Transformative Education: A Philosophical Inquiry

Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy

in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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Graduate Program in Educational Studies

The Ohio State University

2017

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Abstract

It has become commonplace within the educational research community to invoke the transformative power of education. Calls to adopt a "transformative" approach to teaching, learning, pedagogy, assessment, and professional education can be heard across the disciplines of educational research today—in fields as different as adult education and school leadership, and as estranged as social justice education and educational psychology. Parallel to this discussion is the increasing usage of the language of transformation by administrators, informational brochures, official websites, and student affairs personnel in higher education. Beyond the English-speaking world, the German fields of educational theory and qualitative educational research have recently seen a flurry of activity on the topic of *transformatorische Bildungsprozesse* (transformative educational processes). The first aim of this dissertation is to examine some of the common philosophical assumptions that lie behind these various invocations of transformation. What does it mean to undergo a transformative experience? What pedagogical methods are required to bring them about? Where has the idea of a transformative education come from, and what anthropological premises does it assume? These questions are addressed in the first two chapters, which conclude that the various usages of the idea of transformation in education today fall into four different "paradigms" of transformative experience: conversion, overcoming, discov-

ery and initiation. In the third chapter, I explore some of the ethical problems that accompany each of the paradigmatic approaches to transformative education. The central result of this analysis is that only the "initiation paradigm" possesses the necessary resources for addressing the characteristic ethical problems of transformative education, and I therefore defend a revised version of transformative initiation in the fourth chapter. Within the initiation paradigm, educational transformation is standardly conceived as an initiation into disciplinary practices, but in this chapter I argue that this conception should be extended to include an induction into a tragic-ironic tradition. The latter can provide resources to protect against what I call the potentially "deformative" outcomes of practical initiation and challenges the standard conception of mastery as proficiency. In the fifth and final chapter, I assess some recent practical proposals for bringing transformative education into the classroom. Although the current enthusiasm for transformative education carries real promise, careful analysis of its actual proposals reveals that the idea is often appropriated and assimilated to non-transformative, and indeed anti-transformative educational ends.

For Anna

Was fesselt mich an irdische Beschwerden?

Acknowledgements

The joys of creative work are due in large part to those occasional experiences of insight which seem in the moment of their occurrence to be wholly personal, novel, and authentic, but which often prove after some reflection to be indebted to a friend, family member or colleague who first inspired its awakening. If there are any insightful perspectives or ideas in the proceeding work, they are the result of inspiration from these significant others who have graciously supported this project. If you are reading this dissertation, you are probably one of them. Thank you especially to the Department of Educational Studies and the Graduate School for providing crucial financial support throughout my doctoral studies at Ohio State University, to Bryan Warnick for exemplifying reasonableness and humanity in educational inquiry, to Bruce Kimball for exemplifying the old *Gelehrsamkeit* (I have fallen short of the example), to Kevin Gary and Matthew Farrelly for getting me through a crisis, to Jamie Teeple and John Fantuzzo for suggesting literature in key places, to the baristas of Stauf's German Village and Rösttrommel for allowing me to continually overstay my welcome, to my parents for being unshakably proud even when I don't deserve it, to my brothers for putting up with any preening I might be guilty of, to Lisa Sanders for abetting my early desire to be a know-it-all, and to Paul McCloud, Mark Jonas and Anna Yacek for everything.

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Fields of Study

Major Field: Educational Studies

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Philosophy, just like art and poetry, must have its source in the concrete apprehension of the world. As far as it has its head on straight, it may not proceed so cold-bloodedly that in the end the entire human being, head and heart included, is impelled into action and rattled through and through. Philosophy is not an algebra problem. Rather, Vauvenargues is right when he says: *les grandes pensées viennent du coer.* The greatest thoughts come from the heart. (Schopenhauer, 2015, p. 17)

Wandel und Wechsel liebt, wer lebt. (Wagner, 2009, p. 29)

Transformation and turmoil are loved by those who live.

Chapter 1: Introduction

> However paradoxical it may seem, the con-
> cept of experience seems to me one of the
> most obscure we have. (Gadamer, 1989, p.
> 341)

1. Transformative Experience: Three Scenes

On a fateful day in 1842, Alphonse Ratisbonne, a French agnostic living in Rome,

emerged from a café at which he had been dining to find a close friend of his disembarking

his carriage. Alphonse's friend invited him to take a ride with him, but asked him to wait

a few minutes while he attended to some business in the nearby church of the Sant'Andrea

delle Fratte. Rather than wait in the carriage, Alphonse decided to pass the time by wan-

dering into the church. At first, nothing in particular stood out to Alphonse in the modest

chapel. He remembers only "an entirely black dog which went trotting and turning before

me as I mused" (quoted in James, 1987/1901, p. 208). Then, "in an instant," Alphonse

reports, "the dog had disappeared, the whole church had vanished, I no longer saw anything

. . . or more truly I saw, O my God, one thing alone." He continues:

> I did not know where I was. I did not know whether I was Alphonse
> or another. I only felt myself changed and believed myself another
> me; I looked for myself in myself and did not find myself. In the
> bottom of my soul I felt an explosion of the most ardent joy; I could
> not speak; I had no wish to reveal what had happened. [. . . .] I could
> give no account to myself of the truth of which I had acquired

knowledge and a faith. All that I can say is that in an instant the bandage had fallen from my eyes; and not one bandage only, but the whole manifold of bandages in which I had been brought up. One after another they rapidly disappeared, even as mud and ice disappear under the rays of the burning sun. (p. 209)

Alphonse had experienced a vision of the Virgin Mary, and the experience was so powerful for him, it caused the total crisis and transformation of identity that he recounts in the passage above. From this moment on, he would call himself Marie-Alphonse, the rechristening being a token of his gratitude and awe before his moment of spiritual awakening.

Buckminster Fuller, an American inventor and intellectual, recounts a similarly transformative moment in his own biography. Following a series of career missteps and the death of his new-born daughter, Fuller was overcome by debilitating grief, melancholy and a creeping sense that his daughter's recent death had been a result of his shortcomings as a provider. One evening his self-loathing had come to a grim head. He left his apartment with the explicit intention of casting himself into Lake Michigan and ending his misery. Yet when he arrived to do his gruesome bidding, he heard a voice that he could only describe as the "voice of the universe." The voice said to him, "You do not belong to you; you belong to the universe." Fuller took the utterance to be an unexpected imperative: Use what talents and energy you have to do as much good as you can while you are alive. As one of his biographers writes, Fuller "realized in that moment that, for all his mistakes, he was the custodian of a unique package of experiences that just might have some utility for mankind" (quoted in Jarvis, 1996, p. 110). He would thereafter devote his life to developing

2

the eccentric, but ecologically sustainable and cost-efficient housing and transportation technologies for which he is famous.

Bede Griffiths (2003), an ecumenical monk, describes his experience of transformation as a moment in which the beauty of nature suddenly revealed itself. He recounts the "shock of surprise" he felt upon hearing the birdsong that accompanied a walk he took one evening as a schoolboy. "It seemed to me that I had never heard the birds singing before and I wondered whether they sang like this all year round and I had never noticed it." Everyday features of nature, like "the sight of a wild rose growing on a hedge" suddenly "came to me like visitations from another world." Griffiths continues:

> It came to me quite suddenly, as it were out of the blue, and now that I look back on it, it seems to me that it was one of the decisive moments of my life. Up to that time I had lived the life of a normal schoolboy, quite content with the world as I found it. Now I was suddenly made aware of another world of beauty and mystery such as I had never imagined to exist, except in poetry. It was as though I had begun to see and smell and hear for the first time. The world appeared to me as Wordsworth describes with "the glory and freshness of a dream." [. . .] But it was not only my senses that were awakened. I experienced an overwhelming emotion in the presence of nature, especially at evening. It began to have a kind of sacramental character for me. I approached it with a sense of almost religious awe and, in a hush that comes before sunset, I felt again the presence of an almost unfathomable mystery. (p. 2)

The experiences of Marie-Alphonse, Fuller and Griffiths are all spellbinding accounts of a decisive and dramatic redirection of a person's life course. They certainly make for engrossing reading. But what if they were much more? What if transformative experiences somehow held the key to what we are really after in education? In the moment of his conversion, Marie-Alphonse gains access to a "truth" which had hitherto been hidden from

him. A certain kind of ineffable "knowledge" is born. In Fuller's case, a motivational reservoir that would endure for the rest of his life abruptly bursts through his state of precarious desperation. And Griffiths claims that he had begun "to see and smell" as if for the first time. What is the nature of the new knowledge and sensation that Griffiths and Marie-Alphonse have received? What is the psychological basis of Fuller's new-found motivation? Why were these sources of knowledge and motivation inaccessible to each beforehand? Why are their experiences difficult to express in words? What preceding psychological or personal events helped contribute to these epistemic and personal breakthroughs?

In addition to the epistemic and motivational ruptures involved in these experiences, Marie-Alphonse, Fuller and Griffiths each witness a clear split between their old and new selves. As Marie-Alphonse succinctly, and paradoxically, puts it: "I looked for myself in myself and did not find myself." Who exactly is looking here? And where exactly? How can one not find oneself in oneself? Is there a conception of the self and growth that can make sense of such a statement?

The questions these experiences raise threaten to unsettle some of our most fundamental assumptions about the character and aims of the educational process. If education is about truth, knowledge and self-change, if its success depends on the discovery of enduring motivational sources, and if transformative experiences like Marie-Alphonse's, Fuller's and Griffiths' are what produce each of these in their most genuine forms, might such experiences be the true and proper aim of an education really worthy of the name? But, then, if transformative experiences are as radically discontinuous and unpredictable as these examples suggest, what are we to do with the conventional conception of education

as a continuous and intentional progression toward pre-determinable aims? How can our theories of educational growth accommodate the phenomenon of transformative self-change?

2. Transformation as an Educational Aim

Because transformative experiences seem to hold so much potential for the educational encounter, an increasing number of educational theorists and researchers have argued that transformation should be considered a central, if not *the* central, educational aim. Although the educational research community is usually sharply divided along disciplinary, methodological and political boundaries, calls for unlocking the transformative power of education can be heard across the educational research community today—whether in the form of "transformative education" (English, 2014; Jackson, 1986), "transformative learning" (Taylor & Cranton, 2012; Taylor, 2007; Mezirow and Associates, 2000), "transformational teaching" (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012; Rosebrough & Leverett, 2011; cf. Albers & Frederick, 2013; Pinto et al. 2012; Giroux, 1988), "transformative experience" (Pugh, 2011, 2002; cf. Paul, 2014), "transformative school leadership" (Shields, 2010, 2004; Wiener, 2004; cf. Bass, 1991), and "transformative pedagogy" (Elenes, 2013; Nagda, Gurin & Lopez, 2003; hooks, 1994; Lusted, 1986). Beyond the English-speaking world, the German field of philosophy of education has recently seen a flurry of activity on the topic of "transformative educational processes," [*transformatorische Bildungsprozesse*] following Hans-Christoph Koller's (2012) book-length discussion of *Bildung* as transformation (Koller, 2016; Nohl, 2016; Kokemohr, 2007; Marotzki, 1990; Buck,

1981). In almost every case, transformative education is hailed as a new, and better orientation to the educational encounter than what has come before. Teaching should no longer be thought an act of transferring knowledge from the teacher to student, or of merely *informing* students of what they will need to get by in the world, the consensus view claims. Rather, education should *transform* our relations to others, to ourselves, and to the world around us. As one source has it, "our mission in education," should be "transformational rather than informational" (Rosebrough & Leverett, 2011, p. ix).

Parallel to this growing consensus in the educational research community is the increasing usage of the language of transformation in higher education circles. University administrators, informational brochures, official websites, and student affairs personnel regularly invoke the language of transformation to describe the kind of experience that they strive to provide for their students. Describing the mission of Harvard College, dean Rahkesh Khurana (n.d.) writes, "We want to ensure we are providing students a deeply transformative experience—intellectually, socially and personally—that will prepare them for a life of service and leadership." In an interview on the Boston College Lynch School of Education website, Dean Stanton Wortham (n.d.) summarizes the aim of the school as "education for transformation," and declares "we're working on transforming human beings." A brief issued by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (Keeling, 2004) puts the aim of university education in similar terms: "student affairs professionals have a particular responsibility for ensuring that institutions of higher education become true learning communities committed to providing transformative educational experiences for all students" (p. 29). At Ohio State University, this idea has become institutional reality

in the form of a newly introduced Second-Year Transformational Experience Program (STEP). Similar programs described in similar terms are in operation at Yale, University of Washington, San Francisco State University, among others.

But what exactly does it mean for education to be *trans*formational, rather than *in*formational, or perhaps merely formational? What revisions might we need to make in our educational theories to accommodate, or indeed to direct our efforts towards transformative experience? When one surveys the various responses that educationists have given to these questions, the seeming consensus among the educational research disciplines and university administrators quickly begins to dissipate. For adult educator, Jack Mezirow (1981), transformative education is an "emancipatory process" in which "adults come to recognize their culturally induced dependency roles and relationships and the reasons for them and take action to overcome them" (pp. 6-7). Transformation is thus a politically charged experience. Yet, for philosopher of education, Andrea English (2014), "reflective-transformative learning" is any instance in which we successfully reshape the horizon of our expectations to accomodate a novel or unexplained element in our experience, political or otherwise (pp. 75-76). German educational theorist Hans-Christoph Koller (2012) calls transformative those experiences in which we "meet the demands of the other" (p. 86) by forming "new sentences and forms of discourse" that can mitigate tensions *between* various forms of life (p. 97), while British philosopher of education R. S. Peters (1971/1966) claims that true transformation follows only from "the kind of commitment that comes from being on the *inside* of a form of thought and awareness" (p. 31; emphasis added). In contrast to these theoretical formulations, educational psychologist, Kevin Pugh (2002), believes that

teaching for "transformative experiences" means encouraging three concrete actions on the part of the student: "1) active use of [a new] concept, 2) an expansion of perception, and 3) an expansion of value" (p. 1104). Psychologists George Slavich and Philip Zimbardo (2012) also opt for a less theoretical definition; yet they ascribe to "transformational teaching" three somewhat different tasks: "(1) facilitate students' acquisition and mastery of key course concepts; (2) enhance students' strategies and skills for learning and discovery; and (3) promote positive learning-related attitudes, values, and beliefs in students" (p. 581). For the critical pedagogue, Paulo Freire (1993/1968), both of these latter approaches, if not all of the ones already described, are just so many strains of the corrupt "banking model" of education. In truly transformative education, Freire argues, students profess "devotion to the cause of liberation" and "enter into *communion* with the people," an experience he describes as nothing less than a "conversion" and a "rebirth" (pp. 42-43).

Clearly then, the meaning of transformation is ambiguous and contested in the contemporary educational landscape. In the hands of educational psychologists, transformative education means something wildly different from what the critical pedagogues mean by it, and the critical pedagogues mean something again quite different from what adult educators mean. This ambiguity is troubling. The surface agreement implied by the wide use of the concept "transformative education" and its variants only obscures a deeper dissensus regarding its aims and methods. In such a predicament, invocations of the transformative power of education, as compelling as they may seem, cannot avoid the fate of self-contradiction.

3. Problematic Connotations

One of the central aims of this dissertation is to clear up some of the current conceptual confusion surrounding transformative education using the tools of philosophical analysis, a task I take up directly in Chapter 2. If "experience" is one of our most obscure concepts, as Gadamer suggests in this chapter's epigraph, then "transformative experience" is doubly so. Before discussing the particulars of this conceptual inquiry, however, I wish to make two related observations about the idea of transformative education that the contemporary discussion often overlooks. First, in spite of the many claims to the novelty of the transformative approach, there is really nothing new about the idea of an education for personal transformation. The promise of transformation has been with philosophy of education from the very beginning. Plato's (1997) Allegory of the Cave, for example, remains one of the greatest illustrations of the transformative potential of education. In Plato's Allegory, a prisoner enchained in the bowels of a fire-lit cave is dragged by an unnamed "someone" through several painful stages of enlightenment symbolized by her movement out of the cave. The prisoner's eventual departure from the cave educates her as to the reality of things, but simultaneously changes her to such a degree that she finds herself alienated from her fellow inmates when she returns. The exhortative tone of the narrative should not be mistaken. Every stage in the prisoners' transformation is emotionally taxing and even painful—an experience forced upon her by her unyielding guide. Plato's message seems to be that education has the power to permanently "turn around" the soul—the literal meaning of conversion—towards enlightenment and moral edification, but that these goals are accomplished only through great hardship, risk and loss.

The trials of Plato's prisoner lead directly to the second observation about the idea of transformative education I would like to make. Namely, the history of the idea of transformation has invested the term with problematic meanings and connotations that should make us wary of an unreflective embrace of its promises for education. In ancient Greek mythology, for example, the power to transform belonged to the office of the divinities, and it was deployed for less than noble causes. Ovid's (2004) *Metamorphoses* compiles many such examples of these less-than-noble, indeed positively reprehensible uses of the power of transformation. One particularly troubling transformation involves the daughter of the river Inachus, Io. Jupiter takes notice of Io's beauty one day and is so overcome by lust that he chases her down to take advantage of her. In order to escape being caught by his wife Juno after the fact, Jupiter transforms the ill-starred Io into a "snow-white heifer" (p. 36, l. 610-615) The outcome is no happy one for Io. Juno sees through Jupiter's plot and becomes jealous of Io's beauty, even as a heifer. Aeschylus' (1961) *Prometheus Bound* tells of the ceaseless wanderings on which Io is subsequently driven by Juno (Hera), wanderings so torturous that she states at one point in her narrative: "even to speak of those events from which my troubles first arose, and my unhappy transformation, makes me weep" (p. 39, l. 625-661). In another unfortunate tale from the *Metamorphoses*, the skilled weaver, Arachne, comes under the ire of Minerva for boasting that her weaving skills are equal to the goddess'. In a competition between the two, the acceptance of which was already an act of defiance, Arachne weaves a "picture betraying the gods' misdemeanors" (p. 216, Book 6, l. 130-135). Furious at her impiety, Minerva thrashes Arachne with a piece

of boxwood and transforms her into a spider. Transformation, at least in its classical understanding, can be a divine punishment as well as a sordid expediency to cover up unfaithfulness.

The *Metamorphoses* also depict more positive transformations, however. Daphne, "the child of the river Penéüs" (p. 28, l. 450-455) becomes the object of Apollo's love after being pierced by Cupidian arrow. Apollo races after Daphne "the one of them . . . in hope and the other in fear" until he was so close that "his breath was ruffling the hair on her neck." Daphne calls out to her river father to save her "by changing my form" (p. 32, l. 545-550). Instantenously, she is transformed into a laurel tree and delivered from the lascivious advances of Apollo (who still cannot help but caress the tree). Classical transformation can also be a saving grace, it seems.

T. H. White's (1987) *The Once and Future King* offers a glimpse into the life of the idea in Medieval Europe, where the power to transform was thought to be possessed by men and women with preternatural powers—witches, fairies, necromancers and, of course, wizards like the great Merlyn. In the novel, we find a fascinating use for the powers of transformation. Merlyn, who is charged with the intellectual upbringing of young King Arthur when he was still called "the Wart," educates him by temporarily transforming him into various animals. The Wart is turned into a fish, a hawk, an ant, a goose and a badger. Merlyn never explicitly reveals the educational theory behind his ways, but in a wonderful scene depicting the start of the Wart's aquatic adventure, White writes:

> The Wart found he had no clothes on. He found that he had tumbled
> off the drawbridge, landing with a smack on his side in the water.

He found that the moat and the bridge had grown hundreds of times bigger. He knew that he was turning into a fish.

"Oh, Merlyn," he cried, "please come too."

"For this once," said a large and solemn tench beside his ear, "I will come. But in future you will have to go by yourself. The essence of education is experience, and the essence of experience is self-reliance." (pp. 45-46)

For Merlyn, the wizard who lives through time backwards and knows of both Arthur's future ascendance to the crown and his eventual downfall, Arthur's transformations are precisely the kinds of experiences the future king will need to pursue lasting justice in Britain, a task he will have to undertake without the help of Merlyn. In the Arthurian tale, preternatural transformation gains a crucial educational purpose.

Parallel to Roman and Medieval paganism, the idea of transformation comes to play a central role in Christian theology as well—particularly, in the complex of ideas constituted by *metanoia* and conversion. According to Bertucio (2016), the transformative implications of *metanoia* were embodied in the practices of reading and study that were cultivated in the medieval monastic orders, especially that of the Benedictines. The process of metanoetic experience by which the monk "turns toward and participates in the νους [nous] of Christ" mirrors the transformative process of paideia envisioned by Plato and recovered by Heidegger, Bertucio argues (p. 513). In later Protestant mysticism, especially the 19th century religious awakenings in the US and Europe, the idea of transformation gained special prominence in the metaphors of rebirth and awakening, used as various descriptors of the conversion experience. On this view, "'[a]wakened' is the one who has been torn away

from a sinful life to one of the true faith through a definite and temporally discrete conversion experience" (Bollnow, 1962, p. 48). Alternatively, protestant reformers described the conversion experience as a spiritual "rebirth," which, like the awakening experience, transports the individual from a mere "being-in-the-world" to a "being-in-truth" (ibid.).[1] As the KJV has it: "Verily, verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). Especially in American Evangelicalism, the power of this idea has gained a special prominence.

The place of transformation in the modern vocabulary is further secured and colored by its function in the structuralist theories of society and self that began their ascent to popularity in the middle of the 19th century, roughly with the publication of Marx's *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. On the structuralist view, social and economic relations are organized into enduring forms or structures that operate independently of any particular agent or institution. Shifts in these structures, as from a feudal to a capitalist economic order, are cataclysmic, since they involve the dissolution of a deeply established fabric of social engagements, but also because they reconstruct these relations into a new organizational structure (Hollis, 2011, pp. 5-9). The emergence of a new social structure is thus always an outgrowth of the previous one, a going-beyond of the now sublated form, i.e. a trans-form-ation. Many of the structuralist social theories developed in the twentieth century posit a reciprocal causal interplay between social and psychological structures, and thus transformations in one sphere are thought to have serious

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[1] In this study, if a quotation stems from a German source in the References section, then I have lacked an (adequate) published translation and provided it myself.

consequences for the other, if not to initiate parallel transformations there. Polanyi's (2007) *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of our Time* provides an example of how social transformations can drastically alter individual psychology, while Erik Erikson's (1985) structuralist theory of ego-development in *Child and Society* evinces the deep connection between psychological transformations and the quality of our social life. Henceforth individual development would increasingly be thought to proceed in structural shifts and "crises" (Erikson, 1985).

A final context that inflects our contemporary understanding of transformation is what we might call mass consumer culture, or, with Richard Sennett (2006), the "culture of the new capitalism." As Sennett (1999) observes, life in the modern world has become increasingly marked by an imperious demand for flexibility. According to Sennett, this flexibility inevitably infiltrates our understanding of who we are and what we are capable of—in particular, our capacity to undergo drastic life changes. The pressures to stay up-to-date with the latest technological developments and labor market demands, and to accommodate ourselves to the disappearance of formal guarantees of job security or social support, thus seem to present us with an ominous *must*: Transform or perish. Paradoxically, this necessity is sold back to us today as a commodity with seemingly emancipatory potential. The most egregious examples of this are the various technology commercials featuring young, attractive men and women using their devices on mountaintops, beaches and concerts to creatively chronicle their eventful lives. "Buy this product and you can transform your life!" the advertisements implicitly promise. Marketing campaigns increasingly

appeal to the lifestyles with which the products might be associated rather than their technical qualities—that is, we might say, to their supposed transformative power. Sometimes the message of transformation is quite explicit. In the nutrition and health industry, we are constantly promised that the newest exercise plan, ab roller, or root extract can, to quote the title of a recent article in the *Daily Mail*¸ "totally transform your body in your forties: Father-of-three, 45, reveals the results of his incredible 12-week transformation (and reveals his very simple secrets to success)" (London, 2017). "Transform thyself!" thus comes to replace the old imperative of the Delphic oracle, "Know thyself!" Luckily, the process is easy and quick in our brave new world.

When the term "transformation" is used in contemporary education, it is unlikely that educationists have any one of these examples explicitly in mind, and often the attempt is made to clearly limit the connotational universe of the term, if not to operationalize it for quantitative research (e.g. Pugh, 2002). Yet in spite of such attempts, the history of words avenges itself, having deposited meanings and connotations within its lexical borders that continue to color our imagination when the term is employed. The same is true of transformation. There is a sense of the mystical in the idea, of supernatural or at least extraordinary powers, which can open us up to a new and better life, but which simultaneously involve danger, risk or even crisis. It seems to call up structuralist theories of the self, to refer to shifting forms of self- and world-relations (e.g. Koller, 2012), but simultaneously to imply profound, even cataclysmic self-change.

This is as it should be. Transformative experiences, however we define them, correspond to moments of significant personal change, and this change is bound to involve us

in challenging, even overwhelming, psychological or social predicaments. Today, the calls for transformative education do not adequately confront this "darker side" of the transformative process, however, ignoring the ethical hazards that accompany transformative education. Rather too much like those ubiquitous advertisements today for new health or fitness fads, the rhetoric of transformative education promises too much in too little time and in doing so may actually endanger those involved. Indeed, to invest the teacher with the authority to transform is to grant her a power that, as our brief historical review of the term demonstrates, had previously been reserved for gods and other supernatural figures. We may no longer subscribe to the metaphysics that had made transformation an instrument of the divinities, but the stories nonetheless force a question upon us: Are we comfortable handing over to teachers the degree of power implied in transforming students?

In place of a direct confrontation with these ethical issues, proponents most often starkly oppose transformative education to a pedagogical bogeyman and indirectly justify it by a critique of the latter. For critical pedagogues, transformative education is the alternative to a fundamentally regressive and ideological mode of education (Giroux, 1988; Freire, 1993); for multiculturalists, it is opposed to culturally hegemonic education (Banks, 2001a); for educational psychologists, the enemy is the sage-on-the-stage model of teaching (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012); and for philosophers, the opponent is the "mimetic tradition" (Jackson, 1986), accumulative learning [*Dazulernen*] (English, 2014), or the appropriation of information (Koller, 2011 in reference to Kokemohr, 2007). In contrast to this approach, the ethical implications of transformative education are addressed directly in Chapter 3.

4. Defining Transformation: The Standard Approach

Not only do the various historical connotations of transformation raise questions about the ethical status of transformative education; they raise a question of definition. What does it mean exactly to undergo a transformation? Philosophers and educational theorists who have concerned themselves with transformative education have typically addressed this question by first deriving a basic ontology of the self—e.g. the substructures of personality, fundamental drives or desires, engrained cultural and conceptual perspectives, or characteristic interests—from a favored philosophical anthropology, and then defined transformation as a change in these basic elements. In other words, they have sought to answer the question: What is a transformation? So we find Mezirow (1994), the progenitor of the now very influential "transformative learning theory" in adult education, defining transformation as a shift in the individual's "meaning schemes," i.e. ontologically basic structures of the self which Mezirow derives from a broadly linguistic-constructivist anthropology. Similarly, Koller (2012) follows a modified Humboldtian anthropology to come to a definition of transformation as a change in the linguistic "figures" that constitute the structure of our world- and self-relations. Finally, English (2014) invokes a Deweyan anthropology in defining transformation as the frustration and reflective revision of our ingrained habits of thought and action.

This approach to understanding the meaning of transformation, while reasonable and illuminating, has two distinct disadvantages. First, because each treatment begins with a particular conception of the human person, each one overlooks important facets of the phenomenon of transformation that are revealed by employing other ontological premises.

17

Clearly, human beings are guided by habits of thought and action, as English claims them to be, *and* their experience is framed by a horizon of culturally and ideologically loaded expectations, as Mezirow points out. In fact, these might just be two ways of saying the same thing, and yet their approaches mire them in two fundamentally different theoretical paradigms, as will be made clear in Chapter 2.

The second problem follows from the first. Each of the authors understand the task of grasping the meaning of transformation to be the straightforward theoretical procedure of adopting a philosophical anthropology and then defining transformation as a deep shift in its fundamental elements. As Plato and the other examples in the opening section of this chapter show, however, transformation is always something that is experienced, lived through, grappled with, endured. The theoretical definitions offered by Mezirow, Koller and English seem quite far removed from the richness and complexity of transformative experience.

Perhaps this phenomenological superficiality is a shortcoming, not of these particular accounts of transformative education, but of the very the philosophical enterprise itself. Is it not the unavoidable fate of any work of philosophy to dwell in the towers of theoretical abstraction, where the messy details of experience can be brought under some analytical order, or where we can find solace and inspiration in a more ideal and perfect world? "All philosophers prefer to live in towers," T. H. White (1987) observes. I think our answer to this question should be a firm, No. In his magisterial study of religious experience *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James (1987) clearly, and I think

definitively, unveils the error of "theory-centered" or "reductive" approaches to philosoph-ical inquiry and points us to an alternative. By focusing on the anthropological structure of transformation, the reductive approach taken by Mezirow, Koller and English fails to con-front the "field of experience" in which transformation always occurs. The sharp concep-tual distinctions and structural formula that theory produces fail to capture the shifty reality of the experiential field.

> [D]o what we will with our defining, the truth must at least be con-fronted that we are dealing with a field of experience where there is not a single conception that can be sharply drawn. The pretension, under such conditions, to be rigorously 'scientific' or 'exact' in our terms would only stamp us as lacking in understanding of our task. (p. 42)

The concept of "transformation," like the religious habits of mind James was ex-amining, marks out a field of experience, of which no single theoretical formula can be sufficiently descriptive. To extend the spatial metaphor, a theoretical formula reduces the field of experience to a vector pointing in only one direction. An alternative to the reductive approach would seek out several conceptual "vectors" that can together yield a multi-di-mensional account of transformative experience capable of adequately reflecting its phe-nomenological wealth.

> The theorizing mind tends always to the oversimplification of its materials. This is the root of all that absolutism and one-sided dog-matism by which both philosophy and religion have been infested. Let us not fall immediately into a one-sided view of our subject, but let us rather admit freely at the outset that we may very likely find no one essence, but many characters which may alternately be equally important[.] (p. 32)

Following James' example, if our aim in this study is to understand the nature of transformative experience and its role in the educational process, we should begin, not by stating the anthropological structure of transformation, but *by mapping the field of experience* traced out by the idea. Instead of resolving the original question "What does it mean to undergo a transformation?" into "What is a transformation?" we should ask the phenomenologically sensitive question: "What is it like to experience a transformation?"[2]

5. Outlook: Phenomenologically Sensitive Philosophical Inquiry

To pursue the latter question is to shift to a phenomenologically sensitive mode of philosophical inquiry, for which a variety of literary, autobiographical, psychological, and social theoretic sources become relevant alongside philosophy and educational theory. This mode of inquiry drives the analysis in each of the proceeding chapters.

In Chapter 2, I take on the definitional question in more detail, unearthing four different "paradigms of transformation" at work beneath the rhetoric of transformation in education today—that is, four different ways of understanding the phenomenology of transformative experience. These are the paradigms of conversion, overcoming, discovery and initiation. When educational theorists and researchers argue for a transformative approach to education, they are referring to one of these four transformative experiences. In social justice education, where the idea of a "transformative pedagogy" has gained currency, students are expected to experience a kind of conversion, in which their political allegiances and self-understandings are radically altered so that they align with the project

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[2] For a more contemporary example of a phenomenologically sensitive mode of inquiry, see Jaeggi's (2014) illuminating study of alienation.

of achieving social justice. In adult education, the concept of "transformative learning" points to a conception of transformation as overcoming, according to which the ultimate end of the transformative process is not social justice, but the emancipation of the individual from internalized ideological and personally alienating perspectives. In developmental psychology and pragmatist educational theory, a conception of transformation as a discovery experience is operative. Here transformation is an experience of grappling with and successfully integrating a novel or foreign element into one's horizon of expectations. Finally, neo-Aristotelian educational philosophers have defended a conception of transformation as initiation, in which the student's apprenticeship into disciplinary practices grants her access to the esoteric joys of mastery and practical commitment.

Because these paradigms of transformation correspond to established traditions of educational inquiry, the educational proposals of any one paradigm tend to be constrained by its available conceptual and phenomenological resources. In other words, there is little theoretical cooperation *between* paradigms. The work of Chapter 2 is thus meant to encourage thinking about educational transformation in its multi-dimensional complexity, while clearing up some of its incoherencies.

In Chapter 3, I argue that these four paradigms of transformation, while they each contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the transformative experience, are not created equal—at least from an ethical perspective. Because we are thinking about transformative experience in the context of education, where the protection and cultivation of students' autonomy is always a central concern, we must beware that our transformative intentions do not undermine this all-important mission. Yet, as I show in the chapter, the

intention to transform students can potentially disrupt an autonomy-promoting education in three specific ways: the problem of consent, the problem of controversial direction, and the problem of identity crisis. The paradigms of transformation each possess adequate conceptual resources for addressing the first two problems, I argue, but it is the third that forces us to choose between the paradigms. Because the transformative educator has a relatively short period of time to effect the transformation she seeks in students, she must contend with the danger of a prematurely halted process of transformation. If this were to occur, one of several forms of "identity crisis" (Taylor, 1989) are liable to develop: skepticism, cynicism, disillusionment and conformism. In order to avoid these potential outcomes, I defend the idea commonly advanced in social justice education that the transformative process should be buffered by a supportive community. In contrast to social justice educators, however, I argue that the "classroom community" that they call for only temporarily defers the danger of identity crisis—namely, to the point when students move on from the classroom. As a result, students should be inducted into a community that endures long after the student-teacher and student-student relationships of the classroom are left behind.

In the final section of the chapter, I argue that the enduring community necessary for buffering the transformative process can be found in the idea of disciplines as practices that is central to the initiation paradigm of transformative experience. In other words, if we are to educate for transformation, then we ought to orchestrate the experience as an initiation into practices—that is, in a context in which students learn to appropriate the styles of performance, standards of excellence, forms of interaction, and self-understandings characteristic to the disciplines they are studying. It is thus the initiation paradigm that provides

us with the most ethically sound and compelling approach to transformative education in comparison to the other paradigmatic understandings of educational transformation.

In Chapter 4, I turn to the psychological hazards internal to the initiation process itself. This process can result in several species of "deformation," I argue, each of which involve the emergence of a precarious imbalance between the individual's commitment to the practice and her other social roles and responsibilities. As a response to these eventualities, I defend the supportive power of tragic and ironic tradition as an educational complement of the initiation process. Tragic tradition refers to a kind of "meta-practice" that encompasses various aesthetic resources for facing the tensions that inevitably form *between* our practical and personal commitments. Similarly, ironic tradition refers to a "meta-practical" repository of aesthetic resources, but it distinguishes itself from tragic tradition in its encouragement of radical reflection on the quality of our practical commitments themselves, rather than on the relationships between them. On this view, tragedy and irony are forms of *experience* that call out reflection on the quality of our practical lives, i.e. that help us to answer both the general question, "Am I living well?" and the more specific question, "Is my initiation into this practice disrupting the balance of my commitments in a way that undermines flourishing?"

This engagement with tragedy and irony introduces a tentativeness into the experience of the initiated practitioner—that is, a continual need to assess and re-assess the relationship between our practical commitments and flourishing. As a result, the discussion leads us in the final section of the chapter to rethink the very aim of the transformative

initiation process. Often the aim of initiation is placed in terms of mastery. The fully initi-ated teacher, for example, is a "master teacher," a "trained professional," an "expert," or, quite commonly today, a "reflective practitioner" (Schön, 1987), who keenly coordinates her and her students actions toward certain desirable educational outcomes. However, if ironic and tragic tentativeness is incorporated into our conception of the master teacher, then the aim of her initiation is better characterized as a way of seeing and acting that I refer to as "romanticism," following Whitehead's (1967) understanding of the term. In short, the romantic master cultivates a capacity to (re)see the mystery of the familiar which is essential to both the avoidance of practical deformation and the pursuit of practical flour-ishing.

In Chapter 5, I use this "revised initiationist" conception of transformative educa-tion to shed light on the advantages and pitfalls of the several recent proposals to bring transformative education into the contemporary classroom. Here I argue that the ideal of transformative education is endangered by two trends in the contemporary educational landscape: the appropriation of transformation and its "kitschification." To make this ar-gument, I draw on Philip Jackson's (1986) distinction between the mimetic and transform-ative traditions in educational thought, claiming that proponents of the mimetic tradition have begun to appropriate the language of transformation to advance their own ends. Sim-ilarly, the language of transformation has made its way into the inspirational mantras and sentimentalist slogans of educational kitsch. Both developments are worrisome, since they obscure the fact that the aims and methods of the mimetic tradition have come to dominate over their transformative counterparts in education today and undermine our efforts, both

in theory and in practice, at recovering a place for the transformative ideal. By swallowing up the transformative ideal and the idealism of transformation, they impoverish our educational imagination.

