Hermeneutics

Understanding Educational Experience

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Introduction

The focus of philosophical hermeneutics is on what actually happens in human experience when understanding, in better or worse forms, takes place. This makes hermeneutics well placed to address primary questions such as: What distinguishes experience that is educational from experience that is not? and: What makes experience genuinely educational? It will be generally accepted that education should enhance personal and social wellbeing. It will also be widely granted however that not everything that goes on in schools and colleges can be called educational. In fact many of the experiences that unfold there may be mis-educational, sometimes with negative effects that continue long into adult life. It is crucial then that whenever appraisals are made of the quality of education, we do not fall for half-measures or deficient understandings that fail to reach beyond performances and behaviours.[1]

Where the worth of educational endeavour is judged chiefly by achievement in examinations and the acquisition of qualifications – a conspicuous tendency of our times – the underlying world of educational experience is likely to remain largely in the shadows. Yet what happens in these shadowlands has a decisive importance; one that hermeneutic enquiry can tellingly illustrate. An initial hint of that importance may be gathered from the arresting remark, attributed to Einstein, that education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school. Thinking about this for a moment we realise that what remains may be something like a lifelong dislike, or alternatively a passion, for a particular subject or field of study. It may be a memory of the cruelty, or warmth, of a particular teacher, or recollections of bullying and belittlement, or more happily, of participation and camaraderie. Often perhaps, what remains may be an ambivalent combination of such abiding influences.

In any case, what examples like these reveal is the importance of what was *experienced* in one's schooling, not just of the certificated products of that schooling. Good biographers invariably understand the educational significance <1/2> of what are called the formative influences of childhood and youth, including those of home, of formal education, of sport and cultural pursuits, and so on. In this they make a striking contrast with most of today's formal appraisals of education, customarily carried out by "quality assurance" mechanisms. These latter characteristically identify quality with "learning outcomes" that must often be stated in advance and that must, above all, be measurable. Such mechanisms routinely recast matters of quality as ones of indexed quantity (e.g. of marks, grades, points etc). This kind of metrification has expanded exponentially in a digital age. It makes the drawing-up of comparisons and rankings more tractable for managers and readily tangible for policymakers.

With some notable exceptions, high-stakes testing has become a central instrument of educational policymaking internationally. Teachers in many countries are increasingly constrained to conform to its demands, teaching-to-the-test in an effort to boost their students' results and their school's rankings. Rapid advances in such developments, accompanied by a progressive loss of focus on educational experience, bode ill for teaching as a life-enhancing practice. From a societal viewpoint, they distort the nourishing of energetic and responsible human capabilities that a society is entitled to expect from its educational institutions.

Such trends continue apace, and their very pervasiveness calls for some serious questioning. For instance, questions about the purposes, the fruits and the justification of education continually need to be asked with a fresh candour and probing force. The most central questions, from which everything of significance stems, are simply those in the opening lines of this Introduction. What makes experience genuinely educational?

What distinguishes experience that is educational from experience that is not? And a third question now arises: how could we go about finding out? Because of its central concern with uncovering the nature of human understanding, hermeneutics offers promising paths for addressing these questions, and others that flow from them.[2] To many, the word "hermeneutics" may be forbidding, or remote. Rather than embarking on lengthy explanations here in the Introduction, I will confine myself to some remarks that focus on key issues, beginning by distinguishing traditional hermeneutics from today's philosophical hermeneutics. This will prepare the <2/3> way for an exploration in the chapters that follow of how the latter might illuminate educational experience.

Historically, hermeneutics was the scholarly discipline of pursuing the correct understanding of texts, originally scriptural texts, but later, also legal texts and historical documents. As the discipline developed, particularly with Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), so did its sensitivity to distorting influences on the part of the interpreter. Furnishing a body of rules for avoiding misunderstanding in the interpretation of texts thus became a key concern. Textual hermeneutics continues as an important discipline today, particularly in studies like theology, law, history and literary criticism. Philosophical hermeneutics[3] has expanded the discipline's concern with the understanding of texts to acts of understanding more widely, and especially our comprehension of human understanding itself.

This widening of scope had already begun through the work of Schleiermacher and was continued through the investigations of Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911).[4] It then proceeded in a new key with Heidegger's searching explorations of the historical nature of human understanding in his large work *Being and Time* (first published 1927). A decisive shift in furthering it however followed the publication of Hans-Georg Gadamer's equally large work, *Truth and Method*, in 1960

(Gadamer 2004; German text: Gadamer 1975). We will examine later some key insights yielded by these developments. A crucial one to focus on at this stage however is the idea that human understanding always has a *predisposed* character. That is to say, any present event of understanding owes more than it may be consciously aware of to abiding influences from the past, frequently inexplicit ones. Depending on how these influences that are at play in each event of understanding get thought about, interrogated, neglected, or dismissed, one's orientation toward present and future events of understanding can take different paths. But at the end of the day the slate cannot be wiped clean of such influences so as to enable understanding to become pristine and unshakably founded. <3/4>

This may initially look more like bad news than good news for all educational effort. As we shall see however, the central ideas of hermeneutics have major positive consequences for how education is understood and carried out. In the remainder of this Introduction we will identify some of these ideas in a preliminary way as themes to be examined. This will offer an outline map of the investigations to be undertaken in the chapters that follow. Five themes are selected for exploration. These do not provide an exhaustive survey of the field of hermeneutics –such a task is a much larger one – but they bring under the spotlight some of the educationally most important issues. The selected themes are:

(1) the disclosures offered by philosophical hermeneutics (as distinct from the traditional discipline of hermeneutics) into what inescapably happens in human experience when understanding takes place, including in better or worse forms;

(2) the enhanced comprehension of educational experience provided by hermeneutical reflection, not least the importance of the enduring attitudes that are taken up by students;

(3) the distinct epistemological and ethical orientations provided by hermeneutics for educational thought and action;
(4) the transformed idea of the teacher, and of the relations of teaching and learning, that arises from a hermeneutical conception of human understanding;
(5) the singular significance of tradition in disclosing education as a practice in its own right.

Some preliminary words are now called for on each of the five themes, indicating the kinds of issues raised by each one and how these will be consecutively addressed in the first five chapters. In relation to the first theme (explored in Chapter 1) a hermeneutic account of how human understanding takes place highlights some deficiencies in the familiar notion of transmission, giving primary importance instead to the more inclusive notion of encounter.[5] This follows naturally from the centrality of the play – more precisely inter-play – that hermeneutics recognises in human experience: the play of thoughts and feelings, of language and images, of recollections and anticipations; the play of experience itself as a to-and-fro of play*ing* and being play*ed* (Gadamer 2004, p.102ff). From an educational standpoint, <4/5> the shift from transmission to encounter is a radical move. The main emphasis is moved from questions like "What (or whose) knowledge, skills, values and beliefs are to be to be taught? to questions like: "How can humans best thrive, individually and collectively, through encounters with inheritances of learning? An important port to stress from the start is that such inheritances offer resources – intellectual, spiritual, practical etc.– that are held in common by humankind.

Far from being anyone's private property then, or the preserve of a particular party or group, inheritances of learning are a public good,[6] albeit one that requires efforts of diverse kinds to embrace. For many centuries, and not just in Western

civilisations, consciousness of this point, and of its far-reaching educational import, has often been eclipsed. The dominant view, rather, has been that education is essentially a transmission of selected bodies of knowledge, skills and values from teachers to students, or from an older to a younger generation. Even rival groups who fought long and intense battles for control of schooling still shared the outlook that the heart of the matter was about transmission. The view was widely taken that victory in the fight would ensure that the knowledge and beliefs, the skills and values to be transmitted would be those championed by the victorious party.

For all the prominence of such an outlook however, a hermeneutic perspective would reveal it as something based on a defective conception of human understanding; as an outlook moreover that would place education on an inferior and often partisan course. Hermeneutics discloses human understanding as an ongoing encounter or inter-play, between a person – say a learner – on the one hand and, on the other, that which seeks to address the learner. More boldly however, the learner is also disclosed here as someone who is already predisposed, and inescapably so, by prior influences such as assumptions and preconceptions, biases and prejudices. And to add a further ingredient, that which the learner is seeking to understand (the bodies of knowledge, skills, beliefs etc) may be similarly predisposed, even where subjects dealing with "hard facts" are concerned. Human understanding is seen here to be something that is essentially lively and ongoing, something continually prone to error but also open to correction; something that can be accomplished in greater or lesser degree, but that yet remains unfinished, even unfinishing. As we shall see later, the encounter notion does much fuller justice to what is called a curriculum than do approaches that prioritise contents to the neglect of investigating what actually happens in experiences of learning.

The second theme (Chapter 2) brings some central insights from hermeneutics to bear closely on educational experience. This is now revealed as a *joint* undertaking by teachers and students, albeit one experienced from different and sometimes conflicting standpoints. Even when students seem passive, remaining silent and motionless during a teacher's presentations, they invariably take some attitude to what is addressed to them – of enthusiasm, aversion, indifference and so on. These attitudes lie at the heart of educational experience, but all too often they are passed over in daily practice, especially where there are pressures to get material covered for examinations and tests. Where constructive attitudes are taking root – to the subject, the teacher, fellow students – the quality of educational experience, and of the learning environment, is likely to be enhanced. But the converse is equally important: where aversions to a subject, or teacher, or fellow students become deeply lodged, the outlook for fruitful learning can suffer at length, even where grades and exam performances remain satisfactory or better.

The third theme (Chapter 3) draws on a number of the ideas advanced under the previous two to review the main epistemological and ethical issues in education, thus enabling pedagogy to be understood in more original ways. One of the most central notions in hermeneutics, the "fusion of horizons" is explored here, particularly in connection with the teacher's orientation to knowledge, or more precisely, to knowing. This exploration probes further how teachers regard and interpret the subjects they teach, illustrating how dramatically things change when subjects become presences that actively address the teacher. As it is the students who must ultimately be addressed and engaged, the implications for pedagogy of the shift from a conventional to a hermeneutic relation to knowledge are also examined. The non-erotic character of teaching is stressed in order to underline the inclusive and conversational character that hermeneutics gives to educational practice.

Under the fourth theme (Chapter 4), the thinking and actions that comprise the practice of teaching are explored, to reveal how these receive from hermeneutics a new and different significance. The quality of educational experience is seen here to be closely linked to the main relationships in pedagogy. These relationships fall into a number of distinct but interweaving domains – five are identified – disclosing themselves now in a different light than in conventional forms of practice. The most obvious domain is that of the teacher's relationship to her students, followed closely by that of her relationship to the subject(s) she teaches. Other domains include those of professional relationships with colleagues and the school leadership, then with parents/guardians and the public more widely, and finally, the teacher's relationship to herself. This last domain is where the other relationships come together, productively or less so, thus informing the tenor of the teacher's decisions and actions. That <6/7> tenor can range from the inspirational to the listless, from the harmonious to the conflicted. In these five domains, or more precisely in how they interweave, lie the possibilities for educational experience to be fulfilled or frustrated.

The fifth theme (Chapter 5) concerns the question of tradition in educational thought and action. Hermeneutics acknowledges that all understanding takes place in contexts where prior influences are continually active in experience. Although this might seem at first sight to make hermeneutics an ally of conservative standpoints, a careful analysis reveals a quite different prospect. That analysis begins with an investigation of the notions of "practice" and "practitioner." The investigation highlights the point that every practice worthy of the name (e.g. nursing, architecture, dentistry, etc.) has a tradition embodying inherent goals that define its core responsibilities and that distinguish it from other practices. The non-partisan character of the inherent goals of education as a practice are reviewed in

this context. Contrasting paths for educational thought and action follow from a partisan conception of tradition on the one hand and from a hermeneutic conception on the other, and both are critically considered. This leads to an examination of how an adequate understanding of tradition underpins education as an independent rather than a subordinate practice. That is to say, a practice in its own right, with its own defining purposes, as distinct from an ancillary of some superior powers.

In addition to exploring the five themes it will also be necessary to consider some criticisms of hermeneutics (Chapter 6). The first of these is the charge, originally made by Jürgen Habermas, that hermeneutics is too deferential toward tradition, thus lacking the critical resources to detect oppressive ideological influences that are at work in it. A second important criticism, associated mainly with postmodernist standpoints, charges that philosophical hermeneutics views tradition as the bearer of some eternal truth, thus making of what it offers a metaphysics in disguise. Thirdly, there is a charge made by some literary critics that hermeneutics embodies a relativistic outlook, thus being inhospitable to objective conceptions of meaning and failing to do justice to the intentions of authors. In appraising such criticisms the issues at stake, particularly educational ones, will be examined.

Finally, Chapter 7 will draw some conclusions from the arguments advanced in the book for a range of key issues in educational thought and action. This chapter highlights the very practical nature of hermeneutics while also showing how it informs and orients the central concerns of educational practice. Summary observations are then offered on a selection of such concerns, namely: educational aims and purposes; teacher education, including continuing professional development; educational research; educational leadership; curriculum development and reform; assessment; evaluation and quality assurance; educational policymaking.

Chapter 1

Philosophical Hermeneutics: Outlining the Landscape

Introduction:

Let us start by probing further the suggestion made in the Introduction: that hermeneutics shifts the emphasis in education decisively from transmission to encounter. On the face of it, such a shift would appear questionable. It would seem to neglect issues that have featured prominently in educational debates, both historically and currently. Here one can mention conflicts between liberal and utilitarian education, grammar school and comprehensive school, single-sex and co-educational schools, faith schools and secular schools, streaming and mixed-ability teaching, student selection and equality of educational opportunity, an imposed school curriculum and one resulting from consultations, and so on. It is important to point out then that hermeneutics doesn't set aside such issues; rather it gives them a different character and significance.

A hermeneutic perspective can ascertain at an early stage that arguments between conflicting standpoints on such issues could well prove endless, allowing might (i.e. force in blatant or subtle forms) to decide what is right at the end of the day. Such an eventuality, amply evident from histories of education and from educational systems today, renders feeble the idea of education as a distinct practice; or at best it makes educational practice a subservient arm of the stronger party in the conflicts. Some of the key ideas of hermeneutics provide a different picture: an understanding of educational practice as an undertaking with a coherence and rationale of its own, making its own distinct contributions to individual and community wellbeing. As most of these hermeneutic ideas contrast with long-dominant notions of rationality, it may be helpful to begin

our exploration of them by recollecting a particularly prominent conception of rationality associated with the educational hopes of the Enlightenment.

Trouble in the House of Reason

After retiring as President of the United States in 1809 Thomas Jefferson gave much of his energy to establishing a new kind of educational institution, to be called the University of Virginia. Jefferson was keen that this institution would <8/9> be free of the puritan influences that prevailed in established colleges like Harvard or Yale, or the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg where he had been a student. In a letter to William Roscoe of 27 December 1820 Jefferson's aspirations for the new university are concisely captured in this often-quoted passage:

> this institution will be based on the illimitable freedom of the human mind, for here we are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead, nor to tolerate any error so long as reason is left free to combat it.
> https://tjrs.monticello.org/letter/387

Jefferson's aspiration springs from a firmly-held assumption about the autonomy of reason: that a disciplined use of reason would be capable of freeing the conduct of teaching from all bias and prejudice and of eliminating error from scholarly activity. This stance, sceptical toward the claims of established authority and tradition, embodies in a striking way the high confidence of the Enlightenment in the powers of reason and its self-assured view of the nature of reason. Reason is conceived of here as an even-handed intellectual power, commanding in its authority, providing sound and secure grounds for thinking, judgement and action. Central to its character is its ability to rise above impassioned conflicts and act as an all-wise court of final appeal. Possessing such autonomy, or supreme standing, reason offers unprecedented prospects of continuing advancement in all

major fields of human endeavour. It is thus to be contrasted with standpoints marked by traditional loyalties, parochial outlooks and biases of all kinds.

Such a characterisation of reason and its possibilities offers bright vistas to educational reformers who might wish to dismantle fixed patterns of influence and control in educational institutions. But a suspicion that there was something amiss with this sanguine Enlightenment vision had already begun to take root some decades before Jefferson's emblematic declaration. It can be found for instance in Rousseau's early prizewinning essay, "Discourse on the Moral Effects of the Arts and Sciences" (1750), and in the deliberate passion he deploys in his own reasoning, not least in the Creed of the Priest of Savoy in *Émile* (1762). Various aspects of autonomous reason were subjected to criticism by other leading thinkers in subsequent generations of Western philosophy. These included Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Dewey, Wittgenstein and Heidegger, to mention just a selection. The diversity comprising this selection moreover reveals the ever-widening range from which these criticisms came.

In the 1960s however, the secure foundations that philosophical efforts from Descartes onward had sought to provide for the autonomy of reason were <9/10> confronted in a fundamental way by the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer. From the late 1920s the work of Gadamer's teacher, Heidegger, had been progressively dismantling the traditional but already unsteady disciplines of metaphysics and epistemology. Heidegger was involved in a major venture to understand afresh the relation of being-human to Being. Inspired by some of Heidegger's most incisive ideas, including some fertile insights on hermeneutics, Gadamer pursued his own path – a more circumscribed but no less radical one. His main concern was to illuminate how human understanding itself is possible, or what is it that inescapably takes place when

understanding – in better or worse forms – occurs in human experience.

In Western philosophy Gadamer's name has become especially associated with what is now called philosophical hermeneutics. It is mainly with his works that my own exploration here of some key ideas of hermeneutics will engage. This doesn't mean that other prominent figures in hermeneutic philosophy – Paul Ricoeur in particular, but also Gianni Vattimo and others – are unimportant. But it is Gadamer's work that lends itself best to exploring the import of hermeneutics for education. Ricoeur's investigations proceed mainly from his concerns with human encounters with texts. These investigations also reach well beyond the scope of traditional textual hermeneutics to include encounters among people and groups, but what Ricoeur calls "the model of the text" remains central in his work."[7] His own contributions to philosophical hermeneutic are substantial and he will feature recurrently in the chapters that follow. Vattimo's writings, while replete with hermeneutic influences, owe more to his engagements with Nietzsche than with Gadamer or Heidegger. His work is primarily concerned with ethical-political questions in the cultural and political circumstances of post-modernity.

I should also mention here a further conception of hermeneutics that we won't be considering in this book. That conception is more general and it has featured in the literature of educational research mainly through the work of Gert Biesta. Biesta calls it a "hermeneutical worldview" (Biesta 2017, p.46) and he associates it with a stance that seems as one-sided as it is assertive: "the world appears as an object of our sense-making, our understanding and our interpretation" (ibid). Biesta is critical of this "hermeneutical worldview." He uses the term "egological", rightly so it seems to me, to describe its primary focus <10/11> on self and self's actions (p.49). In fact its depiction of the world as an "object", whether of sense-making,

or of any other organising force, would make such a worldview a stranger to hermeneutics in any contemporary understanding of the word. In philosophical hermeneutics, and this applies to Ricoeur as well as to Gadamer, human understanding is as much an attentive responding as it is a more active form of experience.[8]

It is important then to clarify from the start some key characteristics of hermeneutics as a major field of philosophical enquiry today, and to distinguish this account from both earlier and misleading uses of the term. In this chapter's opening survey of the landscape of hermeneutics, I have selected five themes that are central philosophically and that are also particularly pertinent to education. The five are: prior influences; predisposed reason; effective history; tradition; the experience of art. We shall begin by considering the first two.

The Play of Influences and Bias

Gadamer argues that human reason is always predisposed by influences of one kind or another; that it can never be without them. This means that the idea of an absolute reason is impossible for the historical creatures that human beings are. In a section of *Truth and Method* called "Heidegger's Disclosure of the Fore-Structure of Understanding"(Gadamer 2004, pp.267-272), Gadamer credits Heidegger with highlighting the unavoidably historical nature of human understanding and pursuing explicitly some radical consequences of that acknowledgement. The first important idea we meet here is the "hermeneutic circle." This idea refers to a rule that guided traditional hermeneutics in its work: the text as a whole must be understood by reference to its individual parts and the individual parts must be understood by reference to the whole text. Heidegger's researches show however that the hermeneutic circle is not merely a procedural aid to avoid misunderstanding in the interpretation of texts. He illustrates that the circle operates as an

inherent feature of human understanding in all its forms. The circle is already present as a continual over-and-back play in the <11/12> unfolding of understanding in each person: – a play of anticipations, recollections, projections, musings, and a host of other influences. So it is something more fundamental than just a relationship between particulars and context in this or that instance of scholarly interpretation.

This gives the circle a new significance, extending its scope beyond the realm of texts to how human understanding itself is to be properly conceived. In accomplishing this dramatic shift moreover, Heidegger undermines the long-dominant idea that interpretation is something that is subsequently added to acts of comprehension that have already taken place cognitively (Heidegger, 2008 §32). Interpretation of one kind or another, he argues, is already present as an inescapable feature of every and all experiences of understanding. There isn't firstly an understanding event followed then by an interpretation event. On the contrary, both are present together from the start. For instance, when we hear something we have already interpreted it, correctly or mistakenly, *as* something in the very act of understanding it: as a snatch of some foreign language, as a piece of jazz, as an emergency vehicle siren, and so on. Where we fail to make out what it is, we still understand it *as* something puzzling, or *as* confusing, or *as* unintelligible. What goes for what we hear goes also for what we see, taste, smell and touch, or for any combination of the senses working together as our experience unfolds. In short, human understanding has an "as" structure that influences from the start everything that takes place in that understanding. Secondly, Heidegger shows that it is the historical character (*Geschichtlichkeit*) of being human in a world with others that gives rise to this "as." The "as", which is ever active in experience, leaves its historical mark. It is invariably informed and disposed by what has happened

previously, and in turn, it orients one's understanding as one encounters something new (§32).

While taking a different direction than Heidegger on a number of issues, Gadamer acknowledges that Heidegger's investigations have provided some seminal insights for research on a range of major philosophical concerns. Putting some of these insights to work in his own enquiries, Gadamer writes: "Reason exists for us only in concrete historical terms –i.e. it is not its own master but remains constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates" (Gadamer 2004, p.277). The radicalness of this point is frequently overlooked, not least by postmodernist criticisms that attribute to hermeneutics an essentialist character (an issue that we will return to in Chapter 6). Reason cannot step outside of human history and assume some omniscient, or God-like vantage point. Gadamer points out that even the most critical and circumspect forms of self-reflection still work *within* a much larger totality of historical influences. These influences are already and always at work – more precisely, *at play* – in humans' experiences of understanding. Thus he <12/13> concludes that "[t]he self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. *That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being*" (Gadamer 2004, p.278, emphasis in original).

This striking declaration in *Truth and Method*, attributing an inherently prejudiced character to human understanding, is repeated even more boldly a few year later in an essay summarising Gadamer's main arguments: "It is not so much our judgements as it is our prejudices that constitute our being" (Gadamer 2008, p.9). He acknowledges that the declaration is provocative, adding that he is employing it to restore to its rightful place a more positive conception of prejudice that was driven out of linguistic usage by the Enlightenment. That older

conception had a potential explanatory power that the Enlightenment eclipsed. It would understand prejudice as a provisional judgement that was given "before all of the elements that determine a situation have been examined" (Gadamer 2004, p.273). This could be a negative or a positive judgement, revealing something of how the person making it was predisposed, i.e. towards what and against what. But equally important, because of its provisional character, it would also mark the openness of experience to further encounters that might serve to inform, to challenge, to correct a person's beliefs and outlooks.

Gadamer regards the lack of such openness as a major shortcoming of the rationalistic conceptions of reason, or of human understanding, championed by the Enlightenment. He calls it the Enlightenment's prejudice against prejudice. In a remark that contrasts conspicuously with Jefferson's aspiration quoted earlier, Gadamer writes:

> The overcoming of all prejudices, this global demand of the Enlightenment, will itself prove to be a prejudice, and removing it opens the way to an appropriate understanding of the finitude which dominates not only our humanity but also our historical consciousness" (2004, p.277).

Notwithstanding the provocative note in Gadamer's remarks on prejudice, they carry a sober and incisive insight. This may be more clearly evident if for "prejudice" we read the less highly-charged term "predisposing influences." Such influences would include preconceptions, gut feelings, hunches, prejudgements, assumptions, biases, and so on. Any of these could be positive or negative. They could also be something that one was aware of, or half-aware, or indeed unconscious. What Gadamer is keen to stress is that such influences, while not necessarily predestining

any outcomes, are always present, overtly or unwittingly, whenever understanding takes place. <13/14>

It is just this point that discloses the inescapably partial character of human understanding, including all forms of knowing and reasoning that constitute it. "Partial" here should be understood in both senses of the word: incompleteness and bias. The point to emphasise is that hermeneutics identifies such limitations as inescapable features of human efforts to understand – i.e. to think, to reason, to know. This shows how radically hermeneutics departs from long-prevailing forms of epistemology and metaphysics. In relation to epistemology and its time-honoured quest for certain and secure foundations, (e.g. Descartes, Kant, even Husserl) the argument that partiality, in the sense of bias, is inescapable has far-reaching consequences. In fact it suggests that the epistemological task itself is a doomed one, even a mistaken one; but that its mistakes are ones from which crucial things can be learned. As for metaphysics, the argument that the human quest for knowledge is an unfinished and unfinishable task is similarly chastening. The positing by traditional metaphysics of a magisterial standpoint from which all of being might be authoritatively comprehended is now seen as something beyond the best efforts of finite, historical humans. In short, hermeneutics is neither a foundational nor an essentialist form of philosophy.

Discarding the omniscient pretensions of an absolute reason and recognising that all understanding is infused by predisposing influences are two of the five selected features of hermeneutics that are central for education. Let us now turn to the other three. Let us now turn to the other three. The first of these is the notion of effective history (*Wirkunksgeschichte*), the second is the notion of tradition (*Überlieferung/Tradition*), and the third is the experience of art (*der Erfahrung der Kunst*). We shall consider each of these in turn now before turning to the educational import of hermeneutics.

Effective History, Tradition and the Experience of Art

Human experience is not a succession of disconnected "nows." The historical effects of previous experiences are embodied in *how* they have predisposed the person who has undergone them. The consequences are that, in their encounters with others, people will unavoidably be "coming from different places", to use a colloquial phrase. They will come favourably predisposed toward some ideas, viewpoints and persons, unfavourably toward others, indifferently toward still others. Such stances reveal the effects of people's histories as individuals, also as groups. This effective history is, moreover, continually unfolding in experience. In making this point, hermeneutics also calls attention to the importance of *being conscious* of what is actually unfolding. In other words, it <14/15> emphasises the need to be alert to the effects of history – of one's own, that of others, and of history more widely – on the person who is trying to understand. Consciousness of the effects of history is a central theme in Gadamer's work, and he coined a lengthy term to capture it (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* 2004, p.299ff). Where this critical consciousness is absent it can lead to a poor awareness that one's situation is bounded by a restricted horizon. Horizon is an important concept in hermeneutics and Gadamer describes it simply as "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (2004, p.301). Consciousness of effective history would open one's horizons, but not in the Jeffersonian sense of assuming supreme powers for reason. Rather, it would regard one's best thoughts to date as thoughts to be held in a wholehearted way, while also being continually open to betterment in the light of pertinent criticism.

Turning now to tradition, this is a central notion in many fields of human endeavour, including politics, religion, sport, the

arts and sciences, and not least education. Its connotations range from the more inclusive (e.g. festive traditions like Carnival) to the more restrictive (e.g. fundamentalist traditions in religion or politics). In education, tradition is often invoked as a warrant for doing things in a particular way, often to the exclusion of other ways. In its influencing of contrasting senses of identity it can also give rise to recurring conflicts between contending parties. We shall examine these issues in more detail later, but for now our concern is to ascertain how tradition features in hermeneutics, which holds that all human understanding takes place within tradition. Two German terms for "tradition" are used in *Truth and Method*, apparently interchangeably: *Tradition* and *Überlieferung* (Gadamer 1975, p.264;2004, p.277ff). The first of these doesn't yield any further information than does its identical English counterpart, but the second provides some illuminating clues. Etymologically, it calls attention to the possibility of a totality of influences that *lie over* us, or are already delivered over to us, as humans in our individual and collective efforts to understand.

