the idolatry of reason into which we have sunk, the idolatry which prevents us from seeing. It could be said that there is a philosophical anthropology of childhood entailed in practice theory, and it looks a lot like Paweł. That is part of what art and humanistic study can do: allow a direct vision of the real world and the real people in it, and so give the lie to the elaborate constructions of reason that we create. In this regard, film, since its very beginning, has had a significant obsession with children, with how children see the world and with how film allows us to see them.[92]

Samantha Morton's *The Unloved* is set in Britain's child protection system rather than the classroom. But a transposition in the imagination can be illuminating, if we are thinking in terms of systems. One brief school scene that takes place only in the background proceedings of a gym class from which the girl is herself sitting out, suggests the comparison is indeed valid. The children are being put through their paces by a teacher who was evidently desperate the night before to come up with a new lesson plan, and has them choosing different parts of their

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[92] Vicky Lebeau explores this obsession in *Childhood and Cinema*: "The image of the child on screen is an object to think with . . ." (13); and "it is a recurring theme: children and childhoods as forever fading within, falling between, the words that might attempt to describe them" (16).

bodies and then supposedly propelling themselves around the gym using only those parts. No doubt the teacher has also articulated to herself a theory that claims some sort of purpose to the exercise: that it will promote body awareness or resourcefulness, perhaps. But it remains an arbitrary purpose to an arbitrary exercise. The scene is funny in itself, but, when children are trapped for 12 years in a world in which they are subject to plans and purposes that may seem commonsensical but are in reality just as arbitrary, it may not be quite as funny.

In any case, the serious main thrust of the film is the unfolding of the fate of a girl of about 11 within and in relation to the system she finds herself in after she has been beaten by her alcoholic father and realizes that she must seek help. On one level, the film delivers the sort of critical observations of the child protection system that might be expected from a film dealing with a hot-button issue like this. In her group-home experience, she witnesses the aerosol sniffing by and the sexual abuse of her roommate, as well as the general dysfunctionality of the home. Her main case-worker, at one point, complains about not being able to see her more often, because of austerity measures and the transportation restrictions set out by the office. The film itself ends with the statement that "71,746 children are in care in the UK; 36,405 children are on the 'at risk' register in the UK." All of these elements have led at least one reviewer to dismiss the film as a work of art, calling it instead an advocacy project, an appeal for charity. The system can be fixed with more money for more research into the establishment of best practices for greater effectiveness and accountability. This is a familiar kind of appeal and rationale—obvious to the point that any other kind of response to the problems of youth in our society is hardly imaginable. There is a circularity of self-justification to this procedure of seeking fixes that is hard to escape: for example, putting the number up on the screen implies that the number needs to be brought down, but that can only be done, supposedly, by feeding the system. It is

understandable, then, how, if this kind of appeal is what the film amounts to, it must be dead and dry as a work of art.

But there is much more going on here, and it is so easy to overlook because it is so difficult to see beyond the rationalism that ever increasingly guides and undergirds our thinking about our responsibilities to the young. If the film offers any glimmer of hope for the girl to survive the system, it is a glimmer from entirely outside the parameters of the system's rationality, which also means beyond the therapeutic rationality of facilitative communication, and so depends on her being able to separate herself from it without sinking into the holes that swallow up those around her.

The key scene is easy to miss, because nothing happens in it that is not entirely ordinary, entirely part of the expected procedure. The case worker has come in to talk to the girl, and she talks to her, of course, from the clipboard, going one by one through all of the things that need to be dealt with. None of these things seem very important to the girl. She has exactly the look of a child who is in the presence of an adult going one by one through a list of things that need to be dealt with. When given an opportunity to raise any of her own concerns, she finally voices the question that is really pre-occupying her: Why can't she live with her mother? The professional answer is straightforward and measured: it is not possible, for now. That option has already been examined and checked off.

For the girl, the "why" is existential. It comes from a world entirely beyond the vision of rationalized care—a world that, nevertheless, happens to be the real world. It would be missing the point for the caseworker to seriously try to organize everyone involved (perhaps into another committee) and then facilitate delivery of the answer to this question. But it is somehow quite imaginable for a social worker, given, say, a more well-funded system and a lighter

caseload, to claim to be able to take on such a task. The whole system depends on the assumption that everything is open to facilitation. Of course, to assume that everything is articulable for this purpose is to overlook everything that isn't articulable. The girl's question calls not for the correct procedure of addressing a child's inquiries, but for following the logic of life. Indeed, it is literally in her personal predilection for long, meandering, unauthorized walks that her glimmer of hope lies. She first developed this rudimentary spiritual discipline, no doubt, as a way of dealing with her father's bouts of drunkenness. It also turns out to be what sparks his drunken rage. In the end, it gives her a means of distancing herself from the system she seems destined to live within, and it leads her, if not to any clear answers, at least back to the love of both parents, however inscrutable each may remain. The "message" of the film, I think, cannot be merely the improvement of such a fundamentally flawed system. It is a bleak film, but if there is any hope it has to be a hope that there may somehow emerge a new kind of institutional support for children in trouble, something outside of it all, like the girl's walks.

Another image comes from the John Boorman film, *Hope and Glory*, and, like the interview scene in *The Unloved*, it is a scene from the end that captures well the spirit of the whole film. On the morning of what is supposed to be the start of a new academic year in wartime London, John is driven to school by his grumpy, school-denouncing grandfather. When they arrive and he goes in through the gate to the schoolyard, it is a scene of mayhem, with not only the expected running and skipping of children but the rushing about of firemen as well. The school has been hit by a bomb overnight, and is still smoldering. There will be no school for the year. John's friend Roger in a spontaneous expression of joy, raises his arms to the sky and shouts "Thank you, Adolph!" The semi-autobiographical film is Boorman's meditative expression of thanks, however ambivalent, for a childhood that was paradoxically able to thrive

amid so much destruction. In fact, it was allowed to thrive so well, it seems, precisely because of the disruption of the usual order of things. For most of the length of the film we simply get a glimpse of the things that John experienced and observed: the absence of his father, the pregnancy of his sister, the absurd scenes of play amid ruins, the eventual loss of the family home. The heightened sense of life and death shared by all around him was the beginning of his real education. A brief classroom scene from relatively early in the film shows, in contrast, a caricaturish pedant who is fixated on driving home the significance of "the pink bits" on the map (i.e., the British Empire). The schoolyard scene comes at the end of the film, after we have seen John gradually get used to his grandfather's eccentricities while staying at his home on the river outside of London. It is only in the closing voice-over, however, that we get a sense of how the grandfather will back up his denunciations of school now that he has time to give John a real education.

Chapter 6: Apprenticeship Revisited

In *Juvenescence: A Cultural History of Our Age*, Robert Pogue Harrison reflects (from

within the humanistic disciplines) on the paradox of a youth-obsessed society in which the adult

generations seem to be covertly at war with the young. He makes the following Arendtian

observation:

> The greatest blessing a society can confer on its young is to turn them into the
> heirs, rather than the orphans, of history. It is also the greatest blessing a
> society can confer on itself, for heirs rejuvenate the heritage by creatively
> renewing its legacies. Orphans, by contrast, relate to the past as an alien
> unapproachable continent—if they relate to it at all. Our age seems intent on
> turning the world as a whole into an orphanage, for reasons that no one—least
> of all the author of this book—truly understands. (xi–xii)

This thesis emerged out of a suspicion that the idea of teaching about religion offers a false

inheritance to the young. It has turned into a wide-ranging exploration of some key aspects of the

total institution in which that deception or self-deception takes place, especially the tendency to

deny the logic of inheritance, which is really the same as the logic of meaning. I use "total

institution" here just as metaphorically as Harrison uses "orphanage," although certainly the

modern school comes pretty close to actually realizing that tempting dream of all or most

modern institutions, with the sheer amount of time it exacts from the daily lives of young people

and with the profound effect such a corralling of young hours is bound to have on the world of

everyone who passes through it. The aims are totalistic, or are invariably formulated in terms of a

totalistic getting everyone on board, and so they justify totalistic means. We are still caught in

Comenius' abstract dream of "teaching all things to all men."[93] No longer sure what it means to

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[93] "We venture to promise a Great Didactic, that is to say, the whole art of teaching all things to all men, and indeed
of teaching them with certainty, so that the result cannot fail to follow; further, of teaching them pleasantly, that is to
say, without annoyance or aversion on the part of teacher or pupil, but rather with the greatest enjoyment for both;
further of teaching them thoroughly, not superficially and showily, but in such a manner as to lead to true
knowledge, to gentle morals, and to the deepest piety. Lastly, we wish to prove all this a priori, that is to say, from

form the young within a habitus that shapes character beyond our efforts at formation, we think it might somehow redress the imbalance if we teach them a codified, quasi-reverent "respect" of all religions.[94] The totalism of schooling is justified by, given substance by, and completed in the theoretical holism that has become common sense, entwined with the very ethos of our culture. Children learn very early, and absorb from the air they breathe that feelings, relationships, possibilities, purposes, meaning, and authority are all easily articulable, schematizable, manipulable, and manageable. Modern compulsory schooling makes sense, and can be taken so much for granted, because dealing with our responsibilities to the next generation by means of setting out and managing plans and objectives makes sense. And it makes sense, when those plans and objectives fall flat or have undesirable consequences, to manage the problems by desperately generating more plans and objectives. The puzzle is how to get a grip on this dynamic so that anxiety about the responsibility to give the inheritance that is due the young, the inheritance of the humanities, for Harrison, does not turn it all into a false inheritance administered within a total institution.