The purpose of this study can be summed up as an exploration of the theoretical and practical promise of transformative education. To this end, this study assesses the paradigmatic ways in which the transformative ideal influences educational thinking, the ethical pitfalls involved in pursuing this ideal, the possible ways that the paradigmatic conceptions of transformative education might be revised to avoid these pitfalls, and the ideological forces in the contemporary educational world that have worked to submerge the transformative ideal. As such, the project can be characterized as an exercise in recovery in a double sense. First, this study attempts to recover a perspective from which the experiential and ethical dimensions of transformative education can be clearly evaluated. Second, it explores how we might recover a transformative orientation to the educational encounter in an educational world that too often trades imagination and idealism for measurement and control.

Chapter 2: The Paradigms of Transformation

> Conversion to the people requires a profound rebirth. (Freire, 1993/1968, pp. 42-43)

> From the power by which all humankind is bound, he who overcomes himself has liberation found. (Goethe, 1953, p. 164)

> Experience is the name everyone gives to their mistakes. (Wilde, 2007)

1. Introduction

The promise of transformation captivates the contemporary educational imagination. In spite of the often deep theoretical and methodological differences that can isolate the disciplines of educational research from one another, the potentially transformative quality of education is consistently invoked across the spectrum of educational thought. "Transformation" and the modifiers "transformative" and "transformational" can be found appended to almost every central concept in educational discourse today—"educational transformation", "perspective transformation", "transformative pedagogy", "transformative learning", "transformational teaching", "transformative leadership" and even "transformative assessment." Yet when educational theorists and philosophers have turned their

attention to the role of transformation in the educational process, they have left these numerous discussions of transformation unexamined. Instead, they have typically begun their inquiries with a favored philosophical anthropology and then defined transformation as a change in the basic elements that this anthropology imputes to the human person. As discussed in the previous chapter, this reductive or *a priori* approach passes over crucial resources for understanding the phenomenon of transformation within the full range of educational thinking.

In this chapter, we shall approach the question of the role of transformation in the educational process in a different way. Instead of attending to the anthropological structure of educational transformation, our inquiry will concentrate on the kinds of experiences learners are expected to undergo when they are submitted to transformative education. What do educational theorists and researchers have in mind for students when they promote "transformative pedagogy", "transformative learning", "transformational teaching", and "transformative leadership"? What is the *experiential meaning* of these invocations of transformation within the disciplines of educational research?

A careful study of the literature allows us to distinguish between four paradigms of transformation—that is, four distinct ways of understanding the transformative experience: transformation as conversion, as overcoming, as discovery, and as initiation. For theorists and philosophers within the conversion paradigm, transformative education is the attempt to bring about a conversion experience in students, and so for the rest of the paradigms. That these four paradigms emerge from and conceptually organize the vast literature on transformation in education is the central thesis of this chapter.

In order to motivate this thesis, the task of this chapter will be twofold. First, I endeavor to show that the rhetoric of transformation in contemporary educational research evinces the influence of these four paradigms of transformative experience. Following this demonstration, I provide, second, an account of the pedagogical dimensions of each of these paradigmatic conceptions of transformation.[3] Because in almost every case the influence of the paradigm types of transformative experience escapes the attention of its proponents, their explicit pedagogical propositions often come into conflict with those that derive from the operative paradigm. For example, proponents of the conversion paradigm often call for the use of dialogue as a means of student transformation. Yet, as it will be shown, it is doubtful that dialogue alone is capable of bringing about the conversion experience that its proponents hope to initiate in students. Thus, the task of determining the pedagogical consequences of a paradigm requires extending and critiquing some of its central proponents, often by reference to their historical antecedents. Because I think there is value in

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[3] In what follows, I use the phrase "rhetoric of transformation" to refer to the totality of usages of "transformation" and the qualifiers "transformative" and "transformational" in contemporary educational research. The phrase encompasses the usage of terms such as "transformative education", "transformative educator", "transformative intellectual", "transformative pedagogy", "transformative leadership", "transformative learning", "transformational teaching", "transformative experience", "transformative process", "perspective transformation", "transformation", "self-transformation", and "*transformatorische Bildungsprozesse*" [transformative educational processes] (the central concept of a growing literature in the German field of philosophy of education). In using the term "rhetoric", I intend to imply that the usage of such terms is less reflective than it should be. This is a flaw of the literature that the following discussion seeks to ameliorate. Also included in the purview of this study, but not in the phrase "rhetoric of transformation," are "big-change" concepts such as "metamorphosis", "self-change", "stage transition", "revolution", "reconstruction", "epiphany", "life-changing experience" "*Wandel*", "*Umwandlung*", "*Verwandlung*", "*Veränderung*" and "*Bildung*". While I think that the four paradigms of transformation I outline below cover the complete ground of the rhetoric of transformation, I am open to the idea that there may be further paradigms needed to understand the experiential meaning of the other big-change concepts in education. In other words, the four paradigms of transformation are an exhaustive list of the archetypes of transformation operating within the rhetoric of transformation today, but not necessarily of the phenomenon of transformation *tout court*. That said, I think that the big change concepts can be accommodated by the four paradigms I advance below.

keeping interpretation separate from criticism as far as possible, the discussion of the paradigm begins with the first, descriptive-interpretive task and then, following a section break marked "* * *", shifts to the second, critical-evaluative task.

The first case to be studied is social justice education, an eclectic mix of social theory, educational philosophy and activist literature which consistently invokes the idea of transformation. Here I demonstrate that the idea of conversion seems to be implicit in their usages of transformation and its cognates. To make this argument, I point to the particularly strong form of transformation that social justice educators like Sonia Nieto, Megan Boler and Henry Giroux hope to accomplish and the sometimes religious verbiage with which they characterize this aim. The second paradigm I investigate is transformation as overcoming. Traces of this paradigm can be found in social justice education, but it is best exemplified in contemporary educational research by Jack Mezirow's theory of transformative learning. Next, the paradigms of discovery and initiation are discussed. Recent philosophical work on transformative education by Andrea English and Hans-Christoph Koller, as well as the developmental psychology of Kohlberg and Erikson, are shown to be exemplars of the former, while the neo-Aristotelian educational philosophies of R. S. Peters, Chris Higgins, Joe Dunne and Kenneth Strike are shown to be exemplars of the latter.

Although the concept of "paradigm" tends to be quite overused in contemporary parlance, I employ the term to refer to the four types of transformation for two main reasons. First, each paradigm seems to constitute a fundamental form in which a transformative experience can take its shape. In this sense, conversion, overcoming, discovery and

initiation are archetypes of transformation. Second, and equally as important, theorists invoking a particular type of transformation rarely manage to think outside of its basic anthropological presuppositions. These models of transformation therefore operate in educational theory like parallel Kuhnian paradigms. That is, the contours of inquiry are derived from and legitimated by the authority of an established research tradition, which provides a context in which progress can be made but simultaneously traps theorists within a kind of theoretical parochialism. The notion of the "paradigm" is not perfect in this context, however, since proponents' *pedagogical* claims often cut across paradigm boundaries, often in ways that contradict their political and anthropological commitments.

The phenomenologically sensitive method of inquiry employed in this chapter is an indirect and more laborious approach to determining the meaning of transformation than simply deriving it from a philosophical anthropology, yet I believe it is our best chance at formulating a conception of transformative education that accommodates the phenomenological wealth of transformative experience. Because we want educators to have at their disposal a thick, and imaginatively rich language for understanding their pedagogical encounters with students in addition to, if not in place of, the reductive languages of the psychological and didactical theory they learn in their training, this conception is likely to be well-suited to the task of educating. Furthermore, an appreciation of how transformation is experienced by the student will help us to bring the ethical hazards peculiar to transformative education into full view in Chapter 3. The reader may want to skip to the concluding section of the chapter, where I present a table schematizing the results of the proceeding analysis, before beginning the long march through the paradigms.

2. Transformation as Conversion

The idea of conversion evokes the image of an individual suddenly gripped by a powerful, even overwhelming force, of divine or at least unknown origins, which reveals a hidden truth or exposes the error of our ways, and which permanently alters our inner lives and often our outward existence as well. The scenes from the previous chapter are likely to come to mind: Griffiths' (2003) encounter with sublime beauty of nature revealed that the natural environment was no neutral background, but a cipher of the presence of God. Seeing the flight of the lark and the grandeur of the sunset, Griffiths writes, "I felt inclined to kneel on the ground, as though I had been standing in the presence of an angel; and I hardly dared to look on the face of the sky, because it seemed as though it was but a veil before the face of God" (p. 2). Fuller's and Marie-Alphonse's experiences were also religious in nature. Marie-Alphonse's witnessing of the Virgin Mary dissolved his agnosticism and ushered him into the circle of religious commitment. Fuller, like Griffiths and Marie-Alphonse, was also overtaken by some higher, cosmic power, one that instructed him to take the fullest advantage of the gift of life.

In education, the idea of conversion takes on a more active sense. Conversion here implies the act of converting, or the experience of having been converted by someone. In specifically religious education, both the active sense of conversion and the more spontaneous, metaphysical sense are important. Spontaneous conversion experiences like those of Griffiths, Fuller or Marie-Alphonse are celebrated moments in religious life; they serve as seeming evidence of divine intervention and constitute the starting point for some of the most exemplary commitments to the faith that the tradition knows of—we might name

Paul, Augustine, and Ignatius of Loyola in this context. But the act of converting non-believers to the faith also plays an important role in religious education, especially in the Christian tradition. In his remarkable *On Christian Learning*, for example, Augustine (2010) clearly defends the educational importance of this active sense of conversion.

> Thus the expositor and teacher of the Divine Scripture, the defender of right faith and the enemy of error, should both teach the good and extirpate the evil. And in this labor of words, he should conciliate those who are opposed, arouse those who are remiss, and teach those ignorant of his subject what is occurring and what they should expect. [. . .] Here entreaties and reproofs, exhortations and rebukes, and whatever other devices are necessary to move minds must be used. (p. 53)

Active conversion implies an effort to get the student to adopt the principles and ideals of the relevant religious doctrine, the "right faith," as Augustine puts it. Its content is therefore somewhat more constrained than spontaneous conversion. Nevertheless, the experience of adopting a religious doctrine as one's own can mean very different experiences for different people. In his study of the conversion experience, for example, William James (1987) observes that the religious worldview is typically colored by one of two fundamentally different religious "attitudes": the healthy-minded and the morbid-minded attitude. Whereas the healthy-minded individual believes the existence of evil to be ultimately illusory and negative emotions such as fear and guilt to be curable barriers to personal happiness, the morbid-minded individual believes the existence of evil and suffering to be irremovable qualities of life after the fall. Morbid-minded souls see human society as, by and large, spiritually corrupt, themselves as sinful and guilty, personal suffering as purify-

32

ing and necessary, and salvation as sweet escape. They therefore seek redemption and deliverance from the evils of this world—to be twice born, born again (p. 134). Nietzsche's criticisms of Christianity's inherent psychological tendencies notwithstanding, both the morbid-minded and the healthy-minded attitude are possible outlooks within Christian life. Unexpectedly, this distinction will prove invaluable for our attempt to understand the contemporary rhetoric of transformation below.

Although the idea of conversion may thus seem most at home in religious traditions, it can be found in a perhaps surprising place in current educational thinking. Much of the writing on "transformative pedagogy" and "transformative leadership" in the broad field of social justice education can be placed within the conversion paradigm of transformation. To demonstrate how the idea of conversion influences and organizes the thinking of social justice educators, we must first turn our attention to the way the concept of transformation and its cognates are employed in social justice education.

The motif of transformation pervades the field of social justice education. Sonia Nieto (1999), a prominent multicultural theorist, claims, for example, that adopting a multicultural educational program that is truly committed to social justice requires transformation at each level of its implementation:

> Multicultural education, and all good teaching, is about transformation. I do not refer to just individual awareness but to a deep transformation on a number of levels—individual, collective, and institutional. Each of these levels is needed to foster student learning. (pp. xviii-xix)

James Banks (2001a), the "grandfather" of multicultural education (Levinson, 2010), echoes Nieto's educational imperative for the multicultural school.

> To implement multicultural education in a school, we must reform its power relationships, the verbal interaction between teachers and students, the culture of the school, the curriculum, extracurricular activities, attitudes toward minority languages, the testing program, and grouping. The institutional norms, social structures, cause-belief statements, values, and goals of the school must be transformed and reconstructed. (p. 22)

Nieto and Banks both maintain that the multicultural school cannot be content simply to add topics close to the multiculturalist's heart to the already-existing social studies curriculum, or to introduce a "world cultures" day to the school schedule. These all-too familiar measures can at best make students aware of the cultural diversity that exists around them; they do little to curate a school environment in which this diversity can *transform* the way students live with one another. With this latter aim, the multicultural school seeks to contribute to the achievement of multicultural equity and the elimination of racism, ethnocentrism and cultural prejudice in society at large. In critical pedagogy more generally, focus expands from the multicultural aims of education and embraces even broader political goals, such as the achievement of civic equality and the eradication of oppression. The teacher that works toward realizing such aims employs "transformative pedagogy" (Elenes, 2013; Nagda, Gurin & Lopez, 2003; hooks, 1994; Lusted, 1986) and earns the title of "transformative educator" (Albers & Frederick, 2013) or "transformative intellectual" (Giroux, 1988; cf. Pinto et al., 2012). Likewise, school administrators who "adopt a set of guiding criteria … to act as benchmarks for the development of socially just education" are no mere bureaucratic functionaries; they become "transformative educational leaders" (Shields, 2010, 2004; Weiner, 2003).

Terms like "transformative pedagogy," "transformative educator," "transformative educational leaders" and the "deep transformation" that Nieto places at the center of multicultural education are ambiguous between several senses of transformation, each of which social justice educators simultaneously affirm. *First*, full implementation of social justice education demands a thoroughgoing transformation of the traditional school curriculum and culture. The traditional school privileges members of dominant racial and ethnic groups in an unjust way, and this must be changed from the inside out.

Second, the school oriented to social justice should strive to become a formidable agency in the transformation of oppressive social structures within larger society. The school system is the way it is because of deep structural injustices built into the economy, state bureaucracy and popular culture, but these institutions are the way they are at least in part because of the socializing force of the school system. An educational program that does not work against structural injustice ends up perpetuating it.

Third, structural transformation requires the profound personal transformation of teachers. All too many teachers, these theorists argue, have been trained to accept unquestioningly the culturally insensitive teaching techniques they learned at college, the biased curriculum they are handed on the first day of school, and their own implicit prejudices regarding children of other ethnicities and social class backgrounds. In adopting the social justice approach to education, teachers will therefore have to seriously reconsider not only what they hold to be the proper content and method of education, but who they are and what they stand for. Nieto (1999), for example, describes the transformation of the teacher as a journey of personal "awakening": "beginning with their personal transformation,

teachers can move on to create more productive ways of working with others, and from there to challenge the policies and practices of the schools in which they work" (pp. xviii-xix). Giroux (1988) characterizes the duties of the social justice educator with similar language, imploring teachers to lay down the "language of management and efficiency" that saturates teacher education programs and to start "tak[ing] active responsibility for raising serious questions about what they teach, how they are to teach, and what the larger goals are for which they are striving" (p. 126).

Fourth, students too must undergo a profound transformation within a social justice educational program. Because social justice education is self-consciously concerned with rectifying injustice, students will have to confront the uncomfortable realities of racism, sexism, class conflict and cultural prejudice in society and resolve to do something about them. Privileged students must learn to uncover and jettison internalized ideologies that prevent them from seeing their role in perpetuating oppression, while marginalized students will have to learn to overcome their feelings of inadequacy, shame, powerlessness, or resentment that compound the systemic injustice and material disadvantage that they already face. Because these feelings and ideologies are lodged deep within the psyche and are thus closely tied up with students' identities, teachers will have to work hard to bring about the shifts in students' experience necessary for transformative political action.

To this end, Megan Boler (1999) argues for a "pedagogy of discomfort," an approach to social justice education she describes as simultaneously "an invitation to inquiry as well as a call to action" (p. 176). By encouraging students to interrogate their "cherished beliefs and assumptions" (p. 176) and especially the emotional reactions that inevitably

occur in the process of interrogation (p. 178), Boler's pedagogy of discomfort seeks to cultivate in students a "willingness to reconsider and undergo a possible transformation of [their] self-identity in relation to others and to history" (p. 179). Boler refers to this process as facing one's "demons" (pp. 175, 200). If all goes well, students' self-searching interrogations can finally lead them "to inhabit a more ambiguous and flexible sense of self" (p. 176) that is more accepting of difference and less tolerant of attempts to erase it.

Giroux (1988) explains the goal of social justice education in similarly transformative terms. For Giroux, the task of the critical educator is to "help students develop a deep and abiding faith in the struggle to overcome economic, political and social injustices" (p. 127). Empowered by this faith, the student willingly accompanies the teacher in "struggling for a qualitatively better world for all people" (p. 128).

Social justice educators are thus committed to a particularly strong form of transformative education. Critical transformation, as we might call it, is "strong" in five important senses.

First, the change students are to experience reaches deep into the core of the self. The student is brought to interrogate her conscious and unconscious prejudices and to root out suspect political allegiances. In the process, the teacher will have to discuss extremely sensitive issues relating to racism, poverty, and other historical and present manifestations of oppression. These issues are sensitive both because they require students to confront the long history of human brutality and because they reveal the terrible truth that the students themselves play a part in its reproduction, a fact too often insulated from the purview of the privileged (which itself is a troubling realization). As many have pointed out, this

means that transformative social justice education involves a certain kind of *suffering*. (Mintz, 2013; Berlak, 2004; Boler, 1997).

Second, what might be called the "ontological" aim of critical transformation is highly determined.[4] The process of transformative self-change that social justice education sets in motion is constrained to a well-defined end. The formerly disengaged, or disenfranchised, student is transformed into an active political agent.

Third, the practical aim of critical transformation is also highly determined. The student of social justice education emerges with an agenda—to fight against the oppression of marginalized peoples and to pursue nothing less than the democratic reconstruction of society (Sleeter and Grant, 2008). As James Banks (2001b) puts it, students must "acquire the knowledge, values, and skills they need to participate in social change so that victimized and excluded ethnic and racial groups can become full participants in U.S. society and so the nation will move closer to attaining its democratic ideals" (p. 245).

This close alignment of social aims with the results of personal transformation implies two further "strong" characteristics of critical transformation that are seldom stated explicitly. Thus our *fourth* sense of the strength of critical transformation is the likelihood that it will produce an individual who is opposed to her culture and society in a profound way.[5] As mentioned, one of the important results of social justice education is that the

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[4] This oft-misused term is meant to refer simply to the self in the process of change. This process is "ontologically determined" if the goal of the process corresponds to a definite identity or self. In the case of social justice education, the ontological determination of the transformed self is political in nature; but this need not be the case.

[5] This characteristic further determines the ontological aim of critical transformation. I have decided to call it out as a separate quality because it will serve to distinguish critical transformation from the other models of transformation discussed below.

individual comes to acknowledge the pervasiveness of injustice in contemporary society, whether in the form of economic policies that perpetuate inequality, housing policies that effectively re-segregate different races and economic classes, or educational tracking systems that shunt off already marginalized populations into dead-end vocational programs. A crucial result of social justice education is, in other words, the acknowledgement of the structural ubiquity of oppression. In light of this unsettling realization, the individual is bound to feel alienated from many aspects of the world she knows.

The *fifth* and final sense of critical transformation's strength is that its proponents usually cast as *instrumental* to the elimination of structural injustice rather than being valued for its own sake. Boler (1997)'s explanation of what she takes to be the core of social justice education captures this instrumentality nicely: "As an educator I understand my role to be . . . to teach a critical thinking that seeks to transform consciousness in such a way that a Holocaust could never happen again" (p. 255). Such juxtapositions are both typical and necessary for social justice educators. The "strength" of critical transformation is justified by reference to the dire circumstances that are taken to exist outside the school. Because dehumanizing oppression is omnipresent in contemporary society, we have an obligation to transform society into something more equal and just. The structural transformation of society can only occur if individuals first come to see the inequality and injustice that pervades our world and resolve to change it. Therefore, teachers cannot afford to wait around for students' political consciousness to awaken of its own accord. It must be *awoken*. Hence for the social justice educator, transformative education is, first and foremost, education for social change.

Although this brief analysis of social justice education cannot do justice to the important differences between its several strains, especially those between postmodernist, feminist, multiculturalist and more traditional Marxist discourses, it is significant that figures as diverse as Boler (feminist/postmodernist), Nieto (multiculturalist), and Giroux (traditional Marxist) all point to a common conception of transformation, one that represents the first paradigm of transformative education. In broad outline, social justice educators believe that there is something deeply wrong with the world we live in, and that we are host to the very sources of this corruption. Before real social progress can be achieved, we must therefore eradicate the evil that lies within, the ideologies, emotional conditionings, prejudices and predispositions that perpetuate inequality and injustice. Inevitably, and in fact desirably, this means the individual must suffer, must confront herself as a host of these corruptions and her world as the arena in which their terrible consequences play out. If all goes well, this confrontation leads to a productive sense of *guilt* (e.g. Nieto & Bode, 1996, p. 310). Because the number of people who have successfully accomplished this cognitive feat, whose scales have fallen from their eyes, is still small and marginal(ized), it is necessary to win others to the cause of social justice. Social justice educators are cautious on this point, but they can often be found encouraging a sort of proselytism and even a sermonizing form of address (e.g. Jones, 1999).

Transformative education, on this conception, is thus an attempt to bring about a profound individual transformation, in which students come to see the injustice of the world and the evil in themselves, and to spread the word of social justice. The connection to James' conception of the morbid-minded religious attitude discussed earlier should be

40

now clear. The belief in world corruption, the conviction of individual "sin," the celebration of suffering and guilt, the need for profound personal change and reidentification, the desire to enter into a group of initiated and marginalized seers, and the project of proselytism—these are the very principles that, according to James, prepare the way for the conversion and spiritual rebirth of the morbid-minded, and these principles are essential to the educational imaginary of social justice as well. Critical transformation in social justice education, we can say, is thus a kind of *conversion*. It is the attempt of morbid-minded educators to convert their students to see, and work against, the sickness of social life.

While the common conception of transformation represented by these authors points to a conversional conception of transformation, it is Paulo Freire, the grandfather of social justice education, who explicitly establishes the connection between critical transformation and conversion.

> Given the preceding context, another issue of indubitable importance arises: the fact that certain members of the oppressor class join the oppressed in their struggle for liberation, thus moving from one pole of the contradiction to the other. [. . . T]hese adherents to the people's cause constantly run the risk of falling into a type of generosity as malefic as that of the oppressors. The generosity of the oppressors is nourished by an unjust order. [. . .] Our converts, on the other hand, truly desire to transform the unjust order [. . . .] The man or woman who proclaims devotion to the cause of liberation and yet is unable to enter into *communion* with the people, who he or she continues to regard as totally ignorant, is grievously self-deceived. [. . .] Conversion to the people requires a profound rebirth. Those who undergo it must take on a new form of existence; they can no longer remain as they were. (pp. 42-43; cf. pp. 72, 112)

Freire's use of religious language to describe the transformation he hopes to achieve—e.g. his references to "devotion," "communion," "conversion" and "rebirth"—is

striking. Although we may be tempted to explain the presence of such language as a peculiar tendency of a devout Catholic and passionate adherent of liberation theology, it is not an exception within social justice education. Giroux's call to critical educators to rouse in their students a "deep and abiding faith" in the cause of social justice and Boler's call to students to face their "demons" are cases in point. Beneath the rhetoric of transformation in social justice education is an underlying will to convert.[6]

* * *

Let's now turn to the pedagogical dimensions of the conversion paradigm. It is an oft-overlooked aspect of Freire's seminal book that it actually suggests two pedagogies to its readers: a pedagogy of the oppressed and, in the passage above, a pedagogy of the oppressor. Freire's radically egalitarian, dialogue-based educational program, in which concrete and everyday aspects of the oppressed's experience are posed as problems, usually gets all the attention. However, Freire indicates in the passage above that such a program cannot hope to get off the ground unless some members of the "oppressors" have been converted into the defenders and teachers of the oppressed, thus "moving from one pole of the contradiction to the other" (p. 42).

The failure to give due attention Freire's "pedagogy of the oppressor" has significant consequences for the coherency of critical pedagogy. When one surveys the field of social justice education, the attention given to dialogue, and the consistency with which its

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[6] Critics of social justice education often refer to this "will to convert," as I am calling it, as an undue privileging of civic equality over individual liberty (e.g. Levinson, 2010).

proponents affirm its pedagogical supremacy, is truly remarkable. Given the strong trans-formation that social justice educators hope to accomplish in students, these affirmations take on a paradoxical aspect. A non-directive conception of dialogue is strongly implied in Freire's (1993) critique of banking education and explicitly endorsed in his conception of problem-posing education. For Freire, the dialogue form of communication is supposed to radically contrast with the standard, directive forms of student-teacher interaction which reinforce the oppression of the already marginalized. At one point, Freire's commitment to non-directive pedagogy even brings him to lambaste college professors for assigning cer-tain sections of texts for students to read rather than letting them decide for themselves (p. 57). While this commitment to non-directivity would seem to jar against the strong trans-formative motives that his political mission requires, Freire leaves room for the reasonable position that the pedagogy of the oppressor conversion is different from the pedagogy needed for the liberation of the oppressed.

Freire's followers have rarely confronted this disparity, however. Instead, the pro-ject of social justice education is carried on under the banner of egalitarian dialogue without reflecting on whether dialogue is well-suited to accomplish the strong conversional goals this project calls for. Thus, although Freire is often referenced as a *locus classicus* for a defense of egalitarian dialogue, his invocation of the idea of conversion links social justice education with a long tradition in educational thought, running through Augustine and be-ginning with Plato's memorable Allegory of the Cave, which advances a pedagogical *al-ternative* to egalitarian dialogue. The cave-dwelling prisoners of Plato's Allegory of the

Cave are characterized as so thoroughly indoctrinated into the illusory reality of the shadows before them that they must be compelled to look at the fire behind them that is the source of their illusions. Plato's point seems to be that liberation from such deeply internalized errors requires the soul to be "turned around"—converted—through rigorous re-habituation at the hands of a powerfully directive educator. If we are indoctrinated into our political ideologies as Plato's prisoners, then we, too, will require this rigorous re-habituation.

Augustine's (2010) treatment of religious education in *On Christian Learning* provides another quintessential defense of a pedagogy of conversion, one that sheds light on its practical dimension. Continuing the passage quoted at the beginning of this section, Augustine presents the duties of the Christian educator as follows:

> Thus the expositor and teacher of the Divine Scripture, the defender of right faith and the enemy of error, should both teach the good and extirpate the evil. And in this labor of words, he should conciliate those who are opposed, arouse those who are remiss, and teach those ignorant of his subject what is occurring and what they should expect. [. . .] Here entreaties and reproofs, exhortations and rebukes, and whatever other devices are necessary to move minds must be used. [. . .] It is necessary therefore for the ecclesiastical orator, when he urges that something be done, not only to teach that he may instruct and to please that he may hold attention, but also to persuade that he may be victorious. For it now remains for that man, in whom the demonstration of truth, even when suavity of diction was added, did not move to consent, to be persuaded by the heights of eloquence. (pp. 53-54)

For Augustine, the Christian educator has the duty to move hearts and minds by the force of eloquence away from the evil and towards the true faith. Rhetorical eloquence, Augustine argues, is a crucial pedagogical method of an education for conversion. If so,

then this may lend some insight into the pedagogy of conversion. While we can agree that dialogue will play some role in the conversional teacher-student interaction, it is ultimately rhetoric and eloquence that is needed to win over students to the cause of social justice.[7] In other words, conversion implies *persuasion*.

There is, then, a certain tension between the explicit pedagogical endorsements of social justice educators and the demands of conversional pedagogy—namely, the tension between (egalitarian) dialogue and rhetoric. The important implications this tension has for the ethics of transformation will be addressed in more detail in the next chapter. Yet even though egalitarian dialogue may not be enough to accomplish *conversional* educational goals, this does not mean that it cannot be transformative in a difference sense. Indeed inquiring into the specific sense in which dialogue can be transformative will usher in a second paradigm of transformation. If dialogue is not transformative in the strong, conversional sense intended by some social justice educators, what is the nature of a transformation that can occur in dialogue?

In a crucial section on the banking model of education in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1993/1968) suggests an answer to this question.

> Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-students with students-teachers. [. . .] The students—no longer docile listeners—are now critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher. (pp. 61-62)

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[7] Freire's repeated appeals to the power of the "word" in the *Pedagogy* can be seen as an opening in his pedagogical theory for the role of rhetoric.

> Problem-posing education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation of persons as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation. (p. 65)

The teacher, who has become a "teacher-student" (p. 61), rejects banking education and embraces problem-posing dialogue so that her "student-teachers" can begin to assert themselves as "critical co-investigators" and "transformers" of their world. The new role the students take up in dialogue is no artificial appendage to who they are; it is an "authentic" identity from which the social order has alienated them. In other words, problem-posing dialogue enables students to overcome the internalized forces that alienate them from their true selves and their basic humanity. The transformation that occurs through dialogue is an *overcoming*.

The tension between the dialogical pedagogy and strong transformation that social justice educators hope to effect thus shows itself to be a conflict between two different paradigms of transformation: transformation as overcoming and transformation as conversion. Let's now turn to the overcoming paradigm in contemporary educational thought.

3. Transformation as Overcoming

The overcoming paradigm conceives of transformation in quite similar terms to the conversion paradigm, but with at least one crucial difference. According to both paradigms, the individual is thought to be afflicted with various ideological dispositions and prejudices, the eradication of which constitutes a central educational aim. For contemporary thinkers in the conversion paradigm, this aim is considered a stepping stone on the path to achieving social equality. It is only in the context of this social project that the individual's

transformation from an ideological to a non-ideological mode of seeing and acting possesses significance. In the overcoming paradigm, however, the presence of ideological dispositions and prejudices within the individual is considered a problem because of their alienating influence on that same individual. Thinking about oneself and one's world through the frame of ideology distances us from who we really are—that is, from the ideal of an authentic life rather than a collective ideal of social equality. For the overcoming paradigm, transformative education is therefore primarily about personal liberation. The transformative process is therefore valuable in itself; it constitutes a final, rather than an instrumental, aim of education.

Sociologist and adult educator Jack Mezirow provides a clear example of this way of thinking in contemporary educational theory. His theory of "perspective transformation" formulated in the 1970's and developed until his passing in 2014 has exerted an immense influence on the trajectory of adult education research as well as the conception of transformative education in other fields. The theory, now known as "transformative learning theory," is employed across educational research today—in adult education (Taylor, 2008), educational psychology (Heddy & Pugh, 2015), school leadership (Shields, 2010), professional education (Branch et al., 2001), and in the literature on student affairs (Keeling, 2004). Because of its wide employment throughout educational research and its status as "the dominant theoretical orientation of adult education" (Taylor, 2017, p. 25), it will repay us to concentrate on Mezirow's formulation.

A good starting point for understanding transformative learning theory is to consider the conception of adult learning to which Mezirow was initially reacting. Mezirow

(1978) speaks of an "egregious error" that adult educators commit within the "dominant model" of adult education. Mezirow captures the rigidity of this model quite well:

> In the dominant model of adult education, educational objectives are set in terms of specific behaviors to be acquired, usually as dictated by a task to be accomplished or a role to be played. The current performance level of learners is ascertained, and this is compared with the level of performance established as necessary. The shortfall—in terms of required competencies—is divided into a number of educational exercises reduced to their component elements. These are to be mastered in sequence and with instant feedback on the adequacy of learner performance. Finally, education is evaluated by subtracting measured learning gains in competencies from the behavioral objectives. (p. 107)

The dominant model of adult education takes the student to be a bundle of variously developed competencies and the educational process to be the attainment of a series of objectives ordered toward mastery of the needed competencies. Mezirow's critique of this model is intriguing, but elliptical. He claims that the approach amounts to "indoctrination to engineer consent," which "frequently addresses the wrong reality to begin with" (p. 107), but says little else. Mezirow's point seems to be that the error of the dominant approach is to be found in the way it determines the educational needs of students. Educators of the dominant model typically assess students' educational needs by measuring the "distance" between students' current level of skill and the level of skill considered to be "competence." The subject matter is usually derived from a pre-determined curriculum of in the relevant area of competency, but educators may adjust this subject matter by asking students where their own interests lie. This latter approach, though perhaps less heavy-handed than the former, is not necessarily better. For Mezirow, the transformative teacher can take

neither students' interests nor their levels of competency at face value. Rather, the transformative teacher must understand both against the backdrop of the "wrong reality" that has played a role their creation. That is, she should ask, "Where has this student's interest come from?" or "Why does this student have this level of skill and not another?"

Mezirow's (1975) work with women in workplace re-entry programs is the background of his critique of the dominant model of adult education. To understand the expressed needs of women in such programs merely in terms of competencies after centuries of exclusion from the workplace is to overlook the potential influence of sexism on the formulation of those needs. Women's visions of appropriate occupations for themselves as well as the skills they already possess may conform all-too closely to expectations derived from traditional gender roles. Before they can begin to decide what competencies and occupations are right for them, women may therefore need an educational space that challenges them to rethink who they are and what they are capable of. In the process, the ideological forces that have previously given shape to their lives are progressively unveiled so that their influence can be finally expurgated.

Mezirow calls this alternative to the dominant model of adult education "perspective transformation." Drawing on Habermas' *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Mezirow (1981) declares the overarching aim of education for perspective transformation to be nothing less than self-emancipation:

> Perspective transformation is the emancipatory process of becoming critically aware of how and why the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions has come to constrain the way we see ourselves and our relationships, reconstituting this structure to permit a more inclusive and discriminating integration of experience and acting upon these

new understandings. It is the learning process by which adults come to recognize their culturally induced dependency roles and relationships and the reasons for them and take action to *overcome* them. (pp. 6-7; emphasis added)

Over three decades later, Edward Taylor (2017) characterizes the project of transformative learning in remarkably similar terms:

Over time [meaning] perspectives become engrained into our psyche[,] providing a rationalization for an often irrational world. They are a reflection of our cultural and psychological assumptions, constraining our worldview, often distorting our thoughts and perceptions. We become dependent upon them and change in perspective is often very difficult. (pp. 17-18)

Because of the stubbornness of such "constraining" and "distorting" perspectives, to which we easily become "dependent", Taylor argues that "it is important for educators to provide opportunities for learners within and outside the classroom to act on new insights in the process of transformative learning" (p. 23).

The conception of transformation at work in adult education, at least within the Mezirow-Taylor strain, is almost identical to the one advanced by Freire and other social justice educators when they appeal to the transformative power of dialogue.[8] For each of these parties, the individual's horizon of thought and action is greatly limited by misunderstandings about her identity and rightful role in the world. These misunderstandings have been, through a variety of channels, deeply internalized and thus block out the expression

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[8] See Taylor (2017, pp. 19-23) and Tennant (2005) for an overview of the various other "strains" of transformative learning theory in adult education. For direct criticisms of Mezirow's supposed fixation on the individual and her overcoming of "distorted" and "constraining" perspectives, see Collard & Law (1989), Clark & Wilson (1991) and Pietrykowski (1996), who each argue that Mezirow does not develop enough of a connection between transformative learning and *social* change. Following the view defended in this study, these can be understood as criticisms from a conversion paradigm perspective. Taylor (2017) refers to the view these critics defend as the "social-emancipatory" view of transformative learning (p. 20).

of an authentic self that lies underneath. The individual has thus in an important sense become alienated from his or her true identity—as a "world transformer" in Freire's case, or as a self-determining and autonomous individual in Mezirow's (1981, p. 9). In this paradigm, transformative education, whether it is called perspective transformation or problem-posing dialogue—Mezirow (1978) himself characterizes Freire's educational theory as offering a pedagogy of perspective transformation (p. 103)—is required so that the individual emancipate herself from the alienating influence of these false perspectives. In other words, transformative education is an *overcoming* of alienation.