Gadamer repeatedly points out that the presence of such a totality is inescapable. So to say that all human understanding takes place within tradition, and is therefore influenced by tradition, is to say in a fuller way what has already been said in the previous paragraphs. But now the question arises: how is this meaning of tradition, as an inescapable totality of influences that affects all understanding, to be distinguished from more specific, more parochial meanings of tradition? If the German words *Überlieferung* and *Tradition* were used to identify them respectively, perhaps Gadamer might have made the distinction between the two meanings explicit and clear. But this is not the case, and to do so might involve taking an arbitrary stance to the German language. <15/16> There is an ambiguity nevertheless in his remarks on tradition that Gadamer doesn't address. This

question will be taken take up and reviewed more fully in Chapters 5 and 6.

That kind of closer analysis is not necessary at this point however in tracing the connection between the notion of tradition and that of horizon. The horizon of the person who is attempting to understand something becomes narrower or wider, depending on how previous influences have predisposed that person, and on how she deals with these influences in her current experience. She will have certain preferences and dislikes, enthusiasms and aversions, loyalties and rivalries, and so on. But what is true of her in her own situation is also true of that which addresses her – whether in a book, a conversation, a movie, a podcast, a tweet or whatever. What addresses her always has *its own* horizon, narrower or wider as the case may be. This point may be readily enough granted where it is another person who is doing the addressing, but can it be said of a book? or of a text of any kind? or of anything that isn't a live human voice? Hermeneutics would answer "yes" to all three questions. That is to say, a text is understood as a voice that addresses the reader, whether the text is a novel, a poem, an instruction manual, an official report, a policy manifesto, or other.

Two qualifications are needed here. Firstly, the reference to the "voice" of the text would be more accurately rendered "voices", plural. A book that is a collection of essays, or a report of a commission, clearly contains more than one voice, and tensions may be evident between some of these. A novel will also usually contain a range of voices, the reader becoming more acquainted with their characteristics and differences as the plot uncovers the thoughts and doings of the various characters. Even a philosophical text, say Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, may contain voices other than the dominant voice that makes the argument, for instance those of the unnamed philosophers Aristotle periodically criticises. Or a text may speak to me with a

somewhat different voice on reading it in middle age than it did when I first read it as a student.

The second qualification is the suggestion that it might sometimes be more accurate to say "potential voice" rather than "voice". Clearly, if I am faced with a text in a language that I don't understand, say Spanish, the text says nothing to me; it remains voiceless. I recognise however that it could potentially say something to me, and I could even decide to learn Spanish. But a text in my own language might also remain voiceless, for instance my textbook in maths, a subject that I dislike. But again, the textbook, and more importantly the subject maths, could *potentially* say something to me, if somehow my aversions could be overcome. My interest could be quickened and some real encounter might get underway. Something new might be opened up for me, be it challenging, engaging, or otherwise provoking of new thoughts and energies. Bearing these <16/17> arguments in mind, the more familiar I become with a text, the better I can appreciate its own horizon, including the tensions, insights, biases etc. that are active within that horizon.

Finally, in relation to the experience of art, Gadamer pursues a lengthy critique of "aesthetic consciousness" in the first part of *Truth and Method*. The main purpose of that critique is to challenge the dominance of "aesthetic" thinking in understanding art, while revealing that genuine art is an interplay: a to-and-fro movement which allows truths to be disclosed, revealed, uncovered. The critique credits the major enquiries of figures like Kant and Schiller for providing enduring insights into the experience of works of art, but it also takes issue with both of them. From an educational standpoint, Gadamer's criticisms of Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* are particularly pertinent (Schiller 2004). Schiller is faulted for giving an undeserved priority to aesthetic consciousness – the cultivated taste that places art in a realm elevated above that of

practical human realities and that allows individuals to take subjective delight in works created for that realm.

Notwithstanding the fact that Schiller's *Letters* had as much moral as aesthetic purpose, this elevation makes of art a superior kind of escapism, "performed in the self-consciousness of the 'aesthetic experience' " (Gadamer 2004, p.74). In his many writings on art Gadamer takes it out of the realm of "aesthetic consciousness" and restores it to the contexts of life more widely. Remaining with that wider context he argues that both the creation and the experience of works of art involve an interplay that has an unforced momentum of its own. This distinctive interplay, if it gets genuinely underway, enables the uncovering and sharing of truths that might be repeatedly bypassed in the everyday patterns of living and working. The reference to truths here is not to truths established by scientific research, or to truth in any absolute conceptual sense. Rather it concerns the lifting of a veil: "It produces and brings to light what is otherwise constantly hidden and withdrawn" (2004, p.112). Genuine art creates a communicative atmosphere that opens up possibilities for seeing one's life, or aspects of it, anew, for having settled outlooks unsettled and even transformed in enduring ways. Summing up his reflections on art in "The Relevance of the Beautiful" an essay written in his late seventies, Gadamer concludes as follows:

> The work of art transforms our fleeting experience into the stable and lasting form of an independent and internally coherent creation. It does so in such a way that we go beyond ourselves by penetrating deeper into the work. That "something can be held in our hesitant stay" (Hölderlin) – this is what art has always been and still is today (Gadamer, 1998, p.53). <17/18>

This going beyond ourselves happens in any genuine experience of a work of art – say a painting, a piece of music, a

literary work and so on. But it applies doubly where the artwork is experienced as one's *own* creation, or where one has participated in its creation, or realisation. It is in this regard, as we shall explore in more detail later, that hermeneutics has an original significance for the art of teaching.

In this opening investigation we have examined five core themes in hermeneutics: the impossibility of an absolute reason; the predisposing of all understanding by previous influences; the notion of effective history; tradition as a totality of influences; and finally the experience of art as a disclosure of truth. There is more to be said on these and related themes. But expanding our familiarity with hermeneutic ideas might best be done by considering them from here on in the context of education as a distinct form of human engagement. In particular, our focus will be on how such hermeneutic ideas can transform, or we might say restore, our understanding of educational experience <18/19>.

Chapter 2

Uncovering Educational Experience

Introduction

Because of its focus on what actually happens where events of understanding take place, hermeneutics has a particular light to shed on experiences that are embedded, often inconspicuously, in practices of learning. When we consider seriously the core responsibilities of teaching we realise that these are concerned with deliberate interventions that seek to make changes for the better, *through study and learning*, in the lives of students. On this account, teaching is a practice that seeks to make its own distinct contribution to enabling people to thrive as human beings – what Aristotle called *eudaimonia*. Other practices have their own contributions to make to this goal – e.g. nursing, engineering, librarianship. But teaching, or education as a broader family of actions, makes its contribution through developing and advancing practices of learning, and associated practices of teaching.[9] Yet in educational policy reforms, practices of teaching and learning often receive less attention than do so-called "learning outcomes" i.e. test and examination results. Teachers regularly criticise policies that promote "teaching-to-the-test" because such policies interfere with the core responsibilities of teaching. Yet many are constrained, for their own job security, to acquiesce in the pedagogical routines that such policies foster.

Approaching the Heart of the Matter

Seeking to identify explicitly such core responsibilities, it is helpful to recall some perceptive observations of Klaus Mollenhauer, a leading figure in the *Pädagogik* tradition in Germany in the later

20th century. Although he is clearly <19/20> influenced by Schleiermacher, Mollenhauer doesn't refer to later hermeneutic philosophers like Gadamer and Ricoeur. His reflections nevertheless have strong parallels with the tenor of thinking in the previous pages of this book. Mollenhauer points out that the desire to have children at all presupposes a commonly-held belief that something good and worthwhile can be shared with them in their upbringing and education (Mollenhauer 2014, p.8ff). But how can this be done, he asks, while respecting the selfhood of each and doing justice to the equality of each? Pedagogy, he insists, has to delve deep and pay attention to the expectations and desires that are part of each child's individuality. "Schleiermacher," Mollenhauer continues, "noted that there is far more to children than what is directly accessible through understanding and explanation and that educators need to cultivate 'divinatory abilities' in themselves" (Mollenhauer 2014, p.64). This heightened perceptiveness is seen as a crucial pedagogical responsibility, helping to "bring to awareness the non-conventionalized self of the child" (p.65). Pursuing important practical consequences of these points, Mollenhauer concludes that:

> children should be brought up not as if they were material to be changed and formed. Instead they should be brought up in support of a kind of power and potentiality that develops itself, in a dialogical relationship, in a kind of mutual interchange or call and response (p.65).

Fundamental here is the emphasis on an underlying presence of multiple possibilities in each person, and on the interplay of call and response in bringing to life the more promising ones. This recalls the shift from transmission to encounter first mentioned in the Introduction. In such encounters efforts are concentrated on engaging with influences from the past and present in ways that advance hopeful possibilities for the future. Far from any imposition

or conquest, the unmistakable tenor of such efforts is to enable others to *be* as humans. More specifically, it is to make it possible for them, through practices of study and learning, to become more fully human in a world of plurality.

Mollenhauer draws no sharp distinction between upbringing and education. Central to both are the pedagogical discernment and the ethical commitments he highlights. But as children grow older other responsibilities make their way to centre stage; responsibilities that are in some respects more specific and in others more wide-ranging than those of parenting or upbringing. Such responsibilities are characteristically identified with the practices of teaching and learning in formal education, whether this education takes place in schools, colleges, universities, or a range of other settings. They are our focal concern here. <20/21>

Among such educational responsibilities the following three might feature uncontroversially in any minimal and defensible list:

> **(a)** to uncover the constructive potentialities[10] that are native to each student, amid the plurality of classroom life;
> **(b)** to cultivate these potentialities by opening up new imaginative landscapes through the topics or subjects being taught;
> **(c)** to build learning environments where the practices of learning themselves embody justice, inclusion and participation.

There is much, as we shall see later, that needs to be added to this minimum, but the three responsibilities just mentioned identify goals that are inherent in *educational* practice, or, more precisely, in education *as* a practice. They bring under the spotlight the quality of the educational experiences – in a wide range of subjects – that teaching has to bring about. They direct attention moreover to central features of teachers' work that are frequently passed over, not least by policymakers. They also help to highlight important

grounds for justification that teaching practitioners will readily recognise and share *qua practitioners*, despite their different outlooks in other matters.

One might ask here however where this threefold characterisation of the core responsibilities of education leaves other goals that were long held to be no less central. In particular, it might be asked: Where does this leave literacy and numeracy? The kind of answer hermeneutics would give to this question illustrates something of the shift that hermeneutic thinking brings to educational questions more widely. That answer would run as follows. Becoming literate and numerate play a similar role in education that learning to walk and to talk play in life as a whole: i.e. essential, but for enabling and embodying substantial purposes, in this case inherently educational ones. Accordingly, literacy and numeracy are not mere instruments, although they could succumb to being that. Their true educational character is revealed when they embody and enhance something of inherent educational worth in experiences of learning. Bearing these points in mind, let us turn to examine more particularly what hermeneutics illuminates about educational experience. <21/22>

The Presence of the Overlooked

John Dewey's work is a good place to begin this examination, as he placed experience at the heart of his enquiries. Many of Dewey's arguments have a close affinity with hermeneutic insights. Reviewing some similarities will identify important features that are prominent in both Dewey's work and hermeneutics. Exploring the contrasts however can highlight what is distinct in hermeneutics, illustrating the radical nature of its challenges and also revealing its productiveness where our understanding of educational thought and action is concerned.

Dewey's book *Experience and Education* (Dewey 2008) was first published in 1938, when he was almost seventy. It contained a

concise restatement of some of his central ideas, in the light of criticisms earlier versions of these ideas had received.[11] As well as introducing the key notion of collateral learning, *Experience and Education* includes arguments that take the form of bold statements on pedagogy. The following three are leading examples: "it is the business of the educator to see in what direction an experience is heading" (p.38); "there is no such thing as educational value in the abstract" (p.46); "now 'preparation' is a treacherous idea" (p.47). Far from being assertions that lack warrant, such declarations proceed from Dewey's arguments, early in the book, that everything important in education depends on the *quality* of the experience that students have. The quality of experience is the central theme of the book, which presents in succinct form some of the main concepts of Dewey's philosophy.

"Continuity" and "interaction" are two such concepts. They are key features of all human experience. Dewey calls them "the longitudinal and lateral aspect of experience" (p.44). Alternatively they might be called the historical and social dimensions of experience. They serve as important reminders that experiences are never a series of unconnected "nows" and that even the most private experience is pervaded and shaped by social influences. Dewey explains that the quality of any experience has two aspects: firstly, an immediate aspect of agreeableness or disagreeableness and secondly, the influence of this, positively or negatively, on subsequent experiences (p.27). The immediate aspect is something that can often be readily recognised, but the second aspect, the enduring effect, is more elusive. In a perceptive observation that echoes Schleiermacher and Mollenhauer, and that anticipates Gadamer's investigations of "effective history," Dewey remarks: "The effect of an experience is not borne on its face" (p27). More specifically, one might expand this to say that the effects <22/23> of an experience are not always clearly evident, or that *not all* the effects of an experience are evident. But in any case, "wholly independent of desire or intent, every experience lives on in further

experiences" (p.27). To the extent that experiences live on positively they contribute to making subsequent experiences "educative." Where they live on negatively however, they contribute to making further experiences "mis-educative." There could also be effects that involve shifting combinations of both positive and negative. Such effects point to more complex regions that Dewey's philosophy doesn't explore, but that are, as we shall see, central to the concerns of hermeneutics.

We can look more closely now at the warrant for Dewey's statements on pedagogy. The three just quoted are logically-drawn conclusions from his arguments on quality in educational experience, providing illustrations of the practical import of pedagogical thinking itself. Taking the three in turn, the first says that "it is the business of the educator to see in what direction an experience is heading." When guided by an alertness to the subtle constituents of quality, the educator will be in a better position to ascertain and plan the kinds of experiences that need to be provided to build fruitfully on those already had. Similarly, she will be aware of the need to anticipate and avoid the kinds of experiences that give rise to aversions, resentments or indifference (pp.38-40).

The second statement declares that "there is no such thing as educational value in the abstract." The important insight here is that regardless of the current social or intellectual standing of a subject of study, its *educational* value lies primarily in how successfully it quickens the interest of students and sustains their commitment to study (p.46). For instance, a woodwork lesson that engages the students productively has its educational value in the quality of that engagement, i.e. the extent to which it uncovers and fosters some genuine personal capability. A maths lesson that fails to do so lacks this educational value, regardless of whatever repute maths might enjoy as a high status subject.

The third statement, " 'preparation' is a treacherous idea," captures a related point. What is treacherous is the common assumption that certain subjects and skills should be the mainstay

of study because they are be thought to be useful for the future. A variant of this idea, more common in our day than in Dewey's, is the preoccupation with preparation for tests and exams. In arguing against such an idea of preparation, Dewey stresses that here "the potentialities of the present are sacrificed to a suppositious future" (p.49). He adds that the only preparation that is consistent with high-quality educational experience is that which always resolves to make the most of the potentialities of the present. By continually doing this, we are best prepared for doing the same thing in the future (ibid). These three samples reveal important dimensions of learning <23/24> experiences that are ever present, but that that frequently remain overlooked, even by teachers.

Arguably the most important insight in *Experience and Education* however is the notion of collateral learning, which we can now examine in more detail. Dewey introduces it as follows:

> Perhaps the greatest of all pedagogical fallacies is the notion that a person learns only the particular thing he is studying at the time. Collateral learning in the way of formation of enduring attitudes, of likes and dislikes, may be and often is much more important than the spelling lesson or lesson in geography or history that is learned. For these attitudes are fundamentally what count in the future. The most important attitude that can be formed is that of desire to go on learning (p.48).

By concentrating on what goes on inconspicuously while the covering of the syllabus goes on overtly, Dewey seeks to bring into the open the internal world of experience that unfolds in the minds and hearts of the students. Previous thinkers like Rousseau, Froebel, Pestalozzi, Montessori, and others in the so-called "child-centred" tradition, had of course called attention to the importance of understanding the differences between children's and adults' experiences of learning. What is decisive in the "collateral" notion

however is the alertness to the crucial things that might be missed, and regularly so, if pedagogical efforts are preoccupied with preparation for examinations. Such preoccupation could mean that the most defining and defensible purposes of education become lost, and that mis-educational tendencies get underway. For instance: that whatever a subject might have to say to particular students' interests is bypassed; that opportunities for encounters with new horizons are missed; that crucial potentialities remain undiscovered or fallow; that adverse attitudes to certain subjects, teachers and other students begin to take root and advance.

These ideas of Dewey's foreshadow, in important respects, some of the characteristic themes of hermeneutics we have touched on in the previous chapter. Yet Dewey's philosophy could not venture into recognisably hermeneutic territory. This is not because of a gap in time between Dewey's active lifetime (1880s to 1940s) and the advent of hermeneutics as a major international development in Western philosophy (roughly 1960s onwards). It has much more to do with Dewey's dedication to a particular method in pursuing philosophy. A closer look at this method will identify some internal tensions in his approach; tensions that curtail the yield of his thinking. <24/25>

A Method for All Occasions?

At the close of the second chapter of *Experience and Education* Dewey writes that "the empirical sciences now offer the best type of intellectual organization which can be found in any field" (p.31). Later in the book he argues forcefully for the "experimental method of science" in elucidating the coherent theory of experience that the book seeks to provide (pp.85-88). He insists that his entire research procedure is based on the natural sciences. In a telling rejoinder to contributors to the volume of the Library of Living Philosophers dedicated to his work, Dewey writes as follows:

> For many years I have consistently – and rather persistently – maintained that the key to a philosophical theory of experience must proceed from initially linking it with the processes and functions of life as the latter are disclosed in biological science (Dewey, 1939/1989, p.530).

Clearly, Dewey's attachment to a conception of research procedure based on experimental science allows him to bring to the foreground many important features of experience that are too often passed over. It also enables him to demonstrate convincingly the importance of these features. But this attachment also precludes him from disclosing adequately *experience as lived* in pursuing his researches. It confines him to exploring experience from the outside, as an object of detached scrutiny. Excluded are the inner realms of experience that cannot be reached by such scrutiny, or alternatively, that may be able to withdraw behind a façade of staged behaviour when subjected to such scrutiny. Adopting an experimental stance demands methodologically that whatever is being investigated is regarded as an object at a distance, an object which, for research purposes, is a different kind of thing, or process, or being, from the researcher. Such an object is brought before the researcher *in order to be* scrutinised, manoeuvred, or prised open by the researcher. But it is not the kind of object that can decide whether to disclose itself to the researcher, or to hide itself, or maybe to attempt some protective combination of both.

Against the argument I am advancing here it might be claimed that the "experimental method" championed by Dewey also embraces adequately the uncovering of experience that is characteristic of research in the humanities. He regularly uses the terms "we", "us" and "our" in carrying out his many enquiries (e.g. *How we Think* (1933); *Experience and Education* (1938); *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1939). This usage frequently gives to Dewey's texts a conversational air that includes the reader as a fellow traveller as the investigation proceeds. But <25/26> the "we"

that is employed to engage the reader does not consistently extend to any "we" (we human beings as such) through which experience itself takes place. Dewey's use of "we" switches seamlessly to the third person when dealing centrally with the main pillars of his philosophy. For example: "The growth and development of any living organism from seed to maturity illustrates the meaning of continuity"; or: "An organism does not live in an environment; it lives by means of an environment" (Dewey 1939, p.23, p.25). In such remarks the "we", the "us" and the "our" have disappeared. To try to accommodate them would mean abandoning or rethinking the research approach. The object of enquiry remains at a methodological remove for Dewey, even when it is human experience itself. The "divinatory ability" that Mollenhauer regards as essential for the teacher is systematically placed beyond the reach of the educational researcher.

By contrast, hermeneutics insists on explicitly acknowledging what is involved in taking a "we" standpoint, or more precisely, a "we human beings" orientation. This acknowledgement takes the following form: In order properly to comprehend human understanding itself, enquiry must recognise that the "object" of investigation here remains at the same time a human being, or human beings. It must be aware that such beings are capable, in their participation, of influencing or even changing the character of the investigation. They are also capable of frustrating the investigation, either unwittingly or artfully. Such forms of participation might be regarded as deficiencies, undermining the objectivity of the investigation, or contaminating the data with subjective influences. But objectivity and subjectivity, as construed by experimental sciences, are simply inappropriate here. Properly speaking, a subjective standpoint in enquiry seeks to disclose the experience of a particular individual in its fuller dimensions. And a "we" standpoint in an enquiry seeks, not objectivity on a scientific model, but to bring in the fuller dimensions of experience more widely. It stresses that in the conduct of research into human

understanding, the researcher cannot discard her own standing as a participant by methodologically stepping outside of her own experience to a supposedly objective vantage point. Gadamer captures the point at issue here when replying to those among a first generation of critics who (mis)understood *Truth and Method* as taking up a "commitment" (*Engagement*) to one or other method, or outlook, or party.

> If there is any practical consequence of the present investigation, it certainly has nothing to do with an unscientific "commitment"; instead, it is concerned with the "scientific" integrity (*"wissenschaftliche" Redlichkeit*)[12] <26/27> of acknowledging the commitment involved in all understanding. My concern was and is philosophic: not what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing. (2004, pp-xxv-xxvi).

The contrast can now be shown more fully between hermeneutics and Dewey's approach. In Dewey's case, what is being investigated, namely human experience, is placed and kept at a methodological remove, and is rendered ontologically different, from the researcher. Gadamer, by contrast, speaks of what unavoidably happens to us, if we critically consult our experience as human beings. There is a strong parallel here with Wittgenstein's references to "we" and "us" in his *Philosophical Investigations*.[13] This involves something more than, and something different from, taking a conversational approach with the reader. The personal pronouns "we", "us" and "our" are regularly used by Gadamer – and by Wittgenstein – because the investigation is seeking to capture features of our human being-ness as such, or in other words, *inescapable* features of being human.

A practical example may illustrate the point at issue. A teacher, let us call her Kate, is pursuing an action research initiative in her classroom. She is seeking to gather thorough feedback on the

quality of her students' learning, with a view to enhancing that quality through initiatives in her own practice. So she is both teacher and researcher. To begin with, Kate is aware that there are countless variables in the situation that cannot be controlled, as can be done routinely in experimental sciences. She is equally aware that many of these variables, especially human feelings, could erupt spontaneously, in ever-shifting combinations and in varying degrees of intensity. She appreciates more keenly, as the research proceeds, that her work with the students is essentially a joint venture, as distinct from being mainly an exercise in transmission and reception (or perhaps rejection). Even where some students are pulling against her, indeed especially in such instances, the joint nature of the venture reveals itself to Kate in a range of emergent realities. These include: a growing consciousness of the vulnerability of the relationships; of previous damage done to relationships (by others or by herself); of the continual need for inventive action to repair and build a productive sense of "we". She learns to read the situation more <27/28> perceptively, to revise her working assumptions, to compare her thoughts carefully with those of discerning colleagues, to hear the students with new ears, to reconfigure her pedagogical actions.

In addition to gaining sharper insights into her students' learning experiences, Kate notices some changes in her own self-understanding. She comes to see some things she was previously blind to in her actions and her thinking; things that had been "happening under her nose" to use a common phrase, or "over and above our wanting and doing," as Gadamer puts it. Maintaining the objectivity of a detached observer in such a situation would ultimately be an evasion; a flight from the *reflexive* awareness that research integrity requires.. Such an awareness on the teacher's part is keenly attentive to what might befall both the researcher and the researched, for better and for worse, as the research progresses. Furthermore, this awareness carries its own imperatives for research and its conduct; not just action research but any research

that attempts to capture what is significant in experiences of learning. We can readily detect that it orients the researcher differently than any standpoint of experimental science does, and that it calls for more adequate and appropriate paths of enquiry.

These illustrations reveal further the tensions between the goals on the one hand, and the methods on the other, of Dewey's explorations of experience. They distinguish these explorations more clearly from any hermeneutic account. Consider again, for instance, his remark that "the *effect* of an experience is not borne on its face" (2008, p.27), or that experiences live on in further experiences "wholly independent of desire or intent" (p.27). Such remarks acknowledge that there are features of experience that are essentially inner or personal. They also recognise that these features are important. While Dewey's scientific approach can point suggestively toward such landscapes of lived experience, it cannot go much further in disclosing them. It cannot explain how, or why, what happens in these realms might bring different students to experience differently – sometimes quite differently – what is apparently the same event. Such happening has everything to do with different "effective histories" and with the quality of the relationships that are experienced in school, college or other learning environment. Disclosing these histories and relationships, and what takes place fruitfully or deficiently through them, lies at the heart of any adequate effort to understand educational experience. These will be key concerns in later chapters. But first comes the question of the adequacy of research effort. We can see that the methods of experimental sciences fall short in this event and that hermeneutics may have something more promising to offer. But with what would hermeneutics replace the methods of experimental science? and what kinds of claims could these have to universality, or widespread acceptance? <28/29>

Rationalities and Learning

Among the sources that contribute profitably in addressing these questions are those of Max van Manen, especially his book *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (van Manen, 2016). There, van Manen sets out the features of a "hermeneutic phenomenological human science" (p.8 ff). He retains the word "science", but in the sense of *Wissenschaft* – a much fuller term which includes scholarly enquiry in the arts and humanities as well as in natural and social sciences (p.14). A hermeneutic phenomenological human science, he explains, is both descriptive (phenomenological) and interpretative (hermeneutic). It tries to get beyond what is revealed in the behaviours of things, organisms and processes. Its aspirations and concerns lie beyond the stock-in-trade of experimental and behavioural science. It seeks to capture "the fullness of living," to disclose the meaning, or want of it, that their experiences of living have for people (p.12). It does not abandon objectivity or rationality, but the criteria of rationality that apply to it are in key respects different from those that apply to experimental sciences.

A phenomenological science embodies "a broadened notion of rationality", one that "redefines the meaning of concepts such as 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity,' and does not make unbridgeable distinctions between fact and value, the empirical and the normative" (p.16). In relation to the broadened rationality that he argues for, van Manen holds that "rationality expresses a faith that we can share this world, that we can make things understandable to each other, that experience can be made intelligible" (p.16). But he adds that this broadened rationality allows that "there is always an element of the ineffable to life"; it acknowledges that "it is the complexity and mystery of life that calls for reflection in the first place" (p.17).

The work of Fiachra Long on the phenomenology of learning provides some further insights here. Long takes up Husserl's call to probe critically the "natural attitude" of everyday outlooks in an effort to "get back to the things themselves" (Long, 2023, p.27). Similarly, he invokes Heidegger's phenomenological efforts to reach beyond appearances to "that which shows itself from itself" (Long, p.29). Long argues that because phenomena "can remain hidden and effectively unnoticed despite appearances … a particular method is required to prevent us from getting lost in appearances" (p.27). Husserl, he points out, proposes that such a method might proceed by systematically bracketing out the appearances presented in any pre-critical or unreflective consciousness. Such a bracketing might thus identify and counter "the supposed transparency of appearances" (p.27). In this connection Long correctly cautions that researchers should not regard data gathered from respondents as being unproblematic; that "the 'subjects' of research may be singularly unsuitable as witnesses of <29/30> their own experience" (p.28). This is a telling point, creating substantial difficulties for the design and use of empirical research instruments in the human sciences.

Where Husserl's proposal is concerned a troubling question remains. Can bracketing remove all intruding perspectives and biases? A hermeneutic standpoint, while crediting the effort to get beyond appearances, would hold that the bracketing move itself is misconceived. As a method, or a systematic procedure, bracketing suggests that preconceptions springing from everyday conventional outlooks can be comprehensively identified and methodically set aside, ultimately yielding faultless vistas for understanding. Hermeneutics, by contrast, points out if that if pre-understandings are set aside, so is the success of any and all attempts to understand. It is *through* our interpretative pre-understandings, whether unexamined or disciplined, that we are enabled to understand anything at all.