Underlying all of this apparently self-assured management of inter-generational responsibilities on an experiential level is a naïve faith in the bald matter-of-factness of everything. There is little recognition of any mode of understanding beyond immediate understanding that might require something like a long process of initiation before anything like inheritance is possible. The adult response to the young, it seems, itself comes out of a certain moment in modern youthfulness: the moment of disenchantment, when all the possibilities are

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the unalterable nature of the matter itself, drawing off, as from a living source, the constantly flowing runlets, and bringing them together again into one concentrated stream, that we may lay the foundations of the universal art of founding universal schools" (John Amos Comenius par. 3).

[94] See Paul Woodruff, *Reverence*, for an interesting discussion of the possibility of maintaining a genuinely reverent orientation within a secular world.

arrayed, each being perfectly articulable and all being equally flat. Harrison speaks of such a

moment partly in terms of what he calls *Americanism*, but in a way that applies quite generally to

the therapeutic/communicative ethos, reflecting as it does a youthfully ignorant faith in the

sufficiency of matter-of-fact, two-dimensional schematizations of other cultural possibilities.

Quoting his friend Michel Serres from a conversation, he says, "While America is

comprehensible from the perspective of all other cultures, it is the perspective from which all

other cultures are incomprehensible" (146). They are incomprehensible precisely because of the

unquestionability of their comprehensibility. They are all essentially plottable on the matter-of-

fact diagram of cultural possibilities. And if those other cultures look into that two-dimensional

world, that screen of contemporary culture, long enough, then they become unintelligible to

themselves. That is the dark side of contemporary juvenescence for Harrison. But there is also

the sense of newness and wonder of the child, and Harrison's question is whether there is hope

that some kind of cultural recovery of this may also be part of the historical trajectory we are on.

Can we, culturally, grow younger still?

Perhaps. And perhaps that possibility is tied in with the problem of meaning into which

secularization has led its own educational project. But we will not discover what re-enchantment

might be for a secular age simply by going back to a time before secularization, which would

really only be going back to a modern idea of what that should be, nor by trying desperately to

hang on to a youthful sense of wonder and possibility, which, as we should know, only ends in

coaxing bored youth to fain excitement. If we really want to uncover something of significance

in the current cultural youthful turn, we need to face and work through, rather than always try to

plaster a smiley face over, the 12-plus years of boredom to which we sentence young people.

Consider how the sense of wonder changes and develops through childhood and youth. To get back to the true source of childhood wonder, as Chesterton insisted, it is necessary to go back to the very dawn of consciousness. The wonder of a seven-year-old over the opening of a door upon a dragon in a story is already a somewhat jaded form of wonder; it is the three-year-old's wonder at the door simply opening that is truly pristine. "Tales say that apples were golden only to refresh the forgotten moment when we found they were green" (*Orthodoxy* 51). And, although Chesterton suggests that there is hope of returning to something of this original wonder later in life ("Pleasures"), there is certainly no educational plan that will sustain indefinitely childhood excitement and enthusiasm, as adults reinterpret it. And there is no spiritual regimen that everyone can be put on to ensure a re-enchanting Reformation of society. The best way, I would suggest, to redress the sense of lost meaning is not to strive desperately to go back in time or to try to get back to the state of "excitement" that we project onto children, but to get back in attunement with the natural maturation of the child's own desires. Those desires become more and more seriously directed toward inheritance of the practices of the adult world in late childhood and adolescence, the age of traditional apprenticeship.[95] And in religious contexts they lead as well into the shaping of character in what is called formation. But to the extent *religion* is a suspect category—"religions" not being as easily separable from entire forms of life as we usually imagine—to that same extent, formation itself cannot be limited to the merely religious in a secular age. This is really what AR tends to do: to identify meaningful worlds with these

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[95] For a multifaceted discussion of the problems faced by youth in fulfilling this desire for the inheritance of practices in our changing and confusing society, see Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Barbara Schneider, *Becoming Adult*: "In principle there is no reason why young people should not have the chance to learn directly, hands-on, what it means to be a nuclear engineer, oceanographer, plumber, or physician. But in practice adolescents have become extremely sheltered from adult work. . . . We mainly train them to be consumers—of abstract information, entertainment, and mostly useless products—with too little regard for concrete, active engagement with the environment. What is needed is an opportunity for youth to experience the joys and responsibilities of making things happen, without being prematurely drawn into monotonous work" (219–20).

things that are called "religion," even though a majority of the young people will not have any strong connection with these worlds. To so limit it is inevitably to tend on the whole toward something much less than formation, toward moralism and the invocation of platitudes.

This is the point of my claim of the insufficiency of what I take to be Hunter's and J. K. A. Smith's position, the sophisticated Christian position, for formation. My question is, What about all of those for whom full participation in a religious tradition is not an authentic possibility? It is not as simple as suggesting that everyone adopt a faith tradition so that they can educate their children within it. That is not where most people are. Moreover, as Hunter himself admits, even Catholic education has become deeply influenced by the larger cultural ethos, so that, in a sense, the educators in these schools have been largely formed by something other than the formation that they claim to be giving to their Catholic students.[96] A religious tradition may, but won't necessarily, provide a way to get a grip on the problem of meaning that secularization has left us with. Even there, there is the question of what background is *really* forming the young. In relation to that background, even what is intended in a sophisticated way as religious formation could well turn out empty in that regard. And, again, to this I say, If we are concerned with recovering some form of formation, why not look at the way that children's desires mature over time, because formation is what they end up desiring? In fact, this maturation of desire is a shift in the kind of thing that seems fascinating or magical to them—from the apple, to the magic

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[96] More precisely, Hunter's position is that Christian education in the United States is full of contradictions introduced by the pervasive influence of the broader therapeutic culture. Catholicism and Judaism, he suggests, for historically based reasons, have kept their curricula "remarkably free of the influence of secular therapeutic strategies—at least the influence is not so obvious" (*Death of Character* 136–37); but then there is the actual interpretation of the curricula by the staff of the schools, which is inevitably influenced by therapeutic culture (140–45).

apple, to the skill involved in baking a good apple pie. Desire leads naturally to a difficult path at the end of which it might become possible once again to be amazed simply that there is an apple.

By late childhood or early adolescence, about the age of Kieślowkski's Paweł, magic is beginning to be found in the kind of skill exhibited by adults who have mastered a craft or a practice—including, but not only, religious practice.[97] This is what young people at this age are fascinated by, and it is exactly what school and the theoretical holism by which we think we can prepare the young for the world deny. The fascination thus tends to get distorted or redirected toward objects of mass fascination in youth culture: for example, practicing dangerous skateboarding jumps or idolizing the guitar gods; and these can easily degenerate further into Jackass stunts or complacency with completely "unmusical" forms of music. Brothers Alex and Brett Harris, while certainly onto something in their critique of contemporary adolescence, also inevitably tend to slip into exhibiting this misplaced or unfocused fascination in their book *Do Hard Things: A Teenage Rebellion against Low Expectations*. They exhibit the natural pull toward mastery of the difficult, and yet they still seem, despite their efforts to articulate the problem and the solution, caught in the fixation on high excitement, the flipside of which is, indeed, low expectations. When you fling yourself madly all over the map trying one "hard thing" after another, you are not going to make much progress in the truly difficult pursuit of excellence at anything in particular.

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[97] Remember the magic aspect even of the highly rationalized and rationalizing home computer system set up by Paweł and his father.

The popular music producer Daniel Lanois has noted this same sort of tendency toward the conflating[98] of the comprehensive ease of surveying many things with the mastery that can only come from concentration on one thing in the children of his friends in the music biz:

> [Brian Eno] never gave me advice by the finger. He gave me advice by good work done. I see a lot of, even kids of my friends, they try 20 different things and then they get to be 18 and they're not doing any of them anymore. And I wonder, Was that good advice for your kid? If you're lucky enough to be a dreamer and to imagine how things could be, then don't wait. You can always educate yourself and provide yourself with new information as you go along. But I think it's a mistake to wait and to take a long course with a view of coming out as a professional. I think the earlier the better. If your're lucky enough to love something as a kid, then pursue it with full passion, and start into it right away, man.

It might be expected that the children of people with some degree of mastery or proficiency in an art form would be given, or simply absorb, insight into what is required in order to learn to do something well, but instead they seem compelled to worry about nothing so much as keeping their options open. In this they are showing the inability to focus so typical of young people today.[99] The advice they have been given is of the wrong kind—"advice by the finger," a very large finger specifying the secret—and it is also just wrong—keeping options open and taking the long, institutionalized course to a presumed inheritance. Indeed, according to educational common sense today, it seems that the more vulnerable the young people, the more we need to insist on this bad advice of the wrong kind.