Because Mezirow (1981), like proponents of the conversion paradigm, wants students to adopt a "critical" perspective on themselves and society, he and his followers are committed to a strong form of transformation. However, the transformation of "perspective transformation" or "transformative learning" is not as strong as that of the conversional "transformative pedagogy." For example, perspective transformation is not as ontologically determined as is conversion in social justice education. The transformed individual for Mezirow is a critically minded and self-determining adult, but this adult lacks any specific political allegiance. Consequently, perspective transformation is not as practically determined as transformative pedagogy is. The transformed individual has no particular political agenda according to Mezirow. Rather, Mezirow is more concerned with how the individual fits into her society and the extent to which her (transformative) education can help her improve that fit. The transformed individual is not supposed to feel the extreme alienation from society that the conversionists intend. In fact, the final "stage" of Mezirow's (1978) conception of the transformative process is the achievement of "contractual

51

solidarity within which it becomes possible again to participate in society" (p. 105). For all of these reasons, perspective transformation is less instrumental than conversional transformation. Because perspective transformation is personally emancipatory, it is intrinsically valuable to those involved.[9]

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Let's turn now to the pedagogical dimensions of the overcoming paradigm. Although the overcoming paradigm presents a weaker form of transformation than the conversion paradigm, the task of overcoming alienation is no small one. Consider what it is like to experience alienation for a moment—to be plagued by an overwhelming feeling of apathy toward the things that we should hold dear, a sense that we are not in control of our own lives, a creeping suspicion that we are a fraud or a failure, or a seemingly unending struggle to fight back behaviors and desires that seem completely alien to who we are and want to be. There is something deep and substantive missing in an alienated life. Can dialogue suffice as a pedagogical vehicle for its overcoming?

The answer to this question is a resounding "yes," I think, in the case of marginalized and oppressed populations who have been systematically excluded from public life. The experience of suddenly being given a voice to speak on issues that grow out of their own direct experience must have had a profound effect on the women Mezirow studied in

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[9] Perspective transformation seems to be more epistemically determined than conversion, however. Mezirow (1981) believes the transformed individual should possess several kinds of knowledge—namely, knowledge of (1) the psycho-social assumptions that had previously governed the way she thought (retrospective self-knowledge), (2) the new assumptions that currently govern the way she thinks (current self-knowledge), and (3) the way in which assumptions govern thinking in general (sociological/psychological knowledge). This insight is supposed to imbue the transformed individual's experience with meaning and makes her more sensitive to the meaning others make of their experience (p. 12).

career re-entry programs in the 1970's as well as the Brazilian peasant farmers Freire taught. Because such experiences provide learners with an authentic sense of agency and self-worth, they are likely a crucial source of inspiration for overcoming the feelings of inadequacy, powerlessness or resentment that have grown out of their social exclusion.[10] The same effect may be observed when children, whether of marginalized backgrounds or not, are finally given the power of self-determination in their education after having their authentic interests and aims long ignored by their educators.

In cases where alienation is not a direct outcome of such exclusion, however, the transformative power of dialogue becomes less convincing. Marx's (1978) alienated worker, who is divorced from the joy of creative production by a wage economy and the division of labor, Marcuse's (1991) one-dimensional man, who is condemned to a "comfortable, smooth, democratic unfreedom" by the ubiquity of consumer decadence (p. 1), and Nietzsche's (2005) herd animal, who is locked in step with the expectations of mass

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[10] Defending dialogue in this context should not be taken to mean, as it too often is, that excluded voices should be simply inserted into institutional language and practices without any efforts on the part of the excluded to learn institutional language and practices. Dialogue should mean learning on both sides. Richard Rodriguez (1981), a child of Mexican immigrants, eloquently reveals the double mistake of this "insertion approach" of bilingual education in his autobiographical account of his struggles to integrate into American society in *The Hunger of Memory*. According to Rodriguez, bilingual education can actually endanger the privacy of students' home languages and impede students' development of a public voice:

> Supporters of bilingual education imply today that students like me miss a great deal by not being taught in their family's language. What they seem not to recognize is that, as a socially disadvantaged child, I regarded Spanish as a private language. It was a ghetto language that deepened and strengthened my feeling of public separateness. What I needed to learn in school was that I had the right, and the obligation, to speak the public language. . . . Without question, it would have pleased me to have heard my teachers address me in Spanish when I entered the classroom. I would have felt so much less afraid. . . . But I would have delayed—postponed for how long?—having to learn the language of public society. I would have evaded—and for how long?—learning the great lesson of school: that I had a public identity. (pp. 29-30)

culture and society—each of these characterizations of the human condition consider alienation to be a pervasive and deeply engrained pathology of modern life, one to which both the excluded and non-excluded are subjected. The sources of alienation are thus more complex than ideological misunderstanding, and its overcoming more difficult than giving voice to the excluded. If so, we may need something more than dialogue for overcoming alienation.

One way to characterize alienation that suggests a pedagogical alternative is to follow Rahel Jaggi's (2014) conception of alienation as an incapacity to "appropriate" the conditions of our own lives. On this view, alienation is a disruption in our ability to see ourselves and our lives as a product of our own willful actions and decisions, whether because of internalized ideological categories, personal shortcomings, or psychological neuroses. Overcoming alienation would therefore require opportunities in which we can see our world as a concrete outcome of our own creative efforts, a transformative process Jaeggi refers to as *appropriation* (p. 38).

> In a process of appropriation both what is appropriated and the appropriator are *transformed*. [. . .] Appropriation would then be *a permanent process of transformation* in which what is appropriated first comes to be through its appropriation[. . . .] The aspiration of a successful appropriation of self and world would be, then, to make the world one's own[.] (pp. 38-39)

In spite of Mezirow's endorsement of Freirean dialogue, we may follow Jaeggi in looking to Dewey and Hegel for guidance on the kinds of practices that can provide such

opportunities for transformative appropriation (e.g. p. 89).[11] Dewey, following Hegel's philosophy of work, famously encouraged schools to offer their students cooperative and engaging activities like sewing, gardening, cooking, and woodworking. For Dewey, each of these activities provides a context for aesthetically rich experience and identity-conferring work. The finished products of cooperative work concretize students' latent creative capacities and invest the previously "alien" environment with a social meaning. From this perspective, it is concrete, socially engaged work that can combat alienation, rather than dialogue.

If we look to Friedrich Nietzsche's solution to the problem of alienation, we find a similar pedagogical response. Fighting the alienation endemic to modern life requires deep commitment to creative projects. Yet in slight contrast to Dewey and Hegel, Nietzsche (e.g. 2011) believes it is especially "high-cultural" projects and forms of expression that are truly identity-conferring for the individual. Rather than thinking these two responses contrary, they can be seen as calls to create educational environments in which the values of both authenticity and excellence can be realized.

Although Mezirow himself comes to weaken his early emphasis on Freirean dialogue as the pedagogical vehicle of perspective transformation, advancing several decades

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[11] Although Freire repeatedly employs Hegelian language to advance his conception of the human being as world-transformer (see p. 27, 51, 62, 67, 68, 82, 106, 107, 110)—"human hands," Freire writes, "work, and working, transform the world" (p. 27)—Hegel's philosophy of work translates into Freire's pedagogy in only an indirect way. Freire is clearly fascinated with the transformative power of language in the *Pedagogy*. To *name* the world, Freire claims, is to transform it. Hence the central role that dialogue plays in Freire's educational vision. Yet, in the famous master-slave section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* where Hegel (1977) advances his philosophy of work, Hegel clearly has in mind a much more concrete and material from of engagement with the world (§195, p. 118). Like Hegel and Dewey, I am skeptical that dialogue can have the power Freire believes it to have in the face of the extreme forms of modern alienation.

later a pedagogy of "critical reflection of assumptions," he remains committed to a conception of transformation as overcoming throughout his career. In this later work, for example, Mezirow (1998) writes, "CRA [critical reflection of assumptions] and its variant, critical self reflection on assumptions, are the emancipatory dimensions of adult learning, the function of thought and language that frees the learner from frames of reference, paradigms, or cultural canon [. . .] that limit or distort communication and understanding" (pp. 191-192). For the early and the late Mezirow, perspective transformation thus remains a Goethean project of emancipatory overcoming: "he who overcomes himself has liberation found."

Interestingly, when Mezirow discusses the psychological basis of perspective transformation, he employs some of the central concepts of a yet a third paradigm of transformative experience. Mezirow argues that perspective transformation is catalyzed by what he calls a "disorienting dilemma," a breakdown in our ability to make meaning of a salient aspect of our experience. For Mezirow (1981), all experience is framed by a "meaning perspective," "the structure of psycho-cultural assumptions within which new experience is assimilated and transformed by one's past experience" (p. 6). Mezirow sometimes speaks as if meaning perspectives fully "determine how we think, feel and behave" (ibid.) but he softens this claim in other places, arguing that meaning perspectives determine only the "horizon of our expectations" (Mezirow, 1994, p. 223).[12] Because meaning perspectives are always partially constituted by ideological categories, which characteristically construe

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[12] Mezirow (1994) eventually comes to distinguish between "meaning schemes" and "meaning perspectives," where the former refers to specific beliefs, ideas, concepts and feelings that we may have concerning a particular topic or event and the latter to more general web of "predispositions" and "psychosocial assumptions" that frame our experience (p. 223).

experience in rigid dichotomies and oppositions—student and teacher, male and female, friend and foe—meaning perspectives always fail to account for some recalcitrant aspects of our experience. In other words, pockets of meaningless always remain within a meaning perspective (Mezirow, 1981, p. 14).

The sheer existence of pockets of meaninglessness does not guarantee transformation, however. Like the anomalies of Kuhn's paradigms, meaninglessness coexists alongside meaning, only becoming salient when accompanied by pressure, anxiety and conflict (Mezirow, 1978, p. 105). Sometimes this conflict occurs because of an uncontrollable event, such as the death of a loved one or loss of a job. But, according to Mezirow, educators should not wait around for such crises to occur. The transformative educator should help instigate disorienting dilemmas by calling our attention to phenomena that our meaning perspectives fail to invest with meaning. In this way, a structural shift from one meaning perspective to another is set in motion.

Mezirow shares his belief in the importance of "dilemma" for the transformative process with the proponents of the third paradigm of transformative experience—the discovery paradigm. Let's turn now to this important conception of transformation.

4. Transformation as Discovery

One common quality of the previous two paradigms of transformation is that they both understand transformation to be a response to something gone awry in the development of the individual. We are all adrift in an unjust world, their thinkers claim. We are subject to corrupt beliefs, ideological assumptions, and self-destructive drives that alienate

us from who we really are or should be, and it is only a profoundly transformative education that can lead us out of our pitiable state. While the conversion paradigm understands transformation to be a dramatic alteration of one's political allegiances and political involvement, the overcoming paradigm believes it to consist in the liberation of the individual from internalized alienating tendencies and dispositions.

For thinkers of the discovery paradigm, things are quite different. According to two of its central figures, the developmental psychologists Erik Erikson and Lawrence Kohlberg, transformative change is thought to be a natural part of the process of healthy and normal development. The transformative educator is therefore responsible for initiating the kinds of transformative experiences that promote normal cognitive development, or alternatively for helping the individual cope with the transformations that naturally occur in the process of her psychological growth.

Erik Erikson's (1985/1950) conception of personality development in *Childhood and Society* is an exemplary representative of this view of educational transformation. Erikson's famous chapter on the "Eight Ages of Man" outlines a series of eight progressive phases of personality development, each of which encompass a characteristic struggle between a positive "ego-syntonic" psychological state and negative, neurotic one. The resolution of the struggle is secured through the rearing strategies of the child's guardian or educator, who must see to it that the child has enough experiences of the ego-syntonic state so that his or her tendencies to the neurotic state are quelled. So, for example, the first phase of personality development involves the child's largely unconscious efforts to gain a sense of basic trust with her guardian. The quest for trust takes the form of a response to

a crisis because of the child's extreme dependence on her guardian for nurturance and the inevitable frustrations of her instinctive solicitations of this care. More specifically, the child must come to trust in the reliability of her guardian even when the guardian is not immediately engaged in providing for her needs: "The infant's first social achievement is, then, his willingness to let the mother out of sight without undue anxiety or rage, because she has become an inner certainty as well as an outer predictability" (p. 247).

Although the achievement of this basic trust is of essential importance for further normal development, it does not thereby abolish the conditions of psychical crisis. The child's primal fear of abandonment and deprivation remains with the child throughout life. In other words, the always partially unresolved struggle for trust lays the foundation for future crises: "even under the most favorable of circumstances, this stage seems to introduce into psychic life . . . a sense of inner division and universal nostalgia for a paradise forfeited. It is against this powerful combination of a sense of having been deprived, of having been divided, and of having been abandoned—that basic trust must maintain itself throughout life" (p. 250). By the third stage of personality development, characterized by the struggle between executing basic plans of action (initiative) and the risk of these actions being rejected by trusted peers and adults (guilt), the inner division of the child becomes particularly severe. According to Erikson, this emergent division gives rise to a dramatic transformation.

> Here the most fateful split and transformation in the emotional pow-
> erhouse occurs, a split between potential human glory and potential
> total destruction. For here the child becomes forever divided in him-
> self. The instinct fragments which before had enhanced the growth
> of his infantile body and mind now become divided in to an infantile

59

set which perpetuates the exuberance of growth potentials, and a parental set which supports and increases self-observation, self-guidance, and self-punishment. (p. 256)

In this phase of growth, the individual becomes, or in Erikson's terms, transforms into, a being part child and part adult. The child is torn between his desire to win the respect of adult society and his childlike tendencies. Again, the child is faced with a crisis of an almost tragic nature, for the free play of her childish interests and impulses are the very resources which enable her to learn how to integrate into the adult world. The educator is therefore faced with an almost paradoxical task. In order to satisfy the child's desire to participate meaningfully in adult society, the educator must offer the child opportunities to take on more "adult" responsibilities and expect closer conformance the expected conduct of adults. Simultaneously, however, the educator must leave ample room for the expression of childlike impulses to explore and learn. Though difficult, it is possible to maintain a productive balance between these two demands, according to Erikson, yet the educator's efforts can be undermined, if the child is required to suppress her childish whimsies for the sake of conforming to adult expectations while trusted adults themselves transgress these expectations. In fact, this can lead to a debilitating form of submerged "hate" that can wreak psychological havoc later in life (p. 257).

The already delicate task of helping the child through the initiative-guilt crisis becomes even more complex with the onset of adolescence. At this stage, Erikson famously argues, the child goes through a total crisis of identity.

With the establishment of a good initial relationship to the world of skills and tools, and with the advent of puberty, childhood proper comes to an end. Youth begins. But in puberty and adolescence all

60

samenesses and continuities relied on earlier are more or less ques-
tioned again, because of a rapidity of body growth which equals that
of early childhood and because of the new addition of genital ma-
turity. The growing and developing youths, faced with this physio-
logical revolution within them, and with tangible adult tasks ahead
of them are now primarily concerned with what they appear to be in
the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they feel they
are, and with the question of how to connect the roles and skills cul-
tivated earlier with the occupational prototypes of the day. In their
search for a new sense of continuity and sameness, adolescents have
to refight many of the battles of earlier years, even though to do so
they must artificially appoint perfectly well-meaning people to play
the roles of adversaries; and they are ever ready to install lasting
idols and ideals as guardians of a final identity. (p. 261)

The identity crisis is simultaneously a problem of social adaptation as well as a
consequence of the "physiological revolution" that is occurring within the child. The child
has come, or is very quickly coming, to full sexual maturity, the immediate demands of
which clash against the sober and sublimated adult world. The lesson for the educator here
is to beware of the adolescent's tendency either to "overidentify" with causes or groups
whose ritualized beliefs and roles promise stability or to "float" between potential roles
without ever being able to settle into one.

This account of Erikson's theory of development, though brief, reveals a few im-
portant aspects of the educational program that grows out of it. Education within a stage
must accommodate the child's newly emerged physiological impulses by changing, or
again transforming, his or her social environment. At each stage of growth, the task of the
educator is to provide experiences for the child in which he or she adopts social roles and
responsibilities that resolve the characteristic anxieties and neurotic tendencies of that
stage. However, in order to move from one stage to the next, the educator must play an

active role in manipulating the environment for transformation. The "underlying assumption" of successful movement through the eight stages of development is whether the social environment can be "so constituted as to meet and invite this succession of potentialities for interaction" and thus accommodate "the growing person's readiness to be driven toward, to be aware of, and to interact with, a widening social radius" (p. 270).

In an ambitious article entitled "Development as the Aim of Education," Kohlberg & Mayer (1972) claim to formulate a conception of development opposed to that of Erikson. Kohlberg advances the notion of a "structural-hierarchical" developmental stage against Erikson's "embryological" conception of the developmental stage. For Kohlberg, an embryological stage is developmental level initiated by underlying physiological causes which become active according to a predetermined schedule of growth. Developmentally appropriate education thus becomes a reactive affair.

> For maturational theory, a stage represents the total state of the organism at a given period of time; for example, Gesell's embryological concept of stage equates it with the typical behavior patter of an age period. [. . .] While in the theories of Freud and Erikson, stages are less directly equated with ages, psychoanalytic stages are still embryological in the sense that age leads to a new stage regardless of experience and regardless of reorganizations at previous stages. As a result, education and experience become valuable not for movement to a new stage, but for healthy or successful integration of the concerns of the present stage. Onset of the next stage occurs regardless of experience; only healthy integration of a stage is contingent on experience. (p. 458)

Kohlberg's account of Erikson's developmental theory is not entirely accurate. As we have seen, Erikson believes that the psychological needs that emerge at each stage of

development, such as basic trust, stay with the child throughout adult life, and even explicitly come into question anew in the identity crisis stage. Successful integration of a stage crisis thus *is* valuable for movement to the next stage, *pace* Kohlberg, because the resolution of the new crisis presupposes the psychological balance won from previous ones. However, Kohlberg is right to point out that the educator's task in Erikson's view is largely a matter of helping the child to accommodate the psychological changes brought about by the so-called "ground plan" of organic development. Erikson's (1985) steps of development are, after all, "*predetermined* in the growing person's readiness to be driven toward, to be aware of, and to interact with a widening social radius" (p. 270; emphasis added). Although Erikson does not mean that the educator is merely a passive bystander to the child's development, her tasks do derive from the child's maturational stage, rather than, say, his or her distance from a moral or cultural ideal.[13] The educator is therefore under external pressure to complete these tasks at the right time, as the stages present themselves according to a physiological, rather than educational, schedule.

Kohlberg and Mayer follow Piaget rather than Erikson in conceiving of stages as independent of age and organic state.

> [I]n cognitive-developmental theory a stage is a delimited structure of thought, fixed in a sequence of structures but theoretically independent of time and total organismic state. Such stages are hierarchical reorganizations; attainment of a higher stage presupposes attainment of the prior stage and represents a reorganization or transformation of it. Accordingly, attainment of the next stage is a valid aim of education. (pp. 458-459)

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[13] Of course, Erikson's conception of maturity is imbued with moral and cultural values.

For Kohlberg, the complexity of the child's thought and action is determined by her previous cognitive development, not her physiological or psychological state. That children exhibit progressively higher forms of cognition as they age is not evidence of a "ground plan" of cognitive development embedded in the nature of the child; rather it is a token of the efforts of educators and the child's own personal initiative in developing modes of thought for successful coping with the world around her.

There is a crucial educational lesson to learn from this conception of the developmental stage, according to Kohlberg. Because higher stages of thought do not emerge of their own accord, the educator must see to it that the child encounters cognitive conflicts that destabilize the integrity of his or her current thought-structure. The child must face problems that resist resolution with her established modes of thought and action and thus require the next higher level of cognition or moral reasoning.

> As applied to educational intervention, the theory holds that facilitating the child's movement to the next step of development involves exposure to the next higher level of thought and conflict requiring the active application of the current level of thought to problematic situations. (p. 459)

Although Kohlberg presents a theory of development that differs from Erikson's maturational theory, their theories of *transformation* are almost identical. Development, organic or hierarchical, does not proceed in a seamless series of cognitive or moral amplifications, but in deep structural shifts brought on by crisis and conflict. Movement from one developmental stage to the next marks the birth of a new psychical or cognitive structure. The key difference between these two conceptions is the role that the educator is to

play. For Kohlberg, the teacher actively initiates the internal conflicts that spur on the transformation of the current phase of cognition rather than playing the role of Erikson's caregiver. However, in both cases, conflict and crisis is the catalyst of the dramatic, transformative shifts that constitute normal psychological development.

The analysis of Erikson and Kohlberg's shared conception of transformative development helps reveal a common thread running through many different treatments of educational transformation—that is, the STRUCTURE → CRISIS → NEW STRUCTURE pattern of transformation. To take an example beyond Erikson and Kohlberg, Jack Mezirow's transformative learning theory grants conflict and crisis a central role, as we have already seen. For Mezirow, the "disorienting dilemma" is a necessary catalyst for transformation. The educator instigates these dilemmas by introducing students to resistant problems that expose the contradictions of their current form of thought and action. At one point, Mezirow (1991) even characterizes transformative learning theory as a theory of adult development: "transformation," he writes in his seminal statement on the theory, "can lead developmentally toward a more inclusive, differentiated, permeable, and integrated perspective and that, insofar as it is possible, we all naturally move toward such an orientation. *This is what development means in adulthood*" (p. 155).

Although the general structure of Mezirow's perspective transformation and the Kohlbergian-Eriksonian theory of transformation are homologous, their theories diverge in their understanding of the transformative experience. Mezirow considers the "contradictions" embedded in developmental stages to be ideological, having their source in unjust relations of power and their effect in the alienation of the individual from her true self.

Kohlberg & Erikson believe these "contradictions" to be inevitable phenomena of the child's still-undeveloped cognitive and emotional assets. For Mezirow, the pinnacle of development is the reflective analysis of the ideological categories that trap us in alienating self-conceptions and social relations. For Kohlberg and Erikson, the aim of development is a healthy, well-adjusted, morally responsible adult.

The structural homology of Kohlberg and Erikson's conceptions of transformative development extends into two recent attempts to formulate a comprehensive theory of educational transformation, that of Andrea English and Hans-Christoph Koller. Both English and Koller believe that a problematizing incident—an interruption, disappointment, irritation or frustration—is the catalyst for transformation. Such experiences are "problematizing" in the sense that they reveal inadequacies in the students' taken-for-granted modes of engaging with the natural and social world. For English (2014), the educator's task is thus to make the classroom a space for problematizing experience, a conception of the educational environment she explicitly draws from John Dewey and connects to contemporary thinkers in the hermeneutical tradition. In order to grow, students must be confronted with unexpected and novel situations for which their habits of thought and action prove inadequate. In such situations, the world "resists our interaction;" we "*receive* something from the world" (p. 66); and we thus realize a limitation of our knowledge and ability (p. 70). English calls this moment the "pre-reflective beginning" of learning (p. 76), a consequence of "discontinuous" or "negative" experience that spurs on transformative inquiry (p. 115). Of course, such encounters can become discouraging and counterproductive, and so an-

other important task the teacher must fulfill is to find precisely that point at which an interruption sparks inquiry into resolving the problem, not resignation (p. 96). When this golden mean is found, English believes that the child is presented with a *choice* to transform the interruption into a pursuable problem, that is, a choice to begin a process of "reflective-transformative learning" (pp. 75-76). In the end, this process leads not only to the resolution of this particular problem, but to the reconstruction the child's system of previously inadequate habits of thought and action. The "transformed" child thus possess a system of habits that are better coordinated to the demands of the environment in the future (p. 95).

Koller's view is similar. Koller (2012), like English, "begins with the premise . . . that educational processes are initiated by a kind of crisis experience, which consists in a confrontation with problems, for whose resolution the established figures of world- and self-relations prove insufficient" (p. 71). More specifically, the individual must come to terms with the disruptive emergence of a novel or foreign other in their experience: "Transformative educational processes" are "responsive occurrences" that "answer the demands of a foreign other" (p. 86). Meeting these demands requires a "process of the emergence of new sentences and forms of discourse," i.e. a new structure of self- and world-relations. This new structure, rather than appropriating the source of the conflict and completely resolving the conflict, "recognizes and holds open the conflict" (p. 97). Koller is thus more wary than English of promoting a form of transformative education that swallows up the problematizing source of the transformative event. The conflict is not necessarily "resolved" but made productive. A successful transformation brings about the discovery of

"an idiom, in which the conflict can be adequately articulated" (p. 97). Thus even while he preserves the presence of conflict through the transformative event, Koller still believes progress is made in transformation.

Summarizing English and Koller, then, transformation consists in progressive accommodation of oneself to an unmet and problematizing demand from without. This is an almost identical conception of transformation to Erikson and Kohlberg. In each case, the learner is presented with a conflict or crisis that requires her to search for a strategy for reconciling herself to the offending phenomenon and restructure her web of beliefs and behaviors accordingly. Thus, again, we find the STRUCTURE → CRISIS → NEW STRUCTURE pattern of transformation operating behind the scenes.

Although each of these thinkers posit a common structure for the transformative process, it is Thomas Kuhn, a thinker very much in the background of these accounts (e.g. Koller, 2012, pp. 104-108), that can finally point us to the *experience* of this process. The broad outline of Kuhn's theory of scientific change is also homologous to the basic pattern of transformation discussed above. Kuhn believes that revolutionary changes in scientific understanding proceed after a period of crisis within the reigning scientific paradigm. Yet in reflecting on the nature of the *personal* insights that can lead to large-scale scientific revolutions, Kuhn (2000) makes a crucial observation for extending our understanding of the present paradigm of transformation. Reflecting on the moment in which the idea of the scientific paradigm began to germinate, Kuhn invokes a metaphor of "pieces falling into place" to describe structural shift that occurred in his thinking:

68

> That sort of experience—the pieces suddenly sorting themselves out
> and coming together in a new way—is the first general characteristic
> of revolutionary change [. . . .I]t involves some relatively sudden
> and unstructured transformation in which some part of the flux of
> experience sorts itself out differently and displays patterns that were
> not visible before. (pp. 16-17)

Kuhn is describing here an experience of discovery. The accommodation and reconciliation of the individual to a problematizing, crisis-inducing element in experience is, at root, a process of discovering a new frame of understanding and new strategy of action that better fits the "patterns that were not visible before." The Kuhnian connection thus helps us to see that the archetype of transformative experience operating in this paradigm is a conception of transformation as *discovery*. Educational psychologist Kevin Pugh's (2002) conception of "transformative experience" provides us with a clear way of articulating what happens in such transformative discoveries. To discover is to experience both an "expansion of perception" and an "expansion of value" as a new idea emerges into our conceptual universe (p. 1104).

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Given that John Dewey's theory of experience is a major influence informing the theoretical apparatus of the present paradigm (Pugh, 2011; English, 2014; Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972), we should not be surprised to find a deep connection between the discovery experience and transformative education. "Scientific methods, and the methods pursued by the scientific inquirer," Dewey (1903) writes in an early essay, "give us an exact and concrete exhibition of the path which intelligence takes when working most efficiently, under most favorable conditions" (p. 200). In light of the relationship between the experience of

discovery and the conception of transformation operative in this paradigm, we can begin to evaluate some of the pedagogical claims that its proponents make. One thing that stands out when the thinkers discussed above turn to pedagogy is their almost exclusive focus on the crisis moment of transformation. The transformative educator's job, each maintain, is to tactfully "interrupt" the student's typical ways of thinking and acting with crisis-inducing problems so that progress can be made. The student must confront recalcitrant novelties in the course of experience, the final appropriation of which dissolves major elements of her preexisting web of beliefs. For thinkers of the discovery paradigm, true learning is a kind of crisis management.

While this view admirably defends the centrality of crisis and conflict within the (transformative) educational process—something that the positive psychological sway of contemporary educational rhetoric likes to sweep under the rug—it tends to commit the opposite error, focusing too much on the crisis moment of the transformative process and thus disregarding a crucial precondition for the emergence of transformative crisis. A truly generative crisis, conflict, or interruption always appears against a "horizon" of expectations and anticipations. To confront otherness productively, we must possess a honed system of expectations which can provide a basis for engaging with novelty even while some of these expectations are frustrated. This is one of the important lessons of Thomas Kuhn's conception of the paradigm shift in *Structure*. Kuhn (2012) explicitly argues that paradigm-shifting novelty and anomaly can only appear to the individual scientist against a fully formed horizon, or "background," of expectation.

> [N]ovelty emerges only with difficulty, manifested by resistance, against a background provided by expectation. . . . Without the special [technical and conceptual] apparatus that is constructed mainly for anticipated functions, the results that lead ultimately to novelty could not occur. And even when the apparatus exists, novelty ordinarily emerges only for the man who, knowing *with precision* what he should expect, is able to recognize that something gone wrong. Anomaly appears only against the background provided by the paradigm. (pp. 64-65)

The formation of a horizon of expectations, i.e. the special technical and conceptual apparatus with which the scientist sees the world, is an educational process just as important as the process of crisis management. The scientist's rigorous training in the use of the characteristic instruments, concepts and theories of the paradigm is simultaneously a honing of her expectations and anticipations of experience. While this training narrows the scientist's purview, it simultaneously develops the scientists' powers of observation to such a degree that she can appreciate some truly extraordinary experiences as anomalous novelties—a precondition of paradigm shift. Kuhn calls this training a process of "professionalization" (p. 64) and "educational initiation" (p. 164).

In a discussion of the "hermeneutical" nature of experience, Günter Buck (1981) presents a theory of "horizon transformation" [*Horizontwandel*] that makes an identical point to Kuhn's, though he is referenced by both Koller and English as a theoretical ally. Buck, too, focuses much of his energy on describing the crisis moment of horizon transformation; yet he makes sure to emphasize the dependence of the crisis moment on the formation of an experiential horizon.

> Within each immediate experience, even one which brings a thing to consciousness for the first time, resides a "pre-knowledge," a *prius*, which is itself a moment of experience and which provides

the ground of possibility for the experience of novelty. This ground of possibility is the experiential context in which novelty becomes readable and interpretable. . . . Precisely because experience at each point of its process reaches beyond every previous act of cognition, or the sum total of previous cognitions, and transcends them, experience can become acquainted with a singular thing and progress to more comprehensive experiences. . . . The transcendence of experience [can be] described as the horizonal structure of experience. (pp. 88-89)

The horizon of experience is not merely a passive backdrop against which the world makes its dramatic appearance, or a lens through which we see it do so. Rather, the experiential horizon is a system of anticipations or expectations that actively reaches out into the world, rendering the flux of experience interpretable and understandable (p. 91). Our knowledge of the social and natural world flows into experience in the form of an anticipation, to be confirmed or frustrated by it. The horizon thus preserves the essential continuity of experience in the face of novel or foreign experiences so that we can look back on our experience with the Wildean insight: "Experience is the name everyone gives to their mistakes." As Buck observes, "[i]t is precisely this [continuity] that grounds the possibility of learning processes" (p. 91). In disregarding the necessity of forming a horizon of anticipation, proponents of the discovery paradigm miss a crucial dimension of transformative education—or, more specifically, of education for generative horizon transformation.

Education is in itself hermeneutically structured insofar as it, first, presupposes the appropriation and habituation of a practice or an ensemble of active relations and, second, supports the further appropriation and mastery of this practice through the activity of interpretation. . . . The habituation of a practice encompasses both the learning of practical skills (e.g. speaking) and moral virtues, as well as forms of knowledge and experience as they appear in the established sciences[.] (p. 35)

72

Deeply internalizing the characteristic modes of thinking, acting, and interacting of practices is the process by which we build up and hone a horizon of expectations. Kuhn calls this process, as we have seen, "educational initiation," and Buck's term for the process is "habituation" [*Einübung*]. Buck and Kuhn's insights thus demonstrate that the discovery paradigm is unstable on its own terms insofar as it draws pedagogical conclusions from the crisis moment of transformation at the expense of horizon formation.

Although this result might seem to cast the educational process as a relationship between a *transformative* process of crisis management and *formative* process of habituation, thinkers who have paid more attention to the latter process of habituation have also, perhaps surprisingly, construed it as a transformative experience. In other words, the formation of a horizon of anticipations can itself be a transformative process. Thus, Buck and Kuhn lead us directly to a fourth paradigm of transformation.

5. Transformation as Initiation

The quality that sets the initiation paradigm apart from previous paradigms is the role that the concept of a *practice* plays in its proponents' understanding of the educational process. According to thinkers of the initiation paradigm, some forms of human activity have developed a great degree of complexity and social organization over the course of their history. The stray curiosity of an intellectual becomes years later an organized discipline of research with international conferences, PhD programs, professional societies and peer-reviewed journals. Games that were once simple pastimes with very little organization

become full-blown sports with uniforms, championships and doping scandals. For an example of the former, think of the history of the field of evolutionary biology from its roots in Darwin's notebooks to its status today. For an example of the latter, think of how rudimentary golf must have looked when it was first played and the showy sophistication that surrounds it now.

At some point in the evolution from pastime to "practice," the value of participating in the activity becomes inaccessible, even incomprehensible, to outsiders and novice practitioners. An extended induction into the activity is now required in order to master the complex skills and strategies necessary for success in the activity and to appreciate the meaning of the rituals that surround it. In other words, the *goods of the practice* become almost completely internal or esoteric to the practice. Even the apprentice to a practice cannot yet understand the full significance and value of the actions, rituals, and forms of interpersonal engagement that constitute the practice. "When an outsider asks of a practice—for example, a student encountering a new discipline—'what's this good for?', it is really a trick question," Chris Higgins (2011) writes. "The only real answer is 'come on in and, after a somewhat lengthy process of initiation, see for yourself.'" (p. 65)

The goods of practices are esoteric not only because they involve the mastery of complex skills, but because they include the development of what Higgins calls a "biographical genre" and a "moral phenomenology." Becoming an experienced practitioner of a practice grants us a certain identity—it means something to call oneself a fisherman, a guitarist or a teacher—and the process thus provides us with a *genre* in which our identity can take a recognizable form. In addition, mastery of the practice occasions the birth of a

new, ethically thick way of seeing the world, i.e. a moral phenomenology. A master fisherman, for example, sees a different lake than the novice. He has an almost innate sense of what lure to use, where to cast, how to account for currents and weather, and he is skeptical of the new "Fisherman's App" for smartphones that promises to make all of these judgments for him. This mistrust is not merely directed at the accuracy of the app's algorithms, but at its potential to detract from the joyful challenge of "reading" the lake. Thus, the master fisherman's talents are not mere technical skills, Higgins points out, but rather *virtues*, or *excellences of character*, which enable the master fisherman to attain the goods of fishing in a way that preserves the integrity of the practice of fishing. The fisherman's aim is never merely to catch fish, but "to do so in a manner consonant with the excellences of the craft" (p. 56; quote is from MacIntyre). This is what makes the master fisherman's experience a moral phenomenology. Master practitioners are simultaneously exemplars of the aesthetic dispositions and ethical worldviews that unlock the inner joy of their practice, as well as defenders of their practice from social conditions or technologies that would endanger this peculiar form of joy.

Because initiation into practices requires such a thoroughgoing reorientation of the apprentice's perspective, it is described as a process of transformation. "In learning how to transform material into something excellent," Higgins writes, "the practitioner must also transform herself. . . . [A]pprentices to practices have to overcome 'inadequacies of desire, taste, habit, and judgment,'" and simultaneously "hone [their] perception, deeper [their] sensitivities, and develop [their] powers" (p. 57). On this view, students are to be understood as apprentices to the various disciplinary practices to which they are introduced in

school, and their training in these disciplines thus as a transformation of the apprentice to a master of the discipline. Anything less than this, argues philosopher of education R. S. Peters (1971), fails to live up to the name of education. The knowledge that we acquire in the process of education "must characterize [our] way of looking at things" and "involve the kind of commitment that comes from being on the inside of a form of thought and awareness." For Peters, "'education' implies that a man's outlook is transformed by what he knows" (p. 31). When our education does not involve these deep forms of appropriation, we become merely "knowledgeable" and our knowledge "inert."

Kenneth Strike's (2005) essay "Trust, Traditions and Pluralism" offers an illuminating practical example of what education for transformative initiation looks like in practice. Strike paints a picture of his high school math teacher, Mrs. Smith, who was able to make a case for mathematics in a way that set her pedagogy apart.

> Mrs Smith was my ninth grade algebra teacher. To enter Mrs Smith's class was to enter the Temple of Mathematics. Equations were objects of reverence. There were no attempts to make math fun or 'relevant'. There was no discussion of how math helped one get a good job. Rather, Mrs Smith was able to point to the goods that made math intrinsically valuable. I recall a demonstration in which she 'proved' that 1=0. We were invited to discover what went wrong. We checked the proof line by line. Everything seemed OK. We were invited to inspect a particular line. No one could see what was wrong. Finally we were told, 'Why, here you've multiplied by O'. This was done in a way so as to suggest 'Isn't it fascinating that multiplying by zero can be so hard to see, yet it has such an effect on an otherwise powerful proof?' Through Mrs Smith's evident engagement with this paradox, and her insistence that it had to be resolved and understood, we had been given a small window on what motivated mathematicians. (p. 234)

Mrs. Smith's first step towards motivating students in the subject matter of mathematics was not to present an argument for how important mathematics will be for college or career success, or for how useful mathematics is for solving practical problems. These would be external appeals to the value of mathematics. Rather, Mrs. Smith is concerned to show students what motivates *her* about mathematics. Mrs. Smith seeks to reveal the internal sources of motivation within the practice of mathematics to which only those who have mastered the practice have full access. Strike does *not* point to the students' experience of *discovering* why 1 does not equal 0 as the significant educational moment, as we would expect thinkers of the discovery paradigm to do. Rather, the students' discovery of the error in the proof and Mrs. Smith's enthusiastic engagement with it forms a single scene in an extended process of "initiation," in which Mrs. Smith attempts to lay bare the sources of joy and excitement that she derives from the practice of mathematics.