So how might we advance further in answering the two questions raised at the end of the previous section: With what kind of methods would hermeneutics replace those of experimental science, and what kinds of claims could these have to universality, or widespread acceptance? A solution to the difficulties may arise, not by confronting anew the tensions in phenomenology, nor by opposing method with an anti-method,[14] but by carefully relating the notion of method to the kind of research that is to be undertaken. This means that one kind of method might differ in essential respects with another, depending on the nature of what is to be investigated *and* of the researcher's purposes in the investigation. Method might thus be understood along the following lines: Method comprises the circumspect procedures of enquiry that are formed by researchers to explore new terrain. More important than following a set of fixed rules, this involves tailoring defensible strategies of enquiry to the nature of what is being investigated. It also involves giving reasons to explain and do justice to that which a research task seeks to uncover. Disclaiming any absolute standpoint, such a conception of method involves a central role for criticism and for self-criticism.

Both points are crucial. In relation to the first, inviting criticism of one's research findings, and working through these, may result in the refining or reconceiving of the original research questions, thus opening up more germane possibilities for enquiry. This much is common to experimental sciences on the one hand and explorations of human experience on the other. But the point about *self*-criticism, particularly the interrogation of prior influences that are <30/31> unearthed as the research proceeds, has a particular importance for any research that explores human experience. During the course of such research the researcher's self-understanding, not just the findings on the "object" of the research, might undergo some significant shifts.

We have touched on this last point in the previous section (in the action research example Kate found that her self-understanding

had changed), but as the point is central to an adequate comprehension of hermeneutics it calls for fuller elaboration now. We can begin this by drawing together van Manen's observations on a broadened rationality with some hermeneutically alert remarks made by Charles Taylor in revisiting William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* on the centenary of its publication (Taylor, 2002). As we have seen, van Manen's broadened rationality involves "a faith that we can share this world, that we can make things understandable to each other, that experience can be made intelligible." For anyone who maintains that any research stance must eschew such faith and insist instead on experimental science's notion of objectivity, Taylor's affirmation of James's insights uncovers a key issue:

> James holds … that there are some domains in which truths will be hidden from us unless we go at least halfway toward them. Do you like me or not? If I am determined to test this by adopting a stance of maximum distance and suspicion, the chances are that I will forfeit the chance of a positive answer. An analogous phenomenon on the scale of the whole society is social trust; doubt it root and branch, and you will destroy it (Taylor 2002, p.46).

What might have become opened up withdraws further from accessibility. So the faith question is nothing less than a requirement of sorts; a point mentioned by van Manen, although more decisively by Taylor. Taylor's remarks provide a good illustration of van Manen's "broadened rationality", while also calling attention to what is lost in its absence. A venturing half-way toward others, an orientation toward some form of dialogue, is involved in the kinds of faith that van Manen and Taylor stress, or in the rationality that embodies this faith. A research approach informed by such a rationality does not proceed by applying a readymade theoretical framework, even a phenomenological one. It involves, rather, an

interplay of attentiveness and responsiveness, of questioning and listening, of eliciting and refocusing.

All of this recognises that the truths to be discovered may often, or even primarily, be emergent in character. Accordingly, allowing scope to a trusting kind of back-and-forth in inter-personal encounters allow such truths to become unhidden, to speak for themselves and from themselves. There are some <31/32> resonances of such a faith in Dewey's works *My Pedagogic Creed* (1897) and *A Common Faith* (1934). But his attachment to the frameworks of experimental science precludes him from paths of discovery onto which he might otherwise be led in pursuing the implications of that faith. A parallel can be seen here with the disabling tension in Husserl's work. On the one hand lies phenomenology as the rigorous science that Husserl sought to establish; on the other lies phenomenology as a unique way to disclose lived experience.

In contrast to Jefferson's conception of reason as a uniform and supreme authority for regulating human thought, reason, in human use, becomes embodied and elaborated in different forms of rationality. A plurality of rationalities is an inescapable fact about being human in a world shared with others. There may be better or worse forms of rationality, but not an overarching form that can pronounce with final authority on all others. An important point to bring out here then is that different fields of human endeavour, involving as they do different types or genres of learning, *necessitate* the elaboration of appropriately different rationalities. Serious mistakes take place, and often become institutionalised, when one rationality pervades a domain foreign to its own. It is particularly mistaken for any form of rationality to claim a universality that maintains its supremacy by subduing or denying the claims of other forms. More promising is the discipline of criticism and self-criticism referred to above: that each form seeks to detect the parochialisms in its own outlooks and procedures, and

to remedy these while taking an active interest in developments in other forms.

Where investigations of human thought and action are concerned, the rationality of a hermeneutic enquiry can thus be seen to be more appropriate and more adequate than that of an experimental science. This is not to rule out any role for the latter in what are called the social sciences. The merits of experimental-scientific studies in such fields – e.g. sociology, economics, psychology – are connected with their investigations of demonstrable patterns in human behaviour, as distinct from human experience. These merits fall under a cloud however if "scientifically established" disclosures about behaviour are taken to include everything significant in the field in question. For its part, a hermeneutic rationality begins with an acknowledgement that what is being researched needs to be heard from itself; that is to say, in its *own voice*. Experience needs to be brought to voice and to speak meaningfully from itself if it is to be understood – by researchers, by teachers, or by anyone else. As we shall see later, this applies as much to what speaks from the subjects on a school curriculum as it does to what speaks from human experience. The emergent character of the truths disclosed by such forms of enquiry now suggests something <32/33> further: that the enquiry itself may, in some important but subtle sense, have the to-and-fro character of a conversation, or dialogue.

The Socratic Emphasis in Hermeneutics

There needs to be something responsive and conversational in any methodical approach that seeks to bring the fullness of educational experience within its scope. This is an important conclusion that can be drawn from the case put forward so far in this chapter. The conclusion brings before us again the ancient notion of Socratic method, but in a way that perceives some anticipations of a hermeneutic perspective in a Socratic approach to philosophy. To

assist in our investigation here however, the notion of Socratic method has to be distinguished from any misleading associations it might have gained in the intellectual history of Western civilisation. Particularly distorting is anything that associates it with a resolute scepticism, or with a self-preoccupied introspection, or with a repertoire of argumentative techniques for defeating one's adversaries, or with an instrumental procedure to capture happiness.[15]

Socratic method is not an arsenal of intellectual and performative strategies that can be called on to serve this purpose or that. On the contrary, it is linked to a singular kind of commitment, analogous to the hermeneutic commitment that seeks to ascertain "what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing" when acts of understanding take place. The early dialogues of Plato, as distinct from the middle and later ones, reveal the dramatic and venturesome character of Socratic educational practice. In these early dialogues (e.g. Gorgias, Protagoras, Euthyphro, Apology), the critical and self-critical exchanges carried on by Socrates and partners characteristically unearth some influential preconceptions and prejudices that the participants had overlooked. It is the impromptu play of conversation itself, in pursuing openly questions of common concern, that does the productive work of bringing assumptions to light. But these exchanges also invariably fall short of establishing conclusions with an unshakeable certainty – on key human concerns like justice, virtue, knowledge, pleasure, wisdom and strength of character. While at the beginning of the encounters many of the participants had forceful views on such concerns, the consequences of the discussion were likely to be a revelation of the many flaws in such views. <33/34>

Such inconclusive outcomes may look like a counsel of despair for those who hold that anything less than certainty is a deficiency that must be fixed. Far from such bad news however, the early dialogues make available crucial insights on the capabilities

and limitations of human understanding itself. The insights are of a subtle but also compelling kind. The most significant of these is that human knowing, despite its inherent biases and limitations, can make worthy advances, but can probably never attain pure or absolute knowledge. Associated conclusions are that human knowing is likely to remain provisional, and continually in need of critique for its improvement. Central here is a recognition that the other person might be right, or right in some respects, where I myself might be wrong.

These were the kinds of insights that underlay Socrates's remark at his trial that "real wisdom is the property of God" and that human wisdom, by contrast, is of little value (Apology, 23a). He disavowed moreover the title teacher, which was primarily associated in Greece with the sophists and their doctrines. Yet his lifetime's efforts were educational in unique ways. For him, a practical imperative follows from a recognition of the insur-mountable limitations of human knowing. To appreciate more fully this imperative and its underlying rationale, it is instructive to contrast it with the stance of David Hume twenty-one-and-a-half centuries later. Hume claimed that an "ought" cannot be derived logically from an "is"; that statements of value cannot be derived from statements of fact (Hume 1896, p.319). For Socrates however an ethical "ought" flows naturally from the acknowledgement of an inescapable "is", or fact (Apology 30a-31c). In other words, uncovering the unavoidable presence of limitations and biases in even the best human knowing orients that knowing toward certain paths rather than others. In particular, it beckons it toward pursuing critical efforts with others in seeking to remedy the shortcomings in one's own knowing that have come to light.[16]

Socrates continually pursued such efforts with leading luminaries of Athenian society, confronting and trying to overcome biases that had taken root through their upbringing, education and adult experiences. These efforts gave him an unparalleled appreciation of both the difficulties and the importance of just this

kind of enquiry. It was an educational endeavour that *ought* to be pursued, and *ought* to be renewed (Apology 29d-e) in order to bring to light illusions, preconceived ideas and unquestioned assumptions. In this endeavour <34/35> much of the narrowness of outlook embodied in such unexamined influences might be overcome, thus making advances toward a more adequate conception of truth. But accompanying these advances was a deepening insight that truth in any absolute sense might lie beyond the scope of human powers. The contrast could hardly be sharper between this distinctly Socratic orientation and what is widely taken to be the paternalistic legacy (Dewey 1997) or the authoritarian legacy (Popper 2011) of Plato. In fact, in the case of Socrates' educational work, we touch here on the deeper and richer dimensions of human learning. Education is disclosed as a distinct cultural practice – or family of associated practices – that is not primarily concerned with the affairs of state, but that provides the very basis on which human societies can best develop and thrive.

The Socratic example shows that unconscious assumptions, preconceptions and prejudices can be uncovered, with salutary consequences, but that we are unlikely as humans to shake ourselves fully free of them. Gadamer doesn't make an explicit connection between the Socratic context and his own arguments. These arguments continually highlight however the presence and influence of prior assumptions, preconceptions and other forms of pre-understandings. Gadamer take the further step moreover – contra both classical epistemology and metaphysics – of showing that such pre-understandings are not only unlikely to be finally overcome; rather that they are inherent features of human understanding itself. In their unexamined form they are likely to lead to recurring conflicts. By allowing them to emerge through genuine dialogue however –viz. by deliberately putting them at risk in encounters with others – important truths about being human itself are enabled to emerge that might otherwise remain obscured. In other words, hermeneutics points toward an ontological

significance for what, in the case of Socrates, was a lifelong conviction.

Socrates' attitude to the doctrines of the sophists was that the certainty they frequently claimed was illusory. Again, hermeneutics takes the further step of holding such certainty to be not only illusory in this or that case, but to be unattainable for humans. An orientation toward questioning forms of dialogue captures, accordingly, one of the most educationally important possibilities of being human. Gadamer uses the phrase "the conversation that we are" (*das Gespräch das wir sind*) in this connection (2004, p.370; 1975, p.360). I would wish to add here that the phrase does not identify something that is already there, i.e. something indisputable about being human, although Gadamer might disagree. Rather, its ontological significance, I suggest, lies in what it beckons us to *be*. The need to make this difference explicit is taken up in Chapter 6, in a review of criticisms of philosophical hermeneutics.

In the above remarks, an ethical dimension can be seen to arise naturally from the ontological investigations of philosophical hermeneutics.<35/36> Elucidating that ethical dimension involves developing an orientation of dialogue, both receptive and questioning, toward knowledge and toward other humans. It is here that the singular appropriateness of hermeneutics to an adequate understanding of education begins to be revealed. <36/37>

Chapter 3

The Hermeneutic Character of Education

Introduction

The first chapter of this book focused on becoming familiar with some central themes in philosophical hermeneutics. The second sought to show how a hermeneutic approach might offer possibilities for disclosing educational experience that remain inaccessible to scientific methodologies, even the more inclusive kind provided by Dewey's thinking. Taken together, Chapters 1 and 2 have furnished a sizeable body of ideas, while touching only in preliminary ways on their deeper educational significance. Let us therefore stock of these ideas and review that significance more closely. This review, in three parts, will seek to show that hermeneutics can provide an understanding of education that is more incisive and more inclusive than established conceptions that tend to make it subservient to one or more body of interests. The first part of Chapter 3 will present a restatement of the insights from hermeneutics that we have encountered so far, detailing the main educational consequences of each. Building on this, the second part will seek to show how our relationship to knowledge is transformed when knowledge itself is understood pedagogically. The central hermeneutic idea of "fusion of horizons" will be explored here, using an example from educational practice to illustrate both its importance and its intricacy. The third part will investigate how a pedagogy informed by hermeneutics recasts teaching and learning as a conversational endeavour with its own ethical character.

Consequences of a Shift of Direction

To begin with then, the main hermeneutic insights we have encountered can be restated as follows:

(1) that all our attempts to understand are inescapably influenced, in one way or another, by what we have previously experienced;
(2) that to understand at all is to understand differently – at least in some degree – than others do;
(3) that the standing which philosophy has long accorded to reason as a supreme, unbiased judge, is mistaken; <37/38>
(4) that human reason, at its best, cannot be more than reason-in-use;
(5) that reason-in-use can become conscious of many of its constraining limitations, but that its best efforts will still remain partial, and in both senses of the word: biased and incomplete;
(6) that method in enquiry or research can help to highlight pitfalls, but that method can also become a misleading dogma where it fails to acknowledge and accommodate itself to the particular nature of what is being explored;
(7) that dialogue with others, by putting at risk one's own claim to truth, and by attending receptively and critically to those of others, can make advances in the search for truth;
(8) that the truth to which humans can aspire is mistakenly conceived if it is regarded as an absolute: as a destination to be reached or a prize to be possessed.

The distinct orientation that insights like these provide for educational thought and action can now be paraphrased by considering each of the insights in turn in an educational context. Firstly, an awareness that previous experiences remain continually active in all human efforts at understanding exposes the limitations of a transmission view of teaching and learning. Handing on to the young "the best of what has been thought and taught to date" becomes questionable when the bodies of facts, beliefs and skills that constitute this "best" might sometimes be mistaken and might well be bettered. This is *not* to say that facts can be discarded; rather to emphasise that facts, including facts that have been taken for

certain for a long time, may be open to revision, even to refutation.[17] It is to say, essentially, that established facts cannot be regarded as a body of certainties that can thus be safely transmitted to students. Nor can they be regarded as a secure repository to which new certainties can be added as scientific research advances.[18] On the contrary, holding established <38/39> facts open to scrutiny, revision and possible refutation, gives a primarily exploratory as distinct from a transmissive character to educational endeavours. It highlights the importance of a community of enquiry, where the stimulus of new perspectives – provided they are pertinent – is to be welcomed as necessary to the success of the endeavour. And what is said of established facts here applies no less to beliefs and skills that have also attained established status. Finally, the insight about the inescapable presence of prior influences cautions that pedagogy takes a wrong turn whenever it falls servant to certainties that must remain beyond question.

Secondly, recognising the point that to understand at all is to understand differently, at least in some degree differently, provides a strong philosophical warrant for the notion of individual differences. In her most well-known book, *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt identifies two uniquely human characteristics that can illustrate the educational importance of difference: natality and plurality. Natality, or being born, has a figurative as well as a literal meaning. It identifies the potentialities that are present not only in the birth of each human being, but that can also be discovered and renewed in all human initiatives (Arendt 1998, p.9). Plurality refers to the fact that while as humans we are all the same, we are so "in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live" (p.8). In educational discourse the notion of individual differences is very often associated with the pedagogical approaches necessary to remedy deficiencies in performance among students. But when this notion is understood as central to how learning itself is experienced, its more radical significance can be appreciated. Pedagogically, this significance has

at least as much to do with ethics as it has with issues of performance and achievement. From a critical standpoint it calls attention to the dangers of educational policies that seek to promote uniformity of outlook, whether political, religious, cultural or other. More positively, it keeps an awareness of plurality and natality themselves to the forefront and highlights the responsibilities of pedagogy to discover the range and quality of promise that are native to each individual.

The next three insights have to do with reason, specifically its limitations and possibilities. As they are closely interwoven, the three can be dealt with together. In contrast to old-school or stereotypical pictures of teaching and the teacher, setting aside the notion of reason as a supreme or unbiased judge takes on a central importance. It recognises that granting anything like supreme powers to reason tends in practice to give professors, principals and other <39/40> educational authorities unwarranted power and influence. Contra the best aspirations of Thomas Jefferson, it doesn't banish bias. In fact to believe that it does can make learning environments more conducive to hierarchies of conceit than to a shared search for the truth of the matter. In democratic societies moreover a sense of professional modesty would seem to demand such setting aside. Here decisions are often likely to be questioned and any tendency toward absolutism is likely to bring trouble on a teacher's or school principal's head. Accepting that human reason can never be more than reason-in-use, and that the best fruits of such reason are limited by bias and incompleteness, has a persuasive practical force in educational contexts. It carries more far-reaching consequences however. It alerts one, in this case the educator, to the necessity for a reflective, informed and committed approach in one's practice, but also to the necessity to invite constructive criticisms from others. This is decisive for how the relationships of educational practice are understood and carried out, including the teacher's relationships with students, with the

subject(s) being taught, with colleagues and so on. These relationships will be the main theme of the next chapter.

Concerning the next insight, the point about method as a safeguard against pitfalls, or as a possible dogma, its pedagogical significance isn't immediately evident and calls for a little more investigation than do the other insights. The heart of this insight, as reviewed in Chapter 2, is that method needs to be keenly perceptive of the particular nature of what is being explored or investigated. This is as true of the conduct of teaching as it is of the conduct of research. While teaching and learning are taking place, everything is continually on the move and changing, as in a football or other field game. There may be moments of celebration or joy, flashes of temper, instances of intelligent co-operation, periods where frustration rules, relatively quiet passages, periodic eruption of fighting, and so on. The situation could hardly be more different to the detachment and controlled circumstances of the research laboratory. So while educational practice is in session, investigation necessarily takes second place to what is being enacted in the classroom by the practitioner, unless the investigation is being carried out by a visiting observer. Even then however, the observer will need to replay some of the sequences of action afterwards to approach anything like an adequate picture.

In this connection Donald Schön (1984), focusing on evidence-gathering by practitioners themselves, drew a helpful distinction between reflection-*on*-action and reflection-*in*-action. Both are concerned with one's practice, not with self-preoccupation. Methodical reflection *on* action takes place after or before the action itself. It is most productive when provided by a rich yield of evidence of what has happened during a session of teaching, whether gathered by the <40/41> teacher herself, by a colleague observer, by feedback from students, by audio and video recordings, or by a combination of strategies. The important thing is that whatever strategies are included in the method offer ways of illuminating and capturing things that might otherwise be passed

over. These include students' unvoiced attitudes, their developing tendencies in collateral learning, their hidden difficulties with concepts, ideas or procedures, and a range of other less evident aspects of educational experience.

Reflection-in-action is a form of intelligent thinking on one's feet. But rarely does it spring to life on its own, or rarely can it be employed without already being fluent in *detecting* and utilising pertinent evidence. It is cultivated and made more capable where it is insightfully informed by the fruits of reflection-on-action. It enables the teacher not only to work to a coherent plan, but also to set aside that plan, momentarily or longer, to follow new paths in original ways if unforeseen opportunities to do so arise. Similarly, adroit reflection-in-action can anticipate different kinds of difficulties in the course of educational practice. Where it is methodically and capably carried out it enables the teacher to take steps in advance to circumvent or minimise such difficulties, or provides her with resourceful remedies where they cannot be avoided. It enhances moreover the yield of material for further productive reflection. This kind of adaptive sensitivity and responsiveness is a stranger to conceptions of pedagogical method that think in terms of progressive v traditional, instructor v facilitator or other such binary opposites. It is also clearly at odds with any conception of method – research or pedagogical – which insists that enquiries in education must follow the distancing that is proper to experimental sciences.

The final two insights are concerned with dialogue and truth, or more precisely, with the kinds of truth to which humans may aspire. Again, their interwoven character makes it possible to consider them together, with respect to their educational significance. Perhaps the most important point to make here is that dialogue does not merely mean being prepared to join in discussion or debate, but being disposed to put one's own claim to truth at risk. Recalling the Socratic emphasis in hermeneutics considered in Chapter 2 – that a practical "ought" is uncovered by recognising an

ontological "is"– highlights the point that an ethical orientation arises naturally from an acknowledgement of something inescapable about human knowing and its limitations.

Of course this orientation toward dialogue runs counter to views of the teacher that were historically dominant. These include the master (*magister*, *maestro*), the pedagogue (often a derogatory term in the English language for the one who knows and instructs), or the pedant (the one who shows off his learning). In the hermeneutic characterisation, by contrast, the emphasis <41/42> is on teaching as and artistic practice, and on the teacher as a thinker-practitioner, an attentive listener and a taker of initiatives for communal enquiry. Far from seeing a curriculum as a repository of anything absolute, the teacher in this characterisation acknowledges the provisional and fallible nature of even the strongest forms of human knowing. With that acknowledgement goes a receptive but also questioning stance toward inheritances of learning, particularly those that are closest to one's work as a practitioner. This involves a commitment to study more and to learn better, especially by continually renewing the relationships that constitute the main domains of educational practice itself.

Understanding knowledge pedagogically

In giving the notion of encounter a more central place than that of transmission, a hermeneutic characterisation of education also puts a focus on the experience of learning, or study, as a matter of *address* and *response*. Achieving a high quality of educational experience is accordingly linked mainly to the quality of that address and response. The address comes from the subject, but in practice it is made, primarily although not exclusively, through the teacher. The teacher brings to voice, well or less well, the subject or topic in question. A teacher might be competent in one or more subjects for many years, and yet be unable to bring them to voice in a vibrant way, or even to understand what this bringing to voice means. The difference between having a competent knowledge of a

subject and teaching it well is crucial. It is why the nature of the teacher's *relationship* to the subject is of primary importance.

To explain the point at issue more clearly it is worth exploring a further central notion in Gadamer's account of hermeneutics, that of a "fusion of horizons" (*Horizontzverschmelzung*; Gadamer 2004, p.305 ff). A horizon, as we saw in Chapter 1, "is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (Gadamer 2004, p.301). Gadamer coined the "fusion of horizons" phrase to describe what happens when efforts by different parties to understand something new have borne genuine fruit. This does not mean that one party's view is assimilated to the other's, or that there is now unanimity of outlook. But some new understanding has ben achieved; some previously unknown truth has been uncovered. As the notion of effective history shows, each person's horizon is shaped by enduring influences from previous experience. Every act of understanding is a historically influenced event. This fits well with the widely shared view that an expansion of horizons, the ability to take a wider rather than a narrower view, is one of the main benefits of a good <42/43> education. What is less widely appreciated is that such expansion of horizons involves getting one's thinking onto different paths than previously, finding that one's imagination is now on a new plane. But prior to this, or in conjunction with it, it also involves some unsettling of our settled notions, some confrontation with preconceptions or prejudices that may have long lain active below the surface of critical awareness. The enabling spark in all of this is not effective history itself, but *consciousness* of effective history (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein,* Gadamer 2004, p.301 ff). Again, let us take a concrete example, this time the experience of Frank, a teacher of maths.

Frank has become conscious of imperfections in his practice as he begins to experience some new demands. He has many years of successful teaching, with creditable results for his students in tests and examinations. This has regularly confirmed him in the

view that his existing routines serve him well. But then something upsets the settled tenor of his ways – in fact three things: an impending change in the examination system, some unexpected feedback from students, and watching a demonstration video of a teacher teaching a newly adopted maths curriculum that Frank will also have to teach soon. This upset begins to reveal to him that the version of maths that he has been teaching is heavy on rules and memorisation, short on explanatory examples, or even lifeless or remote. Some of the students make bold to tell him that they accept the need to study maths for exam purposes, but that it says nothing to them. Frank is puzzled by this last remark. Why should they want it to *say* anything? Surely the point of studying is to master the rules, theorems, formulas etc. so as to perform well. And anyway, isn't maths *supposed* to be hard?

Frank starts to discuss his concerns with a colleague, Sally, but instead of finding reassurance for his existing outlooks he disconcerted to discover that what she is teaching is almost a different subject, despite carrying the same name: maths. In their discussions he insists on the importance of memorising rules of procedure in algebra. Sally doesn't disagree but says that rules without reasons are rather empty. She adds that in teaching algebra it's important that the students see it as being on the hunt for something, initially finding the value of x. The key to pursuing and enjoying this hunt she says, which is like participating in a game, is systematically using what we know to find out what we don't know, making one move at a time. As their exchanges continue Sally invites Frank to her classroom and shows him how she uses algebra tiles to do visual algebra with her students. The tiles, she says, are invaluable in the introductory stages, especially in getting the more reluctant students across the threshold and enabling them to follow the logical steps illustrated by the use of the tiles. <43/44>

Frank can see merit, but also something disconcerting, in what she says. His discomfort becomes a frisson, with the recurring doubts, insights and restlessness this brings. Gradually it yields to

an emerging sense of challenge; firstly the challenge of coming to understand maths in a somewhat different way than he did for years, and secondly that of sharing parts of this new understanding with his students. Frank sees that Sally's horizon is more inclusive, more imaginative and more alive than his own, but also less ordered. Her relationship to the world of mathematics is more energetic than his, but also a bit too informal. But then, as Frank works quietly on tackling the challenges he has acknowledged, he begins to discover something else. What he discovers is that maths has a personality of sorts – replete with varied ideas and lively possibilities. As he come to know this personality better, while continuing his conversations with Sally and his initiatives with his students, Frank begins to accomplish in some degree, as does Sally, the fusion of horizons that Gadamer speaks about. It now strikes him, intermittently then more frequently, that his relationship to maths is wrongly thought of as essentially a matter of mastery and control, notwithstanding how common that view is. Rather, the relationship discloses itself, as it takes form, as a kind of silent but active conversing, something that couldn't happen if he continued regarding maths as essentially a conceptual tool.

This conversing takes new turns that he hadn't expected. It surprises him with fresh ideas; it regularly sends him to look up websites and books that he'd never thought of consulting previously. As a consequence, in due course he can acknowledge, without perplexity, that he is *allowing himself to be addressed*; that maths says something to him that it didn't previously, that it reaches him in new ways. He retains however a firm commitment to some features of his previous understanding of maths as a world of order, precision and logic. He continues to value the memorisation of rules and formulae since he views them as invaluable resources to have to hand. Sally, for her part, begins to give more weight to these latter features. Previously she had tended to downplay the importance of memorisation, as she had summarily identified it with rote learning. In short, neither standpoint has been assimilated to, or has

acquiesced in, the other. Their approaches to maths teaching remain different, but there has been a venturing out for both of them, yielding a shared understanding that has benefited both.

What is said of maths here goes also for any other subject on a school or college curriculum. The proper pedagogical orientation to the subject is concerned less with possessing a mastery of knowledge and more with the cultivation of a lively conversational relationship. The former suggests something completed and also yields too readily to a one-sided view, which we have called <44/45> a transmission view. The latter, by contrast, highlights the unfinishing endeavour needed on the teacher's part to enable a subject to be brought to voice and to make an address that quickens the interests of students. A clear mark of professional maturity among educational practitioners is the recognition of the diverse forms of address, and of the endless possibilities for receptive and critical engagement, that reside in inheritances of learning. With respect to such inheritances, teachers recognise that they themselves are, and remain, students. A further such mark of maturity is the commitment given to sustaining a progressively enriching relationship, over the course of one's life as a practitioner, with the subjects that are one's abiding points of contact with one's students.

Before concluding these remarks on the teacher's orientation toward knowledge it is important to clear up a possible confusion about the notion of a fusion of horizons. This notion is sometimes misunderstood as a dissolving of all differences and disagreements, either between persons or between a reader and a written text that addresses something to him. The term "fusion" (*Verschmelzung*) is an unfortunate choice in one sense because it tends to neglect something crucial. It fails to highlight the unsettling – of one's assumptions, preconceptions, prejudices – that has to take place if one is to appreciate that what each outlook brings with it is something partial, i.e. biased and incomplete. The notion of a frisson, as described above, rather than a fusion, is a better one to

capture this unsettling. Nevertheless the idea of fusion (particularly as employed in physics) provides a suggestive analogy for the new energies released in the event of understanding and the fresh possibilities for truth-seeking that are brought to light.