It should not be forgotten that all of the theoretical advice that is generated on education in the modern world ultimately has real people on the receiving end. When someone has a big idea, someone else ends up having to act it out. But, of course, this *is* continually forgotten, and

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[98] Compare with Sherry Turkle (163) on the deceptive sense of mastery or efficiency that people get from multitasking.
[99] On emerging adulthood, see Christian Smith, *Lost in Transition*, and Jeffrey Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood*; on attention, see Gabor Maté, *Scattered Minds*, and Matthew Crawford, *The World Beyond Your Head*.

the forgetting itself has become institutionalized, necessarily, as the need to come up continually with big ideas has become institutionalized. Prescriptive theories can't deal adequately with the realities of human affairs, grounded as they are in practices and habitus. And they can't deal adequately with real people and their real desires for real inheritance and for real meaning. On some level, I do believe and I do see much evidence to suggest, we know this. And yet we keep forgetting it in and through trying to set it right, again and again, with newly devised plans. We keep forgetting that what we seek when we seek meaning is something beyond our own plans, something that, by taking the weight of responsibility off of our shoulders, will enable us to fulfill our responsibilities to younger generations. What I want to suggest in this chapter is that there is a kind of grace to be found in practices. I am speaking of a grace of meaning in a purely secular sense, but a sense that is all too likely to be lost in the secularist modern world—an openness to meaning that is not represented and articulated in advance as something that *should* be found meaningful, but rather is experienced as something given. I am simply putting a word here to a common element in the way such authors as Richard Sennett (*Craftsman*), Matthew Crawford (*Shop Class*), and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (*Flow*) discuss the experience of practices. Not to say that grace can only or ultimately be found in practices, but, in a secular age, practices are the place to start.

The difficulty, again, is not to lose sight of how difficult it is to get past the tendency to try too hard and end up merely generating more self-deceptions. Richard Linklater's film *Boyhood* illustrates this well. It should be noted, first of all, that the film is based on Linklater's idea of shooting a film about a boy growing up over a 12-year span in which the actor actually does grow up. The method was to meet every year for filming and to improvise the scenes covering the boy at that particular age. There is, then, a big idea that comes before the substance

of the film. But precisely because of this approach the film puts itself, in an interesting way, in tune with the world it represents and with those who are growing up in it—perhaps with more troubling results than were intended, but still results that reveal much. The film is 3 hours of loose-narrative slow cinema through the lens of Hollywood, and is worth watching in its own right, if not easily describable. What I want to zero in on here is the final part of the film, when the theme turns to the moment of boyhood on the doorstep of adulthood.

At this point there is quite a jarring rupture to be felt in the film. A youthful perspective now noticeably and literally takes over in an attempt to say, "This is what it is like finally to have come through boyhood." And what it is like, of course, is very much what it is supposed to be like. It is a leaving behind of or escape from childhood and all that, with a matter-of-factness that leaves one wondering what, if anything, is to be carried over and remain significant of the previous 3 hours or of the life so far. This moment is about leaving home, entering upon the college experience, and facing a new world of apparently open possibilities. But other than a little evidence of artistic proclivity in one of the high-school scenes, it is hard to know what these possibilities might be grounded in. The final scene shows the protagonist, Mason, and his new friends hiking into the canyoned scenery near his new place of residence. The quasi-religious sense of wonder evoked here is certainly not entirely inauthentic, even if it is drug aided, but it is certainly also tinged with the desperate excitement that youth today are so well coached in expressing. In the end, if this effort toward pristine wonder is being presented as the kind of relation to meaning that characterizes or should characterize this stage in life, then little is being said other than, "Here we go again! More meaning in the promise of meaning." This final scene of *Boyhoood* is clearly supposed to hold a lot of resonance for today's viewer, but it is hard to

deny the suspicion that what is resonating here may be disguising a false passage and a false inheritance.

The Grace of Practices

To start the final chapter of this thesis as I have, by underlining the emptiness of what we offer to the young in fulfilling our intergenerational responsibilities in passing on the basis of a meaningful world, is to risk being misinterpreted as saying that we need to try harder to fill the void. Doing so would bring us back to the beginning of the thesis, and I would have to try harder to explain again why it is necessary to stop trying so hard. The trick is to recognize that we are already pre-reflectively geared to rationalize all problems, including problems of meaning following from our rationalizing proclivities. It is not that much effort won't be needed to work our way out of the educational paradoxes and traps that I have been concerned with here, but that effort cannot go on forever being put into the vicious circle of trying to do what can't be done— trying to set out in neat and tidy ways, to rationalize, the conditions of meaningfulness for the next generation. To keep trying to set out the rules of a meaningful world for the young is to end up further and further disenchanting the world that they will, in fact, inherit. The energy of all that effort will, of course, still be needed in order to escape from the vicious circle. But it will be needed precisely in being dispersed, in being sent out into a whole society of practices, where education is more of an afterthought that follows quite naturally, although not without the need of institutional support, from doing what one does.

There are more problems here, of course. As MacIntyre, Sennett, Dreyfus, Crawford, Borgmann, and others all argue in different ways, practices (in the strong sense) have certainly not been lost entirely, but they have in general been debased and weakened in many ways. Even

to consider just the question of how contemporary technologies play into this is hugely complex.[100] All of this is well beyond the scope of this thesis, even though the broader social questions are intimately tied in with the ability to move beyond the contemporary educational miasma. Education can't be separated out and dealt with as a discrete problem, which again would be to keep doing the same thing over and over.[101] But the clearing of the air in the world of education can only come when children are integrated back into a larger society that not only has practices but also recognizes their significance and value, a society that has things to pass on beyond partial, arbitrary, and platitudinous pronouncements about what should be passed on. And, if the broader problems of the rationalization of everything in a secular age need to be recognized in order to move on, then perhaps at least a focus on education that can help toward intuiting that we are failing in our intergenerational responsibilities can lead in part toward the larger recognition that this is largely because we often have so little to offer as inheritance, or at least because we mistake what it is we have that should be so offered.

But it cannot end with seeing the educational problem alone, which will only keep leading back into the vicious circle of trying to improve education. It is a question of city and soul, chicken and egg. Modern schooling is based on and, in turn, perpetuates the big idea of Socrates in Plato's *Republic* that everyone over 10 can effectively be banished and a better city be created by creating better souls from scratch in the young, thus avoiding the passing on of bad

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[100] For example, a lot of computer programming and other technology work is highly skilled craft. Yet these often, if not always, go toward creating things that make life deceptively easy, less in need of practices and more of a flat following of procedures or pushing of buttons, keeping the consumer on the surface of things (Myers in his interview of Carr; Borgmann's device paradigm, *Technology* 40–48; Crawford's "hood under the hood," *Shop Class* 2). So, there are no simple answers in regard to modern technology. You can't say "just use it in the right way," as if that were always obvious, and yet it can't be denied that we live with it and have become accustomed to it. But the temptation is always toward simple answers.

[101] See MacIntyre's comment, which needs to be taken seriously, that there is no such thing as philosophy of education as a distinct area of inquiry, because its boundaries dissolve into the other areas of philosophy where most of the real thinking needs to be done (MacIntyre and Dunne 9).

habits and customs (540e–541a). If it doesn't work the first time, just keep starting over and trying again. Why it never works the first time, however, is that you can never really banish everyone over 10. The educational theorizers certainly won't banish themselves and the teachers they need to carry out their plans for them. As Christian Smith has said, when it comes to intergenerational relations and educational dreams, "We get what we are."[102] What we have become to a very significant degree is manipulators of people, which means that, despite the grandest dreams, we are continually putting ourselves into Procrustean contortions trying to act out one another's arbitrary schemes—like the poor kids in the gym class in Samantha Morton's *The Unloved*.