> I do not recall that Mrs. Smith used terms like elegance, simplicity, paradox or power to describe mathematics, but I do know that she showed us that these things were what motivated her about mathematics. These were words I acquired later for an experience to which she had pointed. Moreover, in her world, consistency and rigor were paramount, contradictions and fuzziness not tolerated, resolving paradoxes obligatory. Mrs. Smith exemplified the virtues required to realize the goods of math. In doing so, she was beginning the process of initiation into the goods internal to mathematics and their associated virtues. [. . .] In effect, her message to us was this. 'Here is what I see in math. There are goods internal to its practice. There are virtues required to realize these goods. Let me help you see them'. (p. 234)

Initiation into the practice of mathematics is not merely a matter of learning skills for solving math problems, or even of developing "critical thinking skills" transferable across disciplines. Mrs. Smith embodies, and hopes to cultivate in her students, certain

virtues—like elegance, simplicity, consistency and rigor—which will allow them to access the intrinsic goods of mathematics. This does not mean that learning problem-solving and critical thinking skills has no part in mathematics initiation. Rather, Mrs. Smith's task is to show how the successful development of such skills, when accompanied by the moral-aesthetic dispositions with which the master employs them, unlocks certain forms of joy and pleasure that are inaccessible to the novice. Solving problems and studying formulae become opportunities to act out the characteristic virtues of mathematics and experience the peculiar joys of the mathematician. In order to render these forms of joy actively appealing to students, however—i.e. to fashion them into sources of motivation—Mrs. Smith's second task is to show that her own demonstrations of excitement and enthusiasm are more than just an oddity of mathematics teachers. She has to show that the practice of mathematics enriches human life in general. Mrs. Smith sees beauty, truth and goodness in mathematics. She teaches mathematics as a vehicle for living a beautiful, true and just life. Mrs. Smith's challenge is to tap into students' innate desire to live just such a life.

Strike, Higgins and Peters' conception of disciplines as practices and education as initiation into practices thus point to a fourth and final paradigm of transformation underlying contemporary educational discourse—transformation as initiation.

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The initiation paradigm distinguishes itself from the previous three paradigms in its explicit connection of the language of transformation with the archetype of transformation that underlies it. Initiations into practices and new communities are profoundly transformative experiences, and thinkers of the initiation paradigm encourage educators to harness

the power of such experiences for what can seem like mundane educational chores such as learning mathematics. Because initiationists formulate their pedagogical recommendations with the concept of initiation explicitly in mind, there is less mismatch between pedagogy and the consequences of the paradigm than there were in previous paradigms. The roles of ritual, tradition and rites of passage, which are quite salient in accounts of initiation processes outside the educational context, are perhaps not given as much attention as they might deserve from defenders of the initiation paradigm. Yet initiationists have occasionally stated their importance (e.g. Peters, 1971; Strike, 2005).

The problems that the initiation paradigm raises are ethical, rather than pedagogical, in nature. If the student prior to her initiation cannot access the internal goods of the disciplinary practice that her teacher would have her learn, then this presents an important ethical problem. The student cannot know that her initiation into the discipline is a worthwhile undertaking for her. In other words, she lacks a basis for legitimate consent to the changes she is about to undergo. Strike himself is keen to the problem; yet his solution is not wholly satisfying. He writes, "students cannot judge the worth of intellectual practices until they have moved some distance down the path of initiation into them. Here trust substitutes for understanding" (p. 232). The teacher's message to students, Strike continues, "must always be, 'Do it my way, think about it as I do, pay attention to these aspects, here's what you should be seeing and beginning to experience. Trust me and you may come to experience it as I do.'" (p. 237). Thus, Strike's solution to the ethical problem of consent is the imperative, "Trust me!"

This solution only seems to raise more questions. What are the preconditions of trust when facing a transformation? What must the teacher do to properly earn it? What qualities must the student possess? What knowledge can help the student make the decision? What if the initiation process makes her worse off rather than better? Can initiation be a form of indoctrination?

In fact, each of the paradigms of transformation raise similarly difficult ethical questions that must be addressed before we can determine which one, if any, is the most attractive for education today. This ethical analysis is the project of the next chapter. Before turning to this project, let's recap what has been discussed so far.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that there are four archetypes of transformative experience that underlie the rhetoric of transformation in education. Not only do the four archetypes, or paradigms, of transformation—conversion, overcoming, discovery and initiation—help us to (1) grasp the experiential meaning of the many invocations of transformation in contemporary education; they simultaneously help us to (2) organize central proponents of transformative education according to the conception of transformative experience they employ, (3) determine the historical antecedents of their educational proposals, and (4) analyze the various pedagogical means of their realization. These four results constitute respectively the right four columns of the summary table (Table 1) on the next page.

With this multi-dimensional understanding of educational transformation at our backs, we are now in a good position to assess the ethical complexities and hazards of

transformative education, the task of the next chapter. But aside from its contribution to the line of argument of this dissertation, an appreciation of the various experiential dimensions of transformation can help us to engage more productively with others who are committed to the transformative potential of education. When we are confronted with one of the many usages of transformation in education today—whether it be in a university mission statement, student affairs document, education blog, advertisement, breakroom chat or scholarly discussion—we have a helpful new question we can pose. To the claims, "The classroom should be a transformative learning environment," or "I aspire to be a transformative educational leader," or "Education is a transformative process," we can ask, "What kind of experience are students supposed to have here? A conversion experience? An overcoming experience? A discovery experience? Or an initiation experience?" With the assistance of the foregoing analysis, we can have a pretty good idea of which one is meant. And if not, we have at any rate kept the student's experience in the center of our educational thinking.

Paradigm	Rhetoric of Transformation	Proponents	Historical Antecedents	Pedagogical Dimensions
Conversion	Transformative pedagogy, transformative educator, transformative leadership	Social justice theorists	Plato, Augustine, Freire	Eloquence, rhetoric
Overcoming	Perspective transformation, transformative learning	Mezirowian adult educators, Freirean social justice theorists	Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche	Dialogue, creative work, engagement with high art
Discovery	Transformation, transformative experience, *transformatorische Bildungsprozesse* [transformative educational processes]	Kohlbergian-Eriksonian developmental psychologists, Deweyan philosophers of education and educational psychologists	Dewey	Interruption of experience, crisis, inquiry
Initiation	Transformation, self-transformation	Neo-Aristotelian philosophers of education	Aristotle, Gadamer	Exemplification, habituation, apprenticeship into practices

Table 1: Overview of the Paradigms of Transformation

Chapter 3: The Ethics of Transformative Education

> Every crisis implies danger. For this reason, it would be hubris and a wrong orientation to education . . . if the educator were to arrogate to herself the task of consciously bringing about crisis for the sake of its salutary effects. It would be an outrageous self-aggrandizement to want to "manipulate" crisis, as it is called in our ugly jargon today. (Bollnow, 1962, p. 37)

> I see no serious ethical issues involved in education for perspective transformation. (Mezirow 1981, p. 20)

> A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops. (Adams, 1975)

1. Introduction

The project of the previous chapter was to explore the world of experience within the idea of transformation. We sought to answer the question: What does it mean to undergo a transformative experience in an educational setting? There are four fundamental shapes in which a transformative experience can take its form. Educative transformation may correspond to a process in which we realign our political allegiances and commit our-

selves to a new cause—a conversion. It may be a process of purging ourselves of internalized ideological perspectives that alienate us from who we really are—an overcoming. It may refer to an encounter with otherness or novelty in which we are forced to reform our horizon of expectations—a discovery. Or, it may be a process of being inducted into and identifying with a new community of practice—an initiation. With these paradigms of transformation in mind, we can better understand the experiential meaning of the references to transformation in current educational theory and research, and we can ensure that our own usages of the language of transformation do justice to the full variety of transformative experience.

Paying attention to the phenomenological dimension of transformative education also sensitizes us to its ethical implications. To adopt a "transformative pedagogy," to promote "transformative learning," to initiate "transformative educational processes" or to engage in "transformational teaching" involves deep psychological restructuring on the part of the student. When one surveys the literature on transformation, one finds no shortage of references to the emotional and cognitive intensity of transformative experiences. Jack Mezirow (1978) claims that transformations are preceded by "disorienting dilemmas"; Erik Erikson (1985) believes that the stages of ego development emerge out of "crises"; Sharon Todd (2003) points to the immense feelings of guilt, suffering and even "violence" that social justice education involves (p. 20); and Andrea English (2014) claims that all learning follows upon an "interruption" of experience, which involves "self-alienation" (p. 99), "struggle" and even "disillusionment" (p. 118). In most dramatic form, Otto Bollnow (1962), although he seems to be skeptical of such language in the epigraph above, even

goes so far as to claim that emergence of true novelty in the educational process only occurs upon "a hell-bound fall into desperation" (p. 41)

If such language is supposed to accurately depict students' experiences in a transformative educational setting, then this would seem to raise serious ethical questions about the legitimacy of transformative education. And yet one struggles to find any extended analytical engagements with the ethical dimensions of transformative education.[14] If the ethics of transformative education are discussed, the treatment often takes an apologetic course, starkly opposing the conception of transformation on offer to a pedagogical bogeyman and indirectly justifying the conception by a critique of the latter. Proponents of the conversion and overcoming paradigms typically defend their conceptions of transformative education, for example, by juxtaposing them to the regressive, culturally hegemonic, and ideological mode of education that has become all-pervasive in schools and institutions of higher education (Mezirow, 1981, p. 20; Giroux, 1988; Banks, 2001). Others declare the educational enemy to be the sage-on-the-stage model of teaching (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012), the "mimetic tradition" (Jackson, 1986), accumulative learning [*Dazulernen*] (English, 2014), or the mere appropriation of information (Kokemohr, 2007). The next step of the argument is to claim that these pedagogical bogeymen are not only inferior educational alternatives, but that they are not educational alternatives at all. Rather, transformative education is the only "true" form of education available to us. Following the argumentative line of these two premises, theorists easily pass over the emotional and cognitive challenges of transformation.

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[14] Todd (2003) is an exception.

The task of this chapter is to confront the ethical issues embedded within the transformative educational process head on. To do so, I discuss, first, some of the common qualities of transformative experience that can be gleaned from the paradigms of transformation. In particular, I argue that the "momentousness" of transformative experience gives rise to three specific ethical problems within the process of educational transformation: the problem of consent, the problem of controversial direction, and the problem of identity crisis. In each case, I explain why the problem arises in the transformative educational process and, after a section break "* * *", explore potential solutions to it. For this latter task, I look to the various paradigms of transformation and assess whether they possess the resources to address the ethical issue at hand. The aim here is to use the ethical analysis to increase our understanding of and simultaneously qualify our support for transformative education, so that the conception we come to defend is properly attuned to the "hazards" of the transformative process. As will be shown, both the problem of consent and the problem of controversial direction can be met with the resources of each of the transformative paradigms. However, the problem of identity crisis pushes the conversion, overcoming and discovery paradigms to their limits. Thus in the final sections of this chapter, I suggest that we pursue the initiation paradigm in the later chapters of this study as the most promising approach to transformative education available to us. The method employed in this chapter is similar to that of the previous chapter in attempting to keep the student's experience at the forefront of the theoretical analysis.

2. The Momentousness of Transformative Experience

Before turning to the specific ethical problems that arise in the context of transformative education, we should take a moment to reflect on the qualities we find in common among the paradigms of transformative experience. The quality that stands out most as common to all is the momentousness of the experience. To experience a conversion, an overcoming, a discovery or an initiation is to enact a scene in our life narratives that we come to recognize as a crossroads in our self-realization. Our previous understandings of who we really are, and who we would like to be—that is, our self-understandings and our self-ideals—are thrown into doubt and partially, if not wholly, reconstructed anew. In other words, transformative experiences require that basic elements of our life narrative be re-written or retold. The momentousness of transformative experience need not be observed in the precise moment in which it is undergone. Rather, it is often in retrospect that we come to appreciate its full importance.

Part of the momentousness of transformative experience derives from the irreversibility of the change it involves, the fact that we can no longer go back to the person we were before our experience. Because transformation alters identity-conferring commitments, sources of personal meaning, and self-understandings, we are, in an important sense, different people after a transformative experience. In fact, we often find it difficult to relate to the person we once were before our experience. This does not mean that transformative experience necessarily translates into consistent behavioral change. Following through on the consequences of a conversion, overcoming, discovery, or initiation experience in our

everyday behavior is a matter of altering deeply engrained habits with a strong physiological anchor. Such re-habituation almost inevitably involves relapses to behavior that we had thought we had left behind. We might say that "true" transformation counts as only that change that secures permanent behavioral consistency; however, it seems closer to the understanding of transformation within the paradigms to say that transformative experience involves an irreversible change in the way we relate, understand, interpret and set goals for our behavior. Thus, it is our self-narrative that is irreversibly changed in a transformation, if not our behavior.

The momentousness of transformative experience also derives from the discontinuity with which it confronts us. Transformation involves a radical break in what we thought to be true about the world and ourselves. For this reason, it is almost always accompanied by personal struggle. As we have seen, crisis is often considered a necessary precursor to transformation (Mezirow, Koller) or a way of characterizing its initial stages (Erikson). While the theorists just mentioned are not incorrect to point out that crisis often occurs in the process of transformative self-change, the concept of crisis seems to slight the importance of the internal struggle that precedes crisis as well as the possibility that transformation can take place without this struggle devolving into crisis. As William James points out in *Varieties of Religious Experience*, transformative change can be brought about by crisis or "lysis"—a slower, more gradual transition from one psychological stage to another (p. 171). While struggle seems an unavoidable element of the transformative experience, there is no reason to think that crisis necessarily proceeds transformative self-change.

This slight correction notwithstanding, we can agree with the Mezirow's and Erikson's of the educational world that accomplishing a transformative change within the brief time-period teachers and students have with each other may require drastic measures like initiating "crises." Teachers cannot wait around for students to happen upon discontinuity of their own accord; they must create the conditions for it to occur now. The "transformation" of transformative education is therefore momentous not only in the sense of being profound and discontinuous, but also in the sense of being *rapid*. As an important consequence, the alternative way of thinking and acting that students adopt on the other side of their transformation will not have grown naturally out of their movement through life. It will be injected, as it were, directly into the arteries of the students' self-understanding.

Given the discontinuity and rapidity of educational transformation, the "negative moment" of the transformative educational process—whether we call it a crisis, a dilemma or something else entirely—will be emotionally and cognitively demanding. Because proponents of transformative education have considered this moment to be necessary for destabilizing the individual's typical modes of thinking and acting so that transformative change may take place, they have generally assumed that the educator's efforts to bring it about are justified. In many cases, this assumption is tucked away in a persuasive definition of "learning" or "education" that simply asserts the place of suffering, dilemma, interruption, frustration, or crisis in the learning process (English, 2014; Higgins, 2011; Berlak, 2004; Mezirow, 1978). The problem here lies not in the assumption itself—for it is certainly true that learning involves a negation of that which has proven to be incorrect or incomplete. Rather, the problem lies in the general disregard of the ethical problems that

grow out of confronting students with a momentous transformative negativity in the educational process. In other words, the ethical hazards of conversion, overcoming, discovery and initiation have remained largely unexamined.

This leaves the project of transformative education on shaky ethical ground. "What gives you the right," we can imagine a concerned parent objecting, "to *transform* my child?" Embedded within this question are several serious ethical challenges to the project of transformative education—one political, one epistemic and one moral. The political issue involves the degree of authority granted to the educator over against the child's guardians. Should educators be entrusted with the power to transform? By itself, the political issue does not present an ethical problem, however, since parents are comfortable granting educators a great degree of "transformative authority" when its domain is generally uncontroversial. For example, it is uncontroversial for many parents that their children are sent to school for roughly 6 to 8 hours a day to be educated in an environment that, by and large, represents the mores of middle-class culture, with its emphases on obedience, good grades, sports and college admissions. That students are transformed into adherents of such a culture is generally accepted as a matter of course. The epistemic issue changes things, however. Can educators really know that the conversion, overcoming, discovery and initiation experiences students will undergo are good for them? Granting educators the authority to change students in ways that they cannot know to be right involves serious risk. Finally, even if we knew that the change students will undergo is a good one, does the momentousness of the change nonetheless endanger the development of students' autonomy? This is

the moral issue embedded in our original question. Perhaps the value of autonomous growth and self-discovery outweighs the value of transforming students for the better.

3. The Problem of Consent

Before addressing any of these objections directly, we should explore one possible way that they may be circumvented altogether. Namely, we may simply elicit consent from students for the transformations they are to undergo. Students, assuming they are properly informed beforehand and have developed the requisite rational faculties, can simply choose their transformative education, thus leaving their autonomy intact.[15] Jack Mezirow (1981) clearly considers this approach a viable option in his brief discussion of the ethics of perspective transformation, arguing that perspective transformation distinguishes itself from traditional forms of adult education by refusing to "engineer learner consent" (p. 20). Perspective transformation, according to Mezirow, is a mode of "self-directed learning" (p. 21). Likewise, Andrea English's (2014) conception of the transformative process leans on the student's ability to meaningfully *choose* to transform the interruptions in her experience into resolvable problems (p. 77). Thus, one way to justify the project of transformation would be to simply to provide conditions for its consent or rejection.

When we consider the nature of consent in the face of a transformative self-change, this approach becomes dubious, however. Let's consider the discontinuity of transformation more closely for a moment. Following philosopher Laurie Paul's (2014) recent

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[15] Clearly this solution, and the problem of consent, do not arise for children that lack the capacity for consent.

treatment of these issues in *Transformative Experience*, transformative experience introduces both an epistemic and a subjective discontinuity into the course of our experience. Epistemic discontinuity consists in a breakdown of our ability to cognitively simulate what it would be like to undergo the experience. Transformative experience belongs to a category of experience that "teaches [us] something [we] could not have learned without having that kind of experience" (p. 10). In this sense, it is akin to eating an ice cream for the very first time, to use a trivial example. It is simply impossible to know what it is like to eat an ice cream before one has had the experience.

The idea of subjective discontinuity is closely related to its epistemic counterpart. Because, as Paul points out, transformative experience involves a decided und unpredictable change in our core preferences, desires and aspirations, it brings about a fundamental shift what it is like to *be ourselves* after the transformation. The pre-transformation individual therefore lacks the phenomenological resources to generate an accurate picture of her post-transformation state. To return to our example, the person who has never tried ice cream cannot model what it would like to be the kind of person who makes decisions about what to do on hot summer days in light of a love of ice cream. When the "love" that is created or destroyed in the experience is located closer to core of our identity, we have undergone a transformation.

Paul points out that these two forms of discontinuity present a serious problem for the standard account of rational decision making within the context of "transformative choice." Transformative choice is a situation in which one of the potential outcomes of a decision is likely to have an epistemically and subjectively transformative effect on us: for

example, when we are deciding to pursue a career or to have a child. Under normal circumstances, we can engage in a cognitive projection of what each experience might be like for us and then choose the one which best accords with our preferences. This is the standard normative decision-theoretic model: the agent (1) cognitively simulates the various possible outcomes of the choice before her, (2) assigns the outcomes a subjective value based on their conformance or non-conformance with her preferences, (3) calculates the expected values of the outcomes by multiplying their subjective values by the probabilities of their obtaining, and finally (4) chooses the course of action which has the maximal expected value (pp. 21-22, 26-27).

In a case where one of the potential outcomes of our decision will be transformative, however, step one and two of the normative model break down. Because we simply do not know what the transformative experience will be like for us, that is, because the transformative experience is epistemically discontinuous, we cannot cognitively simulate it beforehand. Even if we could, the subjectively discontinuous quality of the experience undermines the preferential basis for assigning the transformative outcome a subjective value. The values and preferences we would use to assess the subjective value of the outcome change through the transformative experience. For these reasons, the normative decision-theoretic model becomes completely untenable at the precipice of transformative experience.

The failure of the normative decision-theoretic model in the context of transformative choice leads us to confront the first ethical hazard of transformative education. Without

the ability to meaningfully assign subject values to the probable outcomes of their educational experiences, students seem to be in a place in which they cannot rationally choose to undergo the changes these experiences will bring about. That is, they cannot *consent* to their transformative education. Because students are in a state of deep ignorance as to the kinds of people they will become on the other end of their transformative education, the standard way of securing the rationality of consent—i.e. showing that the consent follows from a choice, the assigned subjective value of which is highest in comparison to other options—loses its viability.[16] Even if a student were to say, quite artificially of course, "I consent to the radical changes I will undergo in this transformative educational experience," we would not be able to attribute rational status to the statement. The student knows not what she does. Rational consent in the context of transformation turns out to be impossible.

Perhaps there is a way around this result. Could we simply provide students with *testimonies* of those who have gone through the relevant transformation? Though the students may not be able to assign subjective values to outcomes through direct cognitive projection, perhaps they can indirectly gain information about the transformative process from others and consent to it. To be specific, the testimony would enable them to determine the probability that the transformative outcomes of the educational process accord with their preferences.

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[16] Interestingly, this problem gets worse, not better, as students grow older and become fully capable of granting or revoking consent.

There are two problems with this solution, however. First, the probability of preference satisfaction that students would generate from hearing testimony is oriented to their *current* preferences. Yet, these preferences, or some subset of them, are precisely what changes in the transformation. Second, as Paul points out, we have good reason to be skeptical of testimony from transformed individuals. On the one hand, the transformation may have been so total that those offering testimony have forgotten what it was like to be their former selves and thus cannot provide reliable testimony as to whether they are, on balance, better or worse off. On the other hand, the transformative experience may include the emergence of a preference for the new state as a matter of course. Even if those providing testimonials can claim that "*now* their preferences are better satisfied," Paul observes, "their preferences may have arisen *simply because they had* [*the transformative experience*] *in the first place*" (p. 90). The transformation, in this way, manufactures consent. Transformed individuals simply cannot identify with the people they we would have been had they not been transformed, and thus they adapt to their new condition by affirming it.

Students of transformative education, in each of its paradigm understandings, seem to be confronted with a serious quandary. In the absence of a rational method of determining the subjective value of their transformative educational experiences, they are confronted with a bare "you'll be glad I did it" statement from their educators and left without a rational basis for consent. Worse, even if the transformative educator has an impressive record of churning out happily transformed students, we cannot be sure that a serious infraction to their autonomy has not occurred. Students' preference for the new state may, as we have seen, simply be a product of the transformation itself, independent of whether it

has made them better off. In other words, the transformed student may have developed a kind of Stockholm Syndrome. Trapped in their new self, they have no choice but to affirm it. Thus, students' consent to transformative education may not only be irrational, but seriously threatening to the integrity of their selfhood.

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Paul's attempt to revise the decision-theoretic account of rational deliberation in light of transformative choice offers us a potential way out of the problem of consent in transformative education, but it will not leave our understanding of the transformative educational encounter completely intact. Interestingly, Paul does not think that the failure of the standard decision-theoretic model in the context of personal transformation spells doom for the rationality of transformative choice altogether. Rather, Paul argues that the way we assign subjective value should simply be shifted away from cognitive simulation and testimony and toward an appreciation of the intrinsic "revelatory value" of having the transformative experience. When we are deciding whether to have a child, for example, the rationality of our choice can be secured not by reference to the probability of it satisfying our desires and preferences—for these will be transformed—but to our desire *to find out what it is like* to be a parent. "The value is, instead, based on the *revelation* the experience involves. Perhaps part of the value of some experiences comes from what they teach us" (p. 92, emphasis added). Experiences can be valued because they promise to reveal "deep facts about the human condition, or . . . teach us information about the nature of moral or aesthetic facts" (ibid.). We can value them because we find out "what it is like to live a

certain kind of life" (ibid.). We can thus rationally choose to have a transformative experience because it will possess this kind of revelatory value.

Paul's conception of revelatory value opens up a crucial way of addressing the problem of consent in transformative education. Namely, students *can* rationally assent to the transformation they will likely go through, but *only if* their assent follows from the value they have placed on finding out what will come of them in the process. Their reason for undergoing transformative education must be its potential to *reveal* what it is like to live the lives their educators consider worthwhile.

The idea of "revelatory consent" thus helps to clarify the issue of trust that arose in the discussion of the initiation paradigm at the end of the previous chapter. To recall, Kenneth Strike (2005) proposed that the student apprenticing into a disciplinary practice must "trust" their educators at the outset of the transformative initiation process because the full value of the practice is necessarily inaccessible to the apprentice. This seems to leave the student with a bare "You'll be glad I did it" justification rather than enumerating the conditions under which the student's trust may be appropriate. Indeed, because epistemic and subjective discontinuity is a characteristic of the transformative experience in each of the paradigms of transformation, and none of their proponents discuss these conditions, each paradigm effectively offers the student the same question-begging justification that Strike does. In light of Paul's solution, we can now say that there are several conditions that need to be met in order to ensure that the student's trust in the transformative process is rationally justifiable, i.e. that it does not inadvertently undermine the development of her autonomy.

(1) The student must choose to undergo transformative education for the sake of the revelatory value of her educational experience. This condition is easier stated than fulfilled. As Paul points out, the way we plan for our futures is deeply conditioned by a peculiarly "Western" conception of self, according to which we deliberate on our subjective futures at every moment, cognitively modeling ourselves within the various possible outcomes and evaluating them according to our current preferences (p. 105). We should not take for granted that students can appreciate their educational experiences for their revelatory value.

Thus, (2) educators may need to work hard to cultivate the very capacity to appreciate revelatory value before transformative processes are set in motion. This may include finding exemplars in literature or history that demonstrate this ability and can inspire others to follow their example—the adventurous spirits, "come what may" fatalists, and stoics of the past.

On the other hand, (3) students should be given a good reason to think that their educational experience will, in fact, be revelatory. The educational experience must be oriented in obvious ways to students' identity construction and moral growth, not merely to cognitive development or career preparation. If these three conditions are met, then student consent can provide an ethical basis for transformative education.

4. The Problem of Controversial Direction

Although fulfilling these three conditions may dissolve the problem of consent, it does not address all of the ethical hazards of transformative education. The boundary between rational maturity and immaturity is always uncertain. Age is only a rough indicator, as is educational level. Yet the proponents of transformative education do not want to miss the chance to transform their students when conditions of rational consent are not perfectly achievable. One finds invocations of the promises of transformative education at all educational levels, from the multicultural middle school to adult career reentry programs. Thus, we are back to the original question posed by our imaginary guardian. "Children do not have the rational capacity to give their consent," the guardian might say in response to the foregoing discussion, "so what about the teacher's epistemic limitations and my child's autonomy?"

The epistemic and moral dimension of the guardian's objection are closely related. One way of capturing this relatedness to is to say that transformative education is ethically objectionable because it inappropriately encourages "directive teaching" in the context of an "epistemically controversial issue." Epistemically controversial issues, according to Michael Hand (2008), are those that cannot be decided on grounds of evidence and rational argument. The perfectionist ideals of the well-turned-out human being and the just society that guide the conceptions of transformation in each of the paradigms are controversial in just this sense. The rightness of the cause of social justice in the conversion paradigm, the philosophical anthropologies that justify the goals of the overcoming and discovery para-

digms, and the conception of the flourishing that grounds the conception of practical apprenticeship in the initiation paradigm cannot be demonstrated once and for all by appeal to evidence and rational argument. Directing students to change in the ways each paradigm proposes would therefore violate students' intellectual autonomy and even constitute a form of indoctrination, according to some prominent voices in the debate on teaching controversial issues (Steutel & Spieker, 2004). In other words, transformative education forecloses some of the individual's intellectual options where they should be left open. According to Hand, such controversial direction may, in addition to undermining student autonomy, corrupt the development of students' capacity to reason. After all, teaching epistemically controversial issues directively prevents students from appreciating the full diversity of rationally defensible positions on these matters.

Since the transformative educator is characteristically attempting to bring about a rapid, discontinuous, irreversible transformation in her students, controversial direction, although it occurs in any educational context, is especially acute here. The transformative educator profoundly *re-directs* her students' life course. Because each of the paradigms of transformation cover epistemically controversial ground, this problem of controversial direction, as we might call it, threatens to derail the entire project of transformative education. As with the problem of consent, each paradigm is exposed to the problem.

Although the problem of controversial directions arises for each of the paradigms, they do not possess equal resources for addressing it. The "strong" forms of transformation proposed in the conversion and overcoming paradigms are more exposed to the problem

of controversial direction than the discovery and initiation paradigms. It is less controversial to conceive of the educational process as a series of discovery experiences or as an initiation into disciplinary practices than it is to conceive of the process as a conversion to the cause of social justice or as an overcoming of internalized ideological norms. This is not because the discovery and initiation paradigms are any less influenced by a perfectionist moral outlook than the conversion and overcoming paradigms—in spite of some attempts to claim its absence (English, 2014; Koller, 2012)—but because the pedagogies of transformation associated with the former are derived from epistemically controversial claims about political reality. In the case of the conversion paradigm, for example, transformative education is instrumentalized to the project of social reconstruction and informed by a controversial assessment of the psycho-social causes of injustice; in the overcoming paradigm, the goals of transformative learning are derived from a controversial theory of ideology, according to which ideological categories and social expectations inhibit the free thought and authentic action of the individual. In the discovery and initiation paradigms, however, pedagogy remains untethered to controversial claims about social injustice or individual alienation—although the discovery paradigm's all-too eager assertion of the role of personal crisis, interruption, and frustration in the transformative process raises its own concerns about the philosophical anthropology informing its view. At any rate, while the

relative political neutrality of the discovery and initiation paradigm may make them problematically quietist on pressing political matters, it shields them from the full force of the problem of controversial direction.[17]

In light of the enthusiasm and frequency with which dialogical pedagogy is promoted in the conversion and overcoming paradigms, this claim may seem to be unwarranted. Isn't dialogue quintessentially non-directive pedagogy? Here we are approaching an important problem in the rhetoric of transformation within these paradigms that we encountered in the previous chapter—namely, the "tension" between the strength of transformation in social justice education and its commitment to egalitarian dialogical pedagogy. To recall our previous discussion of the conversion paradigm, we saw Freire endorse both his famous "problem-posing" dialogue for the critical classroom and a "pedagogy of oppressor-conversion," in which some members of the oppressors are convinced to join the cause of fighting oppression. This latter aim is one that characterizes the efforts of many critical educators. Social justice education is meaningless, its defenders say, if it does not inspire students—in particular, privileged students—to *do something* about social inequities and oppression from which they benefit. For a representative example, Megan Boler (1997) worries that engagements with the suffering of others through literature often produce only a state of "passive empathy" that fails to lead "to anything close to justice, to any shift in existing power relations" or to "radically challenge the reader's worldview" (p.

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[17] I say "may" because it is still an open question whether social justice education in its current form is better suited for achieving conditions of social justice than the discovery or initiation paradigm, or any other educational intervention for that matter. We will return to this issue below. To call the conversionists' and overcomers' claims about political reality controversial is not to say that they are untrue, of course.

255). To avoid this passivity, students need to be armed with a properly critical understanding of society and a productive sense of guilt. For these reasons, we called the conception of transformation at work in social justice education "strong."

In spite of the strength of critical transformation, one finds again and again the claim in the writings of social justice educators that dialogical interactions are the only justifiable relations between teacher and students, that non-dialogical pedagogy is tantamount to oppressive pedagogy. Even when social justice educators have turned a critical eye on dialogue—for example, in Ellsworth's (1989) much discussed article, "Why Doesn't this Feel Empowering?"—the alternative to dialogue they offer ends up sounding a lot like dialogue: "I understand a classroom practice of the unknowable right now to be one that would support students/professor in the never-ending 'moving about' . . . In relation to education, I see this moving about as a strategy that affirms 'you know me/I know you' while pointing insistently to the interested partialness of those knowings" (pp. 321-322; cf. Burbules & Rice, 1991, p. 401). Thus, the problem here is whether it makes sense to encourage teachers to convert students to a critical understanding of society and a firm sense of solidarity with oppressed peoples while simultaneously permitting only dialogical interactions between them. If it is true that students have internalized the ideologies of oppression and privilege as deeply as social justice educators claim them to have—that is, at a level that often escapes the discursive reflections of the rational mind—then it stands to reason that these corruptions will have to be combatted with process of re-habituation that includes non-discursive, non-dialogical, rhetorical methods. For this reason, we concluded that the pedagogy of conversion is not dialogue, but persuasive rhetoric.

Unfortunately, Freire and his followers rarely confront the tension between the pedagogical demands of conversion and their commitment to dialogue. Indeed, the aim of conversion and dialogical pedagogy are sometimes promoted in one and the same sentence in social justice education. Giroux (1988) does this, for example, when he calls on teachers to "treat students as critical agents; make knowledge problematic; utilize critical and affirming dialogue" while simultaneously "mak[ing] the case for struggling for a qualitatively better world for all people" (p. 128). Giroux's imperative, like other encomiums to the power of dialogue, brushes over the fundamental educational challenge facing the social justice educator: *What students think constitutes a better world may not align well with what the social justice educator thinks about the matter*. Dialogue leaves the door wide open for the social justice classroom to take a course that contradicts its broader political aims, and social justice educators are not about to give these up. Thus, as far as I can tell, these references to dialogue serve as a cover for the underlying will to convert in social justice education. The aim is conversion, but dialogue, to use a Wildean turn of phrase, is the trade name of the firm.

David Buckingham (1986), himself a critical media educator, has observed this same tendency within social justice education as well. According to Buckingham, critical education can become a covert "crusade" that refuses to accept the ideological content of its own premises (p. 82). Responding to a conception of media education as a project of "demystifying" the ideology embedded in media, Buckingham writes:

> What isn't open to critical questioning here is the *teacher's* position.
> [. . . I]f 'critical questioning' is to be promoted, it must surely apply

not merely to students but also to teachers, and the methods of analysis teachers introduce must be seen, not as neutral tools for the acquisition of knowledge, but as themselves ideological. [Yet, the demystifiying educator] already has the answers to his critical questions, and his methods of analysis are designed to reveal and to command assent to these answers. [. . .T]o suggest that [this] is a process of equal dialogue, based on a 'genuine sharing of power' [. . .], is just wishful thinking. (p. 93)

C. Alejandra Elenes (2013) is clearly struggling with this tension in her attempt to formulate a "border/transformative pedagogy" that constrains itself to the methods of dialogue:

[W]hile a democratic classroom is one where all perspectives are welcome, a course that studies the effects of race, class, gender, and sexuality oppression recognizes that there are ideologies that are oppressive. Thus, taking a liberal stance that accepts all discourse as equal might leave racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia unchallenged. (p. 345)

As a discourse, then, [transformative pedagogy] can be viewed as oppressive for those students who do not want to be "liberated" or do not see any reason for liberal or progressive politics, and as liberatory by those students who engage in progressive or leftist politics. (p. 343)

Elenes' observation is poignant. The claim that non-dialogical pedagogy is necessarily *oppressive* pedagogy seems to lead to the conclusion that the conversional pedagogue must be ready to "oppress," or at least suppress, in the name of anti-oppression. The conversion paradigm is caught in pedagogical paradox.

The overcoming paradigm runs into a similar problem. It, too, aims to inculcate a critical understanding of society, at least in its Mezirowian form, although its ultimate end is not the mobilization of students for the cause of social justice, but the liberation of the individual from alienating internalized ideologies. Nonetheless this process of overcoming

alienation involves "not only becoming critically aware of habits of perception, thought and action but of the cultural assumptions governing the rules, roles, conventions and social expectations which dictate the way we see, think, feel and act" (Mezirow 1981, p. 13). The teacher's understanding of what these cultural assumptions are, and the right ways of purging them from our psyche, are clearly not open for dialogue. Therefore the same tension arises for Mezirow as in the conversion paradigm.

<p align="center">* * *</p>

Because the conversion and overcoming paradigms resist confronting the controversial direction that their transformative aims entail, they generate few resources for addressing the problem before us. However, I do think there is a solution to the problem of controversial direction. Much ink has been spilled on where to draw the line between justified and unjustified moral direction, civic education and indoctrination, education for social solidarity and education for intellectual autonomy. Of late, these discussions are often carried out within the conceptual universe of liberal political theory, which enables theorists to address such vexed issues by determining how much moral direction "public values" can justify. That is, given that the state can justifiably defend and inculcate a respect for the basic rights and liberties of individuals through institutions like the school (Rawls, 2005, p. 5), educational theorists attempt to determine whether a characteristically "liberal" position on a given moral issue—say, the moral legitimacy of homosexuality—can be derived from these basic principles (Hand, 2008, p. 222). Critics of the liberal approach typically attack either the undue value placed on intellectual autonomy in liberal political theory or criticize the overly negative conception of freedom on which it is based. Freedom is

<p align="center">106</p>

attained *within* traditions and communities, these critics argue, not in the choices the individual makes between various moral and intellectual futures, as if she were shopping in a marketplace of values. The same goes for reason. Rational thinking, as a social practice, is not corrupted by communal influence, but engendered by it. Thus, the educator has more room to direct students than is allowed by liberal political theory, provided that it is part of an initiation into a tradition and this tradition is "open" in certain important ways. In this context, moral direction serves rather than hinders personal autonomy and reason. If we conceive of freedom in positive terms and reason as a social practice, then, the problem of controversial direction disappears.