The ethical tenor of pedagogy

When teaching and learning are regarded as mainly an interplay, as distinct from a transmission, as a joint endeavour rather than a matter of instruction and reception, the relationships and responsibilities involved become newly defined. Much as knowledge takes on an active voice in a hermeneutic perspective, pedagogical relations are likewise revealed as conversational in character, with a distinct ethical orientation. We will investigate that ethical orientation directly here and take up the conversational character of teaching more closely in the next chapter. George Steiner's *Lessons of the Masters* provides a good starting point for reviewing the major ethical issues in teaching as it brings these sharply and succinctly to the fore. The book was written when Steiner's retirement from a life of teaching in universities left him, as he says, "orphaned" (p.19). Well versed in the literature of hermeneutics, Steiner does not disown <45/46> the term "transmission" in describing teaching and learning. He views transmission however not as a transfer of knowledge but as a form of "translation." Translation is described as a perceptive reading between the lines of a text that enables the teacher "to apprehend a revealed Logos" (p.3) and allows this to address the students. Abhorring poor teaching, Steiner has scant regard for any pedagogic routine that is merely utilitarian in its aims, that fails to answer to the lofty responsibilities of the task; a task that Steiner unreservedly calls a vocation. His verdict on utilitarian teaching is uncompromising:

> It diminishes the student, it reduces to gray inanity the subject being presented. It drips into the child's or

> adult's sensibility that most corrosive of acids, boredom, the marsh gas of ennui. Millions have had mathematics, poetry, logical thinking, killed for them by dead teaching, by the perhaps vengeful mediocrity of frustrated pedagogues (p. 18).

Steiner's criticisms of mediocre or poor teaching become even more forceful and more sweeping as the book proceeds. He declares that "anti-teaching is statistically close to being the norm" (p.18). He holds that the majority of secondary teachers (he doesn't mention any country or region) "are more or less amiable gravediggers. They labour to diminish their students to their own level of indifferent fatigue" (p.18). Steiner doesn't produce any evidence for his conclusions about the statistical frequency of poor teaching, or for his claim that the majority of secondary teachers acquiesce in it. His criticisms of utilitarian teaching press home some important truths however, in an era when teaching-to-the-test has become increasingly common.

In his remarks on more constructive teaching Steiner raises some key ethical issues that are central to the hermeneutic account of educational experience being presented in this book. He begins with a tribute: "Genuine teaching has been held to be an *imitatio* of a transcendent, or more precisely divine, act of disclosure, of that unfolding and folding inward of truths which Heidegger attributes to Being (*aletheia*)" (p. 3). Steiner offers stories of masters who have destroyed their students, of students who have betrayed or ruined their masters, and an intriguing "third category" which recognises the joint nature of teaching and learning. This third category is "that of exchange, of an eros of reciprocal trust and, indeed, love" (p.2). He recognises moreover, that there are "boundless possibilities of mixture and nuance" between these categories (p.2). But in describing the actions that seek to embody the heart of teaching, Steiner takes a surprising, even a flagrant turn:

> To teach seriously is to lay hands on what is most vital in a human being. It is to seek access to the quick and innermost of a child's or an adult's <46/47> integrity. A Master invades, he breaks open, he can lay waste in order to cleanse or rebuild (p.18).

This declaration attributes to the teacher a sense of power that is overwhelming in its potency, placing the student in a decidedly submissive position, in fact an unacceptably vulnerable one from the perspective of any defensible pedagogy. The master's will enthrals and holds sway here. There may indeed be life-changing encounters, but there is also likely to be some lasting damage. One can understand the background to Steiner's remark if one recalls the prominent examples to which he regularly returns in the book, particularly the master-student relationship of Abelard and Heloise and of Heidegger and Arendt (pp.2, 62, 82, 88-90). There is an unmistakable note of rapacious ecstasy in these portrayals of educational encounter. It seems to be associated with Steiner's insistence that "Eroticism, covert or declared, fantasized or enacted, is inwoven in teaching" (p.26); also that "Teaching and learning are informed by an otherwise inexpressible sexuality of the human soul" (p.27).

Erotic desire can arise in the conduct of any practice, but far form being foundational in teaching, as Steiner suggests it is, it compromises or corrupts the practice if it takes hold of the practitioner. A teacher may well fall in love with a student. But, for the duration of the practitioner-student relationship, the integrity of the practice itself demands that a teacher cannot announce or reveal that love in any way that differentiates between the beloved and the other students. A discerning observation by Martin Buber, of which Steiner seems unaware, is pertinent here. It succinctly highlights the unerotic and ethical character of teaching *as a practice*.

> Eros is choice, choice made from an inclination. This is precisely what education is not. The man who is loving in Eros chooses the beloved, the modern educator finds his pupil there before him. … the misshapen and the well-proportioned, animal faces, empty faces, and noble faces in indiscriminate confusion … the glance of the educator accepts and receives them all. (Buber 2004, p.112).

Steiner's masters resemble in a sense classical divinities who can loftily disregard ethics in bringing unparalleled inspirations, and torments, to their students. *Practitioners* cannot afford to do the same. The notion of practitioner is foreign to Steiner's account, notwithstanding its insights on the marvels of teaching and its recurrent provoking of pedagogical energies that may be prone to slumber. Equally foreign to Steiner's account is the related notion of teaching *as a practice*. At one point Steiner speaks suggestively of the teacher as one who has taken "an unspoken Hippocratic oath" (p.17). Rather than pursue the <47/48> implications of this point however, including one's responsibilities to fellow practitioners, to the practice itself, or to the intended beneficiaries of the practice, he makes the unashamed declaration on teaching seriously quoted above. And he continues his account that key.

Practices – nursing, architecture, medicine, teaching, etc. – are characteristically associated with a code of practice to which their members (i.e. practitioners) voluntarily subscribe, and to which they can be held to account by the regulatory body for the relevant practice. In most cases such codes are drawn up and recurrently reviewed by practitioners and representative members from other occupations, through the regulatory body for the practice in question: e.g. Nursing and Midwifery Council, Engineering Council, Teaching Council etc. This task affords opportunities to affirm and refine the purposes of the practice and also the practitioners' own sense of identity and commitment. Carrying out the task properly requires a thorough comprehension

not only of the conversational tenor of pedagogy, but also of the kinds of relationships that constitute teaching. It is chiefly these relationships that yield, or frustrate, a high quality of educational experience. We will turn now to examine them at closer range. <48/49>

Chapter 4

Reconsidering the Rationale for Teaching

Introduction

Just as it occasions a pivotal shift in our understanding of educational endeavour more widely, hermeneutics involves a decisive change in how the relationships of educational practice are to be understood. The priority given by conventional accounts of teaching the possession of method and skill in transmitting subject matter rarely does justice to what actually happens in teaching-learning encounters. Unlike tools that are possessed and used, or theories that are mastered and applied, pedagogical skills become embodied – successfully or otherwise – in the relationships of educational practice; relationships that have in each case a specific context and history. This is a decisive but subtle point and perhaps the best way to illustrate it is to begin with an example from educational practice itself. In this case the example comes from a school where a student teacher is carrying out one of his teaching placements. As the story in the example proceeds, we see that some tensions arise, as do contrasting possibilities for understanding and dealing with these.

A Tale from School

Joe is a student teacher of Business Studies who has agreed to teach a section of the course titled "International Trade" during the first weeks of his school placement. Today his theme is a common market; more specifically, the advantages and disadvantages to a country of being a member of a common market. About seven in Joe's Second Year class of twenty-two 13-14 year-old girls and boys are diligently following his presentation and copying down the bullet points as these

gradually appear on the touchscreen at the top of the class. Roughly another seven are also writing down the bullet points, but intermittently or more slowly. Some of these are daydreaming, others are carrying on conversations with friends, but none of the seven are paying consistent attention to Joe's explanations. Among the remainder of the students there is considerable multi-tasking. A few are having fun with peashooters, using biro sleeves and hardened pellets of chewed-up paper; others are making paper planes for carrying scribbled comments and jokes across the room whenever Joe's back is <49/50> turned; others still are carrying on sporadic conversations. Some are combining such pursuits with half-hearted efforts to transcribe from the touchscreen. When Joe does a round of the class to see how the note-taking is going he is disappointed by the sluggish work of the majority of students and finds that one student, Aoife, has written nothing.

Joe asks Aoife why, but the response comes from elsewhere: "She's thinking about last night's fun with Dave!" "If only!" another student swiftly adds, which prompts general laughter and jeers. Joe is alarmed, sensing that matters could quickly fall apart or get nasty unless he intervenes to put them back on course and pull everyone into line. He calls for quiet, not quite successfully, pointing out that the advantages and disadvantages of a common market is one of the most regular exam topics. He adds that he is keen that none of the students would find themselves at a loss when faced with this, or any other topic, at the end-of-term examination. To these remarks Fiona, a polite but candid student, replies: "We get that sir, but this common market stuff and the note-taking are so boring!" A murmur of approval follows Fiona's contribution, most vocally from the peashooters and plane-makers, but by no means confined to them. Joe is dismayed by the extent of the distaste, particularly in view of the lengthy preparation he puts into his lessons. He acknowledges to the students that Business Studies

"might not be the most exciting of subjects" and promises that he'll try to make it more interesting. But how? he asks himself.

Joe discusses his difficulty with his main co-operating teacher in the school, Denise; also with the two fellow-students in his tutorial group, Adaku and Phil. Denise is happy to offer constructive criticism and advice, but only if Joe welcomes it, which he does. She suggests that instead of relying so heavily on textbook and slides, Joe might retrieve some of the main arguments of the Brexit debate in the UK, prior to its 2016 referendum on remaining in or withdrawing from the European Union. She points out that these arguments, pro and contra, involved abundant drama and passion, but also included much incisive analysis. The students might be asked to discover the key issues, beginning their searches with some websites recommended by the teacher. To give more edge to the task the students might, in pairs or threes, be asked to explore how the UK fared in the wake of Brexit. They could find out which of the pro and contra arguments might best stand up now and assemble three points on the strongest case to be made currently for Remain on the one hand and for Leave on the other.

In Joe's discussions with Adaku and Phil, Adaku suggests that gathering such information would be ideal for holding a walking debate in the class. The theme could be: if our country (Ireland in this instance) were to have a referendum on EU membership now, what kind of case could be made for Remain? What <50/51> kind of case could be made for Leave? What are the strongest reasons to be found for and against being in the EU as a common market? Phil suggests that the debate format could help students to find their own words for what their researches might yield, thus countering a tendency merely to copy and paste information from websites, or to rely mainly on artificial intelligence. She adds however that the rules for the debate would have to be clearly understood and strictly enforced. Denise suggests that she and Joe could notify parents about the

upcoming debate, stressing its educational merits and also the even-handedness that will govern its conduct.

The three members of the tutorial group then meet and agree that the plan might work as follows. Two opposing teams of four could be chosen from the Second-Year class, perhaps randomly selected. Depending on timetabling constraints, a 60 or 80 minute period could be scheduled for the debate and each team member would speak for five minutes. The rest of the class would briefly form into three standing groups at the beginning of the debate before taking their seats: those supporting Remain on the left of the room, those supporting Leave on the right and neutrals in the middle. When the teacher called full-time on the debate, the students would weigh up the evidence, then leave their seats to decide the final result. Before concluding the class, a debriefing session would be held, covering items like stepping into and out of role in debates, the part played by biases and friendships in voting decisions, and other related issues. Finally, the teacher would give the class a homework exercise for the next day: Regardless of how you voted, what are (a) the strongest arguments that can be made for membership of a common market? (b) the strongest arguments that can be made against membership of a common market. At the beginning of the next class the teacher could again be at the touchscreen, but now assembling the case for and the case against, as considered arguments are offered by the students.

On completion of the school placement some weeks later Joe reports to his fellow-students on how the plan worked out in practice. He had monitored developments closely before and after the debate. After some initial turbulence, and one-to-one conversations with students who were pulling against him, he was encouraged on seeing things start to settle into a more purposeful rhythm. He noticed changes in four areas in particular. The most evident of these was the change in most students' attitude to their work and in their level of commitment.

The intense conflicts between the contending sides in the UK referendum provoked a lively interest among most students, and the search tasks were pursued with rising enthusiasm. A second important change was an improvement in the climate of relations, including students' relations with the teacher and their relations with each other in pursuing their tasks. Pea-shooting and <51/52> plane-throwing declined rapidly when students had something evidently better to do and there was a notable rise in both co-operative and competitive efforts among the students. Exploring the features, the consequences and the significance of the common market theme had progressively become a shared and enlivening concern. A third and pleasant change that Joe noted was the favourable carry-over into other topics in Business Studies resulting from the students' improving work commitment. This yielded a more participatory way of doing things and an awakened interest in key themes in the world of industry and economics.

Finally, Joe identified other changes, unexpected and subtle ones, that took place in his own outlooks. These emerged gradually, from behind his back as it were, particularly the change in his own understanding of Business Studies. The subject he was teaching began to look different from that in the textbook and the official syllabus, and in ways that were both attractive and demanding. A new kind of landscape began to emerge, furnishing ideas and prospects that he would indeed be able to share with his students. Although it was too early to capture with precision what was happening, Joe was never-theless aware that some important changes were under-way in his understanding of himself and his work.

The Relationships of Educational Practice

It would be possible to tackle in other ways the difficulties that Joe encountered in his Second Year class. For instance, it would be quite

common for the disciplinary procedures of the school to take the primary place in dealing with the conflicts that arose. In that case however, the roles and expectations in which the new teacher became habituated could inconspicuously become an embrace of conformist routines. To decline taking the official route however is not to deny the necessity or value of formal procedures and protocols in the conduct of any practice. It is to say, rather, that if one has primary recourse to such things in the daily conduct of teaching, the relations that define the practice of teaching itself are likely to suffer, with something essential getting lost. It will be helpful then to bear in mind the case of Joe as we turn now to examine five domains of relationship that are central to educational practice. These are: the teacher's relationship to the subject(s) she teaches; to her students; to colleagues and the school leadership; to parents and the wider community; to herself. We will return at the end of this chapter to make an appraisal of how these relationships fared in the case of Joe's experiences. But first we need to explore each of the five domains in turn. Each identifies not so much a personal <52/53> attribute or characteristic on the teacher's part – e.g. strict, informal, conscientious, laid-back, etc. Each relationship (the singular will be used) encompasses, rather, a cluster of related attitudes, commitments and dispositions to action.

(a) The teacher's relationship to the subject of study

It is customary to think of the teacher's knowledge as a possession – something acquired over many years of study. Accordingly, it is quite natural to regard teaching as a kind of transmission – of concepts, skills, outlooks etc. – from teachers to students. This view of the matter is not so much wrong, as inadequate, or one-sided. In regarding knowledge, or skill, mainly as something residing in the teacher's possession, and intended for transmission, it tends to neglect the relational aspects of the event. The teacher's responsibilities are seen essentially as those of instruction, those of the

students as complying with the teacher's expectations that they study and learn. A hermeneutic view of knowledge moves the emphasis from knowledge as possession to know*ing* as experience. It also focuses on the kind of knowing in question. It asks about the *kind of relation* the teacher experiences to the subject of study. To what extent is the subject a continual, formative and valued presence in the teacher's life?

The distinction between knowledge as possession and knowledge as relationship is not the same as that between "knowing that" and "knowing how", associated with Gilbert Ryle (2000). Ryle's distinction maps neatly enough onto that between knowledge and skills. But it doesn't identify the important difference between knowledge as a body of facts, theories and beliefs on the one hand, and, on the other, knowledge as active inheritances with much to address to learners.[19] The depiction I am offering of the relationship of the teacher to the subject(s) she teaches resembles in important respects a relationship that a person might have to a friend, a partner, or a spouse. This makes the subject a living presence as distinct from a "thing", or an "object of study." The relationship moreover, has an ongoing, ever-emergent character. It could become enhanced, or welter in routine, or indeed wane. Like all relationships, if it is to deepen and thrive it needs to be continually nourished and renewed. The teacher's efforts to cultivate it will sometimes encounter disappointments as well as delights, perplexities as well as illuminations, acrimonies as well as harmonies. The voices that seek to address the teacher in this relationship – in geography, biology, economics, maths, woodwork, French, history etc. – carry <53/54> their own worlds of conflict and distortion, as well as their rewarding imaginative vistas. Properly speaking then, there is a continuing conversation – a dialectic of receptivity and criticism – in the teacher's relationship to the subject(s) of study. It is this dialectic, including the tensions it provokes in the teacher, that gives the relationship its buoyancy and energy. Illustrating the point with the example of a teacher of history in this instance,

where the relationship is healthy the teacher is continually keen to encounter and engage with new sources. These might include historical biographies, new analyses of historical events and conflicts, histories written from non-traditional standpoints and so on. Not only does this kind of engagement keep the teacher up-to-date, it also whets and freshens the relationship itself. In pursuing this kind of engagement moreover, the teacher will find that he is quite naturally engaging in debate with himself: playing Devil's Advocate with some of his settled ways of thinking and doing, and allowing some new challenges for the conduct of his own practice to arise and be addressed.

The scope and depth of a teacher's relationship to her teaching subject(s) will vary from a pre-school teacher to graduate school professor. The relationship may range from the teacher being resourcefully at home with a number of different subjects to being involved at an advanced level with one or two. On the quality of this relationship will depend, however, whether rich possibilities can be opened up for students or whether these remain largely unknown, perhaps bypassed by an industrious preoccupation with performances and credentials.

(b) The teacher's relationship to students

The teacher's relationship to the students invariably involves some degree of restraint on movement and thought, particularly on the part of the students. It is not difficult to envisage it as a relationship of unequal powers, or even as an essentially coercive one. In such representations a conflict of wills, overt or implicit, lies at the foundation of the relationship. Moreover the will of the teacher, or more formally the rule of the school, needs to prevail if educational progress is to be made. For all their prominence in common lore however, even in the historical lore of teaching itself, such representations can be quite misleading. They make it difficult to envisage teaching and learning as the joint venture which, as has

been suggested, constitutes the heart of teaching itself. In fact, to the extent that a conception of teaching as an arena of unequal power relations remains to the forefront, the more fertile possibilities of teaching are beclouded, even obscured.

Power is not the primary issue where a teacher in whom an inheritance of learning is alive seeks to share that inheritance, or aspects of it, with his students. What is central, rather is a perceptive and venturesome kind of <54/55> inclination, or attunement. In evoking the voice of the subject, in enabling it to speak in ways that quicken the interests of students, the teacher begins to open up a new imaginative neighbourhood – in maths, Spanish, music, art or whatever. The teacher has travelled that landscape before, but ventures now afresh with a new group of students, not as any mere facilitator, but as a perceptive and energetic educational leader. Indeed the landscape may take on some different features from these known on previous occasions, often springing from contributions by students, whether impromptu or more considered. In embracing his leadership responsibilities here moreover, the teacher enables the students to learn from each other as well as from him, and also directly from what the subject might say to them individually. He remains ready to learn from his students and to intervene to restore and strengthen a co-operative learning climate if this is necessary. Where the teacher's relationship to students is in healthy order, the teacher's authority, exercised on behalf of the group, and of what the subject may have to say, must be clearly distinguishable from any exercise of personal power. Moreover, as it embodies an inclination, or pedagogical propensity, the relationship involves what van Manen calls "pedagogical tact": "Depending on the situation," he writes, "this tact shows itself as subtle influence, as holding back, as openness to the child's experience, as attunement to sensitivity, as situational confidence, as improvisational gift, and so on" (van Manen 2015, p.79). David Aldridge likewise stresses the importance of tact more than method in the relationships of teachers with their students (Aldridge 2015,

p.126). He ties this in with what he calls the "triangle" of teacher, student and subject. "In the moment of understanding," Aldridge continues, "teacher student and text will find themselves in a relationship of mutual 'belonging' to the subject matter and thus, through this relationship, to each other" (p.127). Such belonging is a pedagogical achievement: the unforced outcome of joint efforts that must find their way to it. It can be anticipated and hoped for, but not guaranteed or predicted, or secured for good. It calls in particular for a hermeneutically alert ethical disposition on the teacher's part (ibid).

Through the daily relationships of the classroom, students undergo regular formative experiences of justice and equality in a workplace setting, or endure invidious forms of both. More often perhaps, students' experiences may occupy a shifting or fairly steady place on a continuum between these alternatives. To acknowledge the primacy of such formative experiences in the education of character is to recognise that the outcomes that really matter in education cannot really be set down in advance. Rather, they are directly related to the actions of teachers, arising from what actually and regularly takes place in educational practice. This is to recognise also that much time and energy can be wasted in elaborate battles between rival educational "philosophies." Such battles are <55/56> typically over which values, or whose, should enjoy pride of place in a school curriculum. They tend to involve politicians and powers-that-be rather than educational practitioners and they rarely attend closely to what actually happens in educational experience.

(c) The teacher's relationship to colleagues and school leadership

At first sight a teacher's relationship to colleagues may seem of minor importance compared to her relationship to her subject(s) and to her students. A teacher might well be successful while also being on poor terms with colleagues or the principal. Where such

a situation continues however, over months or possibly years, it is increasingly likely that the teacher will feel a sense of professional and personal isolation. This may be remedied to some extent by colleagues-at-a-distance, for example by a teacher's membership of an on-line workshop or professional development group. These can provoke new ideas and energies, and offer a wide range of welcome opportunities for enhancements of practice that previous generations of teaching practitioners lacked. Yet they cannot provide the spontaneous feedback that face-to-face contact with trusted colleagues can, in the midst of practice itself. Particularly valuable in this latter regard are invitations by colleagues to visit each other's classrooms when the occasion permits. Reflective practice – from Socrates to Schön to various forms of action research – can only be said to be properly fruitful where there is a shared commitment among practitioners to becoming their own best critics.

Teachers' initiatives with emerging technologies, not least artificial intelligence, provide a good example of this point. Although AI is frequently feared for its potential to facilitate cheating by students, it also provides a major source for stimulating co-operative and innovative forms of practice among teachers. Prominent here is becoming well-versed in the more promising and the more harmful aspects of AI, ranging from enhancing the pedagogical inventiveness of practitioners to refining their discernment where detecting more elusive forms of cheating is concerned (Celik et al. 2022) There is an economy of increase, as distinct from an economy of scarcity, involved in sharing the insights arising from practitioner initiatives. Gadamer captures the heart of the point in the following remark:

> the more what is desirable is displayed for all in a way that is convincing to all, the more those involved discover themselves in this common reality; and to that extent human beings possess freedom in the positive sense, they have their true

identity in that common reality (Gadamer 1983, p.77). <56/57>

School leaderships play a crucial part in fostering such co-operative practice, or in allowing it to deteriorate in counterfeit forms. Colleagueship in any authentic form moreover allows the artistic in teaching to come to the fore. "Artistic" here carries the sense, described earlier, of enabling truths that were previously hidden or passed over to come to the fore and offer something of transformative value. Pursuing this further, there is an enabling balance to be sought between a teacher's creative individuality as a practitioner and the collegial necessities that support that individuality in the wider learning environment of a school or college. Where there is a mature awareness that even the best professional insights are partial – in the twin sense of incompleteness and bias explained earlier – the prospect of a collegial *ethos* becomes a productive challenge, even an appealing one, for practitioners.

(d) The teacher's relationship to parents and the wider community

The notion of *in loco parentis* may seem an appropriate one to start our consideration of this domain. To take that path however would soon give rise to some intractable confusions. Of course it may be important for a teacher to act in place of a parent in infant education, but even there this ranks below responsibilities that are distinctly pedagogical. As a child's schooling proceeds through the years however, those pedagogical responsibilities become primary in a more definite way. This is not to suggest that parents inevitably become irrelevant, or an interference. Where a teacher's relationship with parents (or guardians) is in good order, parents are made clearly aware that the teacher is disposed to work with them in eliciting their child's abilities and aptitudes, in identifying particular strengths or limitations, in promoting sustainable habits of study, and in providing regular feedback on progress. Central to

this understanding on the teacher's part moreover is a desire to include the child more centrally, as soon as realistically possible, in any discussions that concern the child's schooling and future educational prospects. It is not difficult to see that this might lead to conflicts in due course. For instance, a student in secondary school has shown a strong capacity for languages – say Italian and German – and is hoping to study these in university. But the parents feel that the student's exam results are likely to be high enough to qualify for entry to a medical Faculty, and they want this career path for their child. Consistent with her commitment to her practice, the teacher respectfully points out the fulfilment that pursuing a languages degree could bring to the student, and also identifies the career prospects of such a qualification. In giving her earnest advice and making her urgings however, the teacher acknowledges to the parents that the final decision in the matter is not hers to make. <57/58>

Here we can see that the teacher's relationship to parents comprises perceptiveness regarding the student's strengths and interests, the courage to speak up on behalf of the student's aspirations, but also a well-judged sense of boundaries. The advice the teacher gives moreover, albeit that it may be offered warmly and conversationally, is in an important sense impersonal. In similar circumstances with different parents she would do the same; or a different teacher placed in her shoes would do the same. This illustrates the continuity between the teacher's relationship to parents and to the community or society more widely. It indicates the kinds of things the teacher is to be responsible for, particularly the uncovering of students' ownmost strengths and cultivating these in ways that advance co-operation at least as much as competition; that foster justice amid plurality. Clarity on the core responsibilities of teaching toward the larger society also helps to counter demands that schools are to be charged with tackling everything and anything on the always-lengthy list of a society's social problems.

(e) The teacher's relationship to herself

The kind of knowing that informs relationships in the four domains just considered can clearly be seen to be other than technical in nature. Neither can such knowing be called theory. Its reflective, deliberative character is yielded largely by insights arising from the exploration of practice itself. Aristotle called this kind of knowing *phronesis*, distinguishing it thereby from theory and technique (*Ethics Nic.* VI.5, 1140b3-5). *Phronesis* also describes, but not fully, the kind of knowing involved in the final domain, the teacher's relationship to herself. In this domain the other four relationships come together and mingle, harmoniously or discordantly, or even indifferently. Or perhaps they may quite fail to become confluent. This last domain might alternatively be called the teacher's self-understanding, a description that combines a Socratic with an Aristotelian character, and helps to illustrate better how the other relationships are active in it. Its concern with co-ordinating these relationships and informing the conduct of practice distinguishes it from any kind of self-preoccupation. Where this self-understanding is mature and discerning the teacher remains regularly in touch with developments – particularly practical ones – in the fields of study that are her abiding points of contact with her students. She reads these developments, not just for the enrichments they bring to her personal culture. She reads them also with a sensitive eye to how the personal riches she gains might, in age-appropriate ways, be opened up for her students. She remains eager to discuss her rolling trove of ideas with colleagues and to work with them and the school leadership in enhancing the quality of students' learning experiences. <58/59> She is ready moreover to share as clearly as possible with parents her approach to educational practice.

The outline just drawn describes a situation where a creative harmony, or a belonging together, to use Aldridge's phrase, has

been achieved within and between the relationships that comprise a teacher's self-understanding. Such an achievement is not, it should be stressed, something that can be securely possessed for good. Without continuing efforts at developing them, relationships are likely to atrophy. Having mentioned this reminder, it is important to point out that other, less benign states can befall the teacher's self-understanding. For instance, a teacher may experience continuing difficulties in his relationship with students, may be averse to discussing these with colleagues, and may take refuge in progressively enveloping himself in his relationship with his subject. Another teacher may have such an elevated sense of his own subject and its status that he may resent teaching it to those upon whom he considers it to be wasted. He may also find it difficult to conceal his disdain for what he sees as some more lowly subjects taught by colleagues. Or there is the situation where a teacher, in this case a primary teacher, may be deeply involved with a few of the subjects he teaches, be indifferent to another and dislike yet another.