Getting beyond this bad holism means recognizing that neither souls nor cities can be shaped directly. Both are already what they are, and both are already intimately intertwined and mutually informing. Perhaps simply that recognition—and by "recognition" I mean a hard-won awareness that what we are doing in education fundamentally isn't working—will at some point begin to take some of the deadening weight of impossible responsibility from the perceived need to keep fabricating sources of meaning on which to establish the authority of the older generations and the legitimacy of the education system. Practices themselves will then take on that weight and serve as sources of true authority. And if there is at some point to be some broad revival of practices, then one of its blessings might be freedom from the fixation on education as

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[102] Christian Smith said this in a recorded lecture, "The Faith of the Next Generation," based on the material of his book *Soul Searching* and the large-scale study behind it. Smith's most striking finding is that a majority of teenagers—regardless of what affiliation or lack of affiliation is claimed—all hold to, or interpret their own claimed affiliation in terms of, the same generic, common-sense "religion" that he has called *Moralistic Therapeutic Deism* (*Soul Searching* 162–170). This identification of a majority of youth trapped in a mushy middle ground of quasi-spiritual platitudes provided a major impetus to the formulation of the problem of meaning for the present thesis, and specifically the problem of how to fulfill responsibilities toward those young people. That problem is deepened, of course, by the fact that they already are only reflecting what the adult world, the contemporary ethos, has already given them.

a never ending problem. "Une difficulté est une lumière. Une difficulté insurmontable est un soleil," Paul Valéry reminds us.[103] And Thomas Merton says, essentially, that there is no such thing as a problem.[104] Modern schooling has emerged, in large part, out of the perceived problem of what to do with young people once the old apprenticeship model began breaking up in the nineteenth century. Education research, in turn, has focused massive intellectual effort on all aspects of the problem of what to do with young people now that we have them all in school and we seem perpetually on the verge of finally getting them all on board. But, of course, that is another way of saying that we never seem to be able to get them all on board and are perpetually being frustrated. In fact, we are always forgetting and then having to re-articulate what it is we are trying to get them on board with. It is an insurmountable problem that is rationalized as the long road of progress. Eventually, it is bound to be recognized as insurmountable, and then, perhaps, there will no longer be a problem. Perhaps that will lift the ponderous weight of responsibility that leads ultimately to such heavy-handed treatment of the young. And perhaps practices will then be able to offer a kind of grace to intergenerational relations.

  The working of such grace will inevitably be full of apparent paradox. In renouncing the illusion of being able to oversee and manage all aspects of the education of the young, the adult generations will better fulfill their more dispersed responsibilities toward them. From the perspective of the young themselves, deschoolers and unschoolers have long characterized compulsory schooling as a form of mass segregation or imprisonment, and I think it is fair to say

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[103] As quoted in Murdoch viii. My translation: "A difficult problem is a light; an insurmountable problem is a sun."
[104] More precisely: "Contradictions have always existed in the soul of man. But it is only when we prefer analysis to silence that they become a constant and insoluble problem. We are not meant to resolve all contradictions but to live with them and rise above them in the light of exterior and objective values which make them trivial by comparison" (Thomas Merton 80–81).

that a lot of young people, in their hearts, have long agreed.[105] Others as well, like Murray

Milner, just look at the brutalizing effects within schools on the actual human beings who are

segregated into them.[106] A society which learns to recognize once again the significance of

practices freed from the constraints of systematization and theorization will be a society that

once again has a place for the young, indeed, an important role for the young, in learning and

then contributing to the continual renewal of the practices. And this freeing into society will at

the same time be a freeing from society's overzealous prescriptions, a freeing into the practices

as places of refuge from the tyranny of publicly articulable and justifiable aims and objectives

that cage in the days of the young and constrain the behaviours and actions of teachers.

School rightly understood should be "a place apart," as Oakeshott called it (34). And, as

he also explained, "socialization" taken as an explicit program of schooling and as the primary

aim of education denies this privacy to academic studies. The place apart becomes a place for

monitoring, scrutinizing, and micro-managing the young, and for getting them all on board with

whatever crude idea of meaningfulness or social justice the public mind of the day is able to

formulate. The segregation of modern schooling, in other words, is a very public project and,

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[105] Interestingly, for all of the concern education research shows for continually documenting the perceptions of various stakeholder groups on various questions, the very basic question of how people feel about school as such has rarely been asked. More usually the question is bent to point back toward the imperative of school improvement, and so Michael Fullan, in "Michael Fullan on Schools," characterizes the research as indicating a sharp decline in "enthusiasm" for the curriculum material through the school years, to which the obvious response is to keep changing the curriculum or the teaching of it to try to elicit more enthusiasm. One of the very few instances of the straight question is a Swedish study by Bengt-Erik Andersson and Kerstin Strander, who have found that, for both final-year students and the same people as adults seven years after graduation, the proportions are roughly 1/3:1/3:1/3 for love, hate, and indifference. Surely this seems intuitively right to anyone who has ever talked to people casually outside of school about school. The authors conclude, with considerable justification, that the numbers of people being put in their formative years through a system toward which they can only express indifference or hate is a scandal.

[106] Milner describes, in *Freaks, Geeks, and Cool Kids*, the formation of a parodic and distorted alternative society within the school. The corrective is not going to be to keep pretending that we can explicitly show kids how a good society operates by setting up from scratch a mini version. On the contrary, this is where youth problems start. Yet the idea of a controlled alternative society where everything that the young will need for the real society is explicitly taught is the myth of modern education. It might be said that the children are mocking us.

therefore, it is geared toward the formation of people who know and can imagine little else than a world that is matter-of-factly articulable in very public terms. Modern schooling is inherently tied in with the public articulation and justification of aims and objectives, just as education research itself is limited to the kinds of theories and to the support of proposals that are immediately intelligible, "applicable," or obvious.[107] When I see in the news something about the use of newspapers in schools, for example, I think of Jacques Ellul's observations on how news keeps everyone riding the surface of events (43), and I ask, Why should it seem like such a self-evidently good, immediately graspable idea to educate the young on the news? News has now gone beyond just the reporting of events to thoroughly incorporate, as well, elements of the therapeutic/communicative ethos. My question persists: Why not let them stay home and watch Oprah or read the newspaper, when we seem unable to imagine any purpose for education other than very public ones? The paradox is that doing the Oprah thing, the news thing, the democratic debate thing, the therapeutic thing, the trendy social justice thing in the classroom, is what creates the appearance of legitimacy for compulsory schooling. What in fact makes it illegitimate, however, is that if the classroom is for any or all of these easily identifiable things, then it is not a place apart and it is, in fact, forcing everyone into this very publicly delineated mode of existence that takes the place of real formation. This is the totalism of modern education.

Darin Barney has written on how the many technological forms and forums at democracy's disposal today create the illusion of meaningful participation while in fact creating

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[107] Education research always seems intent on proving or supporting what is already taken to be obvious. This criticism has been made of other social sciences as well, but it might be said that education research, as a project for giving authority to the education system, is doomed to efforts to support with supposedly rigourous studies what has already taken on a legitimizing plainness.

what is more like a two-dimensional world of mere publicity or publicness. Rationalized

communicativity has taken the place of grappling with the meaning of what we are doing

collectively. For all the means of dealing with society's problems that have been set up, it seems

to have become that much harder to really get a grip on them and bring wisdom to bear on them.

The mere fact of ready communicability seems, for the time being, to be accepted as sufficient,

and even to give illusions of meaningful participation, of "having a voice," of a certain mastery

of the flow of events, and so on, to a lot of people. At the same time, there is again and again

expressed a sense of things being not quite right in the public forum—lack of civility, not

listening to the other side, the division of every issue into two sides, and so on—but the response

is almost invariable to call for more dialogue, to set up better forums, or to teach the children

how to debate more "respectfully" than the adults do. What it is that eludes democracy today is

hard to put a finger on. I would suggest it all ties in with, and is no doubt a reflection of, the

communicative/therapeutic ethos.

Talk of preparing children for democracy inevitably gets caught in this of trap of

communicativity and publicity. It has become unfathomable—or very difficult to believe—that

the best way to prepare citizens for democracy might be something other than running them

through an artificial mini-democracy for 12 years of training. It seems that little else is

imaginable in the education of future citizens than to teach them to take turns and follow the

rules in respectfully expressing their opinions, as if it were obvious that such a setting out of

ground rules of communication can solve the modern malaise. These opinions, in turn, are

chosen from among the readily identifiable position options laid out on the screen in front of the

imagination. And, once again, what substance there is turns out to rest in the array itself. This is

the real democratic consensus, and it is also a two-dimensional world from which it is very difficult to escape. It is certainly difficult in today's classrooms.

One of the current buzzwords in initiatives to get teachers participating in professional learning communities is the *deprivatization* of teaching. The word is used almost without qualms, as if, because privatization is politically bad, and privatization in education by extension is obviously bad, deprivatization must be good. To take Michael Fullan, again, as only a prominent example, he does express a slight qualm about the ring of the concept, and he tries to be sophisticated about it, but then rationalizes everything at a more comprehensive level:

> Deprivatizing teaching changes culture and practice so that teachers observe other teachers, are observed by others, and participate in informed and telling debate on the quality and effectiveness of their instruction. I am not naive here. I realize that in punitive and otherwise misguided accountability regimes, teachers are ill-advised to open their classroom doors. But the research also reveals that even when conditions are more favorable, when implementation strategies are highly supportive, that many teachers subtly or in other ways play the privatization card. ("Change" 36)

It is "this deeply rooted norm of privacy" to which uncooperative teachers cling that needs to be uprooted, Fullan persists in saying. Commitment to the improvement of schooling can hardly allow him to interpret his slight qualms otherwise than to explain them away as he does. In the need to uproot the roots of privacy, compulsory modern schooling reveals what it so deeply, and so unimprovably, is. The hope on which this final chapter is based, is that, as it becomes more and more what it is in pursuing aims like the "deprivatization of teaching" as a model for and generator of techniques for further deprivatizing the young, its self-contradictions will become more and more apparent. Schooling's deprivatizing mission is at bottom the rooting out of strong practices and their replacement with rationalized or quasi-rationalized behaviour.