The problem with this solution is that it is, itself, highly controversial. The debate above appears to be a vexed and interminable one in contemporary educational theory. It has even gained the status of a paradox—the so-called "paradox of moral education" (Kristjansson, 2006; Peters, 1971). In my view, asking the question of justifiable moral direction in the context of transformative education opens up a different approach to these matters, one that promises to address the problem of controversial direction in a way that both sides of the debate may accept. In the above discussion, we have assumed that transformative education implies an *augmentation* of educators' influence over students. The change students undergo in transformative education is thought to be more thoroughgoing than the one the experience in non-transformative or conventional education. Indeed, this is often how proponents of transformative education characterize their own project. "Historically," the claim standardly goes, "our educational practice has emphasized information transfer from faculty to student." Yet in order to "support *today's* learning outcomes, the focus of

education must shift from information transfer to identity development (transformation)" (Keeling, 2004, p. 9, emphasis added). We can no longer permit ourselves to have a merely *in*formative impact on our students; our interactions must be *trans*formative.

The problem with this assumption is that it overlooks the powerfully formative influence that teachers, and the schools in which they work, *already have* on students. If the transformative/(in)formative distinction is understood not as a distinction between strong and weak self-change, but as a distinction between intended and non-intended self-change, then the paradigms of transformation can be seen as attempts to direct the already powerful formative forces at work in the school toward coherent and empowering ends. If so, the controversial direction of transformative education is a *response* to the controversial direction already happening in schools.

The quintessential defense of this position is formulated by George Counts in *Dare the School Build as New Social Order?* Count argues, correctly I think, that the school is unavoidably directive on important moral issues, even when it purports to allow the child a great degree of freedom. Counts begins his argument with the observation that the school cannot bring "the whole of creation" into its walls. "This means," Counts continues, "that some selection must be made of teachers, curricula, architecture, methods of teaching. And in making the selection the dice must always be weighted in favor of this or that" (p. 19). Even the radically child-centered school—a school that attempts to eschew all controversial direction—cannot avoid making such impositions. In choosing what values to uphold and in cultivating its institutional ethos, the school implicitly endorses a particular way of

thinking and acting. "[A]ll education contains a large element of imposition," Counts concludes (p. 12).

In this way, Counts' argument builds off Henry Adams'(1975) insight quoted at the start of this chapter. The teacher, inevitably and quite problematically, affects eternity. She cannot tell where her influence stops. Instead of lamenting this fact as a tragic inevitability to be minimized at all costs, Counts thinks that the school should take responsibility for its formative influence on students. Indeed the school's attempt to remain neutral on matters of great significance will only render its formative influence more obscure.

> Many who would agree that imposition of some kind is inevitable seem to feel that there is something essentially profane in any effort to understand, plan, and control the process. They will admit that the child is molded by his environment, and then presumably contend that in the fashioning of this environment we should close our eyes to the consequences of our acts, or at least should not endeavor to control our acts in the light of definite knowledge of their consequences. To do the latter would involve and effort to influence deliberately the growth of the child in a particular direction—to cause him to form this habit rather than that, to develop one taste rather than its rival. But this would be a violation of the "rights of the child," and therefore evil. Apparently his rights can be protected only if our influence upon him is thoroughly concealed under a heavy veil of ignorance. If the school can do no better than this, it has no reason for existence. If it is to be merely an arena for the blind play of psychological forces, it might better close its doors. Here is the doctrine of *laissez faire,* driven from the field of social and political theory, seeking refuge in the domain of pedagogy. [. . .] In my judgment, the school should know what it is doing, in so far as this is humanly possible, and accept full responsibility for its acts. (pp. 24-25)

The "responsibly" transformative school must therefore take control of the "blind play of psychological forces" operating within for the sake of empowering educational ends. A school that rejects transformative education outright is one that ultimately allows

the complex of formative cultural influences impacting on students to do their work unimpeded, and this can have dire effects. Counts continues the point with a brilliant and incisive rhetorical flourish:

> Here, in my judgment, is one of the great lacks in our schools and in our intellectual class today. [. . .] Nothing really stirs us, unless it be that the bath water is cold, the toast burnt, or the elevator not running; or that perchance we miss the first section of a revolving door. Possibly this is the fundamental reason why we are so fearful of molding the child. We are moved by no great faiths; we are touched by no great passions. We can view a world order rushing rapidly towards collapse with no more concern than the outcome of a horse race; we can see injustice, crime and misery in their most terrible forms all about us and, if we are not directly affected, register the emotions of a scientist studying white rats in a laboratory. And in the name of freedom, objectivity, and the open mind, we would transmit this general attitude of futility to our children. In my opinion, this is a confession of complete moral and spiritual bankruptcy. We cannot . . . evade the responsibility of bringing to the younger generation a vision which will call forth their active loyalties and challenge them to creative and arduous labors. (pp. 22-23)

To remain silent on pressing issues of injustice or to make no effort to encourage students to do something about them has itself a powerfully formative effect. Namely, it "transmits" an "attitude of futility" to students—a belief, whether implicit or explicit, that efforts to eradicate injustice are pointless and that avoiding inconvenience, no matter how petty, is what really matters. The values of consumerism and the aesthetics of mass culture; the glorifications of wealth, work and technology in capitalist society; and the racist and sexist prejudices which underlie many of our current institutional practices and students' home cultures are thereby permitted to shape the child in the non-transformative school. Transformative education—here the project of enlisting students' "active loyalties" to right

110

social wrongs—is an attempt to focus the forces of moral direction at work in the school toward personally meaningful and socially beneficial ends.

Counts is thus proposing an understanding of transformative education very much in line with the aims of the conversion paradigm. Yet unlike many of the other proponents of conversional pedagogy, Counts has no illusions about the imposition that critical conversion entails, nor about the supposed power of dialogue: "If Progressive Education is to be genuinely progressive, it must . . . fashion a compelling and challenging vision of human destiny, and become less frightened than it is today at the bogies of *imposition* and *indoctrination*" (pp. 9-10).

Counts leaves us with a consequentialist defense of the controversial direction inherent to transformative education. Intending to transform students introduces difficult ethical issues related to consent and indoctrination. Yet, if we do not attempt to transform students, their growth will be guided instead by the disempowering and debilitating forces within school and society. Given how hostile to student flourishing conditions in both public and private schools can be, and how pervasive the excesses of consumer culture outside of them have become, I think we are forced to accept the argument.

Yet this argument does not yet provide a full justification for transformative education. The shift to a consequentialist mode of argument, while invaluable for dealing with the problem of controversial direction, raises some more questions about the potentially negative consequences of educational transformation. Namely, what could go wrong in the process of transforming students? What are the ethical hazards of transformative experience?

The urgency of these questions become apparent, I think, in Jack Mezirow's brief attempt to deal with the ethical problems of transformative learning. Mezirow's (1981) discussion is explicitly directed at the charge that perspective transformation is potentially indoctrinatory. Against this charge, Mezirow argues that the transformative educator is not attempting to "influence a specific action," but only to "clarify the situation" in which students find themselves and to help them "more clearly understand the reasons for their problems."

> Helping adults construe experience in a way in which they may more clearly understand the reasons for their problems and understand the options open to them so that they may assume responsibility for decision making is the essence of education. [. . .] Education becomes indoctrination only when the educator tries to influence a specific action as an extension of his will, or perhaps when he blindly helps a learner blindly follow the dictates of an unexamined set of cultural assumptions about who he is and the nature of his relationships. To show someone a new set of rules, tactics and criteria for judging which clarify the situation in which he or she must act is significantly different from trying to engineer learner consent to take the actions favored by the educator within the new perspective. (p. 20)

Clearly, Mezirow's counterargument against the charge of indoctrination cannot stand, since the "new set of rules, tactics and criteria for judging" that the educator would have students adopt, her understanding of what her students' "problems" are, and the strategies she adopts to support their overcoming are all epistemically controversial. They derive from a broadly critical understanding of society and a conception of the ideologically confined individual. Thus, to avoid the charge of controversial direction, the educator's actions demand further justification—for example, in the manner of the Countsian consequentialist argument presented above.

The more serious problem lies in what Mezirow's argument assumes, however. Mezirow does not seem to appreciate that confronting both the fact of our ideological confinement as well as its causes can be an emotionally overwhelming experience. To find out that our entire lives have been guided by faulty and alienating prejudices that we have more or less blindly come to accept is likely to be a profoundly unsettling revelation, especially when we realize that the sources of these premises are our parents, teachers, friends, even our favorite films and TV shows. In other words, Mezirow assumes that such "disorienting dilemmas" involve no psychological hazards that might derail the transformative process entirely, at least none that a dialogical environment cannot take care of (p. 19). Hence Mezirow can promote disorientating students on the one hand, and yet conclude with the astonishing claim: "I see no serious ethical issues involved in education for perspective transformation" (p. 20). This assumption demands scrutiny.

5. The Problem of Identity Crisis

In the first part of *Democracy and Education*, Dewey (2008) makes an observation about teacher influence that, at first, may seem quite obvious, but on second glance shows itself to be a weighty educational truth with far-reaching consequences for the student-teacher encounter. Educators, in spite of all their pedagogical efforts, never make direct changes to their students. No matter how small or large the change intended, we are powerless to usher it into existence by direct channels. Rather, Dewey points out, educational change is always mediated by the educational environment. As educators, we can only manipulate this environment in hopes that the desired changes are stimulated in students.

Transformative educators, regardless of their intentions for their students, are therefore left to creating the right kind of environment for transformation. Since it is much more difficult to create an environment that combats the powerful formative forces that disempower students' growth than to create an environment that, say, stimulates students' interest in social studies, there is a significant degree of uncertainty concerning whether the desired transformation will, in fact, come about or not.

By itself, the uncertainty of success in the transformative process does not introduce an ethical problem. Because transformative change is so important for our personal development, it may be well worth the educator's efforts even if she is likely to fail. The ethical problem here comes into full view when we ask what "failure" really means from the perspective of the transforming student. If failure means merely that no deep change has occurred—that we remain who we are in spite of our educator's attempts at transformation—then all is well. Wasting time is not ethically neutral, but it may be justified by the impressive potential of transformative self-change.

The really worrisome failure that can occur in this process is the educator's successful negation of students' prior self-understanding without offering substantive and compelling alternatives with which to replace it. Transformative experience entails that our standard ways of seeing the world and finding our way within it are challenged, negated, or shown to be invalid or incomplete so that a new perspectives and self-understanding can take their place. But what if the new self-understanding, the new order of things, never emerges? Nicholas Burbules (1990), grappling with some of the "tragic" circumstances that educators regularly face, clearly describes the issue at hand.

> The educational process is imperfect and incomplete. We interact with students for a relatively short time in their lives; in that time, we are often more effective at tearing down their preconceptions than we are at enabling them to reconstruct something more complete. When the process is unfinished, as it usually is, how then do we argue that it is all for the best, having robbed students of something dear to them and given them so little in return? (p. 474)

It is much easier, Burbules points out, to tear down our meaning-conferring frameworks of self-understanding than to reconstruct them again and to dissolve our web of social relationships than to spin them anew. Burbules is pointing to a situation in which the transformative process comes to a halt, falling short of a robust positive phase in which the individual gains access to new set of perspectives or framework of self-understanding from which she can observe that real progress has been made.

Isn't this negative result significant enough by itself? If the perspectives or frameworks that we come to reject were flawed in important ways, why exactly is it a problem to be deprived of them? Burbules' response to this question reveals the nature of the ethical problem we are faced with here.

> We often find, for example, that helping students consider a radically different way of viewing their circumstances involves challenging their incoming pre-conceptions and frameworks of understanding. [. . .] The problem here is that certain ways of viewing the world are invested with enormous significance (religious beliefs are a clear instance), and to challenge these is often to deprive students of an important source of security and significance in their lives. Another instance involves ethnicity, where cultural traits may constitute an impediment to learning; sometimes intentionally, sometimes not, we cause students to question habits and values that tie them to important communities within and outside the school. The losses here are real, and it is not enough to tell oneself that it is for the student's good. (p. 474)

Burbules' observation is insightful. The losses of a halted transformation cannot simply be brushed aside. They are real and several. When students' cultural, religious and personal perspectives are radically called into question, they may be deprived of "frameworks of understanding" that grant them a sense of meaning and security, as well as "habits and values" that tie them to personally significant cultural or ideological communities. Furthermore, the frameworks of understanding, habit and value that Burbules is describing are not only important because they provide us with meaning and security, but because such frameworks are what make human agency possible, as Charles Taylor (1989) observes. These frameworks offer us various social practices and forms of life within which we can direct our various desires and predilections towards meaningful and empowering ends. To lose touch with such fundamental existential anchors without anything to replace them with is therefore no insignificant experience. It is, in Taylor's words, to undergo a serious form of "identity crisis' (pp. 27-29).[18] In other words, when we experience a dissolution of our frameworks of understanding, habit and value without a replacement, we experience a kind of *trauma*. The individual can no longer go back to her old ways of thinking, her old roles and responsibilities, and her old ways of getting on in the world because the educator has shown them to be seriously flawed. But without a compelling alternative, the individual is left without a coherent way of drawing qualitative distinctions between different actions, decisions or ways of life to pursue in the future. In such a state, the individual's agency is seriously curtailed.

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[18] Taylor takes this concept from Erikson, of course, but gives it an existentialist hue.

To fully appreciate the gravity of this ethical problem, we need to move closer to the realm of first-personal experience, towards what identity crisis means for the transforming individual. There are, I think, four basic ways that the identity crisis can be experienced. First, the ambiguous situation in which the individual is left may lead to state of utter *skepticism*. The failure of one frame of meaning may give way to an incredulity before the possibility of any frame whatsoever. One of the most vivid depictions of such a disposition is Hegel's (1977) account of the Skeptic in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. According to Hegel, the thoroughgoing skeptic is characterized by a "dizziness of a perpetually self-engendered disorder," an "absolute dialectical unrest," whose incessant negations of all would-be ethical and epistemic truths are "both bewildered and bewildering." The skeptical disposition, according to Hegel, leads directly to a thoroughly "unhappy consciousness," defined by its desperate yearning for something transcendent and "beyond" although it had previously rejected its very possibility (pp. 124-126, §§205-206; cf. Kalkavage, 2007, pp. 132-136).

Moving closer to what this experience would look like in an educational setting, Friedrich Nietzsche argues that totalizing skepticism is a special danger within academic culture. According to Nietzsche (2011), education at the university often forces students to entertain "fifty systems [of thought] in the form of words and fifty critiques of them . . . side by side and intermingled" with little regard for their existential significance or "whether one can live in accordance with [them]" (p. 187). This treatment of academic subject matter can send the message that ideas are simply things to be compared, contrasted and criticized; rather than guides to how we live our lives. The educational environment of

the university is worsened by a breed of professors, Nietzsche adds, who possess a "a certain drive to dialectical investigation, the huntsman's joy in following the sly fox's path in the realm of thought so that it is not really truth that is sought but the seeking itself, and the main pleasure consists in the cunning tracking, encircling, and correct killing." Thinking thus becomes the macabre act of hunting down inconsistencies and faulty premises. Worse, if we "add to this the impulse to contradiction, the personality wanting to be aware of itself and make itself felt in opposition to all others," then we have a picture of the university academic for whom contradiction and negation "becomes a pleasure and the goal is personal victory" (p. 170). Taught by such people, skepticism is difficult to avoid.

The skepticism of academic culture that Nietzsche points to is masterfully depicted in J. D. Salinger's (1989) *Franny and Zooey*. Salinger tells the story of a young woman, Zooey, who has become utterly alienated from the intellectual milieu of her affluent and prestigious university. Franny's characterization of the "section man" clearly represents the pathology of academic skepticism.

> [W]here I come from, a section man's a person that takes over a class when the professor isn't there or is busy having a nervous breakdown or is at the dentist or something. He's usually a graduate student or something. Anyway, if it's a course in Russian Literature, say, he comes in, in his little button-down-collar shirt and striped tie, and starts knocking Turgenev for about a half hour. Then, when he's finished, when he's completely *ruined* Turgenev for you, he starts talking about Stendhal or somebody he wrote his these for his M.A. on. Where I go, the English Department has about ten little section men running around ruining things for people. (p. 13)

The section man, the academic version of Hegel's universal skeptic and the embodiment of Nietzsche's huntsman-professor, understands the work of the intellect to be a simple matter of "critical thinking," a deployment of intellectual skills so as to tear down any idea, to debunk its flawed premises and to defame its author for his naivete. While the figure of the academic skeptic is probably difficult to find in its pure Hegelian-Nietzschean-Salingerian form, the culture of "critical thinking" is ubiquitous in education. Teachers and professors regularly defend their practices by referring to the fact that they are helping students to "question assumptions" or "think critically about what they take for granted." While these may be worthy aims, their pursuit is hazardous. Educated in a culture of critical thinking, the individual may become incapable of engaging with ideas, systems of thought, and the authors themselves as potential media through which the difficult negativity of transformation can be overcome. Instead they become mere fodder for preening contradiction. The transformative process thus comes to a halt, and instead of a new personal order, a self-aggrandizing skepticism takes hold.

Another possible reaction to identity crisis is the emergence of *cynicism.* In its most extreme form, the individual replaces her lost commitments with cynical maxims about the inherent badness of human beings, the thoroughly corrupt nature of society, the folly of science and baselessness of human knowledge, or even the worthlessness of her own life. The classic source of cynical truisms is Oscar Wilde's Lord Henry, who himself initiates a rather horrifying transformation of young Dorian Gray into a dissolute hedonist. In a crucial turning point of this transformation, for example, Lord Henry says to Dorian, "The only way to get rid of temptation is to yield to it," a truly poisonous maxim that would

119

become the guiding motto of Dorian's increasingly debauched escapades (p. 18) Lord Henry's cynicism about commitment would only exacerbate the process: "Faithfulness is to the emotional life what consistency is to the life of the intellect – simply a confession of failure" (p. 41).[19]

In less extreme form, cynicism can manifest itself as a kind of self-indulgent disregard for others. This connection is less intuitive, but support for it can be found in a perhaps unlikely place—medical education. In the medical education literature, it has been repeatedly observed that the educational process involved in medical school can be a profoundly transformative experience (Silver, 1982, p. 309; Conrad, 1988, p. 323; Hafferty and Franks, 1994, p. 865; Coulehan et al., 1995, p. 61; Knight, 1995, p. 266; Papadakis, 1998; Gross, 2001, p. 390). However, since the 1950s, medical educators have noticed a troubling trend among outgoing medical students, namely "the cynicism which has been observed to be characteristic of medical students" (Eron, 1955, p. 560). Since Eron's (1955) path-breaking article, medical educators have perennially grappled with the problem of "the cynical transformation of medical students" (Hojat et al. 2004, p. 935), with the result that some have even begun dividing medical education into the "cynical" and "pre-cynical" years (Flaherty 1990, p. 149).

Coulehan & Williams (2001) explain the phenomenon of cynicism as a case of either "values deflation," a state in which students come to reject as naïve the moral ideals and virtues that they once believed should guide medical practice, or "values conflation,"

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[19] Indeed, Lord Henry and Dorian are interesting case studies in cynicism, as the former's seems to be of a frivolous, playful and opportunist brand, while the latter's becomes progressively bitter and self-destructive.

a phenomenon where "[p]hysicians convince themselves that behaviors favored in the hospital's culture of survival do, in the long run, best serve the interests of their patients" (p. 601, cf. Kay, 1990). In both cases, Coulehan & Williams argue, the patient-centered ethic of professional medicine gives way to an ethic of technicism and self-interest, which they describe as an "'objective' professional identity that generally narrows their sphere of responsibility and confines it to the technical arena" (ibid.). Faced with a mountain of medical science to learn, complex medical procedures to master, cadavers to dissect, and difficult patients to appease, many students retreat to the identity of detached "bioscientists," who "look to science and its methods of making knowledge as the key to unlocking *all* the secrets of the body—how it works, how it is maintained, how it breaks down, and how it is fixed. . . – but also the key to their relationship with patients and other health care providers" (Wear and Castellani 2000, pp. 610, 605). When their technical expertise fails to ensure smooth interactions with patients, these doctors find themselves unable to cope with the difficulty, labeling certain problem patients with various derogatory epithets behind closed doors (Leiderman & Grisso 1985; Grouse 1982). Thus, for a variety of reasons— and the fault is by no means easy to place on either faculty or the students themselves— the transformation of medical students into caring professional doctors veers toward a self-serving cynicism.

Coulehan & Williams' (2001) study in fact introduces a third way of experiencing identity crisis, exhibited by one of the medical students he interviewed when she was starting her program. The faculty had taken note of the enthusiasm and optimism this student showed about her forthcoming educational journey and, several years later, asked her to

write about her experiences in medical school. Unfortunately by that time, the student's

optimism had given way to what can only be called *disillusionment*.

> When I arrived in medical school, I was eager to get involved. I was
> excited about addressing important issues because, as medical stu-
> dents, I was sure that we would have some clout and certainly a
> commitment to the well-being of others. . . . However, medical
> school is an utter drain. For two years lecturers parade up and down
> describing their own particular niche as if it were the most important
> thing for a student to learn. And then during the clinical years, life
> is brutal. People are rude, the hours are long, and there is always a
> test at the end of the rotation. . . . After a while I reasoned that the
> most important thing I could do for my patients, for my fellow hu-
> man beings, for the future of medicine, as well as for me, was to
> assure myself some peaceful time. [. . .R]ather than thinking arro-
> gantly that I could improve the lives and souls of others, I decided
> to focus more on my own life. [. . .] I certainly understand now in a
> way that I never did before how people are able to change very little.
> [. . .] In some sense I think activism is futile. It isn't just that there
> will always be more to do—it's that most projects are Band-Aid
> treatments and simply provide an opportunity to feel good about
> oneself that isn't justified. [. . .] Furthermore, I've become numb. So
> much of what I do as a student is stuff that I don't fully believe it.
> And rather than try to change everything that I consider wrong in
> the hospital or the community at large, I just try to get through
> school in the hope that I will move on to bigger and better things
> when I have more control over my circumstances. (quoted in
> Coulehan & Williams, 2001, p. 599)

This passage is significant because we clearly feel the students' disillusionment

with the profession of medicine by the end of the passage. The student's initial enthusiasm

has become a feeling of "numbness," and her optimism has given way to an almost hope-

less resignation to the way things are in medical culture.

The spectre of disillusionment also haunts Salinger's account of Franny's experi-

ence at university. Shortly after Franny's outburst about the section men, the reader

watches her fall victim to an excruciating breakdown while dining with her boyfriend,

Lane, who himself proves to be a prime exhibit of the section-men pathology. Franny experiences a crisis of self-confidence so total that she is bed-ridden for several days, having realized that she cannot return to the phony university culture but unable to figure out what her next step should be. While this is an admittedly dramatic reaction to identity crisis, we can say that another danger of transformative negativity is that it leaves that individual not skeptical or cynical, but utterly disillusioned.

The final form that the identity crisis can take on is *conformism*. In order to make up for the connections to significant personal and ideological communities that the individual has lost, she may come to desperately and uncritically adhere to any cause or group that promises to replace that loss.[20] Erik Erikson (1985), the original source of the term "identity crisis," sees this conformism as one of the most serious dangers that individuals face within the identity crisis phase, in particular, adolescents. "To keep themselves together," Erikson writes, adolescents may "overidentify, to the point of complete loss of identity, with the heroes of cliques and crowds." They are "ever ready to install lasting idols and ideals as guardians of a final identity." In the face of identity crisis,

> [y]oung people can also be[come] remarkably clannish and cruel in their exclusion of all those who are 'different,' in skin color or cultural background, in tastes and gifts, and often in such petty aspects of dress and gesture as have been temporarily selected as *the* signs of in-grouper or out-grouper. It is important to understand (which does not mean condone or participate in) such intolerance as a defense against a sense of identity confusion. For adolescents not only help one another temporarily through much discomfort by forming

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[20] At first, this reaction to identity crisis may seem directly opposed to the skeptical posture, which at least ostensibly attempts to remain incredulous before the legitimacy of any communal commitment or framework of meaning. However, as we saw in the discussion of academic skepticism, the will to negate is actually, and ironically, a fundamental pillar of academic culture—in other words, it reveals a conformity of its own.

cliques and by stereotyping themselves, their ideals, and their ene-
mies; they also perversely test each other's capacity to pledge fidel-
ity. [. . .] The adolescent mind is [. . . therefore] an ideological
mind—and, indeed, it is the ideological outlook of a society that
speaks most clearly to the adolescent who is eager to be affirmed by
his peers, and is ready to be confirmed by rituals, creed, and pro-
grams which at the same time define what is evil, uncanny, and in-
imical. (pp. 262-263)

Thus, conformism in thinking and acting is yet another psychological state to which

the negativity of the transformative process can lead. One illuminating example from an

educational setting stems from the critical media educator and theorist, David Buckingham,

whose thoughts on teacher ideology we discussed above. Buckingham (1986) tellingly de-

scribes the pitfalls of textual and media critique when it is conducted in a "demystifying"

mode—that is, when it becomes a simple attempt to "unveil" the ideological categories

embedded within the media at hand. Buckingham argues that this approach can quickly

devolve into a pledging of allegiance to the critical cause, rather than an opportunity for

true self-reflection and learning.

The limitations of 'demystification' are not confined to teaching in
schools, however. In addressing similar issues in higher education,
I have been disturbed by the way in which students initially tend to
define themselves against texts which are perceived as ideologically
suspect. A group dynamic may develop in which the strength of
one's criticism is taken as evidence of one's ideological soundness—
what one might term a 'more right-on than thou' stance. Again, this
is a game which students can easily learn and which they can use as
a means of scoring political points. What it may prevent is any
recognition of the complexity of our responses to texts, and, indeed,
of the differences between them—in this game, dissenters are
simply defined as hopeless liberals. This precisely avoids any exam-
ination of one's own position, not merely for white people and for
men (who can avoid recognising their own racism and sexism by
displacing it onto a text), but also for black people and women (who
may be forced into an artificial solidarity which cannot acknowledge

124

contradictions). What all too often results is a blanket rejection of popular forms, and the constant re-statement of a 'bottom line' in which, to paraphrase Terry Lovell, the fact that the media are not feminist and revolutionary necessarily means they are agents of patriarchy and reaction. Such an approach leads to a situation in which Media Studies is inevitably, in Masterman's terms, a 'negative enterprise', relieved only by the search for the Holy Grail of the truly progressive text. (p. 91)

Buckingham's observation demonstrates just how difficult it can be for teachers, even with good intentions and informed pedagogy, to negate students' prior beliefs and commitments without bringing on a psychological state even worse than the previous one. There *is* ideology embedded in the media, ideology that students have internalized in their media consumption. There is no doubt about that. But how can we bring students to reject this ideology in a way that avoids the conformism Buckingham observes in the critical classroom? More generally, how can we transform students in a way that avoids the various manifestations of identity crisis discussed above?

* * *

While the account of identity crisis just offered is an admittedly dramatic representation of a potential outcome of transformative education—the completely disillusioned student or desperate conformist are probably quite hard to find in real life; many of these traits are likely combined with one another in complex and inextricable ways when they do occur; and educators are probably more likely to have little transformative effect on their students rather than to convert them to all-out skepticism or cynicism (though they will certainly have a *formative* effect)—this treatment is meant as a reminder of a central ethical hazard of the transformative endeavor. Identity crisis is an ever-present possibility

125

in the negative phase of transformation. If we are to sing the praises of transformative education, then we must face up to the prospects of skepticism, cynicism, disillusionment and conformism.

How, then, might our conception of transformative education attune itself to these ethical hazards? What resources do the paradigms of transformation have for meeting the challenge? Attempts to come to terms with these prospects in the paradigms of transformation are seldom as frank as Elenes' (2013) account of the disillusionment and alienation her white students reported in a class on women's issues that she had taught. She reproduces two teaching evaluations in her article which display students grappling with what they term the "reverse discrimination" and "bias" of the course (p. 347). For example, one student writes:

> "Race, Class, and Gender," is described in the syllabus as addressing "the intersections of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, age et cetera in the lives of women of color in the U.S." Well, excuse me, but don't white euro-american women (who probably don't rate capital letters like Hispanics and Blacks) have race and gender? Aren't there poor white euroamerican women, and aren't they oppressed by classism as poor Blacks and Asians are, even if not in exactly the same way? Aren't white euro-american lesbians discriminated against? Doesn't agism affect all women, of all colors, all ethnicities, all classes, in one way or another? I honestly thought that when I enrolled in this course, I'd be in an environment where educated, enlightened women and men would be practicing a higher level of egalitarianism that in the general population. Instead, I've found what I can only call reverse discrimination. (quoted in Elenes, 2013, p. 347)

What has gone wrong here? Elenes chalks up these complaints to the persistence of "neo-conservatism and the universalization and normativity of whiteness" in the students' thinking. "[N]o doubt racism is behind the students' view," she adds (p. 349). These are

126

harsh words. From her perspective, the neo-conservative and racist views that Elenes' students brought with them to class simply got in the way of the transformative goals of the course. For whatever reason, these deeply engrained prejudices persisted in spite of her best efforts to achieve a transformative effect.

Yet, another way of understanding this student's reaction—one that suggests itself from the preceding analysis of identity crisis and that I find to be less judgmental about the student's character than Elenes' reading—is that the student *has* in fact changed her views in important ways, but simply found no place for herself in the new framework of understanding that she has been provided. Her usage of terms like classism and ageism are indicators that she has in fact adopted some of the conceptual artillery of social justice education, and her observations that white Americans are victims of classist and ageist discrimination are both true and "critical." Perhaps, then, she is caught between an old "neo-conservative" frame and the new politically progressive one, unable to affirm either. In other words, she meets with a bald discontinuity, lacking the resources needed to bridge the divide between her old and new self. Hence her frustration, bitterness, and perhaps cynicism.

If this account is plausible, then it may help us to understand what a solution to the problem of identity crisis may look like. Identity crisis occurs when the discontinuity we confront is so extreme that there is no ground on which we can progress through the experience. For all of the talk of discontinuity in the transformative process, it must be undergirded by some *continuous* medium which allows us to grapple with the challenge before us. This continuity would prevent the transformative process from halting on the negativity

of the discontinuous experience. In other words, it would prevent the onset of skepticism, cynicism, disillusionment and conformism.

What, then, is the nature of this supportive continuity? Sharon Todd's (2003) conception of what she calls the "implied ethics of education" suggests an answer. According to Todd, social justice education requires that we open ourselves up to deeply painful experiences: "our susceptibility to another's pain, our ability to suffer and be persecuted by the Other, means that one has exposed oneself to the Other, that the Other has entered us and pierced the membrane of self-identity" (p. 112). Whether in the form of novels, films, poems or first-hand accounts, encountering the suffering of others can lead, indeed should lead, to feelings of guilt and a sense of responsibility. For this reason, Todd claims that education "enacts a violence that is necessary to the formation of the subject" (p. 20). In an environment of so much pain, guilt, and "violence," Todd asks in the final pages of the book, "How do we avoid creating a climate of hopelessness when we say that treating others with the dignity they deserve is rooted in a nonintentional being-for the Other, particularly when the whole project of social justice education is based on such ethical promise?" (p. 142). In other words, how can social justice education avoid identity crisis? Todd answers her own question: "Where ethical possibility lies, then, is in *the everyday social relations that make up our classroom life*, and our reminders to ourselves that learning takes place through our attentiveness in those relations can, at best, help us attend to their occurrences in ways that remain responsive" (p. 146; emphasis added). The bulwark to the danger of "hopelessness" in transformative education is, according to Todd, a responsive classroom community.

The power of "classroom community" is indeed a common refrain among social justice educators. Sonia Nieto (1998), to take another example, considers one of the central aims of her multicultural courses to be creating classroom community. The classroom community, Nieto writes, is there to prevent students becoming "disheartened" or dismissive when dealing with emotionally demanding issues dealing with racism:

> [R]acism can be described in ways that are overly contentious and destructive. [. . .] That is, people who are in fact racist or biased may simply dismiss the entire topic of racism, while those who are sincerely working against racism may feel disheartened and disempowered by it. The important point is not that discussions of racism should be suppressed [. . .] but they need to be broached directly and honestly [. . .] in a way that creates a sense of community rather than pointing fingers and closing down communication. [. . .] If a community is created in which all voices are respected, it seems to me that this is itself a noble first step. What I mean by "community" here, however, is not only that all voices are respected but that a deeper sense of bonding and caring can develop despite the very real differences that exist. (pp. 30-31)

Nieto and Todd make an important observation. Classroom communities are crucial for buffering the transformative process, especially when it involves dealing with difficult issues related to racism and the suffering of others. The struggle involved in the negative phase of transformation causes us to interrogate, and perhaps reject, our prior commitments to the families, cultures, nations, and ideological groups in which we have been brought up. Such interrogations can lead to a universal skepticism of *all* communal commitments, to a cynical self-interestedness, to disillusioned resignation, or to an uncritical conformity to just any community, when it is conducted in a space which fails to replace or perhaps to repair our prior communal commitments. As educators, we can sometimes be quite self-deceived about our own commitments and communal adherences, preferring to think of

ourselves as prejudice-less, radical freethinkers who valiantly uphold the values of "critical thinking" in defiance of the duped masses. Yet, as Nieto and Todd help us to see, this will not do if we are serious about avoiding the risk of identity crisis. The transformative classroom must emphasize community.

This insight constitutes an important advantage that the conversion and overcoming paradigms possess over the discovery paradigm. In the latter, focus can tend to fixate on the individual transformative process—its anthropological structure, its proper ends, the role of crisis within it, and so forth. Ironically, discovery experiences are not even possible in the absence of a communal process of initiation which forms the individual's horizon of expectations. Yet, this formational process, and the important support it provides for the discontinuity of the transformative process, is consistently overlooked in theoretical treatments of transformation as discovery. Because the references to discontinuity in the discovery process typically come with almost no discussion of the possibility of identity crisis, it stands to reason that either (1) the discovery experience is so common that it is not supposed to raise such deep psychological issues (thus the "crisis" that is spoken of is strictly metaphorical), or that (2) theorists have formulated their pedagogies of discovery without having taken proper account of this problem.

In spite of this advantage, I do not think Nieto and Todd's affirmations of community are quite radical enough to meet the full demands of transformative discontinuity, if for a relatively simple reason. As mentioned in the original formulation of the problem of identity crisis, we "interact with students for a relatively short time in their lives" (Burbules, 1990, p. 474). In this brief period, we may, if we are skilled educators, be able to

130

foster social relations in the classroom that alleviate some of the burden of transformation while its initial phases are occurring. But these relations have an impending expiration date. The relationships that make up the classroom community most often end with the dispersal of the class. If so, we seem to have only postponed the problem of identity crisis to the final exam period, as it were, or shortly thereafter. Although classroom community must be *part* of our solution, it still leaves us with Burbules' (1990) question: "When the process is unfinished, as it usually is, how then do we argue that it is all for the best, having robbed students of something dear to them and given them so little in return?" (p. 474)

The answer lies, I believe, in an extension of Todd and Nieto's conception of community. The community understood as merely the "social" or interpersonal relations obtaining between students in the classroom is too ephemeral to serve as the continuous ground on which transformation plays out. Rather, what is needed is a community that transcends the interpersonal relationships of the classroom. The transformative classroom should attempt to usher students into a community in which they will find lasting membership, and that provides them with an enduring framework for understanding the changes they are experiencing.

What kind of community can offer such enduring continuity? I think we can turn to the resources of the initiation paradigm to answer this question. The "deep" conception of community embedded in the concept of practice provides crucial resources for addressing the problem of identity crisis. In addition to the social relationships they foster between practitioners, communities of practice support the transformative process with three more "dimensions of continuity." The first is the practice's provision of what Higgins (2011)

calls a "biographical genre" (p. 58). To become a participant in a practice is, in other words, to gain a certain kind of identity. It means something different to be a mathematician or a writer, and it is the job of the educator in the initiation paradigm to exemplify how mathematicians or writers make decisions, relate to the subject matter, and plan for the future. This latter task corresponds to the second dimension of practical continuity. The qualities of those considered exemplary practitioners are values held (roughly) in common, and these examples guide the individual in developing the characteristics that are worth cultivating beyond the classroom. This is not to say that there is complete consensus on what it means to be a "good" writer or mathematician, but there are celebrated individuals within any practice. The third dimension of continuity within practices are the standards by which each skill to be learned must conform, or at least relate. These standards, like the qualities of exemplary practitioners, are endorsed by the community of practitioners. Again, there may be extensive debate on the proper content of the standards, and the exemplary individuals that are celebrated may be precisely those that have transcended these standards— yet, in doing so they address themselves to, if not completely conform to, these standards. Since these three dimensions of continuity promise to endure much longer than the interpersonal relationships within the classroom, initiation into practices offers an appealing resolution of the problem of identity crisis.