Myriad further examples could be taken from everyday practice to show how the domains of relationship combine in changing ways to inform, well or defectively, the teacher's self-understanding. Perhaps the most important difference between the hermeneutic outlook underlying this "domains of relationship" approach and more conventional conceptions of teaching is a shift in perspective from having, or possessing, to *being* and *becoming.* Most characterisations of teaching emphasise possession rather than relationship; for instance, possession of subject knowledge, possession of the skills that students are expected to learn, possession of pedagogical method, possession of communicative personality attributes. I should stress again that the argument I am making does not neglect knowledge, skills or personal attributes of any kind. It suggests, rather, that what is most important about them where education is concerned is how they become manifest – how illuminatingly, how productively – in the relationships that are

necessarily part of *being a teacher*. A fuller sense of the notion of fluency illustrates the point at issue. A conventional view of teaching thinks of fluency as having an assured mastery of one or more teaching subject. It refers mainly to possession of knowledge or skill. By contrast, fluency in the case I am advancing here refers to each and all the domains of relationship. Its focus is on *being* at home in each of the domains, *being* attentive and energetic in cultivating each, and *being* able to make them confluent in one's thinking and actions as a teacher. <59/60>

A Further Take on the Tale from School

Rather than offering a theory that can then be applied to practice, hermeneutics seeks to disclose practice itself, to illuminate what unfolds there. It endeavours to understand as fully as possible what actually happens when teaching and learning are attempted, and to avail of the insights gained to enhance the quality of practice. It involves both self-critical and co-operative endeavours. A concrete way to show this is to consider again the tale from school with which this chapter began. In this review of the tale however we will be observing with a keener eye how the teacher Joe and his colleagues deal with the issues that arise in Joe's work with the Second Year students. Our focus will be on the relationships that develop in each of the five domains.

Firstly, in his early efforts Joe was burdening his students with a nondescript version of Business Studies, drawn mechanically from the textbook. His use of digital technology, far from giving an air of modernity to his teaching, was a variant of chalk-and-talk in the service of copious amounts of information. Note-taking and listening were the main activities envisaged for the students. Fiona's remark about finding Business Studies boring interrupted Joe's acquiescence in dull routines and called attention to an unhealthy kind of collateral learning that was widely going on under Joe's nose. To stress that the topic could come up in a forthcoming exam,

as Joe was at first disposed to do, is to close the door to the kind of insight Fiona's comment might offer. Here however, Joe's initial response mirrors that of countless teachers over generations, where constructive possibilities are regularly bypassed by the force of conventional wisdom. Fortunately for him, the advice from his more experienced colleague Denise prompts him to reconsider his view that Business Studies "might not be the most interesting of subjects." Denise's suggestion about the Brexit debate in the UK points Joe in a new direction, one that allow more play to his own thinking; a play that intensifies in discussions with his fellow student teachers Adaku and Phil.

Secondly, the ways in which Joe's relationship to the students developed were unforced consequences of the fresh approach he adopted to teaching the unit on a common market. That approach provided opportunities to arouse the students' interests, in contrast to the lacklustre character of his initial presentations. As the story notes, Joe had to call a few individual students aside and speak to them firmly on a one-to-one basis. In doing this however he had more attractive options to offer them than would be the case if he were to invoke promptly the disciplinary procedures of the school. He took the opportunity to build a pedagogically healthy relationship, as distinct from a bureaucratic one involving public displays of power. This is not to suggest that Joe would never <60/61> use the school's disciplinary policies. The one-to-one conversations with resistant students (carried out in a semi-public place but not overheard) gave Joe a chance, in the first instance, to listen to what account individual students could give of themselves and their actions. They also offered an opening to explain his own purposes and to discover any particulars in the students' view of things that might be helpful in refining and achieving these purposes. They provided, finally, an important occasion to explain that if the disciplinary procedures had to be used, it would not be because Joe was keen to do so, but was being forced to do so.

Thirdly, Joe's relationship with colleagues, in this case Denise, Adaku and Phil, yielded the productive possibilities that arise when practitioners practise the art of becoming their own best critics. More individualistic conceptions of teaching, by contrast, are likely to give rise to forms of protectionism, or striving for competitive advantage, even to professional isolation, in relations between practitioners. The predominance of neoliberal ideas in educational reform policies internationally in recent decades has proved inhospitable to the development of genuinely co-operative cultures of work. A rhetoric of collaboration is in fact a hallmark of much of this policy, but for the most part it is a collaboration that is contrived in its nature; part of performance management policies rather than a product of any ownership of leadership initiatives by practitioners themselves.[20] There is an ebb and flow to such policy pressures however, and even in many objectively unpromising situations, opportunities for original initiative can arise. What must be emphasised is the continuing importance of practitioners becoming their own best critics, both in their initial teacher education and in regular professional development efforts throughout their careers. It was decisive for Joe and his colleague student teachers to discover this path and to take rewarding early steps on it.

In relation the fourth domain, the teacher's relationship with parents and the wider public, this didn't feature directly in the story of Joe, apart from the notification sent to parents about the upcoming walking debate. Sending the notification however, and being available to explain the debate's educational purposes, were nevertheless important. For instance it forestalled misunderstandings that might otherwise arise about the school being involved in political campaigning of any kind. It could not be presumed that the twenty-two stories carried home by students about the debate were identical, or indeed <61/62> accurate. For Joe and his colleague student teachers, this contact with parents highlighted the importance of building parental support; also of not taking them for

granted, especially in relation to issues where the feelings of some parents might run high.

And now, to changes in Joe's self-understanding as a teacher. As the weeks went by the effects of the debate initiative flowed into other aspects of his work. Business Studies was taking on a new appeal as a field potentially laden with surprises and energising possibilities for teaching, but also with some new challenges. Joe began to browse the Business pages of newspapers, and Business news websites, for ideas and current issues: tax havens, loan defaults, industrial relations, price inflation, and so on. Infusing his existing knowledge of Business with ideas from such sources prompted successive changes in his view of the subject itself. It began to speak to him in new and different ways than previously. The improvements in his relationship with the Second Year students sprang partly from these developments; partly also from the efforts Joe spent – including the one-to-one sessions – in building a basis for constructive relations with the students. He didn't lose all his anxieties, but he noticed that they were waning; also that difficulties which he previously felt were daunting began to appear as challenges worthy of tackling in resourceful ways. These developments, and the recurring stimulus received from discussions with Denise, Adaku and Phil, prompted a significant shift in Joe's understanding of what being a teacher means. He began to realise that he was embarking on a somewhat different path to the one he had taken up in his early days as a student teacher and had continued to follow routinely at the beginning of his school placement.

Standing back to appraise the significance of these points, we can say that Joe begins to understand the nature of teaching and learning as a distinct and demanding practice, and what it means to be a practitioner of this particular practice. The conventional understanding of his responsibilities that he initially held is ruffled by the considerable challenges he meets in the

classroom. That turbulent time could understandably make Joe rush to embrace the protections offered by the school's disciplinary procedures. Relying mainly on these however might not only hinder Joe's capacity to build constructive relations with his students. It could also begin to habituate him in conventional "teacherly" routines, thereby obscuring his access to better alternatives. Denise's timely suggestion about a more dramatic approach to the concept of a common market catches Joe's interest. It starts what becomes in time a decisive shift in his understanding of Business Studies: a shift from arranging inert concepts for transmission to students to an outlook that encourages a play of thinking with live and lively ideas. But that is not all. The creative character of Joe's subsequent discussions with both Denise and his fellow student teachers <62/63> reveals teaching and its possibilities in an inventive light. He finds the courage and energy to venture half-way, or more, and hold one-to one meetings with resistant students. The uncovering of truths that he wouldn't otherwise have encountered sets him on a new and promising path where his relations with his students are concerned. In short, although it is still early days for Joe in teaching, his new approach to his work is already imbued with something of artistic substance.

This closer look at the relationships of teaching and learning elucidates more fully the conversational conception of pedagogy that arises from a hermeneutic perspective. But further important questions soon arise, given that educational thought and action are never free of historical influences. For instance, can educational practice, as a conversational engagement between inheritances of learning and the sensibilities of students, be ethically committed as described in Chapter 3 and yet avoid any and all charges of indoctrination? How can the teacher avoid being a champion of certain interpretations and an opponent of others while bringing to voice themes from cultural, scientific, religious and other

traditions? We will address such questions in the following chapter, in dealing with the relation between tradition and educational practice. <63-64>

Chapter 5

Tradition in Educational Practice

Introduction

The word "practice" has been featuring regularly in these pages since the Introduction. The word "tradition" is likewise entering more into our discussion. Both terms are reasonably clear in everyday usage, but both also embrace a wide range of meaning. This hasn't hindered our enquiry so far, but it is necessary to define them further now so that we can set out the particular importance of each, and illustrate their joint significance, in a hermeneutic understanding of education. We will begin by elucidating the notion of practice, then proceed to do the same with the notion of tradition. This will lead to a review of two sometimes comparable, but ultimately contrasting, views of tradition in educational practice. Arising from this review Chapter 5 will conclude by offering some ideas on an educational understanding of tradition itself, or tradition as a nonpartisan source that informs and unifies pedagogical thought and action.

Practice and its Responsibilities

In everyday usage, the meaning of "practice" varies considerably. Take for example sentences like the following: (1) "After a month's unrelenting practice I mastered the correct skills of typing." (2) "Jim made a daily practice of being the last to arrive at work and the first to leave." (3) "Ursula flourished as a doctor after joining the new practice." The first example refers to the repeated drill and effort that has gone into training oneself to type well. The second refers to the habit of a lazy or reluctant worker. The third refers to practice as an occupational commitment and accentuates the close link between this sense of the word and the term "practitioner." It

is this third sense that is our particular concern. Its origins can be traced to the Greek term *praxis* (πρᾶξις), which Aristotle described in book VI of his *Ethics* as intelligent action directed toward some human good. *Phronesis* (already mentioned briefly in Chapters 3 and 4) is the deliberative and reflective kind of knowledge, or more precisely, the kind of knowing, <64/65> that is most appropriate to *praxis*.[21] For Aristotle, the most important form of practice was politics, not in the sense of acrimonious party politics, but in the sense of promoting the good of the community (*polis*) as a whole. From Marx onwards the notion of *praxis* (usually left untranslated) has enjoyed a renaissance in Western philosophy, featuring regularly, in explicit or implicit form, in the works of a wide range of thinkers: Arendt, Habermas, Bernstein, Freire, Benhabib, to mention just a handful.

The Aristotelian heart of the notion of practice receives its full due in explorations of its importance for today's concerns by philosophers like Gadamer, Alasdair MacIntyre and Joseph Dunne. In his essay "Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy" Gadamer engages closely with Aristotle in distinguishing practical philosophy sharply from theoretical, scientific and technical forms of thinking. He identifies the key responsibility of practical philosophy as that of providing the insights that guide choice (*prohairesis*) in defensible action; i.e. in practice itself (Gadamer 1983, p.92). He draws three key conclusions here. First, humans cannot be spared this responsibility by turning to science or technology, or any kind of "expert know-how" (p.92). Second, the sources of practical philosophy lie chiefly in critical reflection on practice itself – on the traditions that influence and pervade it and on the issues, predicaments and possibilities that arise in it (p.92). Third, practical philosophy "demands of the one learning it the same indissoluble relationship to practice [that] it does of the one teaching it" (p.93). In contrast to transmission conceptions of learning a hermeneutic-practical conception discloses both teachers and students as

participants, called to a joint engagement; one that has an ever-emergent character.

MacIntyre, whose arguments on many points resemble hermeneutics, carries out a detailed review of the Aristotelian background of practice in his most well-known book *After Virtue* (MacIntyre 2013). There, he uses the phrase "a practice" (always with an indefinite or definite article) to highlight the virtues embodied already in actions that properly constitute practices and to stress the contributions that practices make to the public good. To distinguish a practice from skills that might be ingredients of it, he explains: "throwing a ball with skill" is not a practice, but "the game of football is." "Bricklaying is not a practice; architecture is. Planting turnips is not a practice; farming is" (p.187). Other examples of practices he mentions include: the work of the historian, painting, music, "arts, sciences, politics in the Aristotelian sense" (p.188). The range of such practices is wide, but an important point MacIntyre makes about them in <65/66> every case is the presence, from the start, of goods internal to each practice, e.g. the promotion of health, of justice, of artistic endeavour.

External goods may also be associated with a practice – for instance, the high status and earnings of professional footballers – but such goods are just that, external. They can be obtained by other means. They are not definitive of the practice, whereas the internal goods are precisely that.[22] Where external goods tend to feature strongly in the conduct of any practice its internal goods may become compromised, even corrupted. International scandals in practices like banking, law and accounting have provided telling instances of this tendency in recent decades.

Joseph Dunne's explorations of practice carry strong parallels with MacIntyre's. He emphasises the distinction between inherent and external goods and the importance of virtues that are naturally exercised in faithfully pursuing a practice. But Dunne focuses on practice in an educational context and is more explicit than

MacIntyre in pursuing the connections between practice and practitioner.[23] He describes a practice as follows:

> A practice is a coherent and invariably quite complex set of activities and tasks that has evolved cooperatively and cumulatively over time. It is alive in the community who are its insiders (i.e. its genuine practitioners), and it stays alive only so long as they sustain a commitment to creatively develop and extend it – sometimes by shifts which at the time may seem dramatic and even subversive (Dunne 2005, pp.152-153). <66/67>

This description calls attention to the point that the evolving character of a practice makes it the carrier of a tradition, or traditions. It also highlights the responsibilities of practitioners in any practice to the inherent goals of the practice and to the colleagues they work with in realising and developing these goals. In Chapter 2 we identified three such inherent goals in educational practice, namely: (a) to uncover the potentialities that are native to each student, amid the plurality of classroom life; (b) to cultivate these potentialities by opening up new imaginative landscapes through the topics or subjects being taught; (c) to build learning environments where the practices of teaching and learning themselves embody justice, inclusion and participation. Dunne's description of a practice provides a fuller context for locating these goals and for understanding the kinds of efforts educational practitioners have to undertake in pursuing them. Such efforts include, centrally, nurturing and sustaining the relationships of teaching and learning explored in the rationale for teaching in Chapter 4.

Concrete examples that capture core instances of contributing constructively to the practice help to flesh out this fuller contextual understanding. Here we might recall examples like those of Kate in Chapter 2, or Frank and Sally in Chapter 3, or Joe, Denise and colleagues in Chapter 4. Such examples illustrate a key respons-

ibility mentioned by Dunne, but not by MacIntyre; namely that of creatively developing and extending the practice, whether by incremental or more dramatic shifts in thought and action. Exercising this responsibility successfully captures what hermeneutics sees as the *artistic* quality of teaching. Recalling what happens to the teachers in the three cited examples, the experience in each case "brings to light what is otherwise hidden or withdrawn" (Gadamer 2004, p.112) in everyday routines of teaching. The examples show, in different ways, how some inherent goals of educational practice are brought to the fore and become embodied in action. In each example there is a going-beyond oneself that unsettles a family of ensconced outlooks, presenting the teacher with previously unthought possibilities and subsequently enlarging both self-understanding and the teachers' understanding of educational practice itself. Here, the artwork belongs with performing arts rather than with fine art. The work being created is nothing other than the learning environment and its emergent possibilities. Far from being a work fixed for posterity in stone or canvas, it is the ever-vulnerable achievement of "something that can be held in our hesitant stay", to recall Hölderlin's words quoted earlier.

Where teachers struggle with uncooperative students, inept school leadership, inadequate resources, poor self-understanding or other drawbacks, such achievements are rendered more difficult. Indeed the health of the practice may suffer, sometimes seriously, yet without inevitably undermining its <67/68> integrity. Where there is a failure on the part of governments or powerful interests to recognise the inherent goals of the practice however, the nature of the problem is otherwise. To the extent that teaching is precluded from exercising its inherent responsibilities in properly answerable ways, to the extent that practitioners are regularly constrained to implement policies designed and imposed by external forces, educational practice become distorted or disfigured.

The Ambivalence and Ubiquity of Tradition

The word "tradition", like "practice", covers a wide field of meanings, ranging from prohibitions and compulsions at one end of the scale, through exclusive rituals and observances, to inclusive festivity and poetic inspiration at the other end. Amid this varied range however, from custodian on the one hand to muse on the other, there are features that remain constant. Firstly, tradition invariably refers to beliefs, customs and actions that have gained some enduring influence in the past and that continue to speak to the present. Secondly, integral to the notion of tradition is that, in speaking to the present, it seeks respect, reaffirmation and renewal. Thirdly, such reaffirmation can be a powerful force in shaping the sense of identity of those who participate in it. Conversely, tradition is hardly less powerful as a point of reference for those who reject it and seek to define themselves in opposition to it. In one form or another then, tradition remains nearby. It is also pervasive. It infuses virtually all fields of human life, including politics, religion, commerce and industry, family, sport, science, the arts, and not least, education.

Plato's *Republic* stands as the *locus classicus* for custodial traditions in education, although it remains open to debate whether Plato himself would have wished it to play this historical role. Prominent among Plato's modern critics is Karl Popper, who gave the title "The Spell of Plato" to the first volume of his book *The Open Society and its Enemies*, (Popper 2002). By contrast, Gadamer insists that Plato was no Platonist" (Gadamer 1985, p.193; 1997, p.40), arguing that the application of a literal logic misses the figurative heart of Plato's work. Whatever about such disagreements, the fact remains that the Platonist doctrine of making education an instrument of the controlling powers became decisive in Western civilisations.

But it didn't do so for many centuries. The turning point eventually came with St Augustine. In the early fifth century CE,

almost seven centuries after Plato, Augustine's appropriation of the Neoplatonism of his own day proved decisive in the shaping of dominant Western outlooks in matters theological and educational (Brown 2000, p.316ff). The imagery of a heavenly and an earthly <68/69> city in Augustine's monumental work, *The City of God* (Augustine, 2000), drew much of its abiding force from the long-established Platonic division between an upper world of changeless truth and a lower world of illusion, acrimony and sensuality. But with Augustine the lower world now gained a further dimension, regularly marked by depravity, "bondage to vice" and ultimate damnation, from which the sinner could be saved only by the undeserved grace of God.

Just at the time when Christianity was becoming the established religion of an empire, the tenor of that Christianity was being set in an austere, hierarchical pattern, if also in a highly learned mode. It was an ascendant tradition in the making, in the former lands of the Roman Empire, later to be called Christendom (Hogan 1995, Ch.2). In the Middle Ages, despite periodic rebellions and heresies, the uniformity and authority of a Christian tradition, now controlled from Rome as a seat of institutional Christian power, reigned supreme in the educational institutions of Europe. Luther's revolt in 1517, and the turbulent events of Reformation and Counter-Reformation that followed, broke asunder this uniformity. Henceforth there were recurring antagonisms between different traditions of Christianity, not least where education and schooling were concerned (Burton & Baines 2022). In time, after denominational forms of Christianity built their own traditions, conflicts between church and state over the control of schooling also arose. These were at their most intense during the nineteenth century (Murphy 2007; Coolahan 1991).

But today in Western civilisations it is common to have different traditions of schooling working side by side, frequently funded from the same public purse. Accommodations that have been reached over many generations of acrimony reveal that there

can be much common ground between different traditions where the subjects to be taught in school are concerned. For instance, apart from the subject Religious Education, the curriculum in Catholic schools and secular schools may be largely the same, if not identical. Catholic schools however have long insisted on the distinctiveness of a religious animating spirit that pervades the work of teachers and the life of the school. As the Vatican document, *The Catholic School*, puts it: "A teacher who is full of Christian wisdom, well prepared in his own subject, does more than convey the sense of what he is teaching to his pupils. Over and above what he says, he guides his pupils beyond his mere words to the heart of total Truth (Vatican, 1977, § 41 ff). There is a corresponding emphasis in the Vatican's educational documents on "the ecclesial nature of the Catholic school" (Vatican, 1997, §11).

Historically, such a standpoint made it a necessity for the Catholic church to possess and maintain its own powers to found schools, and also to select the teachers it deemed suitable. On this understanding, the school is an institution that works *within* a Catholic tradition, as an important but subsidiary <69/70> arm of the church. Allowing for relevant doctrinal differences, a similar historical story can be told of schools in other religious traditions: Protestant, Muslim, Jewish and so on. A comparable pattern, moreover, can be observed where the tradition in question is a political ideology, say Communism in the USSR and its satellites prior to 1989, or "socialism with Chinese characteristics" in China more recently. The ideological, as opposed to religious, functions of such schools mean that the animating spirit comes from the form of Marxism approved by the state.

In contrast to these examples from authoritarian societies, in most democracies today the underlying custodial rationale of faith schools is more low-key, more urbane, than in former times. Yet the idea persists in some ecclesiastical quarters that schools are a subservient arm of the authorities in the relevant religious tradition. Where such schools are publicly funded, as they are in many

democracies, they are also subject, like their secular counterparts, to new forms of control. These latter are now mainly associated with the educational policies of neoliberal origin that have become characteristic of international educational reforms from the late 1980s onwards. It is not an exaggeration to say that this reform movement has itself become a tradition (Sahlberg, 2016); in fact no less formidable now than the traditions of Christendom during the Middle Ages.

From the historical résumé in the previous paragraphs, tradition in education would invariably seem to involve contending parties battling for assured access to the minds and hearts of the young. Such representations of tradition make it difficult to position educational practice outside of a custodial context. They also tend to acquiesce in a transmission view of teaching. Yet it is just such a positioning – i.e. outside of a custodial context – that a hermeneutic understanding of education calls for. The work of Alasdair MacIntyre becomes pertinent here as his explorations of tradition, no less than his investigations of practice, come to grips with issues at the heart of tradition in education. MacIntyre's notion of tradition has both parallels and contrasts with hermeneutics. In examining MacIntyre's notion here, and then examining Gadamer's, these issues may yield to some constructive resolution. We may be able to mark out a path from conceptions of practice that are custodial or partisan at root toward ones that disclose a more original and vital significance of tradition for education. <70/71>

Tradition in Education: Parallels and Contrasts

(a) *Promoting an ordered combativeness – MacIntyre*

MacIntyre provides an impressive rationale for a custodial conception of tradition in education. His trilogy *After Virtue* (2007 3rd edition), *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1989) and *Three Rival Virtues of Moral Enquiry* (1990) confirmed him as a leading

figure in 20th century moral philosophy in the Anglophone world. A strong defender of Catholicism and its intellectual legacies, MacIntyre's loyalty is not, however, that of a traditionalist who insists on the unshakeable truth of his own standpoint. Tradition, he begins, forms the social and historical context underlying all efforts of human understanding. Against individualistic philosophies of all kinds –e.g. Descartes, Sartre, modern liberalism– he argues for an unavoidable historical and social element in human understanding and reasoning:

> For all reasoning takes place within the context of some traditional mode of thought, transcending through criticism and invention the limitations of what had hitherto been reasoned in that tradition; this is as true of modern physics as of medieval logic (1985, p.222).

The parallel with hermeneutics is clearly evident here. Like Gadamer, MacIntyre stresses that it is not possible for humans to attain a superior standpoint, outside of the social and historical influences of human life, that would provide an incontestable kind of understanding. On this matter he states: "I am irremediably anti-Hegelian in rejecting the notion of an absolute standpoint, independent of the particularity of all traditions" (1994, p.295). This argument has brought suspicions of relativism against MacIntyre (e.g. Haldane 1994). His response is bold and twofold. Firstly, he points out that the relativity of cultural and social traditions does not prevent any of them from making claims to truth. Secondly, he insists that "no such tradition is or can be relativistic about the truth of its own assertions or about truth" (MacIntyre 1994, p.295).

These two points feature prominently in MacIntyre's critique of education, particularly the kind of education provided in liberal universities in the Western world. In such centres of learning, MacIntyre states, there has been a characteristic assumption that

scholarly competence involves advanced standards of rationality that are independent of standpoint: – standards "accepted by all teachers and accessible to all students" (1988, p.399). Achieving such impartial standards would therefore be necessary for such competence and would require the abandonment, or overcoming, of standards associated with particular traditions – Catholic, Protestant, Marxist, nationalist, or whatever. But the <71/72> assumption that such shared standards are possible is a "false premise," MacIntyre insists (1990, p.225).

Against such a premise he advances the claim that belonging to a tradition necessarily involves supporting its truth claims and engaging in argument about these with upholders of rival traditions. In criticising the idea of a Great Books curriculum that has been prominent in American universities, MacIntyre maintains that teachers have to side with one or other tradition and to uphold it against rival traditions:

> but we are in fact the inheritors, if that is the right word, of a number of incompatible and rival traditions and there is no way of either selecting a list of books to be read or advancing a determinate account of how they are to be read, interpreted, and elucidated which does not involve taking a partisan stand in the conflict of traditions (1990, p.228).

At first sight this looks like a regression to some sectarian or traditionalist standpoint. But MacIntyre is careful to point out that it differs from such standpoints in being prepared to put its own claims to truth at risk, even while defending them as robustly as possible. In words that are characteristically bold, he illustrates his commitment to an orientation that is combative but well-behaved, and to the self-criticism that is an inherent part of the commitment itself: "Only those who whose tradition allows for the possibility of its hegemony being put in question can have rational warrant for asserting such a hegemony" (1988, p.388).

Drawing these points together, educational practice in MacIntyre's view emerges not as a primary practice with its own inherent purposes and its own ethical requirements, but as a subordinate, or ancillary kind of endeavour. Its purposes would be those of *serving a particular tradition* and advancing the claims of that tradition by engaging in ordered conflict with rival traditions in the activities of teaching, learning and research. Of course educational practice in schools and colleges could still engage in critical debates, in making new discoveries and in developing new paths for thought and action. But at the end of the day all such activity would be expected to conform to the particular tradition that holds authority over the schools and colleges in question (MacIntyre 1988,p.399; 1990 p.230 ff). Where the provision of schooling is concerned, this kind of standpoint would seek to have a plurality *of* schools – each tradition having its own establishments – as distinct from seeking to include a plurality of humankind *within* each school or college. <72/73>

(b) *Realising "The conversation that we are" – Gadamer*

In Chapter 1 we examined a twofold argument at the heart of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*. Firstly, predisposing influences are ever present in all human efforts at understanding. Secondly, while we might discipline those we succeed in identifying, we cannot detect and rid our minds of all such influences. We also noted that, in his response to critics, Gadamer insisted that his philosophical concern was to uncover what actually happens in human experience when understanding – in better or poorer forms – takes place. The focus in such enquiry is on discovering what features are inescapable, or universal, in human understanding as such; on seeking to establish more clearly the possibilities and limitations of understanding itself. This identifies a strong contrast between Gadamer's point of departure and MacIntyre's, despite the many parallels in their positions. MacIntyre seeks from the start to

advance and defend a specific tradition of rational enquiry that is informed by Augustinian Christianity (MacIntyre 1998, p.10). Both Gadamer and MacIntyre acknowledge that human understanding is always embedded in tradition, but for Gadamer, tradition is radically more open than it is for MacIntyre.

As we noted in Chapter 1, there are two senses of tradition in Gadamer's writing. He doesn't distinguish clearly between them, but it is especially necessary to do so if tradition is to be understood in its full import for education, as distinct from in a narrower, more specific sense that is more common. Firstly, tradition describes the inescapable *totality* of prior influences that makes possible human understanding itself. Secondly, tradition describes a more specific body of beliefs, outlooks, customs, and so on, with which one identifies, and which in turn informs one's sense of identity. This second sense is not necessarily partisan, or custodial, but could well become so. Depending on the specific contents of tradition in this narrower sense, it could become an "ism" that divides as much as it unites, even defining itself in opposition to things that are not of that "ism." By contrast, the first sense seeks chiefly to capture a key point about the way humans *are* in the world; to identify something inescapable. For MacIntyre, understanding takes place within the second of the two senses of tradition, while for Gadamer it takes place within both senses. For our purposes here it is important to keep in the foreground the difference between the two senses.