A practice in the strong sense, as MacIntyre's definition makes clear, is definitely a "socially established" form of activity.[108] It could even be said that those who engage in a given practice constitute a specialized co-operative public. But that kind of public, if one wants to use the word, is something very different from the public that oversees and presumes to be able to vet the authority of and sanction the legitimacy of modern schooling. And there is to strong practices, besides the social aspect, an intensely private aspect as well, such that a practice becomes a meeting point, perhaps the primary meeting point, of the person and the community. A child at a certain age begins to desire the kind of mastery that, if all goes well, will lead down the difficult path of acquiring a practice and, if there is no guarantee of acquiring virtue, there is, at least, if the practice is a genuine one, a guarantee of encountering virtue and the goods to which it is oriented. So, it is only in a very private struggle of the person to master, over time, the very complex and difficult sets of skills involved in a practice that real moral and spiritual formation can happen. This is true socialization, against which can be seen the emptiness of all schemes that need to deny privacy to the young in order ostensibly to ensure that they are fit to enter society by the time they are released from schooling (and into another holding period: Christian Smith, *Lost*; Arnett).

That an education over a long process of formation could teach a person to go down below the surface of publicity is the possibility that is invisible on that two-dimensional surface. There is an ever-present sense of lack of depth, and yet that depth can only be sought through the schemes and diagrams set out on that level. This is the vicious circle, the theoretical holism, the

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[108] Again, MacIntyre's definition of a practice: "any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity 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" (*After Virtue* 187).

trap of publicity. Hunter, as we saw in the introductory chapter, has said that, belying the ubiquitous talk in education today about diversity, we are actually quite terrified of real diversity.[109] More to the educational heart of the matter, we are fine with diversity as long as it can be plotted out and facilitated, thus all effectively reduced to the same thing. What is terrifying is the thought that that plotting and facilitating may, in the end, depend on a questionable histrionics or on various means of subtly and not so subtly coercing everyone to get on board and act out the latest big idea. When Wendell Berry speaks of "the tyranny of somebody else's big idea" ("Family" n.pag.), what allows the tyranny to take place is that the idea is not a reflection of someone's private thought, but that someone has come up with something that has an immediate obviousness and can marginally pass as legitimate. That is why the kids in Morton's gym class *have* to propel themselves around the floor by their elbows, or their ear lobes, or whatever it might be, and *have* to do it, presumably, in the name of coming through on their end of intergenerational bargain. The stupid, meaningless game, along with whatever rationalized objective has been dreamt up for it, is not just the teacher's private idea. The teacher, no doubt, privately has a lot more sense than that. It is the teacher's desperate, contorted idea for keeping the whole game going in the realm of publicity.

The choice is not between the heavy-handed arbitrariness of the public project of modern schooling, as represented by Morton's gym teacher or by the platitudes to which religion in public schools is bound to be reduced, on the one hand, and vacuous solipsism, on the other. Those are false options. An education in touch with reality has to allow the young person the

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[109] "When it comes to the moral life, our educational philosophies and policies aggressively contradict the ideals and policies promoting diversity. We actually fear diversity of this deeply normative kind, and therefore do all in our power to domesticate the troubling particularities of moral commitment and community" (*Death of Character* 230).

freedom, which is to say the privacy, to get in touch with reality. Freedom from the publicity of educationist theory means freedom of action and freedom of thought, which is not at all to say that action and thought don't require socially established disciplines. Character isn't formed by experts in forming character, whom the public can simply authorize to take care of the job so that no one else need be bothered. Nor is meaning found by plans for making education meaningful. Character is formed and meaning found, no one knows exactly how, through practices that are embedded in society but that also open onto reality beyond the merely public.

This is can perhaps be taken to bring up the admittedly tricky question of whether or not the raising or the education of the young can be regarded as a practice. Sennett, for example, considers parenting a craft (*Craftsman* 101–02). By this, on my reading, what he means to emphasize is that good parents in their concern with formation need to learn to work with the resistance of reality, as good craftsmen do, a reality that in this case takes the form of a child who, him- or herself is encountering reality. So, he is stressing a warning. It might be said, rather than that parenting is a craft, that there is something learned about reality through any craft or strong practice that then influences good parenting, as it influences character and the broader virtues beyond those of the craft itself.

But there is another side to conceiving of parenting or educating as a craft that itself draws this warning: namely, the temptation to think that a person can be shaped according to a mere idea of how a person should be shaped. Modern compulsory schooling is set up precisely to provide the means to shape children en masse. Well-meaning attempts to humanize or add art to the modern education project—through child-centred pedagogy, caring, and so on—can make education seem more like a craft, but they cannot escape schooling's requirement of putting the shaping of the child first, so it is craft in a troubling sense, with the child as a thing. Force and

rigid insistence take on a mild, artsy disguise, as in circle time. The only alternative, as I am

arguing, is to take the focus off of the shaping of the child—including off of teaching as a

practice or a profession—and allow the freedom to be shaped by a practice or practices, and by

people who have learned from practices.

One of the great perils of secularization is the tendency to take ourselves too seriously

and to overestimate the ability of human beings to make their own conditions of meaning. This is

why the public sphere requires illumination from sources outside of the realm of publicity.

Wendell Berry, in a poem that comes out of his "Sabbaths" series, centred on his own practice of

going for long, private Sunday walks, has expressed this need for other sources aptly in relation

to education:

> Speak
> publicly what cannot be taught or learned in public.
> Listen privately, silently to the voices that rise up
> from the pages of books and from your own heart.
> Be still and listen to the voices that belong
> to the streambanks and the trees and the open fields. (*Leavings* 92)

Secularization has brought us to a point at which it has become extremely difficult to

see education as anything other than a learning in public, and to see the public sphere as anything

other than a place in which citizens heavy handedly try to "educate" one another to say the right

things. Even recent re-evaluation of the secularist assumption that religion is *merely* private

tends—as seen in the AR program—toward the ramping up of that homogenizing effect of

secularization by bringing religion out of the merely private realm and into the merely public

realm, where its primary purpose is not illumination in any significant sense but rather to educate

citizens on how to be nice to one another, according to liberal principles already established.

In his recent book titled *The World beyond Your Head*, on the fate of attention and on the connected fate of strong practices in the contemporary world, Matthew Crawford[110] suggests that the usual preoccupations we encounter these days—particularly the "right to privacy in our digital lives"—are insufficiently thick to really get hold of:

> Apart from the usual concerns about online security and identity theft, I have to confess that I am not terribly worried about keeping particular facts about myself hidden from the data-mongers—*until* they use that data to make a claim on my attention. I think we need to sharpen the conceptually murky right to privacy by supplementing it with a *right not to be addressed*. This would apply not, of course, to those who address me face-to-face, but to those who never show their face, and treat my mind as a resource to be harvested by mechanized means.
> Attention is the thing that is most one's own: in the normal course of things, we choose what to pay attention to, and in a very real sense this determines what is real for us; what is actually present to our consciousness. Appropriations of our attention are then an especially intimate matter.
> But it is also true that our attention is directed to a world that is shared; one's attention is not simply one's own, for the simple reason that its objects are often present to others as well. (*World Beyond Your Head*, 13, emphasis in original)

Crawford then goes on to discuss the importance of attention and of strong practices to the establishment of a coherent and situated self. This is the secular formation that the present thesis has been searching for, and, essentially, the positive purpose of the thesis is to recommend the potentially seminal work of Crawford, along with Sennett, for a new way of thinking about education and meaning, and then to turn the floor over to them.

Still, my contribution has been to insist on the importance of the negative critique, and to warn of how easily intuitions of the way ahead can keep getting pulled back into the same old

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[110] Crawford, along with Sennett, is currently exploring territory with immense implications for education, but neither does much drawing out of those implications vis-à-vis the system we now have and the nature of its malaise. One way of characterizing the present thesis is as an attempt to get started doing that, or at least to recommend these thinkers as seminal for renewal of educational thought, while noting also the perils of trying to appropriate them within the modern education as we conceive of it. These thinkers could potentially serve together, along with a philosopher like Dreyfus, as a sort of new Dewey, but it is necessary to learn from Dewey's mistake of trying to do something completely different within the same institutional structures.

vicious circle. So, it is crucial to see what a much needed renewal of practices would be up against. In this regard, Crawford's "right not to be addressed," could use some further sharpening of its own to bring home what is educationally at stake here. His examples of invasiveness are drawn mainly from advertising, and the digital extension of advertising's reach. But the invasiveness of which he speaks is deeply ingrained in the contemporary ethos and in the dominant conceptualization of what education is for. It can all be seen as another dead end for the Reform impulse, telling us to start over and have another go with something else. The public sphere itself has become a place where anyone can try to educate everyone else, but with the limitation that only platitudes and slogans can be used. Education itself, dependent on the articulation of public purposes, has become entrapped in the two-dimensionality of publicity, which is to say it has become educationally pointless. Frustration and heavy handedness are the background tones to contemporary attempts to set the young up in a meaningful world. There is perhaps no better way of responding than to say that they have "a right not to be addressed" with, not to be bombarded by, abstract aims and objectives. That said, to use the word *right* is to risk turning this into another easily applied rule. It is a matter of decency, of seeing what is being done and admitting it. Only then can we begin to think about what is to be done.