Because the initiation paradigm seems to confront this important ethical hazard most adeptly, it deserves further analysis in the coming chapters.[21] I say "analysis," and

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[21] One may object that the utopianism of social justice education provides the transformative continuity that is needed to avoid the problem of identity crisis. Freire, for example, speaks often of joining in the efforts of the "people" or "the oppressed" as an important aim of education for social justice. Others speak of fighting on behalf of "the marginalized," "the underprivileged," or even "low SES." As important as this struggle is,

not yet full endorsement, however, because the educational premises and perspectives of the initiation paradigm raise some important ethical challenges of their own. The communal emphasis within the initiation process may address the problem of identity crisis; yet it simultaneously raises concerns about how the new community interacts with our other roles and responsibilities in our lives. If the process of joining a community is transformative, its demands and duties may become unduly privileged in the universe of roles we play—a state that Jaeggi (2014) has referred to as a paradigm case of alienation, but we will call "deformation." Addressing this ethical challenge, and making necessary emendations to the initiation paradigm in light of it, is the central task of the next chapter.

6. Conclusion

In this chapter, we confronted an important fact about transformative education that is too often left unexamined by its proponents. The process of transforming students teems with ethical hazards. These hazards do not ultimately undermine the project of transformative education, as I have argued, but they should qualify our support for it. Because of the dramatic subjective and epistemic discontinuity implied in transformative experience, the basis for rational consent as it is typically conceived falls away. Addressing this ethical

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these terms do not refer to communities. They refer to abstract groupings of individuals. Social justice educators characteristically hope that these groupings would band together and collectively work toward improving their lot, thus *becoming* a community, but as they are, they lack the clear dimensions of continuity that practices offer. Social justice education could, however, emphasize the *historical practice of social critique*—its characteristic commitments, standards of excellence, and valued exemplars—and thus provide a firm backbone for the transformative process. Yet insofar as social justice education refers only to future, utopian communities, it runs the risk of severing students ties to identity-conferring home and ideological communities and bringing about the trauma of identity crisis.

problem was not merely a matter of solving a theoretical puzzle; rather it permanently conditioned the way we think about eliciting consent from students at the precipice of transformative education. Namely, we learned that rational assent to transformation cannot follow from a subjective value assessment based on a student's cognitive projection, but rather only from a desire to have her future revealed to her—to experience the so-called revelatory value of transformation. We should not take for granted that students already possess this desire; in fact, a robust willingness to learn from experience may be an important precondition of transformative education, the development of which should constitute the initial stages of the transformative process.

The problem of controversial direction opened up our ethical perspective to the potential negative consequences of the transformative process. To address this issue, we showed that controversial direction is unavoidable in education today, and that transformative education can be thought of as an attempt to focus the formative power of the school toward empowering ends. However, we also learned that there are important "dangers" that surround this process. The individual may fall into skepticism, cynicism, disillusionment or conformism, if the educator does not buffer the transformative process in the appropriate way. While proponents of social justice educators have insightfully pointed out the important buffering effect of classroom communities, even deeper communal bonds are likely necessary to hold off the prospect of identity crisis. These bonds are central to the initiation paradigm of transformation, and therefore its conception of transformative education will be given closer scrutiny in the following chapters.

Chapter 4: Spheres of Transformation: Practices, Traditions, Epiphany

> For this [highest form of] knowledge is not something that can be put into words like other sciences; but after long-continued intercourse between teacher and pupil, in joint pursuit of the subject, suddenly, like light flashing forth when a fire is kindled, it is born in the soul and straightaway nourishes itself. (Plato, 1997, p. 1659, 341c-d)

> Just as philosophy begins with doubt, so also a life that may be called human begins with irony. (Kierkegaard, 1989, p. 6)

> The old believe everything; the middle-aged suspect everything; the young know everything. (Wilde, 1907, p. 144)

1. Introduction

In a statement outlining the mission of Harvard's undergraduate program, Dean Rhakesh Khurana (n.d.) characterizes the overarching aim of Harvard College as nothing less than the profound transformation of its students. "We want to ensure," Khurana writes, "we are providing students a deeply transformative experience—intellectually, socially and personally—that will prepare them for a life of service and leadership." From the vantage

point we have won from the previous chapter, we can now look on such educational motives with a better appreciation of the ethical hazards hidden therein. Although we may agree with Khurana that the university cannot be content to train its students for various professional endeavors, that its project is a transformative one in some sense of the term, we must be alert to the psychological challenges that education for transformation presents. In order to avoid the risks of an aborted process of transformation, transformative educational processes should be buffered by an initiation into the robust and enduring community represented by practices.

By terminating on this claim, the ethical analysis of the previous chapter yields a negative argument for the conception of educative transformation operative within the initiation paradigm. Conceiving of the transformative process as an initiation into practices was seen to provide the necessary resources for confronting the ethical problems that arise from the momentousness of transformative experience. However, this does not mean, and it is not the case, that the initiation paradigm is hazard-free. Continuing our phenomenologically sensitive philosophical inquiry into the realm of initiation, we find that there are several characteristic ways in which the initiation process can break down, resulting in what will be called "deformations." The central aim of this chapter is to show how these various deformations arise and to suggest ways to prevent them from doing so.

The argument of the chapter proceeds as follows. In the first two sections, I discuss the nature of practical initiation once more and show that it can, if misemployed, lead to three types of deformative self-change: specialism, parochialism and alienation. Specialism is a state in which the experiential frames of one practice become so dominant that

they are employed in other practical contexts where other frames are more appropriate. Alternatively, and in most cases additionally, the appropriation of these practical frames leads to an avoidance of other practices outside the specialty. Parochialism refers to a similar state of mind, but it encompasses an added degree of intolerance for other practical perspectives. Alienation is the final form of deformation, referring to our tendency to replace our ties to natural communities—to families, friends, and loved ones—with the new relationships opened up by our practical initiation. Together these three "failure modes" of initiation constitute the problem of deformation.

In the next sections, I argue that adequately addressing each of these types of deformation forces us to undertake several revisions to the basic concepts and ideals of the initiation paradigm. The first of these is the contextualization of practical initiation within what I call a "tragic tradition." Because transformative initiation inevitably engenders potentially deformative tensions between our various other practical commitments, the initiation process should be couched within a tradition containing resources for coping with and courageously facing these tensions. Here tragedy is understood not in the colloquial sense of great loss, but as a genre of human experience that consists in exemplary confrontations with conflicts of value, responsibility and commitment (Higgins, 2011; MacIntyre, 2007; Arcilla, 1992; Burbules, 1990; Hook, 1959). In this way, the dilemmas and crises depicted in tragic art provide imaginative resources for avoiding tragedy in the colloquial sense or, when it befalls us nonetheless, for confronting it with courage and grace.

The tragic tradition does not, by itself, suffice for meeting the challenge of deformation, however, since the latter may arise, not from a mismanagement of our practical

137

tensions, but from an overcommitment to a chosen practice. Whether for reasons of true enthusiasm and enthrallment, or less redeemable escapist or careerist tendencies, our participation in the practice becomes a kind of obsession. Nietzsche's (1974) notion of the "spirit of gaiety," which he formulates as a response to precisely this problem in *The Gay Science*, is first considered as a potential complement to the tragic tradition. However, the indeterminacy of Nietzsche's spirit of gaiety ultimately leads us to endorse an "ironic tradition" as our educational complement, following Jonathon Lear's (2014) conception of Kierkegaardian irony. On this view, irony is, again in contrast to its colloquial sense, a form of experience characterized by radical reflection on the quality of one's practical commitments, not a snarky comment by a sardonic wit.

The ironic tradition in this Kierkegaardian sense proves to contain the most promising resources for meeting the problem of deformation. Because, for Lear, irony is a form of critical reflection that takes place within a context of commitment, it provides a crucial check against the vice of overcommitment without simultaneously endorsing its opposite, an "under-committed" frivolity or dilettantism. Although Lear believes the ironic perspective to derive from reflection on the ideals and exemplars that practices celebrate, I argue in the penultimate section that this conception overlooks the ironic potential of two other forms of ironic experience: natality and fidelity. The second, natal dimension of irony demonstrates the reciprocity of the transformative relationship between teacher and students—i.e. that transformation can and should go both ways in the initiation process—while the notion of fidelity speaks directly to the challenge of avoiding the problem of alienation.

In the final section, one final revision is made to our understanding of the initiation paradigm. Here I argue that the concept of mastery—the standard conception of the telos of initiation—does not adequately capture the capacity for ironic experience and tragic insight that a well-tempered, i.e. non-deformed, master possesses. In other words, the phenomenology of the true master escapes the conceptual frame of "mastery." Drawing on A. N. Whitehead (1957), I argue that it is the notion of "romanticism," which consists in the capacity to experience "epiphany," that captures this phenomenology. Romanticism encompasses the master's mastery, but also her capacity to experience the limitations of her practical perspective. The experience of these limitations—the wonder, reverence and gratitude the master comes to feel toward the mystery of the seemingly familiar—is epiphany.

2. Initiation into Practices

Before turning to the ways in which the initiation process can go astray, let's first recall what the initiation paradigm claims to offer the student. Initiation into practices is a process of becoming strongly identified with a community of practitioners who uphold standards of excellence and celebrate exemplars of proficient performance in common. Practices encompass two main sources of value for the initiated practitioner.[22] The *first* derives from the experience of having mastered the practice itself, the achievement which is often considered the final telos of the initiation process. This experience of mastery, whether it is achieved in the practice of mathematics or Argentinian tango, is thought to be

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[22] The value of practices *for practitioners* is not the only kind of value that practices possess, however. Practices are valuable for what they *produce* as well, i.e. for the products and performances whose worth can be appreciated by both the non-initiated layperson and initiated practitioners. See Higgins (2011, 59f.) for further discussion.

integral to a flourishing life. Not only does the process of acquiring mastery tie us to other like-minded individuals, the experience of mastery itself connects us to our physical environment in a way that reconciles us to the reticent and stubborn otherness that the world often exhibits, especially during the learning process. In mastery, we are, if only momentarily, fully coordinated to the lifeworld, using our habituated powers of cognition and organized action to shape the environment into something predictably responsive, affirming and even beautiful. Even when the master encounters problems or setbacks in the course of action, indeed especially when she does, her powers of judgment and coordination help her to turn the experience into a personally rewarding one. This is the more active sense of mastery. The pianist *masters* a complicated passage in a new piece, the expert tango dancer turns a partner's misstep into an advanced "ocho," the blacksmith corrects an apprentice's mis-strike just before losing temperature, and each feels an elusive harmony with their surroundings. The labor of learning thus gives way to meaningful and empowering experiences of mastery that reassure the individual of her connectedness to the world.

As we will see later in this chapter, the concept of mastery does not quite do justice to the complex phenomenology of the initiated practitioner—in particular, the practiced openness of the master's gaze. But it suffices for communicating the environmental connectedness of her experience, a state of mind Dewey (1997) called the "continuity" of experience and initiationists often refer to as "practical wisdom" or *phronesis* (Dunne, 2005, 1993; Strike, 2005; Higgins, 2002). In order to achieve this continuity, the individual must internalize certain habits and skills, social behaviors and self-understandings, that have proven themselves over time to be instrumental to its achievement. Taken together, these

qualities constitute a "biographical genre," the *second* source of value in practices (Higgins, 2011). Apprenticing into a practice means acquiring a concrete sense of identity and framework for handling difficult questions about selfhood and purpose. The dizzying open-endedness of significant existential issues—What should I do with my life? What values are most central to me? What kind of people should I surround myself with?—is mitigated by the examples that initiated practitioners set. The aspiring mathematician or dancer learns to do as other mathematicians and dancers do, seeking out conditions that support the pursuit of their practice. They order their days so that they have enough time to ply their craft and can come to the right state of body and mind to do it well. They associate with those who see the value of their practice and who can help them to perfect their skills. Even questions that at first seem banal in relation to these existential questions—What should I wear today? Should I get the new smart phone?—are illuminated with the biographical genre of the practice. Teachers wear teacherly things and always seem to have the phone one update behind their students; businessmen wear suits and read the *Economist*; outdoorsmen don robust shoes and keep a close eye on the weather (which they claim to be able to predict). In each case, the practice lends structure and direction to the life course, infusing its formerly arbitrary elements a coherent meaning.

Understanding education as an initiation into practices means reconceiving the subjects and disciplines that make up the curriculum as disciplinary practices. This does not necessarily entail any particular curricular organization; mathematics need not be taught as a standalone subject taking up a 45 minute school period, for example. There are many ways in which subjects may be combined in the school curriculum and still be pursued as

practices. However, education as initiation does require us to rethink what we are doing when we are teaching the skills and topics of mathematics in the school context. In fact, it discourages us from thinking of subjects as conglomerations of various "topics" and "skills" peculiar to the discipline, or as arenas for developing general "critical thinking skills." Rather, engagement with subject matter should be conceived as an induction into a robust form of life with characteristic ways of speaking, seeing and acting and esoteric sources of value. This is the sense in which education as initiation is transformative. When conceived as practices, subjects like mathematics, history, and language arts thus become repositories of human striving and achievement; they are home to characteristic forms of joy and satisfaction that can be attained only through cultivating certain habitual "virtues"; they encompass a community of practitioners whose existence extends into the past and the future; and they present apprenticing students with various live options for how to construct a meaningful life. In sum, subjects as practices become vehicles for flourishing.

3. The Problem of Deformation

At least this is the hope. Merely reconceiving of the transformative educational process as an initiation into practices does not by itself guarantee that students acquire the joy of mastery and a meaningful practical identity; it requires skilled educators to mediate the process at each step. "As in so many other fields," William James (1992) writes, "success depends mainly on the native genius of the teacher, the sympathy, tact, and perception which enable him to seize the right moment and to set the right example" (p. 743). Yet the challenges of initiation go well beyond the practical matter of teacher tact. Even if we were

to assume that educators have the requisite tact and the classroom conditions are right, there are real hazards involved in the initiation process. Although the experience of mastery calls up strongly positive images of coordination, reconciliation, immersion and "flow," it is won only after a long and arduous process of initiation, which focuses its cultivating power on a particular subset of our capacities, talents and skills. This focusing is essential to attaining precision in performance and judgment in the practice. And yet there is a serious danger in this focused apprenticeship. Friedrich Nietzsche's (1974) reflections on professional initiation helps us to name it:

> You see the friends of your youth again after they have taken possession of their specialty—and always the opposite has happened, too! Always they themselves are now possessed by it and obsessed with it. Grown into their nook, crumpled beyond recognition, unfree, deprived of their balance, emaciated and angular all over except for one place where they are downright rotund—one feels moved and falls silent when one sees them again this way. [. . .] On this earth one pays dearly for every kind of *mastery*, and perhaps one pays too dearly for everything. (pp. 322-323, §366)

According to Nietzsche, there is an important hazard in the effort to achieve practical mastery. The process of gaining a clear sense of personal identity, of mastering a difficult craft, and of being welcomed into a community of practitioners we deeply respect can change how we see and act so profoundly that we lose touch with the forms of life and ways of being to which we were once connected. We become "possessed" by our new preoccupation, thrown off-balance, at once "angular" and "rotund." Nietzsche is pointing us to a problem in the initiation process that is, in essence, the opposite of the problem of identity crisis discussed in the previous chapter. The worry is not that the transformative process comes to halt, but that our lives are jerked into the perspectival and social grip of

143

the practice into which we are apprenticing. Nietzsche's imagery of crookedness, emaciation, angularity and crippling is suggestive for the problem we are dealing with here. The pursuit of mastery in the initiation paradigm is threatened by the prospect of *deformation*.

There are several different senses in which we can understand the deformation that arises within the initiation process. The first is deformation as *specialism*. Specialist deformation has occurred when an obvious narrowing of perspective accompanies the achievement of mastery.[23] Speaking of the culture of modern work, Barrett (1962) observes, for example, that "doctors and engineers tend to see thigs from the viewpoint of their own specialty, and usually show a very marked blind spot to whatever falls outside this particular province. The more specialized a vision the sharper its focus; but also the more nearly total the blind spot toward all things that lie on the periphery of this focus." (pp. 4-5) Specialism—or as Bennett puts it, "professional deformation" (p. 4)—is the loss of the capacity to see beyond the focal circumference of the appropriated practice. The conceptual resources and values inherent to one practice are used to explain and evaluate phenomena for which other perspectives would be more appropriate.

A telling first-personal account of such specialistic deformation comes from a passage in Charles Darwin's autobiography, reproduced in William James' (1992) *Talks to Teachers on Psychology*. In the passage, Darwin laments how his lifelong devotion to science ultimately numbed his sensitivity to poetry and the arts.

> Up to the age of thirty, or beyond it, poetry of many kinds . . . gave
> me great pleasure, and even as a schoolboy I took intense delight in
> Shakespeare, especially in the historical plays. I have also said that

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[23] Of course, some narrowing of perspective is inevitable in the initiation process. Here I am using the term in a specific pejorative sense which will be explained presently.

144

formerly pictures gave me considerable, and music very great de-
light. But now for many years I cannot endure to read a line of po-
etry: I have tried lately to read Shakespeare, and found it so intoler-
ably dull that it nauseated me. I have also almost lost my taste for
pictures or music. . . . My mind seems to have become a kind of
machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts,
but why this should have caused the atrophy of that part of the brain
along, on which the higher tastes depend, I cannot conceive. . . . If I
had to live my life again, I would have made a rule to read some
poetry and listen to some music at least once every week; for per-
haps the parts of my brain now atrophied would thus have been kept
active through use. The loss of these tastes is a loss of happiness,
and may possible be injurious to the intellect, and more probably to
the moral character, by enfeebling the emotional part of our nature.
(quoted in James, 1992, p. 754)

Darwin's candid account of his loss of aesthetic sensibility helps us to see that there

is something important at stake in avoiding the problem of specialism. The losses of spe-

cialism are not only "injurious to the intellect," but can undermine the development of

"moral character." Crucially for this species of deformation, Darwin experiences his spe-

cialism as a loss. He realizes that he cannot see the world in any other way than that of the

law-deriving biologist. Because of his loss of sensitivity, Darwin not only ceases to appre-

ciate poetry and music, but stops patronizing them altogether. The perspective narrowing

of specialism is thus accompanied by a circumscription of one's commitments to other

endeavors and practical engagements. The commitment to the specialty takes over.

An example of specialism in an educational context can be found in Melvin Kon-

ner's autobiographical account of his time in medical school. Here Konner recounts an

experience watching a film rendition of Verdi's *La Traviata* in which his medical training

had begun to degrade his ability to appreciate the aesthetic quality of the work.

[T]he film was more or less wonderful; but the main problem I had was with Violetta's consumption. I could not experience it except as a medical student. I was trying hard to banish medical thoughts, and there I was twisting one of my favorite operas into the perspective of a physician, which I could not abandon even for two hours. (quoted in Conrad, 1988, p. 329)

Konner, a Verdi enthusiast, could not shut out the analytical noise caused by the medical identity he was acquiring in medical school. The joy of watching Verdi's opera had been corrupted by the medical perspective. Konner's medical initiation is turning him into a specialist, a person unable to suspend the ways of seeing and doing that constitute his specialization, even when they are quite out of place.

Although Konner and Darwin have both fallen victim to a specialistic narrowing of perspective, they have at least preserved the humility and perspicacity to attest to as much. Their professional deformation is self-conscious. Yet the self-consciousness of Konner and Darwin's specialism may be the exception, rather than the rule, in the world of initiation. Describing the academics of his day, Nietzsche notices that "[a]lmost always the books of scholars are somehow oppressive, oppressed; the 'specialist' emerges somewhere—his zeal, his seriousness, his fury, his overestimation of the nook in which he sits and spins, his hunched back" (p. 322, §366). There is no "fury" in the tone of Darwin and Konner. Rather one senses the remorse, even grief, they feel over what they have lost.

The "furious specialism" that Nietzsche is referring to is another pervasive phenomenon of academic life, one that deserves to be called out as a second type of deformation. One place we find this phenomenon is in the reflections of Walter Faber, the engineer protagonist of Max Frisch's (1959) *Homo Faber*. Faber's coldly calculative and rationalistic worldview, a product of his training as an engineer, has rendered him almost

146

completely insensitive to, and indeed exasperated by, "what people mean when they talk about having an *experience*" (p. 21). Reflecting on his time in the Tamaulipas desert and the seemingly hyperbolic metaphors his companions use to describe its beauty, he declares:

> I'm a technologist and accustomed to seeing things as they are. I see everything they are talking about very clearly; after all, I'm not blind. I see the moon over the Tamaulipas desert—it is more distinct than at other times, perhaps, but still a calculable mass circling around our planet, an example of gravitation, interesting, but in what way an experience? I see the jagged rocks, standing out black against the moonlight; perhaps they do look like the jagged backs of prehistoric monsters, but I know they are rocks, stone, probably volcanic, one should have to examine them to be sure of this. [. . .] Why get womanish? I don't see any Flood either, but sand lit up by the moon and made undulating, like water, by the wind, which doesn't surprise me; I don't find it fantastic, but perfectly explicable. [. . .] Why get hysterical? Mountains are mountains, even if in a certain light they may look like something else, but it is the Sierra Madre Oriental, and we are not standing in a kingdom of the dead, but in the Tamaulipas desert, Mexico, about sixty miles from the nearest road, which is unpleasant, but in what way an experience? [. . .] Why should I experience what isn't there? (pp. 21-22)

Faber's worldview cannot abide his companions' dreamy, metaphysical imputations to the objective environment around him, whose elements can be exhaustively explained and described with the analytical gaze of science, he believes. Any other perspective is simply "hysterical" or "womanish." Faber's capacity to experience beauty is as dead as an already-blossomed agave, and yet he believes that he is the only one that perceives the true nature of things.

Nietzsche and Faber thus point us to a second species of deformation, a state we might call *parochialism.* Parochialism is specialism with an added quality of spitefulness or zealotry; it is specialism unconscious of its loss. The relevant distinction here is the

"fury" and exasperation associated with the parochial state. The parochially deformed person harbors an inner frustration with the seeming naivete of those who see the world through other perspectives and who evaluate it with competing values.

We can find a "real-life" example of this parochialism in Steven Weinberg's (1992) defense of the reductionistic worldview in *Dreams of a Final Theory*. In a telling passage, Weinberg dismisses critics who cannot accept the coldness and impersonality of the particle physicist's reductionist gaze.

> At the other end of the spectrum are the opponents of reductionism who are appalled by what they feel to be the bleakness of modern science. To whatever extent they and their world can be reduced to a matter of particles or fields and their interactions, they feel diminished by that knowledge. [. . .] At its nuttiest extreme are those with holistics in their heads, those whose reaction to reductionism takes the form of a belief in psychic energies, life forces that cannot be described in terms of the ordinary laws of inanimate nature. I would not try to answer these critics with a peptalk about the beauties of modern science. The reductionist worldview is chilling and impersonal. It has to be accepted as it is, not because we like it, but because that is the way the world works. (p. 53)

Though perhaps subtle, one can feel the exasperation, even fury, in Weinberg's stance. Would that those "nutty" individuals, who still hold on to an understanding of the world that resists the "ordinary laws of inanimate nature," convert to the true religion of reductionism! In an earlier discussion of the nature of scientific explanation, this fury even takes on a vivid metaphorical form. Reacting to the early Wittgenstein's rejection of scientific explanation by means of laws of nature, Weinberg writes:

> Ludwig Wittgenstein, denying even the possibility of explaining any fact on the basis of any other fact, warned that "at the basis of the whole modern view of the world lies the illusion that the so-called laws of nature are the explanations of natural phenomena." Such

148

> warnings leave me cold. To tell a physicist that the laws of nature are not explanations of natural phenomena is like telling a tiger stalking prey that all flesh is grass. (pp. 28-29)

The fury of Weinberg's specialism takes the form here of a tiger. One can only imagine how the tiger might respond to being told that flesh is grass: given that tigers are ferocious man-eating beasts, it is not likely to be peaceful! At any rate, Weinberg's example is interesting because it demonstrates that parochialist fury is not only elicited in response to other views, but characterizes the motivational impetus of the parochialist's work.

The final type of deformation I would like to discuss is deformation as *alienation*. In both specialism and parochialism, the individual experiences a narrowing of perspective, in which the conceptual and valuational elements newly introduced into the individual's worldview become over-dominant. This means the individual imports, so to speak, these elements into domains of life where other concepts and values are better suited. It also means she unduly privileges the roles and responsibilities of the new practice to those she possesses in other significant domains of life. When this privileging begins to eclipse specifically those roles and responsibilities that derive from what might be called our "natural communities"—our families, friends, home communities, cultures and countries—something particularly pernicious has occurred. Our initiation has, in effect, alienated us from sources of personal meaning that play a crucially formative role in the establishment of our early identity.

This alienation is a problem for several reasons. When a community of practice simply *replaces* our ties to natural communities in the transformative process, we are

149

brought into a psychologically precarious state—one in which we experience a decided break, a yawing discontinuity, between our former and new selves. Child psychologists have shown again and again how the dissolution of relationships to our parents and siblings can undermine the conditions for healthy psychological growth and later emotional stability. Having lost touch with such relationships, we are forced to find stand-ins for these supportive ties within the new community, or else must try to live a life without the intense bonds of natural community. Since the new bonds of practical community never quite reach the same unconditionality of the love experienced in natural communities, both reactions are likely to lead to problems. Although the initiation process may be more or less successful in avoiding specialism and parochialism, the individual who has become alienated from her natural communities now clutches onto her practical commitments all-too closely. Her participation becomes desperate, she becomes emotionally vulnerable when she encounters setbacks, and the pleasures of mastery soon wear off. From a more objective standpoint, a life that is missing the love of family, of old friends, of our cultural heritage and of our country seems to be worse off than one that preserves these bonds, all else being equal. Someone who throws herself into the attractions of a new practice without looking back to the communities she has left behind seems to have embraced all-too quickly its glittery novelties—whether of college friends, academic culture, or the corporate life. Oppositely, a community that demands, implicitly or explicitly, that we distance ourselves from these relationships is an all-too jealous one.

This conception of deformation as alienation can be made more explicit, and its danger more compelling, if we turn our attention to a particularly moving autobiographical

example from Richard Rodriguez's (2004) *Hunger of Memory*. Here Rodriguez recounts how his embrace of academic culture steadily alienated him from his working-class, Mexican immigrant family, especially his mother and father. Rodriguez had hoped that his immersion in academic life might be able to replace the familial relationships from which he had grown increasingly distant since he was a child. In a sobering account of this tragic development, he writes:

> Here is a child who cannot forget that his academic success distances him from a life he loved, even from his own memory of himself. Initially, he wavers, balances allegiance. [. . .] Gradually, necessarily, the balance is lost. The boy needs to spend more and more time studying, each night enclosing himself in the silence permitted and required by intense concentration. He takes his first step toward academic success, away from his family. From the very first days, through the years following, it will be with his parents—the figures of lost authority, the persons toward whom he feels deepest love— that the change will be most powerfully measured. A separation will unravel between them. Advancing in his studies, the boy notices that his mother and father have not changed as much as he. Rather, when he sees them, they often remind him of the person he once was and the life he earlier shared with them. [. . .] And to evade nostalgia for the life he has lost, he concentrates on the benefits education will bestow upon him. He becomes especially ambitious. Without the support of old certainties and consolations, almost mechanically, he assumes the procedures and doctrines of the classroom. The kind of allegiance the young student might have given his mother and father only days earlier, he transfers to the teacher, the new figure of authority. (pp. 50-52)

Speaking directly from his experience, Rodriguez describes how his growing awareness of alienation metamorphosed into an almost desperate academic ambition. The community of teachers, thinkers and authors to which he was introduced in his studies promised to replace what he was simultaneously losing.

> Quiet at home, I sat with my papers for hours each night. I never forgot that schooling had irretrievably changed my family's life. That knowledge, however, did not weaken ambition. Instead, it strengthened resolve. Those times I remembered the loss of my past with regret, I quickly reminded myself of all the things my teachers could give me. (They could make me an educated man.) I tightened my grip on pencil and books. I evaded nostalgia. (p. 53)

Rodriguez's ambition culminated in his decision to take a PhD in literature. Although he prized the opportunity to become a master of the scholar's trade, an achievement he had worked towards his whole life, the luster of his initiation once achieved quickly wore off.

> When I traveled to London to write a dissertation on English Renaissance literature, I was finally confident of membership in a 'community of scholars.' But the pleasure that confidence gave me faded rapidly. After only two or three months in the reading room of the British Museum, it became clear that I had joined a lonely community. Around me each day were dour faces eclipsed by large piles of books. [. . .] We did from a union, though one in which we remained distant from one another. (pp. 74-75)

In spite of the fact that he had achieved the final prize of all his previous efforts, the new community of practice could not replace his sense of connection to his parents. Although he had suppressed it for almost twenty-five years, Rodriguez finally began to feel nostalgia for what he had lost.

Rodriguez is masterful in his ability to capture the feeling of familial alienation that so often accompanies initiation into academic life, and the battle with nostalgia in which this alienation frequently takes its form. Rodriguez's story conjures up the first scenes of Plato's Allegory of the Cave, in which the prisoner, in order to reach final enlightenment, must leave his companions behind in the belly of the cave. Plato and Rodriguez seem to be

saying that alienation is a tragic inevitability of the educational process. "Those who would take seriously the boy's success—and his failure," Rodriguez writes, "would be forced to realize how great is the change *any* academic undergoes, how far one *must* move from one's past" (p. 72; emphasis added). Indeed this fatalistic posture can often be found in discussions of the initiation process. Nietzsche is another example. "Every craft, even if it should have a golden floor," Nietzsche (1974) declares, "has a leaden ceiling over it that presses and presses down upon the soul until it becomes queer and crooked. . . . Let nobody suppose that one could possibly avoid such crippling by some artifice of education" (p. 322, §366).

While we may be sympathetic to the idea that loss is an inevitable aspect of the transformative process, it would be a serious mistake, and an ethically suspect one, to adopt such a fatalistic stance on alienation, in my view. One begins to suspect whether this tragic fatalism serves merely as an *ex post facto* rationalization excusing us from considering how initiation can be conducted to avoid the problem of alienation. Plato's prisoner *returns* to his fellow cave dwellers, after all. Thus, in contrast to Nietzsche and Rodriguez, we should try to conceive, or reconceive, of the initiation process so that it avoids the problem of alienation.

Adequately addressing the problem of alienation, as well as the other two forms of deformation, will involve revising some of the central concepts and tenets of the initiation paradigm. Rather than being a mere concession to the realities of education, the task of facing the prospect of deformation will only enrich our understanding of the nature and goals of the initiation process, as I hope to show below. In light of the three dimensions of

deformation, our conception of initiation will have to address the following question: How might the initiation paradigm be reformulated so that apprentices to academic practices can avoid the losses of specialism, the fury of parochialism, and the nostalgia of alienation?

4. Tragic Tradition and the Spirit of Gaiety

The first step in approaching an answer to this question is to acknowledge that practical deformation is not merely a matter of finding time for a few more hobbies, friendly rendezvous, or reading outside our specialty. Rather, deformation has one of its sources in an ineluctable fact about human life. In spite of our periodic longings for a simpler existence, free of burdensome commitments, guided by spontaneous whims, and imbued with authentic desires, we are all intricately and unavoidably wrapped up in overlapping layers of cultural, political and professional practices, each of which make demands on our time and energy and vie for special attention. We are sons and daughters, husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, siblings and friends, engineers and basketball players, Americans and cosmopolitans. Managing our commitments to these various roles is one of the central challenges of living a good life. The way we balance our devotions and the extent to which we immerse ourselves in each role defines who we are and what we stand for. Far from being impediments to freedom, spontaneity, and authenticity, our practical commitments are the elements in which these qualities can be experienced.

Characterizing the management of our sundry practical identities as a "balancing" does not quite capture the immense difficulties with which the predicament confronts us. Fulfilling our responsibilities in one practice directly conflicts with the demands of another.

Spending quality time with our spouses means skipping an important conference or putting a project on hold. Striving for career success often means missing out on a family reunion or forgetting to write our friends back. The pursuit of one set of practical goals thus implies foregoing distinctive and substantial goods, which make equally compelling appeals to our attention. Though we are apt to shut away this uncomfortable truth, human life is a tragic negotiation between our familial, professional and political roles, to whose demands we never quite do justice. In heart-wrenching depictions of tragic dilemmas from Sophocles *Antigone* to Arthur Miller's *All My Sons,* the muses of Western culture have called us to remember this irrevocable fact. In spite of the colloquial tendency to reserve the word "tragic" for cases of severe loss and hardship, this sense of tragedy sensitizes us to the tragic tensions that undergird any human life.

Are Nietzsche and Rodriguez right, then? Are the losses of initiation unavoidable, and its nature therefore tragic? Is the apprentice condemned to witness her practical commitments warped around the demands of the new practice? Although we can agree that the tensions that arise between our practical commitments are never fully to be resolved, that life is, at least in this specific sense, unavoidably tragic, we can also notice that there are better and worse ways to confront this tragic reality. One can capitulate to tragedy, becoming embittered and resigned to its inevitability; or one can meet it with courage and grace. This courage and grace does not come of its own accord. Just as the apprentice to a practice must form certain habits of mind and skills that conduce to the attainment of practical mastery, so a courageous and graceful engagement with the tragic practical tensions of life also

requires that we possess certain qualities, skills and dispositions. "Working through practical predicaments," Chris Higgins (2011) argues, "and selecting, synthesizing and ordering our ethical commitments . . . calls for particular types of excellence" (p. 52). If so, the various forms of deformation are not inescapable products of initiation, but simply *mismanagements* of the tragic tensions that arise between our practical commitments. In such dilemmas, we are left without the imaginative resources for making a choice between our competing practical roles. We are thus presented with a particularly serious discontinuity in our experience, one that cannot be addressed with the resources provided by the practices of which we are members. Asking "What would a mathematician do in this dilemma? Or a good daughter?" leaves the individual only with opposing criteria for making the decision at hand. The strain created by our pursuit of a new practice, instead of, like a bow, setting a trajectory for our lives, warps our perspective and deforms the web of commitments that constitute our identity.

What, then, does the apprentice to an academic practice require in order to manage the tragic dilemmas of her initiation well? For Alasdair MacIntyre (2007), the inevitability that tragic discontinuities arise *between* our practical commitments implies that the initiation process must seek to establish continuity at level of *tradition* (Higgins, 2011, p. 242). Traditions offer the initiation process a supportive background for dealing with the tragic dilemmas that arise among our practical commitments. They provide a stock of exemplars and narratives that show us, first, that we are not alone in our struggles, and second, that there are ways to deal with practical dilemmas in more or less principled and productive ways. On this view, tragedy is a normative, rather than a descriptive term; it is an honorific

to be bestowed on a work when the creative resources it encompasses in fact inspire us to handle our lives better.

Thus, although practices provide more enduring continuity than the classroom community, as we saw in the previous chapter, they alone cannot protect against the serious and potentially deformative discontinuities that arise between our practical identities. Initiation that hopes to avoid deformation must be at once an initiation into practices as well as initiation into a tragic "meta-practice," the concentric sphere of tragic tradition.

Following this argument, we can conclude with Rodriguez and Nietzsche that initiation is indeed "tragic," but mean something quite different from them at the same time. Initiation into practices should be accompanied by an induction into a tragic tradition, whose examples can help the individual cope with the tensions engendered by her practical apprenticeship. The tragic tradition not only provides her with concrete strategies for ordering these roles judiciously, but simultaneously transfigures the tragic quality of such endeavors into something affirmative and even beautiful.

Insofar as specialism, parochialism and alienation arise from mismanagements of our various practical commitments, a tragic tradition can offer a crucial bulwark against deformative initiation. The tragedians of the Western tradition provide us with imaginative resources to reasonably order our practical responsibilities and to meet the tensions that arise in the process with grace, humility and goodwill. Very few of us will ever experience the deeply tragic situations that an Oedipus or an Antigone face, and yet their examples call us to heed the subtle tragic dimensions of our practical lives. Their alarming quality can inspire us to deal openly and honestly with the individuals involved in these tragic

relations *before* our entanglement progresses to such an extreme valence. Tragic tradition encourages us to have difficult discussions with ourselves and others about what is worth committing to and what is thereby sacrificed.