Being critically conscious of the effects of tradition, conceived as a totality of diverse influences rather than those of a specific tradition, is conducive to a different orientation than that of ordered conflict championed by MacIntyre. It is particularly important for educational endeavours. This consciousness recognises from the start the limitations inherent in human forms of understanding, i.e. partiality in the double sense of bias and incompleteness. Because of this, <73/74> the educational orientations that follow naturally from it are more investigative than directive; they are self-critical as well as critical. These orientations

find their peculiar character in the Socratic emphasis in hermeneutics, as reviewed in Chapter 2. Accordingly, the conversational, or dialogue theme comes to the fore. Viewing the relation of humans to tradition as a manifold conversation reminds us that each voice in the conversation – science, history, music, religion etc. – has its own internal tensions as well as harmonies. Every fruitful encounter with tradition, on this account, involves successfully realising what Gadamer calls "the conversation that we ourselves are" (Gadamer 2004, p.370). But such encounter, it is worth stressing again, involves some unsettlement of previous assumptions before it can accomplish any transformation of understanding among participants: some frisson before any fusion. For MacIntyre, by contrast, tradition is more specific and already committed: something that is protective of its own loyalties, with allegiances that distinguish it clearly from its rivals. The educational significance of tradition on this view can hardly be other than custodial, with teachers resembling a strict or more urbane version of the guardian class in Plato's *Republic*.

There is much more that could be explored in relation to custodial and conversational conceptions of tradition, beyond the comparisons and contrasts presented here. But the presentation makes available key points for understanding a deeper significance of tradition for educational thought and action. We will turn now briefly to review some of these.

An Educational Understanding of Tradition

Loyalty to a specific tradition can provide a profound source of identity and affirmation, of celebration and renewal. But it could also be an obstacle rather than an enablement if the loyalty is unquestioning or if the tradition is rigid or exclusionary; if it views other traditions chiefly as adversaries rather than as manifestations of human plurality. This point takes on additional importance where teachers are concerned because the nature of educational

practice is such that it positions the teacher at the core of an ongoing interplay of influences. If I am strongly committed to a particular church or political party, I may be prone as a teacher to favour my own leanings, if not quite to proselytise, in my daily practice. An argument in favour of a custodial conception of tradition, like that advanced by MacIntyre, holds that it is right and proper to do this, provided that it is done explicitly, and in a way that invites criticism from rival traditions. However much this might sometimes be acceptable in a university, especially <74/75> at postgraduate level, it presents major difficulties in the context of primary or secondary education. Here the students cannot be presumed to be able to present contrasting arguments with a capability that in any way approaches the teacher's. Furthermore, if students offer contributions from their own readings or researches that represent a diversity or a disparity of viewpoints, the custodial teacher may feel conscientiously obliged to "correct" these to align them with his own loyalties.

None of this is to suggest however that the teacher has to be a pacifying or neutral presence, evading the differences between mutually opposed traditions. In bringing a subject or topic to voice, the teacher does an injustice to inheritances of learning if she silences any side in the conflicts that are embedded in the subject she is teaching. To avoid disfiguring the encounter the teacher seeks, rather, to elicit in age-appropriate ways the internal tensions residing in the voice she is attempting to bring to presence. Examples might include the following: in history, the many opposed standpoints in the Reformation; in geography or economics, conflicting approaches to economic development; in science, contrasting theories on climate change or ecological degeneration. The point is not to advocate for one side or another, but to enable students to recognise and engage with the heart of the matter.

This kind of pedagogical effort (the walking debate in Chapter 4 is a good example) is essential to the task of opening up

new imaginative neighbourhoods. What is called for then is neither sedating nor recruiting, but an educational understanding of tradition itself, or a pedagogical understanding, to be more specific. Such an understanding, springing from the kind of conversational orientation explored above, uncovers original opportunities for teachers to take a leadership role in the interplay of influences, and to do so in ways that are both promising and defensible. Similarly, it offers productive possibilities for education to advance as a practice in its own right, as distinct from the subordinate undertaking it has often been historically, and is even today in many countries.

Summarising the main features of such an understanding will draw together many of the currents of argument presented so far. Let us begin with the twofold recognition – referred to at a number of points earlier– that the fruits of even the best efforts of human understanding remain partial in both senses of the word: (a) incomplete; (b) biased. In its sense of incompleteness, "partial" highlights the continuing necessity for perspectives from others, alive and dead, to improve our best knowledge to date, and to expand our horizons continually beyond the parochial or partisan. This acknowledges overtly that, for humans, absolute knowledge is unattainable, recalling Socrates' perceptive remark that "real wisdom is the property of God" (Apology 23a). <75/76> In its second sense, bias, "partial" is a reminder that our best efforts at knowing – also at teaching, study and learning – can never claim to be free of all prior influences. While vigilance in relation to these influences remains a pedagogical necessity, some will still continue to slip into our hearts and minds by the back door, as it were.

In an *educational* orientation to tradition then, there is a recognition that we are beckoned to respond in conversational ways to what tradition, in any of its voices, addresses to us. Richard Rorty has memorably described the purpose of "edifying philosophy" as "keeping the conversation going" rather than establishing "all of Truth." (Rorty 2009, p.377). In an analogous sense, an

educational understanding of tradition sees its purpose as getting new conversations started, often in difficult circumstances, and sustaining them thereafter.

But an educational understanding of tradition does not dismiss the notion of a final truth; rather it regards such truth as a form of wisdom lying beyond the best efforts of humans; known only to God as Socrates puts it (Apology 23a). This frees educational thought and action to see tradition not as the final authority on anything, but as a fertile domain for pedagogical purposes. Tradition comes to be viewed not just as a totality of influences, but as influences that seek to *say* something to students, teachers and learners more widely. The crucial educational point here is that in seeking to say something, the purpose of the address is not to convert, or dominate, or indeed to transmit knowledge, but *to call forth a response*, and a deepening sense of engagement.

The teacher, on this conversational account of things, emerges as the person who must enable the voices of tradition – in history, science, French, music etc. – to speak. But for this to happen the teacher must first be a person in whom one or more inheritance of learning is alive. This, as we saw in Chapter 4, redefines the notion of fluency, in any and all subjects. Fluency becomes less as a matter of a skill that is mastered and possessed; it becomes primarily a capability that is born of a vibrant and ongoing *relationship* that the teacher cultivates with the subject or subjects in question.

Likewise, the active interplay of teaching and learning becomes understood as an exploratory venture jointly embarked on by teacher and students. But teachers and students are not equal partners in this venture. The teacher's range of responsibilities is clearly wider than that of the students. For instance, the teacher has a key leadership role, resourcefully taking initiatives "that go at least half-way" in the different relationships that comprise educational practice. Not only must the teacher bring the subject to speak; she must seek to do so in ways that quicken the students'

interests and that encourage some questioning or self-sustaining response. The teacher endeavours to open up new landscapes that enable students to discover something of their own <76/77> inherent possibilities; i.e. to discover something of the historian in themselves, of the scientist, the woodworker, the linguist, and so on. Such discoveries may or may not have career implications later.

The learning environments of conversational teaching thus seek to bring students to encounter tradition in ways that are hospitable to unforced disclosures of personal identity – including discovering one's own limitations as well as one's strengths. Although the teacher may have passed through the new landscape many times before, each time she does so with a fresh group of students she is prepared to venture afresh, and to learn something new. If there is a recurrence here, it is never a recurrence of quite the same.

To sum up, when understood from a hermeneutical perspective, educational thought and action are conversational from the start. In consequence, there isn't a rift here between thought on the one hand and action in the other, as if the former were a domain of theory that had to be applied to another domain called practice. Keeping the focus on the experience of human understanding and its inescapable features – as has been attempted here from the outset – enables pedagogy to realise a fruitful belonging-together of thought and action. This belonging-together also underlines the distinctiveness of pedagogy itself, and of educational practice as an artistic endeavour that loosens the hold of the conventional and that orients practitioners *educationally* toward and within tradition. <77/78>

Chapter 6

Hermeneutics Under Scrutiny

Introduction

In the decades since philosophical hermeneutics became a major development in Western philosophy – viz. from the 1960s onwards – it has had a deep influence in the humanities, especially in literary criticism and philosophy. Its influence continues to extend moreover in scientific research, particularly in post-empirical approaches in both the social and natural sciences. But how does the hermeneutic account of understanding and of educational experience stand up to scrutiny? From the range of critical appraisals of hermeneutics that have appeared in these decades, I propose to review in this chapter those that deal mainly with Gadamer's arguments, as they are the ones that have been at the core of this book. The focus of the review will be sharpened moreover by keeping a keen eye on the issues that are most pertinent to education, or more precisely, to how educational thought and action are to be understood.

Proceeding with the review then, we will consider criticisms from three different sources: from a critical theory standpoint by Jürgen Habermas; from a postmodernist standpoint by Jacques Derrida and John D. Caputo; from an objectivist standpoint by E. D. Hirsch and Emilio Betti. In carrying out the review, other key voices will also feature, for instance that of Paul Ricoeur, himself a hermeneutic philosopher, and of Richard Bernstein, whose work has accomplished a hermeneutic shift within pragmatist philosophy. Working our way through these various perspectives has a further purpose however than that of just carrying out a critical review. That purpose is to refine and strengthen some pathways for

educational thought and action that have been in the making since the early pages of the book.

Confronting the Status Quo: Scrutiny from Critical Theory

A well-known debate between Habermas and Gadamer occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s, followed thereafter by intermittent comments on each other's writings until Gadamer's death in 2002. The debate commenced with Habermas' engagement with *Truth and Method* in the journal *Philosophiche Rundschau* in 1967. There he credited Gadamer's work for highlighting the historicalness of human experience and exposing the objectivist illusions of <78/79> positivism. But he also brought criticisms against it, two of his central ones being the following: Firstly, Gadamer's arguments took too uncritical an attitude to authority, thus failing to acknowledge sufficiently and to build on the distinction between reason and authority accomplished by the Enlightenment (Habermas 1988, pp.168-170). Secondly, philosophical hermeneutics lacked the resources to serve an emancipatory interest that would enable false consciousness to be successfully confronted. It failed to perceive "the fact that the practical connection between understanding and the initial hermeneutic situation of the interpreter requires a hypothetical anticipation of a philosophy of history with practical intent" (pp. 174-175).

For Habermas, hermeneutics, being indebted to tradition, could not adequately identify and challenge institutionalised injustices and forms of oppression that were deeply lodged in tradition. While Gadamer's notion of dialogue might enable understandings to be reached and misunderstandings to be resolved, at the end of the day its critical powers were limited: "Hermeneutics comes up against the limits of the context of tradition from the inside" (p172). Something stronger, with a more acute edge, was called for, Habermas insisted, to reveal the unacknowledged coercive forces, particularly the "deceptions of language", residing in such contexts.

Taking psychoanalysis as an example of an approach capable of uncovering illusions at an individual level, Habermas argues in a later contribution that a critique of ideology, pursued through "critical social sciences", is needed to accomplish this therapeutic task at a societal level (Habermas 1970/1986, pp.301ff). These sciences would be guided by a theory of communicative action, that theory being inspired by the notion of unconstrained, undistorted communication. Such a theoretical-scientific standpoint could attain a level of penetration and critical objectivity that lay beyond hermeneutics.

In his response to the charge that he is too deferential to authority Gadamer begins by observing that "authority is not *always* wrong". And he continues:

> Yet Habermas regards it as an untenable assertion, and treason to the heritage of the Enlightenment, that the act of rendering transparent the structure of prejudgements in understanding should possibly lead to an acknowledgement of authority (2008, p.33).

Gadamer had already argued in *Truth and Method* that the proper recognition of authority "is always connected with the idea that what the authority says is not irrational and arbitrary but can, in principle, be discovered to be true" (2004, p.281); (*im Prinzip eingesehen werden kann*; 1975, p.264). That is to say, its truth claims can be seen to be open to rational scrutiny. Gadamer had also <79/80> added that "this is the essence of the authority claimed by the teacher, the superior, the expert" (ibid). And in his response to Habermas he adds further that reason and authority are not abstract antitheses, as the Enlightenment would maintain. Rather, "they stand in a basically ambivalent relation, a relation that I think should be explored rather than casually accepting the antithesis as a 'fundamental conviction'" (2008, p.33).

In relation to the point that hermeneutics lacks key critical resources, Gadamer insists that a critical interest is at work in

hermeneutics comparable to the emancipatory interest of Habermas's sociological critiques. Habermas gives priority in the critique of ideology to unmasking the "deceptions of language" through which communication gets systematically distorted. For Gadamer, an emancipatory interest seeks to free us from "outer and inner social forces and compulsions," but he stresses that "critique is in itself a linguistic act of reflection" (2008, p.30). "Reflection", he affirms, cannot "escape from ideological ossification if it does not engage in constant self-reflection and attempts at self-awareness" (p.38). He points out moreover that such attempts cannot proceed from some superior vantage point that might consider itself free of history and its effects. Hermeneutics, Gadamer continues, is concerned with all forms of understanding – economic, political, religious, artistic etc. – not just those needed for informing the critical social sciences: "The principle of hermeneutics simply means that we should try to understand everything that can be understood" (p.31). Its scope is universal.

This alleged universality remained a problematic issue in Habermas's criticism. In his 1970 contribution to the exchange it is clear that Habermas accepts Gadamer's "dialogue that we are" standpoint, or "prior consensus" thesis: namely, that every misunderstanding presupposes the existence of a shared anticipation of possible agreement. This marks a significant shift from Habermas's earlier criticisms. But he disagrees with Gadamer "on the way in which that prior consensus is to be defined" (Habermas 1986, p.313). Elaborating on this he writes: "Gadamer, if I am correct, is of the opinion that the hermeneutical elucidation of unintelligible or misunderstood expression must always refer back to a prior consensus which has been reliably worked out in the dialogue of a convergent tradition" (ibid). Habermas detects in such prior consensus not only the presence of incisive insights but also that of force o of distortion and coercion, often unacknowledged. Accordingly he calls for a "depth hermeneutics" in which the

notion of unconstrained, undistorted communication plays a guiding and anticipatory role.

For Gadamer, however, any such role cannot arise from outside the experienced world of tradition. In an essay titled "To What extent does language <80/81> preform thought?", included as a postscript to later editions of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer responds to Habermas's later criticisms by saying:

> The fact that it is in the midst of a linguistic world and through the mediation of an experience pre-formed by language that we grow up in our world does not remove the possibilities of critique. On the contrary, the possibility of going beyond our conventions and beyond all those experiences that are schematized in advance opens up before us once we find ourselves, in our conversation with others, faced with opposed thinkers, with new critical tests, with new experiences (2004, pp.550-551).

In a lengthy essay first published in French in 1973 Paul Ricoeur reviewed key issues in the debate between Gadamer and Habermas (Ricoeur 2009a), while making valuable contributions of his own to it. He emphasised that their starting points and philosophical priorities were different – Habermas's main concern being an Enlightenment-informed practical interest in emancipation from oppression and Gadamer's being an ontological concern with what inescapably happens in acts of understanding. Attempts to reconcile these differences by any efforts at conflation would be mistaken, Ricoeur insists. Equally, he adds, there is nothing more deceptive than an alleged antinomy between these two orientations (p.100). Ricoeur acclaims Habermas's recurring stress on the importance of methodically articulating and justifying a critical distance in all philosophical encounters with inheritances from tradition. But he also points out, rightly, that Habermas's guiding notion of an unconstrained communication cannot be anticipated "emptily, in the manner of a regulative ideal." It cannot *but* be

informed by some engagement with "works received from the past" (p.97).

Gadamer, however, on Ricoeur's analysis, underplays the importance of method. His presentation of hermeneutics has failed to "overcome the ruinous dichotomy, inherited from Dilthey, between 'explanation'(*erklären*) and 'understanding' (*verstehen*)" (Ricoeur 2009a, p.92). Dilthey firmly associated the former with the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*) and the latter with the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*). As a result of this failure, Ricoeur continues, in Gadamer's account "the hermeneutical experience itself discourages the recognition of any critical instance" (p.90). The pages of *Truth and Method*, with their stand-off stance toward method and their preference, in critical encounters, for Classical, Romantic and Hegelian authors, provide some support for Ricouer's criticism. But in the same year as Ricoeur was writing these criticisms (1973), Gadamer – as his essay "To what extent does <81/82> language preform thought?" reveals – was already coming to address some of these shortcomings in his *magnum opus.*`

In the later writings of both Gadamer and Habermas, some fruits of the debate of the late sixties and seventies are clearly evident, notwithstanding the fact that their chief concerns still remain quite different. For Gadamer, hermeneutics remains central as "the entire realm where human beings come to an understanding with one another [*Verstandigung*]" (2019, p.179). Habermas's main concern remains that of providing a grounding for critical social science with a practical intent; but the range of themes and discursive partners his writings engage with has continued to increase during the 21st century.

Two brief remarks will suffice to indicate the mutual benefits of their debate. Firstly, Gadamer's many writings on practical philosophy in his later years reveal a keener awareness of issues of justice and democracy than was evident in *Truth and Method*. For instance, the essays in *Reason in the Age of Science* (1983) reveal

Gadamer's keen sensitivity to distorting forces that Habermas had long criticised, including the perilous effects of "the technologizing of the formation of public opinion" (p.73). The main points of reference of these later writings remain, however, the classical Greek philosophers Socrates, Plato, Aristotle – and also Hegel, rather than thinkers in the critical heritage of the Enlightenment. Secondly, for his part, Habermas's later works reveal a hermeneutic perceptiveness and disposition to dialogue that in many respects evokes Gadamer himself. His engagement with conversational partners like Joseph Ratzinger (Habermas & Ratzinger 2006) and his reappraisals of religious tradition (Habermas et al 2010), place his later works in a philosophical context with some striking resemblances to that described by Gadamer in the above quotation that refers to the possibilities of critique.[24]

Closet Essentialism: Scrutiny from Postmodernist Stances

Jacques Derrida's contribution to his first public meeting with Gadamer revealed a curious blend of incomprehension and scepticism. The occasion was a conference organised by the Goethe Institute in Paris in April 1981 for a debate between two leading exponents of hermeneutics and deconstruction. <82/83> Gadamer opened the proceedings with an address titled "Text and Interpretation" (Gadamer 1989). Here he summarised some of his key arguments and identified differences between the pathways his own and Derrida's thinking had taken from their respective debts to Heidegger's work. In particular, Gadamer stressed that philosophical hermeneutics sees the engagement with texts as an ongoing interplay involving an anticipation of meaning that allows the text to speak and be heard. This interplay – both attentive and questioning – enables meaningful insights and illuminations to emerge. Foreign to it however is any once-and-for all determination of the meaning of the text. Subsequent readings by the same reader

might ask new questions of the text, or yield new or different insights.

Such a line of argument would seem to offer some points of contact with Derrida's "playful" deconstruction. Derrida's contribution to the debate however was unexpectedly brief. In his response he made little reference to the substance of Gadamer's lengthy address; rather he focused on a passing reference by Gadamer to "the good will to try to understand one another" and questioned the philosophical basis of such will. In the three questions, or rather counter-points, he put to Gadamer Derrida proposed: (i) that Gadamer's appeal to good will belonged, despite any claims to the contrary, to a Kantian metaphysics – "a metaphysics of the will" (Derrida 1989, p.53); (ii) that Gadamer's references to the interpretation of texts as an "experience of living dialogue" was quite problematical, contrasting fundamentally with what Derrida construed as "a discontinuous re-structuring" (ibid); (iii) that "one needs to ask whether the precondition for *Verstehen* ["understanding the other"], far from being the continuity of *rapport*, is not rather the interruption of *rapport*, a certain *rapport* of interruption?" (ibid).

What the terseness of Derrida's response left unexplained and unsaid was provided in considerable detail by John Caputo in his essay "Gadamer's Closet Essentialism: a Derridean Critique" (Caputo 1989), and also in his book *Radical Hermeneutics* (Caputo 1987). Caputo shares with Joseph Margolis – from whom he has taken the phrase "closet essentialism" – the view that Gadamer's hermeneutics is a form of traditionalism. Both focus on a telling remark from the section of *Truth and Method* where Gadamer deals with prejudices as conditions of understanding.

> That which has been sanctioned by tradition and custom has an authority that is nameless, and our finite historical being is marked by the fact that the authority of what has been handed down to us—and not just what is clearly grounded—always has power over our

> attitudes and behaviour <83/84> (Gadamer 2004, p.281; quoted by Margolis 2007, p,63 and by Caputo 1989, p.258).

On a first reading there seems to be something self-defeating in this remark for Gadamer's arguments on the non-partisan character of philosophical hermeneutics. This impression is strengthened by his further remark, a few sentences later, which states that "tradition has a justification that lies beyond rational grounding and in large measure determines our institutions and attitudes" (p.282). Such declarations seem like an authoritarian stance, albeit in urbane form. They allow Caputo to suggest plausibly that "Gadamer remains attached to the tradition as the bearer of eternal truths, which in a way does nothing more than modify Plato and Hegel from a Heideggerian standpoint" (Caputo 1987, p.111). Elaborating on this point, Caputo suggests further that "Gadamer delimits the Hegelian project of setting the truth into time, not by denying eternal truth but by protesting that there is no one final formulation of it" (ibid). In other words, Gadamer remains committed to a fixed idea of truth that resides changelessly behind the widely varying understandings of it promoted by hermeneutics.

In his "Derridean Critique" article, published two years after his *Radical Hermeneutics* book, Caputo's criticisms are more forceful. Here he insists that Gadamer has retreated from the more radical challenges raised by Heidegger that Derrida, he maintains, embraced. On this analysis hermeneutics is mainly interested in passing along to further generations some differently outfitted presentations of metaphysical conceptions of truth and stability. The verdict for hermeneutics of Caputo's deconstructive critique is harsh:

> For deconstruction, tradition is largely the story of the winners while the dissenters have been excommunicated, torched, castrated, exiled, or imprisoned. It does not matter much whether the tradition in question

> is that of the state or the university, of literature or philosophy: it always resorts to the same tricks (Caputo 1989, p.264).

Caputo concludes his criticisms by construing deconstruction and hermeneutics in terms that highlight the radical boldness of the former and that attribute a philosophical faintheartedness to the latter.

> If Gadamer is interested in how the metaphysical tradition passes along its stored-up treasures, Derrida is on the look-out for the police state that inevitably accompanies theories of infinite wealth. Philosophical hermeneutics takes a stab at recognizing the finitude and flux that <84/85> inhabits all human institutions, but deconstruction doubts that hermeneutics has its heart in it (ibid).

One might ask at this point: is there anything in Gadamer's works that merits such a severe verdict? A careful and thorough reading of these works would yield a warrantable "no" answer. Yet it remains the case that Gadamer's continuing failure, or reluctance, to clear up the ambiguities that attend his references to tradition – arguably the most central notion in his philosophy – opens the door to adverse stances toward hermeneutics. Gadamer might have forestalled such stances, at least to some extent, had he provided more frequent reminders that his real concern always remained philosophical. As stressed more than once in the earlier pages of this book, that concern is with uncovering what inescapably happens when understanding, whether in better or worse forms, takes place in human experience. Such reminders are particularly necessary wherever Gadamer makes statements like: "that which has been sanctioned by tradition and custom has an authority that is nameless", or "tradition has a justification that lies beyond rational grounding." Without such well-placed reminders the reader may well pursue a quite misleading path. Gadamer

seems to assume however that what he states in such remarks is self-evident once the remarks have been made.

I have been using the phrase "totality of influences" to try to capture the inclusive scope of Gadamer's notion of tradition. He doesn't use this phrase himself. During my early engagements with Gadamer's work I was confused, sometimes perplexed, by what looked like some paternalistic if not authoritarian references to tradition. It seemed to me that these references stood ill with the main tenor of his arguments, as paraphrased for instance in Chapter 1 above. When I tumbled upon the phrase "a *totality* of influences", it accommodated Gadamer's more inclusive depiction of tradition the one hand, and his more specific depictions on the other. Equally important, it provided a way of resolving the inconsistencies arising from the way both depictions interweave in *Truth and Method*.

Paweł Dybel (2011) and Anniina Leiviskä (2015) have likewise distinguished two different but inter-related meanings of tradition in their investigations of Gadamer's work. Dybel describes the distinction as one between an "ontological" and an "ontic" meaning. The ontological sense would be "tradition taken as a whole of the process of understanding that goes on as the permanent self-differentiation in its relationship to the past" (p.474). The "ontic" sense would mean "the concrete, unique tradition one is in dialogue with when one tries to understand the variety of its manifestations (works) handed down from the <85/86> past" (p.473).[25] Leiviskä draws on Dybel's work in her analysis and describes the two meanings as follows: "first tradition as an ontological structure; and second, tradition as a concrete, unique horizon that can be encountered in an individual act of understanding" (Leiviskä 2015, p.588). The ontological meaning, and primary one she points out, "refers to the entire process of tradition, a continuum of historical influences, which can perhaps be best understood through Gadamer's notion of effective history

(*Wirkungsgeschichte*)" (ibid). Thus, *all* acts of understanding fall under the influence of tradition, whether knowingly or not.

The second meaning, "the concrete unique horizons" that are revealed in more specific encounters with the past, is a more commonly understood meaning of tradition. Central to it are the engagements of individuals or groups with those enduring influences that speak most meaningfully and deeply to them – viz. from particular inheritances of thought, belief, action, artistic and scientific endeavour, and so on. As we have seen, tradition in this second sense can divide as well as unite, not least because of the importance it gives to values of one kind rather than another in shaping a sense of personal or shared identity. It can be a source of rivalry as well as pride, of acrimony as well as community, of exclusion as well as belonging.

Keeping the ontological sense of tradition to the foreground, remarks like "that which has been sanctioned by tradition and custom has an authority that is nameless", or "tradition has a justification that lies beyond rational grounding," lose their authoritarian character. They are seen as remarks that simply describe what *is* the case, regardless of whether some might wish to add "regrettably," or others might wish to add "fortunately." For instance, it just *is* the case that, as Charles Taylor remarks, it was almost impossible not to believe in God in Western society in 1500, while in the 21st century "many find this not only easy, but even inescapable" (Taylor 2007, p.25). The sheer weight of tradition (in the ontological sense) operates quite differently in these contrasting epochs. It should be pointed out here that Gadamer does not offer valuations of his own on the "authority that is nameless." He merely describes the fact of it. His most important remark on authority is the one quoted earlier, that "the justification of authority is always connected with the idea that what the authority says is not irrational and arbitrary but can, in principle, be discovered to be true" (2004, p.281). This is also relevant when considering the comment that "tradition has a justification that lies beyond rational grounding."

Reason, as Gadamer recurrently says, is reason in use. It does not stand outside tradition <86/87> but falls under the play and sway of tradition, again in the ontological sense. As Joseph Dunne puts it, "reason itself is not outside tradition; to the contrary we might say that tradition is the condition of its possibility as human reason" (Dunne 1997, p.113).

Caputo's Derridean criticism of Gadamer's hermeneutics – and Derrida's own insofar as their terseness indicate any definite line of attack – are preoccupied with a notion of tradition viewed as loyalty to some underlying commitments, declared or undeclared. As critiques of Gadamer's actual position, they embark on a mistaken path from the start, but this does not take from the insights they offer on an important shortcoming in Gadamer's work: an indistinctness in defining and clarifying some of his central ideas. It must be acknowledged that Gadamer's commitments can plausibly be construed as conservative loyalties if what he has called his real commitment is overlooked, or ignored, by his readers, or beclouded by ambiguities in key terms in his writings. That commitment remains, however, the continuing effort to uncover what, from an ontological standpoint, is inescapable: "not what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing" (2004, pp-xxv-xxvi).

The Objectivity of the Text: Scrutiny from Betti and Hirsch

Other prominent criticisms of philosophical hermeneutics, specifically of Gadamer's standpoint, charge that it fails to acknowledge the objectivity of the text that is to be understood, or to define properly what is to count as the meaning of a text. These criticisms have been made by Emilio Betti and by E.D. Hirsch, both of whom disagree with conclusions that Gadamer draws from acknowledging the historical character of understanding. In the interplay of influences between a reader and a text, Gadamer holds that the reader is also *being played* in this interplay, and therefore

cannot be in full command of what happens in it. But he also suggests that the meaning of the text does not escape from this being-played. To such suggestions Betti and Hirsch are firmly opposed (Betti, 2021, Ch. 24, p.4; Hirsch, 1977, pp.249-251). Both insist that hermeneutics must avoid misinterpretation by establishing clearly and objectively what the meaning of any particular text is.