What can be said now is that the answer will not be another program. It will be a matter of extricating ourselves from institutions that institutionalize the wrong intergenerational relations and force us continually to fabricate false sources of authority. It will be a matter of finding a way back to the strong practices within which authority rests and from which meaning flows.

Consider the story of one who escaped, and did so through a practice. In an on-stage

interview, jazz guitarist Julian Lage has given a brief account of growing up once having been

identified as a child prodigy:

> Well, my schooling was so weird as a kid. I mean, I'm very, very lucky. I
> grew up in Northern California, so keep that in mind. I was in third grade,
> fourth grade, and the school district came to my parents and said, "We really
> think Julian should not be going to school full time [laughter from the
> audience], because we can tell he has a propensity for music and we don't
> have a music program" . . . is what they were saying. "And if you can
> facilitate him studying—whether it be going to a conservatory or teachers—
> we'll help you with that." And my parents said, "No, we've got four other
> children and they're turning out fine, and Julian needs to be no different."
> And they kind of kept saying, "But, really, we think this would be . . ." So, I
> ended up in an independent study program, went to school part time, and then
> practiced . . . you know, went to school 2 days a week, then practiced 11
> hours a day for the rest of the week. That was my life until high school. And
> then, high school, I thought, okay, I want to have the high school experience.
> My parents said, "You're going to hate it [more audience laughter]. You don't
> realize what your life's been like." I said, "No, but I want to have friends, and
> this and that." So, I went for about, almost a year. I thought, "Oh God! This is
> awful! I have no time to do anything that's important to me." So, I went to
> junior college and got most of my college credits done by the time I was about
> 17 or so. (transcribed from video; breaks in original)

Northern California or anywhere else, this is an unusual case, and the admission that school

would not be the best thing for Lage was the admission of an exception. In fact, Lage was

probably lucky that the school district didn't have a music program, because then the case for

exception would have been much harder to make.[112] The interesting question is why the

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[111] Wisdom of the Hands is the name of a blog by Doug Stowe about his experiences teaching woodworking to children.

[112] There is something distorting about the very idea of a program for educating or training the young: the larger it is or the minute it becomes a social program or pursues any other aims than the goods of a practice, the more it is going to pursue aims other than aims internal to the practice. Take the example of El Sistema in Venezuela, a music-education success, by all accounts, and one on the right track with the idea of teaching kids to do one thing really well—and yet it is sold above all as a social program, and, though it has produced success stories, it can't be the right fit or a good use of time for every child marshalled into the program (see the film of that name). The logical end, when you think about it, would be something like a society made up entirely of baseball players—a nice dream,

recognition that school is a hindrance in this one case, that something wonderful is being denied in keeping this child from doing things that are important to him, does not extend to the other children in the school system. Who is a prodigy and who isn't? On what rationalistic grounds is it decided that, every once in a while, there will be an exception granted for one child to the rationalizing regimen through which all the others are put? If, as is widely recognized, any normal human being needs roughly 10,000 hours (say, 3 to 4 hours a day over 6 to 7 years) to master a given practice (not to mention allowance for boredom, seeking, confusion, and false starts), then why do we keep insisting that meaning can somehow be reinjected into those 6 compulsory, life-sapping hours a day that effectively take away the time necessary for young people to do what is, or could be, important to them?

The answer, of course, is buried in history. I have discerned in Taylor a few of the long civilizational trajectories that I suggest are significant for understanding why we have come to take so much for granted an intergenerational arrangement that is so odd. I have also suggested the importance of seeing sociologically the contemporary ethos identified by Illouz and others within that long trajectory. But there is also the more specific, although still highly complex, question of how and why modern schooling arose. And here we are limited by what it is that we expect from history, especially from a history of education that has been instituted to a considerable extent within social foundations, as a field within a sort of secular theology devoted to the improvement of schooling. We are hampered by the difficulty of recognizing, at least of giving public recognition to, history as contemplation of the past rather than history as something for giving us pat answers that can be self-justificatory or useful. The deeper impulses identified

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if you happen to like baseball, but it would never work in reality. So, a big idea for social reform is a temptation, but a big idea means putting on blinkers and using a heavy hand. Musical expertise for everyone, even the tone deaf!

by Illouz and Taylor that are in play in our secular age, as I have said a number of times already, call for a revisiting of the history of education, just when the education world seems to be collectively assuming that historical scholarship in the field has all been finished off and tied up with a bow. To ask persistently, however, how people have seen educational authority in relation to meaning is to continue to contemplate.

That said, there is much to contemplate in some of the better already existing work on history of education, even if it doesn't normally zero in with a lot of philosophical insight on the more important questions. Alison Prentice's *The School Promoters*, for example, especially the chapter on "occupations in transition," at least provides a bridge for making further connections between the history of education and what we can call the history of the working class or the social history of work.[113] Suffice it to say, for present purposes, that Prentice rightly points out the significance, linked to the primary moral purposes, of the emergence of the idea of state and compulsory education in mid-nineteenth century Upper Canada at a time when industrialization and bureaucratization were at least on the horizon:

> Under earlier conditions, the work place was often the household; sons frequently followed the occupation of their fathers; wives and daughters could and did participate in the remunerative work of the household; and apprenticeship or service was the usual introduction to an occupation. Each small village or regional society was perceived as a relatively fixed hierarchy of ranks and orders, based on the local structure of occupations. It was as these general conditions of employment seemed increasingly threatened that observers began to be alarmed by the prospect of a general breakdown in the traditional ordering of society.
> . . . For the present generation, the old patterns might perhaps endure; for the next, an unpredictable future was the only certainty, and it was this problem that school promoters were trying to understand and solve. With the gradual disappearance of apprenticeship, how were fathers to secure the futures of their male children? With the disappearance of the old "stations"

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[113] The latter, I would distinguish from the formulaic and pseudo-radical race, class, gender analysis that has become common in the humanities and virtually inescapable in education research.

and "orders," how was a person's place in society to be determined? The answer, as always, was through schooling. (88–89)

And the nature and purpose of that schooling, of course, would reflect what the movers and planners took to be significant, and it would be connected to the authority they themselves attempted to establish. As Prentice puts it, they held a "dualistic approach" to work: there was "rude, simple, or uneducated" work, and then there was "educated" work. Educated work was distinguished not by field of endeavour, but by method of attack within any field of endeavour (91). It was to be theoretical understanding, as opposed to the skills of "mere operatives," that would bring success in the new society, and it was to be theoretical understanding that would "promote industry and manufacturing in Canada" (95). By definition, then, merely skilled work was a form of slavery.[114] Suffice it to say for present purposes, in summary of Prentice, that the idea of state and compulsory schooling emerged as apprenticeship was breaking up.

Now, I don't, by any means, want to make a "back to the good old days" case for apprenticeship in any earlier institutional form. Indeed, as W. J. Rorabaugh makes clear in his examination of the breakup of apprenticeship in the American context, the reasons were many and complex but, ultimately, carried their own moral weight for the time. Rorabaugh's title, *The Craft Apprentice: From Franklin to the Machine Age in America*, makes reference to Benjamin Franklin, who ran away from his own apprenticeship to his brother. The overall impression left by Rorabaugh's study, making ample use as it does of first-hand accounts, is of a widely felt

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[114] There is a need to delve much more deeply than Prentice does here into the kinds of questions that Harry Braverman has posed for the twentieth century about the slipperiness of the concept of skill and its relation to technology, on the one hand, and meaningful work, on the other. Matthew Crawford, in *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, has essentially updated Braverman for the new "knowledge economy," and provides a model for getting a handle on the philosophical significance of these questions. For both, however, while education is touched on tangentially, it is not really targeted. There is a need to put the claims of modern schooling on the spot and to ask of it, from its nineteenth-century origins to the present, what real substance it has been providing for the young that they could not acquire much more efficiently (in the final analysis) in other ways. See also, Sennett on the false virtue of "flexibility" in the new capitalism (103–30), and consider the educational ramifications and tie-ins.

need to escape from the constraints of institutional structures that were only ever partially and

half-heartedly transplanted from Europe in the first place. Crafts and trades were changing with

the introduction of new technologies. The printing trade had made it possible for anyone with

knowledge of any craft to make a few bucks on what were previously considered "secrets" by

publishing explanations of them. Young men could teach themselves, and so avoid a lot of the

other baggage of apprenticeship, by reading these books.[115] There was in nineteenth century

America, above all, a sense of a world of beckoning possibilities through which the individual

could advance and better himself, and for which apprenticeship seemed less and less like the

right preparation. In short, by the nineteenth century apprenticeship had become what I am

suggesting modern schooling has now become: something to be escaped.