If practical deformation results from a mismanagement of practical commitments, the tragic tradition is likely to solve our problem. Yet deformation can occur for a somewhat simpler reason than this. When we undergo an initiation into a new practice, the new practical identity to which we are introduced—with its attractions of joining a respected community of practitioners and the promise of someday achieving mastery—will almost inevitably tend to warp the individual's other practical commitments into its orbit. Even if the initiation process is an immensely positive experience for the individual, and perhaps especially when this is the case, the transformative force of the process threatens to permanently destabilize the balance that the individual had hitherto achieved, or to take her from one imbalance to another. This time, the imbalance arises not because we fail to find a principled way to order our ethical commitments, but because we simply, and for whatever reason, *overcommit* to the new practice. Although these two options may seem equivalent on a logical level, they are experientially different. Somewhere within the process of initiation, we lose sight of, or perhaps we never quite come to fully appreciate, the limitations of the new practice in which we have immersed ourselves. Indeed, our immersion may become so total that we do not even notice the tragic tensions created between our practical identities at all. Our lives are radically warped around the new practice by laws of seeming necessity, and we lose the capacity to question, let alone suspend, the application of the newly won perspective into the various ambits of social life. In the end, we find ourselves

alienated from relationships that matter, our gaze narrowed by the confines of our practical specialty, or our emotional life infiltrated by parochialist fury.

One caveat should be mentioned before we launch into the analysis of overcommitment. Depending on our prior life history, what may look to an outsider like overcommitment to a practice may in fact be precisely the right degree of commitment, just as a courageous act will seem rash and foolhardy to a coward. If we are struggling to leave behind a life of addiction, infidelity, or some other personal failing, for example, then allowing our lives to be "warped" by our participation in a new practice, say Alcoholics Anonymous or relationship therapy, is not a case of overcommitment. Since the corrupt "practice" of abusing alcohol or having an affair is parasitic on our other practical roles, we may need the refuge of a new practice to prevent the corrupt one from permanently destroying the chance of a well-managed life.[24] That is, we may need to section ourselves off from family, friends and colleagues to focus on our recuperation. After a time, perhaps when we can negotiate these relationships on new terms, we will be able to face the problems of balance and stability anew.

Thus, we cannot say in general whether an individual's degree of devotion is excessive or deficient; such judgments can only be made on a case by case basis. Overcommitment is, in this way, akin to a vice. It is a state that undermines the balance and stability

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[24] I have placed "practice" in quotes here because alcohol abuse, while it is a widespread social phenomena, is *not* a practice in the sense intended by proponents of the initiation paradigm. For a discussion of some of the criteria that make a social activity a practice, see Higgins (2011) and Dunne (1993). According to Higgins, a social activity is a practice if its characteristic actions demonstrate (1) coherence and (2) complexity, if it (3) originates in a social environment and is (4) executed in the same, if it (5) possesses a conscious history, and if it continually (6) initiates new members into its form of life (pp. 67-68). Furthermore, the practice must (7) be home to "internal goods," which together open up a particular way of flourishing to practitioners (p. 65). Criteria 1, 2, 5, and 7 are missing from the activity of alcohol abuse.

that any viable human life must possess, but it is one we cannot know we have entered unless we have learned from the example of those who have gone before us. Of course, the status of overcommitment as a vice does not mean that we should never commit ourselves to, even occasionally "lose ourselves" in the pursuit of a practice. This would be the vice of undercommitment. Rather, our degree of commitment must find a golden mean between obsession and dilettantism.

How might the vice of overcommitment be avoided, then? Just as the educational response to the problem of mismanaged practical tensions could only be formulated once we understood the nature of the problem, the same is true for practical overcommitment. (We shall soon see that this "overcommitment" demonstrates only an incapacity to truly commit to practices.) Perhaps the best place to start is an examination of the most extreme form of overcommitment we encounter in the deformations. Because the specialist can at least acknowledge the losses of her specialism and the alienated individual can feel a nostalgia for her withered relationships, it is the furious, exasperated parochialist, the Walter Fabers of the world, who should command our attention. What exactly has gone wrong here? Again, we can turn to Nietzsche for initial insight into the nature of the problem. In a section entitled, "'Science' as a prejudice," Nietzsche (1974) directly criticizes the reductionist worldview that we saw Steven Weinberg defend in our discussion of parochialism. Nietzsche refers to the physicist's confession of reductionism as "the faith with which so many materialistic natural scientists rest content nowadays, the faith in a world that is supposed to have its equivalent and its measure in human thought and human valuations— a 'world of truth' that can be mastered completely and forever with the aid of our square

little reason." That the world could be explained by a "final" physical theory is precisely such an arrogation. Nietzsche continues:

> What? Do we really want to permit existence to be degraded for us like this—reduced to a mere exercise for a calculator and an indoor diversion for mathematicians? Above all, one should not wish to divest existence of its *rich ambiguity*: that is a dictate of good taste, gentleman, the taste of reverence for everything that lies beyond your horizon. That the only justifiable interpretation of the world should be one in which *you* are justified because one can continue to work and do research in *your* sense (you really mean, mechanistically?)—and interpretation that permits counting, calculating, weighing, seeing, and touching, and nothing more—that is a crudity and naivete[.] (p. 335, §373)

Although the physicist claims to be describing an impersonal world—"The reductionist worldview *is* chilling and impersonal," Weinberg declares in the quotation above—the idea that his efforts are leading him to an ultimate explanatory edifice, a final theory, is an example of the most extreme aggrandizement of human reason. According to Nietzsche, this optimism in the explanatory powers of science, and Weinberg's exasperation with other views of the world, reveal only a deep longing to see, and an accompanying faith that he *will* see, the human being reflected in the laws of nature.[25] As another particle physicist, Brian Greene (2000), puts it, "The ultimate theory would provide an unshakable pillar of coherence forever assuring us that the universe is a comprehensible place" (p. 17).

Nietzsche's psychological excavation of parochialism does not stop here. In the opening passages of the aptly-titled *Gay Science*, Nietzsche reveals the root of the parochial

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[25] It is logically possible to accept the legitimacy of particle physics and yet reject reductionism, of course.

longing for ultimate explanation to be the moment at which we forget how, or are forbidden, to laugh.

> Gradually, man has become a fantastic animal that has to fulfill one more condition of existence than any other animal: man *has to* believe, to know, from time to time *why* he exists; his race cannot flourish without a periodic trust in life—without faith in *reason in life*. And again and again the human race will decree from time to time: "There is something at which it is absolutely forbidden henceforth to laugh." (p. 75, §1)

Further:

> In the great majority, the intellect is a clumsy, gloomy, creaking machine that is difficult to start. They call it "taking the matter seriously" when they want to work with this machine and think well. How burdensome they must find good thinking! The lovely human creature always seems to lose its good spirits when it thinks well; it becomes "serious." And "where laughter and gaiety are found, thinking does not amount to anything": that is the prejudice of this serious creature against all "gay science." (p. 257, §327)

Parochialism is, then, quite simply, an inability to laugh at the contingency of one's view of things. It is a formerly curious and experimenting gaze that has fixated on truths it now protects with an all-too serious devotion. It is an inability to cope with the fact that the one's worldview is, at root, an *interpretation* of the world, a world that, as Nietzsche puts it, "*may include infinite interpretations*" (p. 336, §374).

The parochial seriousness Nietzsche observes in the scientific enterprise is not peculiar to the practice of science, but can be found among the practitioners and protectors of any practice. It emerges at that point in the life of a practice where its standards of excellence have become all-too rigid, its stock of celebrated exemplars all-too stagnant, and its demands on apprentices and practitioners all-too solicitous. Champions of the practice

162

adopt a protectionist and conservative stance against novelty, and their convictions about the value of its conventions—justified as they may be—lapse into parochial dismissals of the potential value of others. To avoid such a development, the spirit of gaiety, encouraging us to return to the foundations and norms of the practice with a critical eye, must be preserved in practical life.

While Nietzsche's distinction between the spirit of gaiety and parochial seriousness illuminates the complex psychology of parochialism and overcommitment, its radical open-endedness presents some of its own problems. Nietzsche's alternative is not supposed to be a defense of thoroughgoing relativism or a rejection of science. It is clearly intended as an entreaty to his readers to bring a spirit of gaiety and affirmation to the quest for knowledge that lies at the heart of the scientist's practice: "*Life as a means to knowledge*: with this principle in one's heart one can live not only boldly but even gaily, and laugh gaily, too" (p. 255, §324). The spirit of gaiety is proposed as an affirming fallibilism; it is the cheerful laughter at practical limitation even while we devote ourselves to the roles and responsibilities of the practice. And yet this is a precarious combination. How can we prevent such critical laughter from digressing into the snickering of a cynic? How can we question the conventions of a practice, exposing their arbitrariness and inadequacy, without thereby weakening our commitment to it? Nietzsche is all-too vague in these passages about how the spirit of gaiety, as important as it may be for checking the advances of parochial seriousness and deformation, can avoid lapsing into an all-out rejection of the practical identity to which we have committed. Is there an educational counterpoint to the tragic

tradition which can help us cultivate a spirit of gaiety without undermining our commitment to the practice?

5. Ironic Tradition: Ideality, Natality, Fidelity

An answer to this question might suggest itself if we can find an example in which the limitations of a practice are openly confronted without its causing an utter rejection of the its hold on the individual. For this, we can turn to Jonathon Lear's (2014) account of a unique species of experience that can occur, and does so perhaps all-too infrequently, in the life of practical commitment. Lear describes an experience in which the assumptions and conventions of a practices suddenly seem to us to be quite inadequate and wholly strange, and we are pulled up short by the realization. A "gap" opens up between the realities of practical life and the ideals to which the practice constantly refers. In this case, Lear's concern is the practice of teaching.

> So, I am sitting at home in the evening grading papers, and I begin to wonder what this has to do with *actually teaching* my students. For a while, this is a normal reflection in which I step back and wonder about the value of my activity. I still have a sense of what the ideal is; I am just reflecting on how well the activity of grading contributes to it. [. . .] But then things get out of hand. I am *struck* by teaching in a way that disrupts my normal self-understanding of what it is to teach (which includes normal reflection on teaching). This is not a continuation of my practical reasoning; it is a disruption of it. It is more like vertigo than a process of stepping back to reflect. When it comes to previous, received understandings of teaching— even those that have been reflectively questioned and adjusted in the normal ways—*all bets are off*. (p. 17)

Out of Lear's "vertigo" issues a profusion of fundamental questions about teaching that suddenly break into conscious and demand his attention.

Are my students the individuals coming into my classroom at the appointed time . . . or are they to be located elsewhere? Are they in the younger generation . . . or are they my age or older? Might they come along in a different generation altogether . . . maybe in the next century? And if my classroom is where my students are, where is my classroom? What am I to make of the room I actually do walk into now? Where should I be to encounter my students? What would it be to encounter them? And if I were to encounter them, what would it be to help them, rather than harm them? What is development? (ibid.)

Crucially, Lear's are not questions about the *value* of the teaching practice itself. Lear's experience causes him to realize that there may be fundamental problems with his understanding of teaching, but the questions that emerge do not concern a choice between alternative practices. He is not considering a career change. Rather, he has returned to the question of *how to practice teaching well*. Lear's questions issue from a deep desire to better realize some pedagogical ideal in his teaching. Lear's experience is occasioned by the realization that his prior identity as a teacher falls short, or is not obviously connected to, an ideal of teaching—that with respect to this ideal, he has been just "going through the motions," mindlessly accepting and enacting established norms of the teaching practice. Thus, while Lear confronts fundamental limitations of the social practice of teaching, he remains committed to it in a profound way. "It is because I care about teaching that I have come to a halt as a teacher," Lear writes (p. 19). Glossing what he means by being "struck" by teaching in his earlier account, Lear continues:

I am *struck* by teaching—by an intimation of its goodness, its fundamental significance—and am filled with longing to grasp what it is and incorporate it into my life. I can no longer simply live with the available social understandings of teaching; if I am to return to them it must be in a different way. (p. 20)

Because Lear's questions call him to realize the ideal of good teaching, this experience, which Lear calls *ironic experience*, is evidence of devoted attachment to the teaching practice, even while it requires him to detach himself from certain ways of thinking and doing lodged therein. Ironic experience constitutes "a peculiar form of committed reflection" (p. 21), in which we demonstrate "utter seriousness and commitment (in this case, to teaching), not its opposite" (p. 19).

Ironic experience provides a compelling response to the precarity of the Nietzschean spirit of gaiety. Our tendency to associate any instance of irreverent humor or witty criticism with irony obscured the fact that irony is, at its very best, a fundamentally committed disposition that can gaily confront the limitations of practices without rejecting them. A tradition that can provide ironic resources to the initiate is therefore one that can, at the same time, encourage reflection on the foundations of our practical identities and prevent deformative overcommitment to them. In fact, the ironic disposition Lear defends shows that true commitment to practices *requires* us to occasionally engage in such reflection, since it proceeds from a deep desire to realize its ideal form.

The educational response to overcommitment we have been looking for follows directly from these observations. For Lear, ironic experience is occasioned, whether explicitly or implicitly, by a question of the following form (p. 16):

(1)   Among all X's, is there any X?

In the experience Lear describes, the question that generates his reassessment of the teaching practice is: Among all teachers, is there any teacher? Lear is confronted with the suspicion that his actions as a teacher fall short of a conception of the true teacher. Although

he does teacherly things—grading, formulating assignments, lecturing, holding office hours—is he *really* a teacher? Lear's formula clearly demonstrates the importance of ideals, of possessing vivid conceptions of practical ideals, for ironic experience. To cultivate the ironic disposition that can prevent deformative overcommitment in the initiation process we must therefore present the initiate with exemplary individuals and powerful ideas whose ideality can challenge the conventions currently embedded within the practice. While the significance of exemplars is often asserted by defenders of the initiation paradigm, Lear's is a somewhat different justification of their role. Instead of thinking of exemplars as providing merely a pattern for practitioners to emulate in their pursuit of mastery, *exemplary individuals can serve as a source of critical irony for continual reassessment of the practice*. Their example perpetually transcends the conventional contours of practical life.

The second educational requirement for cultivating the ironic disposition dwells at the level of tradition. Since the reflectivity required for ironic experience implies a degree of transcendence from the realities of the practice, and since ironic reflection is a skill independent of any particular practice, the initiate would be well served with examples of individuals outside the practice who have cultivated this very capacity to ironic reflection. These individuals may be radical critics of the practice itself or ironic wits whose target is something entirely different from it. In either case, a serious commitment to the practice demands that practitioners engage with those who can draw out ironic reflection on its norms and values. It is the Marx' and Oscar Wilde's of the world just as much as the Beethoven's that steer us away from the fate of the Walter Faber's.

While Lear's account of ironic experience is invaluable for formulating an educational response to overcommitment, it is, in my view, incomplete as it stands. As mentioned, Lear believes that the basic structure of the ironic experience corresponds to the question, (1) "Among all the X's, is there an X?" The ironic experience here is one that proceeds from the *ideality* of the placeholder X—whether an ideal teacher, musician or Christian. This encourages the educator to introduce students to exemplary individuals and ideas both because they embody practical mastery, and because they can occasion ironic reflection on practical norms. However, if we turn the latter half of the ironic formula, not towards lofty ideals, but back on the subject, there seem to be two more basic interrogative patterns that can give rise to ironic experience. They are:

(2)   Among all the X's, is there room for *me*?

(3)   Among all the X's, is there room for *you*?

Question (2) refers to an ironic experience that arises not from the ideality of the placeholder X, but from what Hannah Arendt has called our *natality*. The question whether a practice has room for *us* thematizes the radical individuality that we, each of us, harbor. In Arendt's (2006) words, natality is "the uniqueness that distinguishes every human being from every other, the quality by virtue of which he is not only a stranger in the world but something that has never been here before" (p. 185). Practices should stand by their standards, but they should also be flexible enough to allow for individual "style" in performance. This natal style is especially apparent in *apprentices* to practices, before their initiation has permanently recast their preferences, values and perspectives according to the practice's standards of performance. The novice's ways of seeing and acting, their neologisms and

168

unexpected questions challenge initiated practitioners to restate the conventions of the practice as well as their justifications in a way that the novice can appreciate. This endeavor can give rise to the same ironic experiences which we saw emerge from the ideality of practices. Indeed, such experiences seem to be a common aspect of classroom life. In the course of a lesson on a familiar topic, a student's impulsive question or observation often leads us to rethink how we have previously understood the topic and change our approach to teaching it in the future.

Something like a natality-irony reaction seems to have occurred in a class Thomas Kuhn (2000) taught on physics for non-science majors as a graduate student, indeed with dramatic effect. The topic Kuhn was to cover was the history of mechanics, and thought he might begin with Aristotle. Yet, "as I was reading him," Kuhn admits, "Aristotle appeared not only ignorant of mechanics, but a dreadfully bad physical scientist as well" (p. 16). Simply dismissing Aristotle as a bad physical scientist to his students would not do the trick, Kuhn seems to have thought, because he expected they would demand a believable reason as to why Aristotle's physics was taken seriously for so long. Thus anticipating the natal question, Why was Aristotle taken seriously for so long if he was such a bad physical scientist?, Kuhn moved from his initial dismissal to the extremely generative suspicion: "Might not the fault be mine rather than Aristotle's?" (ibid.) This question ultimately resulted in his discovery of the paradigm structure of scientific revolutions for which he is famous.

> I continued to puzzle over the text, and my suspicions ultimately
> proved well founded. I was sitting at my desk with the text of Aris-
> totle's *Physics* open in front of me and with a four-colored pencil in

169

my hand. Looking up, I gazed abstractedly out the window of my room—the visual image is one I still retain. Suddenly the fragments in my head sorted themselves out in a new way, and fell into place together. My jaw dropped, for all at once Aristotle seemed a very good physicist indeed, but of a sort I'd never dreamed possible. Now I could understand why he had said what he'd said, and what his authority had been. Statements that had previously seemed egregious mistakes, now seemed at worse near misses within a powerful and generally successful tradition. (pp. 16-17)

Kuhn's insight seems to be a result of his taking the perspective of the novice seriously, who has not already learned to pass off Aristotle's legacy as human folly, accident, or the influence of metaphysical dogma. Appreciating the natality of the novice in the initiation process thus reveals an important symmetry of initiationist transformation. Initiation can be transformative for both teacher and student.

The calling out of the "you" in third form of irony introduces another crucial element into the transformative initiation process. This question thematizes the apprenticing subject once again, but not from the perspective of the apprenticing subject herself, but of those whom the subject knows well. "You're really starting to sound like a *doctor*." "Don't use your *teacher voice* with me." Statements like these are often made by our significant others—friends, parents, spouses, siblings and children—when we are apprenticing into a practice. These critical redresses often come, not seldom with a tinge of spite, when our significant others notice that our commitment to a practice has become all-too serious, that we are trying a bit too hard to conform to its demands and perhaps losing ourselves in the process. Our loved ones are, at their best, the guardians of who we once were before our initiation. In the ideal case, they remind us of the virtues of that old self, incomplete as it

may have been, and urge us to maintain these qualities through the transformative initiation process.

Although the tensions that such relationships create between the self we inhabit in our natural communities and the practical identity we are adopting can lead to strife, they can also be tremendously productive for our commitment to the practice—namely, by providing an occasion for ironic reflection. Here it is our *fidelity*, rather than natality or ideality, that catalyzes the dialectic of ironic detachment and reattachment. Occasionally asking ourselves, "Could I explain my research to my mom?" or better, "Can I show her what is so exciting and worthwhile about it?" is not just a nice thing to do to keep conversation going; it can lead to dramatic insights into the changes (good and bad) that our practical initiation has brought about and the nature (good or bad) of that thing we are becoming. It may reveal deformations in the making, and remind us to preserve our old selves or our natality in the initiation process. Of course, the comments of our loved ones are sometimes products of mere envy or spite, and thus fidelity, like natality and ideality, involves cultivating *the right degree of sensitivity* to the claims of our natural communities. Returning to Richard Rodriguez's example, young Rodriguez simply could not see that his relationships to his parents were not only compatible with his devotion to the academic practice, but, if cultivated in the right way, could become crucial ironic resources for committing to the writer's trade with all his heart. Indeed, insofar as his nostalgia for these relationships was the emotional catalyst for writing his autobiography—a characteristically literary undertaking of course—these relationships at least partially served their purpose.

The transformative tradition should thus reassure us of the value of such relationships, even while our practical initiation can seem at times to pull us away from them.

6. The Telos of Initiation: From Mastery to Romanticism

Incorporating an ironic dimension into the transformative tradition promises to yield resources to the practitioner that are necessary for avoiding the problem of deformation. Irony opens up a way of critically evaluating the norms, rituals, roles and aims of practices that strengthens the individual's practical commitment, while preventing the "overcommitted" state that leads to deformation. This Kierkegaard-inspired, dialectical understanding of practical membership, oscillating between committed critique and critical commitment, is shared by those whose concerns may seem at first glance to be quite distant from those of Kierkegaard—for example, Theodor Adorno. In his famous essay "Theory of Pseudo-Culture" Adorno (2003) advances a remarkably similar conception of education (*Bildung*), according to which the goals of the educational process can only be realized when a dialectical interaction between the sovereignty of critique and the assimilative thrust of commitment is maintained: "If the force field of *Bildung* congeals around fixed categories, be it spirit or nature, sovereignty or assimilation, then each of these isolated categories becomes the contradiction of what they intend, offers itself up to ideology and advances *Rückbildung* [reverse-Bildung]" (p. 96).[26] To defend a productive tension between critique and commitment, Adorno calls us to reflect on what has been lost in the progressive rejection of tradition since the dawn of Enlightenment thought: "Among the

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[26] For the English translation, see Adorno (1993).

172

conditions of *Bildung* was, necessarily, tradition. According to Sombart's and Max Weber's teaching, it was something pre-bourgeois, essentially incommensurable with bourgeois rationality. The loss of tradition through the disenchantment of the world terminates in a state of imagelessness [*Bilderlosigkeit*], a desolation of the spirit which turns now to mere means, and which is incompatible with *Bildung*" (p. 105). Adorno, like Lear's Kierkegaard, hopes to restore us to a state in which the power of traditions can be harnessed to provide the individual with vivid "images" and compelling ideals, which serve not only as molds to follow, but as resources for ironic reflection and tragic insight.

Characterizing the role of the tragic and ironic dimensions of transformative tradition as "providing resources" to practitioners does not quite do justice their nature, however, and coming to terms with this fact will necessitate one final revision to our understanding of the initiation paradigm. To recall, Lear (2014) speaks of irony in connection with a certain kind of experience, one in which we confront, or rather *are confronted with*, the limitations of a practice with respect to its own ideals. There is an unexpectedness and spontaneity to such ironic experiences. Although Lear is somewhat vague on this point, we cannot simply call such experiences forth by asking the formal question that structures them—among all teachers, is there a teacher? Rather, the vision of the ideal must present itself to our consciousness in a way that somehow "grabs" us. It must appear a "live option" for our commitment, to use a turn of phrase from William James. Because of the relative uncontrollability of such ironic experiences, true masters of practices always seem to preserve a tentativeness in their self-understandings as masters. They know they always have more to learn. Lear captures this feeling in the context of teaching: "I treat teaching as a

master-craft, an arduous but noble calling; and even after all these years, I still think of myself as an apprentice, en route" (p. 18). To describe the telos of initiation as mastery—as the "standard" account of the initiation paradigm has it—therefore misses something essential to the character of the master. There is an openness to radical experience that the idea of "mastery" does not quite capture.

For Lear, the state that we are after in the initiation process is not mastery, but something he calls "ironic existence." Ironic existence is a way of embodying our practical identities that remains ever-ready for ironic disruption.

> In ironic existence, I would have the capacity both to live out my practical identity as a teacher—which includes calling it into question in standard forms of reflective criticism—*and* to call all of that questioning into question; not via another reflective question, but rather via an ironic disruption of the whole process. In this twofold movement I would both be manifesting my best understanding of what it is about teaching that makes it a human excellence *and* be giving myself a reminder that this best understanding itself contains the possibility of ironic disruption. (p. 31)

The "standard forms of reflective criticism" that Lear takes to be just the first level of masterly reflection refer to the habits of thought and action of the "reflective practitioner," a term that comes up again and again in contemporary theories of teaching and learning since the publication of Donald Schön's (1987), *Educating the reflective practitioner*. Reflective practitioners in teaching are always considering whether their selection of texts is appropriate for the personalities and needs of their students, they react flexibly to their students spontaneous interests, they know their subject inside and out and can make exciting connections between it and their students' lives, and they know how to derive joy and fulfillment from their teaching. While this type of reflective action is essential to good

teaching, the "true" master teacher possesses yet another level of reflective capacity, according to Lear. Namely, the master teacher preserves an openness to ironic reflection on the very form and results of these practical reflections. That is, the teacher can, must, occasionally ask: "What does all this text selection, lesson planning, discussion-leading, and life connection have to do with *teaching*? What would a Keating or a Socrates say about my classroom?"

While Lear's conception of ironic existence gets us closer to the telos of initiation, I do not think it quite captures the phenomenology of those true masters of practices, who maintain an openness to ironic experience in Lear's sense, but who also attend to the natality of novices, preserve fidelity to their natural communities, and cultivate an affirmative disposition to the tragic tensions of practical life—the three dimensions of transformative initiation that Lear's "ironic existence" does not take into account. This limitation causes Lear to conceive of the ironic experience as, at root, "a species of uncanniness" (p. 15), for it leads us to see our previous actions as wholly odd with respect to the newly recognized ideal. However, uncanniness places too much emphasis on the disruptive element of such experiences, missing the element of gaiety, affirmation, and empowerment that accompany them (which he might have seen if his account of ironic experience included the dimensions of natality and fidelity). We need a concept that can capture both sides of the experience.

In a truly remarkable essay on education called "The Rhythm of Education," A. N. Whitehead (1957) points us to an alternative description of the master's phenomenology that, it seems to me, can progress our understanding of transformative initiation onto new

and fruitful ground.[27] Whitehead characterizes the standard conception of the initiation process we have been revising in this chapter as the stage of "precision" in the educational process. Precision is the process by which we attain mastery, expertise, and judgment in a practice—in a word, the level of the reflective practitioner. To this process, Whitehead appends two more stages, however—an initial stage of "romance" and a final stage of "generalization." The stage of "romance" refers to the initial steps of the initiation process in which the student develops, or rather *should* develop, a romantic attachment to the discipline. For the early apprentice, "subject matter has the vividness of novelty; it holds within itself unexplored connections with possibilities half-disclosed by glimpses and half-concealed by the wealth of material." The teacher's job at this initial stage is to show students that the world before them holds a store of mysteries and paradoxes that hard work in the subject will someday explain. If done well, the novice is overcome by "romantic emotion," "the excitement consequent on the transition from the bare facts to the first realizations of the import of their unexplored relationships" (p. 28). Whitehead's argument is that the difficult and protracted process of appropriating subject matter and gaining precision in the skills of disciplinary practices is possible—or, we might say *non-deformative*—only if the novice has developed a romantic attachment to the subject matter beforehand. "It is evident that a stage of precision is barren without a previous stage of romance. . . . It is simply a series of meaningless statements about bare facts, produced artificially and without any further relevance" (p. 29).

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[27] Although I am suggesting we move past a conception of the telos of initiation as "mastery," I have not found it easy to leave behind the word "master."

In the final stage, the stage of "generalization," Whitehead intriguingly claims that the student acquires both generalized knowledge in the practice and experiences a "return to romanticism" (p. 30). Somehow, the achievement of masterly precision in the practice leads back to the romance of apprenticeship. In spite of the immense suggestiveness of the notion of "masterly romanticism," Whitehead leaves his account just there. He devotes a mere six sentences to his description of this "fruition which has been the goal of the precise training" (p. 30).

A few pages earlier and in a quite different context, however, Whitehead adumbrates just enough of vision of the romantic master to allow us to determine what such a state might entail. Discussing the seeming paradox that the use of language is one of the most complex mental tasks we can think of and yet it is one of the first that infants learn, Whitehead writes:

> The first intellectual task which confronts an infant is the acquirement of spoken language. What an appalling task, the correlation of meanings with sounds! It requires an analysis of ideas and an analysis of sounds. We all know that the infant does it, and the miracle of his achievement is explicable. But so are all miracles, and yet to the wise they remain miracles. (p. 25)

The final line of this passage "and yet to the wise they remain miracles" is the key, I think, to the phenomenology of that state which integrates the full spectrum of ironic experience and tragic insight. After passing through a phase of honing one's skills and systematizing one's understanding of a disciplinary practice—say in linguistics, to follow Whitehead's example—the linguist comes to a stage at which the original wonder and en-

177

ticement with language is felt again with full force. This original enthrallment was nourished by the hope that the discipline's conceptual content and forms of reasoning might harbor the power to explain away the mysteries of, say, illocution and perlocution that had appeared in the linguist's early experiences with linguistics. Indeed, part of the linguist's motivation to gain precision in the discipline was presumably its promise to solve some of these open questions. However, Whitehead suggests that finally solving the mysteries that initially lead us into practices, mastering their skills and standards of excellence, and developing general and systematic understanding of the discipline do not exhaust the complexity of the true master's perspective. Rather, the true master possesses the capacity for reenchanted experience, in which she can see the things she now deeply understands again in the light of the novice's romantic gaze. The trained linguist can still marvel at the miracle of learning language, though she can give a precise account of it.

Romanticism is a fitting term for the state we are trying to describe, insofar as it encompasses the project of "regain[ing] the meaning, mystery, and magic" that is all but "lost in the fragmented modern world," as Beiser (2003) characterizes the cultural program of the early German Romanticists. Indeed, the ideal of masterly romanticism directly challenges an overly technicist understanding of skillful work. But as a candidate for the telos of non-deformative initiation this masterly romanticism must, additionally, synthesize the tragic and ironic dimensions of the initiation process. In what sense is romanticism the tragic-ironic disposition we have been looking for?

At this final stage of initiation, the master realizes that the promise of precision that was once the source of her romantic attachment to the practice can never be fulfilled, that

even the simplest phenomena remain ponderous and obscure, and that the reticence of nature from the instruments of the discipline is itself beautiful. The new romance thus derives from a sort of tragic humility, admixed with gratitude and reverence. This stance is not only an acknowledgment of the epistemic boundaries of one's discipline, but a capacity to see even the phenomena that the discipline can explain as miraculous—that is, miraculous not in the literal sense of a supernatural visitation, but in the sense of an uncanny, and yet simultaneously affirmative and empowering experience. In other words, the master retains the romantic capacity for *epiphany*—for experiencing the mystery of the familiar. In this sense, epiphany is the marriage of mastery, tragedy and irony.[28]

This elevation of epiphanic experience and romanticism to the telos of transformative initiation is meant to be both a normative and descriptive move. Openness to epiphany simply better characterizes the nature of those true masters we come across in life, I submit, and it simultaneously represents an ideal for educators to pursue in the initiation process. True masters—at least the ones that I would describe as such—are not only expert explainers or virtuosos of their disciplines. They are not the world-historical "creative geniuses" that nineteenth-century Romantics loved to glorify. Rather, the true master is someone who

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[28] This conception of epiphany differs from Hogan's understanding (1995) of the experience via Charles Taylor (1989). For Hogan, epiphany is any moment in which we "see the everyday and the ordinary from a new perspective" (p. 153). Hogan adds that the aftermath of the epiphany consists in "the familiar and mysterious . . . in mingling play" (p. 153) but elsewhere seems to want to employ the term for all "interruptions of the kind of learning which is routine and unreflective in character," without distinguishing between those of the apprentice or the novice (p. 154). This expansive definition of epiphany is problematic, however, because the difference between the novice's interruptive experience and the master's epiphany is a significant one. For the novice, the experience an interruption by some inexplicable or mysterious element is a riddle to be solved as he gains more precision, the solution dawning on her in a sudden, "ah-ha" fashion. For the master, however, the interruption of epiphany is, to extend the metaphor, an encounter with the riddle of human experience itself. This conception of epiphany is therefore closer to Jonas' (2015) account of Platonic epiphany, which he characterizes as an experience of "awakening" that "is not entailed by . . . logical argumentation," nor, we might add, by one's explanatory apparatus (p. 42).

can be discerned best in her interaction with learners and apprentices, where she exhibits an enthusiasm and wonder that matches theirs. She can occasionally reflect on her work from the standpoint of powerful ideals without discouragement or loss of commitment. She can see the novice's attempts to learn a new skill as prophesies of later precision, but she can also appreciate the novice's accidental combinations and unexpected questions as contributing something truly novel and productive to the practice. She can, additionally, maintain close ties to her family and close friends, both because they are a source of personal value to her, but also because they mediate her tendency to conform all-too closely to the internal expectations of the practice in her thinking and action. Finally, she can affirm with a tragic sensibility the limitations of her discipline as a source of fulfillment and as a vehicle for knowledge. Pursuing her practice in these several ways, she is occasionally taken aback by the mystery of even the most seemingly familiar phenomena, an experience I have called epiphany. In this sense, the sphere of tragic-ironic tradition surrounding practical initiation is self-transcending. Initiation is preparation for epiphany.

7. Conclusion

The ideals of romanticism and epiphany are the solution to the riddle of deformation. How might we initiate students into disciplinary practices—with their established standards, conventions, rituals and exemplars—in a way that prevents them from becoming alienated from their natural communities, crippled by specialistic thinking, and overcome by parochial resentment? The answer I have suggested in this chapter is to reconceive of the initiation process as occurring in the spheres of both practices and traditions, the latter

of which should possess tragic and ironic resources to stave off the deformations. The end of the transformative initiation process is best characterized, not by the achievement of mastery, but by the capacity to experience epiphany, a state of masterly romanticism in which one wonders at and reveres the reticence of the world.

Reconceiving transformative education as education for epiphany challenges the way we think about educational practice in several illuminating respects. In the next and final chapter, we shall explore some of these practical dimensions by turning to several recent proposals to bring transformative education into the classroom. Among these contemporary proposals, we shall see both promising applications of our revised initiationist approach as well as antagonistic contenders. In the attempt to understand the nature of these contenders, we shall find that serious systemic barriers stand in the way of realizing an education for epiphany. Yet—and this is the rhetorical thrust of the next and final chapter—that should not dissuade us from trying.

Chapter 5: Conclusion: Recovering the Transformative Tradition

> Teaching within our own country and possibly within the Western world at large seems to be moving in the direction of becoming increasingly mimetic in its orientation and, correspondingly, less transformative. (Jackson, 1986, p. 131)

> Formative assessment is transformational! (Miller, 2015)

1. Introduction

The aim of the last two chapters was to confront the ethical problems internal to the project of transformative education. First, we sought to explicate the nature of transformative self-change and determine the specific ethical issues that arise from it. This discussion demonstrated that there are three ethical problems peculiar to the project of transformative education: the problems of consent, controversial direction, and identity crisis. The problem of identity crisis, which refers to the skepticism, cynicism, disillusionment and conformism that can result from a prematurely halted transformative process, challenges the transformative ideal most deeply. The prospect of identity crisis calls our attention to what is psychologically at stake in transformative education. Though the project of transformative education promises to deliver us from prejudice, blindness and inauthenticity, and to

grant direction to our lives, its incursions into the deepest layers of the self introduces serious personal risk. To minimize this risk, the support of an enduring practical community was shown to be needed, which can provide a buffer for the reconstructions of self-understanding that transformative education sets into motion.

While this ethical-phenomenological analysis led to an endorsement of the initiation paradigm and its conception of disciplines as practices, we soon realized that our endorsement would have to be qualified—or rather, that some of the basic tenets of the paradigm would have to be adjusted before it could be responsibly endorsed as an approach to transformative education. This adjustment occurred in reaction to the several deformations that can result from the initiation process: specialism, parochialism and alienation. Not only are these deformations possible outcomes of the initiation process; they are widespread and familiar. To some, deformation is, further, an inevitable outcome of the initiation process. We could not agree with this fatalistic conclusion, however. A determination to direct the initiation process towards an ideal of human flourishing led us to realize the supportive service that *tradition* can offer—understood not merely as "that which has been passed down," but as a repository for tragic and ironic resources that assist the individual in grappling with the existential challenges of the initiation process. Finally, and as a consequence, we saw that the incorporation of the tragic-ironic tradition into the initiation process helped us to understand the true telos of initiation. The talk of mastery and the reflective practitioner in the initiation paradigm does not quite capture the phenomenology of the "true master," whose romantic orientation to her practice preserves a capacity to ironic experience and tragic insight. The essence of the master's romanticism was described as

183

the capacity to experience epiphanies, an occasion in which we bear witness to the irreducible mystery of the familiar.