Betti supplies four "canons" to accomplish this. The first canon, "the autonomy of the object", stresses that a text has its own autonomy; that its meaning can and must be objectively established by careful attention to the intention of the author: "the formative intention at the act of their genesis." (Ch. 8 p.2). <87/88> The second canon, "coherence of meaning", echoes Schleiermacher on the hermeneutic circle and states that the single elements of a text must be understood as integrative parts of the totality of the text: "the reciprocal illumination of parts and totality" (Ch.9, p.2). The third canon, "the actuality of understanding", states that the interpreter should mentally reconstruct "in an inverse way" the creative process of the original author (Ch.11, p. 1). In other words the reader would go back, step by step, from the published text to the author's starting point, in an effort to recover ("reconstruct") fully the path taken by the author. The sympathetic understanding called for in this event is also pertinent to Betti's fourth canon, that of "hermeneutical correspondence of meaning." This calls for "the ability to assume toward the object of interpretation, a congenial attitude animated by a sentiment of strict affinity" (Ch. 28, p.2).

Betti grants that "the hermeneutical method proposed by Gadamer" would allow an understanding between the text and the reader, but contends that its "feeble point" is that it "in no way warrants the correctness of that understanding" (Ch. 24, p.1). The alleged shortcoming could be amended, Betti contends, only where the readers' understanding "would conform in a fully adequate way to the objective meaning of the text." This demand for "correspondence of meaning" is the most important, and the most

controversial, of the four canons. Betti is firm in holding that unless a text can be shown to have a determinate meaning – one that is capable in principle of being accurately shared – there can be no basis for accuracy in interpretation.

The determinate meaning of a text, or the lack of it, is also a key issue raised by Hirsch in his book *Validity in Interpretation* (Hirsch 1977). He flatly rejects Gadamer's suggestion that the meaning of a text can never be purely confined to the author's intention. On this point, it is worth noting, Ricoeur is substantially in agreement with Gadamer (Ricoeur, 2010b, pp.210-211). Upholding the "determinant power of authorial will" (p. 68), Hirsch champions hermeneutics as "the philological effort to find out what the author meant –the only proper foundation for criticism" (p57). The meaning of a text does not change, according to Hirsch. It is the task of hermeneutics to capture that meaning faithfully and to establish it clearly: "The permanent meaning is, and can be, nothing other than the author's meaning" (p.216). While stating that he does not abandon the "concept of historicity," Hirsch does not accept the main conclusions that Gadamer draws from recognising the historical character of human experiences of understanding. In particular, he shuns the possibility that effective history and a play of often inconspicuous influences continue to work in all acts of understanding (p.258 ff). <88/89>

For Hirsch there is a crucial distinction moreover to be drawn between the *meaning* and the *significance* of a text and he charges Gadamer with overlooking this distinction (p.255). Elucidating the distinction himself, Hirsch writes:

> The meaning of a text is that which the author meant by his use of particular linguistic symbols. Being linguistic this meaning is communal, that is, self-identical and reproducible in more than one consciousness. Being reproducible, it is the same wherever and whenever it is understood by another. However, each time this

> meaning is construed, its meaning to the construer (its significance) is different (p.255).

Hirsch's distinction fits comfortably with what takes he takes the "concept of historicity" to represent, namely "a fundamental differentness between past and present cultures" (p.256). This twofold conception – binary rather than continuous – facilitates the drawing of firm contrasts between a current "now" on the one hand and any previous "thens" on the other. It also adds weight to the argument that making a distinction between the intention of the author and the meaning of a text, as Gadamer and Ricoeur do, is mistaken.

In response to these criticisms by Betti and Hirsch it must be said, to begin with, that there is a straightforwardness, a realistic appeal, in the tenor of the criticisms. For does it not stand to reason that the meaning of a text is nothing other that the author's intention? and that this meaning stands in contrast to any interpretations that others might make of it? indeed that interpretation is a different and subsequent act to understanding the author's true meaning? But it is precisely the plausibility of these commonly-shared outlooks that is called into question by any adequate acknowledgement of the historicity of understanding. To get to the heart of the issue we need to take a step back and recall some points that have been made earlier.

Far from seeing history as a succession of discrete nows (or thens) to be surveyed critically and authoritatively from the standpoint of the present, a proper acknowledgement of the "concept of historicity" does just the reverse. It brings before us the insight that the historicalness of human experience is essentially something unrehearsed and ongoing, not something that can be controlled in a decisive *now*, whether by philosophical acumen, political might, or any other force. Experience occurs within, and is carried along by, history itself. In other words, we are, as humans, participants in the ceaseless play of history, a play that reaches back

from what we have recently or more distantly experienced ourselves to what has been experienced by earlier generations back to ancient times. Accordingly, an ever-active, ever-emergent totality of influences forms the background or context of all human experience. This totality of influences, <89/90> in personal or more institutionalised forms, constitutes the play of history, or the effective history, in which we are and remain immersed, whether in active or acquiescent ways.

As we have already seen, many of these influences may be conflicting ones. They may be gathered in rival traditions of august longevity and power. They may give rise to new enmities and to festive assemblies, to recurring wars and to efforts to break open new paths of thought and action. Where they hold us prisoner, as in the case of entrenched prejudices, a questioning stance can interrogate that hold. This may ultimately loosen the hold, transform it, or even overcome it in impressive measure. Or it may not. But effective history and its incessant play of influences cannot be rendered powerless, or otherwise put out of action. It can of course be overlooked; it frequently is, and not least in enquiries that put all their faith in the notion that a canon of methods can guarantee a secure access to truth.

Betti and Hirsch share the aim of providing a method for deciding the validity of interpretations. There is a difference however in how they regard the relation of understanding to interpretation. For Hirsh, interpretation is separate from and subsequent to understanding: "The systematic side of interpretation begins where the process of understanding ends" (p.170). For Betti, the sequence works in reverse: "the *interpretation* [is] a process whose object and adequate result is the *understanding*" (Ch. 2, p. 1). Neither seem to acknowledge Heidegger's decisive insight on the "as" structure of understanding; i.e. that, in understanding something, we have in that very event already interpreted it *as* something.

Bearing these points in mind we can focus now on Betti's first canon, the "formative intention" of the author, and on Hirsch's insistence on the permanence of the author's meaning. This focus will allow the core issues in their difference with philosophical hermeneutics to be more readily illustrated and addressed. In drawing the distinction between the meaning and the significance of a text Hirsch writes that the (permanent) meaning is reproducible in more than one consciousness (see quotation above). But if we attend closely here to experience, is it ever the case that exactly the same meaning can be reproduced? We are talking here about a reproduction by humans, not by a photocopier, or scanner, or other precise technological means.

Perhaps an affirmative answer to the question can be given in the case of a fairly short and exact text, like a set of instructions to students for carrying out experiments in a school laboratory. Safety in the laboratory depends on something definite: that all students understand in the same way the meaning of the words written in the instructions. This would seem to describe a clear-cut case of determinate meaning. But it needs to be stressed here that the students, <90/91> in understanding the meaning, are also already involved in interpretation. The text is understood *as* a set of instructions to be followed for reasons of health and safety. The word "faucet" in the instructions is understood *as* the tap that releases water to the sinks on each bench through an overhanging U-shaped pipe. The phrase "long hair must always be tied back securely" is understood *as* a command, not as a recommendation, and so on. In short, while there may still be some differences in the students' readings of the text, it is difficult to argue with the notion of determinate meaning here. This example also shows how interpretation in inseparably entwined with understanding from the start.

But can determinate meaning feature as unambiguously as this in reproducing the meaning of a literary text? Take for instance a well known text, the opening chapter of *Pride and Prejudice*,

where the contrasting characters of Mrs Bennet and her husband William are described. How can the intention of the author, Jane Austen, be objectively established here, as Betti and Hirsch require, unless that intention can be fully ascertained – by the reader, the critic, the interpreter, the student, or whoever? Let us continue with *Pride and Prejudice*. A teacher gives a group of students the task of providing a faithful paraphrase of the opening chapter. On being asked to comment on the first important point that has come up in their answers, one student says that Mr Bennet toys with his wife's anxieties over their daughters. Another says that Mr Bennet's attitude to his wife is one of humorous but mocking irony. Another suggests that Mr Bennet continually ridicules his wife but that she doesn't seem to notice. Another quotes Jane Austen herself, saying that Mr Bennet was "a mixture of quick parts, sarcastic humour, reserve and caprice." All of the answers offered could be "supported by reference to the text", to use a favourite phrase of examiners. It is probably impossible for any reader to understand Jane Austen's conception of Mr Bennet, or any other of her characters, in a way that matches (i.e. captures precisely) Jane Austen's own conception when writing the book in the early 18th century.

This also applies to attempts to "reconstruct" the original *situation* of the author, i.e. the personal, social and historical background from which the author writes. The reconstruction would find it very difficult to recapture faithfully and fully that original situation. It might include less in some respects and more in others, than what the original situation included. Contra Hirsch's claim that the *meaning* of the text "is the same whenever and whenever it is reproduced by another," this is clearly not the case in the example just cited. Nor is it the case in comparable examples of texts that are encountered in daily experience, whether in school or in society more widely. For all that there may well be a high degree of concurrence in interpretations, what a text means (or an event) will <91/92> be understood differently, at least *in some degree*, by the different individuals who encounter it.

Betti's and Hirsch's attempts to establish the correct meaning of a text by insisting on recapturing objectively the intention of the author are mistaken. In short, construal cannot be cleanly divorced from meaning, despite the appeal that this simplifying of matters has. The arguments made by both critics nevertheless help to illustrate certain shortcomings in the way that Gadamer phrases and presents his arguments. Such shortcomings can lead to serious divergences in understanding philosophical hermeneutics itself, and what it is about. These call for closer attention now.

Unfinished Business: Ambiguity and Clarity in Key Ideas

A recurring indistinctness in Gadamer's writings, sometimes at crucial points, presents considerable difficulties for his readers. The Norwegian-American philosopher Kristin Gjesdel speaks for more than herself when she writes that "Gadamer in my view is not a particularly clear thinker and the structure and arguments of his main work, *Truth and Method*, are quite frustrating" (Gjesdel, 2023). She is not criticising the merits of Gadamer's ideas here; rather calling attention to necessary clarifications that were left undone. These omissions have had adverse consequences. For instance, the literary critic Terry Eagleton, assuming that he has accurately understood Gadamer, has asserted: "It might be as well to ask Gadamer whose and what 'tradition' he actually has in mind. For his theory holds only on the enormous assumption that there is indeed a single 'mainstream' tradition" (Eagleton 2008 p.63). Like Betti and Hirsh, Eagleton takes it that Gadamer is primarily concerned with presenting a "hermeneutic method." All three have missed the ontological concern, and the philosophical kind of exploration proper to it, that are central for Gadamer from the outset. More than occasionally, intractable thickets of prose becloud both the nature and the substance of Gadamer's central arguments. He tells the revealing story against himself that from his early teaching days his friends invented a term, "the Gad", to refer to "a

settled measure of unnecessary complications" (Gadamer 1985, p.71). What presents most difficulties for my own readings of Gadamer is his inattention to the need to include with his explanations a few clarifications to highlight the core of what he *is* saying and, equally important, what he is *not* saying.

If we recall and bring together here some of Gadamer's more striking claims, it is easy to see why the consequences of imperfections like those just referred to have led to charges of conservatism, relativism, or closet essentialism. These <92/93> striking claims include the following seven: that the meaning of a text is not the same as the author's intention; that "to understand at all is to understand differently"; that prejudices are conditions of understanding; that understanding is a fusion of horizons; that tradition and custom have an authority that is nameless; that we *are* a dialogue; that encounters with texts are comparable with encounters with living persons. Dealing in turn with these claims, however briefly, should help to provide an account of philosophical hermeneutics which picks up important things that, had Gadamer completed, would give a more accurate and defensible account of his best ideas.

The first two claims – about the author's meaning and about understanding differently – have given rise to such a serious misconception of Gadamer's position by Hirsh that the latter can conclude that "we are left with the consequence that a text means nothing particular at all" (Hirsch 1977, p.251). Such misperceptions might be minimised had Gadamer, in his analysis of the intention of the author, stressed that the author's intention *counts centrally* in understanding a text, but that it cannot be *identified* with the meaning of a text. Similarly, a more fruitful engagement by Hirsch with Gadamer's work might have ensued had Gadamer amended his claim about understanding differently to say: "to understand at all is to understand *in some degree* differently." Clearly, Gadamer himself wants a determinate meaning – his own meaning as author – to be taken by his readers from the declaration

he had to make, more than once, in his responses to the critics of *Truth and Method*. I have quoted it a few times already: "My concern was and is philosophic: not what we do or what we ought to do, but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing." Making such a declaration would be self-defeating if its author expected more difference than concurrence in how it was understood by its hearers.

In relation to the second claim, prejudices as conditions of understanding, fortunately Gadamer's efforts to explain this point fare better: prejudices can be understood as provisional judgements that are made before all relevant factors in a situation can be considered. So do his explanations of positive as well as negative prejudices, and of how prior influences, or effective history, contribute to these. The lucidity of these explanations contrasts markedly however with his elucidations of some of his other central claims that we have listed here for review.

This is especially true of the third claim on the list, the fusion of horizons. In Chapter 3 we explored this notion at some length, illustrating its subtleties by taking the example of a conventional and successful maths teacher who is getting concerned about new challenges in his work. That review – of the course of his exchanges with a colleague and with students – sought to show how a fusion of horizons can be distinguished from accommodations based on <93/94> domination, assimilation, acquiescence, or other diminished forms of mutuality. The idea of calling on such a concrete example was prompted both by the absence of one in Gadamer's writings and by serious misunderstandings of the notion of fusion of horizons by critics like those considered above. In particular, the importance of acknowledging as fully as possible the nature and the extent of difference in one's encounters with others needs to be stressed, as do the often unsettling effects of such acknowledgement. This "frisson" element in the fusion of horizons is passed over too lightly in Gadamer's presentation of the notion in *Truth and Method*.

Where the central notion of tradition is concerned, we have considered the ambiguities in Gadamer's "tradition" concept earlier (p.58ff). It was stressed there that the idea of tradition having an authority that lies outside of the arguments of reason loses its sense of affront if Gadamer's primary ontological sense of the word is kept to the forefront. But it is left to readers like Dybel (2011) and Leiviskä (2015) to supply the necessary clarifications that reveal this ontological sense clearly and to show that it is the primary one. Unfortunately, such omissions give rise to misunderstandings of some of Gadamer's most incisive insights and sometimes channel scholarly energies into adversarial probes like Eagleton's.

In relation to "the dialogue that we are", Gadamer regards this as an unavoidable presupposition of human communicative experience: "the hermeneutic phenomenon too implies the primacy of dialogue" (2004 p.363). But to argue like this suggests that as human beings we are inherently oriented more toward dialogue than toward self-interest, or conflict, or dominating others. Richard Bernstein, who clearly acclaims the thrust of Gadamer's philosophy, has pinpointed the difficulties raised by Gadamer's presentation of this issue.

> If understanding presupposes the kind of dialogue that Gadamer describes then it certainly is *not* universal, but rare indeed – and perhaps, as Derrida might suggest, impossible. No such conversation or dialogue took place between Gadamer and Derrida. One might even question whether we find examples of such dialogues in Gadamer's beloved Platonic dialogues. Are the partners in these dialogues really open to each other and are they guided by the subject matter developed in the conversation? (Bernstein 2008, p.582).

Had Gadamer made a clear and probing analysis of the ontological status of the phrase "the dialogue that we are" it might have yielded some promising results. For instance, that analysis might be seen to *suggest* a certain ethical <94/95> orientation: an

orientation toward dialogue. For in acknowledging openly the ontological reality that our best human efforts to understand are partial – incomplete and biased – the fruitful furtherance of these efforts is beckoned to attend to the best efforts and offerings of others.

Turning now to the seventh claim, that encounters with texts are comparable with encounters with living persons, Gadamer recognises that a text does not speak to us as humans do. He says however that we ourselves, who are trying to understand, must make the text speak. And he adds:

> "making the text speak," is not an arbitrary procedure that we undertake on our own initiative but that, as a question, it is related to the answer that is expected in the text. Anticipating an answer itself presupposes that the questioner is part of the tradition and regards himself as addressed by it (2004, p.370).

The notion of putting questions to a text and anticipating answers from it is a rich one – and Ricoeur explores it in some detail (Ricoeur 2009b) – but as Bernstein rightly points out, "we cannot gloss over" the point that there is a fundamental difference between conversing with a person and conversing with a text (Bernstein 2008, pp.582-583). More needs to be explained by Gadamer on how *the text* speaks, or can be made to speak. Perhaps such explanation might run along lines such as the following: I can look to Plato's *Republic* for answers to how, as a teacher, I might take the allegory of the cave to illuminate my work. As I struggle with this, the text cannot interrupt me as a person would to say: "you've picked me up wrong there I fear; let me put it to you in a different way." But I might re-read the text, asking: "Would the chief point of the story apply mainly to the students (i.e. as the chained prisoners)? or perhaps to the bulk of the teaching staff in the school? or even to myself?" The text remains silent, and I cannot plead with it to answer as I might with a person. On subsequent readings of course I might receive

further insights or provokings. But it is a somewhat different me who is now coming to the text. I may have benefited in the meantime from conversations with others who had taken their own answers from the text. Gadamer, however, leaves these important matters under-explored.

Nevertheless, the notion of a dialogue with a text is not only a realistic possibility; it is also a pedagogically fertile one. But it involves a different kind of dialogue, indeed a different *discipline* of dialogue – more piecemeal, more a gestation – than encounters with people do. Let us recall here the importance of the teacher's relationship with the subject(s) she teaches, discussed in Chapter 4. Becoming ever more proficient in the discipline of dialogue with a text is <95/96> one of the best capabilities that a teacher might pursue in cultivating that relationship. This is especially so if "text" is broadened to mean not only written scripts, but also video clips, audio recordings, and other digital resources that may deftly aid the voicing of the text.

With this review of criticisms of philosophical hermeneutics, and of issues that Gadamer left insufficiently clear, we have come to the end of the explorations suggested by the book's title. It remains now to conclude with a summary, or recap, of some of the main consequences for educational thought and practice. <96/97>

Chapter 7

Conclusion: Some Practical Consequences

Overview

Dewey's critique of traditional and progressive approaches in his book *Experience and Education* seeks to address a shortcoming shared by both; namely insufficient attention to the subjects to be studied, and to how these are experienced by students. His remarks on the teacher's responsibilities in this regard, and especially his insights on collateral learning, go a long way to remedy this shortcoming. Nevertheless, as we saw in Chapter 2, Dewey's self-imposed methodological constraints place an exploration of the intricate relationships of educational practice beyond the scope of his work. Overcoming these constraints is one of the key advantages offered by philosophical hermeneutics to educational thought and action. Where it might have been supposed that hermeneutics was too complex a field to illuminate plainly such thought and action, just the reverse is the case. The recurring examples from school and college that have appeared in these pages are equally native to educational practice and to hermeneutic philosophy

The account presented in this book has concentrated on the inherent goods of education. These goods illustrate the nature of education as a practice in its own right, distinguishing it both from other practices and from the designs that politicians or others in power might want education to fulfil. The history of education shows that such designs are rarely if ever absent. Their resurgence has been newly evident in countries that have become dramatically more authoritarian since the turn of the century, most notably perhaps Russia and China. But in a less crass form such far-reaching extrinsic designs have also fuelled educational policy reforms in many democracies during the same period, or even

longer. From the Reagan-Thatcher decade of the 1980s many Western governments have sought to make schools follow a doctrinaire rule that, in the name of improving quality, largely ignores the very quality of what is experienced in schools. What Sahlberg has called the Global Educational Reform Movement (Sahlberg, 2021, Ch.4) has made what can be measured (e.g. "learning outcomes") the paramount criterion a world that neoliberal policies have rendered more individualist, more technicist and more mercenary. It is against this background that the summary conclusions of our exploration are now offered. <97/98> The eight headings chosen are not an exhaustive list; rather they seek to capture emblematic examples of the kind of thought and action that affirms the core of educational worth, and provides promising paths for its defensible future advance.

a. *Educational Aims and Purposes*

Inherent purposes, as considered in Chapter 5, are what define the core of a practice. They underline the shared commitments and efforts of practitioners *qua* practitioners, notwithstanding what the practitioners' views might be on other matters. The inherent purposes identified for education as a practice in its own right were: (a) uncovering the constructive potentialities that are native to each student; (b) cultivating these potentialities by opening up new imaginative landscapes through the topics or subjects being taught; (c) building learning environments where the practices of learning themselves embody justice, inclusion and participation. Around these core purposes many other enriching ones might be accommodated and refined from inheritances of learning old and new, including artistic, scientific, vocational, civic, sporting, and so on. Crucial to remember however is that in the hermeneutic perspective offered here, educational effort remains focused on the enablement of the students, and in ways that answer as much as possible to their ever-emergent strengths and limitations.

Where educational practice is in a healthy state moreover, this effort is pursued in age-appropriate ways from infant school to graduate school and adult and continuing education. Equally as important as the quality of the learning experience is the quality of the learning environment, or more precisely, of what habitually occurs in the shared learning *ethos*. Educational purposes are more fruitfully achieved where they are adeptly embodied in educational experiences themselves, as distinct from being pronounced or prescribed from above, as if that were the heart of the matter. This embodying seeks to bring to voice the subjects being taught, so that students can respond to and engage authentically with what they say.

Although this pedagogical effort seeks to do justice to the individuality and emergent sense of identity of each student, it is not individualistic. From the start it is alert to the need to ensure that where individual students progress or thrive, this is not at the expense of other students. At more advanced levels of practice this means that the daily conduct of teaching takes perceptive account of the notion of plurality – especially where sensitivities over things like academic achievement, socio-economic standing, ethnic background and physical appearance are concerned. An ongoing necessity here is to ensure that in their regular classroom encounters, students come not only to respect widely different manifestations of <98/99> human diversity, but to *experience* such diversity as a central feature of a daily life. This also provides a strong counterpoint, in regular and practical ways, to the often divisive tendencies of unrestrained social media in the lives of students.

The embodiment of purpose in practice thus understands that success in the education of character depends centrally on the quality of pedagogical actions. That is to say, it depends on *how* conflicts are negotiated, jealousies abated, embarrassments anticipated, show-off displays deflected, provocations defused, put-downs of others checked, and so on. Such pedagogical action draws

crucially on the reflective insights and energies of teachers who have become fluent, or capable, in the range of relationships explored in Chapter 4. Lessons from attentive and critical reflections on practice itself carry some of the most important insights for educational thought and action, including educational research. Such insights spring from individual and shared consideration of mistakes, obstacles, breakthroughs, sudden inspirations and so on, that have been experienced in the conduct of practice and that are then given a second reading.

b. *Teacher Education and Professional Development*

Conventional conceptions of teacher education have regularly regarded this undertaking as a range of study programmes to promote a body of competences, often specified on checklists, that student teachers must show they possess.[26] A hermeneutic conception, by contrast, places more emphasis on ways of being and relating than on having and applying. Practice here is understood as a reflective and deliberative arena of action, as distinct from being mainly a matter of technical effectiveness or applied theory. This is not to say that the skills of teaching are neglected. On the contrary, the skills, or more accurately capabilities, that are necessary for fruitful educational encounters are brought to light by investigating first what takes place, inescapably, in encounters between students and inheritances of learning, old and new. Such investigation profitably informs pedagogy on the range of demands that such encounters <99/100> give rise to, and the kinds of actions that might make these encounters fruitful in an enduring sense.

Elucidating such an informed pedagogy, the book identified capabilities linked to five domains of relationship: the teacher's relationship to the subject(s) being taught, to the students, to colleagues and school leadership, to parents and the wider community, to herself. Becoming properly capable in these domains of relationships means that as skills are learned, they find roots in

the teacher's selfhood and embodiment in the relationships themselves. The learning experiences most conducive to nurturing these capabilities are ones that offer student teachers opportunities to become their own most discerning critics. In devising courses of study that promote these goals, teacher education needs continually to develop, review and refine a clear, supportive rationale. It involves working closely and co-operatively with the student teachers, with practitioners in schools, as well as drawing on research insights, many of which are generated in the context of practice itself. This strengthening of pedagogy is crucial in affirming and upholding the responsibilities and freedoms of education as a public good, not least where these are threatened by inhospitable external forces (Godoń 2024, p.145ff; Wrońska 2024, pp.104-105).

The primary focus on informed practice here does not mean that subjects encompassed by the traditional theoretical areas of teacher education are irrelevant. Quite the reverse, in fact; but there is an important shift in understanding *how* they are relevant. For instance, insights from psychological and sociological research, from historical, philosophical and literary studies, from research on curriculum and assessment, are crucial. But they need to be confluent and clearly focused on illuminating educational possibilities and impediments experienced in educational practice. Equally important, they need to identify the many influences, factors and policies that make environments of learning educationally promising, or indeed mis-educational. Again, this highlights the importance of strengthening pedagogy as a practical and a research endeavour. Where teacher education is in healthy order, student teachers more readily acquire a taste for the kind of literature that not only illuminates their initial progress toward qualifying as a teacher. They can also discern in that literature the kinds of sources that stand them in good stead as they pursue their continuing paths thereafter as practitioners.

To attain and retain that healthy order, including provision for its renewal in professional development programmes, requires the regulation of teacher education to be in the hands of a representative regulatory body; a statutory Teaching Council or its equivalent. It is important that such a body is independent of the government, but also answerable to the public through parliament. Practitioners might be the single biggest voice on such a body, which would <100/101> also include representative voices from different sectors of society. Also crucial to its success is a strong research capacity and a discerning, fearless leadership.

c. *Educational Research*

It follows from what has been said in the last paragraph, and in the book's analysis more generally, that there is an important distinction to be drawn between research that is closely engaged with practice on the one hand, and on the other, research that studies education as an important socio-economic force. Variants of this distinction date from John Elliott's in 1987 (Elliott 1987) to one stated in a position paper by the British Educational Research Association in 2019 (BERA 2019), to that drawn by Bob Lingard in 2022 (Lingard & Selwin 2022). The heart of the distinction can be put as follows. *Educational research* refers to enquiries that seek an ever fuller understanding of educational practice in order to enhance and advance that practice. *Research about education* refers to enquiries, usually employing social sciences, that seek to understand education as a prominent feature of society and economy. Such enquiries, often large-scale empirical studies, often seek to influence aspects of national education policies, but are usually less engaged with the enhancement of practice. There can of course be overlaps between both kinds of research. In recent years for instance, research and evaluation programmes like the OECD's PISA and the World Bank's SABER-Teachers seek to

influence both national education policies and the quality of educational practice in schools.

The evidence-based approaches that have been prevalent internationally in policy-related research have changed the landscape of educational research, contributing in particular to a dramatic rise of large-scale studies like PISA. This development has fuelled a tendency, now a dominant one, to embrace forms of evidence that are promptly measurable. Yet this is also a tendency that largely overlooks or ignores evidence of what actually happens in the experiences that constitute educational practice. For instance, the almost exclusive use of the notion of "learning outcomes" in research on the quality of education tends to regard quality itself as a matter of measured grades, percentages and scores. In other words the concept of quality is largely recast as one of indexed quantity. Where this happens, as we saw in Chapter 2, what quality actually means in educational experience is bypassed. It lies beyond the scope of the evidence-gathering machinery, even unrecognisable to it. While the directors of the PISA studies show some awareness of this shortcoming (Schleicher 2019), it is not clear that they see it as the pitfall it is. But the problem has not registered with most of the bodies that commission or undertake "evidence-based" research into quality assurance issues, and who show a boundless appetite for data that can readily translated into comparisons and rankings. <101/102>

The development and enhancement of practice needs to be a clear priority in all *educational* research, as in nursing, medical, agricultural, or other research associated with a particular field of practice and its practitioners. Research about education – e.g. concerned with social or economic effects of education as a social institution – has a different focus, if sometimes a related one. Following this line of argument, different forms of *educational* research need to work together, or at least in some knowledge of what each other are doing and with some clear connection to improving the quality of educational experience. Such a goal is

more likely to repay research efforts where there is some shared commitment to the inherent goods of educational practice, and where a circumspect eye is kept on extrinsic forces that might compromise these goods.

d. *Educational Leadership*

Perhaps the most important point to begin with here is the difference between educational leadership on the one hand and educational management and administration on the other. There is clearly some overlap, as in the daily work of a school principal who has a managerial duties to fulfil in addition to exercising a leadership responsibility for the quality of teaching and learning. Sometimes, where a leadership capacity is weak, refuge might plausibly be taken in the endless demands of management or administration to evade those of leadership. It is important then to be clear about the focus of leadership. Educational leadership is primarily about taking initiatives to promote a high quality of educational experience. This description is so short that something might seem to be missing. The conciseness of the description is its merit however. These few words show that educational leadership is not the preserve of a school principal, even less so of a policymaker at some remove from schools and colleges. Leadership initiatives might be taken by any teacher, with the expectation of being supported by colleagues and principal. Or students might participate in taking leadership initiatives, with the support of fellow-students, parents and teachers, especially where some developmental work is underway in their class or school. Educational leadership initiatives might also be taken by educational researchers, working closely with clusters of schools on professional development programmes. Educational authorities, professional support services and indeed schools inspectorates also have important educational leadership roles to play, not least in encouraging and advancing actions taken by school communities

to build strong learning environments for their students. In all cases however the goal remains shared: enhancing the quality of the learning experience of students.