At the same time, something was left behind. Apprenticeship, whatever the

shortcomings in its American version, had still served a number of complexly interrelated social

functions:

> It was a system of education and job training by which important practical
> information was passed on from one generation to the next; it was a
> mechanism by which youths could model themselves on socially approved
> adults; it was an institution devised to insure proper moral development
> through the master's fatherly responsibility for the behavior of his apprentice;
> and it was a means of social control imposed upon potentially disruptive male
> adolescents. (Rorabaugh vii)

Rorabaugh's concluding paragraph deserves quoting in full:

> In the end old-fashioned apprenticeship was swept away by a wave of
> changed that engulfed traditional society and its artisan culture through the
> power of concentrated capital, the genius of mechanical innovation, and the
> ideology of individualism and self-help. Gone was the intricate and carefully
> balanced social fabric that had both comforted and constricted youths as they
> learned to become adults at work and in the family. Gone was a support
> network of custom and the master's rules that governed the lives of the young.
> Gone were the old rules for learning how to grow up. In the place of

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[115] Apprenticeship proper was for males.

apprenticeship with its semibondage was a mixture of new attitudes and new institutions. Youths were encouraged to think for themselves, to push ahead on their own at their own pace, to become entrepreneurs, and to rise, like Horatio Alger's characters, to moral and financial success. To help them get ahead, the American public school created a more wide-ranging, creative, and flexible system for the education of the young than apprenticeship ever had offered. And American religious values of the mid and late nineteenth century reinforced the notion of personal responsibility for one's life. Yet the price paid for these changes was high. Many youths could not live up to the more demanding personal responsibility that the new system dictated, and when they failed, the society was so fluid and shapeless that they could find no support to grasp. For some the end of apprenticeship meant an education and success in business or the professions; for others it meant a life sentence at low wages in a factory; and for still others it meant becoming a street urchin and drifting into crime, drugs, and an early death. The decline of social order alarmed many, but no one could put the humpty-dumpty of apprenticeship together again. And so today we retain the legacy of disgruntled youths and perplexing delinquency. We are left with a present that does not work and a past that is lost. What we have gained is freedom, but the cost was high.[116] (209)

The cost of leaving apprenticeship behind has turned out to be the institutional system that arose to replace it. At stake is much more than a portion of the population failing to buy in or to live up to the social vision of schooling, which, in theory, can always be addressed by adding to the system something more meaningful, just for them. As I have argued throughout this thesis, the cost continues to be tallied as such efforts continue to be generated according to the logic inherent in this way of rationalizing intergenerational authority. That logic continues to work itself out, and it can only be hoped that the contradictions of modern schooling will soon work

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[116] It might be noted that many historians of childhood come to very similar conclusions about something being lost in removing children from society and from real work: see for example, Ariès, Zelizer, and Mintz.

This is not to overlook the great abuses that have been perpetrated in the modern age for the sake of getting labour out of children: see, for example, E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 366–384.

While the above historians recommend some form of employment, it would be necessary to carefully ask what that is, recognizing that many of today's jobs (e.g., fast food) are not very formative and still recognizing that many that are looked down upon can indeed be formative (e.g., hair styling; see Michael Rose, *The Mind at Work*)—and much depends on the person. For an insightful look at some recent serious apprenticeship revival initiatives for youth, see Robert Halpern, *The Means to Grow Up*.

themselves into recognition, when it will become obvious that some kind of new synthesis is needed, with new institutions to support it. The freedom that was gained in abandoning apprenticeship for the regime of schooling was a false freedom to the extent that it was thought that human beings can do and make meaningful things without the kinds of disciplinary guidelines provided by practices.

Finding something that works will depend on bringing strong practices back into the search for meaning and authority in education. New institutional arrangements will have to follow upon that, when there is something for new institutions to house and protect. But, of course, a revival of practices is much more than an educational question, and, as I have already said, education cannot even really be the main focus. Although it might be possible to shake ourselves back into recognition of the inadequacy of what we have been doing in education by saying "for the sake of the children," the practices themselves are necessarily done for the sake of their own goods, according to their own standards. Thus it is perfectly understandable that the most promising thought being done today on just this need for a revival of practices, while frequently touching on educational concerns, never seems (to the schooled understanding) to deal with it directly. "Shop class" is highlighted in the title of Crawford's first book, for example, but that historical phenomenon actually gets very little ink in the book itself, other than to note its passing and explain that it never really was an adequate means of training young people in the trades (28–31).[117]

The education that Crawford *is* concerned with in *Shop Class as Soulcraft* and in his more recent *The World Outside Your Head*, is education in the old-fashioned sense of

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[117] My own experience of shop class, in junior high and before the shift to preparation for the information economy, was of something very much designed as a taster pack, but with no option to follow up on any of it.

formation—inner formation of the mind and the soul through formation of the disciplined habits and manual skills of a craft or trade. He may deal with the education system only tangentially, but the personal account he relates in order to set the stage gives a revealing example of our inability to square academic practices of thought with the contemporary ethos and with our compulsive articulations of social objectives. He had gone through the system and reached its summit, earning a PhD from the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago. This qualified him for a job in a think tank in Washington, DC. But he soon realized that he was serving as little more than a glorified clerk. The think tank had no place for thought (*Shop Class* 4–5). I suspect that what was in play against Crawford here, turning this PhD into a clerk, was, ironically, the kind of educational/communicative imperative that drives most think tanks. Once it is decided that awareness needs to be raised on a given issue, then there is need for little more than cleverness in finding ways to make the pitch. Orientation to action, utility, publicity, and communicativity requires such a decision before a program or agenda can be set out, and this decision is always going to be an arbitrary decision, or at the very least an arbitrary cut off point, in relation to practices of thought that are properly oriented to just seeing what is there. In seeking support and validation from those practices of thought, these articulations of social objectives, along with the institutions that demand them, co-opt and thereby harm the practices— not to mention the frustrations they create for people trying to pursue those practices.

Thus having gone right to the end of the educational system only to discover a dead end, Crawford turned back to one of the mechanical trades he had learned as an irregularly schooled teenager and started a motorcycle repair business. It was here, ironically, that he found a home for a line of thought that—when fleshed out along with the help of others exploring the significance of strong practices, such as Sennett and Dreyfus—has the immense implications for

the whole educational enterprise for which this thesis has been trying to prepare the reader. I

don't want to try to summarize Crawford (or the others), but rather to recommend him.

Nevertheless, I will say that his insights rest on a re-seeing of the dualistic approach to work and

education at the foundations of modern schooling. Manual-trades work, like motorcycle repair, is

not at all unthinking. There is, of course, much thinking involved in solving the puzzles with

which a mechanic is presented daily (think back to Pirsig in the previous chapter). But the crucial

thing that Crawford is saying is that this kind of repairman's thinking is much more than what

the dualistic mentality or theoretical holism might at best concede to be exercise for the mind,

while still perceiving it to be a dead end of no theoretical import and therefore of no practical use

toward changing the world or getting everyone on board: that is, of no use beyond the repair of

the motorcycle itself.

What a repairman does that a theoretical manipulator and creator of plans doesn't do,

Crawford is saying, is to engage directly with reality. The stochastic arts, as he likes to call them,

the arts of repairing, keep one humble. One is faced, at every turn of the puzzle one is trying to

solve, with the physical reality of what one has to work with. Unlike the theoretical work on

education that we have been looking at, it is not a matter of making something up that sounds

important and meaningful and then finding the instruments, such as compulsory schooling

readily provides, to make everyone conform. As far as practicality, the repair of a motorcycle is

at least of undeniable use, however small that usefulness may be compared to plans for an

imagined reform of society. But Crawford also emphasizes that it has its own theoretical worth.