Given the challenges and hazards of the transformative educational process, the reader may still be wondering whether transformative education is really worth the risk. Perhaps we should aspire to something less than transformative education, rather than adopt these various safety measures. To this reservation we can make two replies. First, we can simply repeat the argument that was made in our discussion of the problem of controversial direction in Chapter 3. If educators do not take up the task of transformation, the formation of students' identities will be left the powerful forces at work in consumer society, in which contortions much worse than the crises and deformations of transformative education are commonplace. Contortions is the right word: Richard Sennett's (1999) account of the culture of late capitalism compellingly demonstrates the imperious "flexibility" that is demanded of the modern employee, as traditional working contracts, social supports and interpersonal relations liquidate around her. This is not to say that transformative education is crusade against the corruptions of modern life. Rather, transformative education is the attempt to direct the process of identity formation toward rational and empowering ends.

The second thing we can say to our hypothetical respondent is that transformative education as initiation into practices grasps something distinctive in the school subject that we often too easily pass over. School subjects like Mathematics, English, and Social Studies are potentially transformative endeavors; they encompass communities of practitioners

who derive special fulfillment, joy and purpose from their participation in them. Conceiving of subjects in this way represents a determination to forge a lasting connection between learning even in its seemingly mundane form in the school setting and an ideal of human flourishing.

Transformative education, in spite of its risks, is something manifestly worth striving for, then. Yet the project is not without its opponents. In addition to the problems internal to the project of transformative education, there are external challengers to the transformative ideal within the contemporary educational landscape. In this final chapter, we shall confront the forces in the educational world that work against the aims and ideals of transformative education. Drawing on Philip Jackson's (1986) distinction between the mimetic and transformative tradition, I point to two such forces: the appropriation of transformation and its "kitschification." Regarding the first, I show that proponents of the widespread mimetic tradition consistently appropriate the language of transformation to advance their educational mission. The second phenomenon, the kitschification of transformation, refers to the halo of educational kitsch that surrounds the contemporary practice of teaching and the increasing usage of transformative language there. I have purposely chosen an ugly word to describe an ugly phenomenon. Both of these discursive forces have the effect of leveling our collective educational imagination, the former by serving up flashy rationalizations the educational status quo and the latter by condemning good willed attempts to improve it to the realm of cliché.

In the final section of this chapter, I turn to some recent work in educational psychology by Kevin Pugh (2011, 2002) that, in my view, avoids falling into these two tendencies. Pugh advances a conception of education for transformative experience that is closely aligned with the conception of education for epiphany defended in the previous chapter. Pugh's work provides crucial empirical support for this educational model, but it simultaneously synthesizes two of the transformative paradigms we have previously discussed—discovery and initiation. Following this lead, I show in the final lines of the chapter that the conversion and overcoming can be synthesized under the heading of initiation. This is to say that education for epiphany is a political project, a committed pursuit of social justice as well as a process of self-overcoming, just as much as a quest for belonging and identity within practical community.

2. The Mimetic *versus* the Transformative Tradition

In the opening lines of his essay, "The Mimetic and the Transformative: Alternative Outlooks on Teaching," Jackson (1986) advances a startling thesis about the educational world. Jackson claims that the educational debate of the last few centuries can be understood as a competition between just two "distinguishably different ways of thinking about education and translating that thought into practice," or two educational "traditions." Jackson calls these the mimetic and the transformative tradition. For Jackson, the most distinguishing feature of the two traditions is their various understandings and appraisals of knowledge. In the mimetic tradition, educational success is equated with the acquisition of knowledge, understood as something "detachable" from learners, possessed by the teacher,

and transmitted to students through adept instruction. The student's knowledge "can be judged right or wrong, accurate or inaccurate, correct or incorrect on the basis of a comparison with the teacher's own knowledge or with some other model as found in a textbook or other instructional materials" (p. 118). The student's learning is thus always second-hand, a reproduction of what the teacher or textbook offers as the standard of success. For all of the talk of constructivism, the telos of education for the mimetic tradition is the accurately reproduced datum. The learning process is, at root, an exercise in imitation.

The mimetic understanding of education is closely modeled after the feedback loop in cybernetics, Jackson points out, and generally proceeds as follows. First, some sort of pre-test is given in order to determine students' epistemic needs and to establish a baseline for assessing progress. Next, the missing knowledge or skill is presented to students, who are then encouraged to perform certain progressively ordered activities that conduce to its eventual appropriation and "mastery." If the students are successful, a reward is offered for their efforts and they are allowed to advance to the next level of knowledge or skill. If they are not successful, remediation is in order and the loop is repeated. For the process to work as intended, the teacher must be an expert in the methods of content delivery as well as a careful record-keeper of student progress and performance. She should perform periodical checks during the process of appropriation to make sure progress towards the desired outcome has been made, and should cap this process off with a final assessment of mastery. In contemporary parlance, the skilled teacher should employ "formative" and "summative" assessments to focus the learning process. Jackson sums up the mimetic tradition with the phrase "teaching-by-the-numbers" (p. 141).

Although there is much to praise in the mimetic approach to student learning, the transformative tradition takes a much different approach. While the central metaphor of the mimetic tradition, with its heavy emphasis on knowledge acquisition, is that of filling an empty vessel, the central metaphor of the transformative tradition is the molding of clay. This molding is first and foremost a moral, rather than an epistemic, undertaking. Success here is moral edification; the goal is to "make [students] better persons, not simply more knowledgeable or more skillful, but better in the sense of being closer to what humans are capable of becoming" (p. 127). As a result, teachers adopt much different pedagogy than the one favored by the mimetic tradition. Looking to the examples of no less than Socrates and Christ, Jackson derives three main elements of transformative pedagogy: personal modeling, soft suasion, and the use of narrative. With these methods, transformative teachers avoid the rigidity of mimetic instruction.

> Teachers working within the transformative tradition seek to change their students (and possibly themselves as well) by means neither didactic nor dogmatic. Instead, they use discussion, demonstration, argumentation. Armed only with the tools of reason, the transformative teacher seeks to accomplish what can be attained in no other way. (ibid.)

The picture of the teacher that emerges from this tradition is almost the opposite of the mimetic teacher. In engaging in discussion and dialogue, the transformative teacher may actively *subvert* her expertise in order to make room for students to express their perspectives and thus to allow the process of self- and knowledge-*construction* to take place. The ideal teacher is no performance analyst or record-keeper; she must strive to be a source of moral inspiration.

Jackson's understanding of the transformative tradition does not align perfectly with the conception of transformation as initiation that we have come to endorse, but it shares important similarities. As mentioned in the introduction, the initiationist is determined to connect learning processes to the ideal of human flourishing and committed to orchestrating these processes towards formative and identity-conferring ends. Thus, her goal extends beyond the "knowledge acquisition" of the mimetic tradition to the "moral edification" of the transformative tradition. Furthermore, the teacher as romantic knows her students' perspectives to be integral to the life of the practice and will occasionally yield to their judgments and concerns, i.e. "subvert" her expertise to cultivate natality. Yet in spite of these similarities, Jackson's contrast between mimetic and transformative education is too stark, given that mimesis inevitably, and quite desirably, occurs in the initiation process. Bryan Warnick (2008) has pointed out, for example, that there is an enduring prejudice in the history of philosophy against mimesis and imitation, which has led philosophers of education from Locke to Kant, and now to Jackson, to dismiss its educational value out of hand. Jackson falls victim to this prejudice when he claims, quite oddly, that the "purest" form of transformative education is psychotherapy, since no transmittance of subject matter and thus no imitation occurs in a psychotherapy session (p. 129). However, at the beginning of the essay Jackson states his awareness of a possible mediation of the mimetic and transformative imaginaries: "there is a perspective from which the two outlooks appear complementary and interdependent. Indeed, there are angles of vision from

which what originally seemed to be two diametrically opposed orientations suddenly appear to be one" (p. 116). Education for epiphany provides just such an "angle of vision," I believe.

These criticisms notwithstanding, Jackson's characterization of the mimetic tradition is invaluable for understanding a central oppositional force to transformative education in the contemporary educational landscape. Jackson argues that the transformative tradition is quickly losing what ground it still has today, marshaling several convincing pieces of evidence to back up this claim. First, Jackson points out that the majority of contemporary educational research focuses on subjects that naturally conduce to more mimetic styles of teaching—e. g. reading, mathematics and science—instead of those that are disposed to transformative pedagogy—e. g. music, art or social studies. Although transformative teaching is clearly possible in the former domains, research is typically limited to whether certain quantitatively measurable outcomes have been attained rather than more transformative, and less easily measurable, outcomes. Attention is fixated on "the acquisition of scientific *knowledge* rather than the development of a scientific *attitude*, on the growth of reading *skills* rather than the cultivation of a love for literature" (p. 139).

Second, Jackson points out that while the justification of such research is usually couched in normative terms, its normative content is rarely examined. The researcher, while attempting to maintain strict standards of objectivity, is on the search for better, more effective strategies for pedagogical intervention. The aim of the research is to produce seemingly helpful statements of the form: "according to our research, given conditions 1, 2 and 3, teaching A in the manner of x is most effective." Yet what is often missing in such

statements is an explicit account of the value-ladenness of the little word "effective." The cultural, institutional and philosophical assumptions that make A seem worth teaching and x seem an appropriate way of teaching it are left unexamined. Furthermore, the normative assumptions at work behind the vocabularies, methodologies and research designs of the researchers are also taken for granted. Thus, contemporary educational research tends to distract attention away from the ethical dimension of teaching and learning that the transformative perspective takes to be central. Instead, its prescriptions to teachers and administrators focus almost exclusively on *technique* (p. 140).

Third, while the prejudices of the educational research community might not necessarily pose a problem if their influence were confined to its own ranks, Jackson argues that they have seeped into American classrooms and curriculum plans. The imperative to teach with "evidenced-based practices" can be heard all over the educational community today. Yet its accompanying implication that the practice of teaching is subordinate to the science of teaching, and teachers subordinate to the scientists of teaching—that is, that teachers' do not possess any practical, situation-specific knowledge that is inaccessible to outside researchers or resistant to generalization—is not as well-recognized. When teachers and researchers take on such roles, the mimetic prejudices of the research community become the *modus operandi* of teachers and administrators.[29]

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[29] This research referred to here is not constrained to that done by professors in colleges of education. As Labaree (2004) has convincingly argued, education professors by and large have a minimal impact on the form and content of U.S. education. The research that is meant is simply that which is used to shape education policy, write education standards, formulate school management strategies, etc. This research is carried out by a number of organizations, including research consortia, think tanks, private corporations and the government.

In light of these observations, we can agree that the mimetic tradition is a powerful competitor to the transformative tradition in the contemporary educational landscape. Yet in case the reader is skeptical of Jackson's sweeping claims about educational research, a prominent example of the mimetic/transformative competition may be of service. As we have seen, the concept of "mastery" is central to the standard conception of the initiation paradigm of transformation education. Indeed, in contemporary educational parlance, the concept of "mastery" is omnipresent. The proliferation of the idea of mastery can be traced back, not to any neo-Aristotelian educational philosopher, but to Bandura's (1977) ground-breaking essay in *Psychological Review*, "Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change." In direct opposition to the developmental psychological and the behaviorist traditions, Bandura argues that behavioral change in individuals is best explained by reference to self-efficacy beliefs concerning the particular situation at hand rather than to "global personality traits" or subconscious "motives of effectance" (p. 203). In other words, the likelihood of behavior change is conditioned, even "determined" (p. 191), by the individual's expectations of her own effectiveness in dealing successfully with the particular problems and challenges with which she is faced. Bandura derives this conclusion from his research with adult snake phobics. Bandura finds that the phobics' expectations of their effectiveness in handling a snake encounter not only determine the likelihood of success in dealing with their fear of snakes, but that these expectations can be improved by providing them with opportunities to experience "mastery." In the case of Bandura's experiments, this meant being introduced to more and more intimate interactions with snakes—from exercises in which phobics would imagine how they would interact with the snake, to its

192

direct handling. The more experiences in which phobics successfully faced their fear of snakes, the greater their sense of personal efficacy and the greater the chance that they would persist in overcoming their fear.

Since the publication of this article, Bandura's theory of self-efficacy has become the dominant paradigm of educational psychology, and its central conceptual element, the "mastery experience," has become a mainstay of contemporary educational thinking. Children in schools are presented with a litany of challenging tasks, so the argument goes. If the likelihood of overcoming challenges is determined by the strength of students' sense of personal efficacy, as Bandura claims, then educators should devote themselves to improving students' self-efficacy beliefs. More specifically, educators should provide students with opportunities for collecting *mastery experiences*, progressively increasing the intensity and difficulty of educational challenges as students' confidence in their coping abilities improves.

Where's the rub? Social cognitive theory, as important as its contribution to education may be, provides a theoretical basis for developing more effective techniques for increasing student motivation; it defines more precisely what kind of "feedback" is relevant for the teacher when moving through the learning process. It has no theory of what it is worthwhile to learn or become. Because, in addition, the research on social cognitive theory in education mostly takes place within the context of subjects like science and mathematics, even when "controversial issues" are the focus of the study (e.g. Sinatra & Seyranian, 2016), it is an unambiguous adherent of mimetic principles. More important for our purposes, however, is its usage of the concept of mastery. The concept of mastery refers

here to experiences of overcoming (academic) challenges. Student learning is taken to be relevantly similar to a phobic struggling to overcome, or master, her fear. Notwithstanding the problematic philosophical implications of this assumption, this notion of mastery is a far cry from the ideal of *mastering a practice*. "Mastery experiences" are suddenly made available at every step of the learning process.

In using and operationalizing the term in this reductive way, social cognitivists seriously delimit the connotational universe of the idea. Educational measures like "mastery grading," which propose to replace the traditional A through F grading scheme with a mastery/progressing/not-progressing spectrum and to focus the learning process on the acquisition of progressively more difficult skills, have generated a great degree of enthusiasm in the educational world. Yet their proponents do not seem to notice what has been lost in the transaction. Again, measures like these may have great value, but so do the ideals that they simultaneously sweep under the rug.

3. The Appropriation of Transformation

This "appropriation" of mastery by the mimetic tradition, if we can call it that, is a revealing case study. The mimetic tradition works against the transformative ideal with surprisingly subtle methods. To put it bluntly, the mimetic tradition appropriates long-standing educational ideas, paring off alternative meanings and implied ideals which may possess transformative potential. This tendency becomes even more clear if we turn our attention to a recent piece of research in educational psychology which, again, clearly demonstrates some of the characteristic markers of the mimetic tradition (unsurprisingly,

since they are social cognitivists). The authors of the research, Slavich and Zimbardo (2012), seek to formulate an approach to teaching that synthesizes several decades of research in educational psychology on best-practices in teaching. This research boils down to three "overarching principles" of teaching: "(1) facilitate students' acquisition and mastery of key course concepts; (2) enhance students' strategies and skills for learning and discovery; and (3) promote positive learning-related attitudes, values, and beliefs in students" (p. 581). These principles by themselves do not necessarily commit the authors to the mimetic tradition—the place given to discovery might align them with the discovery paradigm of transformative education, after all. However, their emphasis in principle (1) on "acquisition" of "key course concepts", and their concentration in principle (2) on the development of "skills and strategies" for learning tell us that they are in close proximity to it.

When Slavich and Zimbardo turn to defining the central task of the educator, they demonstrate quite clearly where their allegiance lies, however: "From this perspective, instructors are viewed as intellectual coaches who create teams of students who collaborate with each other and with their teacher to master bodies of information" (p. 576). Here the subject is conceived as a "body of information" to be internalized by the student and reproduced in various kinds of assessments. Slavich and Zimbardo's framework proposes to add a dimension to this "traditional role of facilitating students' acquisition of key course concepts" of "promoting students' personal development and enhancing their disposition toward learning." (ibid.), but even their understanding of the latter falls into the mold of the mimetic. Teachers can enhance students' disposition to learning by "framing questions

in terms of students' current level of understanding and by presenting problems that are of appropriate difficulty, given students' prior knowledge and current skill" or simply by "creating study guides, providing sample exam questions, and, when possible, relaxing or removing time limits for exams" (p. 590). It is hard to see how any of this goes beyond the "traditional role" of the teacher. Finally, Slavich and Zimbardo's approach even demonstrates the subordination of teacher to scientist that Jackson considers to be one of the central elements of the mimetic research tradition. Discussing how teachers may learn the proposed framework, the authors write:

> [H]ow can departments and institutions develop instructors who utilize this approach? This is not an easy problem to solve since teachers at all levels of instruction typically have too many demands and very little time. One solution for addressing this practical problem involves summarizing [the approach] in an easily digestible format—for example, using handouts or videos that require minimal time or that can be read or watched in short intervals. (p. 598)

The author's framework is apparently something for experts to hand down to teachers in easily "digestible" form.

The most surprising and, for our purposes, most significant aspect of Slavich and Zimbardo's endorsed teaching approach is not its loyalty to the mimetic tradition, however. Rather, it is its name. Slavich and Zimbardo call their framework *transformational teaching*. Slavich and Zimbardo cite the transformative learning theory of Jack Mezirow throughout the article, claiming that its third principle, i.e. the promotion of "positive learning-related attitudes, values, and beliefs in students," is what makes theirs a transformative approach to teaching (p. 576). While there is no question that a love of learning is a worthy, perhaps even transformative educational aim (if, say, it were coupled with a conception of

what it is worthwhile to learn), Slavich and Zimbardo's suggestions for its realization never manage to leave the realm of the mimetic. What we have here is therefore a clear case of an *appropriation of the concept of transformation*. Once again, the mimetic tradition usurps the language of transformation to advance its own agenda.

Such appropriations are widespread in current educational rhetoric. Transformation and its cognates are highly positively connoted terms, and as such, their usage often functions as a rhetorical move to plug a favored pedagogical technique. Most often, the qualifier "transformative" or "transformational" is simply appended to the front of the technique's name, without specifying the sense in which students will be transformed by its application or offering a plausible argument, or really any argument at all, that would evince the transformative potential of the technique. As a result, "transformative" or "transformational" come to mean simply "good" or, rather, "I like this." It is the linguistic equivalent of a thumbs-up and a toothy smile.

A final example of appropriation can be found in the contemporary discussion of formative assessment. In an upbeat blogpost on the popular American teacher resource website *edutopia*, Andrew Miller (2015) declares that "Formative Assessment Is Transformational!" Miller is a keen supporter of formative assessment—i.e. those periodic evaluations intended to chart students' progress towards predetermined learning outcomes. Not only is it "one of the single most important things that teachers can do"; it "can be a transformational experience for [teachers] as practitioners and, more importantly, for their students" (n.p.). The author of the ASCD Handbook on *Transformative Assessment* agrees

with Miller (Popham, 2008). The book is composed of seven chapters, each of which is devoted to the particulars of formative assessment.

If formative assessment counts as transformative education, then the transformative tradition is not, as Jackson claimed, on the decline; rather, we are swimming in it. Every day, on clipboards across America, school principals check boxes indicating whether and with what frequency their teachers are performing formative assessments. Eulogies to the effectiveness of formative assessment can be found in countless pedagogy textbooks, training documents, teacher evaluation standards, department of education websites, and teaching blogs. The promotion of formative assessment is, we can all agree, sound pedagogical advice. Of course teachers should be attentive to their students' progress and provide them with low-stakes feedback in a consistent and constructive manner. But is this really transformative education?

The meaning of formative assessment cannot be fully understood in isolation from its role in a vast web of contemporary pedagogical jargon, much of which originates from large-scale, quantitative research projects conducted by high-profile educational psychometricians and modeled after the randomized field trials approach in medical research (see Feuer, Towne & Shavelson, 2002; Smeyers 2008). Through the lens of much of this research, teaching is understood as the employment of maximally effective pedagogical tactics for getting students to exhibit the behaviors that have received official sanction in the form of learning outcomes, as we have seen. Because formative assessments are thought to be indispensable for the success of this process, the teacher must be not only an expert

judge of when to use a "think-pair-share" activity or "jigsaw" group work, but a careful collector of student progress and performance data as well.

The educational imaginary to which formative assessment refers is thus characteristically mimetic. The implied conception of the teacher as "content deliverer"; the emphasis on measurement, assessment and outcomes; the conversion of a commonsense idea into a Latin-based, technical-sounding term, and the implied role of the researcher as a consultant of a scientifically-uninformed teaching workforce all point to mimesis as the guiding educational ideal. In other words, to call formative assessment "transformational" is to commit the same category error that Slavich and Zimbardo did. Formative assessment, like "transformational teaching," is literally the opposite of transformative education.

4. The Kitschification of Transformation

Such misusages of the language of transformation are frustrating, since they empty the transformative ideal of its power to refer to a different kind of teacher-student interaction, one doggedly committed to realizing an ideal of human flourishing in the educational process and yet manifestly aware of the psychologically challenging, transformative experiences that this calls for. Instead "transformation" becomes merely a way of dressing up things we are already doing in education which have little to do with transformative experience in any of its paradigmatic forms.

This is no harmless quirk of educational language. The appropriation of transformation masks the progressive impoverishment of our educational imagination at the hands of the mimetic tradition. To repeat one of the main points of critique above, the mimetic

199

tradition tends to see the problems of schooling as problems that can be solved by the right combination of turn-and-talks and learning logs, tablet PCs and smartboards, study guides and sample exam questions. That is, educational problems are a matter of improving pedagogical technique, adopting up-to-date technology policies, and applying proven classroom management strategies. From the standpoint of the transformative ideal, the problems of educational practice stem from a different source. They ramify from a collective educational imagination that has become prosaic, uninspired, complacent, flat. They are evidence of learning without idealism and romanticism, either in the student, the teacher, or both. Mimesis in transformative disguise distracts us away from the potential richness of the educational encounter. On my view, only an education for epiphany can fully capture this richness.

Leaning on the work of Maxine Greene (1987) and Milan Kundera (1984), Chris Higgins (2011) distinguishes another, closely related culprit in the impoverishment of the contemporary educational imagination, a phenomenon that has come to reside in the rhetoric of transformation as well. This co-conspirator of appropriation is the "banality and sentiment" characteristic of so much educational talk, the "often thin and 'inspirational'" mode in which the aims of teaching and learning are discussed—in a word, *educational kitsch* (p. 252). According to Higgins, kitsch culture "present[s] a world in which all questions are already answered, all feelings hollow, and all statements tautologous," for at its essence is the categorical denial of, in Kundera's words, "shit" (p. 253) That is, kitsch

culture "excludes everything from its purview which is [considered] essentially unacceptable in human existence" (Kundera, 1984, p. 248). It is the desperate resolve to think and live by the comforts of cliché.

Educational kitsch is a slightly more moderate form of Kundera's kitsch culture, yet this moderation seems only to make it more invidious in effect. From the perspective of educational kitsch, it is not that all educational questions are already answered; it is rather that these questions are always answered in the same way. All our educational problems would dissipate if teachers just had a more Winning Attitude, if they were a little more passionate, energetic, caring, and entertaining, educational kitsch assures us. This assumption, or something like it, seems to underlie those mawkish appeals to educators to take their teaching to the "next level," while consistently demeaning their intelligence and disregarding the value of their practical experience. These are the my-favorite-teacher-in-middle-school stories; the articles claiming to have determined the "6 Traits of Life-Changing Teachers" (Ray, 2017); the inspirational slogans about being more optimistic, adopting a "growth mentality," or "believing" in students; or various other motivational paraphernalia. If we could reach enough teachers with our message, the creators of the paraphernalia seem to believe, just think how great our schools would be! Increasingly, this message draws on the language of transformation. The "6 Traits of Life-Changing Teachers" become the "4 Things Transformational Teachers Do" (Finley, 2015), and transformation becomes educational kitsch.

The reality of the problem I am pointing to is clearly demonstrated, I believe, in two bestselling books my wife and her fellow teachers received in her first year at a public

middle school: Harry and Rosemary Wong's (1998) *The First Days of School: How to Be an Effective Teacher* and Dave Burgess' (2012) *Teach Like a Pirate: Increase Student Engagement, Boost Your Creativity, and Transform Your Life as an Educator.* The density of kitsch in the Wong and Wong book is so bewildering that it is hard to know where to start, and it is probably pedantic even to try. Its style is best characterized as "pep-talk" and its intellectual engagement with its readers on par with that of a coloring book. Page 19 features, for example, a perforated certificate that reads "The teacher in this classroom is a *professional* [in large green italics] with the required training, certification, and dedication necessary to provide a QUALITY EDUCATION to all students who enter." Just two pages later, the authors feel the need to remind their teacher-readers, "You are not in a private practice. You are an employee of a school district. You must teach the district curriculum" (p. 21). (This is chiseled into what looks to be, ironically enough, a gravestone.)

The pirate book is even more troubling. This is a book whose Amazon page features the author dressed in a pirate costume. Chapter Five is entitled "Transformation," which sprawls the top of the chapter's first page in all-caps and in a font that was apparently selected for its swashbuckling aspect. The chapter is further adorned with an epigraph written by the author himself, superimposed over treasure. In the chapter, the author encourages teachers to combat the "soul-killing suckiness" (Burgess, 2012, p. 55) of the typical school day by undertaking a "bar-raising paradigm shift" in their practice. This paradigm shift can be accomplished, Burgess suggests,

> by attempting to blur the lines between education and entertainment.
> I stopped using the term 'edutainment' because it became a bit of a
> cliché, but I still believe it is a fairly accurate term for my classroom

[!]. My goal is to, at least sometimes, have students asking them-selves, "Is this a lesson I walked into or a show?" When I'm pre-senting content, I attempt to draw on tried and true principles of staging and showmanship in order to turn my lesson into an event…an extravaganza. (p. 60)

We have not covered transformation as edutainment in this study because, clearly, it has nothing to do with the deep personal changes that transformative experience involves. Entertainment is almost by definition non-transformative; we can sit back and enjoy the show without having our prejudices or expectations challenged in any serious way. Worse, equating entertainment and transformation kitischifies the transformative ideal, turning it into something teachers achieve if they could only learn to apply the "principles of staging and showmanship" to their history lessons. Here, transformative teaching is flashy and fun, like a red-nosed reindeer or, as Burgess suggests, a "purple cow" (p. 55). "Do you have any lessons you could sell tickets for?" Burgess implores his readers to ask themselves (p. 59). Multiple times in the chapter, Burgess recommends the concepts of marketing to his readers for rethinking how they might better "position" their teaching in the school's ped-agogical marketplace.

My point here is not that showmanship, even in its flashier forms, is wholly out of place in teaching. The teacher's attempts to cultivate a romantic attachment to subject mat-ter in students may in fact need to draw on these sorts of tactics at times. Rather, the fun-damental danger of this kitschification of transformation is that it levels our educational imagination in an even more extreme way than the appropriation of transformation. When transformation is appropriated, it becomes an ellipsis for "I like this," a rhetorical move for

justifying what we are already doing. When transformation is kitschified—reduced to inspirational appeals to "transform your life as an educator" and simplistic formulas about how to jazz up history lessons—it cannot even refer to what we are already doing. It becomes a vague promise that neither endorses the status quo nor professes a concrete educational ideal. Kitischified transformation exists in the meaningless nether-realm between reality and ideality that is the misty domain of cliché. Kundera caricatures this phenomenon in political life with the slogan "Long live life!" In education, it occurs when teachers are assured that "by using passion, enthusiasm, powerful presentations, and creativity" in their lessons, they can "turn them into pirate treasure" (Burgess, 2012, p. 63).

One last example that comes even closer to Kundera's caricature can be found in a recent publication of the ASCD, *Transformational Teaching in the Information Age: Making Why and How We Teach Relevant to Students* (Rosebrough & Leverett, 2011). Incredibly, every chapter of the book is named after an educational cliché. "Inspire Your Students," the first chapter reads. The other chapter titles entreaty teachers to "Embrace Your Role as a Whole Teacher, Teach the Whole Student, Place Students in the Center, Teach for Learning, Know How Students Learn, Teach Students How to Learn, and Teach by Asking Questions." Though admittedly little can be learned from chapter titles, the title, "Teach for Learning," is an educational phase eerily similar in to Kundera's "Long live life." At the very least, they do not bode well.

Unfortunately but not surprisingly, Rosebrough and Leverett's understanding of transformational teaching, while illuminating in some places, remains within the nether-realm of their chapter titles. "Transformational teaching begins," they write, "with the

learner, and transformational learning involves deep understanding and occurs in class-rooms where teachers have high expectations. . . . Higher achievement is a by-product of teaching to a holism of goals and to a depth of understanding. We can reach the whole child through inspiration and a more reflective perception of our role as educators" (p. 16). Cobbled together with empty phrases like "high expectations," "deep understanding," and "the whole child," the author's conception of transformational teaching remains itself empty.

5. Transformation in Practice

To close out this study, I would like to shift from a critical to a more constructive mode of engagement with the current educational discourse. In addition to the forces of appropriation and kitschification that undermine the project of transformative education, there are examples that work to advance the transformative ideal as well. In my view, there is one particularly powerful example that deserves our attention, the groundbreaking work of educational psychologist Kevin Pugh (2011; 2002; & Girod, 2007) on "transformative experience" in science education.

Echoing some of Jackson's reservations about the influence of the mimetic educational research tradition, Pugh (2002; cf. Pugh et al., 2010a) points out in a seminal article that science education research focuses almost exclusively on students' acquisition of new science concepts or the correction of scientific misconceptions. Researchers thereby overlook the equally, if not supremely *more* important goal of enriching students' experience with these concepts. Hardly any teacher or education researcher would deny the importance

of enriching students experience with science; and yet, "[i]n general, the various perspectives on science education have focused more on how engagement in enriching experience fosters concept development/change and less on how engagement with concepts fosters enriched experiences" (p. 1101). Enriching students' experience has become a *means* to the end of concept acquisition, Pugh observes, rather than the other way around.

In opposition to this mimetic tendency in educational psychology, Pugh looks to John Dewey's conceptions of an "idea" in *How We Think* and "*an* experience" in *Art and Experience*, in order to generate an empirical research construct that captures what it means for a (science) concept to enrich everyday experience. According to Pugh, the teacher must first "artistically craft" the concept into an "idea" before it can begin to enrich experience. This involves modeling how the concept has made the teacher's own experience richer and more meaningful so that students can anticipate how the concept might do the same for theirs. The teacher thus attempts to unlock the experiential potential harbored within the concepts to be learned. In other words, she helps students to imagine what new things the concept will be able to "explain, reveal or illuminate" (p. 1105). When this anticipation consummates in an experience of illumination or revelation that the student values, Pugh calls it transformative experience. For Pugh (2011), transformative experience is thus "a learning episode in which a student acts on the subject matter by using it in everyday experience to more fully perceive some aspect of the world and finds meaning in doing so" (p. 111).

Pugh's effort to recover the connection between everyday experience and school learning is not only admirable; it is a compelling example of what an education for epiphany might look like in practice. Pugh's (2002) description of a science lesson in which he attempts to bring his theoretical construct to pedagogical life is lesson that many of us, I think, would have been lucky to have experienced in school. Speaking about his lesson on "adaptation," Pugh remarks,

> I often talked about how I perceived animals in terms of their adaptions, and I talked about how understanding their adaptation made these animals so much more interesting to me. For instance, I expressed my fascination at being able to see the polar bear as a walking greenhouse (polar bear fur employs clear, hollow fibers to trap heat like a greenhouse). At times I also talked about my current experiences of seeing or thinking about adaptations in my everyday life. For instance, one day I began class by stating, "While driving here, I passed a bunch of Canadian geese and I started to think, I began to wonder, 'Why do they have a black head and white neck? What's the adaptive purpose?'" [. . .] I even modeled my own beliefs about science and education to create a classroom environment that valued transformative experience with the content. I told the students, "my personal perspective is science isn't worth much to you if it doesn't sort of make the world more meaningful to look at; help you to understand things or make some part of your world more interesting. . . . When I teach, what I really want you to do is to try and be able to see things in a new way, in a different way." (p. 1110)

The parallels with the conception of education for epiphany advanced in the previous chapter are manifold. Pugh's emphasis centers not only on the experience of illumination, but also on the "increase in value" that should accompany the experience; this indicates a commitment to connecting school learning to an ideal of flourishing (as do his repeated invocations of Dewey). Furthermore, Pugh's account of his own relationship to the subject as an educator, his enthusiasm and "wonder" that he modeled for students in the

lesson, are crucial ways to create the kind of romantic attachment in students that White-head considered essential to the educational process. Yet further, Pugh argues that education for transformative experience is most effective when the teacher follows an "apprenticeship approach." The aim of the apprenticeship approach is "to create a particular learning or discourse community and help students come to participate more centrally in that community." "Teaching for transformative experience," he continues, seeks "to create a context where particular ways of experiencing the world through concepts are displayed and valued and to help students come to participate more centrally in these experiences" (p. 1106). Pugh's model thus embraces the importance of practical community in the transformative process and builds off a conception of education as initiation.

Pugh's study, as well as his later work on transformative experience (e.g. Pugh & Girod, 2007; Pugh et al., 2011), accomplishes several important things for the project of transformative education. First, it backs up the normative argument for education for epiphany provided in this study with empirical evidence that supports the urgency of this educational proposal as well as its cognitive benefits. Pugh et al. (2010b) found that less than 8% of 164 biology students in a school they studied reported having experiences like the transformative experiences Pugh discusses. And those exposed to approaches like Pugh's (2002) were 2.5 times more likely to experience an expansion of their everyday perception as a result. Second, Pugh's research offers detailed and empirically-grounded practical guidance on the scaffolding and modeling strategies that teachers can use to bring about such experiences (see Pugh & Girod, 2007). Finally, and most importantly, it points to an important fact about the project of transformative education as a whole that we have as yet

not been able to address in this study. The theoretical background for Pugh's conception of transformative experience is John Dewey. Previously in this study (Chapter 2), proponents of Deweyan theoretical frameworks consistently fell into an understanding of transformation as discovery, according to which transformative experience is a moment of anticipatory frustration by and subsequent integration of a novel or "foreign" element in experience. This encounter begets a more effective system of anticipations. However, Pugh's construct shows that these paradigmatic boundaries need not constrain our thinking about transformation. The transformative experiences Pugh is talking about are a kind of discovery experience—they involve improvements in our anticipatory system—but they simultaneously involve an increase in subjective value. This latter increase can be secured, Pugh believes, only in the context of an experiential apprenticeship—precisely what we would expect from the initiation paradigm. Pugh's "transformative experience" thus incorporates both transformation as a discovery-induced shift in the anticipational structures of experience and as an initiation into a practical community.

Pugh's synthesis helps us to see that similar syntheses are possible with the other two paradigms. Transformative initiation will involve experiences of overcoming and conversion just as much as it will involve experiences of discovery. These concepts merely highlight different aspects of the process. Just as occasions of illumination and discovery will be common in appropriating the practical perspective of the discipline, so will be confrontations with personal shortcomings, anxieties, and even addictions that bar us from experiencing the fulfillments and joys of this process—that is, from accessing those "internal goods of practices" we discussed in the previous chapter. Indeed, it would be quite

naïve to think that attaining the ends of practical initiation requires only a cultivation of that which is already there within us, rather than, simultaneously, a rooting out of that which prevents us from fully appreciating the value of the practice. We all harbor ingrained tendencies and dispositions that can frustrate our achievement of that affirming romanticism which is the beginning and end of initiation. The tragic and ironic resources of the tradition can inspire us to overcome them.

The shift in biographical genre that occurs in initiation can equally be described as a kind of conversion process. To recall, the conversion paradigm had a political edge to it; it often involved subscribing to a political ideology committed to realizing an ideal of social justice. As Albert Borgmann (2014) has pointed out, the initiated practitioner is simultaneously a defender of her practice against social movements and technologies that would threaten to undermine them (p. 333)—especially those that transfer the power of practical organization from practitioners to bureaucrats. Practical initiation, properly understood, thus always possesses a political dimension. Yet the simultaneous induction into tragic and ironic tradition that accompanies practical initiation carries with it important political dimensions as well. Richard Rorty's (1989) defense of ironic reflection is a case in point. Rorty demonstrates that the capacity for ironic experience is a psychological complement of pragmatic liberalism, both of which strive to preserve the open-endedness, pluralism and dialogical nature of common life. The same is true of the tragic tradition. For Sidney Hook (1959), the noblest and most "heroic" approach to the tragic sense of social life—i.e. the fact that adopting any social policy involves a trade-off between distinctive goods and rights—is the pragmatist response advanced by John Dewey. This response resolves "to

inquire, to reason together, to seek in every crisis the creative devices and inventions that will not only make life fuller and richer but tragedy bearable" (p. 20). Thus, it would be a mistake to think that an endorsement of initiation is an abandonment of the educational or political aims of the conversion, overcoming or discovery paradigms. Education for epiphany attempts to achieve these aims while facing the ineluctable precarities of the transformative process. That is, it attempts to place the precariousness of transformation in the service of human flourishing.

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