Where educational leadership understands quality and its enhancement as being a matter of producing increases in measurable "learning outcomes", the <102/103> question of quality itself may become obscured. Take the example of a school principal who warns his staff at the beginning of the school year that they need to give all their energies to improving the school's test and examination grades. He points out that otherwise some of them may lose their jobs after the publication of results and rankings at the end of the school year. Such an instance might be taken to describe a leadership approach that takes a strong hand. Its merits as a leadership approach of any kind are dubious however; in fact as an instance of educational leadership it is a telling example of just the reverse.

There is much written in the literature of educational research about the advantages of "distributed leadership," or collaborative leadership, in schools (Spillane 2006; Harris, Jones & Huffman 2017). This research stresses the difference between leadership that delegates an abundance of tasks, but remains at root hierarchical, and leadership that is genuinely participatory. The distinction is an important one, as the counterfeit can sometimes resemble the real thing. In fact at an early point in his research on schools, Andy Hargreaves had identified variants of "contrived collegiality" as a device to implement imposed educational reforms in the US, Canada and UK (Hargreaves 1994, Chs. 9 & 10). Such collegiality was based more on acquiescence and unvoiced fears among teachers than on any genuine participation in leadership initiatives on their part. In contrast to such instances, building and sharing leadership capacity in educational settings calls for inspirations and efforts of a different genus. Such efforts are those that advance, attentively and progressively, the kinds of practitioner relationships and capabilities explored in Chapter 4 above.

e. *Curriculum Development and Reform*

Debates about curriculum have more often than not been attended by conflicts over liberal versus vocational education, or the need to advance STEM subjects, or what knowledge is of most worth, or the superior or inferior standing of different subjects. At their politically most intense the disagreements tend to focus on what, or whose, values are to be transmitted to the younger generations. A hermeneutic perspective reveals these conflicts as largely misplaced pursuits, recurrently consuming energies that might be more profitably employed in educational endeavours. Let us take the question of values first. The key point here is quite concise. High-level conflicts for control of schooling between groups with rival sets of values are a common theme in the history of education. It is frequently the case however that these values are primarily political, or religious, or utilitarian, or otherwise ideological in character. Such value conflicts, being preoccupied with the securing of power to control curricula and the terms of employment of teachers, frequently neglect the key question of what actually happens in classrooms. From an educational standpoint <103/104> however, as we have seen in this book, the values that count in the long run are those that are actually experienced by students in their work with teachers and each other. And the most important point is *how* these values are experienced, and how regularly. Associated with this view of the matter is the following decisive shift in how curricula are thought about. Where the contents of a curriculum are concerned, the question of what knowledge is of most worth is mistakenly conceived when it is regarded as a hierarchy of subjects or disciplines. This question needs to be addressed, rather, in connection with the range of aptitude and possibility in each human being. Mature educational thinking recognises that this range is different, in greater or lesser degree, in every individual.

A promising approach to curriculum development and reform is to tackle the question of how inheritances of learning, as these evolve and change, might be best organised so as to speak fruitfully to the emergent potentials of learners. This keeps the focus on the inherent benefits of education as a practice and marks a strong contrast with politicised views of curriculum. The task involved has some aspects that are related to the circumstances of individual learning environments, enabling teachers to engage rewardingly with their subjects for pedagogical purposes. It also has aspects related to the contribution of educational practice to society more widely, ensuring as far as possible that the subjects taught are free from political or other bias. Reviewing and revising curricula in a public education system involves addressing conflicts that reside in different subjects of study, dealing with these in pedagogically informed ways, and arriving at decisions that stand up to pedagogical scrutiny. This is an ever-evolving task, responsive to developments in the world of knowledge – e.g. arts, sciences, technology – and also to far-reaching changes that affect learners, including changes in social media and the products of artificial intelligence. While curriculum development and reform can be undertaken by individual schools, there are clear merits in providing national curriculum frameworks to enhance this work. Such frameworks need to be sufficiently flexible to allow discretionary scope to teachers and schools in developing their own practice. But the frameworks also need a design that is sufficiently comprehensive and robust that educational experiences of a comparably high quality can be provided for students in schools throughout a country or jurisdiction.

Statutory Curriculum Councils, founded on a similar basis to the Teaching Councils referred to above (i.e. a representative body, independent of government, answerable to the public) are well placed to carry out the tasks just outlined. Alternatively, an enabling curriculum framework might be provided for by legislation. In the absence of some such public body, or such legally <104/105> pres-

cribed and protected functions, much harm can befall curricula. The path may be open to governments in power, and/or powers behind the throne, to shape the work of schools and colleges in ways that obstruct or disfigure educational practice.

f. *Assessment*

The central responsibility of assessment is to provide as accurate and as adequate an appraisal as possible of the benefits students have gained, or not gained, from their educational experiences. This remains true of all forms of assessment –summative, formative, diagnostic, or whatever. It is easy to overlook this in an era when teaching-to-the test has become one of the major consequences of a few decades of educational reforms policies that promote high-stakes testing internationally. It could be argued that much of the harm done by intensive preparation for high-stakes examinations and tests might be removed if the exams could be seen to reward genuinely educational qualities. There may be merit in this as a damage limitation exercise, but it could also be seen as changing the goalposts while leaving a faulty game unchanged. In any case, it is more important to recall here Dewey's insight about the mistaken practice of using education to prepare for a fixed future. Such preparation neglects the better possibilities of the present, while it is through making the most of these present possibilities daily that students are prepared for doing the same thing in the future. In fact this insight owes as much to Aristotle as to Dewey. As the opening sentences of Book II of his *Ethics* point out, the human qualities that take root are those in which we become habituated in a particular *ethos* where these qualities are themselves embodied prominently in practice.

In 2003 a landmark study on assessment for learning was published by Paul Black and colleagues (Black et al 2003). Drawing on extensive school-based research in England the study illustrated the lasting benefits of involving students as active and responsible

learners through regular and constructive feedback on their work. Yet despite the widespread welcome in recent decades for assessment for learning approaches among educational practitioners and researchers alike, high-stakes testing still dominates national policies on assessment in most countries. International large-scale assessments (ILSAs) like PISA, TIMMS and PIRLS have contributed in a major way to this. In 2008 the OECD published a report titled *Assessment for Learning: Formative Assessment* (OECD 2008), based on an analysis of "exemplary practice carried out in secondary schools in eight education systems (p.1). Highlighting the educational benefits of such practices it included in its "policy principles" a recommendation to "align summative and formative assessment" (p.11). Yet the crucial point, the necessity to tackle persistent inconsistencies between these <105/106> contrasting approaches, is not addressed in the report. But the inconsistencies have not been squarely addressed by the OECD to date, notwithstanding its initiatives to broaden the range of qualities assessed by its various PISA instruments.

Reviewing this issue in a wide-ranging research study, Jo-Anne Baird and colleagues have called attention to the responsibility that *all* forms of assessment have for improving the quality of learning (Baird et al. 2019). They also stress the necessity for high-stakes testing to take this responsibility more seriously: "Designing tests worth teaching to has to become a recognised goal" (p.340). In addition there is much that could be done in showing how summative tests could be used in formative ways. This might include, for instance, sharing with students selected samples of previously completed examination work, from the highest grades down through the different grade levels to "Fail" and "No Grade". A selection of contrasting examples from each grade would be important, firstly to illustrate creativity and individuality, but also to avoid the risk of the samples being taken by students as templates. In this way, the *use* of criteria employed for assessing ("grade descriptors" if you like) would be made explicit, enabling students

to see the logic of assessment and how this works in practice in the different subjects of study. Such participation by students can be accomplished, in age-appropriate ways, from primary school onwards. It shows that the joint nature of teaching and learning also includes the crucial business of assessment. In an era preoccupied with "evidence-based" policymaking it is ironic that government policies and ILSAs remain, for the most part, strangers to the need to encourage such developments in educational practice internationally. Meanwhile, the need for urgent research on bridging the gap between the contrasting approaches to assessment remains.

g. *Evaluation and Quality Assurance*

We have already touched in the previous paragraphs on some of the major issues under this heading. For instance there is a considerable overlap between assessment and evaluation: ILSAs are widely seen not just as assessments of students' achievements but also as evaluations of national education systems and their educational policies. Assessment and evaluation in education are properly concerned with making valid appraisals of the quality of educational practice, and with promoting improvements in that quality. Where assessment focuses on the quality of students' learning, evaluation has a more inclusive remit. That remit is to examine and adjudge the quality of educational practice more widely, including its vision, its leadership, its judicious use of resources, its contribution to a society's well-being. It is essential however, in following this wider remit, that the conduct of evaluations does not distort or <106/107> misconceive what quality means, whether for ease of management, or attractiveness to policymakers, or reasons of expediency, or other.

Yet, just this is done by the widescale practice, referred to already, of recasting matters of quality as ones of indexed quantity, thus reducing the concept of quality to a hollow semblance of what it should be. Take for instance the situation where a school's test

results raise its annual ranking on a national or regional league able, thus securing for itself additional funding from the public purse. In many countries and jurisdictions currently, this would be officially taken to be an improvement in quality. Of course improvement in exam performances could also mean an enhanced quality of educational experience for many students. But it could also mean the opposite, even for highly successful students. Here one can mention familiar practices like cramming and rote memorisation, question-spotting and avoidance of complex topics, contrived rehearsal drills, additional tuition or "grinds" for more materially advantaged students. It can often mean a failure to engage in a progressive and enduring way with what subjects seek to say, in favour of a concentration on exam techniques tailored to peak performance in the short term.

Unfortunately, official endorsements of quality that are based on depleted understandings of the notion of quality itself might also be construed as validations of school leadership. The real evaluation question that needs to be probed here however is whether, or to what extent, the commended leadership relies on fuelling among teachers a competitive individualism, whether or not masked by contrived forms of collegiality. Leadership as enforced compliance can range from more blatant to more subtle forms. Comparable questions might be asked of other aspects of educational practice that are directly related to quality, but that cannot be accounted for by measurement. They include professional development policies, admission procedures, approaches to special needs, grouping or segregating of students, the rationale for timetabling and available subject options, and so on. The examples could be extended of the harmful consequences flowing from the metrification of quality. The charge that metrification needs to be able to withstand is the following one: Metrification evades the more intricate responsibilities of the evaluation of quality. It makes what can be measured important by obscuring the inconvenient fact that measurement alone cannot capture what is centrally important; namely the

searching analysis and appraisal of the heart of the matter that any professional concern with quality properly demands.

A major area where the evaluation of quality in education has historically given rise to conflicts and anxieties is the inspection of schools. Traditionally this was a hierarchical affair, with the inspectors enjoying a powerful and often a feared position *vis-a-vis* that of teachers, or indeed school principals. By the <107/108> 1960s and 70s school inspection in most democratic countries had become a more professional and civilised business. But a revival from the late 1980s onward of the 19th century idea of Payment-by Results – abandoned in the UK by 1900 – enabled modern-day variants of performance-related pay to be embodied in the expanding range of neoliberal reforms internationally. In England and Wales the replacement of Her Majesty's Inspectorate by Ofsted was a major result of the early reforms. Here the hierarchical relations of old were re-established, but with an all-encompassing reach, including unending data gathering by practitioners for a truly labyrinthine bureaucracy. Ofsted, which now operates only in England, has, during its lifetime, been recurrently involved in conflicts with teachers, with educational researchers and also with the public (Roberts 2018).

Even as variants of externally devised educational reforms were being reproduced in most Anglophone countries –and elsewhere – a contrasting notion was also on the rise, namely school self-evaluation. The research of John MacBeath and colleagues, first in Scotland and then internationally, has tracked and contributed to the advance of this idea, identifying the challenges it poses, the obstacles it must overcome and the benefits it offers (MacBeath 1999, 2012). In some countries, including my own (Ireland), school self-evaluation has been adopted as national policy, and continues to make headway, despite initial difficulties (O'Brien et al 2019). As a way of pursuing quality assurance, and in marked contrast to the reforms of the neoliberal era, school self-evaluation has the evident merit of respecting the integrity of educational

practice, while remaining within the authority of the schools inspectorate and schools themselves. At the level of daily work in schools, self-evaluation has been shown to be successful in advancing the following aspects of educational practice: students' learning, professional development of practitioners, school leadership, home-school relations (MacBeath 2012, Ch. 1) Such improvements, as well as the self-evaluation idea itself, arise from a conception of educational practice that broadly parallels the hermeneutic perspective developed in this book. The underlying rationale is both practical and incisive, based on a threefold idea. Cultivating high quality in teaching and learning involves, firstly, a perceptive understanding of educational experience. Secondly, it requires a capacity among practitioners to build learning environments that bring about enriching encounters with inheritances of learning. Thirly, it requires practitioners who have become their own best co-operative critics and who remain committed to ever greater proficiency in the intricate relationships of learning that lie at the heart of educational practice. <108/109>

h. *Policymaking*

The relationship between educational policymaking and the world of educational practice needs to be based on a sound foundation, and to be pursued with consistency, if education is to make its best contribution to personal and societal well-being. In one way this point is so self-evident that is hardly needs stating here. Yet it requires continual reaffirmation and ongoing elucidation, as the march of events can subject the relationship to gradual atrophy or more sudden disruption and distortion. As has been referenced at many points already, especially in Chapter 5, the history of Western education has regularly witnessed educational practice being made a subordinate endeavour, to be controlled in all essentials by the current party in power.

Ecclesiastical versions of this pattern of control, often with their own conflicts, were the norm from the Middle Ages onwards, to be succeeded in the era of modern history by Church-State rivalries. These latter conflicts usually resulted in the State gaining the upper hand. An early example was the massive transfer of power in educational policy matters from Church to State hands accomplished during the Napoleonic sequel to the French Revolution. In the authoritarian states of the twentieth century – e.g. Nazi Germany, USSR and its satellite states, Spain during the Franco dictatorship – educational policy was essentially shaped by the State ideology. Where schools, or more likely individual teachers, failed to comply they placed themselves in dangerous, sometimes disastrous situations. In the early 21st century, some authoritarian States are again on the rise, Russia, China and Iran being prominent examples from a lengthening list. While some aspects of educational policy in authoritarian countries look familiar from an international perspective (e.g. China and Russia [prior to its invasion of Ukraine] participate in PISA), submission to the State's ideological requirements is mandatory for all schools. Compliance with a coercive State policy has also been a feature of educational reforms in many democracies in the recent neoliberal era. Here, however, the preferred instruments of enforcement are not the security forces of the State but funding procedures that are linked to indicators of the required conformity and performances.

There are of course exceptions to this rather gloomy story. Some promising initiatives can be identified in policymaking in a number of jurisdictions in recent decades, including, in different respects, Scotland, Ireland, Alberta and Ontario in the Anglophone world. But one of the best examples of a country that has reached consistently high success in educational policymaking is Finland. Particularly interesting are the two aspects of this success: *what* has been achieved and *how* that has been achieved. In relation to the former, the hallmarks of education in Finland include the following, which Pasi Sahlberg has included in his book *Finnish Lessons*

(Sahlberg 2021). First of all, the quality <109/110> of learning environments in the country's schools and colleges is very high, enabled by a well-considered and flexible curriculum framework. Second, students are active and responsible participants in their own learning. Third, teachers share in educational leadership as co-operative and constructive critics of their own work. Fourth, teachers enjoy high levels of trust with parents and a high standing in society. Fifth, rather than a plurality of school types, plurality is included within each school, thus also advancing equality and social justice. Sixth, assessment is primarily school-based, allowing diagnostic, formative and summative assessment to be interwoven. Seventh, advanced technologies are widely used by teachers, but not in ways that remove practitioners' individuality and creativity. (Sahlberg 2021, Chs. 2 and 3).

After Finland topped the PISA lists in 2003 and 2006 the country was regularly visited by potential policy-borrowers from elsewhere, seeking techniques or "secrets" that might enable them to achieve similar success. But these journeys were often misconceived. Finland's success was a by-product, not an aim, of the country's approach to educational practice. In more recent rounds of PISA, other countries have ranked higher than Finland, some spectacular results being achieved by East Asian countries. This has drawn international attention to extensive private tutoring and test-driven study practice in countries like Singapore and South Korea (Christensen 2019; Lee & Sung 2019). Finland meanwhile continues to score significantly above the OECD average, forgoing any preoccupation with international competitive rankings and remaining focused on the effort to provide a high quality of educational experience in all its schools. This sober, but energetic focus is emblematic. It appears that Finland remained largely unaffected by the neoliberal education policies that fuelled the Global Educational Reform Movement. The country deliberately chose to follow a different path (Sahlberg 2021, Ch.4).

Turning now, and finally, to *how* this success in policymaking and implementation was achieved, the lessons to be learned are crucial ones. Far from any quick fix, the story of educational success in Finland had its origins in the 1960s. The fuller account can be found in a historical report covering three-and-a-half decades of policy reforms in Finnish education, prepared for the World Bank and published under its auspices (Aho, Pitkänen & Sahlberg 2006). Following many years of disagreement, including a rural-urban divide over forms of schooling, an important consensus was reached in 1963. The public comprehensive school (*Peruskoulu*), providing each locality's primary and lower secondary education under one roof, would become the backbone of Finland's educational system. This consensus turned out to be the basis for a deliberative and longer-term approach to policymaking that engaged the public seriously. It was shaken from time to time by criticisms that the *Peruskoulu* was <110/111> not doing enough for more talented students. But it held together despite such criticisms, and also despite changes of government. Accordingly, during the last third of the 20th century, carefully thought-through reforms became possible in key areas, including: curriculum and assessment, teacher education, educational leadership, provision for special needs, home-school relations, education through and for social justice. Acrimonies did not disappear from educational discourse but they no longer dominated in a way that obstructed a clear view of educational practice itself and its larger personal and societal benefits. In short, educational policymaking came of age in a way that has few parallels internationally.

Let us conclude by briefly revisiting a core issue raised in the Introduction. What goes on daily, weekly and yearly in schools and colleges can be mis-educational as well as educational. Efforts to make accurate appraisals of quality, and to promote it in educational practice, are therefore of first importance. But such efforts proceed on a mistaken path unless they have first understood the key point that quality resides in educational experience before

it does in measured performances. A hermeneutic perspective grants unrivalled access the landscape of educational experience. It does so moreover in ways that allow that landscape to reveal itself promisingly from within and to transfigure the actions of teachers with their students. And that makes all the difference.

NOTES

[1] A note on the use of personal pronouns. Whenever the word "we" is used in this book it refers to the author and reader(s), or, where the context indicates it, we human beings. What I am keen to avoid is any use of "we" that might be taken to presume any kind of exclusivity, explicit or implicit (e.g. "we are all familiar with Vygotsky's concept of a zone of proximal development"; "we advanced Occidentals" etc. The text is an invitation to readers to join the author in a joint enquiry, pursued by the author and whoever begins to read these pages. As regards gender, efforts will be made employ the male and female, "she" and "he", on a 50:50 basis, thus avoiding awkward constructions like "she/he" and "his or her."

[2] As these questions indicate, the focus of this book will be on educational experience and educational practice. For a detailed consideration of the relation between hermeneutics and educational theories see S. Gallagher's study, *Hermeneutics and Education* (Gallagher 1992). For an exploration of how hermeneutics might illuminate life as an educational way of being, see A. Wierciński's large work, *Hermeneutics of Education* (Wierciński 2020).

[3] The word "hermeneutics" will be treated as a singular rather than a plural, despite the "s" at the end.

[4] Schleiermacher argued that the illuminations that hermeneutics could yield reached beyond the field of theology to other forms of enquiry. Dilthey took up this idea and pursued it especially in relation to historical researches. He sought to give human science (*Geisteswissenschaften*) a similar standing to that already enjoyed by natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*). For a review of key figures and issues in the development of hermeneutics, see Palmer (1969). For Schleiermacher's lectures on education, see Friesen & Kenklies (2023).

[5] A word of caution is needed in relation to this term. In this book "encounter" is not connected with "encounter groups", a form of therapy used in psychology. The term does, however, carry suggestions of the unexpected, of something that might or might not happen, when a meeting is more than a routine affair.

[6] For a detailed investigation of subjects of study as "a common heritage that we all share and have access to" see Korsgaard 2024, especially Chapter 3.

[7] See Ricoeur's collection *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II*, with Foreword by R. Kearney, translated by K. Blamey and J.B. Thompson. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2007. Ricoeur, moreover, has avoided making experience an explicit focus in his investigations. On this he says: "I have vigorously resisted the word 'experience' throughout my

career, out of a distrust of immediacy, effusiveness, intuitionism' (Ricoeur 1998, p.139).

[8] In a footnote (2017, p.57) Biesta says that the hermeneutics he criticises does not cover all positions and views that go under the name of hermeneutics. He acknowledges that his own use of the term is inspired by Emannuel Levinas' criticisms of hermeneutics in the latter's *Humanism of the Other* (Levinas 2006). Levinas himself makes little specific reference to major hermeneutic philosophers like Gadamer and Ricoeur. What he understands as hermeneutics seems rather to arise from his readings of Husserl and of Heidegger's early philosophy. See Levinas (1998).

[9] In recent years, the connotations of the term "learning" have been diminished by its increasing association with, or reduction to, "learning outcomes": i.e. examination and test results that can be readily measured for purposes of indexing and ranking. Gert Biesta has called this trend "learnification" and has abandoned using the term "learning". (See Biesta 2010, Ch. 1). My own view is that it is better to retain the term, reclaiming and reaffirming its rich historical resonances. See the observations on practice and tradition in Chapter 5.

[10] For the present, constructive potentialities can be understood as ones that indicate some significant contribution to individual and social wellbeing, as distinct from those that may portend some harm. The distinction will be clarified and refined in later chapters, especially through some concrete examples.

[11] While some of Dewey's earlier works could be called texts in or on progressive education, it would be inaccurate to say this about *Experience and Education* (Dewey 2008).

[12] Although "*wissenschaftliche*" is normally translated as "scientific" in English, a more accurate translation might be "scholarly", thus rendering *wissenschaftliche Redlichkeit* as "scholarly integrity", or "academic integrity", or "research integrity"; something wider in scope than just scientific integrity.

[13] See for instance #129 of *Philosophical Investigations*, and those before and after it, for some resonances with Gadamer's arguments that I have presented here.

[14] This is something that Paul Feyerabend was accused of, somewhat wrongly, following the publication of his *Against Method* in 1975

[15] In the Introduction to his book, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Vlastos, 1991) Gregory Vlastos addresses such issues and provides an illuminating review of some of the controversies concerning the real significance of the enigmatic life and actions of Socrates.

[16] There are parallels here with Hannah Arendt's notion of "going visiting." Giving an ethical twist to Kant's notion of an "enlarged mentality", Arendt writes: "To think with an enlarged mentality means that one trains one's

imagination to go visiting" an enlarged range of standpoints. (Arendt 1992, p.43)

[17] One of the most striking examples of this, in this instance from the natural sciences, has been the discarding by medical practice of the 'fact' that stomach ulcers are caused by excess stomach acid, never by bacteria. The prevailing scientific wisdom was that conditions in the stomach were too acidic for bacteria to survive. That this wisdom had become an abiding scientific prejudice was shown by Australian researchers Barry Marshall and Robin Warren, who won the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 2005. They showed that a bacterium, namely Helicobacter pylori, was a major cause of stomach ulcers and that, rather than remaining a chronic ailment, they could be successfully treated with the appropriate antibiotic.

[18] The work of Karl Popper during the mid-twentieth century held that all observations are theory-laden, and also argued that openness to falsification was the criterion that distinguished a scientific approach from a not scientific one. Popper's arguments, although not mentioning the role of prejudices in understanding, anticipated important currents of philosophical hermeneutics. *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (Popper 2002), originally published in German in 1935).

[19] In this connection, Lee Shulman's notion of "pedagogical content knowledge" (Shulman 2013) marks a substantial advance on customary ways of regarding knowledge for teaching purposes. But it still remains tied to a notion of knowledge as possession, as distinct from modes of knowing as ways of being.

[20] In the mid 1990s Andy Hargreaves reviewed a number of studies of effects of the first waves of such policy changes in the US, Canada and UK. He noted that by then, contrived forms of collegiality were becoming a widespread means, and consequence, of implementing imposed kinds of educational reforms in schools (Hargreaves 1994, Chs. 9 & 10).

[21] For a rich elucidation of the notion of *phronesis*, informed by Gadamer's hermeneutics, see Joseph Dunne's book *Back to the Rough Ground* (Dunne 1997).

[22] In his book *Oneself as Another* Paul Ricoeur describes "practices" in a way that has similarities with MacIntyre's and Dunne's accounts. He highlights the Aristotelian background and also refers to MacIntyre's analysis presented in *After Virtue*, including acknowledging the importance of internal goods (Ricoeur, 1994, pp.176-178). But MacIntyre's and Dunne's accounts deal in close detail with the notion of internal goods. A conception of practice that is somewhat similar to MacIntyre's and Dunne's, but without the Aristotelian background, is presented by Michael Oakeshott (Oakeshott 1966, 1981). He refers to practice as everyday action where valuations related to desire and aversion, approval and disapproval, are to the fore. Kevin Williams highlights the primacy Oakeshott's conception gives to rules

of discourse and performance. Williams points out that, for Oakeshott, the notions of practice and the practical "serve to distinguish the ordinary world of human affairs from the scholarly or contemplative forms of understanding or experience" (Williams 2007, pp.18-19). The notion of goods internal to a practice is absent, however, from Oakeshott's account.

[23] In a debate between MacIntyre and Dunne in 2003, MacIntyre held that teaching is an ingredient of every practice but that teaching itself is not a practice. Dunne argued that, on MacIntyre's own account of a practice, teaching would be included. The debate led to a special issue of the *Journal of Philosophy of Education* (also published as a book) which contained a number of contributions to the practice theme, including a further contribution from Dunne arguing strongly for teaching as a practice. See Dunne & Hogan (2004).

[24] As research continues on the Habermas archives in the University of Frankfurt, it has become clear that a mutually fruitful forty-year correspondence took place between Habermas and Gadamer. See Sandra Richter (2021).

[25] The ontological/ontic distinction drawn by Dybel echoes, as he acknowledges, that drawn by Heidegger between Being and beings in §4 of *Being and Time*.

[26] A "competences" approach to teacher education reached it height during the 1990's, often itemising very large numbers of competences. The approach was widespread in the different regions of the United Kingdom. For instance, in 1998 a publication called the *Northern Ireland Teacher Education Partnership Handbook* (produced by the government but later withdrawn) listed 92 competences which would have to be included in all programmes of teacher education. In 2009 a research report on teacher education in 9 countries commissioned by the Teaching Council in the Republic of Ireland showed that by that date the international research literature was producing predominantly negative findings on competency approaches to teacher education (Conway et al 2009, Chapter 3.3).

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