Fixing a motorcycle is a good in itself, because, in bringing the mechanic up against reality, it

also brings him or her in touch with reality at a very basic level. This is where the meditative

quality of much manual work comes in. It is difficult to say much more about it here than what I

have said about practices already, but, in turning the floor over to Crawford on this, I do want to

emphasize that this engagement with reality, on however simple-seeming a level, should not be

underestimated as key to the problem of mutually invisible paradigms, and so also as holding the

beginning of an answer to modern schooling's conceptually self-perpetuating problem of

meaning.[118]

The hopelessness of the one paradigm seen in light of the other is perhaps best summed

up in Crawford's image of the simple satisfaction of the trades:

> I started working as an electrician's helper shortly before I turned fourteen. I
> wasn't attending school at the time and worked full-time until I was fifteen,
> then kept the trade up during the summers while in high school and college,
> with steadily increasing responsibility. . . .
>   I never ceased to take pleasure in the moment, at the end of a job, when I
> would flip the switch. "And there was light." . . .
>   The satisfactions of manifesting oneself concretely in the world through
> manual competence have been known to make a man quiet and easy. They
> seem to relieve him of the felt need to offer chattering *interpretations* of
> himself to vindicate his worth. He can simply point: the building stands, the
> car now runs, the lights are on. Boasting is what a boy does, because he has
> no real effect in the world. But the tradesman must reckon with the infallible
> judgment of reality, where one's failures or shortcomings cannot be
> interpreted away. His well-founded pride is far from the gratuitous "self-
> esteem" that educators would impart to students, as though by magic. (14–15)

His well-founded pride is, indeed, far from the inherent desperation for meaning in modern

education that I have characterized as a compulsive grasping at straws. It could be said that it is a

self-possession that is in a different mode or grounded entirely differently than the self-

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[118] Also, Sennett in *The Craftsman* deals in intricate detail with much the same thing: what he calls "resistance." He
also has a number of insights into teaching of craft, but, for our purposes here, they all, of course, presume that the
teacher is primarily a craftsman rather than primarily a teacher—and so, again, persistence in thinking about
practices leads toward a fundamental challenge to a system that, by its nature, produces facilitators and specialists in
shaping (i.e., manipulating) human beings, that makes a practice out of teaching and loses sight of the practices
taught.

possession characteristically claimed by modernity, where that claim depends on the plan that is continually undermined by the man (or the child) who doesn't fit it.

While Crawford's first book is, in part, a case for the manual trades, the philosophical and educational significance of what he is talking about goes far beyond just the trades. Not everyone will be interested in the trades as such. Different young people will have different dispositions and aptitudes. There is a lot to be said for his emphasis on material reality, but then the arts and crafts deal with material reality as well, as do many other practices that can't be strictly categorized as trades. And even the intellectual disciplines of the humanities, when oriented to seeing rather than trying to manipulate, are trying to see aspects of reality—that is their whole point.

To be sure, academic pursuits are very specialized and very sedentary, as Crawford himself characterizes them. For most people, therefore, the way into appreciating them and the world of thought that they open up, is through other practices. At the very least, other practices can create a solidarity in which the humanities are recognized as, and are allowed to be, practices. It is indeed in the greater interest of society, or of a community, to foster such a solidarity, and to allow for thought that comes to light in the public forum from a place beyond public oversight. A community legitimately wants its people to be well educated. But the only way to actually achieve that without self-contradiction is to have a community in which practices are allowed to be practices: that is, to have a community in which people are already engaged in such meaningful pursuits before presuming to be able to teach young people how to find meaning. Secularization has left us, for the time being, in a mode of compulsively attempting to take shortcuts to that meaning, to facilitate meanings from the outside. AR, as we have seen, is only one example that reveals a modern education system unable to connect to true sources of

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meaning and authority and so facing a looming legitimacy crisis. Once we work out ways to attend to the needs of young people for meaningful apprenticeship to adults already engaged meaningfully, then we can find a lighter touch in also asking them to become generally educated in the liberal arts—including in the study of religion. The meaningfulness of that education, insofar as it is allowed to be simply an introduction to the disciplines of the humanities, will take care of itself.

Conclusion: Making Institutions

AR, the policy oriented idea of teaching about religion, attempts to address the sense of a historically engendered loss of meaning in education with a rationalistic and simplistic plan: essentially, hold out to young people an abstracted array of traditional sources of meaning and hope that something takes. Thus the idea quickly reveals itself to be just one instance of a dysfunctional pattern that modern education compulsively repeats over and over again: setting out seemingly meaningful educational objectives to assuage the nagging sense that adult responsibilities to the next generation need to be addressed in a more meaningful way. Human meaning cannot be so neatly identified and reduced to objectives, and this is how secularization has, for the time being, turned into a trap. It has left us trying to find and pass on meaning in ways that meaning cannot be found or passed on.

This is what I have tried to show. And now I can only make a final plea for recognition of its relevance, which would on first blush seem to leave me having to supply the common-sense shibboleths of relevance: What is the object and the plan? What should we do? How to translate this theory into practice? Sometimes, however, if someone is banging her head against a wall, it is relevant just to notice it and to point it out.

Of course, it is a lot more complicated than that. What I have pointed out is a historically derived and sociologically entrenched situation, and it is reasonable to ask what one can do against these forces. How to raise objections against history, against the whole long process of secularization and where it has left us, without being ridiculously out of harmony with our times? How to go against common sense and question the taken-for-granted without losing all sense-making context? Again, though, I would stress that the most important thing is simply to try to see what is going on, to be willing to stay with that honestly, and not to grasp too quickly for a solution that will turn out to be a false solution. As Charles Spinoza, Fernando Flores, and Hubert Dreyfus say in *Disclosing New Worlds*, "one has to be able to sense and hold on to disharmonies in one's current disclosive activity" (22) or in the common-sense way of doing things.

Now, for those of us with a theoretical bent, that is the basis of what we do. We focus on and we keep holding to the sensed disharmonies. That is what the humanities and social sciences can do. They cannot tell others what to do. But that doesn't mean no-one can do anything. It should not be taken as counsel of despair. The sensing and holding on to disharmonies is the first of two kinds of skill that Spinoza, Flores, and Dreyfus identify in the type of activity they call *historical disclosing* or *history-making*. The second is being "able to change one's disclosive space on the basis of the disharmonious practices" (22). They explain this concept of changing the disclosive space by identifying three modes: articulation, reconfiguration, and cross-appropriation (22–29). Articulation would seem to be the mode that social theory follows in seeking to not only to hold on to but to continually deepen understanding of the puzzle. But it is also important for the more practically oriented person to simply see the puzzle, to identify disharmonies that are covered over by common sense, even if this is done on a

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more intuitive level than theorization. So, to see and articulate a disharmony in common sense is already to begin changing the space in which everyday things happen. They can no longer occur without seeming wrong. Reconfiguration and cross-appropriation, then, are modes of changing the way things are done more directly. Essentially, these are both ways of jumping in and engaging with how common sense has arranged the world. One simply switches arrangements or ways of doing things around in that taken-for-granted world, or one seeks helps and correspondences from other fields of activity in doing so.

Now, putting it in these terms, I would say that because social theory makes a practice of not jumping in in order to keep observing and pressing the articulation, it doesn't have any right to instruct those who do jump in, other than to offer its observations. But perhaps I can at least offer a few more pointed observations, starting with this: that, in my observation, the growing homeschooling and unschooling movement currently stands out as an example of people engaging with education on a genuinely history-making level. They sense that something is wrong with the modern system of schooling, and, instead of following the now accepted procedure of handing the problem back to the system for further research and processing, they ask themselves whether there is not a more direct and immediate response.

This is not to suggest that homeschoolers always or necessarily get it right, but only that, on the whole, they have the right approach to historical disclosure. Neither is it to suggest that homeschooling, strictly speaking, is the answer to the problems of modern schooling that I have tried to bring out in this thesis. There would be at least two major difficulties in trying to apply homeschooling as a general educational model for society: first, some homes would be able to do a much better job, and so such a model would give rise to social justice concerns[119];

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[119] The social justice concerns are acknowledged, for example, by Astra Taylor in her talk on unschooling.

second, though in many things it is possible to muddle along and to teach oneself or to teach one's children something that one doesn't know much about, it is usually better to learn a practice from someone who has mastered that practice, and the more so the more serious, demanding, and meaningful the practice and the more that practice is one that the young person wants to concentrate on for purposes of mastery. To my mind, both of these problems with homeschooling are not reason to forget about homeschooling and go back to school, forgetting also its problems, but rather they are reason to stick with the problems of homeschooling and to try to work them out, to keep pressing, and see where doing so leads, what can be reconfigured. I would think that there would be a world of very concrete possibilities here for extending the impetus behind homeschooling out into the community, into some new kinds of arrangements for apprenticeship. I also suspect that something like this search for masters of practices out in the community would provide one promising way of reconfiguring the quest for meaning in education that currently takes such self-defeating forms.

There are no doubt other ways as well. I am certainly not going to discount the possibility of teachers and administrators finding ways to work from within the system. It would be extremely difficult to keep the disharmonies of the system in view while doing so, but the development of negative capabilities is part of what liberal education should be about. On the other hand, as I have already suggested, perhaps the freshest approach would be, after duly noting the kinds of contradictions I have been exploring, to turn our backs on education as a problem and to simply attend to the strengthening of practices. The desire to pass those practices on to young people would follow as a matter of course from caring about the practices themselves.

All of this looking to the future is speculation. I have in this thesis only been trying to point out stubborn contradictions in the ways that we currently go about trying to meaningfully ground educational authority. Because these are self-contradictory, however, it can at least be expected that people will eventually become aware of them, and then begin to look for something better. It is only to be hoped that they will do so by engaging directly and personally with where history has brought us instead of by formulating yet more plans, programs, and objectives in response to a simplistic idea of what is wrong, such as is given in the current common-sense view of secularization. If they seek first of all to be true both to the integrity of strong practices and to the desire of young people for the kind of meaning that is opened up by these practices, then the trap can be escaped, more dynamic sources of authority found, and, finally, new institutions developed to protect what is important.

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